

CHINESE GRAND STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION AFTER 1990: GOALS, TOOLS, PHASES

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This article is the second part on the issue of China's Grand Strategy. It reveals the dramatic shift in the country's grand strategy under Xi Jinping's leadership, namely from 2017. Now it's crucial to move away from the obsolete understanding of China. Beijing's consideration comes through the lens of Chinese own geostrategic clash with the USA over global leadership, launched by China after 1990.

Despite increased cooperation with the USA during Deng Xiaoping rule, Beijing perceived America as the competitor. Especially after the USSR collapse, US-encouraged efforts to "liberalize" China in 1989 and Gulf War in the Middle East, which convinced Beijing of the American determination to sustain its hegemony by hard force. Chinese Grand Strategy has its goals, tools – political, economic, military means, and three main phases: blunting, building, expansion. All of them are in detail scrutinized in this paper.

Against the background of the Russo-Ukrainian war, Beijing continues to maintain a "neutral" stance and promotes its own vision of ceasefire. China is interested in the end of the war, but it is vital for Beijing if Russo-Ukrainian confrontation result will lead to the strengthening of Russia-China asymmetrical strategic partnership, development of Beijing-led regional alliances in Eurasia, and increase of Chinese global influence.

Key words: China, Chinese Grand Strategy, US-China competition.

ІМПЛЕМЕНТАЦІЯ ГЕНЕРАЛЬНОЇ СТРАТЕГІЇ КИТАЮ ПІСЛЯ 1990 РОКУ: ЦІЛІ, ІНСТРУМЕНТИ, ФАЗИ

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Ця стаття є другою частиною дослідження Генеральної Стратегії Китаю. Вона проливає світло на драматичну зміну Генеральної Стратегії Китаю від час правління Сі Цзіньпіна, а саме після 2017 року. Важливо відійти від застарілого розуміння Китаю. Стратегічне бачення Пекіна, яке було сформоване після 1990 року, походить від його конкуренції з Америкою за глобальне лідерство.

Незважаючи на тісну кооперацію зі США під час правління Ден Сяопіна, Китай завжди сприймав основного партнера як конкурента. Особливо після знищення СРСР, підспудної підтримки Вашингтоном спроб «лібералізувати» Пекін у 1989 році та Війни в Заліві, яка переконала Китай у тому, що США готові підтримувати своє глобальне лідерство за допомогою застосування сили. Китайська Генеральна Стратегія має свої

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цілі, інструменти – політичні, економічні, військові, та три фази. Всі вони детально розглянуті в цій статті.

На тлі російсько-української війни Пекін продовжує займати «нейтральну» позицію та прощовхує власне бачення закінчення конфлікту. Китай зацікавлений у врегулюванні, однак для нього важливо, щоб війна закінчилась посиленням асиметричного китайсько-російського партнерства, розвитком регіональних альянсів під проводом Китаю в Євразії, а також збільшенням глобального впливу Пекіна.

Ключові слова: Китай, китайська Генеральна Стратегія, американо-китайська конкуренція.

In pursuit of preeminence: Chinese Grand Strategy

What is Chinese Grand Strategy's crucial purpose? How China has been achieving it? In nineteenth century, after disastrous Opium wars (鸦片战争), Qing imperial court official and general Li Hongzhang wrote to Tongzhi Emperor: "...now China is in the midst of great changes unseen in millenniums (数千年未有之变局)"¹. He referred to geopolitical shifts that changed the world and made the West center of global political, military, technological, and economic power. These "unseen changes" meant tragedies for China: century of humiliation (百年国耻), unsuccessful modernization efforts, fall of the Empire.

After one century and half Chinese leader Xi Jinping delivered a speech stating "...today's China is in the new period of history, it's the best time for development, the world is in the midst of great changes unseen in a century (百年未有之大变局)"². China was speaking about "unseen changes" again, but if Li's connotation marked threats, then Xi meant opportunities and outlooks. If Li was saying about stagnation and humiliation, then Xi evoked China's rise (中国崛起) and "Chinese dream" (中国梦) realization – "great national rejuvenation" (中华民族伟大复兴) – restoration of Chinese central role in Asia and possible global leadership achievement.

Xi Jinping's leadership since 2012 marked China's confidence that world is changing due to Chinese growing power with further geostrategic "shift to Asia" alongside with West's decline. This belief was underpinned by numerous state as well as scientific publications arguing, firstly, China's rise, saying that China "overtook America on a corner" (弯道超车), and, secondly, Western decline in such areas: political, economic, cultural, global governance and even ideological [求是网 2019; 江灏锋 2022]. Chinese elites declared modern age a "period of historical opportunity" (历史机遇期) for China and launched the complex grand strategy to adjust their own policy and achieve strategic aims³.

Chinese concentric circles grand strategy is organized around **five major goals**. At the core is the aim to preserve CCP and its overwhelming power in the country. This depends on economic stability. China must save authentic economic "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (中国特色社会主义) system, implicitly rejecting Western liberal social and economic models.

¹张允熠 (2020), "百年未有之大变局"的世界历史意义, available at: <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0103/c40531-31533144.html>.

