4 China

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The very concept of a Chinese grand strategy (大战略) remains surprisingly controversial, with extreme interpretations ranging in recent years from ad-hoc opportunism to century-long plans.[1] The truth is more complex than either extreme, but to the extent that any grand power today has a grand strategy today, China most certainly does.[2] Under the ambitious reign of Xi Jinping, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s goal of achieving a twenty-first century version of the glory and successes of Qing dynasty China at its eighteenth century height at home and abroad has been packaged rhetorically as the "China Dream" of "national rejuvenation."[3] This quest to make China great again represents an all-encompassing thirty-five-year plan that is the most forthright and ambitious of any major power. The potential specifics, shaped in part by emerging opportunities, may be gleaned deductively from leadership and policy statements and inductively from capabilities and actions. Despite relative strategic clarity, however, gathering challenges suggest that there is no guarantee of ever-rapid outward expansion of China's geostrategic accomplishments to include Xi's most ambitious, distant targets. Indeed, both China's history and current context suggest that its leaders pursue a hierarchy of priorities akin to a Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs for a "re-rising" great power. Given favorable conditions allowing achievements closer to home, CCP leaders will pursue further progress in ever-distant geographic layers and strategic domains; but if they encounter significant difficulties they will likely retrench to protect "core" interests—most importantly, political continuity. A consequential leader, Xi is pursuing objectives towards the top of the "band" (range of possibilities, in ascending level of ambitiousness) in strength and speed that might be expected of a paramount CCP leader of his generation. But even he cannot ensure their realization and would almost certainly fall back on such top priorities as preserving the continuity of CCP rule if circumstances rendered broader ambitions unrealistic. To elucidate these critical dynamics and their implications for China's grand strategy, its development over time, its prospects for further evolution, and the implications, this chapter (1) survey's Xi's grand strategy, (2) discusses its historical continuities, (3) lists the modern factors that shape and complicate it, and then focuses on how it is operationalized (4) internationally through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to bind Eurasia to China through

infrastructure and commercial development, and (5) domestically by undergirding societal stability with a stronger surveillance state, the last as part of initiatives designed to mitigate the impact of demographic decline and an S-curved slowdown in the growth of China's economy and other elements of national power.

4.1 Xi's grand strategy for China

While some scholars still contest the very notion of a Chinese grand strategy, recent leadership and policy statements and their explicit linkage to historical patterns suggest that China may well have the most forthright grand strategy of any major power today. To the extent that any nation may be said to have a grand strategy, China certainly has one.

China's paramount leader, Xi Jinping, has a great decisional power and his vision matters greatly. A consequential leader, he has consolidated his power and clearly eclipsed his immediate predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin in a way that might well have eluded alternative contenders. The recent overturning of the ten-year term limits on China's presidency instituted by its last leader of similar consequence—the more unassuming, domestically focused Deng Xiaoping, who reversed Maoist excesses and launched pragmatic reforms—gives Xi both a potentially long time horizon to implement his grand strategy and a staggering degree of ownership for its success or failure. Xi portrays his leadership as crucial for now, and his eighty-million-member party's leadership as crucial out to any foreseeable time horizon. Chinese grand strategy overall under Xi is not secret. His goal is to make China empowered and respected again, at home and abroad. To facilitate the internal and external implementation of his strategy, Xi is overseeing sweeping bureaucratic, Party, and military reforms.

Xi Jinping's speech at the 19th CCP National Congress on October 18, 2017 spans sixty-five dense pages in the official English translation, but is readily summarized.[4] A commentary in China's state media offered a pithy encapsulation of Xi's speech: "The Chinese nation ... has stood up, grown rich, and become strong. It will move toward center stage and make greater contributions for mankind."[5] By this logic, China's success proves that its form of Leninist authoritarianism works: "It is time to understand China's path, because it appears it will continue to triumph."[6] In the new era, Xi emphasizes, China is embarked on a domestically popular, historically redolent mission to realize the dream of national rejuvenation championed by all would-be Chinese leaders since imperial disintegration in the early twentieth century following a "Century of Humiliation" at the hands of foreign powers.[7] Elaboration on these points is offered below.

4.2 Two centenary goals

To an extent that is rare for durable public documents, the Chinese grand strategy revealed by Xi has very precise time horizons. These correspond to specific anniversaries. By 2021 (the centenary of the CCP's establishment), the goal is to "Finish building a moderately prosperous society in all respects." Between its 19th and 20th National Congresses, China is envisioned to shift its focus from the first to the second centenary goal. By 2049 (the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic), China's state media explains, the aim is to "Build China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious."[8]

During the first half of the next several decades (2020–35), Beijing is to focus on increasing China's economic and technological strength significantly and "become a global leader in innovation." Soft power should be greatly increased, and China's laws, environment, and living standards also improved. During this time, Xi charges his nation with completing its defense modernization to meet related targets in 2020, 2035, and 2050: "Our military must regard combat capability as the criterion . . . and focus on how to win when it is called upon."

During the second half of the next several decades (2035–49), Xi envisions that China will achieve, domestically, "Common prosperity [and a harmonious society with good governance and a comprehensive welfare state] for [all Chinese citizens]." In the words of its state media, "China is set to become the world's largest economy . . . with an effective social welfare system, [and] a responsive . . . government."[9] Abroad, Xi intends for China to "Become a global leader in terms of [comprehensive] national strength and international influence." As a state media commentary elaborates, "By 2050 . . . China is set to regain its might and re-ascend to the top of the world."[10] Overall, as part of this re-emergence, China should "Become a proud and active member of the community of nations." To support more specific objectives, China should fully transform its armed forces into world-class forces. This is intended to further, and actually achieve, "China's complete reunification," most importantly by "resolving the Taiwan question." This is a point of crucial importance: Xi has given the CCP a deadline of 2049 to reincorporate Taiwan into the People's Republic of China (PRC) in some fashion.

