Fear and Anxiety of China’s Rise
Understanding Response of the Indo-Pacific

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Abstract

The emotional turn in geopolitical decision is often overlooked in academia. However, emotions have had a significant impact on the major geopolitical events. In the current geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region, some democratic nations, including the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, harbor fear of China’s rise. China’s economic growth, military expansion, and offensive foreign policy instilled fear in the Indo-Pacific region. In the fear of China, Indo-Pacific geopolitics is reshaping. When the new dynamics of the Indo-Pacific are counter to China fear, it is important to explore why China’s rise is a matter of fear and anxiety to some nations in the Indo-Pacific. This article uniquely discusses how emotion can unify nations and contribute to establishing new a global order. Without knowing the emotional turn of the geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific, our comprehension of the new landscape remains incomplete. This article aims to explore and understand the impact of emotions on the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific.

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Emotion often goes overlooked in discussions of international relations, yet it exerts a significant influence on geopolitical events, political dynamics, and decision-making processes. Sometimes, emotions supersede rationality, ultimately shaping foreign policy and decisions.

The use of emotional terms in international relations can drastically impact a state’s policy orientation. For instance, phrases like “the barbarians are coming” have been used to justify stringent Western migration policies. Similarly, emotions such as the desire for independence have historically fueled fights for autonomy in the developing world during the colonial period.

Fear emerges as a pivotal emotion in influencing international political dynamics. The expansion of the Soviet Union in Asia and Europe, coupled with its socialist economic ideology, instilled fear among capitalist nations. In the contemporary global geopolitical landscape, fear and anxiety surrounding China’s rise significantly shape global realities and responses, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

This article delves into how fear and anxiety regarding China impact the geopolitical landscape, undertaking a literature review on emotions in international relations and providing theoretical explanations of their operation within this realm. It explores emotions’ historical and cultural contexts, illustrating their influence on the international political landscape.
Furthermore, the article investigates the reasons behind China’s status as a nation evoking fear and anxiety, examining political, economic, military, and ideological changes within China. It aims to elucidate why other nations perceive and react to this fear and anxiety, scrutinizing specific sectors within China that trigger apprehension in other nations and identifying which nations harbor such apprehensions and explaining their responses to China considering their fears.

Thus, the article underscores the importance of emotions in understanding the dynamics of international relations, particularly by elucidating the fear and anxiety surrounding China and its impact on geopolitics.

**Literature Review**

Russian researcher Gleb V. Kotsur posited that emotion in international relations transcends mere biological sensation, encompassing social, cultural, and historical dimensions. Kotsur drew upon Simon Koschut’s concept of *emotional culture*, comprising emotional codes and cultural scripts. *Emotional codes* represent expressions of emotion, while cultural scripts denote accepted verbal representations of emotions within a society.

Koschut highlighted the symbiotic relationship between language and emotion, elucidating their role in power dynamics within international relations. He demonstrated how the United States and Europe leverage *fear* as a tool to address migration influxes.

Koschut argued that emotional discourse shapes social action, asserting that emotions and discourse are intertwined within power dynamics. He contended that emotions, far from being irrational forces, exhibit patterns aligned with social relations. He further elucidated that emotions extend beyond rationality, challenging or spotlighting authorities’ actions. He emphasized that emotions are not solely individual experiences but are socially recognized and engaged with on a broader scale, constituting the experience or belief of a social group.

Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker illustrated the interconnectedness of emotion, discourse, and power. They argued that emotions, far from being solely individual experiences, are socially constructed and wield significant influence in political contexts. They examined how the emotional discourse of “good versus evil”

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2 Kotsur, “Emotions and International Relations,” 212.
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justifies the “war on terror,” institutionalizing emotions like sympathy, victimhood, and anger within political discourses.⁵

Chinese scholar Shiping Tang delineated two fundamental positions on coping with fear in international relations: offensive realism and non-offensive realism. According to Tang, offensive realism advocates for states to adopt a pessimistic view of others’ intentions, asserting that the anarchic nature of the international system prompts states to behave aggressively. According to this theory, it is logical for states to foster a mindset that assumes the worst about others’ intentions. In contrast, non-offensive realism takes a different stance, rejecting the notion of assuming the worst about others’ intentions. It argues that states can and should implement measures to reduce uncertainty surrounding each other’s intentions and mitigate fear. Non-offensive realism emphasizes the importance of managing fear regarding others’ intentions, contending that assuming the worst is not only irrational and counterproductive but also unsustainable. According to this perspective, states may even entertain a more dire scenario than what others intend out of fear.⁶

Muqtedar Khan and Isa Haskologlu elucidated fear’s impact on ancient state structures, realist state structures, and contemporary liberal theories of international relations, influencing state actions. They highlighted how fear, post-2001 and the war on terror, has shaped not only US foreign policy but also the agendas of other nations and international organizations, noting the worrisome trend of states weaponizing fear to achieve foreign policy objectives.⁷

Thus, emotions in international relations exert a significant influence on the geopolitical landscape, with the fear and anxiety surrounding China now eclipsing concerns about terrorism in the Western bloc.