² 新华网 (2021), 中国共产党百年辉煌与百年未有之大变局, available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-04/01/c_1127281691.htm.

³ 共产党员网 (2020), 习近平同志抓住历史机遇, 对福建的改革开放作出了历史性贡献, available at: <https://www.12371.cn/2020/06/16/ART11592272044133110.shtml?from=groupmessage>.

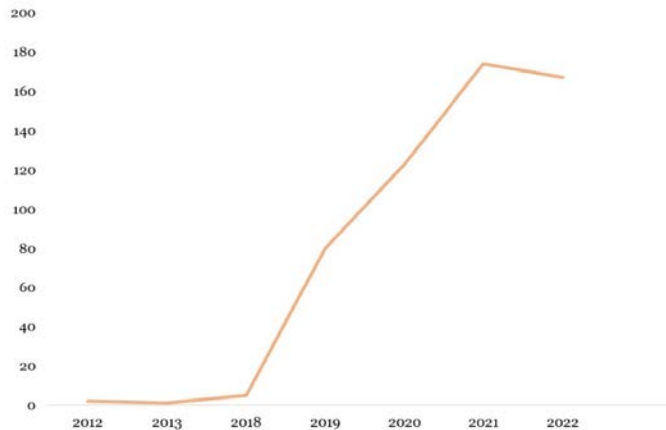


Figure 1. A number of research papers in China exploring “great changes unseen in a century” from the Chinese rise point of view during the last ten years

Source: cnki database

A second target is to maintain economic growth and conduct constant reforms with a purpose to modernize Chinese industry.

A third goal is to achieve national unity by reunification with Taiwan. Fourthly, China seeks to become regional leader in Asia by reestablishing local order, where China will be an indispensable economic partner for neighbors, giving Marxist-oriented Beijing powerful political leverage.

Finally, China is keen to weaken the US-led world order and reorganize it, replacing the USA as global leader, constructing China-led order, where Beijing will more assertively pursue national interests and expand its influence [Rudd 2015]. The last one is the most important Chinese grand strategy purpose now.

If Washington applied the “containment strategy” towards USSR during the Cold War, then China has been employing the “displacement strategy” towards the USA in the post-Cold War period. This grand strategy arose from Chinese assumption that next American competitor after the USSR destruction will be China, both ideologically and economically. Deng Xiaoping wrote, “it seems that one Cold War came to end, but two others have already begun”⁴. Deng was insightful: in 2022 China was proclaimed by Washington as the main competitor⁵.

After the Cold War China and the USA experienced period of engagement, developing mutually beneficial economic connections. However, from the very beginning, Beijing knew it was temporary, and launched a long-term displacement strategy in the 1990s, triggered by trifecta: Tiananmen Square incident – a challenge to internal stability, Gulf War – a fear the US can use military superiority to cope with China, USSR destruction – a perception of the USA as a threat [Doshi 2022, 65].

⁴ Selected works of Deng Xiaoping (1982–1992), We must adhere to socialism and prevent peaceful evolution towards capitalism, 1989, p. 225–226

⁵ Selected works of Deng Xiaoping (1982–1992), We must adhere to socialism and prevent peaceful evolution towards capitalism, 1989, p. 225–226

Chinese elites – realism adepts, understood that for regional and global leadership – restoration of China’s historical “rightful” place, they had to weaken American hegemony short of war and roll back the historical aberration of Western dominance in the world [Kagan 2018]. China had to undermine the hegemon’s three “forms of control” which are possessed by the most powerful state (USA at the moment) to influence others: *coercive domination* (using power to achieve compliance); *motivation* (inducing other states to act according to hegemon’s will); *legitimacy* (having the command right)⁶.

Thus China, as a rising state, firstly decided to *blunt* American grasp over those forms of control, having started from itself – because a rising state can’t challenge global leader if it’s fully dependent on hegemon; secondly, to *build* its forms of control by strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations with other states, initially in the neighborhood; thirdly, to *expand* both blunting and building at the global level on purpose to displace the international leader [Williams 2020].

China followed this grand strategy blueprint since 1989, and its means were varied by Chinese perception of the “US threat” [大学军事论文 2015] and the level of American comprehensive national power.

Thereby, the Chinese displacement grand strategy can be divided into **three phases**.

The first one started in 1989 under Deng’s banner of “hiding capabilities, biding time” (韬光养晦) and extended till 2008, when the USA was struck by Global Financial Crisis. During this period Beijing was quietly committed to self-strengthening and **blunting** American influence over China and Asia.

The second phase’s mottos were Hu Jintao’s “Actively Achieving Successes” (积极有所作为) and Xi Jinping’s “Be Enthusiastic and Achieve Goals” (奋发有为). This phase began in 2009 and finished in 2016 by **building** a framework for Chinese leadership in Asia, when China felt confident and emboldened enough to press the US regional positions after the financial crisis.

The third phase was launched by Xi Jinping as “Great Changes unseen in a century” in 2017. It is implemented against Beijing’s robust belief in China’s rise and West’s decline (东升西降)⁷. Xi Jinping is **expanding** Chinese blunting of the US positions and simultaneously building China’s alternative international order worldwide.