Certainly, articulating and operationalizing Xi's broad policy guidance will require interpretation and translation—including by his speechwriter, strategist, and fellow Politburo Standing Committee Member Wang Huning, Director of the Central Policy Research Office[11]—as well as time and effort. However, it already contains kernels of meaning that must be taken seriously. Other nations' leaders articulate positive, somewhat nebulous goals, but few if any emphasize such transformative objectives as these. Almost none are backed

by a powerful Leninist superstructure vested in the public promulgation of planning documents to direct national initiatives centrally. And perhaps no other leader today enjoys Xi's combination of national power and singlehanded ability to define and direct its allocation and employment. For all these reasons, Xi's grand strategy may well be the grandest and most strategic of any current national effort.

4.3 China's hierarchy of national security priorities

Xi's grand strategy is not simply a list of goals, but a prioritization of them as well. It is rooted not only in an (idealized) vision of the past, but also in historic and geographical patterns.[12]

4.3.1 HISTORICAL CONTINUITIES

Since its emergence more than a millennium ago as periodically reunified "civilizational state" with continually reestablished bureaucracy centred on a relatively fixed cultural homeland core,[13] China's hierarchy of national-security priorities has been grounded in consistently identifiable geographic layers and historical patterns. Particularly striking is the extent to which China's current heartland, geographic periphery, and hierarchy of national security priorities overlaps cartographically with those often manifested previously. At the core: a relatively self-sufficient, defensible heartland amenable to Han Chinese agriculture, contained by consistent geophysical and climatic boundaries as well as marauding nomads and smaller polities limited in potential to pose significant threats or to serve as allies against external threats.[14] To the extent that they first achieved internal order and prosperity, Chinese regimes have consistently striven to maximize their control of this historic homeland and their influence over its immediate surroundings.[15] Michael Swaine and Ashley Tellis identify long-term geographic and political constants in China's security environment that help inform such imperatives:

- A long and in many places geographically vulnerable border,
- The presence of many potential threats, both nearby and distant,
- A domestic political system marked by high levels of elite internecine conflict at the apex and weak institutions or processes for mediating and resolving such conflict, and
- A great power self-image.[16]

Imperial China's security prioritization was arguably informed in part by challenges of holding any massive, diverse polity together facing continental

empires generally (e.g., Russia, the Ottomans, and Napoleonic France). Swaine and Tellis acknowledge variation in the operationalization of China's national security priorities over time, but document a notably robust hierarchy of interests in China's security calculus:

> the maintenance of domestic order and well-being usually takes precedence over the preservation of geopolitical centrality and the establishment of influence over the Chinese periphery, for two reasons. First, the latter two goals cannot be reached without the prior attainment of the former objective. Second, historically, domestic order and well-being have often proved to be extremely difficult to achieve and preserve over time . . . and thus usually require enormous efforts by the state.[17]

As a successor state to the Qing dynasty, the PRC too is a multiethnic empire—albeit a Leninist one—and inherited the Qing's strategic challenges.[18]

But what distinguishes China from all other diverse continental empires in modern history is that it was neither fully protected, nor is now fully limited, by the "stopping power of water" that John Mearsheimer reifies.[19] Instead, across time and government system, Beijing's concentric continentalist rings of security prioritization and achievement have radiated progressively outward—up to and well beyond its claimed land frontiers. Qing era leaders debated whether external territorial threats in the maritime or continental direction should be prioritized, and were ultimately overwhelmed by both; as well as by internal upheaval. During the Cold War, as M. Taylor Fravel documents, Chinese leaders overcame these earlier limitations but still pursued more conciliatory approaches to border disputes when domestic factors (particularly ethnic rebellion) challenged their power from within and foreign cooperation might facilitate Beijing's influence over the people and territory under its control.[20] Strategic advancement has followed a logical geographic progression: "for most of the imperial era, China's strategic periphery consisted primarily of inland regions adjoining its continental borders. During the modern era (i.e., since the mid-nineteenth century), China's strategic periphery has expanded to fully encompass both continental and maritime regions."[21] That dual land–sea power identity informs Beijing's strategic calculus fundamentally today,[22] even as new strategic frontiers including outer space and cyber have also emerged. This long-term progression renders China an exceptional power with an exceptionally operationalizing grand strategy.

4.3.2 MODERN MANIFESTATIONS

Echoes of historical Chinese grand strategy reverberate in the contemporary Leninist-nationalist political context. Since its founding in 1921, the CCP has regarded its own leadership as the most important and fundamental priority, followed by (2) party-state-military administration, (3) governance of the Han-majority homeland, (4) stability in ethno-religious minority borderlands,

(5) integrity of land borders, (6) upholding and furthering disputed sovereignty claims in the Near Seas (Yellow, East, and South China Seas), and (7) addressing emerging interests in the Far Seas beyond.[23] In the latest iteration of a dynastic pattern, Swaine and Tellis relate, "The communist regime moved to reaffirm or consolidate Chinese control over virtually all the above periphery areas (including Taiwan,[24] but excluding Outer Mongolia) within the first decade of its establishment in 1949, through a combination of political and military means."[25] A Mongol innovation, the reorganization of Han-populated areas into provinces for better administrative control, was retained by subsequent dynasties. Similarly, the Qing designated Han-dominated areas of its empire as the "eighteen interior provinces."[26] As evidenced by everything from decades-long military developments optimized to increase Beijing's ability to coerce the island[27] to concerted efforts to isolate Taipei diplomatically,[28] Taiwan's reincorporation—thwarted by US intervention in the Korean War in 1950—remains a core CCP objective.

