DOKUZ EYLÜL UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS PROGRAM
DOCTORAL THESIS
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

GRAND STRATEGY IN THE ERA OF XI JINPING

AND CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH THE MIDDLE EAST

Selim ÖTERBÜLBÜL

Supervisor
Prof. Dr. Zehra Nilüfer KARACASULU

İZMİR- 2023

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this doctoral thesis titled as “Grand Strategy in the Era of Xi Jinping and China’s Relations with the Middle East” has been written by myself in accordance with the academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that all materials benefited in this thesis consist of the mentioned resources in the reference list. I verify all these with my honour.

11 / 01 / 2023

Selim ÖTERBÜLBÜL

ABSTRACT

Doctoral Thesis

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Grand Strategy in the Era of Xi Jinping and China's Relations with the Middle East

Selim ÖTERBÜLBÜL

Dokuz Eylül University

Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of International Relations

International Relations Program

This thesis analyses changes and continuity in China's grand strategy under the leadership of Xi Jinping. The rise of China phenomenon has been discussed in detail in order to present the trajectory of Beijing's political, economic, social, and military objectives while also emphasizing changes in international system. The era of Xi Jinping signifies the revival of China's great power politics in global affairs as he underlies the Belt and Road Initiative and the national rejuvenation for realizing the Chinese Dream. This thesis aims at finding the meaning of the Xi Jinping era in China's grand strategy in order to analyse the adjustment of grand strategy preferences.

The main argument of this study is that China's grand strategy adjustment under Xi Jinping signifies a new response to meet the challenge of traditional concerns and China's developing interest in global affairs. In that regard, the grand strategy of China under Xi Jinping is described as defensive assertiveness, which points an assertive activism for a defensive logic. This study questions defensive and assertive aspects of grand strategy adjustment for revealing its effects in foreign policy during Xi's China through particularly Sino-Middle Eastern relations. This thesis also combines three aspects of grand strategy, which are principle, plan, and behaviour, with the aim of enriching the literature on grand strategy concept, with a specific focus on Chinese approach

on non-intervention principle, the Belt and Road Initiative and security cooperation in the Middle East.
Keywords: China, Grand Strategy, Xi Jinping, Sino-Middle Eastern Relations, Belt and Road Initiative.

ÖZET

Doktora Tezi

Xi Jinping Dönemi Büyük Stratejisi ve Çin'in Ortadoğu ile İlişkileri

Selim ÖTERBÜLBÜL

Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi

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Uluslararası İlişkiler Anabilim Dalı

Uluslararası İlişkiler Programı

Bu tez, Xi Jinping döneminde Çin'in büyük stratejisindeki değişimleri incelemektedir. Uluslararası sistemdeki değişimler vurgulanırken, Pekin yönetiminin siyasi, askeri, sosyal ve ekonomik amaçlarının yönelimini, Çin'in yükselişi olgusu üzerinden detaylı olarak incelemektedir. Xi Jinping dönemi, ulusal yeniden şahlanış ile Çin Rüyasını gerçekleştirme hedefi ve Kuşak Yol Projesi bağlamında küresel ilişkilerde Çin'in büyük güç siyasetinin yükselişini ifade etmektedir. Bu çalışma, Xi Jinping döneminin Çin'in büyük strateji tercihlerindeki değişimleri analiz etmeye çalışmaktadır.

Bu çalışmadaki en önemli argüman, Xi Jinping dönemindeki Çin'in büyük stratejisindeki düzenlemenin, Çin'in geleneksel kaygılarına ve küresel siyasette dönüşen çıkarlarına yönelik yeni bir yanıt niteliği taşımakta olduğudur. Bu açıdan, Xi Jinping dönemindeki değişimin savunmacı anlayış için iddialı bir aktivizm unsuru barındırdığı görüşü ile bu dönemdeki Çin'in büyük stratejisi, savunmacı iddialılık olarak tanımlanmıştır. Bu çalışma, Xi Jinping döneminde büyük strateji düzenlenirken öne çıkan savunmacı ve iddialı yönleri incelerken aynı zamanda bunun Çin dış politikasındaki tercihlere etkisini, Çin-Ortadoğu ilişkilerinin analizi üzerinden ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, büyük strateji kavramının literatürünü zenginleştirmek için özellikle Çin'in iç işlerine karışmama prensibine yaklaşımı, Kuşak Yol Projesi ve Ortadoğu ile olan güvenlik ilişkilerine odaklanarak büyük stratejinin ele alınışında prensip, plan ve davranış olarak üç ayrı boyutla incelenen bu kavramın farklı yaklaşımlarını bütüncül biçimde bir araya getirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çin, Büyük Strateji, Xi Jinping, Çin-Ortadoğu İlişkileri, Kuşak Yol Projesi.

GRAND STRATEGY IN THE ERA OF XI JINPING AND CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH THE MIDDLE EAST

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
	(Officially the Communist Party of China)
COVID-19	Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) disease
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
EU	European Union
G7	Group of Seven
G20	Group of Twenty
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Products
GNI	Gross National Income
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
	(IS, ISIL, Arabic acronym DAESH)
KUOMINTANG	Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT, GMD)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MINURSO	United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission Mali
MONUSCO	United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PAP	People's Armed Police
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People's Republic of China
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
ROC	Republic of China

SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UN	The United Nations
UNFICYP	United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNISFA	United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei
UNITAMS	United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission Sudan
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNSC	The United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	The United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNSMIL	United Nations Support Mission in Libya
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organization
US	The United States of America
USSR	The Soviet Union (Officially the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics)
WMD	Weapon of Mass Destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization

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INTRODUCTION

What lies beyond the Great Wall of China has always been a mystery; for a stranger either attempt to unveil one of the great civilizations or unlock the wealth of the *Far* East. Considering Chinese efforts in order to explore the world around the Mainland, it was not a one-sided interest but instead a result of mutual curiosity. In spite of our best endeavours, China still has many features to present and to be understood. It is a rather important task to better understand the country's political choices considering its growing strength, influence and global activities in many fields as from trade, finance, security, health problems, or environmental issues. The People's Republic of China's (later called China and the PRC) foreign policy provides a fertile ground for International Relations (IR) scholars who have a keen interest in China's foreign relations, domestic politics, and its role in the Asia-Pacific region and global affairs. In conjunction with the phenomenon of the rise of China, either a minor adjustment or major transformation in its foreign affairs has attracted world's attention in the past decade in order to arouse curiosity among scholars. The first impetus of this curiosity is the country's features in terms of its population, natural resources, land mass, and its unique cultural heritage as well as, the potential of this grandeur in various fields. When Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping opened up his country's economy to the global system in 1978, it was a radical turn that resulted in the country becoming the world's second-largest economic power, in addition to increased military capability and an important role in global politics. Yet, China had to meet the challenges, opportunities, and consequences of its rapid rise in the last decade. That rapid change and development in many areas present the second impetus for understanding China's political choices as well as its capabilities, weaknesses, and objectives.

Such curiosity in the future of China is well-known, which brought to mind a phrase often attributed to Napoleon: "China is a sleeping lion. Let it sleep, for when it wakes, the world will tremble." We really do not know the intentions of this lion but even that kind of notoriety signifies China's obscurity and potential might. The epithet has found a contemporary reply from China's paramount leader, President Xi

Jinping: "Today, the lion has woken up. But it is peaceful, pleasant and civilised."[1] That response admitted China's greatness whilst also attempting to calm concerned voices in the global community. It is still noteworthy for questioning whether China poses a threat to the world order or is a welcomed partner within international system? Hence, this thesis aims to contribute to the IR literature by analysing China's foreign policy and grand strategy, particularly evaluating Sino-Middle Eastern relations during the Xi Jinping era.

There are two main points President Xi Jinping underlined as a future projection of China's the centenary goals, *the Chinese Dream* and *the national rejuvenation*.[2] These goals have two components; the first one is trade and economic growth and the second is related to political and security concerns. A strong and prosperous China could avoid any domestic or foreign threats against its stability, economic growth, development objectives, and the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Chinese Dream is based on more political, military, and economic capabilities, wealth and influence to secure all these achievements and reshape global affairs with *Chinese characteristics.*[3] Moreover, it could shape global order, international norms and institutions with more Chinese elements in order to regain its significance and status as a great power. These determinants have led to a degree of consistency when implementing foreign policy on such issues as free trade, development in the global south, respect to sovereignty, non-intervention principle, non-interference in the domestic affairs of others, no-alignment in regional affairs. In this regard, China's foreign policy has been driven by systemic factors as well as domestic determinants of political, economic, and security concerns. Its perception of threat and opportunities has been evaluated through the historical philosophic background, the strategic culture of the county, and the cult of personality of the leader.

[1] Teddy Ng, Andrea Chen, "Xi Jinping says world has nothing to fear from awakening of 'peaceful lion'", **South China Morning Post**, 28 March 2014.
[2] When Xi Jinping rose to the top Communist Party post in November 2012, he made his first reference to that term as a great renewal of the Chinese nation. One of the first reflections in the media included a reference to the national ethos of the US, *the American dream*. "'Chinese dream' resonates online after Xi's speech", **ChinaDaily**, 30 November 2012.
[3] "Xi urges breaking new ground in major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics", **Xinhua**, 24 June 2018.

Scope of the Study

This thesis focuses on China's foreign policy in recent decade during Xi Jinping's leadership era. First, the domestic concerns of China's core national interests are analysed. Significant developments such as leadership change, large scale domestic reforms, activism in foreign affairs, and economic and political developments are examined. In the last decade, China became the world's second-largest economy. China has been governed by the leadership of President Xi and Prime Minister Li since 2012-2013. During that time, it had to deal with different presidencies of Barrack Obama, Donald Trump, and at present with Joe Biden. Besides, China and the world have had to confront many challenges and global issues such as the 2008 financial crisis, the Arab Uprisings, the rise of fundamentalist terrorism and ISIS, environmental issues and global warming, and lately, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, this thesis elaborates on the debate surrounding China's grand strategy adjustment during the era of Xi Jinping. There is a huge academic debate concerning China's grand strategy. In this study, the change and continuity in Chinese foreign affairs are analysed in detail. Third, the scope of this thesis elaborates on Sino-Middle Eastern relations to provide a more detailed analysis of China's grand strategy. The neighbouring countries and regions have great significance in both China's contemporary foreign affairs and its history. Nevertheless, the Middle East is becoming more important in China's foreign affairs due to its foreign policy activism, economic relations, and a new conceptualization of China's global role. For this reason, this study will analyse continuity and change in China's strategic perception in the Middle Eastern affairs through selected cases. The Middle East might not be a political battle-ground between the US and China as Mearsheimer predicts, yet it could be a test for the clash of China's domestic concerns and the limits of change in strategic culture and global involvement.[4] Ever since China has opened up its economy, the main objectives in its relations have been to secure access to crude oil and natural gas resources and expand its market share in

[4] John J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia", **The Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol. 3, 2010, p.392.

the Middle East while avoiding being embroiled in regional conflicts. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the Middle East has an evolving significance in China's foreign affairs in order to demonstrate the responsible great power image of Beijing and its entanglement in the regional issues.

Overall, this thesis analyses China's grand strategy with an emphasis on its relations with the Middle East. Its relations with the states in the Middle East are examined in terms of China's peripheral diplomacy, bilateral relations and economic and political initiatives in the region. Many previous analyses on this subject simply focus on China's energy consumption, the interdependency of both sides in economic relations and trade volumes. Here China's reaction to regional affairs is explained by focusing on the Chinese interests in the region. Although some studies have identified how growing financial interest spill over political and security fields, these have omitted the evolving significance of Sino-Middle Eastern relations in terms of China's grand strategy. This thesis aims to explore the significance of the grand strategy implementation in the Middle East from both domestic and foreign policies of China, rather than simply focusing on great power competition in the region. Therefore, this thesis analyses the impact of grand strategy adjustment of China under Xi Jinping on the Middle East through three facets of grand strategy: grand principle, grand plan, and grand behaviour. In connection with Sino-Middle East relations, the subjects of case studies of three components have chosen as the Principle of Non-Intervention, the Belt and Road Initiative, and China's security cooperation in the region.

Aim of the Study

By focusing on the grand strategy of China, the thesis attempts to understand whether China poses a threat to present global order. It is argued that the era of Xi Jinping signifies an "assertive activism" for a defensive logic in China's grand strategy. This assertive turn is not solely a result of national ambitions or the character of Xi Jinping. On the contrary, the discussion on China's assertive activism has already begun in the first decade of the twenty-first century. This issue has been

widely discussed in the academic community on whether this assertive turn is an aggressive approach against the world order or rather for only against US hegemony.[5]

This thesis argues that this adjustment signifies a new response to meet the challenge of traditional concerns and China's developing interest in this era. Nathan and Scobell emphasize a similar point as the protection of core national interests has been the focus of Chinese foreign policy.[6] This thesis first points how defensive factors can be found in the strategic culture of China: the domestic concerns for territorial integrity, continuation of economic growth, requirements for development cooperation, and proclaimed national objectives and global status by the new leadership role. Thus, it argues that this assertiveness in foreign policy has to be seen as a reflection to cope with defensive apprehension and a response to national concerns that are either deep-rooted in strategic culture or have newly arisen through the rise of China phenomenon.

China has already embraced the "period of strategic opportunities" as an official posture since the 16th Party Congress in 2002.[7] In that regard, the Chinese leadership had perceived such systemic opportunity in order to regain its previous global status. In addition, Xi Jinping defines his term with a discourse on *the New Era*, where his leadership has ranked among Mao, Deng and Xi as the paramount leader of this long history.[8] So that, Xi's assertive turn in foreign affairs can be considered as a result of benefitting from that perceived systemic opportunity as

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[5] Michael D. Swaine, "Perceptions of an Assertive China." **China Leadership Monitor 32** (May 2010), p. 1-19. Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?", **International Security**, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Spring 2013), p.7-48. Dingding Chen, Xiaoyu Pu, Alastair Iain Johnston, "Correspondence Debating China's Assertiveness", **International Security**, Vol. 38, No.3 (Winter 2013/14), p.176-183. Thomas J. Christensen, "The Advantages of an Assertive China", **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. 90, No. 2 (March/April 2011), p.59-62. Yasuhiro Matsuda, "How to Understand China's Assertiveness since 2009: Hypotheses and Policy Implications." CSIS, April 2014. Björn Jerdén, "The Myth of Chinese Assertiveness", **The Diplomat**, 22 April 2014.

[6] Andrew J. Nathan, Andrew Scobell, **China's Search for Security**, Columbia University Press, 2012.

[7] Period of strategic opportunities (Zhanlue jiyu qi de, 战略机遇期的) Chih-Yu Shih, Chiung-Chiu Huang, "The identity and international role of China: relational grand strategy", in **China's International Roles Challenging or Supporting International Order**, Sebastian Harnisch, Sebastian Bersick, Jörn-Carsten Gottwald (eds.), Routledge, 2016, p.67.

[8] As an example, only these leaders' images were used in the celebration for the 100th Anniversary of the Communist Party of China. The names of Mao and Xi and their visions were added into the document while they were still in office even though all of Xi's predecessors have also had their political ideas written into the party constitution.

well. The Middle East has often considered as the most likely ground for revealing such aggressive intentions in the light of present US influence in the region. Yet, it is considered that more research is required to clarify the relationship between the general conceptualization of China's grand strategy and its specific implementation in the Middle East and other areas. This thesis argues that defensive logic can also be found in the trajectory of China's approach to the Middle Eastern affairs. Therefore, Sino-Middle Eastern relations considered as both leverage for reshaping the global order and instrument of the defensive logic of grand strategy that is focused on the core national interests.

The research question of this thesis concerns the defensive nature of grand strategy adjustment that affects foreign policy of Xi's China in the Middle East. The original contribution of this thesis is to construct a debate regarding China's grand strategy that goes beyond the ideological blinders of two camps as "China Threat" and "Peaceful China". In this regard, the research puzzle has two main grounds to develop further. The first is about revealing the scope of the new trends in China's grand strategy in the last decade. It requires a focus on historical background, strategic culture, and the impact of elites on foreign policy in comparison to the previous era. It is important to depict the reasons behind the grand strategy adjustment since the Xi Jinping era has been marked as the third significant transition.[9] Even Zhao argues the Xi era signifies a new modification in foreign affairs as called China's Diplomacy 3.0, after the revolutionary diplomacy of Mao and the development of diplomacy since Deng Xiaoping.[10] For this reason, there is a need to discuss the changes and continuity of grand strategy from Mao to Deng and now to Xi. The strategic culture and the leader's image provide a useful framework to analyse rhetorical and political adjustments.

Xi's leadership role is not limited with the adjustment of diplomacy; it also leads to an institutional restructuring of foreign and security policy apparatus, which is compatible with the reformist agenda in the domestic system since his first days as

[9] Mark Leonard (ed.), **China 3.0**, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2012.
[10] Zhao Kejin, "China's Diplomacy 3.0: China's New Diplomacy in the Post-18th Party Congress Period", (中国外交 3. 0 版: 十八 大后的中国外交新走向), **Social Sciences** (社会科学), 2013, p.10. from **Chinese Politics and Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: The Future Political Trajectory**, Arthur S. Ding, Jagannath P. Panda (eds.), Routledge, 2021, p.271.

a president.[11] The new conceptualization covers activism, assuming more global responsibilities, the goal of mutual development and an increasing presence in many fields of international affairs from Asia to the Arctic or norms of global order to active participation in international institutions. In this framework, the focus on the domestic impediments and the Middle East as a regional case selection would narrow the scope of analysis. The second ground addresses the changes in grand strategy over the Middle East and clarifies the link between grand strategy and foreign policy implementation. Thus, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on both Chinese foreign policy and Sino-Middle Eastern relations, arguing that defensive logic and domestic concerns have a predominant influence on Chinese grand strategy which shapes its perception of the Middle Eastern issues and bilateral relations.

This has all led to the question as to what is the most important factor in reshaping the grand strategy by the beginning of Xi Jinping era. To answer this question, it is necessary to identify the reason for China's adjustment of its grand strategy and how to differ that from its former policy orientations. This study argues that although domestic factors as well as present systemic factors are the real determinants of this grand strategy, domestic factors play bigger role. It is important to identify whether President Xi reshapes the grand strategy for traditional concerns and whether contemporary needs in domestic politics require such adjustment. In that regard, the dependent variable is the adjustment of the grand strategy and its implementation in the Middle East related issues. The independent variable is the defensive logic that can be traced back to the strategic culture and impact of the foreign policy elites as in the leader's image. Neoclassical realist scholars consider these domestic elements as intervening variables, which work as a transmission belt between systemic stimuli and foreign policy implementation.[12] Among other variables, these two are the most significant in shaping the foreign policy perception through what a systemic stimulus presents. The regional cases, which were chosen so as being compatible with effects-of-cause relating the impact of intervening variables on the Chinese grand strategy, are expected to draw attention to the following

[11] Weixing Hu, "Xi Jinping's 'Major Country Diplomacy' The Role of Leadership in Foreign Policy Transformation, **Journal of Contemporary China**, Vol.28, No.115, 2019, p.1-14.
[12] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, **Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics**, Oxford University Press, New York, 2016, p.33-34.

questions: (1) What is the significance of the Middle East in China's global vision? (2) Does Sino-Middle Eastern relations compatible with Xi's grand strategy? (3) What would be the impact of such strategic adjustment on the Middle Eastern affairs, for China and the region? (4) Why has China adopted such a strategy in the Middle East? (5) Why China has though derived security from the region but still stands aloof from regional security issues?

Theoretical Framework

Neoclassical realism provides scrutiny on unit level intervening variables besides constrains of the systemic factors. It is grounded on the realist assumptions as considering states' position in an anarchic system and key emphasis on relative power capabilities. In addition, however, it also paved a new way by going beyond the relative power considerations by functioning as an intervening variable between the international system and foreign policy implementations.[13] This approach has differentiated by analysing how external threats or systemic pressures are translated through unit-level intervening variables into foreign policy.[14] A neoclassical aspect would explain the long term changes of grand strategy with the transformation of international conditions, while unit-level determinants specify the precise reason for state officials' choices on the adjustment. These unit level intervening variables include leader's political perceptions, strategic culture, and domestic political objectives or constraints. This approach requires an in-depth search on each country and perceptions of policymakers in a non-mechanical way. It creates a level of complexity in the classical understanding of realism by involving unit level factors.[15]

[13] Steven E. Lobell, "Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist model" in **Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy**, Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.44.
[14] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, **op.cit.**, 2016, p.33-34.
[15] Hinnebusch and Ehteshami summarize it as complex realism that points out the significance of the joint impact of external threats and domestic factors on state behaviour. These domestic factors include a wide range of domestic variables from state formation, state-society relations to leaders' personalities. Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Foreign Policymaking in the Middle East: Complex Realism" in **International Relations of the Middle East**, Louise Fawcett (ed.), 2016, p.239-259.

Therefore, it is placed in a middle ground between the structural realist aspect and constructivist approach as well as offensive and defensive realist assumptions.[16]

It may be useful to adopt neoclassical realism, which provides further explanations for the state's foreign policy behaviours rather than long term foreign policy outcomes since the underlying structural constraints may not be clearly found in short term policy behaviours.[17] Moreover, relative domestic variables are considered as key variables in this study as a way to explain the dependent variable, which is the grand strategy adjustment and China's foreign policy behaviour towards issues in the Middle East. The neoclassical realist framework provides answers to the function of the leader's image and strategic culture, which working as a transmission belt, in order to reveal relation between capabilities and foreign policy behaviour. Since it places itself as a middle ground among realist thinking, it also provides answers as to why China has a defensive oriented strategic aspect and even some offensive realists foresee confrontational outcomes.

Methodology and Plan

The data has been gathered from primary and secondary resources, such as the White Papers, statements and discourses of the foreign policy elites, daily briefs from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, the United Nations (UN) documents and the Chinese statements in minutes on the UN Security Council Resolutions. Moreover, the data on trade, investment, and arms sales have been gathered from the official sources and the reports of international working groups, in addition to the articles in the Chinese and international media. The debate on selected issues regarding China's grand strategy outputs has elaborated with the growing literature on China's foreign relations in the latest decade, in particular to changes in China's grand strategy and Sino-Middle Eastern relations.

[16] Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", **World Politics**, Vol.51, October 1998, p.152-154.
[17] Balkan Devlen, Özgür Özdamar, "Neoclassical Realism and Foreign Policy Crises", in **Rethinking Realism in International Relations**, Annette Freyberg-Inan et.al. (eds.), Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, p.138.

This study relies on a case study focusing on the three facets of grand strategy. It searches the results on Sino-Middle Eastern affairs through the domestic, regional and international reflections of the defensive logic and assertive turn in foreign affairs. It is in fact, is not a methodological choice as Stake puts it, but as a choice of what is to be studied analytically or holistically, at least for the time being on the selected subject.[18] Even though a case study can be labelled as a soft positivist choice of qualitative analysis, it provides a detailed inquiry for surveying the complexity of a particular issue. A case study offers an exploration from multiple perspectives of a particular subject's complexity and a nuanced view of the reality and provides context-dependent knowledge.[19] Therefore, this study provides in-depth knowledge concerning the varying domestic factors and foreign policy orientations as well as understanding the grand strategy implementations of China via three Middle East related issues. It presents the historical background of each case briefly to provide a framework.

The process tracing method is applied in this study's and problem-driven case inquiry used as a methodological approach. Within qualitative analysis, its primary aim is to comprehensively evaluate independent and intervening variables factors.[20] It also focuses on the content analysis of data collected from primary and secondary sources, such as reports of international organizations, official documents, leader's publication, white papers, press records of daily ministerial briefs and bilateral state visits, project declarations and mainstream media news within a specific period. This is compatible with an analytical review of the extensive literature on foreign affairs. In neoclassical realism, the explanatory function of unit level variables has to follow domestic interests in a causal sequence. The reason is that qualitative analysis emphasizes points of view concerning expressions, language and the object´s surroundings, historical backgrounds, aims and meanings. However, as Maibuer stresses, it is important to note the difference between beliefs as personal cognitive interpretation, and ideas as widely considered tools of instrumentally and

[18] Robert E. Stake, "Qualitative case studies", in **The SAGE handbook of qualitative research**, Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.). Thousand Oaks, SAGE, 2005, p.443.
[19] Bent Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research", **Qualitative Inquiry**, Vol. 12 No. 2 April 2006, p.223-224.
[20] David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", **PS: Political Science & Politics**, Vol.44, No.4, 2011, p.823.

strategically interactive processes.[21] Maibuer's interpretation also points out the significance of official documents and public speeches rather than going into detail on personal history and the personal cognitive process of the foreign policy elites. This research is done in a foreign policy analysis manner that requires an examination of the complex relationship between domestic and international spheres.[22] The selected cases are compatible with the researcher's aim and main research puzzle between the defensive logic behind the grand strategy and evidence provided by empirical cases.[23] Thus, the cases selected reflect China's grand strategy adjustment on the Middle East affairs.

Following the introduction, this thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter presents the main concepts, the conceptual and theoretical framework of the thesis. The conceptual review points the formation of grand strategy and its evolution and adaptation into the IR discipline. It will particularly state that, grand strategy is a useful conceptual framework compatible with foreign policy analysis. The theoretical framework emphasizes the neo-classical realist interpretation of this concept by looking to systemic and domestic variables to understand foreign policy outcomes. This conceptual and theoretical framework is followed by a literature review of the scholarly discussion on whether China has a grand strategy or not. Firstly, this thesis displays China's grand strategy trajectory from a historical perspective in order to demonstrate change and the continuity of policy orientation. It reviews the perceptions of China's history as well as the Chinese strategic culture and philosophical guideline on advised political principles, and how to perceive the world around China. It draws attention to these questions as to whether there is a Chinese grand strategy and how the main determinants of grand strategy have been shaped throughout history. It presents foreign policy perception in the last seventy years. In the second place, this study reviews the strategic culture that can present a solid ground to build political perception throughout the different periods. This thesis elaborates on the discussion of whether China's strategic culture has changed. The

[21] Gustav Meibauer, "Interests, ideas, and the study of state behaviour in neoclassical realism", **Review of International Studies**, 2019, p.31.
[22] May Darwich, Juliet Kaarbo, "IR in the Middle East: Foreign policy analysis in theoretical approaches", **International Relations**, Vol.34, No.2, 2020, p.232.
[23] Jack S. Levy, "Qualitative methods in international relations" in P. Frank, F. P. Harvey, & M. Brecher (eds.), **Evaluating Methodology in International Studies**, University of Michigan Press, 2002, p. 111-160.

emphasis on strategic culture explains how Chinese foreign policy elites perceive China and others while revealing the impulse of decision-making in line with domestic concerns and national interest. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the phenomenon of China's rise. After examining the ongoing debate as to whether China's grand strategy is offensive or defensive in nature, this thesis highlights its original argument on defensive assertiveness grand strategy to understand the latest transformation of China's great power image.

The third chapter presents a historical background of China's foreign relations with domestic and systemic variables and also Sino-Middle Eastern relations in particular. This chapter brings together the theoretical and conceptual discussion in the literature and the main argument of this thesis, a defensive assertive turn in China's grand strategic understanding under the Xi Jinping leadership, to the historical background of China's foreign policy and the analysis of Sino-Middle Eastern relations in particular under Xi's predecessors. Instead of adapting a leader-based chronological order, this section draws Mao and Deng as two main cornerstones of grand strategy adjustment before Xi Jinping. Therefore, this historical background chapter highlights both the transition in the Chinese politics in political, economic, social, and global affairs. In addition, this chapter demonstrates the continuity and changes in Sino-Middle Eastern relations that have occurred up until the Xi Jinping era.

Chapter four analyses China's grand strategy adjustment through three facets of grand strategy concerning the Middle East issues. These facets of grand strategy have to connect China's defensive concerns with the domestic needs and foreign policy implementations. The reflections of grand strategy adjustment are analysed through China's bilateral relations, regional approach and self-proclaimed international role. In accordance with Silove's compartmentalization, these three facets emphasize grand principle, grand plan, and grand behaviour. First, the grand principle of China's grand strategy is analysed through the principle of non-intervention in China's foreign relations. This principle has been one of the main pillars in China's foreign affairs since the early stages of the Cold War. Because, China demands foreign powers, even its closest partners, to refrain from interfering in delicate domestic issues and put them behind the curtain of a non-interference

stance.[24] China emphasizes how it considers its domestic issues as a red line in foreign relations and its repression on related countries to keep potential critical commentaries at a minimum. It is also important to note that those countries in the Middle East struggle for leadership on advocating similar issues based on religious, cultural, and ethnic ties. Yet, there are no clear critical stances or words of condemnation from them on the issues related to China, but a frequent silence on these domestic issues.

The non-interference to domestic politics has often been regarded as a strong suit of China's in comparison to the US and the EU's raising concerns in the Middle Eastern countries. China as a permanent member of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and a major power in world politics has adopted a new international role for actively participating in international institutions and found a suitable ground for its foreign policy activism in shaping international norms. China's choices could affect some critical decisions in the Middle Eastern affairs in the short-term despite the fact that its activism reflects its own defensive logic regarding norm-shaping discussions. The debate surrounding humanitarian intervention in the Middle Eastern issues can be emblematic of China's defensive logic as well as the implication of its choices in regional politics. This grand principle is analysed through China's stance on the civil wars following the Arab Uprisings, in particular the Syrian and Libyan civil wars. This thesis tests its argument on Beijing's political choices and voting patterns in the UNSC and UNSC Resolutions concerning Syria and Libya, comprehensively. Furthermore, the self-proclaimed global role is presented via China's active participation in the UNSC discussions. It examines China's norm-shaping ideals on the non-intervention principle and responsibility to protect discussions through post-Arab Uprisings civil wars. In addition, this thesis examines how China perceives its position in global affairs, both historically and contemporarily. This self-proclaimed role also helps to explain why China assumes such a norm-shaping role and a major county right/responsibility/assertiveness to international norms and institutions.

Secondly, China's grand strategy adjustment is analysed through China's grand plan, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Belt and Road Initiative has often been labelled as an exemplary reflection of Chinese assertiveness during the past

[24] These issues can be listed as Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet, Tiananmen, and the Chinese Communist Party rule.

decade, and the Middle East is one of the key regions of its implementation. This thesis argues that *the Belt and Road Initiative* will clarify the regional aspect of a global initiative for the "win-win" discourse, economic growth, investment opportunity, trade, energy supply-demand relations and the prosperity of the global south. Moreover, the BRI also answers the domestic needs of the Chinese economy through financial investments on development, infrastructure, and ascending trade opportunities through direct investment or Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) credits. The BRI seizes the systemic opportunity in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008, in order to diversify the economic capability, to exploit investment options, and using economic interdependence as a means to secure China's political interests. The grand plan focus of this section demonstrates how such a comprehensive project could be used as leverage for the key political and economic objectives of China.

Finally, China's grand strategic adjustment can be understood as grand behaviour, which has been limited to the security domain of Sino-Middle Eastern relations to demonstrate the limited but significant change in Beijing's security/military footprint in the region. China's security entanglement with the Middle East can be limited to few subjects such as the arms sales, fight against terrorism and fundamental extremism but Beijing's aims goes beyond these issues over years. This section analyses the output of grand behaviour through China's security relations with the region. It presents China's partnerships with the Middle East states and the role of security aspect within these collaborations. In addition, this section discusses the security domain in connection to economic interaction such as arms sales and security/surveillance technology collaboration between parties. Finally, Chinese military presence in the Middle East is discussed whether under the UN missions or the Beijing's own initiative as in joint military drills with the Middle East states.

CHAPTER ONE
CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter constructs a conceptual and theoretical framework for this thesis. It outlines the main conceptual theme, and changes in the meaning of grand strategy from the creation of the notion in a chronological way. For this reason, it may be better understood how this grand strategy concept has adapted from the field of military and security issues into the discipline of International Relations. There are various different definitions of grand strategy, which also showcase different generations in scholarly thinking through the concept. The literature review towards the concept also reveals its evolution in IR, moving from solely the military-based thinking to a more complex analysis that brings together political, social, economic, and military aspects. The limits of this conceptual framework are also noted in the last section before explaining the conceptual lenses of this study and the definition adapted in this thesis.