China has been conducting its grand strategy by blunting, building, and expanding efforts across military, political, and economic domains with the final goal to change the USA as a global leader.

The first phase of the displacement strategy (1989–2008) began with Beijing’s realization that China will replace USSR as the main American competitor. Deng Xiaoping argued, “the Western countries are staging a third world war without gun-smoke” [Deng 1992], later Jiang Zemin wrote that “America will be our main competitor for a long time. The USA wants China to develop, but they don’t want us to reunite (with Taiwan), and become very strong. We should struggle and cooperate with America according to our interests” [江泽民文选 2006].

⁶ Destradi S. (2008), *Empire, Hegemony, and Leadership: Developing a Research Framework for the Study of Regional Powers*, GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/57203/wp79.pdf>.

⁷ 中华人民共和国国防部 (2021), 我们为什么能够成功, available at: http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/sy/tt_214026/4895576.html.

Perceived Relative Power Gap with External Hegemon			
		High	Low
Perceived External Threat from External Hegemon	High	Blunting	Building
	Low	Accommodation	Dominance

Figure 2. China’s grand strategy logic as rising power towards American hegemonic position⁸

Beijing started **military blunting**. These efforts were aimed at the creation of Chinese asymmetric military capabilities undermining American military control in the region. Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin wanted China to hold East Asian maritime territory, namely *sea control*, and weaken the US navy’s ability of unhampered traversing in waters nearby China – *sea denial* (A2/AD: anti-access/area-denial).

The measures implemented were “non-combat military operations” in accordance with the “military strategic guideline” called “Assassin’s Mace weapons” (杀手锏) – China developed asymmetric military tools able to defeat a more powerful opponent, “whatever the enemy is afraid of, we develop that” [Qiao, Wang 1999, 100–105].

So that since the 1990s Beijing seriously invested in sea control/sea denial means: a) it built the largest submarine fleet⁹; b) created the third largest naval mines arsenal¹⁰; c) added to its military capability anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM) – a direct menace to US aircraft carriers. These three measures invoked blunting of America’s ability to exert its military influence on the Chinese maritime periphery. China achieved the advantage by using “four ounces that can move one thousand pounds” (四两拨千斤).

Chinese analysts claimed that increased military capabilities were to “provide China with more maneuvering space for political strategical operations” [Erickson 2013]. Beijing began **political blunting** implementation. It had to weaken American political power in Asia and did this within major Asian regional organizations: Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). China used a defensive realism approach and undermined the institutionalization of Asian organizations which included the USA – APEC, and ASEAN, but supported the development of those, in which Beijing played major role – SCO, ASEAN Plus Three (APT).

Scholar Kai He argues, “The US posed a very serious challenge to China’s internal and external security as a sole superpower” [Kai 2009, 60]. Therefore, Chinese idea was, firstly, to decrease concentrated American efforts to create US-led

⁸ Mark Haas (2005), *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789–1989*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), p. 5–27.

⁹ Global Firepower (2023), *Submarine Fleet Strength by Country*, available at: <https://www.globalfirepower.com/navy-submarines.php>.

¹⁰ Truver S. (2014), *An act of war? The law of naval mining, War on the Rocks*, available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2014/10/an-act-of-war-the-law-of-naval-mining/>.

encirclement with China's neighbors; to reach this goal Beijing started the multilateralism policy (多边主义) in the region, undermining the USA leadership position – “East Asia should find its way to cooperate”.

Secondly, to weaken American political leverage over China by limitation of US institutionalization power [Doshi 2022, 137–141]. Beijing didn't want to follow imposed rules, especially in Asia. Thirdly, to create its platform of cooperation in the region.

Beijing viewed APEC and ASEAN as US-led organizations that could become American hegemony instruments. That's why China limited US political leadership in APEC and ASEAN by a) opposing institutionalization – Beijing consciously restrained organizations' capability to set up any rules or “democratization” efforts. Weakening organizations Chinese approach was implemented in APEC, and was known as “the APEC Approach” (APEC方式)¹¹; b) eliminating organizations' ability to conduct security policy. In 1993 US Secretary Christopher aligned APEC with NATO [Christopher 1998], what China saw as a step towards “Asian NATO”. After that Beijing blocked almost all non-economic issues in APEC, devaluating the organization's security role; c) stalling US efforts towards China's economic liberalization, especially financial sector reforms¹².

On the other hand, created in 2001 Shanghai Cooperation Organization was established to preempt US influence in the region and give the start to China-led regional order. Beijing supported SCO institutionalization, by financing it¹³. China used SCO for: 1) blunting American power in Chinese periphery and strengthening its influence; 2) reassuring neighboring countries, especially Russia and Central Asian states; 3) solving security issues in the region, namely terrorism threats.

China achieved political normalization with the USA after Deng's “reforms and openness” policy implementation. The next target of Chinese leader was the economic equivalent, and it was reached by the signature of most-favored-nation (MFN) with America. US capital, technologies, and market helped China to develop.

A few decades later Beijing was kindly accepted into WTO, which contributed to Chinese economic growth as well. But not everybody in Beijing was satisfied with the dependence on the USA, national elites understood that US received powerful economic leverage over China. For instance, Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing argued that MFN “may become means to coerce and pressure China” [李肇星 2013]. Premier Li Peng was saying that through economic cooperation US attempted to use pressure to cause China to change [李鹏 2008, 215].