Since its emergence as the dominant force in the late 1940s, the CCP's survival in power has been reified and justified as essential to ensuring accomplishment of all other priorities. Following CCP capturing of China as a nation-state in 1949, the next priority has been domestic legitimacy and stability in the core Han-dominated heartland,[29] followed by firm control of Han-minority or -plurality border areas.[30] Since the end of the Cold War, success internally, together with the near-complete settlement of land border disputes, has allowed intensified focus on the next layer: advancing control over Taiwan and other unresolved maritime claims in Near Seas.[31] Xi's new diplomatic emphasis reflects this sharpened focus: "in recent years, the positive features of periphery diplomacy in advancing stability, harmony, and development have been augmented by a clearer and greater stress on the need to safeguard China's national interests and defend its rights in periphery regions, especially with regard to territorial sovereignty and maritime resources."[32]

This cartographic hierarchy aligns strikingly with the performance parameters of Chinese military platforms and weapons systems. Like the operating areas, range ring coverage, and potential kinetic fires of China's military systems, its intensity diminishes progressively with distance.[33] This is no coincidence: this hierarchy of diminishing returns likewise aligns with China's future military and geostrategic prospects (Figure 4.1).[34]

It may seem a truism that a state should prioritize its security interests and efforts to act on them. But China has done so, and continues to do so, in a way that is unique to its circumstances. In fact, China differs from many other states in important respects, including in key factors that inform its grand strategy. Some are strategically constraining, others strategically enabling. Beijing's approach is shaped by the following distinctive constraining factors, even as Xi seeks to alleviate them:

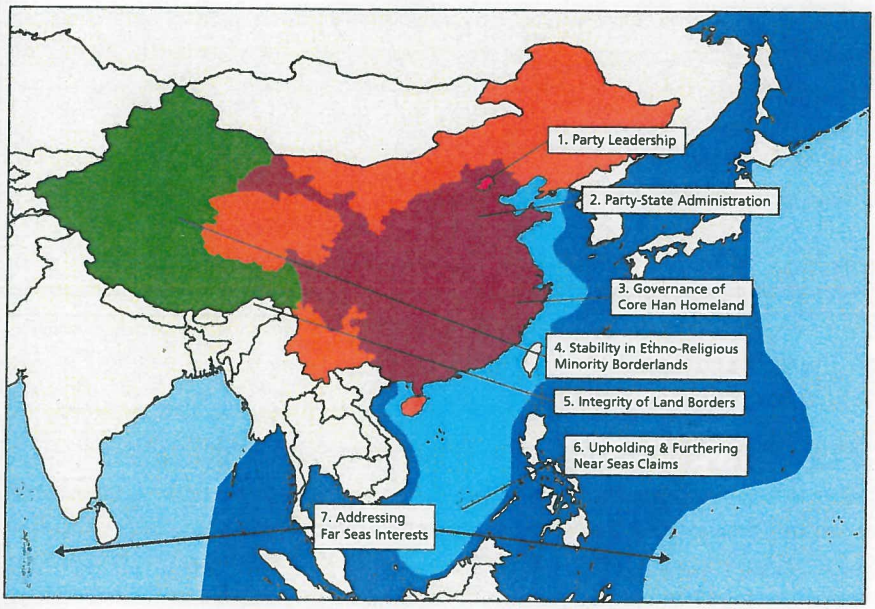

Figure 4.1. China's Hierarchy of National Security Priorities

Domestic-Political Precariousness: Unlike all but a handful of nations, China is ruled by a Leninist Party that has linked its legitimacy in retaining absolute power over society to the maintenance and validation of an ambitious if shape-shifting ideology—an ideology that it has stretched close to the limit in papering over logical contradictions. As the Party itself fears greatly, policy failure or opposition that hits close to home geographically or symbolically could rapidly undermine its rule. Xi's own highly-leveraged position atop cutthroat bureaucratic contention is the ultimate example of this. This motivates the dedication of tremendous resources to domestic surveillance, security, and propaganda.

Unfavorable Political Geography: Unlike the uniquely well-situated United States and advantageously insular maritime powers like Britain, Japan, and Australia, China lies in a geopolitically rough neighborhood with many contested borders and maritime claims. In the assessment of Andrew Nathan and Andrew Scobell, "China's immediate periphery has a good claim to be the most challenging geopolitical environment in the world for a major power."[35] The Middle Kingdom is surrounded by fourteen land neighbors, from atomically ambitious North Korea, to terrorism-plagued Afghanistan, to nuclear-armed

Pakistan. It retains land border disputes with India and Bhutan. Counting as-yet-un-reunified Taiwan, it has disputes with all eight of its maritime neighbors, coupled with a critical constraint on its resolution of them: America's entrenched presence in the region.

Restive Periphery: Unlike many other nations, including virtually all industrialized democracies, China faces significant danger of borderlands such as Tibet and Xinjiang slipping away from the central government's control—a risk that its leaders condemn as "separatism" and invest considerably to counter with local economic development, surveillance, and security measures. Chinese leaders seek to halt an historical cycle of imperial decline, dissipation, and disunity.