In the second section, the theoretical framework of this thesis is presented. Before going into the details of neo-classical realism, this section examines the theoretical approach of different International Relations theories. Then, it pays particular attention to the neo-classical realism as a main theoretical framework since both domestic and international impetuses have been considered as key determinants in grand strategy preferences. Considering the importance of strategic culture in grand strategy preferences, the last section summarizes the role of strategic culture. It brings together different definitions of the strategic culture before later detailing the role of strategic culture in those studies on the International Relations. Since this thesis highlight the defensive foundations of China's strategic choices, the strategic culture has significance in domestic determinants, perception of decision makers on strategic calculations and foreign affairs. Finally, this section concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this theme in academic literature.

1.1. THE CONCEPT OF GRAND STRATEGY

Strategy is a word used to describe a plan for achieving an overall aim. In the discipline of International Relations, the word strategy tends to be used when discussing wars. Strategy can refer to a blueprint for success in various different fields such as economics, business, politics, military, and even sports. The fundamental principle of strategy is based on rational decision-making. It is very simple to adopt strategic thinking whether as discussed by Sun Tzu, and Carl von Clausewitz for the purposes of warfare; by Michael Porter, and Henry Mintzberg for business, by Erving Goffman for sociology, or by John von Neumann for mathematic and game theory. The key component of a strategy is about choosing among alternatives in order to deciding the best course of action to achieve a specific objective. Alternatively, the essence of strategy is about deciding what not to do. It is important to rationalize which option we have chosen in order to explain strategic reasoning. As Sun Tzu points out the highest form of generalship is to baulk the enemy's strategy.[25] It means the upmost function of strategy is about spoiling the most reasonable plan of the enemy instead of pursuing your own agenda. In short, strategy provides a conceptual framework to understand why certain decisions have been made for a given circumstances among other possibilities.

The perceptions of military officers, strategists, or military historians have initially dominated the discussion on strategy until the word was widely adopted and used by other disciplines, including the field of international relations. This extension enables an interdisciplinary inquiry on the strategy and the adaptation this word into various fields. The etymology of the word reveals why the concept of strategy is highly associated with war and military terminology. Strategy comes from the Ancient Greek stratēgó (στρατηγία), which means general office of command and generalship. From Clausewitz perspective, war is merely the continuation of policy by other means. In this sense, strategy goes beyond the limits of war and the military include politics.[26] In a short definition, the word strategy means the employment of nation's total capabilities, ways, and means of war in order to achieve determined

[25] Sun Tzu, **The Art of War**, Lionel Giles (tra.), Luzac & Co, London, 1910, p.17.
[26] Carl von Clausewitz, **On War**, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.28.

goals. Clausewitz's seminal book *On W*ar provided a canonical narrative on how to assign strategy, so that defence and offense in action, and the theory of war in explaining the nature of strategy.[27] Hart has gone beyond the definition of the 19th century limited to war-making. Thus Hart can release strategy from being imprisoned in simply war-making and doing justice to the sphere of policy instead of merely focus on the military field.[28] Hart's definition of strategy incorporates the fields of military and politics while war policy nonetheless remains within the boundaries of war. The meaning of strategy has evolved further evolved over time and it is commonly incorporated into different fields. In short, strategy is the very first source of strategic thinking on different choices and a significant domain of grand strategy, which has emerged from the subfield of military strategy.

1.1.1. The Conceptual History of Grand Strategy

The concept of grand strategy has become more a common concept in strategy studies in particular and the IR discipline in general by the end of the Cold War. The concepts as grand strategy, high strategy or higher strategy are used interchangeably to embody the many fields that strategy can be employed. In fact, grand strategy has to be considered as a meta-strategy or an overall strategy to the strategy itself. As yet, there is no consensus on a common definition of grand strategy. The absence of a widely accepted definition is also one of the major reasons to study the concept. The absence of definition can be considered as a weakness in literature. Yet, it may also refer a strength in its incorporation into different fields since the definitional boundaries are also be counterproductive when adopting that term in another context. The lack of a common definition has allowed for different typologies on the concept and a variety of interpretations. It could be a conceptual purpose for a lack of definitional boundaries, which offers scholars a broad field of study and a historical framework.[29] As Gage points out due to the flexible and

[27] Colin S. Gray, "Clausewitz, history, and the future strategic world", in **The Past as Prologue The Importance of History to the Military Profession**, Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich (eds.) Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.132.
[28] Basil H. Liddell Hart, **Strategy**, Meridian Book, 1991, p.319.
[29] Michael Brenes, "A Teaching Roundtable on Grand Strategy", H-**Diplo Roundtable XXI-35**, 2 April 2020, p.5. (https://hdiplo.org/to/RT21-35)

dynamic nature of the concept, many researchers have been attracted to the concept since issues related to large-scale global problems, social movements, or domestic issues are applied to the scope of grand strategy research.[30] It provides a difference in the focus of analysis as some scholars' works are based on traditional military issues while the others choose to look at non-traditional ones such as pandemics, or climate change. Some researchers may prioritize social, economic, domestic or institutional dimensions or choose to search cultural impetus and cognitive process of decision makers in order to search individual level.

In political science, grand strategy is considered as the intentional employment of all the available assets of a political entity. It is not solely limited to the use of a country's military. For this reason, the definition of grand strategy is inclusive of many fields besides the military, such as diplomacy, economy, business, and technology.[31] It can also legitimize the action of a state. This is the exact point that grand strategy concept differs from foreign policy and the national security strategy. Foreign policy covers the sum of a state's foreign activities with both states and non-states actors in a wide range of interaction based on economy, diplomacy, military, politics, and socio-cultural dimensions. National security strategy, on the other hand, covers the security dimensions of the national interests with a wide range of instruments to use in that sphere. In the end, both of them cover multiple means for their conceptual ends by focusing on the logic, preparation and implementation in order to reach desired outcomes. In line with that understanding, grand strategy covers not only those two but all instruments of a political entity by presenting a guideline to maximize grand strategic objectives.

Grand strategy is a meta-strategy, a strategy composed of all other strategies and works for a greater scope of analysis. Therefore, the intentions of these specified strategies are just a part of this general framework, either being a strategy for foreign relations, a strategy for the macro level performance of economic means, or a strategy for national security. Grand strategy presents a broader perspective that incorporates these other objectives. This confusion has even mentioned as splitting the grand strategy concept into two parts, economic and ideological on one hand, and

[30] Adelaide Feibel, "Grand Strategy Sees Record Interest", **Yale Daily News**, 5 December 2017.
[31] For a detailed analysis on legitimation, see also: Stacie E. Goddard, Ronald R. Krebs, "Rhetoric, Legitimation, and Grand Strategy", **Security Studies**, Vol.24, No.1, 2015, pp.5-36.

military and security issues on the other. However, such distinction is not suitable the "grandiosity" of the grand strategy framework, which requires an integrated approach to the issues.[32] That broad framework also allows for multidisciplinary contributions on either its implementations in different areas or a theoretical debate on the concept. Yet, there might be some common ground for the term since it is essentially found in a set of ideas that address national objectives. Therefore, the term grand strategy will be discussed in detail using several approaches and typologies. This ambiguous but inclusive notion allows for a lively debate on its common definition, and an appropriate method in studying it, its adaptability in different countries, and whether grand strategy is a valuable explanatory concept for research.[33] After these discussions, its place within International Relations studies will be presented before focusing on grand strategy discussions concerning China.

It is clear that, there would not be a description of grand strategy without the contrary. It sounds much like a Blakeian notion that "without contraries is no progression"; indeed, the adaption of grand strategy began with the distinction between small war (la petite guerre) or people's war (volkskrieg) against Napoleon and Napoleonic grand strategy (la grande stratégie).[34] This dialectic formulation found its meaning in the conjuncture in early 19th century Europe. Strategy had, at first, been considered as a synonym for how a war was to be conducted. The meaning of the word was limited to commanding armies up until the 20th century. Thus, a distinction arose from the military field. Secondly, this distinction works for hailing an imperial command of the armies against others' ordinary commander in order to praise the leadership of French Emperor Napoleon. *La Grande Armée*, the army commanded by Napoleon I during the Napoleonic Wars, could only have a grand strategy. In that regard, it makes sense why the concept was adopted from the French language during the Napoleonic era. The very source of the distinction points to the difference between subordinate, and small army command and grand, dominant, imperial decision making. Grand strategy would refer to comprehensive skills and

[32] Richard K. Betts, "The Grandiosity of Grand Strategy", **The Washington Quarterly**, Vol.42, No.4, 2019, p.12.
[33] Thierry Balzacq, Peter Dombrowski, Simon Reich, "Is Grand Strategy a Research Program? A Review Essay", **Security Studies**, Volume 28, Issue 1, 2019, p.58.
[34] Charles James, **A New and Enlarged Military Dictionary, or, Alphabetical Explanation of Technical Terms**, London, The Military Library, 1805, p.862.

ultimate responsibility, together. To sum up, grand strategy summarizes the strategy of the grand army by the grand commander. Ultimately, this distinction in terminology refers to void in the definition of what would be required to lead an army beyond simple duty. It has paved a way for a systematization of the field of military strategy and influenced the 19th century writings from Jomini to Clausewitz on explaining the origins of Napoleon's success and the art of war after the Napoleonic strategy.[35]

In fact, the grand strategy description would fill the gap that exists between theory and practice at first, and a chain of political ends and military means in the following decades. The very first elaboration has been made in the military for the purpose of enlarging knowledge in military leadership and how a war should be successfully conducted. The roots of grand strategy can be traced back to Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, or Clausewitz whose works have generally regarded as inclusive on both the theoretical and practical sides of warfare. These names and their works have been used to compare and contrast the Western and Eastern strategic traditions in general.[36] The reason why Sun Tzu was regarded as one of the pioneers of this concept is that his philosophical standpoint was not limited to the preparation of battle or warfare but also achieving a profitable result after the war is won. As an example, the first six chapters of Sun Tzu's "the Art of War" are considered to be the theoretical part, while the following parts are considered to be a practical guide to military leadership.[37] This long reached planning and integration of theory and practice on the issues of war have led scholars to praise Sun Tzu's work as one of the first examples of grand strategy. As a matter of fact, Sun Tzu is regarded as one of the pioneers of the non-military side of strategy since his work points to the most successful grand strategy (supreme excellence) as achieving success without war.

For a long time, grand strategy was limited to military issues and how warfare should be conducted. This approach has crystalizes in the seminal works of the first generation of historians, officers and scholars who adopted the concept into their

[35] Azar Gat, **The Origins of Military Thought from the Enlightenment to Clausewitz**, Oxford University Press, 1989, p.106-135.
[36] Lukas Milevski, "The idea of genius in Clausewitz and Sun Tzu", **Comparative Strategy**, Vol.38, No.2, p.139-149. For a comparison see: Michael I. Handel, "Comparing Sun Tzu and Clausewitz" in **Masters of War Classical Strategic Thought**, Frank Cass, London, 2001, p.14-23.
[37] Hwy-Chang Moon, **The Art of Strategy Sun Tzu, Michael Porter, and Beyond**, Cambridge University Press, 2018, p.3-4.

works. The logic of this classicist approach was highly influenced by not only the dominance of military issues but also their field of expertise. That's why Mahan, a navy officer/historian and "*inventor of grand strategy*", and Corbett, a naval historian, emphasize a grand strategy based on maritime power, naval force and the purpose of dominating strategic waterways were key in becoming a great power.[38] It can also be considered as an impact of geography where the Anglo-American tradition emphasizes naval supremacy but continental Europe primarily focuses on the army and then armoured units up until the nuclear age. These classicist works primarily focused on the employment of the military instrument to achieve a nation's goals. Carl von Clausewitz incorporated politics and the military by building his grand theory of war as an instrument of politics. It is still important to consider military power as an important instrument of grand strategy. The concept, however, has gone beyond a simple comparison of capabilities to hard thinking about basic interests and the proper role of military power in achieving and maintaining those objectives.[39]

Further development of the concept was based on the distinction between the military and political grounds. According to Milevski, the significance of grand strategy reached its first climax by the Cold War, with the nuclear strategy. Because of the overwhelming emphasis on nuclear armament and an urgent response to nuclear threat, a detailed preparation aspect of the strategy erode for the sake of rapid reactions of states.[40] However, the focus on the interaction between politics and military operations would lead to an emphasis on the role of reasoning and logic in decision making. Those scholars preoccupied with military issues such as Even Gray, who describe his works as Clausewitzian, draws a clear line between military strategy and grand strategy by defining the latter with an overarching status on all instruments of state including the military dimension.[41] As another narrow definition,

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[38] Alfred Thayer Mahan, **The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783**, Boston, Little, Brown, and company, 1898, p.25-89. Benjamin Armstrong, "Mahan, the Forgotten Grand Strategist", **National Interest**, 25 June 2013. Julian Corbett, **Principles of Maritime Strategy**, Dover Publications, 2012

[39] Robert J. Art, **A Grand Strategy for America**, Cornell University Press, New York, 2003, p.2.

[40] Lukas Milevski, **The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Though**, Oxford University Press, 2016, p.83.

[41] Colin S. Gray, **War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History**, Abingdon and New York City: Routledge 2007, p. 283. Colin S. Gray, **The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice**, Oxford University Press, 2010, p.47.

Luttwak adopts a hierarchical approach on grand strategy which has levels of strategic interactions as in a chain of command without identifying policy at top of this linkage.[42] In short, there has been a distinction between narrow and broad approaches in defining grand strategy with an emphasis on the military strategy.

In contemporary discussions, the field of politics and projections in decision making have gained for more significance in analysing grand strategy. Such a multidimensional perspective provides more detailed insight than a one-dimensional one that focus primarily on military. As Posen explains, the rise of the non-military field of grand strategy is compelling since that effort fades the raison d'être of grand strategy. [43] Such criticism addresses the fact that the state exists in a world where war is highly possible. It is the link between military means and political ends, the quest for how to make one produce the other.[44] As the discipline itself became US centric over time, the Cold War period had also led to an evolution in the studies on strategy and grand strategy when the US State Department created the Policy Planning Staff under George Kennan, intending to take "a longer-term, strategic view of global trends".[45] US policies such as containment or deterrence have been regarded as grand strategy examples of the early Cold War period. It also frames grand strategy studies within great power politics.

1.1.2. Definition(s) of Grand Strategy

The complexity of grand strategy enables many definitions based on what is analysed through the concept. All definitions co-exist in its elusive nature without having a fundamental contradiction while reflecting a variety of interpretations in academic studies.[46] One of the impediments in the explanation of grand strategy lies in the belief of most scholars or politicians that it represents idealized principles,

[42] Edward Luttwak, **Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace**, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2001, p. 89.
[43] Barry R. Posen, **Restraint: a new foundation for U.S. grand strategy**, Cornell University Press, New York, 2014, p.2
[44] Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?", **International Security**, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Fall 2000), p.5.
[45] John Lewis Gaddis, **Strategies of Containment A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War**, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005. Beverly Gage, "'Strategy' May Be More Useful to Pawns Than Kings," **The New York Times**, 3 September 2018.
[46] Rebecca Friedman Lissner, "What is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a conceptual Minefield", **Texas National Security Review**, Vol.2, No.1 (November 2018), p.55.

goals, and ways to achieve the desired outcome. The concept of grand strategy is too flexible to be limited to any of these perspectives, so that a "soup" metaphor has often used in describing grand strategy.[47] As the mixture of ingredient into the potage stands, grand strategy would be formed with the mixture of capabilities and objectives. So that, the "grand"-ness in definition does not refer to ambitions but a capability to manage all the resources for the perceived ends.

It is widely accepted that Liddell Hart's *The Decisive Wars of History* in 1929 was the first work to develop or at least popularized the term, grand strategy. Nonetheless, other works written by Edward Mead Earle, Frederick Charles Fuller, H. A. Sargeaunt, Geoffrey West, and Julian Corbett, which also helped to define and conceptualize grand strategy in that period.[48] Hart's definition of grand strategy emphasizes its difference from simple strategy. Hart points out this difference as "whereas strategy is only concerned with the problem of winning military victory, grand strategy must take the longer view—for its problem is the winning of the peace."[49] Hart's definition has a limited scope of inquiry which does not examine the political side of the concept without including warfare. It is considered as calculating the resources, improving the conditions of material capacities and capabilities, and directing them towards the key political object of the war as the goal defined by fundamental policy.[50] In Earle's edited book, *Makers of Modern Strategy,* his introductory discussion of the concept moves the concept away from the predominating of military issues to other relevant fields:

> *Strategy deals with war, preparation for war, and the waging of war. Narrowly defined, it is the art of military command, of projecting and directing a campaign... War is an inherent part of society - strategy has of necessity required increasing consideration of non-military factors, economic, psychological, moral, political, and technological. Strategy, therefore, is not merely a concept of wartime, but is an inherent element of statecraft at all time... The highest type of strategy - sometimes called grand strategy - is that which so integrates the policies and armaments of the nation that the resort to*

[47] Williamson Murray, "Thought on Grand Strategy" in **The Shaping of Grand Strategy Policy, Diplomacy, and War**, Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich, James Lacey (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2011, p.9.
[48] Milevski, **op.cit.**, 2016, p.4-6.
[49] Hart, BHL, **op.cit.**, 1991, p.349-350.
[50] Hart, BHL, **op.cit.**, 1991, p.322.

war is either rendered unnecessary or is undertaken with the maximum chance of victory. [51]

The contemporary interpretation and implementation of grand strategy has developed by adapting in-depth analysis in different fields, including the intersection of foreign, domestic, economic, informational, diplomatic, and social bases It is rather like a development of the reasoning of grand strategy through select elements. Many scholars agree that a variety of disciplines is best considered under the umbrella of grand strategy vis-à-vis it could adapt to different disciplines, research methods, and theoretical approaches. Some scholars like Goldstein note the importance of historical analysis while others like Brands see the concept in a contemporary fashion, an order of importance in daily interactions in the world affairs.[52] For this reason Feaver defines the concept as a blend of history, foreign policy, public policy, political science, and economics as all these disciplines have to answer different aspects of constituent of grand strategy: to blend academic history and theoretical political science with the real-world experience of policy-making elites and practitioners.[53]

According to Morgenthau, diplomacy, *a brain of national power*, has the same purpose as grand strategy by bringing different elements of national power to bear with maximum effect upon those points in the international arena which most concern the national interest.[54] As seen in many academic studies, the classical approach has not entirely been abandoned; instead, it has been transformed in contemporary studies. Biddle points out the scope of security in grand strategy in a wider perspective as grand strategy identifies and articulates a given political actor's security objectives at a particular point in time and describes how they will be achieved using a combination of instruments of power—including the military, diplomatic and economic instruments.[55] Posen's work also prioritizes the security

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[51] Edward Mead Earle, "Introduction," in **Makers of Modern Strategy Military Thought From Machiavelli to Hitler**, Edward Mead Earle (ed.), Princeton University Press, 1943, p.viii.
[52] Avery Goldstein, **Rising to Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security**, Stanford University Press, 2005 p.17-18. Hal Brands, **The Promise and Pitfalls of Grand Strategy**, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2012.
[53] Peter Feaver, "What is grand strategy and why do we need it", **Foreign Policy**, 8 April 2009.
[54] Hans J. Morgenthau, **Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace**, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1948, p. 105.
[55] Tami Davis Biddle, **Strategy and Grand Strategy: What Students and Practitioners Need to Know**, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College Press, 2015, p.5.

issues as his definition covers the concept as a nation-state's aim regarding how to provide security for itself. Posen explains his preference for explaining grand strategy through traditional military approach as:

> *…military threats are the most dangerous, and military remedies are the most costly. Security has traditionally encompassed the preservation of sovereignty, safety, territorial integrity, and power position—the last being the necessary means to the first three. A grand strategy contains explanations for why threats enjoy a certain priority, and why and how the remedies proposed could work. A grand strategy is not a rule book; it is a set of concepts and arguments that need to be revisited regularly*.[56]

On the other hand, Kennedy emphasizes the importance of politics and peacetime by arguing that the crux of grand strategy lies in policy, which is in the capacity of the nation's leaders to bring together all the elements, both military and non-military, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long-term -that is, in wartime and in peacetime- best interests.[57] Silove identified Kennedy's and Posen's definitions as having longevity among early definition attempts since they encourage the proliferation of its definitions into two ways as security oriented or not.[58]

It is to be expected that grand strategy or *high* strategy is well suited in classical realist thinking on the diversification between *high* politics and low politics. The classical realist school of thought makes clear distinctions between domestic and foreign policies while elaborating the distribution of material capabilities, survival, security, and the military issues as high politics vis-à-vis low politics that covers economic, social, and domestic issues. Grand strategy, especially its classical approach, meets literally the requirements of high politics, which includes a state's security relationship with other states in the international system and matters of international diplomacy. However, grand strategy as a concept has developed further by covering *all* components of national power in a detailed nature and has moved beyond the classical realist limitations between high and low politics. Even in the midst of the Second World War, Earle emphasizes the significance of bringing all

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[56] Barry R. Posen, **op.cit.**, 2014, p.1. Barry R. Posen, T**he Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars**, Cornell University Press, 1986, p.13.
[57] Paul Kennedy, "Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition," in **Grand Strategy in War and Peace**, Paul Kennedy (ed.), Yale University Press, New Haven, 1991, p.5.
[58] Nina Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy'", **Security Studies**, Vol.27, No.1, 2018, p.6-7.

strategy.[62] It also shapes the overall strategic success and prospects for international conflict and cooperation. In order to not neglect domestic determinants, grand strategy has to the social and political evolution of the development of long term national objectives. To have a more incorporated perspective, Norris explores the relations between capacity as a nation's economic resources and objectives as a nation's interests.[63] It has to look at one's own domestic agenda as well as the assessment of other actors on one's grand strategic preferences, as in great power politics. This is the result of the widening scope of the concept as the implementation of grand strategy in different fields beyond military.

Neoclassical realism incorporates both external and internal variables and addresses the impact of capabilities by considering intervening variables in analysing the indirect and complex nature of foreign policy.[64] Thus, the concept of grand strategy would also work as an explanatory tool on the intervening variables between the distribution of power in the system and foreign policy behaviour of states. Neoclassical realists criticize the existing literature on missing what is inside the *black box of the state* in explaining the particular foreign policy behaviour of states.[65] They argue that the nature of grand strategy would not allow limiting its scope to the military, war, or wartime politics; instead it requires fiscal and domestic political aspects in analysing long-term planning during peacetime.[66] In addition, they reject the neorealist emphasis on relative power consideration and the geostrategic impulse on grand strategy as well as the contrary, an isolated look on the impact of domestic politics on grand strategy. The neoclassical realist framework covers both systemic pressures and the influence of domestic politics without ignoring one for the sake of the other. The key transmission belt between systemic pressure and domestic impulse is to be understood through the evolution of grand strategy. For example, Kitchen sees the recognition of intervening variables as particularly important in analysing

[62] Richard Rosecrance, Arthur A. Stein (eds.), **The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy**, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1993, p.5.
[63] William J. Norris, **Chinese Economic Statecraft Commercial Actors, Grand Strategy, and State Control** Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2016.
[64] Rose, **op.cit.**, p.144-172.
[65] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, **op.cit.**, 2016, p.132.
[66] Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Steven E. Lobell, "Introduction: Grand Strategy between the World Wars," in **The Challenge of Grand Strategy: The Great Powers and the Broken Balance between the Wars**, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Steven E. Lobell (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.1-3.

grand strategy since the system is providing information to states in their costs and benefits calculation of preferences.[67] As a logical extension of systemic focus, adopting grand strategy within a neoclassical realist framework may be productive in focusing on unit level variables in the grand strategy formation and decision making of foreign policy practices.

1.1.3. Literature Review on the Grand Strategy of Great Powers

There is a limited existing literature that provides typologies of grand strategy.[68] As seen in these studies, there is a dominant emphasis on the US grand strategy studies, not only as a subject of research but also as an object in analysing different countries' grand strategic adjustment or preferences.[69] There is a lively debate on grand strategy types and their feature in the most recent publications. Those would be expected to present alternative types but are either highly affected by the typology on the US grand strategy or fail to present a type beyond their unique case study explanations.[70] Yet, there are some promising results for the further adaptation of the concept of grand strategy. First, the field of research is expanding from the historical examples towards more contemporary studies on great power politics.[71] Second, one of the major critiques on grand strategy is changing to allow for more focus on small states or middle powers, especially the rising powers among the developing world.[72] Third, these would expected to improve the hypothetical

[67] Nicholas Kitchen, "Systemic pressures and domestic ideas: a neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation", **Review of International Studies**, Vol. 36, No.1, (2010), p.142-43.
[68] Luttwak, **op. cit.**, 2001, p.182.
[69] Narushige Michishita, Richard J. Samuels, "Hugging and Hedging: Japanese Grand Strategy in the 21st Century", in **Worldviews of Aspiring Powers: Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China, India, Iran, Japan, and Russia**, Henry R. Nau, Deepa M. Ollapally (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2012, p.146-180.
[70] For further research, see: Rohan Mukherjee, "Chaos as opportunity: the United States and world order in India's grand strategy", **Contemporary Politics**, Vol.26, No.4, June 2020, p.420-438. Fred Charles, Terumasa Nakanishi, "Japan's Grand Strategy", **Foreign Affairs**, Vol.69, No.3, Summer 1990, p.81-95.
[71] As an example, see: Luis Simon, "The Spider in Europe's Web? French Grand Strategy from Iraq to Libya", **Geopolitics**, Vol.18, No.2, 2013, p.403-434. Paul Midford, "The Logic of Reassurance and Japan's Grand Strategy", **Security Studies**, Vol.11, No.3, 2002, p.1-43. Andrew Monaghan, "Putin's Russia: Shaping a 'Grand Strategy'", **International Affairs**, Vol.89, No.5, September 2013, p.1221-1236. David Pratt, "Canadian Grand Strategy and Lessons Learned", **Journal of Transatlantic Studies**, Vol.6, No.1, 2008, p.61-78.
[72] As an example, see: Hal Brands, **Dilemmas of Brazilian Grand Strategy**, Strategic Studies Institute, August 2010. Kevjn Lim, "Iran's Grand Strategic Logic", **Survival**, Vol.62, No.5, 2020,

approach from a US oriented concept to a more applicable tool on what is beyond a simple foreign policy analysis.

The absence of conceptual boundaries enables many types that is largely dependent on researchers' vision of the world, their conceptualization of political issues such as identity, the nature of power, changes in the international system, and their pursued research objective on the chosen subject. Moreover, this often creates confusion as to what is the difference between grand strategy concept and foreign policy. Foreign policy covers the sum of state's foreign activities with both states and non-states actors in a wide range of interaction based on economy, diplomacy, military, politics, and socio-cultural dimensions. On the other hand, grand strategy works as a guideline to maximize the interests and achieve long-term goals. It presents a broader prescription in decision-making in the domestic and foreign policy of the state for the sake of utilizing the various means of all these dimensions. Each choice could develop a new type of grand strategy driven from the necessity of each state's political objectives or their experiences from history. Thus, the typologies of grand strategy are shaped by how the researcher defines the concept either as a thought, a vision, an overall plan, a motivation, a paradigm, a political choice, or a political guideline. Hart points to a multidimensional turn in understanding grand strategy as a result of the interpretations of the contemporary strategists, which attains equal importance with regards to economic, political, and military power.[73] However, the incorporation of other dimensions along with the military has a long history. This multidimensional understanding has accelerated by the end of the Cold War, the transition from the accustomed bipolar structure, and the rise of new security threats including climate change, terrorism, and humanitarian crises. It would shape both multinational reactions as well as each actors' own adjustment on grand strategy to comply with this systemic and domestic needs.

As an early example, Posen and Ross describe grand strategy alternatives but their specified definitions are conditioned with the US example in particular. They summarize four competing grand strategies in the US experience as neo-isolationism,

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p.152-172. Vibhanshu Shekhar, **Indonesia's Foreign Policy and Grand Strategy in the 21st Century: Rise of an Indo-Pacific Power**, Routledge, 2018.

[73] Gary Hart, **The Fourth Power A Grand Strategy for the United States in the Twenty-First Century**, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, p.9-10.

selective engagement, cooperative security, and primacy. The main differentiation of each grand strategy type is based on a major purpose in international politics, basic premises about international politics, preferred political and military instruments, and real world implications.[74] Neo-isolationism focuses on power and security threats as a core of grand strategy with a traditional buffer zone outlook as a guarantee of the absence of threat and a particular emphasis on nuclear power since the high cost of repercussion regarding the nuclear capacity of the US. There will be no involvement in any conflict that could pose a threat if the US stands aloof from all problems, even due to alliance obligations since keeping the US out of foreign conflicts would avoid any threats beyond traditional means. Selective engagement attributes a moral superiority to a country that could select matters in order to get involved. This perspective highly acknowledge the importance of alliances and having nuclear capacity while considering the scared resources as the main problem. Cooperative security prioritizes world peace as a vital interest for the US. It has more a liberal configuration rather than a realist aspect due to the role of international organizations and the development of global norms and regulations which would preserve the US position. Primacy is conditioned the notion of peace with the unwavering superiority of the US in terms of its superior power capability; however the costs and limits of this unilateral and unipolar world view are unclear.

[74] Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy", **International Security**, Vol. 21, No. 3, Winter 1996/97, p.9-13.

Table-1: Grand Strategy Choices

	Neo-Isolationism	Selective engagement	Cooperative Security	Primacy
Analytical Anchor	Minimal, defensive realism	Traditional balance of power realism	Liberalism	Maximal realism/unilateralism
Major Problem of International Politics	Avoiding entanglement in the affairs of others	Peace among the Major Powers	The indivisibility of peace	The Rise of peer competitor
Preferred World Order	Distant balance of power	Balance of power	Interdependence	Hegemonic
Nuclear Dynamics	Supports status quo	Supports status quo	Supports aggression	Supports aggression
Conception of National Interests	Narrow	Restricted	Transnational	Board
Regional Priority	North America	Industrial Eurasia	Global	Industrial Eurasia & home of any potential peer competitor
Nuclear proliferation	Not our problem	Discriminate prevention	Indiscriminate prevention	Indiscriminate prevention
NATO	Withdraw	Maintain	Transform & expand	Expand
Regional Confrontation	Abstain	Contain, Discriminative Intervention	Intervene	Contain, Discriminative Intervention
Ethnic Conflict	Abstain	Contain	Nearly indiscriminative intervention	Contain
Humanitarian Intervention	Abstain	Discriminative	Nearly indiscriminative intervention	Discriminative intervention
Use of Force	Self-defence	Discriminative	Frequent	At will
Force Posture	Minimal self-defence force	Two-MRC force	Reconnaissance strike for multilateral action	A two-power standard force

Source: Grand Strategy Choices According to Posen and Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy", **International Security**, Vol.21, No.3, p.9.

Like Posen and Ross, Robert Art also evaluates possible grand strategy types that the US might choose and lists them as dominion, global collective security, regional collective security, cooperative security, containment, isolationism, offshore balancing, and selective engagement.[75] They are formulated to answer how the US could pursue its dominant position and the national interests of the country in this new international setting. As seen in their formulation, these grand strategy types are not unique to the US but also suitable to the specific time of the post-cold War period. In addition, these studies identify how a specific type of grand strategy could be adopted. As Art points out, regional containment and selective engagement choices could be selected in order to secure national interest, in that case American interest; yet latter is the best way to protect them.

Another recent study revaluates Posen and Ross's four types more focus on International Relations theories by arguing that their study overcomes conceptual confusion of grand strategy debate by clearly delineating interests, objectives, and policy levers. However, their analysis was restricted to military-oriented policy levers as military force structure, security commitments, military deployments, and the use of force.[76] They redefine grand strategy types as restraint, deep engagement, liberal internationalism, and conservative primacy. Besides restraint, which has a theoretical framework over the balance of power theory, the rest of the grand strategy policies adopt variations of hegemonic stability theory as a main theoretical ground with a difference in objectives and policy levers. In these competing typologies, they prioritize two axes of debate to further develop the discussion as nuclear proliferation and the role of international legitimacy in implementing grand strategy.

[75] Robert J. Art, **A Grand Strategy for America**, Cornell University Press, 2003.
[76] Paul C. Avey, Jonathan N. Markowitz, Robert J. Reardon, **Disentangling Grand Strategy International Relations Theory and U.S. Grand Strategy**, **Texas National Security Review**, Vol.2, No.1, November 2018, p.35.