Beijing knew the USA could use the economic leverage on China across three

¹¹ 廖少廉 (1998), 论 APEC 方式, available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/41451153.pdf>.

¹² Bergsten C. Fred (1998), United States Trade with Asia, APEC, and the Financial Crisis, available at: <https://www.piie.com/commentary/testimonies/united-states-trade-asia-apec-and-financial-crisis>.

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2004), President Hu Jintao Signs the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing Signs the Agreement on the Host Country of the Secretariat between the People's Republic of China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/tyfls_665260/tfsxw_665262/200407/t20040705_599881.html.

domains: 1) sanctions; 2) canceling MFN status; 3) cutting off investment and technologies transfers. Thus, China started **economic blunting**.

First, Beijing decided to use a two-sided approach: on the one hand, it was flaunting domestic market and luring American business, emphasizing interdependence with America. Jiang Zemin claimed “US sanctions on China will harm the interests of the United States itself” [江泽民文选 2006]; on the other hand, Beijing actively worked on establishing its own “economic security” in case of economic breakage with the US. China considered the “principle of independence” (独立自主) [[江泽民文选 2006, 201].

Secondly, Beijing wisely used the opportunity to join economic globalization and increase economic connections with other countries, thus weakening overwhelming US grasp over it. Hu Jintao kicked off the “going out” policy (走出去), which increased Chinese trade and cooperation with developing states¹⁴. Beijing created numerous economic connections with other regions after joining WTO/GATT. China secured stable access to overseas markets, attracted new companies and technologies, continued real sector growth, and concurrently accelerated deindustrialization and unemployment rise in the USA.

The second phase (2009–2016) of Chinese grand strategy took off after the Global Financial Crisis. China saw American power diminishing.

Beijing made a shift from blunting the USA to building its own regional order by strengthening military power, establishing China-led Asian political organizations and economic institutions, increasing economic influence in the world, and creating consensual and coercive capabilities over other states.

China estimated that the relative power gap between it, rising power, and America decreased, thus Beijing changed its single focus on the USA to wider regional “regional periphery” (周边外交) and global “community of common destiny” (人类命运共同体) approaches. Prominent scholar Yan Xuetong wrote about second phase of grand strategy, “now we are “Actively Achieving Successes”, showing to neighbors that we are strong, you are weak, it is the main change”¹⁵.

Beijing introduced the discourse of “multipolarity” (多极化) and “international balance of power” (国际力量对比), referring to the transformation of unipolar world to international system led by a few great powers and Chinese policy adjustment according to the changes in the world after the Global Financial Crisis. In 2014 Xi Jinping stated that “the onward advance of multipolarity will not change... It is a world with profound changes in international balance of forces” [习近平 2014].

Taking into account the most important – security concerns, after 2009 China started **military building**. Beijing decided to improve its military capabilities of sea control, amphibious warfare, and power projection regionally and globally, to make them able to become a military foundation for leadership in Asia.

Thus, China increased its investments in aircraft carriers, surface vessels, and overseas and maritime periphery bases construction. In 2009 Hu Jintao argued, “About our core interests, we have to intensify our strategic moves, to make offensive

¹⁴ 胡锦涛 (2012), 胡锦涛在中国共产党第十八次全国代表大会上的报告, available at: <http://www.genetics.cas.cn/dj/xyd/201211/P020121119334195728218.pdf>.

¹⁵ 中国经济周刊 (2013), 阎学通教授: 从韬光养晦到奋发有为, 中国崛起势不可挡, available at: <https://www.sss.tsinghua.edu.cn/info/1074/1902.htm>.

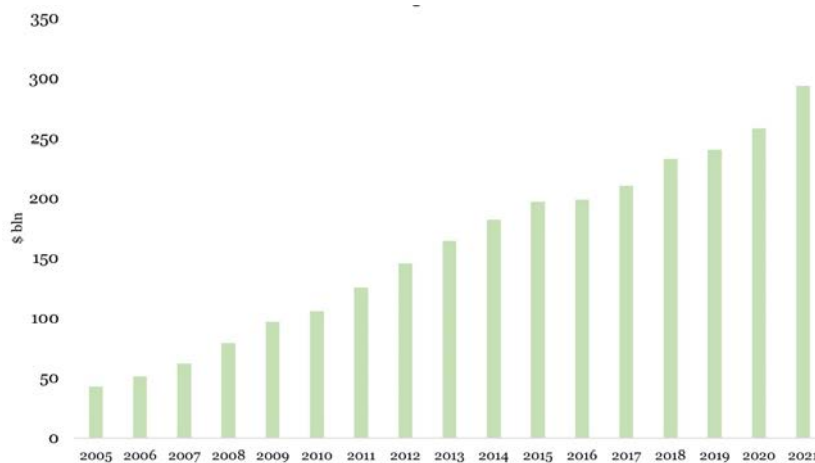


Figure 3. Chinese military spending from 2005 to 2021

Source: World Bank

moves, lead the situation into profitable for us direction” [胡锦涛文选 2016]. If in 2009 Chinese military budget accounted for \$96.6 bln, then in 2010 it made up \$105.5 bln, continuing to grow, and reached \$293.3 bln in 2021¹⁶.