China also enjoys some distinctive enabling factors—some the products of contemporary Chinese strategies themselves, all which Xi seeks to exploit:

Continental and Maritime Power: Unlike many other land powers tied down by difficult neighbors and trapped by unfavorable geography, China is also a great sea power with major maritime interests and capabilities. It has arguably been the only continental power in modern history to achieve a successful, sustained maritime transformation into a hybrid land–sea power—however uneven and unfinished in some respects. Each of China's three sea forces is already the world's largest in numbers of ships.[36] Their numbers continue to grow, even as the vast majority of their foreign counterparts stagnate or shrink. As historian Paul Kennedy observes, there have recently emerged "massive differences in the assumptions of European nations and Asian nations about the significance of sea power, today and into the future."[37] China's navy and coast guard are among the most advanced in the world, while China's maritime militia is greatly superior to Vietnam's—the only known equivalent.

Strong Resource Base: Unlike virtually all other developing countries, with which it shares common problems of internal disparities and nationalistic expectations, China has a mammoth economy—the world's largest by purchasing power parity and second largest by market exchange rates. Despite its internal development goals and increasing limitations, it still has resources to devote to its grand strategic priorities virtually unmatched by any other government today.

Fiscal Flexibility: The CCP does not have to worry about mandatory spending because it can unilaterally readjust its budget without a vote, something that no democracy can do. For now, at least, individual Chinese citizens have established lesser claims to national resources than their voting counterparts in more per-capita-affluent democracies. This gives Beijing tremendous space to develop and implement grand strategy, rather than being constrained by immediate popular referenda, let alone the rising proportion of mandatory entitlement spending burdening Western welfare states.

Chinese Exceptionalism: Unlike those of all but a few nations, China's leaders and many citizens consider their nation to be a great power that merits significant respect and deference. This exceptionalism motivates a significant Chinese regional and global role even amid other pressing priorities. Moreover, while many nations have some remaining dispute(s) with their neighbor(s), virtually none shares China's combination of ideological motivation and hard power ability to press its claims over time.

No Overseas Imperialism: Finally, and perhaps most intriguingly, China thus far has never pursued overseas empire-building outside its immediate region, even though it has pursued continental empire-building all the way into Central and Southeast Asia many times[38] and some view Taiwan as a Han settler colony much as Australia and New Zealand may be considered British settler colonies.[39] CCP propaganda whitewashes the hard power dimensions of and local opposition within China's own imperial history, exaggerates the historical clarity of and continuity in Chinese authority over various polities, and dismisses resentment at Chinese bullying that is particularly pervasive among its neighbors. Nevertheless, no Chinese state ever had the far-flung geographically non-contiguous empires once common among European powers or even America's quasi-imperial appropriation of Spain's colonies. Unlike imperial or Nazi Germany, or Japan, no Chinese predecessor regime suffered catastrophic defeat in pursuing militaristic domination of neighbors against the opposition of intervening great powers. Since the Cold War's end, Beijing's leaders ostensibly pursued policies explicitly designed to eschew Soviet-style overstretch. The closest historical analogy may lie in American activities in the Caribbean and Latin America prior to Theodore Roosevelt's Corollary and Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy—again, a home region phenomenon far from the outermost geographic layers. Looking forward, however, might the ambitious goals of Xi or his successor(s) play out imperially in the eyes of foreign subalterns and/or risk an unprecedented shift from "inside-out" to "outside-in" prioritization that generates a slippery slope toward overstretch? These possibilities will be explored in the following section.

4.3.3 UNCHARTED TERRITORY

Beyond this attempt to assert greater control over its periphery, China is radiating ripples of capability and activity to promote its expanding overseas interests. Here Chinese grand strategy encompasses diplomatic, economic, and military means in service of safeguarding such interests as energy supply security. In parallel, Chinese naval doctrine encompasses progressively-less-intense arcs of control, influence, and reach.[40] Here Xi's efforts represent the latest stage in a longer-term plan by further pursuing the four New Historic

Missions (新的历史使命) articulated by Hu Jintao in 2004[41] and adding as a fifth mission the realization of his own Centenary Goals.[42]

Even the next layer of ripples—throughout maritime Southeast Asia, across the Indian Ocean, into the Red Sea, and down Africa's east coast—overlaps geographically with the seven imperially sponsored voyages of eunuch Admiral Zheng He (conducted 1405–33) and enduring Chinese interests.[43] The Mongols and later the Ming intervened militarily in places like Java and Ceylon. The show of naval force to get Malacca to trade could also be seen today as a form of gunboat diplomacy.[44] "[T]oday's global and regional trading networks and China's gravitational pull on world trade are very much akin to the late Ming," Andrew Wilson notes,

> leading me to conclude that maritime China in the twenty-first century will look much more like China in the sixteenth century than China of the recent past... [T]here is ample historical precedent for China as a major sea power, an innovator in nautical technology, and a significant player in East and Southeast Asia as well as in the Indian Ocean.[45]

Progress still farther from China's shores is rapid from a low baseline, but its hard power elements diminish rapidly with distance. Already, however, China has achieved a status and confidence unseen symbolically in nearly two centuries and unprecedented in geographic scope and sophistication—going, literally and figuratively, where elements of Chinese state power have not gone before. Here, the predictive power of China's geostrategic history may finally be attenuating, but only in the positive direction: setbacks closer to home could readily redirect Beijing's focus inward. For further specifics, we must analyze Xi's own policy mapping.