Table-2: Features of Grand Strategy Types

	Restraint	Deep Engagement	Liberal Internationalism	Conservative Primacy
Theoretical	Balance of Power	Hegemonic Stability Theory	Hegemonic Stability & Institutionalism	Hegemonic Stability & Classical Liberalism
OBJECTIVES				
Regional Priorities	Balance in Core	Stability in Core	Global Stability	Global Stability
Peer Competitor	Prevent	Prevent	Incorporate Into Institutions	Prevent
Globalization	Allow	Promote	Promote	Promote
Institutions	Indifferent	Promote	Promote	Wary
Counterterrorism	Minimal	Moderate	Expansive	Expansive
Counter Proliferation	Minimal	Expansive	Expansive	Expansive
Human Rights Promotion	Minimal	Minimal	Expansive	Expansive
Democracy Promotion	Minimal	Minimal	Expansive	Expansive
POLICY LEVERS				
Commitments	Reduce	Maintain	Expand	Expand
Force Structure	Reduce	Maintain	Maintain	Expand
Troop Deployment	Offshore	Forward in Core	Global	Global
Use of Force	If Balancing Fails	When Core Threatened	Multilateral when Objectives Threatened	Unilateral when Objectives Threatened

Source: Features of Grand Strategy Types According to Avey, Markowitz, Reardon. "Disentangling Grand Strategy International Relations Theory and U.S. Grand Strategy", **Texas National Security Review**, Vol.2, No.1, November 2018, p.34.

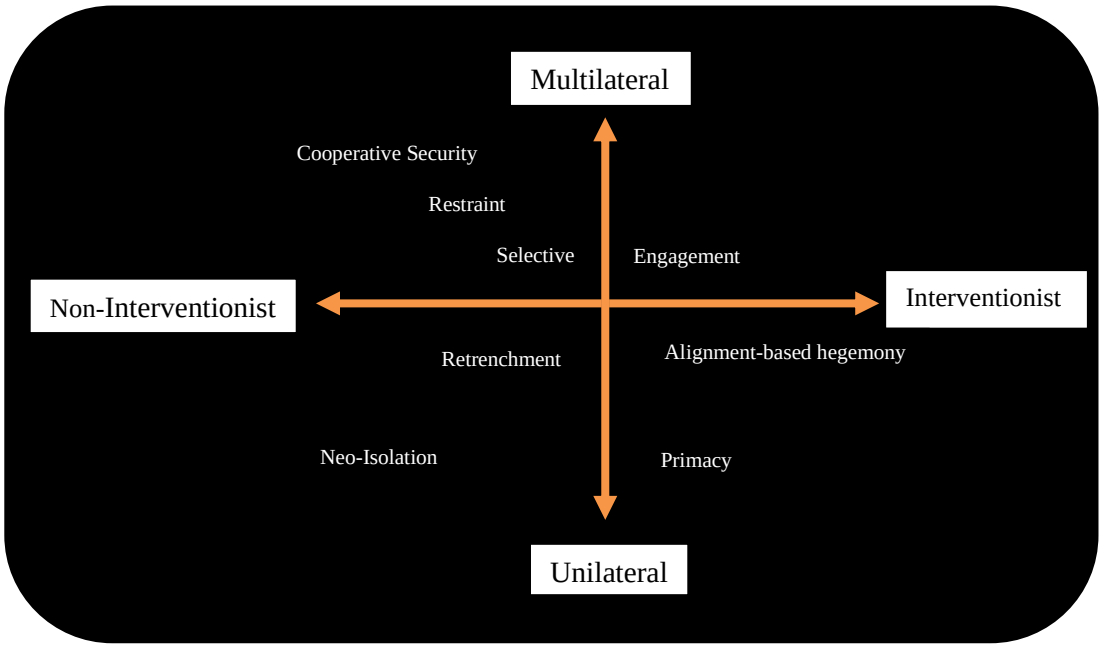
Selden has improved the alternatives in Posen and Ross's list by adding new archetypes as engagement, alignment-based hegemony, restraint, and retrenchment.[77] His study groups those interpretations of grand strategy as a Cartesian coordinate system. In that form of system, these two dimensions are critical in positioning the variety of features that a researcher elaborates.

[77] Zachary Selden, **Alignment, Alliance, and American Grand Strategy**, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2016, p.12.

Selden's two perpendicular dimensions signify the degree of interventionist impulse (interventionist and non-interventionist) and quantity-based approach on diplomatic interactions (unilateral and multilateral). The alignment-based hegemony was highlighted in this study for the future of US foreign policy; other alternatives, however, could also be discussed in the new conjuncture of global affairs. His perception shaped by two questions regarding the necessity of military involvement in global affairs and the legitimization of such military intervention through international organizations.

As a matter of its subject, it could be a logical choice to limit these variations nearly unique to the US grand strategy. Nevertheless, those kinds of typologies cannot reflect the overall grand strategy variations instead, it limits the possibilities in order to convince American decision makers in such conditioned explanations over a selected cases. In Selden's study, it is about calculating the manageable costs for maintaining US hegemony, either through multilateral or unilateral acts and with or without interventions.

Figure 1: Grand Strategy Diagram



Source: Grand strategy types according to Selden, **Alignment, Alliance, and American Grand Strategy**, University of Michigan Press, 2016, p.12.

Silove evaluates the main principles of grand strategy types differently to Posen and Ross's study. Her ontological approach presents three widespread tendencies when applying grand strategy to academic studies as a grand plan, a grand principle, and a grand behaviour.[78] These meanings of grand strategy acknowledge different aspects of the conceptual framework. Thus, those scholars working on the concept can focus on the preparation of the comprehensive plan as a pre-grand strategy, the evolution of principles on grand strategic policy or the implementation regarding the pattern of behaviour in political choices. The rational reasoning for grand strategic output seems similar to a military strategy, which requires intentional preparation for different scenarios on the battlefield. The official documents are final outcomes of individuals' contributions to the political statement which are mostly open-sources to the public and researchers.[79]

These official documents are often reflecting the approved formal narrative, yet a research on grand strategy has to trace back the evolution of these outcome by searching discussions, meetings, and drafts if possible. Such research that is using official documents, should be aware of the danger of reproducing the official narrative. Because, these primary sources may be instrumentalized in order to legitimize the political outlook unless a critical perspective has adapted to the impact of individuals, state systems, or international conjuncture. Also, it is not clear to detect the role of individuals' or institutions' impact on the formation of grand plans. If those studies pursue just a grand plan framework, it would raise criticism on the grand strategy concept as an instrument of a post-factum rationalization.

Grand strategy as a grand plan is an organizing set of principles defined as a framework, guide, or strategic view. However, grand strategy as a grand principle approach would be more inclined to the political and philosophical aspects. The third facet of grand strategy is a grand behaviour which refers to the pattern of behaviour itself as a grand strategy instead of searching for what causes the pattern as in the first approach or the formation period of the pattern as in the second. Grand

[78] Silove, **op.cit.**, p.23.
[79] Norrin M. Ripsman, "Conclusion: The Emerging Sub-field of Comparative Grand Strategy", in **Comparative Grand Strategy A Framework and Cases**, Thierry Balzacq, Peter Dombrowski, Simon Reich (eds.) Oxford University Press, 2019, p.285.

behaviour rather functions as a means to connect a plan and principles or strategic thinking and implementation.

Thus, this compartmentalization reveals more a component of an already-built concept where researchers figure out elements for their research agenda. In addition, Silove's answers to foundational questions are consistent through these three faces of grand strategy.[80] The distinction present in these definitions and meaning of grand strategy is an important step forward to distinguishing what we should understand when working on grand strategy. Even though theoretical meanings may be separated, there is still no clear distinction in practice as Narizny, who approaches concept as a pattern rather than a plan, shows little analytical difference between a plan and a pattern of behaviour.[81]

Lissner also follows the path of Silove in not compartmentalizing the variations of grand strategy but evaluates the types of meaning in academic studies. Consequently, Lissner discusses grand strategy in three levels as variable (descriptive), process (descriptive and prescriptive), and blueprint (prescriptive).[82] Grand strategy as a variable is compatible with the understanding of a grand strategy in terms of neoclassical realist understanding. According to that type, grand strategy demonstrates sources of state behaviour through the interaction between international, domestic, or individual levels. In a neoclassical framework, a country's ability to pursue grand strategy is not solely determined by systemic constraints and opportunities but also domestic politics and strategic culture. Grand strategy as a process is to prioritize the decision making process that goes beyond the boundaries of structural determinism by incorporating the role of individuals and domestic institutions.

The planning of grand strategy and determinants of its formulation has become more important than simply focusing on the outcomes. Grand strategy as a blueprint elaborates the concept as an instrument for an intentional policy design. It rather works like a counsel on the future trajectory of the political decisions by providing a framework through the overall assessment. These still do not provide

[80] Silove, **op.cit.**, p.23-26.
[81] Kevin Narizny, **The Political Economy of Grand Strategy**, Cornell University Press, 2007, p.10.
[82] Rebecca Friedman Lissner, "What Is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield", **Texas National Security Review**, Vol.2, No.1, November 2018, p.58-66.

clear boundaries on developing typologies of grand strategy but can be useful as a categorization on the concept to reveal how the concept has to be perceived. Layton looks for how we elaborate rather than defining the concept. His study evaluates the conceptual understanding by adding international relations perspectives and formulates different grand strategy typologies as denial, engagement, and reform.[83] Yet, such approach oversimplifies the concept while making it more practical in applying and understanding the foreign affairs. However, the concept should not be limited to the implementation but also capture the zeitgeist of the state's policy.

1.1.4. Methodological Limitations on Grand Strategy Studies

This section presents the critiques and methodological limitations of the concept. The methodological and conceptual limits of grand strategy derive from the critiques over its meaning, significance, and implementation in the International Relations. The first aspect is a conceptual crisis that poses both strength and weakness depending on a broad or narrow approach to the subject. The second concerns the capacity in implementing the concept in scholarly research or explaining the long-term projection of a political agenda. The central question concerns whether grand strategy matters when explaining foreign policy behaviours. There have been concerns regarding the inefficiency of the concept as well as arguments on the death or end of grand strategy. These critiques on the conceptual limits of grand strategy studies are closely connected with the capability of the concept to present valid answers and a comprehensive explanation of overall political intentions. Firstly, the concept continues to reflect the dominance of its origin from security studies that focus on the military issues. Second, its overwhelming focus on great power politics makes the conceptual framework appear like an explanatory tool for the discussion on the hegemonic role or interplay between great powers. As a field of research, grand strategy is primarily used in political studies and its primary audience is largely foreign policy elites and policymakers. For this reason, many analyses are mostly disregarded since such studies on grand strategy are highly open to the political influence. Third, its primary focus has been US grand strategy,

[83] Peter Layton, **Grand Strategy**, Brisbane, 2018, p.76-87.

although there is now a growing field of research among scholars towards small states and comparative grand strategy studies.[84]

The complex nature of the concept makes hard to have a clear definition. Instead, it invites both an inflation of definitions due to its complexity and an ambiguity in the level of analysis with a broad meaning. Consequently, the lack of boundaries regarding a clear definition should not be seen as a problem but a fact of this conceptual framework. Grand strategy has to be understood in accordance with the research question. When the concept is defined in narrow terms, there is always the possibility some key parts of the broader understanding of grand strategy are ignored or disregarded. Considering the concept as emerging from the subfield of military strategy, it can be difficult to differentiate between the diverse meanings of grand strategy, strategy, tactic, concept, or operation. This explains why the concept is highly reliant on military terminology and a hierarchical elaboration of the levels of strategy.[85] Martel tries to overcome this complexity by going into detail in the scales of geography, temporal scope, types of ends, types of powers, and the interactions of all levels from top to bottom. [86] He elaborates on grand strategy in a hierarchical context as inclusive of all types of power for the highest political ends on a global scale with a long term scope. However, his arguments rewrite the traditional understanding in a new fashion without presenting comprehensive explanations for conceptual description.

The military aspect still has a dominant place in IR literature considering the adaptation of grand strategy from the security studies. This causes inherently an attachment to the realist approach in searching grand strategy instead of adopting other theories. In line with the debate among realist scholars, Silove points to a critical attitude against neorealist explanations in the literature, which does not help in revealing the competing explanations on the causes of grand strategy.[87] Following Lake's call for eclecticism in IR studies, Kirss supports the call to connect grand strategy with aspects of domestic and international politics, midrange theories, and

[84] Thierry Balzacq, Peter Dombrowski, Simon Reich (eds.), **Comparative Grand Strategy A Framework and Cases**, Oxford University Press, 2019.
[85] Luttwak separates the levels of strategy in a technical, tactical, and operational level. Luttwak, **op.cit.**, 2001, p.93-135.
[86] Martel, **op.cit.**, p.30-31.
[87] Silove, **op. cit.**, p.30.

the diversification of various tests instead of a vicious circle of debate on types and definition.[88] Nevertheless, writers of a recent study criticize a grand strategy concept that does not incorporate the military's operational demands with fast changing trends in world politics. They underline counterproductive results of grand strategy due to disregarding the complex nature of military.[89] In the end, the concept has derived from the military field but has been freed from the limitations of security-oriented elaborations.

Nevertheless, foreign policy issues are not limited to military matters but has other dimensions. Grand strategy scholars have allowed for a more inclusive approach that takes into consideration non-military factors. Considering Gray's inclusive framework as all strategy is a grand strategy, the incorporation of non-military factors is required even in the military or security oriented studies in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of a general logic.[90] Therefore, grand strategy would functions as a ground between politics and other instruments including the military, diplomacy, economy, and social, technological, and informational capabilities. However, this exact point is a source of criticism since it cannot place the concept as an independent variable, an essential framework for foreign policy behaviour, or a transmission belt in between them. It also points to another dimension on grand strategy discussion, whatever to approach the concept as a theory or a practice.

There are some detailed critiques on the meaning and implementation of grand strategy. This serves to demonstrate the limits of the concept as lacking of sufficient clarity, especially in distinction with policy and strategy. These critiques emphasize that there is no clear distinction between grand strategy and foreign policy. Since grand strategy could be have considered as synonymous with foreign policy, Dueck addresses that issue by emphasizing their difference. It is often difficult to separate foreign policy and grand strategy and the terminology is often

[88] Alexander Kirss, "Review: Does Grand Strategy Matter", **Strategic Studies Quarterly**, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Winter 2018), p.128. David A. Lake, "Theory is dead, long live theory: The end of the Great Debates and the rise of eclecticism in International Relations", **European Journal of International Relations**, Vol.19, No.3, pp.567-587.
[89] Simon Reich, Peter Dombrowski, **The End of Grand Strategy: US Maritime Operations in the Twenty-First Century**, Cornell University Press, 2018.
[90] Colin S. Gray, **The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice**, Oxford University Press, 2010), p.28.

blurred.[91] The first could be reactive to the latest development yet the latter, by nature, is difficult to change in a short period of time. However, the real issue in this critique concerns revealing foreign policy choices on the patterns of grand strategy adjustment. Through the expansion of the "International Relations approach" on the concept as well as moving beyond the security studies limitations, grand strategy incorporates different determinants of foreign policy. In this way, grand strategy and foreign policy analysis became coinciding fields since diplomacy, the implementation of hard/soft power, and decision making process can be regarded as a part of grand strategy studies even though grand strategy is not limited to foreign policy.

Another limitation of the concept is about its implementation of the selected cases. Grand strategy primarily reflects a state oriented perspective yet the contemporary nature of international relations has already gone beyond that nation-state focus. Adopting the concept to the nature of alliances or alternative cases on international organizations or non-state actors is one way in which to negate this limitation.[92] However, the majority of grand strategy studies continue to use the concept in a state-oriented approach yet, the scope of grand strategy cannot be limited to either a nation-state unit of analysis or the field of security.[93] A state's political position in the international system would be in the facade of grand strategy. But, the domestic impetus regarding leaders, institutions and social/cultural elements have a key role in shaping state's assumptions on its own national capabilities, objectives, and present or future opportunities and threats. This will demonstrate multiple levels of grand strategy rather than a unitary perception. It also allows a distinction between a large shift in between grand strategy outlooks and a grand strategy adjustment within itself. Therefore, there is a fertile ground for adopting this concept in order to go beyond the monolithic perspective of the concept and state-

[91] Colin Dueck, **Reluctant crusader Power, culture and change in American Grand Strategy**, Princeton University Press, Oxford, 2006.

[92] For a detailed analysis on alliances, see also: Peter R. Mansoor, Williamson Murray (eds.), Grand Strategy and Military Alliances, Cambridge University Press, 2016. Michael E. Smith, "A Liberal Grand Strategy in a Realist World? Power, purpose and the EU's changing global role", **Journal of European Public Policy**, Vol.18, No.2, 2011, p.144-163.

[93] For more info on unit of analysis, see also: Nuri Yurdusev, "'Level of Analysis' and 'Unit of Analysis': A Case for Distinction", **Millennium: Journal of International Studies**, Vol. 22, No.1, spring 1993, p.77-88. For an example of non-security adaptation of grand strategy, see: Leslie A. Currya, Minh A. Luong, et.al., "Achieving large ends with limited means: grand strategy in global health", **International Health**, Vol.2, No.2, 2010, pp.82-86.

oriented explanations. It would extend the scope of research into the role of individuals, strategic culture, bureaucratic institutions, domestic politics on grand strategy or the grand strategy of international organizations, non-governmental organizations, multinational companies or even terrorist groups.

Considering the limits of the classical and neorealist school of thought, neoclassical realist perspective opens an alternative way within the realism by incorporating domestic variables with a systemic basis. As seen in some recent studies, there is a rising trend in adapting grand strategy to non-state actors' political choices, especially with the temptation of discussing the future of the EU.[94] Another dimension concerns revealing the determinants of the state level by going into the details of the role of domestic politics, polarization in society, the impact of elites, bureaucratic politics, and the role of the leaders.[95] Therefore, grand strategy literature could revisit two long-standing debates on public opinion and polarization, particularly with the rise of polarization and populist discourse in US and European countries.

It could be argued that grand strategy studies are largely limited to great power politics when selecting state oriented cases. In fact, these great powers have been predominantly selected from the Western examples. Not only International Relations, but humanities and social sciences in general, have long suffered from the

[94] Markus Kornprobst, "Building agreements upon agreements: The European Union and grand strategy", **European Journal of International Relations**, Vol. 21, No.2, 2015, pp.267-292. Neil Winn, "European Union grand strategy and defense: strategy, sovereignty, and political union", **International Affairs Forum**, Vol.4, No.2, 2013, pp.174-179. Pascal Vennesson, "Competing Visions for the European Union Grand Strategy", **European Foreign Affairs Review**, Vol.15, 2010, pp.57-75. Ingo Trauschweizer, "Adapt and survive: NATO in the Cold War", in **Grand Strategy and Military Alliances**, Peter R. Mansoor, Williamson Murray (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2016. Mary Habeck, **Al Qaeda's Grand Strategy in its War with the World**, Foreign Policy Research Institute, February 2014

[95] Elizabeth N. Saunders, **Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions** , Cornell University Press, 2011. Alexandra Guisinger, Elizabeth N. Saunders, "Mapping the Boundaries of Elite Cues How Elites Shape Mass Opinion across International Issues", **International Studies Quarterly**, Vol.61, No. 2, June 2017, pp. 425-441. Lilliana Mason, "'I Disrespectfully Agree': The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization," **American Journal of Political Science**, Vol.59, No. 1 (January 2015), pp.128-45. Patrick Porter, "Why U.S. Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit and the Foreign Policy Establishment" **International Security**, Vol.42, No.4, 2019, pp.9-46. Peter D. Feaver, Hal Brands, Rebecca Friedman Lissner, Patrick Porter, "Correspondence: The Establishment and US Grand Strategy" **International Security**, Vol.43, No.4, 2019, pp.197-204.

same problem.[96] This is perhaps a result of the Western dominance over the production and circulation of knowledge. Mingst and Arreguín-Toft as argue that the "European emphasis is justified because, for better or worse, in both theory and practice contemporary IR is rooted in the European experience."[97] These studies on the grand strategies of great powers largely focus on the Western cases in searching their historical or contemporary policies.[98] However, it is the reflections of old school of thought, which predominantly focuses on the interplay between great powers despite the role of small states and middle powers have already acknowledged.[99]

Moreover, Eurocentric knowledge creates divergence between the West and the rest of the world since the theories of IR reflect a Western way of thinking. A revaluation can also question the ability of Western IR scholars' explanations on the political actions of non-Western states. Such critique questions an understanding of world politics through the inevitable ends of the Western experiences despite the fact that even the European experiences have resulted differently.[100] Grand strategy can be one of the main parts of this puzzle when making assumptions on non-Western experiences in world politics. Thus, an alternative from the Eurocentric approach has to be applied to grand strategy studies with a critical assessment of Western-oriented knowledge. Otherwise, grand strategy can be an instrument to pursue others in a Western fashion, in fact the American way.

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[96] Audrey Alejandro, **Western Dominance in International Relations**, Routledge, 2020. John M. Hobson, "The other side of the Westphalian Frontier", in **Postcolonial Theory and International Relations A critical Introduction**, Sanjay Seth (ed.), Routledge, 2013.

[97] Karen A Mingst, Ivan Arreguín-Toft, **Essentials of International Relations**, W. W. Norton & Company, 2017, p.22.

[98] As an example of this selection on historical cases, see also: Edward Luttwak, **The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire**, Johns Hopkins University Press 1979. Edward Luttwak, **The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire**, Harvard University Press, 2009.

[99] Holbraad criticizes that outdated though as: "Those who, in the tradition of Ranke, concentrate exclusively on the interrelations of the great powers, today the super powers, enjoy the obvious advantages of dealing with the chief actors, but are sometimes apt to take a rather Olympian view of international politics. Some of the charges of distortion that have been directed at the historians of earlier centuries, who snobbishly were inclined to write only about popes and emperors, kings and generals and to ignore the lower orders of society, may apply also to some modern writers on international politics." Carsten Holbraad, "The Role of Middle Powers", **Cooperation and Conflict**, Vol.6, No.77, 1971. Amry Vandenbosch, "The Small States in International Politics and Organization", **The Journal of Politics**, Vol.26, No.2, May 1962, p. 293-312.

[100] Moore demonstrates these differences among European cases over the evolutions of domestic systems: Barrington Moore, Jr. **Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World**, Penguin Books, 1973.

A case study on non-Western countries would be a good start to negotiate the Eurocentric problem; there is however, a larger problem that lies behind the Western oriented approach. Grand strategy literature suffers from not only being Eurocentric but also having an American experience at its centre. It is described as American parochialism due to the American institutional dominance, the productive power of the size of the academic community, and the influential role of publications, impact factors, and hegemony of language.[101] It has been argued that this is a preferred American stance regarding a way of thinking to highlight "the New World", which is embedded in an idealistic anti-"Old World" founding bias.[102] The position of the US has inevitably concerned others' conceptualization and construction of foreign policy due to its predominant role in world politics. Nevertheless, most works use the concept of grand strategy to refer to the *principal* grand strategy of the US.

The positions of other states have been defined as an authoritarian, ideological, geopolitical, or political challenges as being interpreted by US-oriented lenses.[103] Therefore, any major changes or challenges of the US foreign policy would boost the publications on grand strategy as seen by the end of the bipolar system, the discussion on unilateral interventions, or Trump's contradictory foreign relations. Danner calls for an alternative to the Western oriented way since it will fall short on explaining the rest of the world due to the insufficient lenses of the Western Judeo-Christian tradition.[104] However, his argument falls into the same trap by putting the basis of Chinese tradition on explaining China's grand strategy. Sullivan calls for a solution, especially on the US-China relations that those studies that use the canonical works have to extend its scope towards what is beyond Sun Tzu, like Zuo Zhuan, instead of repeating the same Thucydides pattern.[105]

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[101] Helen Louise Turton, **International Relations and American Dominance A diverse discipline**, Routledge, 2016, p.144. Gunther Hellmann, "International Relations as a Field of Studies" in **International Encyclopaedia of Political Science: Vol.8**, Bertrand Badie, Dirk Berg-Schlosser, Leonardo Morlino (eds.), Sage, 2011, p. 1299-1303.

[102] Adam Garfinkle, "The silent death of American grand strategy", **American Review** No. 15, Feb-Apr 2015, p.14

[103] Hal Brands, "Grand Strategy for a new Twilight Struggle" in **New Voices in Grand Strategy**, CNAS, 2019, p.14-16.

[104] Lukas K. Danner, **China's Grand Strategy Contradictory Foreign Policy?**, Palgrave, 2018, p.2.

[105] John Sullivan, "Trapped by Thucydides? Updating the Strategic Canon for a Sinocentric Era", **War on the Rocks**, 28 December 2020. (https://warontherocks.com/2020/12/trapped-by-thucydides-updating-the-strategic-canon-for-a-sinocentric-era/) This critique find its meaning with Graham Allison, **Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?**, Mariner Books, 2018.

In that case, what would be the solution to overcoming US oriented grand strategy studies? First of all, scholars who work on grand strategy have to change their conceptualization from the largely US or the Western oriented examples. If grand strategy needs a long term vision and holistic approach on interests and instruments for making decisions, the uniqueness of each case either as a state or a non-state actor in global politics, has to be emphasized. It would be fruitless in adapting one's unique experiences in the past to the present circumstances or waiting to achieve the same result by following the same preferences. Each grand strategy has developed through its own conditions and requires a detailed analysis. In that regard, any cross-case research has to be conducted on the motivations on political objectives, and the process of deciding what the political actor wanted to achieve over a particular period. The incorporation of non-Western examples would have a prevailing perspective of grand strategy studies on different cultures, political systems, and forms of government, geographical conditions, the role of individuals and institutions in each case.

Secondly, a comparative analysis of grand strategy provides means by which to overcome the US-oriented case selection. In other scenarios, either US-oriented or not, the outputs of grand strategy research hypothetically provide unique cases instead of serving the conceptual framework. Moreover, as Ripsman points out, this would allow for the expansion of the literature on this concept.[106] This is a first step for developing a comparative approach to the concept, even though the comparison has already started in searching different policies of US presidents.[107] A comparative research method would enable us to demonstrate the new typologies, different reactions to the same phenomenon, or the variety of political implementations in diverse cases. In a latest and more comprehensive study of Balzacq, Dombrowski and Reich, scholars point out the strengths of a comparative study on grand strategy as "to discover causal relationships between the domestic drivers and the implementation of grand strategies overlooked in the American-dominated literature;

[106] Norrin M. Ripsman, **op.cit.**, 2019, p.284-298.

[107] For those rather new comparative analyses on this subject, see also: William I. Hitchcock, Melvin P. Leffler, Jeffrey W. Legro (eds.), **Shaper Nations: Strategies for a Changing World**, Harvard University Press, 2016. Brands, **op.cit.**, 2014. William C. Martel, **Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice The Need for an Effective American Foreign** Policy, Cambridge University Press. Ionut Popescu, **Emergent Strategy and Grand Strategy**, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.

to identify areas of convergence and divergence across cases; to highlight key empirical aspects of national strategies".[108] It requires an in-depth look at each case to evaluate national grand strategies. Since it provides the same set of frameworks in a comparative analysis, it would be easier to incorporate the non-state actors of IR such as international organizations, NGOs, terrorist groups, or military alliances, into grand strategy study.[109]

What is missing in grand strategy studies is not limited to the issues about great power politics but an analysis of the rest of the world and their long-term objectives. Grand strategy as a concept has been seen as peculiar to the great powers since a great power has to have a grand strategy in order to preserve its status in the international order and pursue its interests. There is a lively debate on whether a small state have a grand strategy. It extend the scope of analysis by questioning do small states need a grand strategy or what would be the (dis)advantages of having one?[110] Even though it has a limited capacity for eligible choices in order to pursue its national interests, a small state can also adapt different political choices like balancing, bandwagoning, neutrality, seeking protection, and (over)specialization. In accordance with the crux of the concept, grand strategy could work as an instrument for small states' leaders to unify a nation through national morale, an effective management of its limited resources or capabilities, particularly through diplomacy for political means.[111] Moreover, a comprehensive grand strategy adjustment would ensure the most efficient use of scared resources. That would point the limitations of great power orientation of grand strategy studies when adapting the concept to all political entities.

Finally, the arguments on "the end of grand strategy" have to be reconsidered. These critical analyses have mainly focused on the inefficiency of the concept or the decline of its importance. The challenging factors in conventional understandings and typologies of grand strategy are the popular distrust of expertise, highly

[108] Balzacq Dombrowski, and Reich (eds.), **op.cit.**, 2019, p.12.
[109] Layton briefly touched upon some the grand strategies of non-state actors or international campaigns. See: Peter Layton, **Improving Thinking About Grand Strategy: Devising a Grand Strategy Diagnostic Process for Policymakers**, University of New south Wales, PhD Thesis, 2014.
[110] For further analysis on small states, see also: Christine Ingebritsen, Iver Neumann, Sieglinde Gstöhl, Jessica Beyer, **Small States in International Relations**, University of Washington Press, 2006.
[111] Paul Kennedy, "Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition," in **Grand Strategies in War and Peace**, Paul Kennedy (ed.), Yale University Press, 1991, p.4-5.

polarized domestic politics, rise of populist discourse, debates over globalization, the discussion concerning the end of the liberal international order, and changes in threats, actors, intelligence, technology and forms of conflict. By the rise of new security threats, the military aspect of the concept also challenges the inherent limitations of grand strategy with practical differences.[112] What writers hailed as a benign era is the most unexpected period in recent history, the end of the Cold War. It has been argued that strategizing is dangerous in a malign and unstable international environment.[113] Strategizing, especially the thinking of grand strategy requires a clear elaboration of long-term goals to achieve and a guideline for all conditions to secure those interests. However, there is not always a stable and peaceful environment for such long-term planning. Therefore, the end of grand strategy has also been suggested in some studies as a result of the complexity of contemporary international affairs.[114] It could be suggested that and adaptable and flexible approach towards grand strategy would be a way to overcome this conceptual crisis, if there is any, through the virtues of pragmatism. Foreign policy actors eventually accustom to new conditions of global affairs in order to articulate a better response to the conjuncture.

The debate surrounding the" end of grand strategy" suggest that the concept is focused on US policy. These "end" or "death" arguments concerning grand strategy largely refer to the inefficiency of the American grand strategy based on liberal institutionalism. This debate regarding US grand strategy has often reflected how the contemporary notion of the concept is exclusively focused on the US rather than a part of a scholarly discussion or a general framework. Therefore, the critique on the lack of grand strategy turns into a political instrument to argue about the absence of a coherent political agenda in military and foreign policy. Such an attack on official political agenda is reflected in the critiques toward the Obama administration.[115] These assessments describe Obama's era in power as lacking

[112] Simon Reich, Peter Dombrowski, **The End of Grand Strategy: US Maritime Operations in the Twenty-First Century**, Cornell University Press, 2018.
[113] David M. Edelstein, Ronald R. Krebs, "Delusions of Grand Strategy the Problem with Washington's Planning Obsession", **Foreign Affairs**, November/December 2015.
[114] Daniel W. Drezner, Ronald R. Krebs, Randall Schweller, "The End of Grand Strategy America Must Think Small", **Foreign Affairs**, May/June 2020.
[115] Michael Clarke and Anthony Ricketts, "Did Obama have a Grand Strategy?," **Journal of Strategic Studies**, Vol.40, No.1–2, 2017, p.295-324. Rosa Brooks, "Obama Needs a Grand Strategy", **Foreign**

comprehensive strategic thinking with a discussion on the end of Pan-Americana.[116] Thus, Trump's era is labelled as a renaissance of the debate on grand strategy due to leaving behind the liberal institutionalism, proliferation of populist/nationalist backlash, and inefficiency of political polarization. The main argument is notes, these new factors that could have rendered any attempt in order to craft and pursue a grand strategy, since it would be costly and potentially counterproductive.[117]

In fact, those calls sum up the need for a practical result instead of a theoretical grand strategy debate on which direction the US should follow. In such cases, the ascription "end of grand strategy" refers to the end of successful foreign policy outcomes. It is rather turning the conceptual framework into solely an endless discussion on policymaking. To avoid this political trap, grand strategy studies have to embody two features of the concept, explanation and prescription.[118] Prescription is inherently a central feature of grand strategy since it draws the attention of policy makers to the need to select alternative scenarios as well as the writers' instrument for instructing political leaders in a preferred path. If grand strategy studies rely on the cause-and-effect explanation, such deductive results would be applicable for all political sides without imposing guidance. This explanation makes the consequences of foreign policy more predictable since it presents ideal strategic options even the leaders may change.