China under Xi—Fear and Anxiety

Xi Jinping currently serves as the President of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). His policy shift, dubbed “striving for achievement,” represents a departure from Deng Xiaoping’s strategy of “keeping a low profile and biding time.”⁸ Assuming leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the 18th Party Congress in 2012, Xi redirected Chinese foreign policy toward his new strategy

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⁸ Sanjeev Kumar, “China’s South Asia Policy,” India Quarterly 75, no. 2 Special Issue: China (June 2019), 137, https://www.jstor.org/.
in 2013, unveiling the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to fulfill China’s newfound international aspirations.\(^9\)

Securing his third term of leadership during the 20th Party Congress in 2022, Xi amended the country’s constitution in 2018 to eliminate term limits for the presidency, thereby paving the way for potential lifelong rule.\(^10\) Consequently, Xi Jinping has ascended to become China’s most powerful leader since Mao Zedong, the founder of the PRC.

Xi’s redefined foreign policy and the elimination of legal constraints on his presidential term have sparked concerns among other nations regarding China’s increasingly assertive role on the global stage. China’s absence of democratic governance domestically, coupled with its partnerships with authoritarian regimes worldwide, poses an ideological challenge to the United States and other democratic nations, whose strategic goals revolve around advancing global democracy.

Going beyond ideological implications, China is emerging as an alternative development ally for smaller nations, evident in the widespread participation of states in the BRI. As the world’s second-largest GDP holder with substantial investment capital, China is actively involved in infrastructure projects across numerous developing nations.

China’s expanding influence with developing nations has raised alarm in the United States regarding its waning superpower status. As a result, Washington has redirected its strategic priorities from the war on terror to its *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, which promotes a “free and open Indo-Pacific.” The concept of the Indo-Pacific extends beyond geographical boundaries, representing a shared identity among nations grappling with concerns and unease over China’s rise. This regional framework influences the future course of the Asian regional order, underscoring the significance of emotional discourse in shaping international political dynamics.

Mutual concerns among nations have spurred collaboration to tackle shared challenges. Past events such as the terrorist attacks on the United States in 1998 and 2001, the 2008 attacks in India, and the 2015 Paris attacks have prompted concerted international efforts to combat terrorism. Similarly, China’s perceived threats and the resulting anxieties are prompting the formation of regional and global alliances to counter Beijing’s influence in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

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China’s Defense Strategy: Global Concern

China has unveiled a new defense strategy titled *China’s National Defense in the New Era*. According to this strategy, China aims to foster collaboration among Asian nations through initiatives such as the Shanghai Cooperation Council and by forging strategic partnerships with forums like the China–ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Informal Meeting and the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus).11

Outlined in this white paper is China’s sovereignty claim over the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and the Yellow Sea. China has reported conducting 72,000 rights protection and law enforcement operations, 4,600 maritime security patrols, and 80 joint exercises in these regions since 2012. It is noteworthy that the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) comprises 4 million regular troops.12

Xi leads the highest decision-making body of the PLA and is dedicated to advancing the PLA into a world-class force. Presently, the PLA is modernizing its weaponry. In 2018, the PLA allowed the deployment of the Type 15 tank in high-altitude regions such as Tibet. Furthermore, the PLA Air Force has enhanced its capabilities with an array of stealth aircraft, notably the J-20 fighters. The PLA has shifted its focus toward becoming a major maritime power, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. In 2016, China commissioned 18 ships, surpassing the US Navy’s five commissioned ships that year. China has steadily expanded its nuclear arsenal, reaching an estimated 290 warheads in 2019.13 According to projections from the US Defense Department, China is anticipated to possess over 1,000 operational nuclear warheads by 2030.14 China has prioritized the development of antiship ballistic missiles capable of targeting US warships in the Western Pacific. Additionally, the PLA is advancing its hypersonic missile technology, enabling projectiles to travel at speeds significantly faster than the speed of sound.15 In 2020, China initiated the construction of three silo fields intended to house over 300 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM). In 2021, China achieved a significant breakthrough by successfully testing a hypersonic glide vehicle that traversed a distance of 21,600 miles.16

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15 Maizland, “China’s Modernizing Military.”
16 Fravel, Hiim, and Trøan, “China’s Misunderstood Nuclear Expansion.”
China has significantly increased its defense spending to modernize its military, making it the second-largest defense budget spender globally after the United States. From 2000 to 2016, China’s military budget experienced an annual growth rate of approximately 10 percent. According to data from Statista, in 2022, China’s military budget reached USD 292 billion, while India’s stood at USD 81 billion, Japan’s at USD 46 billion, South Korea’s at USD 46 billion, and Australia’s at USD 32 billion—all of which are members of the Indo-Pacific region. Notably, the combined budgets of India, Japan, Australia, and South Korea are less than China’s alone. This surge in China’s military budget has raised regional and global concerns.