4.4 Operationalizing grand strategy and managing its implementation

Mindful that designing and implementing a grand strategy requires an effective coordinating mechanism, Xi is reorganizing the Party, bureaucracy, and military to see through his strategic vision. The organizations, decision-making, and bureaucratic processes involved in operationalizing and managing Xi's grand strategy are already broadly clear; as well as the prioritization, strengths, and weaknesses embodied therein. As paramount leader, Xi holds three top positions: General Secretary of the CCP, Chairman of the Central Military Commission and Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and President of the PRC. In the first role, he leads the political organization in charge of Chinese politics and policy; in the second, he leads China's armed forces in implementing the military component of that policy,

and in the third he represents China abroad as head of state in pursuing the diplomatic component of that policy. The Xi-led Party dominates all: in civil affairs, by supervising a civilian bureaucracy; and in military affairs, by supervising a chain of command and administrative apparatus. In foreign policy, Party hegemony is exemplified by the fact that China's most important and powerful diplomat is not the minister of foreign affairs, but rather the State Councilor under the Premier holding the foreign affairs portfolio. Here, the political power of the key figure responsible for foreign affairs (and limitations on that power) derives from his seat on the Politburo. In defense, the Party commands the Gun through a supervisory system of political commissars, forbids the PLA (a Party-army) from becoming a national army, condemns those who seek "nationalization" of the military, and thereby relegates the "Ministry of National Defense" to a shell organization confined to military diplomacy. This extraordinary concentration of power transmits Xi's grand strategy into Chinese action.

This system, broadly shared with only the few remaining communist nations—all far less capable than China—exhibits strengths and weaknesses diametrically different from those of leading industrialized democracies. China's vast Party-state structure, its work synchronized through countless Party Committee meetings, typically excels at planning, publicly communicating, and implementing a set of top national priorities over time. It suffers from corresponding limitations in real-time interagency information sharing and coordination, particularly in crisis. Xi is pursuing ambitious bureaucratic reforms to reduce such weaknesses, including by establishing a Central State Security Commission (CSSC, 中央国家安全委员会) in 2013, and implementing a new foreign policy management structure as part of a recent State Council reorganization that includes increasing the number and utilization of specialized leading groups and placing the Coast Guard directly under the Central Military Commission. These measures are needed to conceptualize and execute both legs of his strategy. In prioritizing Party survival above all else, however, Xi is unlikely to optimize the system across the board. Together with the Party's bureaucratic hegemony, for example, internal security concerns have thus far dominated the focus of the CSSC, leaving it substantially different from the more externally focused national security councils of the US, Japan, and other major powers.[46]

4.4.1 BRI AS AN EXTERNAL MANIFESTATION OF GRAND STRATEGY

In the foreign policy, geoeconomic, and geostrategic realm, operationalizing Xi's grand strategy of realizing a "China Dream" of national rejuvenation involves making China great again abroad while supporting its internal development. The vision for these ambitions is encapsulated by his signature

BRI, focused primarily on infrastructure development to encourage greater regional integration and connectivity in Eurasia; some of it building on prior initiatives, some of it not yet realized. In a sign that the international and domestic pieces of Xi's grand strategy are linked, many would argue that BRI is least as much (if not more) about supporting domestic growth and stabilizing border regions as it is about gaining influence in distant places. Nevertheless, Xi's foreign policy, centered on BRI, has strong geoeconomic and geopolitical implications for Asia and the world.

BRI encompasses most of the world, albeit in different layers of prioritization and functionality. In 2014, Xi gave a speech introducing his concept of "holistic security" (总体安全观) and emphasized that potential interdependence among traditional and nontraditional factors could potentially impact Beijing's hierarchy of security concerns.[47] Timothy Heath assesses that "Adoption of the holistic security concept now means anything Chinese authorities deem an impediment to the realization of any of the country's developmental objectives—regardless of whether it is economic, political or another category—may now be deemed a 'security threat'" and justify military action of some kind.[48]

On the soft power side of the equation, Xi's vision for an international "community of shared future [common destiny] for mankind" (人类命运共同体), itself based on a "new type of international relations" more favorable to Beijing, is designed to transform "the international environment to make it compatible with China's governance model and emergence as a global leader."[49] Cooperating under the rubric of such Chinese initiatives as BRI accords special priority to regional relations, as embodied in a White Paper on "China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation." Within that context, this document states, "Focusing on common development, China has put forward and actively promoted the Belt and Road Initiative and initiated the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Silk Road Fund."[50]

Specifically, BRI consists of both a Silk Road Economic Belt from China through Eurasia to Europe; and a twenty-first-century Maritime Silk Road from Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean to Africa, the Middle East, and beyond.[51] As will be discussed below, Xi has also announced a "Polar Silk Road" as part of BRI.[52] BRI leverages infrastructure and trade to integrate Eurasia and its periphery, perhaps ultimately within a Sinocentric geoeconomic and geopolitical order.[53] BRI's connection to grand strategy is suggested by both the prestige Xi has invested in it and the Party institutions involved in it; including, apparently, a dedicated Leading Small Group chaired by Xi himself.

Yuan Peng, Vice President of the influential Ministry of State Security–run think tank China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, suggests a new foreign policy approach that builds on both the aforementioned Chinese

security hierarchy and Xi's emphasis on periphery diplomacy. As such, it may offer a basis for prioritizing BRI efforts. "This 'great periphery' should be a 'concentric circle' structure with China at the core, specifically including 'three rings'," Yuan elaborates.