The inefficiency of grand strategy has more coherent arguments since there is little knowledge of its effectiveness on policymaking or in which conditions grand strategy provides successful outcomes. Would it be more efficient in shaping or implementing policies in democracies or autocratic systems? Does geography matter in shaping grand strategy objectives? What causes fundamental change or little adjustment in grand strategy? Which standards should we apply in evaluating the effectiveness of grand strategy? These questions require more analysis and detailed explanations of the competing arguments surrounding the success of grand strategy.

Policy, 23 January 2012, (http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/01/23/obama-needs-a-grand-strategy/). Peter Dombrowski Simon Reich, "Does Donald Trump have a grand strategy", **International Affairs**, Vol.93, No.5, 2017, p.1013-1037.

[116] Anthony H. Cordesman, "Strategy, Grand Strategy, and the Emperor's New Clothes", **CSIS**, 17 March 2015.

[117] Daniel W. Drezner, Ronald R. Krebs, Randall Schweller, "The End of Grand Strategy America Must Think Small", **Foreign Affairs**, May/June 2020.

[118] Balzacq Dombrowski, and Reich (eds.), **op.cit.**, 2018, p.23-26.

However, the existing literature on grand strategy provides little explanation about the determinants of the concept's effectiveness. In a military oriented adaptation, the successful grand strategy is known to result in wartime success. The success of grand strategy has been elaborated as maintaining the balance of means and ends in general. The success of the concept is largely considered within the articulation of a certain set of goals, a clear outlook on the strategic action, and a stable environment for policy implementation. However, as Lissner suggests, grand strategy concept has to be studied as an independent variable instead of a dependent one to understand the effectiveness of strategic planning.[119]

1.1.5. Definition Adapted in this Thesis

As seen in the competing vision on grand strategy and the debate over the best prescription to implement, the variety of elaboration is based on different aspects on the roles of power, the influence of individuals, strategic culture, the role of domestic and international institutions in international politics, and the intentions of the scholars. Grand strategy does not have definitional boundaries, which makes the concept more flexible in searching different determinants. As the concept has spread from the military realm to the political, the next adoptable path leads grand strategy studies to the role of individuals, institutions, culture, and history. A definition of the concept also needs to consider the assessment of the extend to which a grand strategic framework directs the policies of the states in terms of the role of international legitimacy, restraints of strategic culture, or reactive adaptation to newly emerged domestic, regional or international phenomenon. The concept has many opportunities to develop in different fields since its nature provides the most suitable ground for a comprehensive analysis through an interdisciplinary approach. Grand strategy has to show consistency on long-term objectives while exploring the reasons of actions and decision-making reasoning through short term choices of a political actor.

In this thesis, grand strategy has defined as a logic on intentional and coherent political choices in order to reach the highest political objectives/interests at global or

[119] Rebecca Friedman Lissner, "What Is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield", **Texas National Security Review**, Vol.2, No.1, November 2018, p.69.

domestic levels. It has deep-rooted elaborations on prioritizing political objectives, and national needs, ideals, ways, and means cannot be changed through minor changes of policy. However, it also enables the process of revision and adjustment in foreign policy if the time and conjuncture require for a proper reconsidered implementation. It particularly covers long term goals and projections which are hard to change within a short period of time without a major incident. It is not conditioned with just the systemic impulse but also reflects, even predominantly, domestic considerations for long term calculations. Adopting these arguments of Martel and Murray in line with the "International Relations approach", grand strategy could be understood as to why a political entity would apply such a policy regarding the overall capability of a nation's military, diplomatic, economic, technological, informational, and domestic power.[120] Therefore, the concept accounts for why a specific policy has to be implemented while foreign policy explains what to do and strategy clarifies how to do it. In the end, it is all about leading domestic and foreign policy either in wartime and peacetime. It requires a comprehensive understanding among ends and means in order to make the most convenient choice among alternatives. Thus, it creates an effective grand strategy based on core national interests and security concerns.

Therefore, this thesis adopts an integrated approach on both stages of grand strategy: a theoretical composition and political implementation. Popescu implements that approach towards the case of George Kennan's famous containment strategy and the implementations of various US presidents during their presidency.[121] According to Popescu's study, a successful grand strategy during the Cold War might be distracted, unlike to its makers' design. His aspect on grand strategy studies incorporates the notion of "emergent strategy" from the field of Business into the International Relations discipline. This critical analysis also demonstrates the interdisciplinary capacity of the concept and the alternative answers from an emergent strategy perspective. His study also points out the significant role of the leader, foreign policy elites, and diplomats not just decision makers but also doers.

[120] Williamson Murray, "Thought on Grand Strategy" in **The Shaping of Grand Strategy Policy, Diplomacy, and War**, Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich, James Lacey (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2011, p.9. Martel, **op.cit.**, p.30-37.
[121] Popescu, **op.cit.**, 2017.

Therefore, Popescu considers both the theoretical and practical sides of the concept. This communication might overcome what Cavanna sees as a "talk past each other" among conceptual and theoretical dissidence because of multiple disciplinary and methodological cliques.[122] The interdisciplinary nature of the concept is the strong suit in studying foreign policy issues or evolving political choices.

1.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In grand strategy studies, the theoretical approach to the field of research is largely shaped within different perspectives such as realism, liberalism, and social constructivism. The world system theory has also been implemented to extend the scope of research from a solely political or military basis to a wider political economy aspect. The Chinese case on grand strategy is also analysed through these different theoretical approaches. The implementation of these theoretical aspects on China's grand strategy, especially the rise of China phenomenon, denotes the core research emphasis of each theoretical approach. The focus could be on the regional order in the Asia Pacific and East Asia during the Cold War and afterward, the role of regional institutions, the limits of interdependency, the impact of national identity, Chinese culture and philosophical thinking, or the evolution of national interests.[123] For this reason, this section briefly summarizes the variety of theoretical focuses on grand strategy studies. After reviewing the different theoretical explanations, the explanatory power of neoclassical realism on grand strategy studies will be illustrated in particular and how it could elaborate China's grand strategy.

1.2.1. International Relations Theories and Grand Strategy

The grand strategy concept has often been connected with material power since its initiation in military studies. The interaction with different disciplines such

[122] Thomas P. Cavanna, "A Teaching Roundtable on Grand Strategy", **H-Diplo Roundtable XXI-35**, 2 April 2020, p.9-11. (https://hdiplo.org/to/RT21-35 access date: 15 May 2020.)
[123] Aaron L. Friedberg, **A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia**, W.W. Norton, 2011. Adam P. Liff, G. John Ikenberry, "Racing toward Tragedy? China's Rise, Military Competition in the Asia Pacific, and the Security Dilemma", **International Security**, Vol. 39, No. 2, Fall 2014, pp. 52-91. Amitav Acharya, "Power Shift or Paradigm Shift? China's Rise and Asia's Emerging Security Order", **International Studies Quarterly**, Vol.58, 2014, pp.158–173.

as history, sociology, comparative politics, and international relations integrates different aspects in explaining long-term political objectives. The variants of Realism have been the dominant theory on grand strategy considering the roots of the concept in the military field and its first implementation in the field of security. In the realist theoretical aspect, the international system is anarchic and so survival and self-help are the key objectives of a state since there is no higher authority above unitary actors to provide protection. In that environment, national interests which are defined in terms of power, shape not only a states' preferences but also complicate sustainable cooperation with other states. The struggle for power among states will endure since the universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states. If politics is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature then the most optimist scenario in Morgenthau's thinking stands as, "man cannot hope to be good but must be content with being not too evil".[124] Order, however, can be restored if the balance of power is established, particularly among the great powers. The emphases of classical realism consist of the following elements: rationality, insecurity and malleable elements in human nature, the analytic centrality of states, a fundamental interest in survival, self-help, and the primacy of material capabilities. Power and national interest are among the most important elements in the realist perspective in analysing power/objectives for long-run vision of grand strategy.

The structural realist aspect extends the scope of the military-oriented explanations of capabilities to a broader context while emphasizing the role of systemic factors and the perception of relative gain in international affairs. Even though rationality stands for making the best decisions in the worst-case scenarios in Mearsheimer's perception, Waltz leaves out the rational actor assumption by arguing that the possession of great capability has often tempting nations in order to use unnecessary and foolish employment of force.[125] Waltz remains indifferent to unit level factors in the structural realist theory in explaining how external forces shape

[124] Hans J. Morgenthau, **The Politics among Nations The Struggle for Power and Peace**, Alfred A. Knopf, 1948. Hans J. Morgenthau, **Scientific Man vs. Power Politics**, Latimer House, 1947, p.192.
[125] Kenneth N. Waltz, **Theory of International Politics**, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979, p.201. John J. Mearsheimer, "Reckless States and Realism", **International Relations**, Vol.23, No.2, 2009, p.241-256.

states' behaviour, yet says nothing about the effects of internal forces.[126] Two elements became critical in searching grand strategy as how one state perceives another's intention and secondly, as in the logic of relative gain, how the perception of others have shaped by one state's vision. Neoclassical realism combines both systemic constraints and domestic incentives. In addition to the fundamental pursuit of survival and national interest, domestic politics, strategic culture, and the role of a leader's preferences gain priority in analysing overall outcomes of strategic thinking in search of sources of grand strategy.

Many of the studies begin by discussing the new position of China in world politics based on the ascendancy of its power such as a realist power, a regional power, a partial power, a status quo state, a superpower, a fragile superpower, a peaceful lion, and a major power.[127] Consequently, there is no doubt in considering China as a powerful state which also signifies its role in great power competition and systemic order explanation of realism. In searching China's grand strategy, the strategic weight of China is acknowledged, even in a bipolar world system, by the regional tripolarity in East Asia during the last two decades of the Cold War.[128] There is an ongoing debate surrounding the rise of China and the decline of US dominance by the early 21st century. Given the dominance of offensive realism in the analysis of China's contemporary foreign affairs, these explanations are inevitably shaped by the balance of power, relative gain, and capabilities. China is described as the high church of realpolitik in the post-Cold War conjuncture, those studies on China also reflect a realist centre of gravity in their debates.[129] Organski's Power Transition Theory anticipates that new competitive powers would inevitably rise, which might leads to Thucydides Trap.[130] The offensive realist view of hegemonic

[126] Kenneth Waltz, "International Politics is not Foreign Policy," **Security Studies**, Vol.6, No.1, 1996, p. 54-57. Unlike Waltz, some other realist scholars might take unit-level factors into considerations limited to the balance of power logic.
[127] Jian Shi, Zeren Langjia, "China's Ascend: A Strategic Perspective of Its Vision" in **The Changing Global Order Challenges and Prospects**, Madeleine O. Hosli, Joren Selleslaghs (eds.), Springer, 2020, p.65-66.
[128] Michael Yahuda, **The International Politics of the Asia Pacific**, Routledge Curzon, 2004, p.56-73.
[129] Thomas J. Christiansen, "Chinese Realpolitik", **Foreign Affairs** . Vol.75, No.5, September-October 1996, p.37. David Shambaugh, "Coping with a Conflicted China", **The Washington Quarterly**, Vol.34, No.1, 2011, p.22.
[130] Abramo Fimo Kenneth Organski, **World Politics**, Knopf, 1968. Allison Graham, "Thucydides' Trap Has Been Sprung in the Pacific", **Financial Times**, 21 August 2012.

stability theory foresees the inevitable future of China as a power to challenge the established status quo power, the US, as other predecessors of hegemony inevitably faced. According to offensive realists, the rise of China inevitably became a destabilizer factor in regional politics and the world order. Therefore, the determinants of Beijing's grand strategy became a key factor in explaining the future of great power politics, regional order, and global affairs. Moreover, Beijing's military capacity and possible military intervention in international issues are the real concerns in such realist interpretations of grand strategy.

Liberalism emphasizes the possibility of pursuing peace as a significant factor besides seeking survival in an anarchic environment. Neoliberalism extends the scope of a state-oriented approach to the international system by taking into consideration international organizations, NGOs, institutions, and individuals.[131] On the contrary of realism's projection on inevitable conflict, liberalism denotes the spread of common liberal norms, the role of institutions, the pacific effect of free trade and republican government, and the importance of economic interdependence in mitigating potential conflicts. Ikenberry as well as Buzan and Lawson have explained the contemporary world order as a Western-global international society since it reflects the dominance of the American and Western core by its design and a way for consolidating US supremacy.[132] That system explains Chinese efforts in order to not being excluded from this structure. Thus, Beijing explains its own vision in order to shape systemic structure "with the Chinese characteristics" through reshaping global norms and regulations. On the contrary trajectory as Mearsheimer predicts in a zero sum game of a hostile rise, an intense security competition between China and the US-led bloc with Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, and Taiwan would result in the containment of China.[133]

Neoliberal theoretical perspective on China's foreign relations identifies the role of free trade, cooperation and peaceful development in China's rise. These are

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[131] Joseph Nye, "Neorealism and Neoliberalism", **World Politics**, Vol.40, No.2, January 1988, p.235-251.

[132] John G. Ikenberry, **Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order**, Princeton University Press, 2011, p.7. Barry Buzan, George Lawson, **The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations**, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p.273.

[133]John J. Mearsheimer, "Better be Godzilla than .Bambi Debate: Clash of Titans", **Foreign Policy China Rising Special Report**, January/February 2005, p.47.

expected to pave a way for its further participation in the liberal international order through China joining international institutions and the interdependency among those trade partners. Beijing's participation in the WTO and engagement in other international institutions have confirmed neoliberal arguments. If those projections of liberalism are possible, this creates high expectations for a spill-over effect starting from economic liberalization to leading China's political order toward incremental political liberalization with respect to human rights and democratic transition in an open society.[134] Moreover, Beijing's domestic concerns reflecting the normative elements such as respect to sovereignty, non-interference in other states' internal affairs would be basic steps in finding a common ground for political global norms. However, the realist school criticizes the failure of these liberal expectations considering it as an illiberal peace not only in Asia-Pacific but also around the world.[135]

To understand China's grand strategy, the liberal theory prioritizes economic incentives to reach a more cooperative and peaceful environment. Moreover, it also stresses the role of cooperation and participation of international institutions in pursuit of strategic objectives. Consequently, Beijing's decision to open up its economy is an important factor in the liberal theory when explaining China's grand strategy. The key liberal emphasis of future research on China's global vision is based on The Belt and Road Initiative, the AIIB, the economic interdependency with Middle Eastern countries as well as Beijing's contestation of the Law of the Sea and its challenge to some liberal elements of the liberal order such as the Bretton Woods system.[136] The supplemental description of "with the Chinese characteristics" could be tested in its coexistence with the established norms and rules of the liberal order.

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[134] Denny Roy, "China's democratised foreign policy", **Survival: Global Politics and Strategy**, Vol.51, No.2, 2009, p.25-40. Thomas Ambrosio, "The Rise of 'China model' and 'Beijing Consensus': Evidence of Authoritarian Diffusion?", **Contemporary Politics**, Vol.18, No.4, p.381-399. Erich Weede, "The capitalist peace and the rise of China: Establishing global harmony by economic interdependence", **International Interactions: Empirical and Theoretical Research in International Relations**, Vol.36, No.2, 2010, p.206–213.

[135] Fareed Zakaria, The **Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad**, W.W.Norton & Company, 2003.

[136] Jordi Quero, "China's Impact on the Middle East and North Africa's Regional Order Unfolding Regional Effects of Challenging the Global Order", **Contemporary Arab Affairs**, Volume 13, Issue 1 March 2020, p.86-104. Lee Jones, "Does China's Belt and Road Initiative Challenge the Liberal, Rules-Based Order", **Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences**, Vol.13, 2020, p.113–133.

The modern world system theory goes beyond those actor oriented explanations into a macro level analysis with a multidisciplinary approach to world history and a political economic focus on the relations between the centre and periphery. Even though Wallerstein's World System Theory was criticized for being Euro-centric, many scholars also point out that such a world system could be dated back to before to West-oriented historiography, where China was at the centre and Europe was at the periphery.[137] In relation to China's grand strategy, an Asia-oriented world system that put China at its centre would also explain the meaning of *Zhongguo*, the Middle Kingdom. [138] It also refers to how Chinese scholars place their country in connection with the world around them, culturally. This symbolic hierarchical system in Asia has diverged from the Western example of the Westphalian order. Moreover, as a somewhat contemporary example, the regional order in East Asia was different than the European experience during the Cold War.[139] Therefore, China oriented world system presents a unique example on Asia, politically, economically and culturally. In Wallerstein's World System, the revival of China became one of the issues in centre-periphery relations with its economic rise, and the outcomes of its new position at the centre such as studies that focus on China and Third World relations.

Social constructivism has diverged from other theoretical aspects in its ontological and epistemological approach. These are distinct from other theories on the basis of the social construction of knowledge and reality.[140] The socially constructed structure has been used in explaining individuals' decisions, state behaviours, international system, and even theoretical debates embedded in historical, social, and cultural incentives. The social interaction among actors based

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[137] Andre Gunder Frank, Barry K. Gills (eds.), **The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?**, Routledge, 1996. Kenneth Pomeranz, **The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy**, Princeton University Press, 2000. Giavanni Arrighi, Takeshi Hamashita, Mark Selden (eds.), **The Resurgence of East Asia: 500, 150 and 50 Year Perspectives**, Routledge, 2003. Takeshi Hamashita, Linda Grove, Mark Selden (eds.) **China, East Asia and the Global Economy Regional and Historical Perspectives**, Routledge, 2008.

[138] Yanzhong Huang, Joshua Kurlantzick, "China's Approach to Global Governance", **Council of Foreign Relations**, 24 June 2020.

[139] Bahadır Pehlivantürk, "Uluslararası İlişkiler Teorileri ve Asya Pasifik", in **Doğu Asya'nın Politik Ekonomisi, Japonya, Çin ve Güney Kore'de Kalkınma, Siyaset ve Jeostrateji**, K. Ali Akkemik, Sadık Ünay (eds.), Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınevi, 2015, p.104.

[140] Stefano Guzzini, "A Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations", **European Journal of International Relations**, Vol.6, No.2, 2000, pp.147-182.

on norms and ideas explain the construction of international relations as well. The reflection of a national interest could be traced back through each interaction and decision on different cases since both the anarchy and state's behaviour find its meaning within their socially constructed environment.[141] From this perspective, grand strategy studies that have adapted constructivism underscore a country's perception of identity and its interactions with others not only through bilateral relations but also through regional and international levels. It is important to note the unique conditions of each political region and the origins of the regional subsystem that the Western-oriented approaches could not adequately explain without having an eclectic perspective since European experience would not result in the same way beyond time and place.[142]

In explaining the adjustment of grand strategy preferences, an important element concerns how a great power perceives others intention. In that regard, the details of China's grand strategy can be found in the determinants shaped by its identity including its history, culture, religion, ideological background. Moreover, it is important to question the socially constructed nature of its strategy through how these elements interact with international norms, rules, and other countries' policies. Since Bush's perception of China was shaped by foreign policy experts that depict China as a strategic competitor rather than a strategic partner, Obama's vision has strengthened the policy of engagement as it was during Clinton's era.[143] The socially constructed visions as *frienemy* (friend and enemy) and *congagement* (containment and engagement) reflect others perception of engaging with China's global vision.[144] These examples present two different perceptions of China. It also denotes how a grand strategy has evolved differently towards the same phenomenon over the past decade. Considering the dominance of "hard realist" and the US-oriented

[141] Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Makes of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics", **International Organization**, Vol.46, No.2, 1992, pp.391-425. Jeffrey T. Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory", **World Politics**, Vol.50, No.2, 1998, pp.324-348.

[142] David C. Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks", **International Security**, Vol.27, No.4, 2003, p.57-61.Christopher Hammer, Peter J. Katzenstein, "Why is there no NATO in Asia", **International Organization**, Vol.56, No.3, 2002, p.575-576.

[143] Condoleezza Rice, "Campaign 2000 - promoting the national interest", **Foreign Affairs**, Vol.79, No.1, January-February 2000, p. 45-62.

[144] Zalmay Khalizad, et.al, "The United States and a Rising China: Strategic and Military Implications", **RAND**, 1999, p.72-75. Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century", **Foreign Policy**, November 2011.

assumptions on China, Buzan calls for an unbiased stance on China by inclining the scope of the moral purpose in shaping grand strategy.[145] To deal with such impediments in theoretical aspects, this thesis applies a neoclassical realist approach in order to address those biases as best as possible in conducting research. In line with Lake's call, an eclectic theoretical approach to China's grand strategy is required. This thesis applies a neoclassical realist approach since this approach can explain the interaction between domestic and foreign realms, the culturally constructed behaviour of a state, and domestically driven foreign policy decisions.[146]

1.2.2. Neoclassical Realist Perspective on Grand Strategy

From a neoclassical viewpoint foreign affairs are not isolated from domestic politics; instead, both are closely connected. Researches on grand strategy has also requires adapting more ideological, societal, and psychological factors in the analysis. There has been a call in both disciplines, international relations and comparative politics studies, to better consider the interplay between domestic and international affairs abound.[147] Neoclassical realism, in fact, has an uncompromising and cynical stance among international relations theories on the distinction between domestic and international political sphere, even though there has been some attempts to search it with different epistemological and theoretical focuses.[148] Moreover, neoclassical realism found a suitable ground to argue new approaches, because there is an acceptance of theoretical diversity instead of seeking hegemony among theoretical approaches.[149] Thus, the strong feature of neoclassical realism is

[145] Barry Buzan, "The Logic and Contradictions of 'Peaceful Rise/Development' as China's Grand Strategy", **The Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol.7, No. 4, Winter 2014, p.383.
[146] David A. Lake, "Theory is dead, long live theory: The end of the Great Debates and the rise of eclecticism in International Relations", **European Journal of International Relations**, Vol.19, No.3, 2013, pp.567–587.
[147] Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two level games", **International Organization**, Vol.42, No.3, Summer 1988, p.427-460.
[148] For an example of compatible examination of realist theory and constructivist epistemology see: J.Samuel Barkin, "Realist Constructivism", **International Studies Review**, Vol.5, No.3, 2003, p.325-342.
[149] Tim Dunne, Lene Hansen, Colin Wight."The End of International Relations Theory?", **European Journal of International Relations**, Vol.19, No.3, 2013, p.406. Joseph M. Grieco, "The Schools of Thought Problem in International Relations." **International Studies Review**, Vol.21, No.3, 2019, p.424-446. Lorenzo Zambernardi, "Politics Is Too Important to Be Left to Political Scientists: A

about having a fluid nature for analytical innovation. It entails an evolving conversation instead of an analytical certainty and clear boundaries.[150]

Neoclassical realism has gained popularity in the past few decades when analysing foreign affairs by taking into consideration what has been disregarded by classical realist and neorealist perspectives. It creates a complexity in the classical understanding of realism by involving unit level factors.[151] It has differentiated from other realist approaches by analysing how systemic stimuli or external pressures are translated through unit level intervening variables into foreign policy.[152] Neoclassical realism has four distinct arguments differentiate it from other realist thinking; these arguments are based on the deficit in the cognitive process on systemic stimuli and the possibility of the best rational responses. Therefore, these critiques are denoted as:

> *States do not always perceive systemic stimuli correctly. Leaders do not always respond rationally to systemic stimuli. The international system does not always present clear signals about threats and opportunities. Because of domestic political/economic circumstances, states cannot always mobilize the domestic resources necessary to respond as the international system requires.*[153]

Therefore, it has been placed in a middle ground between the structural realist aspect and constructivist approach as well as offensive and defensive realist assumptions.[154] As Foulon summarizes, neoclassical realism distinguishes itself from other theories by bridging three divides: the spatial (domestic–international), the cognitive (matter-ideas), and the temporal (present–future).[155]

Critique of the Theory-Policy Nexus in International Relations", **European Journal of International Relations**, Vol.22, No.1, 2016, p.3-23.

[150] For a recent valuable discussion on theorizing neoclassic realism, see also, Gustav Meibauer et al. (2020) "Forum: Rethinking Neoclassical Realism at Theory's End", **International Studies Review**, Vol., 2020, p.1-28

[151] Hinnebusch and Ehteshami summarize it as complex realism that points out the significance of the joint impact of external threats and domestic factors on the state behaviour. These domestic factors include wide range of domestic variables from state formation, state-society relations to leaders' personalities. Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Foreign Policymaking in the Middle East: Complex Realism" in **International Relations of the Middle East**, Louise Fawcett (ed.), 2016.

[152] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, **op.cit.**, 2016, p.33-34.

[153] Norrin M. Rispman, "Neoclassical Realism", **Oxford Research Encyclopaedia, International Studies**, 2017.

[154] Rose, **op.cit.**, p.152-154.

[155] Michel Foulon, "Neoclassical Realism: Challengers and Bridging Identities", **International Studies Review**, Vol.17, No.4, 2015, p.635-661.

Neoclassical realism includes unit-level characteristics in its analysis while considering the importance of structural factors. These intervening variables, such as the strategic culture and the leader's image, work as a transmission belt between systemic stimuli and foreign policy behaviours. This theoretical stance has been criticized as being the logical extension of structural realism since it still points to the role of systemic factors despite incorporating unit level factors as intervening variables.[156]

Thus, unit level intervening variables will be subjected to scrutiny besides relative distribution of power and constrains of the systemic factors. It is still grounded on the realist assumptions as considering states' positions in an anarchic system and emphasizes the relative power capabilities. It has, however, also provided means by which to go beyond the relative power consideration and is seen by many as an intervening variable between the international system and foreign policy implementations.[157] Yet, there is no consensus among neoclassical realists scholars on which domestic factors are important since there are a variety of unit level factors present such as the perceptions and ideas of political elites, religion, beliefs, culture, identity, regime type, ideology, nationalism, media and public opinion, the role of the military, extraction and mobilization capacity, and the pressure and interaction among bureaucratic institutions.[158]

According to Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell's formulation, the intervening variables in neoclassical realist approach can be categorized into four sets of core variables: the leaders' image (beliefs or images of individual decision makers), strategic culture (entrenched beliefs, worldviews, and shared expectations of a

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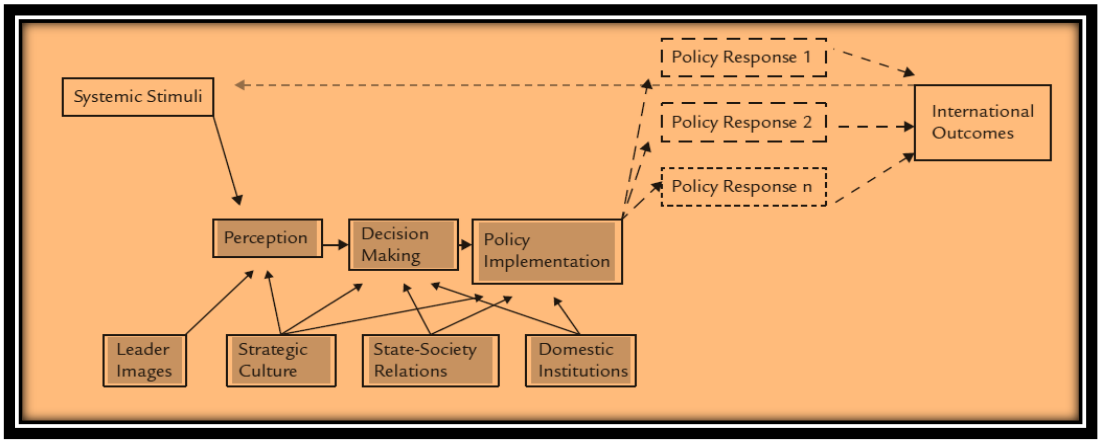
[156] Brian Bathburn, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism", **Security Studies**, Vol.17, No.2, 2008, p.310.

[157] Steven E. Lobell, "Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist model" in **Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy**, Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.44.

[158] For further examples and analysis, see also: Gustav Meibauer, "Interests, Ideas, and the Study of State Behaviour in Neoclassical Realism", **Review of International Studies**, Vol.46, No.1, 2020, p.20-36. Sverrir Steinsson, "Neoclassical Realism in the North Atlantic: Explaining Behaviors and Outcomes in the Cod Wars", **Foreign Policy Analysis**, Vol.13, No.3, 2017, p.599-617. Randall L. Schweller, "Opposite but Compatible Nationalisms: A Neoclassical Realist Approach to the Future of US-China Relations", **The Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol.11, No.1, 2018, p.23-48. Thomas J. Christensen, **Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958**, Princeton University Press, 1996. Fareed Zakaria, **From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role**, Princeton University Press, 1998. Kai He, "Explaining United States-China Relations: Neoclassical Realism and the Nexus of Threat-Interest Perceptions." **The Pacific Review**, Vol.30, No.2, 2017, p.133-151.

society as a whole), state-society relations (impact of interactions between institutions of the state and various economic and or societal groups on foreign policy formulation and implementation), and domestic institutions (differing institutional structures of states on state-society relations).[159]

Figure 2: The Neoclassical Realist Model of Foreign Policy



Source: The Neoclassical Realist Model of Foreign Policy According to Ripsman, Taliaferro, Lobell, **Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics**, 2016, p.59.

It is argued that foreign policy behaviour has been constituted by the different responses of states to similar systemic pressures and opportunities. Ideas drive the responses to either overreaction or under reaction to the perceived threats or the foreign policy behaviour to pursue national goals besides mobilizing domestic support and constructing internal consent to legitimize domestically a state's foreign policy behaviours.[160] In addition, these are primarily based on the complex interaction of those unit level variables with external factors. To analyse this complex nature, neoclassical realist approach requires an in-depth search of each country's and leader's perception alongside with the systemic determinants. It makes domestic policy and leadership of the foreign policy elites important in the formation

[159] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, **op.cit.**, 2016, p.58-60.
[160] Nicholas Kitchen, "Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: A Neo-Classical Realist Model of Grand Strategy Formation", **Review of International Studies**, Vol.36, No.1, 2010, p.132-133. Randall L. Schweller, "Neoclassical Realism and State Mobilization: Expansionist Ideology in the Age of Mass Politics", in **Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy**, Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.247-250.

or adjustment of foreign relations and grand strategy in general. Domestic factors have shaped not only the formation of national interests but also determine threat perception of grand strategic goals. Therefore, it requires studying domestic factors such as ideology, domestic institutions, societal pressure, nationalism, religion, history, culture, or a leader's motives that shape a state's interaction with systemic stimuli. In this study, the main focus is on the strategic culture behind the defensive and cautious attitude in the formation of grand strategy as well as on the leader's image in explaining the short term foreign policy activism while discussing the adjustment in grand strategic preferences.

In analysing grand strategy, neoclassical realism assumes that unit level variables have an important intervening role in conducting foreign policy under systemic pressures. Neoclassical realism is an important approach to grand strategy since it combines the distribution of power on the systemic level with the logic behind the states' foreign policy behaviour in analysing the formation or adjustment of grand strategy. The analytical tools of neoclassical realism overcome the impediments in both classical and structural realism by explaining the role of intervening variables between systemic factors and unit level determinants of foreign policy behaviour.[161] Those variables at unit level such as ideas embedded in strategic culture shape the grand strategy in policymakers' responses to external pressures.[162] Yet, systemic factors have to be considered as the initial factor when applying a neoclassical realist analytical framework. Different polarities have their own conditions with different dynamics at the systemic level. Even though the present systemic conditions are largely elaborated as unipolar, the shortcomings of the global order have been discussed as either based on the decline of US supremacy, lower trust in status quo institutions, or established economic models with widespread inequality.

[161] Nicholas Kitchen, "Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: A Neo-Classical Realist Model of Grand Strategy Formation", **Review of International Studies**, Vol.36, No.1, 2010, p.117-143. Mark R. Brawley, **Political Economy and Grand Strategy A Neoclassical Realist View**, Routledge, 2013, p.1-14.

[162] Colin Dueck, "Ideas and Alternatives in American Grand Strategy, 2000–2004", **Review of International Studies**, Vol.30, 2004, p. 521-523.

1.2.3. China's Grand Strategy and Neoclassical Realism

The neoclassical realist framework clarifies the impact of leader's image and strategic culture, which are placed a transmission belt in between capabilities and foreign policy behaviour of China. Since it functions as a middle ground for realist thinking, it also clarifies why China has a defensive oriented strategic logic even though some offensive realist scholars such as Mearsheimer foresee confrontational and irredentist results.[163] In the case of China's grand strategy, the two most important intervening variables to consider in this thesis are the strategic culture and leader's image. They can be independent variables in explaining the grand strategy formulation and adjustment but as neoclassical realism emphasizes in Figure 2, they can also work as an intervening variables called transmission belt of decision making process from systemic impetus to foreign policy outcomes.