Hu started his “New Historic Missions” (新历史使命) navy modernization campaign with purpose to protect China’s maritime interests and strengthen its position in territorial disputes, especially in the Indo-Pacific; the US was perceived as a competitor for Beijing [Paal 2011]. Issued in 2008 Defense White Paper claimed that People’s Liberation Army (PLA) had to make progress in its ability to rise to “far seas challenges”¹⁷, so that China started building such capabilities, it wanted to become “medium-sized maritime great power” [中等海洋强国].

Later Hu’s development of the “far seas” track power projection was sustained by Xi Jinping. In 2015 White Paper stated that “protection of (Chinese) overseas interests is a strategic demand” [中国日报 2015]. As Chinese relative power compared to the American grew, Beijing decided to lay down a military foundation to constrain the US in the region.

First, China launched its aircraft carriers program. It bought uncompleted ex-Soviet aircraft carrier “Varyag” in Ukraine, refurbished and modernized it; in 2016 the carrier was combat-ready and named Liaoning. In 2017 Beijing commissioned into service domestically designed and built second aircraft carrier “Shandong” – an improved version of “Varyag”. In 2023 China is going to put into service its third aircraft carrier “Fujian”, larger and different from the previous two models. In near future Beijing is planning to construct its fourth aircraft carrier “Type 004”, which will be armed with lasers and railguns; like “Fujian” it will feature nuclear propulsion.¹⁸

Second, Beijing upgraded its surface fleet. Building regional order required next capabilities: amphibious warfare (AMW), anti-submarine warfare (ASW), anti-air

¹⁶ World Bank (2023), China military expenditure.

¹⁷ 国务院新闻办公室 (2009), 2008年中国的国防白皮书, available at: http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2009-01/20/content_2615769.htm.

¹⁸ Lin J. and Singer P.W. (2017), China’s making major progress with its aircraft carrier tech, Popular Science, available at: <https://www.popsci.com/china-aircraft-carrier-technology/>.

warfare (AAW), and mine countermeasures (MCM). For starters, China improved its main surface combatants fleet, constructed or bought from Russia destroyers with anti-submarine and anti-aircraft weaponry. Purchased before 2009 from Moscow four “Sovremenny” class destroyers and domestic Luyang II (Type 052C) class warships were all equipped with modernized ASW and AAW arms¹⁹.

When Xi Jinping came to power, commissioned destroyers Luyang III (Type 052D) and Renhai (Type 055) classes were rigged with the latest AAW HHQ-9 missiles and ASW equipment. Since 2014 the number of constructed destroyers has been dramatically rising; in mid-2020s Beijing will operate 40 destroyers, being inferior only to the USA [Joe 2020]. Mine countermeasures were important as well, so China in 2014 sharply increased MCM vessels production, namely, Type 081A and Type 082 II classes²⁰. Chinese amphibious warfare also was improved due to potential necessity to conduct operations in East and South China Seas. Beijing commissioned more Type 071 landing platform docks, in total eight ships²¹. Chinese marines number will grow to 100 000 [Hanson 2020].

Third, Chinese Science of Military Strategy report in 2013 argued, “we (China) need to structure overseas strategic branch points... to bring political and military influences on the relevant regions”²². Beijing realized the necessity to create capabilities of overseas military power projection; these PLA’s facilities (军事基地) were part of grand strategy and had to help China to set up regional order by controlling maritime connectivity.

In 2014 Beijing reached an agreement with the local government to open its first military base in Djibouti and continued talks with other states about establishing possible facilities there. Simultaneously China started land reclamation of disputed islands in South China Sea with purpose to build bases there, e.g., it constructed numerous facilities with anti-aircraft weapons and a CIWS missile-defense system on the Spratly Islands²³. In respect to overseas military bases allocation Beijing is interested in next locations: Myanmar/Cambodia, Pakistan (Gwadar port), the Bay of Bengal, Djibouti, Seychelles, Tanzania (Dar es Salaam), Sri Lanka (Hambantota) [Miller 2022].

All those military power-strengthening projects marked a more proactive Chinese approach towards the USA and were aimed at Beijing’s regional reinforcement, including China’s leading role in regional organizations. Beijing launched **political building**.

To alter regional order China needed: A) to build independent from the USA “forms of control”, through which it could impose own rules and regulate Asian states behavior; B) to establish a multilateral economic organization that would give Beijing the means to coerce, induce and reach consent through public goods or beneficial bargains; C) to achieve legitimacy by claiming regional leadership.

¹⁹ Global Security, Hangzhou Type 956 Sovremenny, available at: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/haizhou.htm>.

²⁰ Global Security, Chinese Mine Warfare, available at: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/ship-mine.htm>.

²¹ Global Defense Corp (2022), China’s Type 071 Amphibious Dock Landing Craft Joins Naval Exercises First Time, available at: <https://www.globaldefensecorp.com/2022/01/25/chinas-type-071-amphibious-dock-landing-craft-joins-naval-exercises-first-time/>.