> 'The inside ring' consists of the fourteen countries contiguous to China on land; for particular geographical and historical reasons, these are irreplaceably important for China. The 'middle ring' consists of the maritime countries extending from the 'inner ring,' and also areas from the west Pacific to the Indian Ocean to the Middle East and then to parts of central Asia and Russia that are not directly contiguous on land with China. The 'outer ring' continues to extend out to the circle of Africa, Europe, and America, including the poles.[54]

Echoing the geographic basis for China's aforementioned national security priorities, Nathan and Scobell articulate a similar set of four "concentric circles."[55] Both overlap with Sinocentric cartographic conceptions from the imperial era.[56] Such images also sow discomfort among China's neighbors as they imply China's overlordship and a condescending view that they are somehow "less civilized."[57]

Presently, the poles merit particular mention. Beijing depicts its burgeoning polar activities selectively and ambiguously, heretofore attracting little notice outside specialized professional communities that interact minimally. Nevertheless, as a component of an ambitious maritime strategy as part of Xi's grand strategy that is now enshrined in a first-ever Arctic White Paper,[58] China's development as a polar great power will critically shape the emerging new geopolitical order and the way it is governed. China seeks to join the US as the only other nation capable of comprehensive presence, activities, and influence in both the Arctic and Antarctic. Beijing regards the polar regions as vital domains rich in fish, energy, and minerals, as well as a permissive zone for the expansion of Chinese influence and norm-creation—a view that Washington encourages through lack of focus and investment.[59] As they gradually open to seasonal shipping, Arctic sea lanes help China reduce reliance on such potential chokepoints as the Malacca Strait. In keeping with Xi's grand strategy, China has a timetable for polar development that corresponds to his Two Centenary rubric.

All told, however, Xi's BRI is an ambitious, expensive, time-consuming enterprise. Its nascent articulation and implementation leaves many questions, including how internal policy debates will play out. One of the great Chinese foreign policy questions at issue is to what extent Beijing will seek to shape the domestic politics of other countries. Some influential Chinese thinkers have argued for BRI approaches precisely to allow China to develop as much as possible with as little opposition as possible for the US and its allies. Perhaps most prominent is the work of Peking University professor Wang Jisi, formerly a top advisor to Hu Jintao, and today an influential thinker at the nexus

of Beijing's academic and policy communities. In an October 2012 article, Wang advocated a "March West" (西进) of Chinese development into Eurasia just as the US was rebalancing toward East Asia.[60] A Chinese expert consulted by the author echoes what other sources have suggested:

> the 'Marching West' proposition is integrated into the BRI, and constitutes an organized part of the BRI. Professor Wang was entrusted to make such a proposition as a precursor to the unveiling of BRI in order to test the public reactions and responses to the BRI. This is following the common practice of the Chinese government.

In possible indicator of still greater ambitions, in a departure from post-Mao avoidance of political evangelism, the state media distillation of Xi's speech states, "China's success proves that socialism can prevail and be a path for other developing countries to emulate and achieve modernization." This is not simply an endorsement of the standard state-directed developmentalism of the sort that Japan used to practice: "The new world order cannot be just dominated by capitalism and the West, and the time will come for a change."[61] This potentially heralds an ambitious and potentially highly competitive geopolitical strategy. Several prominent Chinese scholars, including Tsinghua University professor Yan Xuetong[62] and PLA Sr. Col. Liu Mingfu,[63] argue that China can and should become a true peer competitor of the US, and perhaps even surpass and replace it in many respects.

Nevertheless, some influential scholars and officials question the current operationalization of China's current grand strategy, particularly regarding specific foreign policy applications. In the view of Renmin University's Shi Yinhong,

> if the focal points of Chinese diplomatic policies are too scattered, or if Beijing fails to calculate the possible risks in the One Belt and One Road initiative and the negative global response toward China's increasing military power, we might not be able to make use of the opportunities brought by the decline and disorganization in the West.[64]

Infrastructure development can be locally disruptive and Chinese entities may have a need to secure their investments, including through the hiring of private security firms. This has the potential to cause local instability that will draw in more resources and thereby undermine the profitability and sustainability of such projects. Another strategic risk relating to BRI is its cultivation of local political parties and strongmen in places where institutions are weak. This exposes China to potential blowback if these groups lose power, especially if they are repressive and China seems complicit in the repression. If the American and Soviet experiences during the Cold War and the recent US forays into Afghanistan and Iraq are any indication, working with local powers in unstable settings can prove highly risky. Qin Yaqing of China

Foreign Affairs University cautions that "a strident turn from one strategy to the other is inadvisable," while maintaining that Beijing's foreign policy to date displays "the existence of both continuity and change, although the former is its main theme with regards to strategic goals, designs, and policies as a whole."[65] Such moderating views are important, even in the Xi era.

In addition to domestic political debate, Xi's ambitious foreign policy may face external pushback, particularly from the US and its allies. For example, at a recent conference,

> Li Ruogu, President of the China Export-Import Bank, expressed his views on China's external situation. He specifically mentioned that the U.S.'s judgment about China has undergone a fundamental change. Sino-U.S. trade friction is essentially a controversy on the direction of China's development. Li Ruogu said that Sino-U.S. relations will not continue along the path they have taken over the past 40 years. Specifically, in the United States, no matter what party or class, most of them advocate a tough attitude towards China. This allows the U.S. to move beyond partisan lines on its China strategy and operate quickly and effectively.[66]

Li's observation is significant: managing major power relations is as important, or even more important, than BRI's success or failure per se.

In any case, China's government and academic community have closely studied the experiences of previously rising great powers.[67] They continue to seek lessons and to avoid mistakes even as they debate the best way to apply them.[68] Whatever challenges Xi's grand strategy may face, considerable thought informs its development and implementation.