The significance of both has to be understood within the framework of the domestic struggle for political elites' influence and the impact of systemic and domestic pressures in neoclassical realism. The impact of these variables that influence Chinese grand strategy provides crucial answers to the motives of China's relations in the Middle East. The status of China of as a rising power, great power, or a super power has been discussed for whether reflects a revisionist behaviour by international stimuli. Even though its assertive policies have gathered much discussion on whether the status quo power or having a revisionist agenda as offensive realists suggest, there is also a strong support on the opposite side since China does not exhibit such revisionist actions and instead sustains its proactive and cautious policy.[164] Moreover, China's external policies largely depend on Beijing's reactions domestic, regional or international conditions. With this in mind, this thesis considers the domestic variables as a key component of foreign relations aims to be cautious so as to avoid falling into the dichotomy of solely peaceful or offensive

[163] Amitai Etzioni, "Mearsheimer's War with China", **The Diplomat**, 29 March 2015.
[164] Alastair Iain Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?", **International Security**, Vol.27, No.4, Spring, 2003, p. 5-56. Feng Huiyın, "Is China a Revisionist Power?", **Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol.2, 2009, p.313–334. Steve Chan, Weixing Hu, Kai He, "Discerning states' revisionist and status-quo orientations: Comparing China and the US", **European Journal of International Relations**, Vol.25, No.2, 2019, p.613-640.

grand strategy explanations. It is important to examine which conditions lead to such status quo behaviour or to avoid revisionist decisions in the case of China.

The neoclassical realist approach examines the effects of the sustainability of economic development, the nature of the regime the strategic culture, and the impact of each leader that has been in power. Even though it is primarily connected with the feelings of historical humiliation as well as historical great power status and pride over contemporary Chinese achievements, there is also a recent trend to include the raising nationalism in the country into the debate.[165] Sørensen, on the other hand, highlights the role of not only incentives but also constraints posed by growing domestic demands and expectations such as performance legitimacy, nationalism and the domestic constraints of new political forces.[166] The unipolar system has benefited China's development since there is no need to direct its attention primarily to international affairs unless it hampers in promoting its interests, influence, and status. If Beijing has so far avoided challenging the US, it is rather because it is content with the present global/regional order while sparing itself from any foreign interventions or burden-sharing. That stance has led to some criticism among the highest levels concerning the peaceful development grand strategy of Beijing. This stance, it is argued, has allowed for domestic development and a focus on regional affairs while being a free rider of the US lead global system. President Obama claimed in an interview that:

> *They (China) have been free riders for the last thirty years and it's worked really well for them…*
>
> *I joked sometimes; can't we be a little more like China? Nobody ever seems to expect them to do anything when this stuff comes up*.[167]

Middle Eastern issues, particularly after the Arab Uprisings, require a proactive engagement from China on the regional issues to protect its investments avoid being a bystander when the balance of power has been needed. It challenges

[165] Randall L. Schweller, "China's Aspirations and the Clash of Nationalisms in East Asia: A Neoclassical Realist Examination", **International Journal of Korean Unification Studies**, Vol.23, No.2, 2014, p.1-40. William A. Callahan, "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism", **Alternatives**, Vol. 29, 2004, p.199-218. Christopher Hughes, "Reclassifying Chinese Nationalism: the geopolitik turn", **Journal of Contemporary China**, Vol.20, No.71, 2011, p.601-620. Evan Osnos, "Making China Great Again", **The New Yorker**, 8 January, 2018. Jessica Chen Weiss, "China's Self-Defeating Nationalism", **Foreign Affairs**, 16 July 2020.

[166] Camilla T. N. Sørensen, "Is China Becoming More Aggressive? A Neoclassical Realist Analysis", **Asian Perspective**, Vol.37, 2013, p.376-379.

[167] Thomas L. Friedman, "Obama on the World", **The New York Times**, 8 August 2014.

China's traditional policy orientation that refrains from the use of force in international affairs and intervention in other states' domestic affairs. Therefore, the discussion on China's manoeuvre under unipolar global conditions is also connected with the regional order and regional balance of power in the case of the Middle East.[168] It is important to analyse China's engagement with the Middle East states when discussing the adjustment in the grand strategy preferences. This also, however calls for incorporating international stimuli with regional conditions other than a state's own neighbourhood.

In this doctoral dissertation, the explanatory power of neoclassical realism can be found by analysing the relation between long term policy outcomes of China's grand strategy preferences and short term foreign policy behaviours of Xi Jinping's administration. Since the underlying structural constraints may not be clearly identified in short-term policy behaviours, the explanatory power is based on adapting unit level intervening variables into its analysis.[169] For this reason, it is important to elaborate China's grand strategy through neoclassical realism, which provides further explanations for the state's foreign policy behaviours rather than long term foreign policy outcomes. This thesis presents the short term outcomes of the Xi administration adjustment on grand strategy in the last decade through analysing China's relations with the Middle East states over the selected cases. Moreover, relative domestic elements are considered as key variables in this research to explain the dependent variable which is the grand strategy adjustment and China's foreign policy behaviour in Middle Eastern issues.

In Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell's formulation, neoclassical realism notes four domestic variables on foreign policy behaviour. These are the leader's image (beliefs or images of individual decision makers), strategic culture (entrenched beliefs, worldviews, and shared expectations of a society as a whole), state-society relations (impact of interactions between institutions of the state and various economic and or societal groups on foreign policy formulation and implementation), and domestic institutions (differing institutional structures of states on state-society

[168] Tuğrul Keskin, Christian N. Braun, "When a Sleeping Giant Wakes – A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of China's Expanding Ties in the Middle East", **Sociology of Islam**, Vol.4, 2016, p.1-26.
[169] Balkan Devlen, Özgür Özdamar, "Neoclassical Realism and Foreign Policy Crises", in **Rethinking Realism in International Relations**, Annette Freyberg-Inan et.al. (eds.), Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, p.138.

relations).[170] The role of institutions, bureaucratic politics, changes in public opinion, and state society relations in general would also present a different dimension of a neoclassical realist inquiry towards China. This thesis explains grand strategy adjustment during the Xi Jinping era by analysing the specific cases in Sino-Middle Eastern relations. Therefore, to limit the scope of this research and the relevance to its research agenda, strategic culture has chosen to understand the domestic variable on the grand strategy of China. Both strategic culture and grand strategy have common scope of inquiry in explaining political output. The strategic culture has to be reviewed both as a general conceptual framework and a detailed variable on Chinese strategic thinking. Moreover, leader's image is also important in this thesis since it limits the timeline with Xi Jinping's leadership era. It requires a study on leader's effect whether as an impediment or accelerator in reshaping grand strategic preferences.

1.3. THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC CULTURE

Since culture is considered to have an impact on strategic outcomes, strategic culture needs to be explained. This section provides a general understanding of the concept of strategic culture. The definitional explanations of strategic culture explore its application within the framework of International Relations studies. The variety of explanations from different generations shows the implementation of strategic culture from a broader term into something more specific research tool. Therefore, the transition from one generation to another primarily demonstrates the evolving role of the concept when seeking to explain state behaviour. In addition, this section discusses how culture has been incorporated into security studies and International Relations. To free the culture from the constructivist emphasis, the concept of strategic culture is primarily elaborated on as an intervening variable between foreign policy behaviour and the systemic stimuli, according to neoclassical realism. Finally, the limits of strategic culture are discusses in the lights of the critiques of each generations on others alongside the understanding of the concept.

[170] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, **op.cit.**, 2016, p.58-60.

1.3.1. The Definition(s) of Strategic Culture

Culture is defined by Geertz as a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which humans can communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.[171] The relationship between culture and state behaviour has become an essential factor in explaining the determinants of policy, founding the cognitive and motivational biases behind political elites decision making and denoting the distinctive ideological or strategic behaviours of states. Almond and Verba's begin their study on the political culture of democracy with the shocking outcomes of the development of fascism and communism before detailing the establishment of variety of political systems based on the role of the self in the system and a set of values and beliefs of a society.[172] The national character has been discussed for explaining distinctive strategic and ideological reactions of the states through those factors pertaining to a cultural background. The development of strategic culture concept illuminates the connection between state behaviour and national character where the interpretation of common history, language, customs, and many other elements of culture would be applied. Haglund notes that strategic culture is descended from the cognate concept of political culture, yet strategic culture as a context can be divided into national historical behaviour, and national character/identity.[173] Lantis extends the sources of strategic culture into three categories as material (geography, natural resources, population, technologic developments), political (historical experiences, political system, military organization, beliefs of political elites), and sociocultural (collective memories, myths, symbols).[174]

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[171] Clifford Geertz, **The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays**, Basic Books, 1973, p.89.
[172] Gabriel Almond, Sidney Verba, **The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations**, Little Brown, 1965, p.11- 12.
[173] David G. Haglund, "What Good is Strategic Culture?" in **Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Culturally Based Insights into Comparative National Security Policymaking**, Jeannie L. Johnson, Kerry M. Kartchner, Jeffrey A. Larsen (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.27
[174] Jeffrey S. Lantis, "Strategic Culture: From Clausewitz to Constructivism", in **Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Culturally Based Insights into Comparative National Security Policymaking**, Jeannie L. Johnson, Kerry M. Kartchner, Jeffrey A. Larsen (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.40.

This cultural approach in the realm of politics would reach international relations by examining the diplomatic and military history and the aspects of security policies during the Cold War. A cultural approach to security studies and international relations generally discusses the ideational factors instead of highlighting just material capabilities. The most prominent feature of strategic culture is based on its permanence over time which presents a continuity of those ideational factors that shape political decisions regardless of the varying material circumstances. Therefore, the concept of strategic culture would be applied in dissimilar geographies, states, and institutions since those ideational factors are embedded in the history, geography, institutions, inherited symbols, meanings, and system of values held in common by a particular society.[175]

In 1977, Snyder adapted the concept of strategic culture into the international relations discipline through security studies by analysing the Soviet nuclear strategy during the Cold War. Snyder defines the concept as "the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to nuclear strategy".[176] The relation between political outcomes of a strategic choice and the implications on military conduct, especially the nuclear armament was discussed within the framework of strategic culture since Snyder questions the implications of whether the USSR has a distinctive strategic culture or not. Strategic culture has been used for explaining the possible strategic behaviours of states through references to their unique strategic properties. It has crystalized the explanatory power of cultural difference on the most delicate issue, weapons of mass destruction. For this reason Booth has continued to discuss superpower relations by looking the ideational foundations of nuclear strategy while emphasizing the problems of ethnocentrism.[177]

Johnston, by paraphrasing Geertz's definition on cultural systems, considers the concept of strategic culture as:

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[175] Swindler points out the broader scope of culture by outlining the failures of explanation solely limited to values. Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies", **American Sociological Review**, Vol. 51, No. 2, April 1986, p. 273-286.

[176] Jack L Snyder, **The Soviet Strategic Culture Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations**, Rand Corporation, 1977, p.8.

[177] Ken Booth, **Strategy and Ethnocentrism**, Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979.

> *an integrated system of symbols (e.g., argumentation structures, analogies, metaphors) which acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious*.[178]

Johnston also denotes the change in the elaboration of the concept through three different waves, or generations. There is no clear answer to the exact definition of the concept as has evolved through the different generations of strategic culture studies. Yet, there are some common features that can be found in their explanations. Scholars of the first generation, like Snyder, Gray, Jones, have incorporated nearly all relevant explanatory elements of culture, or cultural intelligence in Gray's words, in explaining "the intellectual and moral context within which decisions will be made."[179]

The vogue definitional borders of the concept have evolved when we look at the second generation. It began with the expansion of the subject of strategic culture from its initial nuclear-oriented security research. It also coincided with a more constructivist emphasis on international relations issues since it acknowledged the importance of culture, identity, and norms, and the intersubjective meaning of state behaviour. The second generation points out the role of culture in behaviour-discourse discord as a difference between what leaders say and what leaders actually do. It requires a critical analysis of the role of elites in addressing their discourse whether compatible with political action or revealing the manipulation of strategic culture for their own political agenda.[180] Therefore, it questions the real impact and limits of strategic culture on the operational behaviour of the political elites since there is always a difference to be found between the discourse and the actions of decision makers.

The third generation of strategic culture studies, where Johnston's seminal study is to be found, came into prominence in the post-Cold War era. Those scholars of third generation such as Legro, Kier, or Berger, expand the concept by looking

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[178] Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture", **International Security**, Vol.19, No.4, Spring 1995, p.46.
[179] Colin S. Gray, "Out of the Wilderness: Prime-time for Strategic Culture", **Comparative Strategy**, Vol.26, No.1, 2007, p.12.
[180] Bradley Klein, "Hegemony and Strategic Culture: American Power Projection and Alliance Defence Polities", **Review of International Studies**, Vol.14, No.2, 1988, p.133-148.

into the types of cultural determinants such as military culture, political culture, organizational culture, or the eclectic versions of these types.[181] Furthermore, third generation studies are more inclined to understand state behaviour through contemporary cultural factors rather than their historical conditions and a variety of ideational elements. It limits the scope of research from a vast feature of culture into more conditional elements while noting the impossibility of conditioning all cultural elements by an individual. It has also raised questions for factors besides cultural variables to explain why choices are made at a strategic level. So, a new problem arises concerning how to measure the impact of strategic culture on behaviour regarding the role of norms, identity, and institutions. This seeks to explain the varied actions of decision makers in the same conditions or similar strategic preferences despite having different cultures. Johnston calls for testing the political preferences by searching strategic thinking through political documents, which has to work as a solution to the linkage problem between strategic culture and behaviour.[182]

Strategic culture works as an optimizer factor on political choices. It can be reflected as a transmission belt between unit-level and international factors in the formulation of foreign policy. The impact of strategic culture can be interpreted as "a guide to action", "a guide through strategic questions", "a shaper of behaviour", or "regulatory practices of policy".[183] However, it has not always worked as a neutral element. Like other domestic factors, strategic culture can have a mitigating or multiplier effects on the decision making process. Thus, strategic culture may be the answer to the rationality problem in explaining the contradictory, indifferent, and irrational behaviour of states. If historically and socially rooted strategic preferences works as a generator of preferences, then cultural elements would more or less influence all types of behavioural pattern in shaping political outcomes. However, culture is like a lively organism that may produce different outcomes considering the intersubjective meaning of the issues and interaction of the parties.

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[181] Jeffrey W. Legro, **Cooperation under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint during the World War II**, Cornell University Press, 1995. Thomas U. Berger, **Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan**, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. Elizabeth Kier, **Imagining War French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars**, Princeton University Press, 1997.

[182] Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture", **International Security**, Vol.19, No.4, Spring 1995, p.53.

[183] For a comparison of strategic culture definitions among prominent scholars, see also: Lawrence Sondhaus, **Strategic Culture and Ways of War**, Routledge, 2006, p.123-130.

Strategic culture is highly stable and consistent unlike to the material conditions. Nevertheless, it could be affected by developments that enforce reshaping itself in time. Therefore, a valid question arises as what conditions are necessary for strategic culture to change. Duffield notes the main reasons for its being resistant to change as: reflecting a distinctive characteristic to each society, having multiple contents like sets of ideas with alternative meanings in its components rather than consisting of a singular variable, and ignoring inconsistent prior data in the cognitive process.[184] Lantis argues that its resistant character can be challenged by at least three conditions, namely external shocks, foreign policy behaviour, and the role of elites.[185] These factors may discredit core beliefs and values, revive historical traumas, challenge the contemporary political orientation, or it could be prompted by political elites to achieve deliberate adjustment of strategy. Nevertheless, a significant adjustment of strategic culture is possible even if it requires a sustained consensus of political and social elements. This kind of strategic culture adjustment requires time to reach an overall change since it is a collectively developed element rather than an individual's decision.

1.3.2. Debate on Strategic Culture in International Relations

The interdisciplinary approach linking politics and culture has paved the way in international relations discipline. The cultural turn in international relations places culture in a position of prominence with the theoretical development of a constructivist account. The role of ideational factors, especially culturally driven elements such as identity, ideas, symbols, beliefs, social traumas, morals, have attracted the attention of a number of scholars who have integrated these factors into their research.[186] It is not a simple differentiation based on civilizational or cultural

[184] John S. Duffield, **World Power Forsaken: Political Culture, International Institutions, and German Security Policy after Unification**, Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 23-24.
[185] Jeffrey S. Lantis, "Strategic Culture: From Clausewitz to Constructivism", in **Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Culturally Based Insights into Comparative National Security Policymaking**, Jeannie L. Johnson, Kerry M. Kartchner, Jeffrey A. Larsen (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.44-45.
[186] Judith Goldstein, Robert Owen Keohane (eds.), **Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change,** Cornell University Press, 1993. Yosef Lapid, Friedrich Kratochwil , **The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory**, Lynne Rienner, 1996. Valerie M. Hudson, **Culture**

differences. Instead, the cultural turn has an epistemological function in studying components of social structure. The adaptation of strategic culture in international relations and security studies has provided an epistemological difference in how to analyse the foreign policy behaviours of states. Those scholars of the first generation, such as Snyder and Gray, adopted an interpretivist approach to addressing the social explanations through the concept while Johnston sought a more rational understanding. Those first studies placed the issue of national and cultural differences at the core of their research agenda. They criticized the influence of rational choice omnipresence on account of not eliminating the flaws of cultural impact in the decision making process. That would develop an ideational emphasis on what was important in collective cognition of a small group, a society, or even societies that share common values.

Strategic culture in international relations studies place a distinction between culturist and realist theories, especially in security studies. It seeks to challenge ahistorical and acultural elements in those structural explanations; even though Gray argues that not all realists disregard history and culture since he placed culture as an influencer in the process of making and execution of strategy.[187] It is clear that the research objectives of strategic culture studies vary considerably. However, it signifies the extended scope of inquiry of the concept. It provides flexibility and applicability to a wide range of issues rather than showing the limitations of disregarding a specific field. Even though ideational variables are not easily defined due to the different cultural elements, the realist account also suffers from the same problem with varying determinants on the material factors.

Therefore, in the relationship between realism and culturalism, those dismissive assessments on the return to culture in international relations and security issues have faced widespread criticism.[188] In fact, there is for a great deal of potential

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& Foreign Policy, Lynne Rienner, 1997. Howard J. Wiarda, **Culture and Foreign Policy: The Neglected Factor in International Relations**, Routledge, 2013.

[187] Colin S. Gray, "Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back", **Review of International Studies**, Vol. 25, No. 1, January 1999, p.55-56.

[188] As an example of the dismissal of culturalist arguments, see: Michael C. Desch, "Culture Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies", **International Security**, Vol.23, No.1, 1998, p.144-170. As an example of such critical assessment on those dismissive arguments, see: John S. Duffield, Theo Farrell, Richard Price, Michael C. Desch, "Correspondence Isms and Schisms: Culturalism versus Realism in Security Studies", **International Security**, Vol.24, No.1, Summer 1999, p.156-180.

for cross-fertilization between a strategic culturalist and realist understanding. Glenn argues that the four sub-concepts of strategic culture -epiphenomenal, conventional constructivist, post-structuralist, and interpretivist- have competing with the neoclassical aspect of the realist theory. While the conventional constructivist concept was testing the significance of the structure, there are some overlaps that exist between neoclassical realism and the epiphenomenal concept of strategic culture to provide a further competitive collaboration for explanting the foreign policy behaviour of states.[189] It would provide greater insight for understanding the different reasoning and behaviours of the states in similar conditions.[190]

Structural realism considers the constraints and opportunities of the international system as the key element of the state's actions or reactions in foreign policy. Neoclassical realism, however, enables the role of domestic issues in the formation of state responses through critically assessing the systemic stimuli, rational decision making postulate, and ineffective responses. Thus, according to neoclassical realism, the political behaviour of states would be explained by neither unit level factors, such as the economic and political organization of state (*Innenpolitik*), nor simply the systemic considerations to material power (*Aussenpolitik*).[191] It argues that their responses are conditioned by unit-level factors including strategic culture, the leader's image, the role of institutions, regime type, and state-society relations in general rather than solely focusing on structural account. The key role of domestic factors has to explain the divergence from expected and optimal choices among the system-oriented policy responses. These seek to clarify the complex nature of decision making and whether the international environment presents a valuable opportunity, a constraint, a challenge, or an imminent threat. Strategic culture, as an important unit-level factor, also shapes state behaviour when a state selects a policy. Strategic culture reflects a wide range of domestic elements in determining the pattern of habitual political behaviour. Even in different generations that work on the strategic culture concept, their common emphasis acknowledges the political actions

[189] John Glenn, "Realism versus Strategic Culture: Competition and Collaboration?", **International Studies Review** , Vol.11, No.3, September 2009, p.545.
[190] Anders Wivel, "Explaining Why State X Made a Certain Move Last Tuesday: The Promise and Limitations of Realist Foreign Policy Analysis", **Journal of International Relations and Development**, Vol.8, 2005, p.363.
[191] For these different perceptions, see also: Fareed Zakaria, "Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay", **International Security**, Vol.17, No.1992, p. 177-198

of a state and others, collectively. For this reason, the strategic understanding of the elites, decision makers, political leaders, and even the general public are determined by the significance of collective memoirs, threat perception, and political expectations. Therefore, strategic culture may be seen as a valuable means by which to understand the formation of foreign policy discourse and behaviour while not disregarding the cultural context of rationality.

Neoclassical scholars consider strategic culture as an intervening variable between systemic stimuli and domestic conditions.[192] It can reshape the preferences of state by an ideational collective impulse in order to constrain or motivate political responses.[193] It can be stated that the diversity of neoclassical theories that Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman refer to concerns assessing the function of these domestic variables beyond an indifferent position. These domestic factors could be resulted in a multiplier of the opportunities or work as an impediment of changes. Strategic culture can thus act as a mitigating factor in limiting the choices of decision makers, resisting a change in foreign policy, or preventing an adjustment of grand strategy. This thesis considers strategic culture as mitigation rather than an indifferent transmission belt while taking into consideration the interrelation between domestic and international levels. Even though the solely focusing on domestic factors has been criticized, it is important to give space to unit-level variables more in realist analyses.[194] Since, grand strategic preferences resulted in a combination of instruments driven by strategic culture when making particular choices.[195] In that regard, the impact of strategic culture would be a meaningful factor in exploring the reasons behind these particular responses, such as the defensiveness in China's assertive grand strategy.

[192] Rose, **op.cit.**, p.146.
[193] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, **op.cit.**, 2016, p.69-70.
[194] As a detailed analysis on the impact of domestic politics, see Jack Snyder, **Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition**, Cornell University Press, 1991. For a critic on disregarding systemic variables and international politics for the sake of solely focusing on domestic considerations see also: Fareed Zakaria, "Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay", **International Security**, Vol.17, No.1992, p. 177-198.
[195] Colin S. Gray, "Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back", **Review of International Studies**, Vol. 25, No. 1, January 1999, p.68.

1.3.3. Limitations in the Study of Strategic Culture

The limits of strategic cultural research are apparent in each generation's critiques on their predecessors in order to build a coherent argument with a new approach. The most significant critique on the first generation begins with the definition of the concept. Those scholars of the first generation, like Snyder, Gray, and Jones, attribute a far broader meaning to the concept, which makes vogue its definitional boundaries if one claims "all dimensions of strategy are cultural".[196] There is no room left for a non-cultural variable, which also makes it far harder to detect the exact cultural dimension within thinking or behaviour. It has been defined so widely that there are no other factors left besides the components of strategic culture. Johnson points out that the strategic culture variables left little conceptual space left for other explanations besides themselves, thus testing the validity of its implementation on the model of choice would be difficult.[197] It makes the source of strategic culture too vogue to analyse comprehensively. In addition, the methodological flaw makes the concept difficult to apply in a wide variety of cases since there was a limited practice on state behaviour and political elites. The political elites have a significant role in shaping and rebranding the historical narrative for contemporary objectives. However, that approach disregards the possibility of political elites' manipulating its components for political purposes rather than independently determining them. That requires a search for political elites and institutions as keepers and interpreters of culture besides collective memory.

The second generation has suffered from the vogue connection between strategic culture and political behaviour since the latter refers a deliberate preference among alternatives. The cognitive process of decision making cannot be traced, evidently. Yet, the political discourse may give some clue regarding how alternative choices were eliminated. Those studies on strategic culture have to consider the instrumental use of strategic cultural features in the discourse for choosing or eliminating political preferences. In the understanding of second generation account,

[196] Colin S. Gray, "Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back", **Review of International Studies**, Vol. 25, No. 1, January 1999, p.68.
[197] Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture", **International Security**, Vol.19, No.4, Spring 1995, p.37.

Lock's approach on the relation between strategic culture, strategic behaviour, and construction of identity is also important to demonstrate the constitutive function of strategic practice on identity.[198]

To make this relation more problematic, the thinking on preferences and actions may vary multiple times as a result of other variables. This political behaviour is the choice of the political elite. Strategic culture, however, is not the only variable in this decision making process. Consequently, it can reflect not only the optimal preference due to the strategic culture but the overall interaction with other determinants such as the interests of political elites, the objectives of political leaders, and preferences of domestic institutions. Johnston's critique identifies the fundamental problem in the relationship between the concept through political discourse and operational behaviour. He argues that this problematic relation would be seen in multiple behavioural outcomes despite the fact that elites may share similar realpolitik preferences in the realms of politics and security.[199] This approach challenges the being of strategic culture as a unique parameter on different cultural outcomes. Instead of considering the finalized foreign policy or grand strategy as a dependent variable, the third generation found a solution by placing the behaviour as a dependent variable. This change of third generation meets the ambiguity of Gray, who regards strategic culture as a "context", a category transcending both cause and effect. It extends the scope by allowing for non-cultural elements in making particular choices. Furthermore, it enables the limits of cultural variables which have to be shown through the filters of individuals. One cannot simply know all the cultural codes that affect a present issue, but still decision-makers have to make critical decisions in a short time when it has required.

The cultural approach to the decision making process creates expectations in order to explaining the strategic decision making. However, it requires detailed analytical and empirical research on the selected cases as well as an explanation as to how to adapt these cultural insights in the realm of politics. The limits of the concept have to answer the critique on the inefficiency of the strategic culture in general. It

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[198] Edward Lock, "Refining strategic culture: return of the second generation", **Review of International Studies**, Vol.36, No.3, 2010, p. 685-708.
[199] Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture", **International Security**, Vol.19, No.4, Spring 1995, p.40-41.

has been argued that there has yet to be any meaningful results in the overall progress of the concept. Poore criticized the concept itself for having a loose association among its three generations since there is no consensus on some basic issues regarding how to define strategic culture and how the concept should be studied.[200] More empirical research into a particular strategic cultural case may be a way to overcome this disconnection in strategic culture studies. In fact, the comparative strategic culture studies indeed would enrich the arguments on cross cultural arguments in founding a pattern among different states or discussing the reasoning of the distorted actions of those states having close cultural references. The democratic peace theory would be an example of a cultural reference in international relations, which has to extend into different regions and different cultures. Furthermore, Haglund critically assesses the vogue difference between the security culture and strategic culture, which failed to produce any useful result.[201] Instead, he suggests that the concept has two categories: context (history, identity, character) and cognition (symbolism, myth, metaphor). If strategic culture does have an analytical explanation, cognition has to be analysed for using the notion of culture in future studies.

Lantis highlights the contribution of the case studies, which answers to problem of relevance between policy and unit of analysis.[202] Since there is an important deficit in cultural studies due to disregard the sub-cultures in researching the strategic culture, a detailed analysis of preferences based on cultural codes, even competing subcultural elements, would explain the interpretation of different alternatives. Bloomfield also notes the strategic subcultures reflect the domestic struggle for shaping the policy behaviour of the state, which has been favoured as the best way according to the political agenda of each competing domestic interest groups like political parties, ethnic groups, or institutions.[203] Furthermore, it means that it becomes crucial to study the reasoning of political elites and their interaction

[200] Stuart Poore, "What Is the Context? A Reply to the Gray-Johnston Debate on Strategic Culture", **Review of International Studies**, Vol.29, No.2, April 2003, p.284.
[201] David G. Haglund, "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off' Security Culture as Strategic Culture", **Contemporary Security Policy**, Vol.32, No.3, 2011, p.494-516.
[202] Jeffrey S. Lantis, "Strategic Cultures and Security Policies in the Asia-Pacific", **Contemporary Security Policy**, Vol.35, No.2, 2014, p.177-178.
[203] Alan Bloomfield, "Time to Move On: Reconceptualizing the Strategic Culture Debate", **Contemporary Security Policy**, Vol.33, No.3, 2012, p.453.

with others' competing strategic goals since there are multiple choices in the realm of strategy as well as multiple agendas of various domestic groups.[204] The interaction of political elites plays a key role in the formation of strategic culture through not only their values, norms, and worldviews but also alternative strategic subcultures that have eliminated.

In short, the development of strategic culture studies has largely been studied through three generations. This thesis employs primarily the perception of the third generation to understand the notion and its implementation in the case of China's grand strategy. This thesis considers Chinese strategic culture as a mitigating determinant on the assertiveness on the case of China. Concerning its stable features and the cumulative impact of its cultural components, it is one of the main determinants of defensive foundation of grand strategic preferences. Therefore, strategic culture means more than a transmission belt between unit level factors and foreign policy behaviour, but also intervening variable as neoclassical realism stresses.

[204] As a research on the interaction between political myths and strategic narratives, see also: Olivier Schmitt, "When are strategic narratives effective? The shaping of political discourse through the interaction between political myths and strategic narratives", **Contemporary Security Policy**, Vol.39, No.4, 2018, p.487-511.

CHAPTER TWO
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY AND SINO-MIDDLE EASTERN RELATIONS

This chapter links the aforementioned conceptual discussions on grand strategy preferences to the historical background of China's foreign policy and Sino-Middle Eastern relations. It present a historical background on Sino-Middle Eastern relations in order to highlight the domestic and systemic adjustment variables in regards to China's grand strategy. This historical background has been separated into two sections: Mao and his legacy on grand strategy perception and Sino-Middle Eastern relations, and secondly Deng and his successors' role in changing Chinese grand strategy by the opening up reforms. As the Xi Jinping era had been discussed in the China's grand strategy section from different perceptions, the previous two periods, Mao, as well as Deng, Jiang, and Hu, would primarily focus on grand strategy and its reflection on China's relations with the Middle East. In accordance with the theoretical framework, these sub-parts emphasize both domestic and systemic variables in shaping grand strategy preferences, as well as Sino-Middle Eastern relations more generally. Moreover, the defensive assertiveness grand strategy adjustment expresses clearly that China would be involved rather than stand aloof from the Middle East issues. Regardless of whether this relationship is limited to economic interest and interdependence, the Xi Jinping era marks an assertive turn in the China's entanglement with Middle East issues beyond economic concerns. The detailed analysis of this outcome will be presented in the following section under three facets of grand strategy.

Analyses on China's grand strategy have disregarded the role of its reflection in the Middle East, considering the secondary importance of the region for Beijing's strategic calculations. However, there was a remarkable change in the significance of the region in China's strategic thinking since the 2000s. It cannot only be explained in relation either to the cultural and commercial interactions between China and the Middle East as the Silk Road had shown, or China's energy dependency on the region. This complex relation has to be studied by advancing an in-depth analysis on China's entanglement in the Middle East. Furthermore, there is an ascending Chinese

engagement in regional affairs due to the self-perceived global role of Beijing and the assertive activism for defensive purposes in grand strategy design.

This chapter presents the transition of China's grand strategy and its implications on China's entanglement in the Middle East in two parts. First, the historical background of China's grand strategy formations is reviewed by focusing on systemic and domestic variables in each subsection. The historical background points out the trajectory of China's foreign relations in general and the development of Sino-Middle Eastern relations in particular. The rise of Chinese influence in regional affairs has been considered as a result of Beijing's economy oriented engagement with the region in early studies. In the latest decade, it has to be noted that, there is a kind of spill-over from economic relations into further engagement in terms of political, social, diplomatic, and security issues in Sino-Middle Eastern relations. Those changes in foreign policy orientation can be understood within a general framework before going into a detailed analysis of its reflections on Sino-Middle Eastern relations. This part reviews the historical background of China's grand strategy and Sino-Middle Eastern relations. It aims to present the general pattern in grand strategy design and China's evolving role in the Middle East politics, in particular.