The PRC Ministry of Defense has outlined specific priority areas within China’s defense strategy. These include safeguarding national political security, ensuring the security of its people and social stability; opposing and containing Taiwan’s independence; suppressing advocates of separatist movements such as Tibetan independence and the establishment of East Turkistan; protecting China’s maritime rights and interests; securing China’s interests in outer space, electromagnetic space, and cyberspace; and safeguarding China’s overseas interests.

Furthermore, China’s defense strategy asserts that the Senkaku Islands and the islands and other geographic features in the South China Sea are inalienable parts of Chinese territory. However, several other nations also claim sovereignty over these territories, and they are apprehensive about China’s assertive defense strategy in the region.

**China’s Military Exercise in the Indo-Pacific**

China’s regular live exercises and military drills evoke fear and apprehension among neighboring nations in the region. These activities are often perceived as components of China’s broader military aspirations and initiatives, prompting concerns regarding its intentions in the Indo-Pacific region.

In June 2023, China conducted military exercises in the East China Sea, north of Taiwan, featuring live-fire drills from warships. This demonstration of military prowess was interpreted as a show of strength in the region. Subsequently, China

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and Russia commenced joint military exercises in the Sea of Japan the following month, aimed at countering the US–Japan–South Korea cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. This joint exercise underscored the deepening military cooperation between China and Russia.

In September 2023, China conducted another extensive military drill, deploying an aircraft carrier and numerous naval vessels and aircraft, including missile destroyers, frigates, and supply ships. These exercises involved maneuvering through waters around Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines. Additionally, China dispatched at least 68 warplanes near Taiwanese airspace, signaling its assertiveness and readiness to challenge regional security dynamics.

China’s frequent live exercises, military drills, and joint exercises with Russia have instilled a sense of fear and anxiety among the democratic nations in the Indo-Pacific region. These nations, which also serve as security partners of the United States, are apprehensive about China’s escalating assertiveness and its potential implications for regional stability and security.

**China’s Defense Strategy: Fear and Anxiety in Taiwan**

China’s irredentist defense strategy prioritizes the seizure of Taiwan at all costs, which instills fear in the democratic portion of Taiwan’s population. As highlighted in this article, China ranks second globally in military expenditure, trailing only the United States. The prospect of China’s strategy, military expansion, and increased defense budget amplifies apprehension in Taiwan.

Comparatively, Taiwan’s defense capabilities pale in comparison to China’s. China boasts a ground army comprising 2,035,000 personnel, 260,000 navy personnel, and 395,000 air force personnel, while Taiwan maintains approximately 169,000 ground forces, 40,000 navy personnel, and 35,000 air force personnel. Furthermore, China possesses 4,800 tanks, 3,348 aircraft, 59 submarines, and 86 naval ships, whereas Taiwan’s resources include 650 tanks, 691 aircraft, four submarines, and 26 naval vessels.

Given China’s formidable military strength, bolstered military budget, and assertive strategy, the prospect of reunifying Taiwan remains a pressing concern, fostering fear and anxiety within the nation. In the event of a potential military conflict, China’s armed forces would overwhelmingly surpass those of Taiwan.

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Additionally, China’s single-party governance stands in stark contrast to Taiwan’s democratic principles, exacerbating ideological differences and contributing to the prevailing sense of fear and anxiety in Taiwan.

**South China Sea Tensions: Growing Conflict among Nations**

China has asserted its sovereignty over specific territories in the South China Sea. However, nations bordering the South China Sea, including Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Malaysia, oppose China’s territorial claims in the region. Despite international courts having ruled in favor of these rival claimants, China has illegally established advanced military infrastructure and is constructing artificial islands in the South China Sea.\(^{24}\) China’s objectives include controlling overfishing, oil, and gas reserves in the region, sparking anxiety among other South China Sea nations about China’s escalating and aggressive military strategy.

Historically, China has aggressively pursued complete dominance over the South China Sea. In 1974, Chinese forces seized the Paracel Islands from Vietnam, resulting in the deaths of at least 70 Vietnamese troops. Another confrontation between Vietnam and China occurred in 1988. In 2012, China and the Philippines were embroiled in a prolonged maritime standoff, with each accusing the other of encroachment in the Scarborough Shoal.\(^ {25}\) Such confrontations continue today.

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, more than “21% of global trade, totaling $3.37 trillion, transited through the South China Sea in 2016.”\(^ {26}\) Consequently, the United States, as the largest economic power and a global superpower, harbors concerns regarding China’s expansive claims and military presence in the South China Sea, a crucial artery for international trade. On one hand, China’s rapid military modernization has targeted the United States, fueling apprehensions and fears of potential conflict. Meanwhile, the United States’ democratic allies in the Indo-Pacific face direct threats from China’s military buildup and aggressive foreign policy.

**India–China Relations: From Panchsheel to Tensions—A Shift in Dynamics**

India and China have historically maintained enduring bilateral relations, with Panchsheel serving as a foundational policy for peaceful coexistence between the


\(^{25}\) Regilme, “Beyond Paradigms.”