4.4.2 DOMESTIC REFORMS AS INTERNAL MANIFESTATIONS OF GRAND STRATEGY

As with foreign and military policy, Xi seeks to implement the domestic components of his grand strategy successfully through manifold reforms. He embraces the Maoist mantle of Party discipline coupled with bureaucratic reforms, including the reorganization of state-owned enterprises and other efforts to broaden prosperity. Constraints endemic to China's Leninist system (stove piping, corruption, etc.) persist, however: even in its ambitious encapsulation of Xi's speech, China's state media acknowledges that realizing his goals "will take immense work." Specifically, "China needs to tackle the new contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life. China will need to prove it can survive the middle income trap."[69]

Domestic instability is a long-term concern of China, which is becoming an ever-greater surveillance state that monitors its people and shapes their activities and communications using both physical and electronic means.[70] Neither can one ignore the possibility of external tensions, which could divert

China from fully developing economically. The attainment of a plateau in the growth is also a possibility and could drive China into a potential decline after its golden era of rapid catch-up growth following Maoist malpractice.

Even if Xi and his fellow leaders navigate China's many domestic challenges reasonably well, they may still be constrained in the implementation of their grand strategy by a slowdown in the growth rate of China's economy, and its overall national power. Here, China is almost certainly subject to the same slowing that has bedeviled other great powers,[71] but—for reasons specific to its own conditions—may suffer from such an S-curved slowdown even more rapidly and disruptively than those that have gone before it.[72]

The S-curve concept comes from a mathematical model later applied to other fields—including physics, biology, and economics—to show how entities' growth patterns typically change over time. Robert Gilpin argues that a state must inevitably decline because of an historical tendency for national efficiency to decrease as society ages, thereby creating a downward spiral of increasing consumption and decreasing investment that undermines the economic, military, and political underpinnings of a state's international position.[73] A society or country experiences slow growth at its inception, then enjoys more rapid growth as it consolidates, develops, and more resources flow into the treasury.

The process continues until the state reaches its maximum growth rate, an inflection point at which various countervailing forces begin to constrain expansion and set the economy onto a slower growth path or even stagnation. Domestically, social spending and rent seeking behavior may threaten productive investment and economic growth. Internationally, a hegemon tends to "overpay" for influence in the international system because of the tendency for allies to "free-ride." The inherent propensity toward technological diffusion may threaten to undermine a hegemon's economic and technological leadership.

While it is not overextended internationally thus far, China is encountering the domestic aspect of these headwinds at a much earlier stage in its development than did the US and other great powers, thanks in part to its late start in modernization and post-Mao pent-up debt-fueled growth, its dramatic internal disparities, its extraordinary pollution and resource depletion, and its draconian one-child policy and corresponding gender imbalance and aging. Debates over national priorities in the form of gun vs butter, or even guns vs canes,[74] may constrain the operationalization of China's grand strategy sooner, and to an even greater extent, than many currently anticipate.[75]

Aware of these challenges, Xi is taking action in an attempt to counter it and thereby operationalize his grand strategy effectively over time. To this end, the CCP is trying to incentivize childbearing to shore up demographics. It has invested in the world's most sophisticated facial recognition (which can track someone down in minutes). Chinese technology companies are now required

to store all their data with the Ministry of Public Security. For some time to come, increased state penetration and control of society may strengthen existing power structures rather than signify regime weakness. For all these efforts, however, Xi's China appears to be shifting from an era of upside potential to one of downside risks. The Party is not paranoid for nothing.

4.5 Conclusion

Provided that he can continue to dominate, China is poised to be led for years to come by Xi, an ambitious leader with a grand strategy to match. Xi's vision faces great challenges and he himself faces fissiparous bureaucratic politics and accumulating resentment at his heavy-handed political maneuvering. But he stands astride a powerful state with great determination, and will receive the ultimate credit (good or bad) for whatever it achieves. This chapter's key findings are as follows: Xi has a grand strategy for China that he has announced; this strategy has a hierarchy of aims rooted in history; this strategy is shaped by unique modern factors; China is operationalizing its strategy abroad through BRI; and China faces an S-curved slowdown and at the domestic level is operationalizing its grand strategy through initiatives designed to prepare it for this challenge of ebbing national power growth. With China having already arrived as the world's second-most-powerful nation,[76] the question remaining is how much more powerful China will become by when; and with what implications, for what particular realization, of Xi's "China Dream."

China has already made a remarkable achievement: the world's first successful transformation from a land power to a land–sea power in more than a millennium. Accompanying this sea change is arguably the closing of an era begun six centuries ago, when China turned inward and Western nations spread power and influence around the world by sea, ultimately helping to create the liberal international order that since World War II has underwritten a rich network of international institutions, rules, and norms. One key question of our age is to what extent China will continue to rise and develop within this existing framework, and to what extent it will seek to modify it.[77] The nature and scope of Xi's grand strategy suggests that China under his leadership will pursue a strong continued rise, in some ways well within the postwar international system, and in some ways pushing hard at its edges.

In some ways, those edges are already eroding. And, as other chapters in this volume explain, China is not the only power seeking to fray those edges—Russia is pursuing its own irredentism, particularly through hybrid warfare somewhat more intense than China's maritime gray zone operations. In combination, as Peter Dutton argues, these rivalrous great power efforts

have the potential to produce something even more significant than China's emergence as a sea power: the retreat of the liberal international maritime order developed over the past half-millennium in the face of a rising illiberal continental order.[78] With Russia's climatic, demographic, and economic limitations, the rise of such an illiberal order will largely hinge on China, and the operationalization of its grand strategy. These dynamics are encapsulated in the recently issued US National Security Strategy,[79] which itself offers a reasonable basis for an American grand strategy. Will this document's contents ultimately offer some semblance of a twenty-first century grand strategy for Washington, with buy-in from its allies and partners? While the present author would argue in favor of such an approach, this admittedly remains very much an open question.