This section provides a historical background to compare and contrast the trajectory of China's grand strategy. Firstly, it presents systemic and domestic variables to understand the formation of previous grand strategies. Then, each subsection also touches upon China's engagement with the Middle East in relation to its grand strategic preferences. The historical background has been divided into two major grand strategy formations. The first subsection in the historical background explains Mao Zedong's ideology-driven grand strategy as the first formation of China's grand strategy. The second subsection gives an outline of the opening up under Deng Xiaoping and his successors', which would eventually lead to a narrative on a grand strategy as the Peaceful Rise/Development. This builds connections between changes in strategic thinking up to the Xi Jinping era before going into the details of the impacts of three facets of grand strategy on Sino-Middle Eastern relations. In short, this section presents a pattern in grand strategy design instead of compartmentalizing the historical background into each political leader.

2.1. GRAND STRATEGY UNDER MAO ZEDONG

Since the 19th century, the Qing dynasty of China faced major social, political, and economic transformations as well as domestic upheavals, such as the Taiping Civil War 1850-1864, the Clan Wars between Punti and Hakka 1855-1862, the Du Wenxiu (Muslim or Panthay) Rebellion from 1856-1873, and the Dungan Revolt from 1862-1876. All these examples were resulted in a pyrrhic victory for the Qing dynasty, as its power had weakened significantly in the aftermath of these domestic uprisings. On the other hand, the foreign pressures and interventions of imperialist powers reached its zenith when China signed the Treaty of Nanjing on August 29, 1842 as a result of being defeated by Great Britain in the (First) Opium War (1839-1842).[205] The second zenith of foreign intervention would be seen in the formation of the Eight-Nation Alliance (a coalition formed by the Russian Empire, Great Britain, Japan, France, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Germany, and the United States) to supress the Boxer Uprising (Yihetuan Movement) in 1901.

The two thousand years long imperial rule in China ended with the collapse of the Qing dynasty due to the Xinhai Revolution in 1911 and the abdication of the child Emperor Puyi on February 12, 1912. The fate of the new republic would be decided by corrupt bureaucrats and ambitious generals who had the real power when the era of the warlords had begun.[206] Yet, at decades-long period was needed to re-establish order, peace and unity in the country. In the first half of the twentieth century, China was in an endless turmoil due to regime change, domestic instability as in the Warlord era and the First United Front, the Chinese Civil War between nationalist Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the Long March, and foreign interventions, occupations, and eventually the Second World War and the Chinese resistance to Japanese aggression under the Second United Front. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the order could only be restored in Mainland China with the victory of the CCP against Kuomintang.

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[205] John King Fairbank, Merle Goldman, **China: A New History**, Harvard University Press, 2006, p.200.
[206] Edward McCord, **The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism**, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993.

This historical background is an important element in shaping that strategic culture as well as the defensiveness of the grand strategic design. Considering the contemporary influence of this period, which can be seen as the hundred year period leading up to Mao Zedong's coming to power and the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, no era can be understood without its predecessors' legacies. It has to be noted that all those decades in which China was experiencing turmoil, wars, the loss of territories, and suffering came to be known as *the century of humiliation* (the period between 1839-1949).

This label is not something that Mao had created during the formation period of the communist regime and the new socialist state. But, it is a reference to the unstable political and economic environment before the People's Republic of China (PRC), which still has a contemporary influence in shaping the narrative of China. That is, using it to refer to this timeline along with the 19th and 20th centuries, or in making some analogy for today's politics.[207] However, it would be inaccurate to limit such a historical phenomenon as an indication of how strong Western powers tend to behave toward China since the imperialist exploitation and foreign invasions are not limited with the "Western" powers.[208] In fact, the role of Japan, especially, and Russia were considered far more significant than other powers of the Eight-Nation Alliance considering the loss of territories as in Manchuria, and the atrocious cruelties experienced by China during the Second World War.

To present the living impact of that period, Chinese media can easily make a similarity between Eight-Nation Alliance and G7 which was depicted as a platform among great powers to discuss global affairs without China's participation as the G7 excludes Beijing and is critical of China's domestic affairs.[209] Moreover, the

[207] It faced with harsh criticism from the Chinese press when the US Senator Marco Rubio, who used to run for the presidency and has already being sanctioned by China due to the Xinjiang report, made an analogy on the century for humiliation during the discussion of the China Bill in the Senate. He claims that, a century for humiliation awaits the US if it fails against the challenges posed by China. Li Haidong, "Political weirdos like Marco Rubio humiliate US by betraying its founding fathers", **Global Times**, 16 May 2021. "Why China's new sanctions single out Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio", **Fortune**, 13 July 2020.

[208] Alison A. Kaufman, "China's Narratives Regarding National Security Policy", **The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission**, 10 March 2011.

[209] Alex Lo, "The new Eight-Nation Alliance against China", **SCMP**, 2 June 2021. "G7 no longer has the domineering power of Eight-Nation Alliance: GT editorial", **Global Times**, 13 March 2021. Huang Lanlan, "Invaders United Kingdom 1900': Chinese cartoonist Wuheqilin mocks G7 meeting with new illustration", **Global Times**, 8 May 2021.

centenary goals of Xi Jinping can be seen as another example because these not only refer to the centenary of the formation of the PRC after the century of humiliation. But also, these highlight the great achievements that have been achieved since 1949 without experiencing any kind of similar humiliation or foreign intervention on the part of the great powers. It has to be kept in mind that this emphasis acknowledges equality especially among the great powers, in China's foreign relations to avoid any degrading interactions so as to not be humiliated *again*.

When the CCP under the leadership of Mao Zedong prevailed in the Chinese Civil War, the Kuomintang government eventually retreated to Taiwan, also known as Formosa, to sustain its existence as the Republic of China (ROC) while still claiming sovereign rights on the Mainland. The proclamation of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, was the moment to set a general agenda for the future of the newly established state. As noted in the previous chapter, the creation of the grand strategy required extraordinary conditions such as the establishment of a state, a traumatic event in the history of a nation, or a major development to reset the strategic outlook. China's grand strategy under Mao had met such requirements in order to form a new outline not only due to the proclamation of the state but also the end of Chinese Civil War.

2.1.1. Domestic Variables

The grand strategy of Mao's China was shaped by domestic and systemic variables in acknowledging an ideology-driven, isolationist and defensive outlook. The new formation of China's grand strategy had to be coherent and contain with the features of the country, so Mao's grand strategy rested on the civil war experiences and the principle of an agrarian communist revolution besides the burden of the century of humiliation and the lasting instability and disunity of the nation. Secondly, the ideology based alignment shaped the international conjuncture which also paved the way for the feeling of isolation after frictions in Mao's China between both camps. Thirdly, the formation era of the new communist republic also intensified the constant threat perception on foreign intervention towards the regime. So, not only did the Sinification of the Marxist-Leninist ideology have a powerful influence on Mao's ideas about grand strategy, but also the key position of the armed struggle for

his success and revolution had to enforce a strategy based on revolutionary, ideology-based and defensive oriented thinking. Even though China's agrarian society foundation has been criticized, Mao's vision on the agrarian revolution shaped the grand strategic preferences especially in regards to security with an emphasis on the peasant war, the mass revolutionary movements and the mass mobilization, and tactical training of the army.[210] As he describes the guerrilla warfare suitable to the national character and the power of the masses without inter-group hostilities, the People's War Doctrine was developed and China' military plans of that time were prepared in accordance with this strategic output.[211]

The most significant domestic aspect was about adapting and strengthening the communist regime as well as the rule of the CCP and the cult of personality of the paramount leader, Mao Zedong. So, the regime stability for such a communist revolution after a long civil war was the upmost priority. Even though there were times like the Hundred Flowers Campaign which has rather been seen as a short interim of having rather openness and political liberalization to the critical voices of intellectuals, those became just an interlude of political and ideological indoctrination.[212] It created a tense political atmosphere in the domestic politics due to all these ambitions of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and the changes of the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution (1967-1976) because the nation was hardly able to settle with its record of abrupt changes, in that what is reasonable might be a wrong in the next day. Mao's objective was to overtake the industrialized states' production and capability within the fifteen year-long social and economic campaign to accelerate China's development while transforming the agrarian society of China into a society that fully embraced socialist practices in terms of a rapid transition of the economy and labour intensive development.[213] The masses were to be the driving

[210] Richard H. Solomon, **Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture**, University of California Press, 1971, p.186.
[211] Mao Tse-tung, **On Guerrilla Warfare**, University of Illinois Press, 2000, p.41-93. For a detail analysis on Chinese strategic thinking and Mao's development of People's War doctrine, see also: Miracola, **op.cit.** p.401-488.
[212] Roderick MacFarquhar, **The Origins of the Cultural Revolution: Contradictions Among the People, 1956-1957**, Vol.I, Oxford University Press, 1974.
[213] **The Great Socialist Cultural Revolution in China**, Vol. I-X, Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1966. Andrew G. Walder, "The Chinese Cultural Revolution", in **The Cambridge History of Communism Vol. II The Socialist Camp and World Power 1941–1960s**, Norman Naimark, Silvio Pons, Sophie Quinn-Judge (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2017, p.220-242. Alfred L. Chan, **Mao's Crusade Politics and Policy Implementation in China's Great Leap Forward**, Oxford

force of production as well as the transition yet these results of Mao's plan were devastating for the Chinese nation. The outlook of these ambitions had created unrealistic economic and industrial goals, and the political complexities turned into a violence and political purge against those critical to the regime and even caused a great damage to ecological and social life as in the Four Pests Campaign (1958-1962), the Great Famine (1959-1961), and the Campaign against the Four Olds (1966).[214]

Mao's legacy in the Cultural Revolution has been questioned by the trial of the Gang of Four.[215] In the aftermath of the fall of the Gang of Four from power, which include the leading political figures of the time, including Mao's last wife, Deng Xiaoping promoted *Boluan Fanzheng* (return to normal) political agenda and Opening-Up the economy to the political agenda. All these domestic developments shaped the political orientation of Mao's stance on grand strategy, which is more inclined to the defensiveness to protect the regime and party rule at first and being aware of foreign interventions to the development path of China even though it caused disastrous outcomes as in the era of Mao or was succeeded by his predecessors' reforms and further openings. The priority of the regime security, which creates another domestic dimension of defensiveness, is still not quite understood by observers of Chinese politics if they expect Western style liberalization and democracy coming out of these abrupt changes then and now. It has to be noted that, the reintegration of the PRC into the international system has also started in the midst of this domestic chaos, which accelerated the questioning of China's role in international system as well.

University Press, 2001. Jonathan D. Spence, **The Search for Modern China**, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2013, p.484-556.

[214] Judith Rae Shapiro, **Mao's War Against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China**, Cambridge University Press, 2001. Frank Dikötter, **Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-62**, Walker & Co., 2010.

[215] Chi, **op.cit.** Following the fall of the Gang of four in October 1976, this book was published by Chi Hsin, a pen name of a group of Chinese writers and journalists. For a detailed research on that issue, see also: Alexander C. Cook, **The Cultural Revolution on Trial Mao and the Gang of Four**, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

2.1.2. Systemic Variables

The international environment was significant for grand strategy formation since the first phase of the Cold War had already started. This bipolar international system impelled the globe to divide between the two major powers blocs when the PRC was established. As Mao mentioned in his proclamation speech, "this government is willing to establish diplomatic relations with any foreign government that is willing to observe the principles of equality, mutual benefit and the mutual respect of territorial integrity and sovereignty". Those words put an emphasis on seeking recognition and having an equal relationship between parties which had aimed for it for decades.[216] Moreover, the defensive foundation can be seen in the text in that it stresses territorial integrity and respect to sovereignty which were long undone during the century of humiliation. When Mao labelled his rivals as "counter-revolutionary", "imperialist", and "reactionary", it was a clear linkage between his rivals and foreign interferences. That was a direct differentiation with non-communist ideologies from the beginning, and a signal that China would stand aloof from the US and the Western bloc when the ideological confrontation was at its most intense.

In terms of ideology, the issue that the PRC had politically and ideologically inclined towards the USSR in the early years has been oversimplified. Yet, this brotherhood in ideology as Mao called the "People's Democracies" did not last for long due to the Sino-Soviet split driven by ideological and doctrinal divergences as well as critiques over the "cult of personality". However, those were not solely shaped Mao's preference to isolate his country. The feeling of isolation from the outside world also occurred when the majority of the world decided to separate itself from connecting with the PRC. This isolation is based on Mao's China's preference in foreign affairs to be neither oriented with the US nor the USSR, and by supporting independence, economic and political justice of the third world in world affairs, peaceful coexistence and social development.[217] For more than two decades, the

[216] Mao Zedong, "Proclamation of Central People's Government of the PRC (October 1, 1949)", in **The Writings of Mao Zedong 1949-1976, Vol.I**, Michael Y. M. Kau, John K. Leung (eds.), M.E. Sharpe, 1986, p.10-11.
[217] Lillian Craig Harris, **China Considers the Middle East**, I.B. Tauris, 1993, p.178.

government in Taipei chose to represent China on the international stage in the permanent seat of the UNSC instead of Beijing.

The international system was turning into a bipolar system by the time of the Second World War, and the world had split into two major blocs led by the US and the USSR. Even though China inclined towards the communist bloc due to the common ideological preference at first, Mao's China became another faction within the communist camp because of the Sino-Soviet split.[218] In fact, the isolation of Mao's China from the USSR worked out for the Western bloc in two ways. Firstly, China served as an ideological counterweight to the Soviet-led communist bloc and also became a rival on its Eastern frontier. Secondly, the early writings on the regional check and balances emphasized that; China would be the only Asian great power to maintain stability in the Asia-Pacific in that it would check Japanese power after its aggression for decades.[219]

Considering American and British interests in the rest of the world, China, ideally under the Nationalist government, had to be at the centre of the balance of power in the region if the ideological spread of the Soviets was to be kept away from the region and Japan was kept under control. Thus, China became a regional polar, if not a global power in sustaining regional stability through establishing a balance of power and a key third party in the region for the bipolar world system. However, China has always had armed conflict around itself between one great power and the others' proxies during the Cold War, besides its own armed conflicts with its neighbours such as India, Vietnam, and the ROC government in Taiwan, due to maritime and territorial claims. The vast territorial control of the PRC inevitably makes it more than a foreign observer in armed conflicts nearby and it was heavily involved in the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Afghan-Soviet War.[220]

If one word is needed to define China's foreign policy under Mao, it would be isolation since the defensiveness feature of his grand strategy was shaped by the feeling of isolation from the outside world, politically and ideologically. In foreign

[218] Sergey Radchenko, "The Rise and the Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance 1949–1989", in **The Cambridge History of Communism Vol. II The Socialist Camp and World Power 1941–1960s**, Norman Naimark, Silvio Pons, Sophie Quinn-Judge (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2017, p.243-269.
[219] Cordell Hull, **The Memoirs of Cordell Hull: Vol. II**, Hodder & Stoughton, 1948, p.1587.
[220] Feng, **op.cit.**.

policy matters, Mao formed a theory, the Three Worlds Theory, to define the international system and China's position in the world. This kind of division is not unique to Mao's China; instead, one can find many examples of a charismatic leader and his classification of the world according to his country's position such as Nasser's Three Circles Theory for Egypt. Such responses of anti-colonial movements have often been considered a by-product of modernisation, a Eurocentric outlook, and a hegemonic conceptualisation of the world and struggle against it.[221]

Mao's distinction is based on the political economic division of the world into the US and the USSR as the first world, Europe, Canada and Japan as the second world, and the rest of the world at the third world.[222] In fact, this theory was built upon the perception of the great powers and their periphery in terms of being an "intermediate zone" around the great powers. Mao also made use of the US- oriented "one intermediate zone" approach until the Sino-Soviet split extended the outlook of the "two intermediate zones" by including the USSR.[223] Mao emphasizes that the third world is the most populous one among the divisions, yet has the least political economic capacity, which is the source of global inequality driven by the great powers of the first world and the developed nations (in-between) of the second world.

This isolation in foreign affairs motivated the PRC to seek a balance of power in foreign affairs and diversify in its relations by expanding its influence into the third world. Zhou Enlai, the Premier of the PRC, participated in the Bandung Conference (the Asian African Conference) in 1955 where he was welcomed by an enthusiastic crowd flanking his portrait along with Nehru's and Nasser's.[224] He repeated the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, an approach developed for Sino-Indian relations between Zhou and Nehru. It is a set of principles acknowledging peaceful coexistence, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, equality,

[221] Arif Dirlik, "Spectres of the Third World: global modernity and the end of the three worlds", **Third World Quarterly**, Vol.25, No.1, p.133.
[222] It was formed by Mao and declared by Deng Xiaoping in his speech on 10 April 1974 at the Sixth Special Session of the UN General Assembly. The UN, "General Assembly, 6th special session: 2209th plenary meeting", A/PV/2209, Wednesday, 10 April 1974, New York.
[223] Jiang An, "Mao Zedong's "Three Worlds" Theory: Political Considerations and Value for the Times", **Social Sciences in China**, Vol. 34, No. 1, 2013, p.36-39.
[224] Jean Lacouture, **The Demigods: Charismatic Leadership in the Third World**, Alfred A. Knopf, 1970, p.108.

and cooperation, and these principles would become the founding principles of the Non-Aligned Movement.[225] Yet again, it was a reflection of defensiveness in China's grand strategic foundation. Those principles of non-aggression, non-interference, mutual benefit and respect to sovereignty would be referred to in many agreements, treaties, and communiques of China in the following years. This reference is still valid in order to demonstrate China's lasting commitment to non-interference and peaceful coexistence with Xi's emphasis on it being an Asian crafted norm and an embodiment of the Asian tradition of loving peace.[226] To overcome this isolation, one attempt was the expansion of Chinese diplomacy to the third world where the Middle East is one of its main regions and mainly consists of Asian countries.

It is often stressed that the adaptation of domestic politics is highly interlinked with the foreign relations of China. When it adapted moderate, slow, but steady domestic development in 1950s, China's foreign relations also emphasized peaceful coexistence even in the heist of the Cold War.[227] When Chinese officials acknowledge the real outcomes of the Cultural Revolution and relinquished an ideology driven, revolutionary foreign policy outlook for the sake of realist one, the world embraced the integration of Mao's China into the world system in the wake of nearly two decades of isolation.[228] In the late period of Mao, China's reintegration into the world system started by gaining a permanent membership seat for China in the United Nations Security Council and rapprochement with the US in 1972. Therefore, his predecessors have not shared the same burden of isolation as Mao witnessed and would have close relations with the third world states in the late Cold war period.

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[225] Ronald C. Keith, **The Diplomacy of Zhou Enlai**, Palgrave Macmillan, 1989, p.59-.87.

[226] "Xi's speech at 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' anniversary", 28 June 2014. (http://www.china.org.cn/world/2014-07/07/content_32876905.htm)

[227] Mineo Nakajima, "Foreign relations: from the Korean War to the Bandung Line", in **The Cambridge History of China Vol. XIV The People's Republic, Part 1: The Emergence of Revolutionary China 1949-1965**, Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.283.

[228] Keith, **op.cit.**, p.150-208.

2.1.3. Sino-Middle Eastern Relations

In Mao's compartmentalization through his Three Worlds Theory, the Middle East was placed in the Third World where different sets of contradictions such as the post-colonial contradiction, the inter-imperialist conflict and the contradiction between the proletariat and bourgeoisie could affect regional and international affairs. The main determinant of China's engagement with the Middle East was shaped by the feeling of isolation in the international relations and expelled great power status in global affairs. Except its support to pro-liberation and anti-imperialist parties according to the Beijing perspective, the potential role of Beijing in regional issues had dismissed more than two decades. When the region was faced with armed clashes, upheavals, coup d'état and revolutions in many states, the world mostly turned to the United Nations, excluding China. Given the misrepresentation of China in the United Nations, the UNSC could not be a part of the solution in any Middle East crisis according to Beijing.

China shares border with Afghanistan and Pakistan which makes the country almost a neighbour to the Middle East region. However, up until the 1970s, the PRC had no vital interests in Middle East that could not be acquired from another region in the world, so it could easily stand aloof from regional issues with some diplomatic indifference.[229] Yet, it had interactions, which were mainly ideologically motivated, with actors from the region, as well. In line with Mao's Three Worlds Theory, the third world including the Middle East, constitutes the main force that has to be decided the international system, yet has been underrepresented in world politics due to the suppression of the former colonial / imperialist powers. These imperialist parties have created a great power competition among the Western and the Eastern blocs of the bipolar world; turning the Middle East into an intermediate zone of inter-imperialist conflict. Thus, China has placed the region as one part of the general historical development of the world affairs rather than attributing a special place to it in the international system. That would avoid any kind of the Middle East exceptionalism in its analysis of the region as well.

[229] John Calabrese, **China's Changing Relations with the Middle East**, 1991, p.173.

As Shichor argues, China has a distinctive great power characteristic, which has been not quite understood by regional actors, as not having any colonial background or foreign intervention agenda.[230] Even though it has stressed its own interest, the main Chinese concern in the region has always been intercepting those outside interventions of socialist or capitalist imperialisms in accordance with Mao's inter-imperialist contradiction. Furthermore, the approach of Mao's China to the Middle East could be considered as a complete failure unless this Chinese approach was different than other great powers' approach to regional affairs.[231] It has to be noted that, China has no ambitions as other great power do, to be present militarily, economically and politically in the region but limited itself to exerting its influence in the region which is suitable for the non-intervention principle.

Despite this idealistic stance, Beijing's foreign relations did not restrict any Chinese help in choosing the path more inclined to Maoist ideology. Many socialist political parties and groups in those states might follow the Maoist ideological stance in their programme, but few of them found any popular support.[232] China gave support, mainly on ideological, material and economical grounds, to national liberation movements such as the Algerian National Liberation Front in Algeria, and the Dhofar Liberation Front in Oman, yet these were mainly fruitless efforts for revolution in the region.[233] Moreover, these would concern other states in the region as in China's support to Dhofari insurgents caused tension in Sino-Saudi relations.[234] Therefore, it can be noted that, China's concerns and interest in the Gulf region started way before its dependence on the natural resources of this sub-region.

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[230] Shichor mentions that, China has been regarded as a disruptive, subversive, dangerous and irresponsible element in the Middle East due to this misunderstanding on it approach. Yitzhak Shichor, **The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy 1949-1977**, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.8.

[231] Shichor, **op.cit.**, p.192.

[232] In Turkey, Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist–Leninist formed in early 1970s and with its armed wing, the Liberation Army of the Workers and Peasants of Turkey, both have been officially recognized as a terrorist organization. The Egyptian Marxist Organisation had pro-Chinese elements in its ideological stance to spread Maoism till its disbandment in the 1960s. Union of Iranian Communists (Sarbedaran) under Maoist influence was dismantled in the early 1980s by the persecution in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution. As a Maoist-influenced political group, Revolutionary Communist Alliance (Ma'avak) has established in Israel in the early 1970s. The Party of Socialist Revolution in Lebanon was formed in 1964 and the Arab Communist Party in was established in 1968. Tareq Y. Ismael, **The Communist Movement in the Arab World**, Routledge, 2005, p.26

[233] Hashim S.H. Behbehani, **China's Foreign Policy in the Arab World, 1955-75: Three Case Studies**, Kegan Paul International, 1981, p.176.

[234] Harris, **op.cit**, p.117.

When China acquired diplomatic recognition from Iran and Kuwait and sought recognition from Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf, Chinese support for Omani revolutionary groups diminished by 1972. It became clear that the utmost priority of Beijing continue with isolation in foreign relations while being recognized by the rest of the world. Furthermore, internal conflicts in the region, whether seeking a revolutionary aim, were less important than inter-imperialist conflict among the great powers in affecting the whole world. Beijing's real concern was Soviet penetration into this area after the withdrawal of the British presence and control. It should be noted that Beijing was in favour of the British withdrawal from the region as the liberation of the third world from the imperialist, colonialist heritage of the Western world whereas its real concern was about replacing one imperialist control with another by the Soviets. There is no difference in imperialist intervention whether a capitalist or socialist one because Mao considered both as a by-product of the First World.

As the Bandung Conference had crystalized, China sided with the Arab regimes to support their cause in the Arab-Israeli Conflict. When the Palestine Liberalization Organization had been established, the PRC was among the first countries that their delegation visited outside the Middle East. As Nasser's Egypt sought the leadership role in the region through a rather socialist and nationalist discourse, Beijing considered Nasser's Egypt as its first footstep to the region. Zhou Enlai demonstrated Chinese support to Nasser's Egypt by intensified visits to Cairo, especially after the dissolution of the United Arab Republic.[235] Thus, Egypt and Yemen would become the primary hubs for China's support to those liberation groups in other states. However, that ideology-oriented Chinese involvement could be considered as a leadership attempt on the third world since it was not different than other great powers' efforts to stand together against other blocs. As opposed to Shichor, Behbehani's approach understood Chinese involvement in the Middle East within the context of superpower rivalry in the Cold War, even though Beijing's involvement was just limited to supporting revolutionary movements that promoted "liberation", antimonarchy and anti-imperialist causes.[236]

[235] Harris, **op.cit.**, p.110-111.
[236] Behbehani, **op.cit.**, p.182.

Furthermore, Sino-Middle Eastern affairs were also affected by the changing trends in China's domestic politics and foreign relations. These would be seen in the peaceful coexistence trend up from the Bandung Conference, the revolutionary diplomatic line by the Cultural Revolution and the rather independent foreign policy in the late Mao era. It had followed by the descending revolutionary trend in order to finalize China's isolation and restore its global status. As it mention in the previous chapter, the domestic politics was highly connected with China's relation with the outside world. Any development in in domestic politics would have shaped others perception towards the states and Beijing's image in foreign affairs in addition to foreign policy outcomes. Sino-Middle Eastern relations have a cultural and religious dimension since China has an important Muslim minority of Uighur and Hui populations. The Cultural Revolution caused a negative image for Beijing due to accusations of disrespecting Islam and mistreating the Muslim population. This was because the Muslim minority was also subject to suppression in religious practices and abandoning traditions, mosques and religious sites were desecrated, rumours about forced non-halal culinary practices and the forced labour of population for the indoctrination of the whole nation.[237]

2.2. GRAND STRATEGY AFTER THE OPENING-UP REFORMS

The timeline of this subsection covers the period between the leadership transition in the post-Mao era and the premiership of Xi Jinping. Even though the "Reform and Opening-Up" (*Gǎigé Kāifàng*) identified with its founder Deng Xiaoping, his successors Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping have embraced the main idea of reaching a developed Chinese economy, stable economic growth, and rather prosperous social structure while realizing domestic and foreign policy objectives. There was a significant shift in domestic and foreign policy behaviours which have to be understood together with the diverging elite perceptions, domestic determinants and the transition of the systemic pressures throughout that period. Therefore, it would be a grave mistake to elaborate this timeline through the same explanations without acknowledging its own transformation from one leader to

[237] Harris, **op.cit.,** p.98-99.

another as well as one international conjuncture to another. There should not be similar explanations on Deng's initial reforms in a bipolar world and Hu's economic performance as the second largest economy of the multipolar world system. However, there was a grand strategic preference that shaped all those different leaders and periods' determinants within the same framework. When Deng Xiaoping took the leadership and launched Chinese economic reform and opening up, China's grand strategy developed by Mao Zedong had its first major shift. This change was built around being a status quo power that maximizes its relative power through participation in the system rather than having a revisionist agenda that undermines the power and stability of the established global order with revolutionary and ideology-driven impulses.[238] It extends the defensive foundation of grand strategy from rather realist concerns on foreign intervention and regime security to economic security and the sustainability of economic growth and development.

China's grand strategy after the opening-up was shaped by having an inward looking defensive orientation while gradually taking part in the international stage since China has restored itself to great power status through bilateral relations and taking the China seat in the UN. The emphasis on economic performance and domestic development while adapting an underrated foreign policy profile, is commonly referred as "hide your strength and bide your time", yet there was no clear reference to that phrase in exact those words by Deng Xiaoping. It was rather a tricky attempt on the part of foreign observers to depict the quintessence of China's exemplary transformation and insinuating background intentions to ascend in power. In the coming decades, Chinese political elites developed a home-grown label for how they perceived their own successful development, changing role in global affairs, and ascent in power with a grand strategy described as the peaceful rise. It is a summary of their inward looking development path as well as defensive orientation not to show off their capabilities or use their power to change the status quo, instead the goal was to hide China's strength and bide its time, peacefully. In the coming years, even the name "rise" began to seem problematic distracting from the defensive

[238] Johnston, **op.cit.**, 2003, p.5-56. Fei-Ling Wang, "Preservation, Prosperity and Power: What Motivates China's Foreign Power?" **Journal of Contemporary China**, Vol.14, No.45, 2005, p.669-694.

orientation and the narrative of peacefulness, so the following definition became "peaceful development".

2.2.1. Domestic Variables

Following Mao's death on 9 September 1976 and the purge of the Gang of Four in October 1976, Deng Xiaoping gradually regained a leadership position which he had been expelled from by the power struggle in the late Mao era. This era of transition has continued up until Deng initially replaced Hua Guofeng, the designated successor of Mao. While Deng's program was to gradually dismantle the Maoist policies associated with the Cultural Revolution, the era of transition reach the era of reforms. This political agenda known as *Bōluàn Fǎnzhèng* (return to normal and the end of chaos) refers that transition period in the post-Mao era towards the launching of Deng's reforms in the Chinese economy and opening up. The state had to return to "normal" because the malpractices and discontent of the Cultural Revolution, as well as Maoist policies generally, brought the state to the brink of economic collapse, millions were persecuted and social unrest like the Tiananmen Incident (April 1976) were labelled as a counterrevolutionary force, and more importantly threatened the rule of the CCP.[239] So, the "normal", in that regard, could be redefined by the new leadership as the economic reform programme and its effects on the role of China in world politics. The Chinese economic reform and the opening up were launched by Deng on 18 December 1978 during the Bōluàn Fǎnzhèng. Starting with the implementation of Zhou Enlai's Four Modernizations (in the fields of defence, agriculture, industry, and science and technology), the process of incremental reforms and the opening up (*Gǎigé Kāifàng*) refers to the policy changes initiated by Deng's leadership for the integration of the Chinese economy into the liberal order while modernizing and reforming it. This signifies a start for total reorientation of the Chinese economic structure, social strata, and foreign policy orientation, which is often referred as the fastest transition in the history of China.

[239] To define an incident as a "counterrevolutionary" would require a significant escalation from simply elaborating it as a protest. Frederick C. Teiwes, Warren Sun, "The First Tiananmen Incident Revisited: Elite Politics and Crisis Management at the End of the Maoist Era", **Pacific Affairs**, Vol.77, No.2, 2004, p.224.

Firstly, China gradually integrated diplomatically and financially into the contemporary world system without having a Maoist idee fixe based upon living in a world of inter-imperialist contradiction. After China's isolation came to an end due to rapprochement with the US and rapidly established ties with different countries, the isolation of the Chinese economy was ended as well. Deng's opening up to reforms signifies both a turning inward to reshape the economic structure compatible with the world system and a focus out to have further engagement with the global markets. It is important to note at this stage, Mao had also aimed at rapid outcomes for developmental goals, yet his supreme chairmanship chose to pursue a different path in terms of approaches, means, and instruments in reaching those goals. Even though all leaders intended for rapid economic development to realize the country's full potential considering its population, natural resources, and capabilities; Mao's policies resulted in disastrous economic outcomes while Deng and his successors reached a remarkable success in economic development. Even though the era of Mao acknowledged the failures of the Cultural Revolution starting from the Great Famine, it can still be regarded as the premise of Deng's reforms by both its strength and weaknesses. Like the heritage of the many socialist regimes, China had achieved the most valuable output with the creation of human capital, newly introduced industries and infrastructure using the help of the socialist bloc, the rule of the party and rather a stable political environment considering the post-civil war conditions.[240]

In terms of grand strategic preferences, gaps between real productivity and planned output made Mao's socialist regime vulnerable since the inefficiency of economic decision would eventually damage the rule of the party due to the dissatisfaction of the masses. There was an opportunity to realize economic change caused by the death of Mao, which started with the elimination of the Gang of Four, yet the political elite did not have any adapted guide or plan for the trajectory of reform. Naughton argues that the economic success of the gradualist reform strategy did not only provide the regime security but also became a precondition for the political resilience of the CCP.[241] The struggle to maintain the rule of party has been

[240] Loren Brandt, Thomas G. Rawski, **China's Great Economic Transformation**, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.5

[241] Barry Naughton, "A Political Economy of China's Economic Transition", in **China's Great Economic Transformation**, Loren Brandt and Thomas G. Rawski (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.96.

the key point in analysing the trajectory of the opening up reforms and grand strategy adjustment under Xi Jinping, as well. The regional developments also encouraged China's political elite to pursue the path of reform in the economic arena. Its neighbours were levelled up in terms of economic performance while China was still struggling with major issues in its food supply and agricultural production. These boost in the Japanese and South Korean economies revealed a sense of backwardness in comparison to China's great potential and rather poor gains. The success of economic reforms and opening up primarily based on the transition from planned economy to market economy to enhance private ownership, foreign investment and free trade in engaging with the global financial system. It came with huge benefits in the way of as growing prosperity for the majority of the population to leave behind extreme poverty; yet such rapid development would also have its burdens, such as major migration from rural areas to major cities.