\(^{26}\) Regilme, “Beyond Paradigms.”
two nations, even amid the turbulence of the Cold War era.\textsuperscript{27} Former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh once remarked that “Relations between India and China are unique in the world.”\textsuperscript{28}

However, in 2020, the dynamic between the two countries shifted dramatically. The Galwan Valley clash in 2020 was a violent confrontation between Indian and Chinese troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the disputed Galwan Valley region, located in the Ladakh region of the Himalayas. The clash occurred in June 2020 and resulted in casualties on both sides, with 20 Indian soldiers and an undisclosed number of Chinese soldiers losing their lives. Tensions escalated following the clash, leading to increased military presence and heightened security measures along the India–China border. The incident significantly strained bilateral relations between the two countries and prompted widespread international concern about the escalation of border disputes and military tensions in the region.\textsuperscript{29}

In 2021, the Chinese legislature enacted a land borders law that underscored the importance of integrating border defense with socio-economic development.

\textsuperscript{27} Panchsheel, also known as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, is a set of principles that guide diplomatic relations between countries, particularly India and China. The term panchsheel originates from the Sanskrit words “panch,” meaning five, and “sheel,” meaning virtues or principles. These principles were first formally enunciated in the 1954 Sino-Indian Agreement, signed between India’s then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and China’s Premier Zhou Enlai, aimed at resolving border disputes and fostering peaceful relations between the two nations.

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are:

\begin{itemize}
  \item [Mutual] Respect for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity: This principle emphasizes respecting each other’s sovereignty and territorial boundaries, thereby preventing any form of aggression or interference in each other’s internal affairs.
  \item [Mutual] Nonaggression: Both parties agree not to use force or threats of force against each other, promoting peaceful resolution of conflicts and disputes through dialogue and diplomacy.
  \item [Noninterference] in Each Other’s Internal Affairs: This principle underscores the importance of respecting each other’s political and social systems, refraining from interfering in domestic affairs, and maintaining sovereignty over internal governance.
  \item [Equality] and Mutual Benefit: Both countries commit to fostering equal and mutually beneficial relations, ensuring that agreements and cooperation initiatives are fair, balanced, and beneficial to both parties.
  \item [Peaceful] Coexistence: The ultimate goal of Panchsheel is to promote peace, harmony, and cooperation between nations, fostering a conducive environment for mutual understanding, friendship, and development.
\end{itemize}

Panchsheel has served as a guiding framework for diplomatic relations not only between India and China but also between other nations globally. It encapsulates the principles of mutual respect, nonaggression, noninterference, equality, and peaceful coexistence, providing a foundation for fostering stable and harmonious international relations.


in border regions. This legislation was seen as a strategic move to strengthen China’s territorial claims and border security.\(^{30}\) The decision sparked apprehension in New Delhi, leading to a significant shift in India’s foreign policy.

Previously, India had sought to maintain a balance between countering China and fostering cooperation and trade relations. However, the new stance from Beijing led India to adopt a more defensive posture, viewing China with increased suspicion and caution. New Delhi took decisive actions to safeguard its interests. This included imposing restrictions on certain Chinese firms and investments in India, a move that signaled India’s intent to reduce its economic dependence on China. Furthermore, India ramped up its border infrastructure projects in strategically important regions such as Ladakh and the Arunachal Province. These initiatives were aimed at bolstering India’s defense capabilities and ensuring a swift response to any potential threats.\(^{31}\)

The rise of China on the global stage has led to a complex geopolitical landscape. The South China Sea, the Taiwan straits, and the China–India border are all potential flashpoints. The international community is closely watching these regions, as any escalation could have far-reaching implications.

### China’s Cyber and Outer Space Reach: Global Concern

China has faced allegations of conducting extensive overseas surveillance and manipulating its global agenda through cyberspace. These accusations stem from concerns about China’s growing technological prowess and its potential misuse for geopolitical gains.

In 2018, a significant incident brought these concerns to the forefront. It was discovered that there had been a data leak from the new headquarters of the African Union in Ethiopia. This building was not only funded by the Chinese government but also constructed by Huawei, a leading Chinese multinational technology company.\(^{32}\)

This incident raised serious questions about the security of information within such infrastructures. Critics argue that it underscores the risks associated with accepting foreign investments from countries like China in critical sectors, especially when these investments involve the deployment of technology infrastructure.

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\(^{30}\) Nishant Rajeev and Alex Stephenson, “Why We Should All Worry About the China-India Border Dispute,” United States Institute of Peace, 31 May 2023, https://www.usip.org/.


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The data leak incident at the African Union headquarters is often cited as an example of how state-backed entities could potentially exploit technological advancements for surveillance and data gathering. It has led to increased scrutiny of Chinese investments in technology infrastructure worldwide, particularly in regions where China has significant strategic interests.