What is certain is that Xi has a clear grand strategy for China, as well as a clear sense of urgency: "The wheels of history roll on; the tides of the times are vast and mighty. History looks kindly on those with resolve, with drive and ambition, and with plenty of guts; it won't wait for the hesitant, the apathetic, or those shy of a challenge."[80]

NOTES

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2. The approach to grand strategy employed here concerns both international and domestic factors, as seen in Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895–1905* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).
3. "Achieving Rejuvenation is the Dream of the Chinese People," November 29, 2012, in Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2014), 37–9.
4. Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist

Party of China, October 18, 2017, http://english.qstheory.cn/2018-02/11/c_1122395333.htm. Unless otherwise specified, quotes in this and succeeding paragraphs are from this speech. Chinese-language text: 习近平, "决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告," 2017 年10月18日, http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1028/c1001-29613514.html

5. "Milestone Congress Points to New Era for China, The World," *Xinhua*, October 24, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/24/c_136702090.htm
6. Ibid.
7. See Orville Schell and John Delury, *Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Random House, 2013). Arguably, the concept of rejuvenation came primarily in the twentieth century as a response to the "Century of Humiliation" narrative. It was first discussed by the KMT, including Sun Yet-sen, but especially by Chiang Kai-shek in his book *China's Destiny*. The idea of rejuvenation was taken up by Mao ("the Chinese people have stood up!"), which Xi tends to reiterate. Deng likewise exhibited this line of thinking in his Four Modernizations concept. Chinese emperors, by contrast, tended not to have this focus on rejuvenation because those regimes took for granted the view that whichever dynasty ruled was and would be the center of all under heaven (天下) and the celestial empire. Even the Southern Song Dynasty liked to invoke its cultural and moral superiority despite being weaker militarily than its neighbors. See Ja Ian Chong, "Popular Narratives Versus Chinese History: Implications for Understanding An Emergent China," *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 4 (2014): 939–64, http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1354066113503480
8. "Milestone Congress," *Xinhua*.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Nectar Gan, "Who's on China's New Team Handling U.S. Relations? Meet the Most Influential Negotiators," *South China Morning Post*, May 29, 2018, http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2148296/whos-chinas-new-team-handling-us-relations-meet-most
12. Andrew S. Erickson and Joel Wuthnow, "Barriers, Springboards and Benchmarks: China Conceptualizes the Pacific 'Island Chains'," *The China Quarterly* 225 (March 2016): 1–22; Andrew S. Erickson and Joel Wuthnow, "Why Islands Still Matter in Asia: The Enduring Significance of the Pacific 'Island Chains'," *The National Interest*, February 5, 2016, http://www.andrewerickson.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Island-Chains_Why-Islands-Still-Matter-in-Asia_Erickson-Wuthnow_TNI_20160105.pdf; Andrew S. Erickson, "Doctrinal Sea Change, Making Real Waves: Examining the Naval Dimension of Strategy," in *China's Evolving Military Strategy*, ed. Joe McReynolds (Washington, DC: Jamestown Foundation, 2016), 99–132; Andrew S. Erickson, "China's Naval Modernisation, Strategies, and Capabilities," in *International Order at Sea: How it is challenged. How it is maintained*, eds. Jo Inge Bekkevold and Geoffrey Till (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 63–92; Andrew S. Erickson, "Chinese Statesmen and the Use of Air Power," in *The Influence of Airpower upon History:*

Statesmanship, Diplomacy, and Foreign Policy since 1903, eds. Robin Higham and Mark Parillo (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 237–71; Andrew S. Erickson and Gabriel B. Collins, "China's Oil Security Pipe Dream: The Reality, and Strategic Consequences, of Seaborne Imports," *Naval War College Review* 63, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 88–111, http://www.andrewerickson.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/China-Pipeline-Sealane_NWCR_2010-Spring.pdf

13. Peter J. Katzenstein, "China's Rise: East Asia and Beyond," *East Asia Institute Working Paper* 12 (April 2008), https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/137725/2009052018244858.pdf. The mainstream view of ruling imperial houses, the KMT, and the CCP reifies a continuous notion of Chinese regimes, in part to create an impression of legitimacy. As with much history, much remains debated. For examination of China's historical internal diversity, particularly along its periphery, see Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, eds., *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Christine Moll-Murata and Ulrich Theobald, "Military Employment in Qing Dynasty China," in *Fighting for a Living: A Comparative Study of Military Labour 1500–2000* ed. Erik-Jan Zürcher (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 353–92.
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16. Su Hao, 45.
17. Swaine and Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy*, 53.
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25. Swaine and Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy*, 82.
26. See Mark Elliott, "Frontier Stories: Periphery as Center in Qing History," *Frontiers of History in China*, 9, no. 3 (2014): 336–360, https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/elliott/files/elliott_frontier_stories_frontiers_of_history_in_china_2014.pdf; Tianyang Xi, "All the Emperor's Men? Conflicts and Power-Sharing in Imperial China," *Comparative Political Studies*, published online October 29, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018806538.
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30. These areas were not assimilated until relatively recently. Swaine and Tellis, 74.
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