Secondly, reforms also signify an ideological reorientation moving away from the Maoist interpretation of Marxist-Leninist ideology in order to develop *Socialism with Chinese characteristics* as Deng declared in the 12th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party on September 1, 1982. It is essential to understand each unorthodox adaptation, either based on ideological, political, or economic grounds, has to legitimize the newly introduced policies. Starting from the Bōluàn Fǎnzhèng, the new normal was defined as an opposite of the practices of the Mao era, especially the legacy of the Cultural Revolution. This major shift does not refer to any ideological change from communist foundations but a kind of a realist reorientation. Socialism with Chinese characteristics means the integration of "the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete realities of China, to blaze a path of our own and to build a socialism with Chinese characteristics- that is the basic conclusion we have reached after reviewing our long historical experience".[242] There were clear references to the commitment to the Marxist foundation while emphasizing the unique adjustment of China driven from the historical background of the nation. These unique characteristics are based on independence and self-reliance in order to establish foreign relations with others on the foundation of

[242] Deng Xiaoping, **Build Socialism with Chinese Characteristics**, Foreign Language Press, 1985, p.3.

equality and mutual benefit while stressing Beijing's commitment to modernization, development and China's reunification.

In fact, Deng Xiaoping designed the "Four Cardinal Principles" to maintain ideological unity based on a commitment to the socialist path, the people's democratic dictatorship, the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Thought and the supremacy of the Chinese Communist Party.[243] These principles draw a clear line around issues that are not open any kind of debate. In fact, all these principles lead to another of them, the rule of the party in the end, in order to strengthen unquestionable legitimacy of the CCP. Unless you criticize the party or its leadership in terms of these four red lines, other issues can be discussed in the public sphere as the first step of the reformist trajectory and the loosening of state control in relation to every issue.[244] By the 15th National Congress of the CCP, Deng's Four Cardinal Principles were entrenched into the general principles of the Communist Party's Constitution in 1997. As in Jiang Zemin's Three Represents (Sān gè dàibiǎo) and Hu Jintao's Scientific Outlook on Development (Kēxué fāzhǎn guān), Deng's successors have also launched their own visions to be integrated into the ideological formulation of the party, especially during the National Congress of the CCP. Jiang's Three Represents (Representatives), which were stressed in early 2000, identify the CCP as the representatives of development, Chinese culture, and the people.[245] The new ideological formulation of Jiang aims to rationalize current policies in order to mark a continuity in ideology as well as in political practices. Thus, it would re-establish the bond between the leading cadres of the party and the Chinese people in times of rapid modernization and development to place the Party as the guardian of this transformation. The CCP was placed as the source of development as the Party was seen to know the requirements of China's development path and it had been built based upon the cultural codes of the nation.

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[243] Deng Xiaoping, "Uphold the Four Cardinal Principles", 30 March 1979. (http://en.people.cn/dengxp/vol2/text/b1290.html)

[244] David Shambaugh, "The Chinese State in the Post-Mao Era" in **The Modern Chinese State**, David Shambaugh (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.184.

[245] Jiang Zemin, **On the "Three Represents"**, Foreign Language Press, 1985, p.8.

Furthermore, the Three Represents can be seen as the leadership legacy of Jiang, or even the mark of his generation of the party cadres.[246] This already started with Deng's multiple signatures shaping the strategic culture and decision making of the party as in the Four Cardinal Principles, opening up decision-making, or the "hide your strength and bide your time" policy and all culminated in Hu Jintao's Scientific Outlook on Development. All work was based upon building a connection with their own legacies and continuity in the future leadership. What is different in Hu's scientific development concept was is pointing to the social aspect of development instead of Jiang's overemphasis on economy. There is a rising trend in fulfilling the requirements of the market economy over decades but the social repercussions of that rapid development and the resulting income gap would initiate Hu's emphasis on the human capital and rising social inequality. Hu's ideological reorientation started with stressing a comprehensive outlook on development to reach the stable growth of the economy while pointing out the deficits of the concept by using adjectives such as coordinated, human-oriented, all-round, and sustainable.[247] It requires a stable economic growth in order to improve rural areas to use resources efficiently for the whole of the society. Bo also highlights that Hu challenged the prominence of the person in ideology starting from the leader himself, to mitigate Jiang's own role as the sole legitimate interpreter of ideology for the sake of institutionalizing ideology.[248] When China's grand strategy redefined itself in the name of the peaceful development, Hu pursued a harmonious socialist society in order to overcome the arrays of economic, environmental and social problems, which would be the main base for Xi Jinping's initial domestic reforms.

All these changes and preferences clearly demonstrate that China's ideological ground has already been transformed into a new façade that does not have an overwhelming Maoist emphasis. However, that does not mean there is any abandonment from socialist ideals in social and political life or the central role of the CCP in the cause of economic reform and development. Yet, the Western world applauds such changes hoping for a spill over effect, liberalizing moving from the

[246] Manoranjan Mohanty, "Three Represents: Ideology of the Fourth Generation", **China Report**, Vol.39, No.2, 2003, p.237.
[247] "President Hu Jintao's Speech to the APEC CEO Summit", 20 November 2004.
[248] Zhiyue Bo, "Hu Jintao and the CCP's ideology: A historical perspective", **Journal of Chinese Political Science**, Vol.9, No.2, 2004, p.38-39.

economic to the social and political spheres when China gradually adapted free market rules. When the TIME Magazine declared Deng Xiaoping as the person of the year; the first image presented was a reflection of his triumph in the power struggle among Chinese elites in 1978 and the opening up to Japan and the US before opening up his country's economy to the world system as well.[249] When Deng's image was on the cover on the second occasion, in fact, there was a pronounced appreciation for the initiation of economic reforms and the challenging of Maoist orthodoxies.[250] However, the Tiananmen Square Incident was a clear confrontation to expectations of liberalization within the limits of change in China. Madsen presents another angle, summarizing how the Tiananmen Square protests frustrated Western expectations on the spill over of economic, intellectual, and political freedoms, which have to be success, eventually.[251]

It has to be noted that, this reformist period did not have a linear development path where Deng faced not only new problems, which he bore due to this transition but also conflict and disputes with his allies within the party. As Zhao notes, the Tiananmen Square Incident was the climax of Chen Yun's challenge, a main ally of Deng against the Maoist cadres in defeating Hua Guofeng, yet criticizing Deng's market-oriented reforms in favour of more planned economy.[252] Therefore, the Tiananmen crackdown also accelerated the leadership transition from Deng to Jiang.[253] The power of the Tiananmen crackdown image on 4 June 1989, which would especially be identified with the "Unknown Protester" or the "Tank Man", deteriorated China's relations with the West, especially with the US, while hindering diplomatic initiatives with the rest of the world.[254] It revived foreign sanctions once again even though Deng recommended high officials to keep to the cautious dictum as always and to stay calm in those times. In any case, the power of the political elites, the critical position of the PLA and the central role of the CCP once again

[249] Ezra Vogel, **Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China**, Harvard University Press, 2011, p.259-303.
[250] Jennings Parrott, "Time Picks China's Deng Xiaoping as Man of the Year". **Los Angeles Times**, 30 December 1985.
[251] Richard Madsen, **China and the American Dream: A Moral Inquiry**, University of California Press, 1995, p.1-21.
[252] Zhao Suisheng, "Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour: Elite Politics in Post-Tiananmen China", **Asian Survey**, Vol.33, No.8 , 1993, p.742
[253] Vogel, **op.cit.**, p.572-575.
[254] Javier C. Hernandez, "30 Years After Tiananmen, 'Tank Man' Remains an Icon and a Mystery". **The New York Times**. 3 June 2019.

proved to be key despite a strong commitment to the development path and rapid reformation.

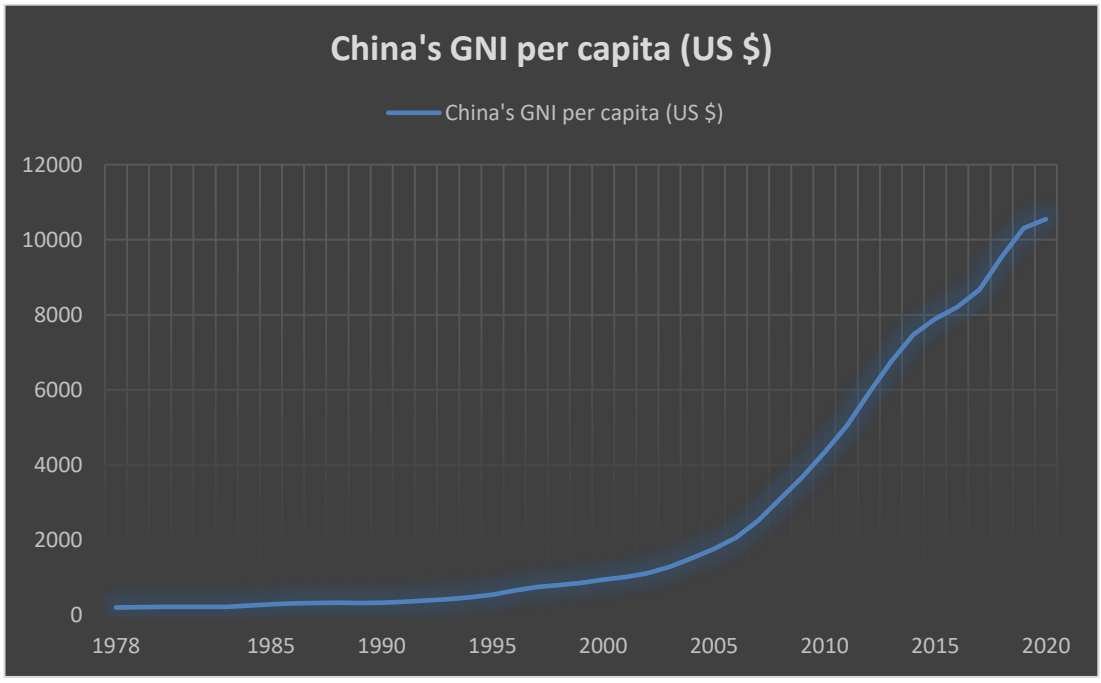
Thirdly, Chinese economic reforms have been closing the gap that occurred during *"the great divergence"*, or at least the gap between the potential of the country and its real achievement in economics.[255] At one point, China's unprecedented success in economics and development was compared with Japan and the high-growth economies of Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong, also known as Four Asian Tigers. However, China's opening up and reform agenda have signified much a bigger game change in the world economy, if not its own achievements in the development path. This was a great coincidence of systemic and domestic determinants in pursuing economic reforms, the momentum of the development and high growth rate. In the end, the Chinese economy entered into a new era when it turned into an engine of the world because of the end of the bipolar confrontation and the coming of increased globalization and rise of foreign investments by the 1990s and 2000s. When the world faced the global financial crisis in 2007-2008, China almost had surplus in comparison to Japan and Germany becoming the world's second largest economy, a great partner in free trade, and an economic might with a stable growth rate in creating new objectives for the political elite and new expectations for the society.

In the foreground of the Chinese economic opening was a remarkably high level of poverty and low levels of income, development, consumption and GDP growth. Considering these initial conditions, the level of China's achievement would be raise to a much greater level. In many aspects, the coastal regions have had the leading role in the developmental boom. These circumstances have transformed China's local governments into champions of development, not only in order to achieve those developmental objectives and higher standards of living for their people but also striving to get further investment in infrastructure in order to have an eligible bases for pillar industries instead of their neighbours and other regions. However, there is the possibility it will spread geographically to the other parts of the country as well as different classes of the society drive them out of extreme poverty. As noted above, the gradual integration to the world system coincided with China's

[255] Kenneth Pomeranz, **The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy**, Princeton University Press, 2000**.**

abandonment of the planned economy for the sake of building a production and trade economy, a rapid liberalization of the Chinese market and an opening of the country's economy to foreign investment. It aims to reach a sustainable economic growth rate, transforming industrial production, and saving the masses from poverty to provide reasonable life standards for all society. According to the World Bank, China's poverty rate fell from 88 percent in 1981 to 66.3 percent within a decade in 1990, 49.8 percent in 2000, and 0.5 percent in 2016 [256] Moreover, the gross national income per capita has risen from 200 dollars in 1978 to 1010 dollar in 2001, 3100 dollar in 2008, and 10550 dollar in 2020. This remarkable achievement along with housing, education and health facilities, infrastructure, and employment development indicates that approximately 850 million citizens have been lifted out of extreme poverty within the four decades of exceptional Chinese economic growth.

Figure 3: China's GNI (1978-2020)



Source: World Bank, China's GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US$)

[256] World Bank, **World Development Indicators**, (https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SI.POV.DDAY&country=CHN)

This rapid development path has led to major success but it has to be noted that, it was a gradual process in being achieved not only in terms of these achievements but also China's integration into the world economy. Jiang Zemin embraced the risks and potential of globalization when the Chinese political elite were rather conservative to introduce such ideas that might lead to an erosion of state and one party rule.[257] As an example, it took fifteen years for China to become a WTO member but in the end, it was a major success for the free market economy and the liberal world order to embrace the most populous state and one of the leading economies of the world. After that major step towards inclusion in the world system, Hu also stressed the development path of this economic boost to build a harmonious society.[258] Therefore, China's rapid development and high growth rate also gave momentum to the world economy. When the Cold War ended, China's share of the global exports of goods was around 3 percent, but it reaches 15 percent as the top exporter in the word while nearly doubling both the US and Germany by the same metric.[259] China's GDP growth rate reached its zenith in the mid-2000s. It was around 15 percent just before the 2008 global financial crisis and the average rate has never been below the 5 percent for over three decades until the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.[260] China's trade to GDP ratio had never reached 10 percent until the opening up reforms in the 1970s but the combined share of exports and imports in the GDP reached its highest in 2006 at 64.5 percent and remained rather stable around 35-40 percent after Trump's trade war with Beijing.

These statistics and financial data demonstrate that China has achieved the most remarkable success in the developing world. The rise of the China phenomenon is mainly built on this economic development and the trajectory of this Chinese capacity in the coming decades. As an official narrative of the peaceful rise/development grand strategy, China places economic achievements and developmental as key to influence third world countries within the framework of developmental cooperation. Secondly, China raises its concerns on regulations and

[257] Marc Lanteigne, **Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction**, Routledge, 2019, p.68-69.
[258] **China 2030: Building a Modern, Harmonious, and Creative Society**, World Bank and the Development Research Center of the State Council, P. R. China, 2012.
[259] Alessandro Nicita, Carlos Razo, "China: The rise of a trade titan", the UNCTAD, 27 April 2021,
[260] World Bank, China's annual GDP growth <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>

the institutions of the global economic order in accordance with its share in the global system. It is also driven by Beijing's self-perceived role in advocating for the third world, the south-south cooperation and win-win relations. Third, China's rise has also raised concerns about other actors as discussed in the assertive rise grand strategy section. This pessimist perception on the part of other states has mainly been shaped by a perceived threat in China's economic rise would lead to problems in the current global economic order and confrontation in other fields of world affairs. Yet, China neither exhibits such revisionist actions, nor challenges the US in many regions and issues, but instead sustains its cautious and low-profile policy while benefitting from the present order.[261] In the end, economy and development oriented domestic determinants mainly shaped Beijing's defensive oriented grand strategy over the decades in two ways. First is how it debate the future of Chinese economic capability in other fields, such as politics and the second is how it searches for the outcomes of the integration of Chinese socialist market economy in relation to the liberal economic order and its institutions.

2.2.2. Systemic Variables

The most problematic part of this section is about the periodization of the timeline even though there were constant changes in the systemic variable. China in the period of opening up reforms had been living in a bipolar world, then a unipolar system by the 1990s and then towards a rather multipolar one in the latest decades. These changes signify both an advantage and disadvantage in searching for the impact of the systemic impetus of China's grand strategy as in the peaceful rise/development phenomenon. On one hand it is difficult to find a continuum in China's projections and predictions because of the international system. One has to keep in mind that China's opening up came about in rather different conditions than in other East Asian states like South Korea or Japan. Moreover, it was not the same under Deng, Jiang, Hu, or Xi. It is commonly assumed in the literature on the PRC in the West that, China is on the same development trajectory even though there was a

[261] Johnston, **op.cit.**,2003, p.5-56. Wang, F-L.**op.cit.**, p.669-694.

nearly half century long Maoist detour, not experienced by other Asian economies.[262] So, it has to be noted that, we are not talking about the same China as well as the same systemic framework at the same time in searching for the trajectory of China's grand strategy during the opening up and reform period. This would lead us to the advantageous facet of this period.

These different systemic variables demonstrate that there is a flexible nature in China's grand strategy adjustment during the opening up period. It could adapt itself into the different international system while the political leadership was adjusting to China's global role and objectives in foreign affairs due to each new systemic requirement. It shows the consistency in the grand strategy adjustment of Deng Xiaoping no matter what the different systemic impetus proposed. Furthermore, it has to be noted that, Deng's opening up reforms could be seen as a rupture from Mao's practices on the economic and social levels, but it also signifies a changing perception in terms of the self-perceived role in the international system. In the constantly changing international conjuncture over decades, it has been critical to adapt to each international environment and the role suited for that. In domestic politics, there has been rupture from the radical practices of the Cultural Revolution, starting from the elimination of the Gang of Four, as a result of inter-elite power struggles. However, there has never been a relinquishment of the ideological foundations or giving up the priority of regime survival/CCP rule, even though the systemic impetus was not perceived through Maoist ideological lenses anymore.

China's grand strategy under Mao was shaped by feelings of isolation in the bipolar world, and a protective, ideology-driven and revolutionist stance in foreign affairs. Instead of having an aggressive foreign policy orientation, these domestic and systemic determinants created a defensive strategy based on the doctrine of self-reliance, economic independence, political stability, territorial integrity, commitment to the ideological perception, and the rule of the party.[263] The CCP leadership transition from Mao to Deng coincided with the relative normalization of

[262] Rana Mitter and Elsbeth Johnson, "What the West Gets Wrong About China", **Harward Business Review**, May-June 2020.
[263] Chien-Hsun Chen, "Modernization in Mainland China: Self-Reliance and Dependence", **The American Journal of Economics and Sociology** Vol.51, No.1, January 1992, p. 59-61.

international affairs for Beijing since the PRC was embraced in the international system once again due to the Sino-American Rapprochement.

The expelling of the Republic of China (Taiwan), which had occupied China seat at the United Nations since its establishment, on 25 October 1971 in favour of the PRC, as well as Chairman Mao Zedong shaking hands with US President Richard Nixon in Beijing, on 21 February 1972; were significant breaks from the PRC's international isolation, causing a move towards establishing full recognition and diplomatic relations with the rest of the world except the communist bloc and the non-aligned states. The ideology and isolation driven legacy of Mao was loosened while the "U.S.-Soviet holy alliance against China" gradually disappeared for the sake of spreading integration into the international system.[264]

When the bipolar world system collapsed, China had already given up this ideology-driven burden of the Maoist perspective to embrace the global system while keeping a low profile in its foreign relations. In the 2000s, the peaceful rise/development discourse in accordance with the defensive impetus on grand strategy would lead China in championing equality, win-win relations, mutual cooperation and common development for mankind. These are suitable in a multipolar world in order to raise its concern against the lead of great powers and to shape the system and international institutions, with Chinese characteristics.

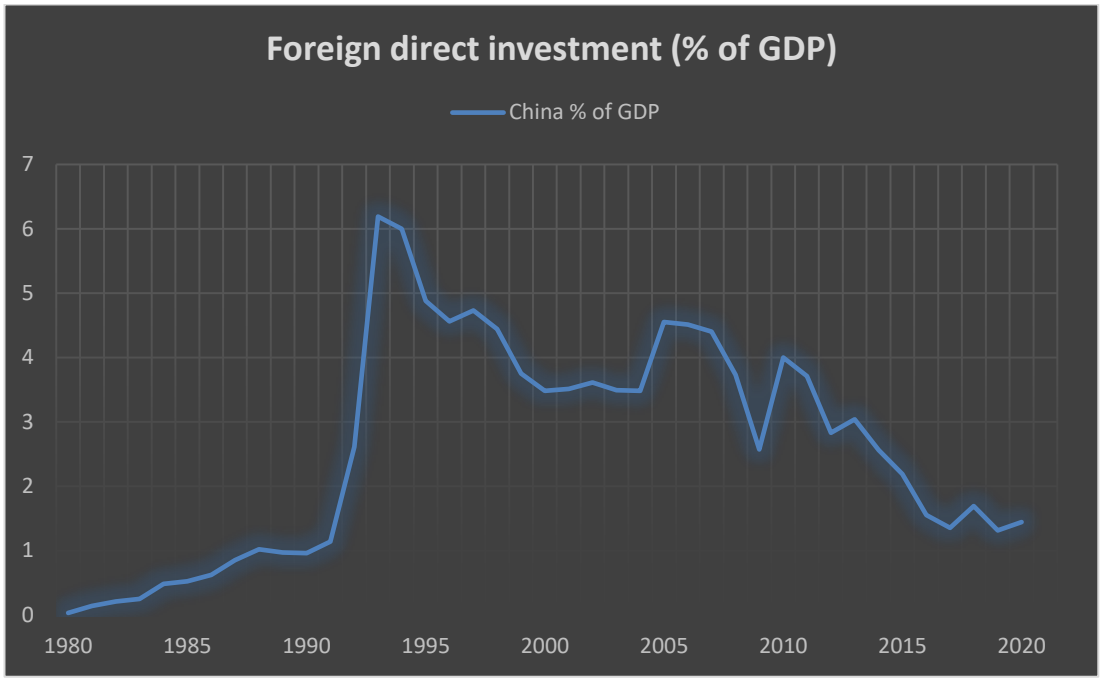
Furthermore, the systemic determinants did not only provide an opportunity for China to be accepted into the liberal world order but also a fertile ground for the rapid development of the Chinese economy into a new stage of globalization that had never been seen before. China's accelerated adaptation into the liberal world order without embracing political liberalization was welcomed by the liberal world order in order to expand free trade and the liberal market system.

When the world economy faced the global financial crisis, China's economic might became visible even though it pursued a low profile for years. China has been the largest contributing economy to global GDP growth since the global financial crisis, 14,147 billion US dollars over a decade, and a major force in the recovery of

[264] Jonathan D. Pollack, "The Implications of Sino-American Normalization", **International Security**, Vol. 3, No. 4, Spring 1979, p.43. Even though the Sino-American rapprochement in the early 1970s, the US did not recognize the PRC until January 1, 1979.

the global economy.[265] Because China has already become the central figure of not only the ancient roots of the globalization tracing such globalization back to the Silk Road, but also the major actor of contemporary globalization with its capabilities and active participation in the international organization and leading grand plans for further engagement with different regions.

Figure 4: Foreign Direct Investment (% of GDP of China)



Source: World Bank, Foreign Direct Investment, Net inflows (% of GDP of China)

As Mühlhahn has stressed, China's success was highly dependent on open access to global markets and the unrestricted flow of goods and capital.[266] The benefits of globalization met the challenges of requirements of China's opening up to reforms. In 1980, foreign direct investment in China was 0.03 percent of its GDP but it reached 6 percent by the 1990s and has an average of around 3 percent over three decades.[267] In 2021, China overtook the US as the world's leading destination for

[265] Qixiang Sun, Xiaolan Fu, "China's battle against the global economic crisis" in **China's Role in Global Economic Recovery**, Xiaolan Fu (ed.), Routledge, 2012, p.3-17.
[266] Klaus Mühlhahn, **Making China Modern**, Harvard University Press, 2019, p.607.
[267] International Monetary Fund, Foreign direct investment, net inflows (% of GDP) - China. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.WD.GD.ZS?locations=CN>

direct foreign investment. However, all these achievements and systemic impetus towards multilateralism also works for offensive or assertive interpretation of China's strategic thinking. Moreover, it would also shapes Xi's foreign policy ideals in being more suitable to the multipolar world, at least in terms of openly criticizing great power decisions such as in times of a unipolar world.

2.2.3. Sino-Middle Eastern Relations

This part explores the role of the Middle East in China's foreign relations following the opening up reforms and China's becoming a major player in the region. The main determinant of China's engagement with the Middle East used to be shaped by being in the Third World, based on Mao's Three Worlds Theory, as well as the feeling of isolation in China's strategic culture and decision making in foreign affairs. However, Deng's adjustment in grand strategy provided a new conceptual framework for China not only in terms of economic reforms but also the implementation of a new approach towards developing countries, including those in the Middle East. In the post Mao era, Beijing abandoned the lens of ideology in order to have good relations with the countries in the region regardless of their relations with the US and the USSR. So that, the new Chinese attitude has been described as one of calculation rather than emotion in foreign affairs.[268] The Middle East is also significant for the extension of China's integration into the world system so that, the rapprochement between Beijing and Washington is able to further the reintegration of China into the world system by establishing diplomatic ties, which eroded the isolation that had lasted more than two decades. As Calabrese notes, China also took advantage of the diminishing influence of the US and the USSR while the latter was portrayed by Beijing as less of a danger, though no less a challenge.[269] Sino-Middle Eastern relations have experienced a rather pragmatic and proactive Chinese attitude in the flourishing connection through an economic opening-up, modernization,

[268] Jon B. Alterman, John W. Garver, **The Vital Triangle: China, The United States, and the Middle East**, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, 2008, p. 4.
[269] John Calabrese, **China and the Middle East (1950-1988): A Changing Framework of Relations**, University of London PhD thesis, 1991, p.268

energy ties, and arms sales.[270] Due to the change in foreign affairs, domestic reforms, and opening to the outside world, which is described as "China's Great Leap Outward" by Scobell, the Middle East gradually became a significant region for China's development path, and countries in the region came to be seen as a partner in many fields, as China is reliant on external markets for resources and employment abroad.[271]

Yet, China has a cautious attitude in terms of regional confrontations and crises such as, the Iraq-Iran War, the Gulf War in 1990, the US Invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the Arab-Israeli conflict, which all would affect the regional stability, energy supply, and China's role as a reliable trade partner and permanent member in the UN Security Council. Reactions to Beijing's arms sales and technology transfers were considered carefully to avoid confrontation with other great powers since China neither has strategic interest nor ambitions that play a leading role in Middle Eastern conflicts in lieu of the US. Instead, China sustains its diplomatic indifference to keep its good relations with all parties, which crystalizes its changing attitude in the Arab-Israeli conflict from being a pro-Arab cause to recognize the independence and right to exist for all. Therefore, China has expanded its influence, investment and trade networks in the Middle East, which can be considered an unprecedented change since there was a limited interaction with the region until the 1970s.

This change can be summarized as being a major business partner in the Middle East during the 1980s, having energy dependency by turning into a net oil and natural gas importer from the region in the early 1990s, and acknowledging the geostrategic importance of the region due to the multidimensional nature of politics and trade in 2000s.[272] The last phase has pushed China to consider not solely economic interests but also stability in the region, the settlement of disputes as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and ethnic and religious ties with the Middle East countries, especially those that could threaten its domestic stability. In

[270] Niv Horesh and Ruike Xu, "Conclusion: China's Growing Presence in the Middle East", in **Toward Well-Oiled Relations? China's Presence in the Middle East following the Arab Spring**, Niv Horesh (ed.), 2016, Palgrave, New York, p.216.
[271] Andrew Scobell, "Introduction", in **China's Great Leap Outward: Hard and Soft Dimensions of a Rising Power**, Andrew Scobell and Marylena Mantas, (eds.),The Academy of Political Science, New York, 2014, p.5-6.
[272] Andrew Scobell, "Why the Middle East matters to China", in **China's Presence in the Middle East The Implications of the One Belt One road Initiative**, Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Niv Horesh (eds.) Routledge, London, 2018,p.9

accordance with our analysis in the last part of this thesis, Sino-Middle Eastern relations after the opening-up reforms can be understood in three main aspects: diplomacy, economy/energy, and military/security.

In regards to diplomacy, the opening up literally found its meaning when Beijing succeeded in establishing diplomatic ties with many countries, those included in the Middle East as well. The PRC has been recognized as the only legitimate government of China in the UN and been given the seat at the UN Security Council because of the rapprochement between Beijing and Washington (the US would officially recognize the PRC in 1979) and the UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 on 25 October 1971.

In the aftermath, China set up diplomatic ties with Middle East states, starting from the pro-Western ones in the region, Turkey, Lebanon, and Iran in late 1971. Even though, Chinese involvement in Egypt was not comparable either to that of the Soviet Union or to that of the U.S, Zhao Ziyang became the first Chinese Premier to visit Cairo in over two decades in December 1982. Cairo presented a threshold for reaching both Arab states and African states and initiating an exemplary cooperation in terms of arms sales, infrastructure, and investment.

Up until 1990, China already had diplomatic relations with many other Middle Eastern countries including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman, the UAE, Palestine, Bahrain, Qatar, and Libya. In 1992, Israel was also added that list-which is important to understand in that China pursued good relations with all states regardless of their own regional issues and stance on the resolution of the Arab-Israel problem. To set aside its ideological blinders based on a classification rooted in the pro-Soviet or pro-American dichotomy, China extends its relations to all parties such as Turkey the only NATO ally in the region, Iran before and after the Revolution, and Libya which has controversial foreign relations, especially after the Lockerbie bombing.[273] Furthermore, the diplomatic demarche was a great success for Beijing since the Middle Eastern states established full diplomatic relations with Beijing while breaking their ties with Taiwan.

[273] Guang Pan, "China's success in the Middle East", **Middle East Quarterly**, December 1997, p.35-40.

Table 3: Recognition of the People's Republic of China in MENA

Year	Recognition of the PRC
1950s	1956 – Egypt, Syria, Yemen 1958 – Iraq, Morocco, Algeria 1959 – the Sudan
1960s	1964 – Tunisia 1968 – South Yemen
1970s	1971 – Turkey, Kuwait, Iran
25 October 1971	*The UN General Assembly Resolution 2758*: Recognition of the People's Republic of China as the only legitimate representative of China to the United Nations.
1970s	1971 – Lebanon 1977 – Jordan 1978 – Oman, Libya
1980s	1984 – The United Arab Emirates 1988 – Palestine, Qatar 1989- Bahrain
1990s	1999 – Saudi Arabia 1992 - Israel

Source: The Table is prepared by the author

The establishment of diplomatic relations paved a way for further cooperation in many fields due to the reintegration of the great power into regional affairs, which was also a great provider for trade and development cooperation. China presents an alternative for Middle Eastern regimes, which have to diversify their sources in the purchasing of arms and when the military assistance from the West, primarily the US, could not be acquired due to different reasons. Moreover, the development of economic and trade relations with the region also reinforced China's provider role for those states in seeking foreign investment for modernization and development projects. These were used as an example of the South-South cooperation when China mainly identified itself with the developing world. Scobell also highlights the Middle East connection for China after the Tiananmen protests in 1989 since the region presented an alternative for trade and source of investment when the Western states imposed sanctions on the PRC.[274] It coincided with China's "Go West" strategy and "the Western Development Programme" to overcome the imbalance between eastern/interior and western/coastal regions of the country.[275] This strategic choice would develop the basis for the Belt and Road Initiative to extend its influence by

[274] Scobell, **op.cit.**, p.9.
[275] Barry Naughton, "The Western Development Program", in **Holding China Together: Diversity and National Integration in the Post- Deng Era**, Barry J. Naughton and Dali L. Yang (eds.), New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 253–296.

improving infrastructure and increasing trade volumes, developing cooperation and investment in the periphery.