In her 2019 study, Sheena Chestnut Greitens highlights that a minimum of 80 countries have adopted Chinese policy and surveillance technology. This is part of a broader concern that China is aiding authoritarian regimes worldwide by enhancing their surveillance capabilities over their citizens.33

Reports have emerged suggesting that Huawei technicians have assisted the governments of Uganda and Zambia in conducting surveillance on political opponents. These allegations, if true, raise serious questions about the ethical use of technology and its potential misuse for political gains.34

Moreover, several countries, including Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Uganda, have shown interest in adopting Chinese digital surveillance policies. This trend indicates a growing influence of China in shaping the digital surveillance landscape in these countries. It also raises concerns about the potential impact on civil liberties and privacy rights.

Chinese companies have been active in selling surveillance systems to various states. These systems often include advanced technologies such as AI-powered facial recognition. Countries such as Ecuador, Iran, Kenya, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe have reportedly procured such systems.35 The proliferation of these technologies could have significant implications for individual privacy and state control.

TikTok, a popular social media application developed by the Chinese company ByteDance, has been the subject of scrutiny in the United States due to national security concerns. The primary apprehension stems from the potential risk of user data leakage to China. Given the vast amount of personal data the app collects, there are fears that this information could be accessed by the Chinese government, potentially compromising the privacy and security of millions of users.

In addition to data privacy issues, there are concerns about content manipulation on the platform. TikTok’s algorithm, which determines the visibility and reach of content, is not transparent. This has led to allegations that the platform could be

used to suppress or promote certain types of content based on political or other considerations.

There have been ongoing accusations that TikTok has engaged in the censorship of political content. Specifically, content related to movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #GeorgeFloyd, and the Hong Kong prodemocracy protests have reportedly been suppressed. Critics argue that this could be an attempt to control the narrative around these significant social and political events.36

These concerns have sparked a broader debate about the role and responsibility of social media platforms in shaping public discourse, protecting user data, and upholding freedom of expression. As the influence of such platforms continues to grow, these issues are likely to remain at the forefront of discussions on digital rights and internet governance.

In response to concerns about potential Chinese surveillance in cyberspace, India has taken significant measures to safeguard its digital space. One such measure was the prohibition of 11 Chinese phone brands, including Oppo, OnePlus, Vivo, and Xiaomi, specifically for military use. This decision was driven by the apprehension that these devices could potentially be used as conduits for cyberespionage.37

In addition to this, India has enforced stringent restrictions on various Chinese apps within its borders. In a sweeping move in 2020, India implemented bans on at least 219 Chinese apps across three distinct phases. This included popular apps like AliExpress, TikTok, Shareit, and Likee, which had millions of users in India. These bans were implemented under the premise of protecting national security and safeguarding the privacy of Indian citizens.

The trend of banning Chinese apps continued into 2022, with India prohibiting an additional 54 Chinese apps. These actions reflect India’s growing concerns about data privacy and digital sovereignty in the face of potential foreign surveillance.38

In 2020, the United Kingdom made a significant decision regarding its telecommunications infrastructure. The UK government announced a ban on the acquisition of new Huawei 5G equipment after 31 December 2020. This decision was part of a broader strategy to eliminate all 5G infrastructure from Chinese firms.

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38 Divya Bhatt, “Full list of Chinese apps banned in India so far: PUBG Mobile, Garena Free Fire, TikTok and hundreds more,” India Today, 21 August 2022, https://www.indiatoday.in/.
within UK networks by the end of 2027.\textsuperscript{39} This move was driven by concerns about potential surveillance activities by the Chinese government in cyberspace. The UK’s decision was based on the advice of the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), which concluded that the security of Huawei’s products could no longer be guaranteed due to the impact of US sanctions on its supply chain.\textsuperscript{40}

UK Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden, when announcing this decision in the House of Commons, stated, “It is the right one for the UK telecoms networks, for our national security, and our economy, both now and indeed in the long run.”\textsuperscript{41} This statement underscores the UK government’s commitment to safeguarding national security and economic interests.

In October 2022, the UK government issued legal notices to 35 UK operators, putting the government’s previous position to remove Huawei kit from UK 5G networks on a legal footing. The key deadline to remove all Huawei equipment in the UK’s 5G network by 2027 remains unchanged.\textsuperscript{42}

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed strong approval of the United Kingdom’s decision to eliminate Huawei’s 5G equipment from its telecommunications infrastructure. He stated, “We want to see every nation who understands freedom and democracy and values that, and knows that it’s important to their own people, to their own sovereign country, to understand the threat that the Chinese Communist Party is posing to them, and to work both themselves and collectively to restore what is rightfully ours.”\textsuperscript{43}

Pompeo’s underscored the global trend of countries taking decisive actions to protect their national security interests in the digital domain. Pompeo’s applause for the United Kingdom’s decision highlights the alignment between the United States and United Kingdom on this issue. It also signals US support for other countries taking similar steps to protect their national security interests in the face of potential cyberthreats.

India, the United States, and the United Kingdom harbor concerns regarding the utilization of Chinese digital devices, telecommunication equipment, and networks in their countries and developing nations. These concerns extend beyond


\textsuperscript{40} “Huawei legal notices issued” (press release, UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 13 October 2022), https://www.gov.uk/.