²² Science of Military Strategy (2013), China Aerospace Studies Institute, available at: airuniversity.af.edu.

²³ Center For Strategies & International Studies (2016), China’s New Spratly Islands Defenses, available at: <https://amti.csis.org/chinas-new-spratly-island-defenses/>.

Firstly, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building-Measures in Asia (CICA) was chosen by China as the suitable multilateral body for promoting Chinese vision of Beijing-led regional architecture. At the CICA summit in 2014, Xi Jinping introduced the “New Asian Security Concept” that opposed US Asian alliances – “it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia”, and promoted Chinese ambition for institutionalized leadership across security and economic domains within CICA framework²⁴. CICA’s importance as a political building instrument for China was emphasized by State Councilor Dai Bingguo in 2010: “after Global Financial Crisis CICA’s members should cooperate to meet each state’s and common goals”²⁵.

Secondly, in 2013 Beijing created its multilateral development bank (MDB) – Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), independent from the USA and able to replace America-led IMF and World Bank in the region. AIIB helped China to conduct its “periphery diplomacy” and upgrade relations with Asian states.

AIIB contributed to Beijing’s regional order building by providing China with abilities to constrain its neighbors, impose advantageous for China norms and rules on others, and uphold its legitimacy as an Asian leader. AIIB has approved in total \$40 bln as of February 2023, where India and other Asian states are the largest borrowers²⁶. The amount of borrowed funds over ten years is not huge, but AIIB is Chinese economic statecraft tool for influence, which can be used to tie other countries politically to China by providing public goods. Regarding AIIB Chinese scholars argue: “geo-economics and geopolitics are having an impact on one another” [Xiao 2016].

Thirdly, to build its legitimacy as a regional leader, Beijing carried out Boao Forum meetings, where China was posed as Asia’s economic, political, and security flagship. The Chinese concept of “Community of Common Destiny” became Beijing’s alternative to US-led alliances approach in Asia. According to it increasing economic cooperation with China made countries align with Beijing, accept its legitimacy, and consider political demands. Chinese White Paper on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation policy put it clearly: “Chinese leaders many times explained the concept of community with common destiny; China is promoting it to establish in Asia”²⁷.

President Xi was constantly stressing necessity for Asian countries to gather around China economically and on security issues. For example, at Peripheral Diplomacy Work Conference in 2013 he emphasized, “we (Asian states) should accommodate common development and rules that have to be obeyed by different countries”²⁸.

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (2014), New Asian Security Concept For New Progress in Security Cooperation, available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/201405/t20140527_678163.html.

²⁵ 外交部 (2010), 戴秉国在亚信论坛第三次峰会上发表讲话, available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/yzxhhy_683118/xgxw_683124/201006/t20100608_9388745.shtml.

²⁶ AIIB (2023), Project Summary, available at: <https://www.aiib.org/en/projects/summary/index.html>.

²⁷ 国务院新闻办公室 (2017), 《中国的亚太安全合作政策》白皮书, available at: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1539907/1539907.htm>.

²⁸ China Council for International Cooperation on Environmental and Development (2013), Important Speech of Xi Jinping at Peripheral Diplomacy Work Conference, available at: http://www.cciced.net/cciceden/NEWSCENTER/LatestEnvironmentalandDevelopmentNews/201310/t20131030_82626.html.

Rising states are using economic power to establish their political order instead of existing one, thereby, it's not a surprise that China decided to employ infrastructure spending, asymmetric trading relations, and currency internationalization as a means of geostrategic strengthening. After the Global Financial Crisis Beijing began independent from the American influence **economic building** in Asia. China started with foreign infrastructure investment – Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), facilitated trade with neighbors, efforts to promote yuan regionally.

For starters, Beijing's increased economic interaction with other states is part of Chinese Grand Strategy because it provided China with *relational*, *structural*, and *domestic* benefits. Giving massive investments to the neighboring countries improved Chinese relational power and became an economic statecraft tool.

States' participation in BRI was called by some Western observers a “debt trap” due to some countries' inability to repay borrowed Chinese funds. BRI created a structural advantage for Beijing – regional connectivity control and trade interdependence between China and other Asian countries, opening the gateway to the Asian markets for Chinese goods.

Therefore, China obtained strategic advantages and relative economic leverage over neighbors – if states didn't cooperate with Beijing, then they could lose vital economic support from China. For instance, suffering from liquidity crisis Sri Lanka was not in a position to pay off the loans, but it needed to continue economic cooperation with China, so Sri Lanka gave Beijing Hambantota Port for a 99-year lease in 2017 [Abeyagoonasekera 2022].

By the same token, excessive dependence on trade with China, notably asymmetric, was used by Beijing to influence some Asian countries. South Korea and the USA decided to deploy THAAD anti-missile system in South Korea in 2017, Beijing assertively responded with trade restrictions on Korean exports to the vast Chinese market²⁹.

In total from \$1 trillion to \$8 trillion were invested under the BRI range; the investment brought domestic benefits to China [Clarke 2018]. It created an impetus for Chinese exports and raw goods import rise as well as allowed state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to export abroad excessive productive capacities. From the Chinese military perspective, constructed transport infrastructure, especially seaports e.g. Gwadar, could be dual-used as well.