\textsuperscript{41} “Huawei to be removed from UK 5G networks by 2027” (press release, UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 14 July 2020), https://www.gov.uk/.

\textsuperscript{42} “Huawei legal notices issued.”

military apprehensions, encompassing anxieties about cybersecurity and bilateral trade in the cyber domain.

Additionally, China has made significant strides in its space capabilities, demonstrating advanced space-based command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities. This includes a growing fleet of modern launch vehicles that can send a variety of payloads into space, from satellites to manned missions.

One of China’s notable achievements in space technology is the BeiDou satellite navigation program. This system, which is comparable to the US Global Positioning System (GPS), provides accurate positioning and timing services to users worldwide, enhancing China’s capabilities in navigation and communication.

In addition to these capabilities, China has developed an array of counterspace and antisatellite (ASAT) weapons. These include kinetic-kill weapons, which destroy satellites through physical impact, directed-energy weapons that can disrupt or damage satellites, co-orbital weapons that can maneuver in space to interfere with other satellites, and cyberweapons that can hack into satellite systems.\textsuperscript{44}

China also boasts an advanced manned space program, which has achieved several milestones, including manned missions, spacewalks, and the establishment of modular space stations. China’s space program, initiated in the 1950s, has set ambitious goals to become a global leader in space exploration by 2045. The country is diligently building its space-related hard-power capabilities, with a rapid expansion of its space exploration efforts. This includes exploration of celestial bodies, such as the moon and Mars, and the study of celestial phenomena.

These advancements underscore China’s commitment to becoming a major player in space exploration and technology. However, they also raise important questions about space security, international cooperation, and the peaceful use of outer space.\textsuperscript{45}

Indeed, the growth of China's cyber capabilities and its active engagement in cyber activities globally have amplified concerns about its overseas surveillance practices. The potential for data leakage, coupled with allegations of content manipulation and censorship, has led to a heightened sense of fear and vigilance among nations. This is particularly true for countries that are heavily reliant on Chinese technology infrastructure or have significant Chinese investments.


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In parallel, China’s advancements in outer space capabilities have been equally noteworthy. Its assertive behavior in space activities, including the development of advanced C4ISR capabilities, counterspace weapons, and a robust manned space program, have raised fears of an escalating competition in outer space. The potential militarization of space and the deployment of advanced surveillance technologies have added a new dimension to global security concerns.

Overall, China’s increasing presence in both the cyber and outer space domains has significantly influenced the geopolitical dynamics, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. The sense of apprehension among these nations is not just about the technological advancements but also about the potential implications for their national security, sovereignty, and regional stability. As a result, these nations are now more motivated than ever to bolster their own cyber and space capabilities, while also seeking to establish norms and regulations that ensure the peaceful and secure use of these domains. This evolving landscape underscores the need for continued dialogue, cooperation, and transparency among nations to address these shared challenges.

China as an Ideological Threat to Democracy

Despite its meteoric economic rise and its status as the world’s second-largest economy, China operates under an authoritarian political system rather than a democratic one. This presents a unique model to the world, demonstrating that rapid economic development can occur outside the framework of a democratic system.

In 2017, President Xi articulated this perspective, stating that China was forging a new path for other developing countries to achieve modernization. This statement can be interpreted as an indication of China’s ambition to export its domestic political model to other states, particularly those in the developing world. The underlying message is that economic growth and modernization are achievable under an authoritarian regime.\(^{46}\)

This perspective, however, has raised concerns among advocates of democratic governance. Christopher Wray, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), has expressed the belief that China poses a threat not only to specific US interests but also to the survival of democracy and the US-led international order. Wray’s viewpoint underscores the perceived challenges that China’s rise presents to the established global order.\(^{47}\)


\(^{47}\) Weiss, “A World Safe for Autocracy?”
In Australia, there have been controversies surrounding political donations linked to Beijing, as well as allegations of pressure tactics and compromising relationships. These concerns have led to the implementation of new laws aimed at countering foreign interference.

In 2018, the Australian Government introduced the National Security Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Act 2018 (EFI Act) to combat the growing challenge of foreign interference. This legislation amended existing offenses in the Criminal Code Act 1995 and introduced new national security offenses.48

The Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018 was also established, which requires individuals or entities undertaking certain activities on behalf of foreign principals to register and provide information about the nature of their relationships.49

These legislative measures were taken in response to concerns about potential foreign influence on Australia's political processes and national security. They represent Australia's efforts to safeguard its democratic processes and institutions from undue foreign influence. As a result of these developments, resources and technology associated with China's overseas policies are often viewed with suspicion in Australia. They are seen as potential threats, particularly in the context of the broader geopolitical tensions between China and other nations.

As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), China has a significant influence on global decision making. It has been observed that China often aligns itself with nations such as Iran, North Korea, and Myanmar, which have not embraced democratic governance. This alignment is not merely coincidental but seems to be a strategic choice, reflecting China's geopolitical interests and ideological leanings.

In the UNSC, China appears to be leading a coalition of nations that lack robust democratic institutions. This coalition includes countries like Russia, Iran, North Korea, and Myanmar. These nations, each with its own unique political context, have found common ground with China on various international issues.

This coalition is often perceived as an alliance of authoritarianism, standing in contrast to the democratic world. The formation of such alliances is not uncommon in international relations, as nations with similar political systems or shared interests often band together to amplify their influence on the global stage.

However, the emergence of this alliance has raised concerns among democratic nations. They fear that the growing influence of this coalition could challenge the

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democratic norms and values that underpin the current international order. These concerns are further amplified by China’s increasing economic and military power, which could potentially be used to support its allies and promote its political model.

This evolving dynamic underscores the need for democratic nations to reaffirm their commitment to democratic values and principles, while also engaging with China and other nondemocratic nations in a constructive dialogue to address shared challenges and promote peace and stability.

Geopolitical Consequences of the Fear of China

The fear of China has heightened among several nations. Consequently, these nations are formulating counterstrategies grounded in offensive realism. It is becoming easier for these nations to devise a response when public sentiment is against China. In 2021, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed that a vast majority of respondents in the United States, Canada, Australia, much of Western Europe, and the more developed states of Asia hold unfavorable views toward China. These individuals also doubt Xi’s commitment toward fostering a peaceful world.  

Another survey, disclosed in 2020 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, indicated that 75 percent of elites in these regions advocate forming a counter coalition as the optimal approach to address China. China has already heightened apprehension among nations such as the United States, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Philippines. These concerned nations are contemplating the formation of a coalition to counter China. The escalating fear and anxiety surrounding China’s assertive ascendency on the global stage have precipitated significant geopolitical ramifications.

Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker, in their exploration of the interplay between emotions, discourse, and language, have highlighted how these elements can be instrumental in exerting power. This concept can be applied to understand the dynamics of China’s engagement with developing countries.

In this context, a discourse termed China’s debt trap has been constructed by Western nations. This term refers to a narrative where China is perceived to be strategically luring developing countries into debt through large infrastructure projects.  

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loans, thereby gaining significant influence over these nations when they are unable to repay.

A case in point is Sri Lanka’s experience with the Chinese infrastructure loan for the development of the Hambantota Port. The Sri Lankan government, unable to repay the loan, was compelled to concede the port to China on a 99-year lease in 2017. This incident served to reinforce the China’s debt-trap narrative, emphasizing the potentially unsustainable nature of China’s loans to developing nations.

The China’s debt-trap discourse has gained considerable traction, shaping perceptions and influencing policy decisions related to China's overseas investments. It underscores the potential risks associated with such loans and the need for developing nations to carefully consider the long-term implications of accepting large infrastructure loans. Similar to how the term war on terrorism instilled fear and raised concerns about terrorism, the term China’s debt trap similarly raises apprehensions about the risks associated with Chinese debt in developing nations.

Given China’s autocratic governance model and its perceived promotion of similar systems in other nations, there is potential for a global coalition to form under the banner of democracy versus autocracy. This dichotomy represents a broader ideological conflict between nations that uphold democratic values and those that follow autocratic principles.

In 2021, US President Joe Biden underscored this rivalry during his first presidential meeting. He expressed that US-China rivalry is part of a broader competition between democracy and autocracy. To advance this narrative and promote democratic values, the United States initiated a conference known as the “Summit for Democracy” in 2021. The objective of these summits is to nurture global democracy, unite nations that uphold democratic values, and address the challenges that democracy faces in the contemporary world.

These summits serve as a platform for democratic nations to share best practices, discuss common challenges, and strengthen their commitment to democratic principles. They provide an opportunity for leaders from government, civil society, and the private sector to set forth an affirmative agenda for democratic renewal and to tackle the greatest threats faced by democracies today through collective action.

Moreover, these summits aim to draw a clear distinction between the democratic and nondemocratic worlds. By doing so, they highlight the differences in governance.

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models, human rights practices, and international engagement between democratic and autocratic nations.\(^\text{54}\)

The democratic world, along with nations in the South China Sea, is contending with the uncertainty surrounding China’s future intentions. Presently, there is no discernible indication of peaceful cooperation. As Tang elucidated, offensive realism is utilized to confront the apprehension that emerges when nations are uncertain about the intentions of others.

In the Indo-Pacific region, the shift in Chinese foreign policy and the ambiguity surrounding its future intentions have intensified apprehensions among nations. Consequently, these nations, driven by their concerns, are formulating counter-policies grounded in offensive realism.

In response to these developments, four democratic nations—the US, Australia, Japan, and India—initiated a strategic dialogue known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). Contrary to some perceptions, the Quad is not a military alliance. It is a platform for these nations to engage in dialogue and cooperate on matters of shared interest in the Indo-Pacific region.