China contributed to the yuan global strengthening as a part of regional order building. Beijing knew that state's financial power arises from a currency's centrality to global finance; America was the world economic leader due to the dollar's hegemony. That's why Beijing promoted yuan at two levels: weakened US dollar as the reserve currency for international settlements and used yuan instead.

After the Global Financial Crisis Hu Jintao initially claimed for “diversification of the international monetary system” (国际货币体系多元化) and later Xi Jinping implemented this idea by encouraging more and more Beijing's partners to use yuan for trade with China³⁰.

²⁹ Tong-Hyung K. (2022), China, South Korea clash over THAAD anti-missile system, Defense News, available at: <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2022/08/10/china-south-korea-clash-over-thaad-anti-missile-system/>.

³⁰ 兴证全球基金 (2009), 胡锦涛: 促进国际货币体系多元化合理化, available at: <https://www.xqfunds.com/info.dohscontentid=6902.htm>.

In case of being a subject of the USA-imposed economic sanctions, Beijing needed its financial messaging system instead of SWIFT. Thus, in 2015 China developed an alternative to SWIFT – Cross-Border Interbank Payments System (CIPS). The system became very popular among Asian business entities; in second quarter of 2022 ¥22.8 trillion were processed through CIPS, which increased by 25% YoY [Bank of China 2022].

The third phase (2017 and beyond) of Chinese grand strategy was launched by general secretary Xi at the Chinese Communist Party’s 19th Party Congress. President’s long speech partially addressed more proactive Chinese position in the world, namely expansion, announcing “new era of powerful China”, “creation of (rejuvenation) new China till 2049”, “active Chinese participation in global governance”, “army’s modernization to the world-class standards”, “rise of China’s international influence” [新华社 2017].

Beijing claimed new approach in its grand strategy amid the “Western global influence declining”, which was seen by China after annexation of Crimea, Brexit, and beginning of Trump’s presidency in 2016. Chinese senior diplomat Yang Jiechi argued, “international system, based on Western centrality, is difficult to sustain”, so Beijing believed it was time for new world order concepts of global governance implementation, notably those, which had to increase China’s influence in the world³¹.

Xi openly started Chinese blunting and building at the global level, striving: A) to undermine America-led international architecture and the US hegemony; B) to build foundations and forms of control for its leadership; C) to displace America as the global leading state across all domains. Firstly, China intensified efforts of army modernization and military bases allocation in other countries. Beijing decided to play more decisive role in world security issues.

Secondly, Chinese global governance political promotion needed to be increased within international organizations and by the institutionalization of Beijing-led organizations. Then by creating new coalitions to counterbalance American alliances and exports of governing practices as well as values to developing states. The last was named “Chinese solution” (中国方案) – a blueprint for emerging economies on how to speed up their development and increase the level of cooperation with China [求是 2021].

Thirdly, Beijing decided to strengthen its global economic position by accelerating cooperation with developing countries through the BRI initiative, weakening the US dollar hegemony, changing “Washington consensus” to “Beijing consensus”, becoming the largest trading partner for the states, increasing investments into innovations and production modernization to seize the fourth industrial revolution leadership [Economy 2018, 121–151].

In respect to **military and security expansion**, China declared overall army forces modernization program aimed at achieving world-class standards, which gradually will lead to reinforced China’s military presence in East Asia and globally, where Beijing poses itself as a “security provider” and “powerful country”. China continues to build aircraft carriers and warships, create unmanned arms, and build up its nuclear force; in 2035 number of Chinese nuclear warheads will quadruple to 1 500³².

³¹ 人民网-人民日报 (2017), 杨洁篪: 推动构建人类命运共同体, available at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1119/c64094-29654801.html>.

³² Copp T. and Baldor L.C. (2022), China to increase nuclear warheads to 1,500, Pentagon warns, AP News, available at: <https://apnews.com/article/taiwan-europe-china-united-states-beijing-af4dd76e993f450df7af8e63d1a0187c>.

Increased Chinese military might will be soon underpinned by the occurrence of its new overseas military bases, for example, in Africa, Cambodia, or in the Maldives in the Indian Ocean, where Beijing is implementing its “String of Pearls” (珍珠链战略) strategy to deter India and secure sea lines. Some states may see Chinese military bases presence as a means of stability guaranteeing.

More confident Beijing issued in 2022 own vague global security vision “Global Security Initiative”, where China is ready to handle global security challenges by using its multilateral and bilateral cooperation with other states³³.

Regarding to **political expansion**, Beijing is focused on improving its global governance capability and establishing China-led world order – “community of common destiny”, as well as vigorously promoting the legitimacy of its system by using economic leverage. China increases the level of its participation in existing international structures like SOC and BRICS as well. Chinese White Book in 2019 stated that “China should actively participate in the global governance system reformation”³⁴.

For starters, Beijing put some efforts to improve its leadership and visions within the UN system, many Chinese officials took positions in leading UN agencies, like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Besides, China set up plenty of controlled international organizations, which grounded its regional and global involvement; for example, Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CACF), and so on.