These nations do conduct joint military exercises and provide aid to regional nations, including arms and training. However, their collective vision extends beyond military cooperation. They aim to ensure a free and open South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific. While not all states in the Indo-Pacific that share concerns about China are members of the Quad, the Quad members play a significant role in providing military aid in the region. This aid is part of a broader strategy to maintain regional stability and balance of power.\(^\text{55}\)

In 2023, the United States unveiled a military aid package worth USD 345 million for Taiwan. This aid serves as a means to enhance Taiwan’s defenses against potential threats from China, encompassing defense, education, and training initiatives for the Taiwanese. Additionally, the aid includes man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), intelligence and surveillance capabilities, firearms, and missiles. However, the objective of this aid extends beyond military prowess. It also aims to uphold Taiwan’s autonomy and foster regional stability. By furnishing this assistance, Washington seeks to ensure that Taiwan can safeguard its interests and uphold its position in the face of any potential aggression.\(^\text{56}\)

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Vietnam has expressed significant concerns regarding China’s policy in the South China Sea, which has resulted in frequent intrusions into Vietnamese waters and harassment of ships engaged in oil and gas exploration. Consequently, Vietnam faces challenges due to its relatively less robust military strength compared to China.

In response to these challenges, Japan, a major power in the Indo-Pacific region, has extended military assistance to Vietnam as part of a broader strategy to counter the perceived threat from China. This assistance encompasses defense equipment and technology transfers, with ongoing discussions for a new Japanese aid program targeting militaries of like-minded developing countries in the region.57

Furthermore, Japan has expanded its military aid package for the Philippines, providing coastal surveillance radars for the Philippine Navy, additional patrol vessels, defense equipment, and radars to bolster the Philippines’ maritime law enforcement capabilities.58

These actions by Japan underscore the evolving military strategy in the Indo-Pacific region, increasingly shaped by concerns and apprehensions surrounding China’s growing influence. This shift entails a focus on preparedness, partnerships, and regional integration as key components of the region’s defense strategy, aiming to deter conflict and ensure military readiness. Thus, the military strategy of the Indo-Pacific region is significantly influenced by the fear and anxiety surrounding China’s actions and intentions.

China has made substantial investments under its BRI, to the tune of an estimated USD 1 trillion in more than 150 countries and international organizations. This initiative aims to boost economic development and interregional connectivity, significantly broadening China’s economic and political influence.59

In response to China’s growing influence, several coalitions and initiatives have been formed. One potential coalition is the Group of Seven (G-7), an intergovernmental organization consisting of seven of the world’s largest advanced economies. The G-7 launched the go (B3W) initiative in June 2021. This initiative aims to provide an alternative to China’s BRI for infrastructure development in low- and middle-income countries. This was later rebranded as the Partnership for Global

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Infrastructure and Investment—a values-driven, high-standard, and transparent infrastructure partnership led by major democracies.  

Similarly, the European Union has launched the Global Gateway initiative. This strategy aims to boost smart, clean, and secure connections in digital, energy, and transport sectors, and to strengthen health, education, and research systems across the world. Like the B3W and its successor programs, the Global Gateway is designed to offer an alternative to China's BRI strategy.

In addition to these initiatives, Australia, Japan, and India have formed the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI). Launched in April 2021, the SCRI is a trilateral agreement that aims to reduce dependence on Chinese foreign trade. The goal of this initiative is to create a “virtuous cycle” of enhancing supply chain resilience, leading to strong, sustainable, balanced, and inclusive growth in the Indo-Pacific region.

These initiatives reflect a broader global trend of seeking to balance China’s growing influence and ensure more robust and diverse supply chains. They represent strategic efforts to maintain regional order and stability while promoting sustainable development and interregional connectivity.

Conclusion

China’s rise has escalated fear worldwide. Its aggressive expansion in military, overseas, and surveillance strategies is reshaping global power dynamics and the contemporary geopolitical landscape.

China’s emergence as a dominant economic power has driven its military expansion and assertive foreign policy revision. This shift in Chinese foreign policy has provoked anxieties among various nations. In response to these fears, democratic nations have emphasized the importance of a free and open Indo-Pacific region to counter China’s BRI. China’s increased defense spending and territorial claims have instilled fear in regional nations, leading them to rely on multilateral groups like the Quad.

The concerns about China’s rise extend beyond military confrontations. They include digital surveillance, cyberthreats, and economic entanglements, culminating in debt-trap diplomacy in developing countries.

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In reaction to these fears, nations have collectively established strategic partnerships, imposed bans on Chinese technology, and made concerted efforts to counter China’s assertiveness. These shared apprehensions regarding China’s expanding influence shape regional alliances and global responses. Consequently, fear and anxiety have bolstered coalition formation, unifying nations based on their social, political, and military experiences of China’s rise.

Ultimately, the fear factor associated with China reshapes global geopolitics, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, altering everyday geopolitical reality. The fears and anxieties triggered by China prompt collective responses and alliances among nations with shared concerns. The interplay between fear, power dynamics, and international relations stands as a critical facet of the evolving global order, indicating that the emotions of nations can profoundly influence the direction of global affairs.

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