Since 2017 Beijing has already obtained significant legitimacy from the authoritative states supported economically by it. Nowadays numerous countries within Asia, Africa, Latin America, and even Europe are ready to participate in the China-led “community of common destiny” and learn Chinese governing practices.

Concerning **economic expansion**, Beijing sees BRI as a structural connectivity instrument of tying other states to China with further rise of trade volumes with them. Now Beijing implements “Dual Circulation” (双循环) strategy, where the increased domestic market consumption co-exists with the BRI development. Chinese plan is to become developed country in the future. Moreover, China has already become the biggest trading partner for majority of the countries on the globe.

Yuan internationalization and usage as an interstate settlement currency is underway, and the number of countries preferring to use it to trade with China increases. In 2023 Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq will sell their hydrocarbon resources to China in yuan³⁵.

But the main Beijing’s focus of grand strategy is on economic leadership achievement of technological modernization. Such development programs like “Made in China 2025” and “Chinese Standard 2035” should make China the global center of the “Fourth Industrial Revolution”, helping it to catch up and overtake (赶超) the West. Innovation improvement is the central goal of the 14th Five-Year

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (2023), The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper, available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjbxw/202302/t20230221_11028348.html.

³⁴ 中华人民共和国中央人民政府 (2019), 新时代的中国与世界, available at: http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-09/27/content_5433889.htm.

³⁵ Global Times (2023), Iraq reportedly to pay in yuan for imports from China, highlighting yuan’s growing role, available at: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202302/1286068.shtml>.

Plan³⁶, “Made in China 2025” covers almost \$2 trillion investment for modernization, for instance, 5G networks construction [Trivedi 2020].

Conclusions

Therefore, the **fundamental goal** of Chinese grand strategy is to establish multipolar world and create anchored in BRI and Community of Common Destiny China-led global order – partial hegemony, with the Beijing-controlled regional core in Asia, strong influential ties with developing countries, which together will become Chinese super-ordinate economic and political macrozone. In the long term, Beijing would like to reset its relationship with the USA, however not as a global leader, but as a regional power.

Through the lens of this blueprint realization China views Russo-Ukrainian war.

Firstly, China doesn’t support war in Ukraine, but its strategic cooperation with Putin-led Russia influences Beijing’s current stance because China and Russia together are aimed at blunting American order. Thus, Beijing perceives Russia as useful temporary anti-American instrument – the more resources the USA devotes to deter Russia in Europe, the less it has to use to resist Chinese expansion in East Asia. For Beijing Russia-China relationship is vital across geostrategic, security, political, and economic domains:

Moscow together with Beijing sustains efforts to establish multipolar world and doesn’t reject reinforced Chinese forms of control and legitimacy within the new architecture of international relations system. Russia supports Chinese intention to execute reunification with Taiwan;

While China is increasing its nuclear warhead arsenal with purpose to make it big enough to strategically deter the USA in East Asia, Russia provides China with the “nuclear umbrella” and maintains high level of military regional cooperation in front of American efforts to create US-led anti-Chinese regional organizations like AUKUS and QUAD. In case of Taiwan crisis, Russia will back China. Besides, Moscow continues to transfer Soviet-era military know-how to China, e.g., missile early warning system technology [Gardner 2013, 119–136];

Russia supports Chinese political leadership in Asia within SOC and BRICS as well as shares the same political “authoritative”, from the Western point of view, norms and practices;

After Russian invasion to Ukraine, Moscow became one of the biggest energy recourse exporters to China, thereby securing Beijing’s demand for oil and gas by land routes. In case of military turmoil and clash with the USA in South China sea, through which sea communications Beijing imports hydrocarbon resources, China can rely on land imports from Russia and Central Asia. Also, Russia is trying to attract Chinese investments without any screening procedures and keeps its market open for made-in-China goods.

Secondly, Beijing sees the USA and AUKUS as threats, thus China shares Russian geopolitical security concerns about NATO enlargement, even if it continues to preserve significant economical connections with Western states and keeps communication lines with Kyiv. However, the grade of China-America competition is to increase across geopolitical, security, economical, and technological domains with

³⁶ MERICS (2021), China’s 14th Five-Year Plan – strengthening the domestic base to become a superpower, available at: <https://merics.org/en/short-analysis/chinas-14th-five-year-plan-strengthening-domestic-base-become-superpower>.

the inevitable future breakage of close economic ties. US-China confrontation will continue to develop long after the multipolar world order establishment.

Thirdly, China firmly took a neutral stance on Russo-Ukrainian war. It didn't openly support official Kyiv against Russian invasion for a few main reasons: A) Ukrainian and Western leaders repeatedly claimed Kyiv is fighting for maintaining West-led liberal world order, which is unacceptable for China now due to its leadership ambitions [Fukuyama 2022]; B) an unprecedented level of Ukraine-USA connections, government dependency on Western financing and Ukraine's intention to join NATO are seen as undesirable by China, because Ukrainian full-scale membership in NATO will, first, add complexity to connectivity between China and Western Europe; second, will mean Russian strategic defeat, thus Beijing wouldn't be able to implement its plan of reunification with Taiwan peacefully, while the island's administration is militarily supported by the USA and perceived by Beijing as a sphere of American influence.

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