What the Middle East means for China has rapidly transformed from being solely an arena of great power rivalry and a geostrategic crossroads of the world to being a strategic extension of China's homeland and periphery while turning into a jugular vein for energy source and economic nexus for Beijing after the opening up of China to the region.[276] The economic relations between China and the Middle East have always been regarded as the most important subject when the region is viewed as an energy source for development and modernization on the Chinese side. On the other hand, China became a significant new customer for the energy market while regional instability and confrontation were scaled up, damaging the stable flux of rentier income. Moreover, China compensated for the void in energy demand from the region when the US developed its self-sufficiency in terms of crude oil consumption. The adjustment of China's grand strategy by Deng Xiaoping starts with initiating opening up reforms that shifted the country to a planned but market-based economic model, which would succeed in social development, modernization, and rapid economic growth over decades. This new policy could not disregard the Middle East region which presented a great opportunity for trade, finance, investment, technology sharing for modernization, and energy sources.

[276] Scobell, **op.cit**, p.11-18.

Table 4: China's Investment & Commercial Ties in MENA

Chinese Company	Country	Date	Investment & Commercial Ties
Sinopec	Iran	2004	Signed a MOU for a 25-year $70 billion agreement to import LNG in exchange for developing the Yadavaran Oil Field.
	Saudi Arabia	2004	Signed a $300 million gas exploration and production deal with Saudi Aramco
	Sudan	2004	Adar-Port Sudan Pipeline
CNCP China National Petroleum Corporation	Iraq	1997	Signed a 22-year production-sharing contract to develop al-Ahdab field for an estimated cost of $1.3 billion.
	Egypt	1997	An agreement to form a joint-investment company with two Egyptian companies
	Sudan	1997	Acquired a 40 per cent stake in the Greater Nile Petroleum Operation Company consortium to explore and develop the Heglig and Unity fields
	Sudan	1999	The Heglig-Port Sudan Pipeline (500,000 bpd) - from the fields to the Red Sea
	Sudan	2000	Khartoum refinery, 70,000 bpd
	Sudan	2004	Adar/Yale fields, 300,000 b/d by 2006
	Sudan	2005	Offshore exploration and production of block 15
The Government of China	Libya	2004	Signed a $300 million, 10 million barrel crude purchase.

Source: **Energy Policy Act 2005**, Section 1837, National Security Review of International Energy Requirements, February 2006

The 1980s has witnessed China's rapid integration into the Middle East market by establishing trade, investment, and financial relationships and arms sales when the region has sought alternatives for varying reasons. This economic relationship provides an exchange of investment and technology in many fields. It

was not that only China invested and established trade and energy ties with Middle Eastern countries. On contrary, the Middle East regimes provides vital loans and investments into China's development path and modernization effort when Beijing sought foreign assistance to bolster up its opening up reforms. As an example, Kuwait was one of the early examples that of drew Beijing's attention in order to exercise its financial capital as being feasible for China's development. In 1985, Kuwait had already launched two waves of low interest loans and investment in China, which would provide funding for the construction of Shaxikou hydro power plant in Fujian, a silk factory in Beijing, an auto factory in Tianjin, a glazed brick factory in Shandong, and a fibreboard factory in Fujian.[277] This was the first steps of economic and political cooperation, which would reach at bilateral trade volume between China and Kuwait of up to 14.3 billion US dollars, 70 times more than over the fifty year period since 1971.

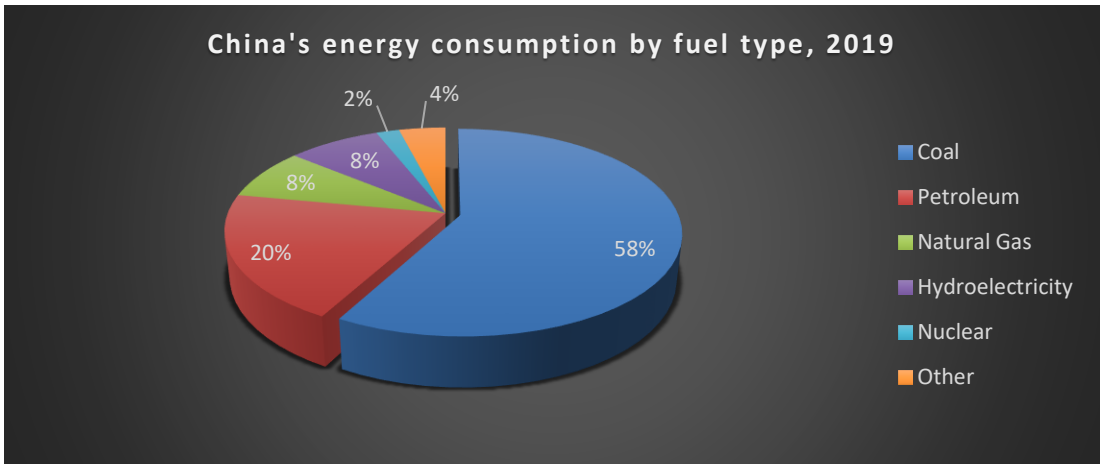
The 1990s signify a return to having low-profile on all sides considering the diversification of alternative markets and suppliers in contrast to the 1980s boom in the energy nexus between China and the Middle East. Beijing lost its impetus for proactive engagement with the region towards having a more normalized and reactionary attitude which also coincided with changes in domestic politics and systemic variables. The bipolar world order ended when China was under the pressure and sanctions off the West due to its internal crackdown against protesters. Sino-Middle Eastern relations were also affected by this systemic, domestic and regional turmoil when the US intervened in the Gulf Crisis and pursued a rather reactionary attitude against closer relations, especially military and technology ties between China and its allies in the Middle East.

In the post-Cold War period, Beijing initiated its own moves to expand economic and energy relations with the region while paying attention to the changing role of the US in the region in relation to wars in the Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq, raising tensions in the Arab-Israeli confrontations, containing nuclear proliferation in Iran, and lastly dealing with domestic upheavals to the authoritarian regimes by the Arab Uprisings.[278] It is mostly coincided with the discussion on whether China would play the role of a balancer against the US dominance and/or even challenge

[277] Calabrese, **op.cit.**, 1991, p.291.
[278] Kadir Temiz, **Chinese Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East**, New York, Routledge, 2022.

the US interests or not. On one side, there is an argument for resisting Chinese intervention into the regional affairs in order to not compete with the US supremacy in the Middle East. In addition to that, there is an ongoing debate in China's domestic circles for acting like a responsible great power, which also affects China's perception of interference in political, economic and social changes in the Middle East. On the other hand, the counter argument also favours China in taking a more responsible posture toward the Middle East, even encouraged by the US in sharing the burden of stability and order in the region with China's active participation.[279] However, the accession to the World Trade Organization was the primary reason to accelerate China's trade with the Middle East, which increased trade volume from US $5 billion to US $ 62.5 billion between 1995 to 2006.

Figure 5: China's Energy Consumption Type, 2019



Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2019.

However, the growth of China's economy has already brought a significant energy need as the country was turning into a major global economic and trade power, and the Middle East became as a key supplier of the country's oil and liquefied natural gas. The reason for this is because, China's rapid development has been accompanied by a sharp as well as crucial increase in oil and natural gas demand. China's fossil fuel energy consumption has increased from 60% in 1978, to

[279] Flynt Leverett and Jeffrey Bader, "Managing China-U.S. Energy Competition in the Middle East", **The Washington Quarterly**, Vol.29, No.1, Winter 2005–2006, p. 199.

its peak of 89% in 2011 according to World Bank data.[280] Today, coal is still has the largest share of China's total energy consumption, while petroleum is 20% and natural gas is 8%. They, therefore, cannot compete with the overall dominance of coal, yet. China's growing footprint in the Middle East has also raised questions as to whether this close interaction between China and the Middle East, especially with the GCC states creates interdependency between parties although China still holds the dominant position in this relationship.[281] As Robinson argued, China understands that interdependence between China and the Middle East, the West, and Japan must be within the framework of mutual benefit, as China has stressed investment, trade, technology transfer, and development cooperation.[282] Moreover, it is argued that, China presents a model of fast economic development without democratization, which could become a welcome substitute to an American model that pushes for political liberalization and criticize its partners for a lack of democratization.[283]

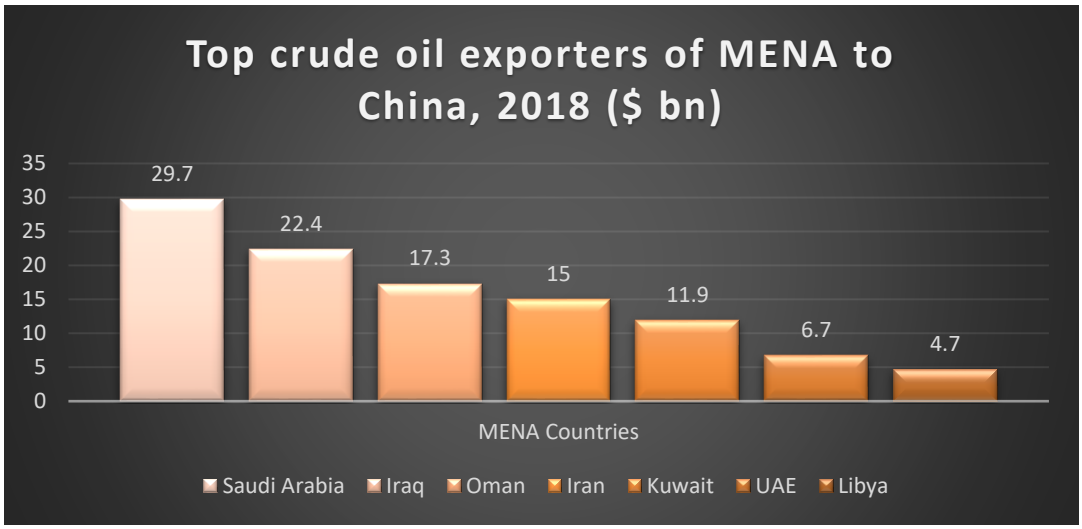
In 1993, China became a net oil importer from the Middle East to the extent that the energy supply came to occupy more and more prominent place in Sino-Middle Eastern relations from then. The Middle East accounts for more than 40 percent of China's oil imports. When China became a WTO member and started to expand its economic capability in its international regulations, the Middle East had already become a significant contributor to the rise of China phenomenon. As an example, Saudi Arabia became China's largest global supplier of crude oil starting in 2002, which culminated in a 70 billion dollar trade volume between the two countries in 2014.[284] The percentage of Middle Eastern oil in China's imports has been around 45%-55% but considering the boost in total imports in the part of Beijing, even the stable share of Middle East oil signifies a major boost in energy consumption. In 1994 the share of Middle Eastern oil was 39.74% (490.670 thousand

[280] World Bank, Fossil fuel energy consumption (% of total) China 30 September 2020. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.USE.COMM.FO.ZS?locations=CN>
[281] Jonathan Fulton, **China's Relations with the Arab Gulf Monarchies: Three Case Studies**, PhD. Thesis, University of Leicester, 2016.
[282] Thomas W. Robinson, "Interdependence in China's Foreign Relations" in Samuel S. Kim (ed.), **China and the World: Chinese Foreign Relations in the Post-cold War Era**, Boulder, Westview Press, 1994.
[283] Yitzhak Shichor, "China's Upsurge: Implications for the Middle East", **Israel Affairs**, Vol.12, No.4, 2006, p.681.
[284] Naser al-Tamimi, "China's rise in the Gulf A Saudi Perspective", in **Salman's Legacy The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia**, Madawi Al-Rasheed (ed.), 2018, Oxford University Press, p.253.

tons), which would increase to 50.09% in 2008 (8.962.070 thousand tons) while China's total oil imports rose twelve times higher (17.889.300 thousand tons) in the same period.[285]

Moreover, the 2008 economic crises also brought attention to China's economic growth which also signified a major change in MENA's economic partnership with China. In 2009, China-MENA trade became more than the US-MENA trade for the first time due to a rapid decline in US-MENA trade flow. In addition to this, the US cannot challenge the growing Chinese economic influx, because the gap between China-MENA and US-MENA trade continued to grow without change. China has extended its trade relations beyond $300 billion whilst the US can barely reach $200 billion in total so that the gap between two reached $132.5 billion in 2018. The largest part of this gap developed due to Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Oman.

Figure 6: China's Oil Import From MENA

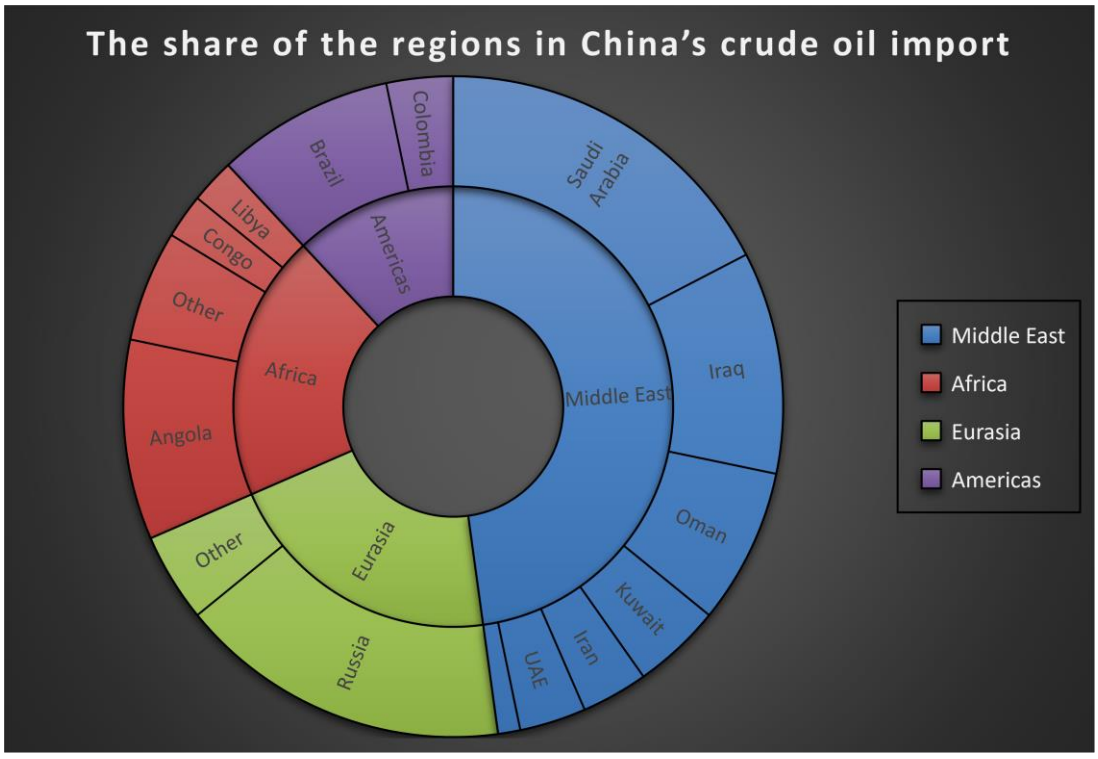


Source: Camille Lons, Jonathan Fulton, Degang Sun, Naser Al-Tamimi, "China's great game in the Middle East", The European Council on Foreign Relations, 21 October 2019, p.5.

[285] Zhao Hongtu, "China's Energy Interest and Security in the Middle East", in **China's Growing Role in the Middle East: Implications for the Region and Beyond**, the Nixon Center, 2010, p.45.

As a consequence of China's economic reforms and opening up, China has transformed from a rather isolated and planned economy to state-dominant market economy. China's unprecedented economic growth can mostly be ascribed to its being described as the powerhouse for the world economy, the main engine of the world industry, or the world's factory, because of the changing capital markets of East Asia and the accession of China to the WTO. These decisions opened a new phase for the world economy, which was also changed by China's astonishing economic growth and development. According to data from the IMF, China indeed became the centre of global growth by accounting for one-third of overall GDP growth in world economy and nearly 15% of global trade. On the basis of oil consumption, China has reached the second rank in the world for oil consumption, having more than 13% of global oil demand, which was only 4% during the early 1990s.

Figure 7: The Share of MENA States in China's Oil Import



Source: The figure is prepared by the author

The share of the Middle East in China's crude oil imports is 44% and 9% of natural gas as of February 2020 which places region as a vital source of energy consumption.[286] Although China has sought to diversify its sources of petroleum, the region continues to be the most important in China's development, and its dependency to total energy imports, is expected to rise from 65% in 2016 to nearly 80% in 2035. Furthermore, this dependency encourages China to pursue an energy transition from fossil fuels to green and renewable energy along with environmental concerns, pollution, and efforts against climate change.[287] Even though China aims to diversify its energy resources, the Middle East, and especially the Gulf region and the Strait of Hormuz, remain as strategic as the Strait of Malacca for Chinese trade routes and energy consumption.

As seen in those agreements between China and Middle East countries for whether named as partnership, strategic partnership, or comprehensive strategic partnership, a strong political will among political elites is present in order to improve bilateral relations in many fields.[288] Due to the increase in China's economic capability, financial capital, and grand strategic plans such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the economic aspect of Sino-Middle Eastern relations is gradually moving away from being limited to energy relations, to other sectors of economic relations. Even though energy is still the primary sector of cooperation, the spill over effect of such interdependency can be seen in growing investment in the petrochemical industry, renewable energy investments, infrastructure, banking, communications and high tech surveillance cooperation. Between 2005 and 2018, the energy sector kept nearly half of total Chinese investment in MENA (47.1%), yet there are a rising trends in transport (19.3%), real estate (15.4%), metals (5.6%), utilities (4.3%), chemicals (2.7%), tourism (1.7%) and agriculture (0.7%).[289] As Tamimi notes, the possible impediments can be the inter-OPEC competition to get a larger share in China's energy demand, China's own prospect to develop renewable resources in

[286] US Energy Information Administration, Country Analysis Executive Summary: China. 30 September 2020. https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/China/china.pdf
[287] Erica Downs, **Green Giants? China's National Oil Companies Prepare for the Energy Transition**, Columbia University Center on Global Energy Policy, September 2021.
[288] Jonathan Fulton, **China's Changing Role in the Middle East**, Atlantic Council, June 2019, p.4.
[289] Amin Mohseni-Cheraghlou, **MENA at the center of the West: China's "opening up to the West" strategy**, MEI, 9 March 2021. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/mena-center-west-chinas-opening-west-strategy>

reducing energy reliance on oil and natural gas imports, the lack of communications due to language barriers, the lack of transparency on both sides due to contradictory legal and regulatory systems, and the lack of technologic advancement enough to compete with Western partners.[290]

China's primary concern is ensuring energy self-sufficiency and securing stable supplies of energy resources without affecting the fluctuation of prices. Even though China's oil imports are expected to go beyond 72% by 2040 as demand is expected to grow faster than the domestic crude supply; the Middle East remains the main source of oil even though international sanctions restrict Sino-Iranian relations, raising tensions in the Gulf region such as with the Qatar crisis, or China's own objective to diversify its energy suppliers.[291] Lastly, the US still has a cultural upper hand and hegemonic control over the region which China has also benefitted from in its security network in the Middle East. The US supremacy in the region also raises questions as to whether China is a free-rider on the quasi stability of the American security network and military presence.[292] These political, economic, cultural, and military bounds between the US and the Middle East states could cause a backlash against further development in Sino-Middle Eastern relations if they are perceived as a threat to hegemonic intentions. However, China's oil dependency in the Middle East is only part of a broader development of commercial and economic ties, which will also expand in the future due to the prospects of the Belt and Road Initiative.[293] Yet, China's energy dependency on a Middle East still dominated by a US military presence present a dilemma in the intentions, benefits, and future security entanglement of Beijing.

In line with the energy-security dilemma, the third issue is Beijing's security/military entanglement with the Middle East after the opening up reforms. The 1980s presents a great opportunity for not just diplomacy, official recognition,

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[290] Al-Tamimi, **op.cit.**, p.258-260.
[291] Gawdat Bahgat, "Chinese and US Energy Policy in the Middle East", in **Toward Well-Oiled Relations? China's Presence in the Middle East Following the Arab Spring**, Niv Horesh (ed.), Palgrave, 2016, p.120-122.
[292] Niv Horesh and Ruike Xu, "Conclusion: China's Growing Presence in the Middle East", in **Toward Well-Oiled Relations? China's Presence in the Middle East following the Arab Spring**, Niv Horesh (ed.), 2016, Palgrave, New York, p.220-3. David Schenker, "China's Middle East Footprint," **The Washington Institute**, 26 April 2013. Friedman, **op.cit.**. Bree Feng, "Obama's 'Free Rider' Comment Draws Chinese Criticism", **The New York Times**, 13 August 2014. "Obama labeling China as 'free rider' in Iraq issue", **China Daily**, 4 September 2014.
[293] Bahgat, **op.cit.,** p.123.

business, energy relations, and investment but also arms sales and military engagement with a party that has been re-emerging as the new great power in the global affairs. In this period, the most significant security/military engagement was China's development and technology cooperation, nuclear technology, and arms sales to the Middle East regimes.[294] In Mao's period, Beijing's arms transfers used to be in the form of military assistance without any compensation, aimed at providing support to the Maoist revolutionary actions of developing countries. However, when China adjusted its foreign policy vision towards more rational and less ideological path, arms transfers became a part of trade relations, but had to be built on trust and mutual benefit of all parties included.[295] Moreover, Beijing has changed its policy on arms control from detachment to active participation in a dozen major international treaties by the early 1990s.[296]

When the capitals of the Middle East faced quasi sanctions from Washington and other Western suppliers of arms and other technologies, China presented an alternative in the context of such strained relations, in order to strengthen their defensive capabilities and technological modernization efforts. China targeted Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia to present itself as a reliable partner for military cooperation and the buying of Chinese weapons without implying an intimate political or strategic partnership. In 1979, Egypt's agreement to buy 50 fighter jets from China, as well as continuing to purchase missiles and submarines raised questions as to whether the Middle East allies of the US had become less dependent on the US when their relations with China are considered.[297] The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war extended the footprint of Chinese weaponry in the region not only in terms of missiles but also tanks, artillery, and small weapons to Iraq, as well as Silkworm missiles to Iran. Yet, Beijing did not take sides in regional confrontations and sold military equipment and weapons to both warring sides in the Iran-Iraq War.

[294] Frank J. Gaffney Jr., "China Arms the Rogues", **Middle East Quarterly**, September 1997, p. 33-39.
[295] Pan Zhenqiang, "China and the Middle East", in **China's Growing Role in the Middle East: Implications for the Region and Beyond**, the Nixon Center, 2010, p.82-84.
[296] Pan, **op.cit.,** p. 35-40. Wang Ling, "Whither Arms Control?" **Contemporary International Relations**, Vol.7, No.3, March 1997.
[297] Daniel Southeri, "China boosts arms sales im MidEast", **The Washington Post**, 4 April 1988.

During the Iran-Iraq War, 61.3% of all of China's arms transfer agreements with the Third World were argued to be with Iran and Iraq together.[298]

Despite the fact that China's arms sales to Iran have diminished, Chinese technology has a share in the development of Iranian ballistic and missile capability, even WMD capability.[299] China's sale of ballistic missiles to the Middle Eastern countries is seen as expanding its military/security influence in the region and recognition of China as a major player in the global affairs since the 1980s. Moreover, the rentier states in the region, especially in the Gulf sub-region, were considered as significant recipients of Chinese weapons which would also compete in the acquisition of Western weaponry, possibly far from being compete in terms of technological achievement but not as in expenditures for arms sales to the Middle East.

However, Israel stands as a unique case that has been seen as a possible contributor to China's economic and military modernisation, as well as a potential opening for acquisitions of weapons and technology on both sides, as well as showing potential for cooperation in military, agriculture, and industry. It started with the China's acquisition of Israel's Soviet-made weaponry stockpiles, which they had captured from defeated Arab armies in 1967 and 1973, to the extent that the military sales were estimated to be $4 billion dollar in between 1976-1988.[300] Although there were no official diplomatic ties between the two countries, they made their first openly declared deal in 1985. With this deal, China and Israel agreed on the training of Chinese officers by Israeli experts and Beijing's purchase of 54 Kfir aircraft, Mercava tanks, Gabriel missiles and upgraded F-10 aircraft. These close relations initiated even the transfer of US made missile technology to China. Because of this, Israel became the second biggest supplier (%20) of arms to China after Russia until the US would block the fulfilment of arms sales between parties as seen in Phalcon AWACS and Harpy deals in the late 1990s.[301] It can be argued that

[298] Richard F. Grimmett, **Trends in Conventional Arms Transfers to the Third World by Major Supplier, 1981-1988**, CRS Report for Congress, 4 August 1989.
[299] Bates Gill, "Chinese Arms Exports to Iran", **China Report**, Vol.34, No.3-4, August 1988, p.355.
[300] Peter Berton, "The Evolution of Sino-Israeli Relations", **Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs**, Vol.4, No.3, 2010, p.70.
[301] Islam Ayyadi and Mohammed Kamal, "China-Israel arms trade and cooperation: history and policy implications", **Asian Affairs**, Vol.47, No.2, 2016, p.263-266.

Israel's willingness to cooperate in China's military modernisation bolstered diplomatic efforts which would result in political benefits, in the sense that Israel was recognized by Beijing and the PRC was recognized by Israel in 1992. Political benefits can also be seen in in China's cutting of military assistance to the PLO and China's political adjustment towards a rather balanced stance in the UN Security Council rather than continuing to be pro-Arab and to stick to common Arab cause.

Whereas economic relations have been the central focus of Sino-Middle Eastern relations, security relations have not been limited to arms sales. The foreign connection to domestic threat perception shapes China's attitude towards the Middle East states since the ethnic and religious minorities in the Western regions of China have become challenging in China's domestic security understanding. Even though Scobell notes Turkey has been referred to as the best example of secularization and democratization in Islamic and Turkic worlds, it also remains China's most "fearsome and formidable rival" in both countries' struggle for influence in the Turkic states of Central Asia, and is also problematic in regards to the Uyghur minority in the Xinjiang region as well.[302] Although China promotes an image of itself being a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society that respects different ethnic and religious minorities, religious extremism and foreign assistance to Uyghur independence is considered as a vital threat to Chinese sovereignty in the Xinjiang region. The rise of terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, which use religious extremism to reach supporters, has caused China to intensify its support to combating terrorism and contributing to international law enforcement cooperation in accordance with the CCP's 'three evils', which are defined as terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism.

2.3. Assessment of Sino-Middle Eastern Relations

The opening up reforms on the part of Deng Xiaoping has changed China's political, economic, and cultural perspectives while reshaping the priorities of the political, business, and military elites. This era has coincided with a new stage of globalization and a neoliberal transition in the expansion of communications,

[302] Scobell, **op.cit.**, p.11-18.

transportation, and information management so that systemic determinants were a casual factor for such opportunity in China's rapid development and modernization path. China's inefficient state control over the economy has gradually yielded a more efficient capitalist way to organize the production of goods, services, and the allocation of economic and financial resources with respect to private property.[303] The commitment to economic reform over a decade has coincided with a post-Cold war conjuncture where China has benefitted from the multipolar environment of globalization in the 2000s. China has taken advantage its rapid development, which has turned the country into the main manufacturer of the global economy due to the unrestricted flow of capital and goods. The Middle East in particular has become China's leverage in testing the limits of economic relations when the 1980s presented a great deal of opportunities in many fields, but the 1990s caused many to question Beijing's entanglement in the region against the backdrop of military involvement, and economic and political pressure from the US on its partners in the region regarding their relations with China. On the other hand, China has needed to increase its influence in the region not only in terms of investment, trade and economic opportunities but also newly emerging security threats to regional stability and its domestic security concerns in connection to the Uyghur issue, extremism, fundamental terrorism and illegal migration.

Cooperation in all fields has constantly deepened between China and Middle Eastern states since the establishment of diplomatic ties. China has a rational and cautious attitude in its relations with the Middle East, where the region has become once again an arena of great power rivalry, a strategic energy source and the economic nexus for China's connection into global energy and trade routes, the strategic extension of China's "Go West" policy and domestic security concerns. Moreover, China's presence in the region gradually goes beyond being a simple trade partners to having public diplomacy instruments in the region such as Confucian Institutes, Chinese media connections in the region, Chinese pilgrimages to the Hejaz, and a Chinese military presence under the umbrella of UN Peacekeeping Missions. China stands as an alternative to the great powers that does not push for the American model of democratization and human rights, as well as criticism in

[303] Mühlhahn, **op.cit.**, p.610-611.

regards to these aspects directed towards Middle Eastern regimes when it provides investment, technology and arms sales to these regional partners.

China has friendly relations with all countries without taking sides in interregional confrontations or having ideological blinders and strategic calculations in terms of whether a Middle East regime is a US ally or not. Instead of becoming another great power in regional issues, this political stance can be seen as the continuum of Deng's adjustment in the post-Mao era to establish close relations with the region so as to benefit from boosting political, cultural, economic, trade, energy, and security/military ties in Sino-Middle Eastern relations.

When Beijing reoriented its foreign relations with the Middle East in the first decade of the 2000s, the main problem was to overcome US dominance in order to have an unconstrained attitude in its approach to regional affairs. China's rational and pragmatist policies in the period were shaped by its foreign policy objectives, domestic priorities, and national interests in the Middle East to overlap not only the US dominance but also other actors of great power struggle in the region.[304] In 2004, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum was set up while President Hu Jintao's Middle East tour was especially significant to further develop dialogue and cooperation not only in terms of economic relations but also the political, cultural fronts between China and the Middle East.

In China's perception to the Middle East, stability, cooperation and development are the key objectives in establishing regional order and closer ties between parties. This is why China opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq, sanctions on Iran regarding its nuclear programme, and foreign intervention into domestic upheavals even when they turned into civil war as in the case of Syria. Even though the Western powers, especially the US urged Beijing to participate in their efforts in the Middle East, China highlighted its independent decision making and different perception of such issues. The Arab-Israeli issue is one of the example of this neutral, impartial attitude to conflicts in the region as Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi summarized China's position in relation to the Middle East politics with five main points at the Annapolis Conference held on 27 November 2007. First and foremost point in regard to the Arab-Israeli Conflict shows that Beijing does not

[304] Alterman and Garver, **op.cit.**, p.16-18.

extend the issue to being a connection to all Arab states anymore. Instead, the proposed guideline is much more specific to the relationship between Israel and Palestine as the issue is henceforth considered as the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Beijing has had a solution-oriented approach to the issue since Yang Jiechi called for the peaceful coexistence of the Arab and Jewish nations, peaceful negotiations to reach a lasting peace without violence, not connecting all regional issues to this particular one that makes all unsolvable, seeking support from the international community to sustains peace talks and humanitarian and development assistance to Palestine, and finally promoting multilateral mechanism of peace promotion on the part of the international community in monitoring and guaranteeing the peace.[305] Beijing put much more effort into building its image as a reliable partner, a good mediator, and not being on the Western bandwagon, interfering in regional affairs having a confrontational and interventionist approach. In the following section, the grand strategic adjustment of Xi Jinping will be presented within this framework. Therefore, the grand strategic adjustment towards defensive assertiveness is not a dramatic change in the overall attitude but a transition from being a proactive great power in regional affairs in accordance to its grand principle, grand plan, and grand behaviour.

[305] Yang Jiechi, "Speech at the Middle East Peace Conference in Annapolis, US", November 27, 2007, http://www.chinese –embassy.org.uk/eng/zyxw/t385710.html

CHAPTER THREE
CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC CULTURE

The third chapter of this thesis will focus on China's grand strategy. As presented in the previous chapters, the main features of grand strategy can be adapted to China since the concept needs to be explained beyond the US grand strategy and applied to other great powers. The first section shows China's grand strategy that shape's China's political preferences, economic choices, diplomatic moves, military thinking, foreign relations, and overall perceptions in global affairs. After a brief summary of the material sources of China's grand strategy, this section covers the interpretations of China's grand strategy and China's strategic culture as a significant impetus for the defensive foundation of grand strategic preferences.

3.1. DEFINING CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY

China's grand strategy will be discussed in accordance with two major perception. First, the defensive interpretation of China's grand strategy will be analysed due to official narrative and consistency in policy making since the era of Deng Xiaoping. However, the changes and adjustment within that defensive grand strategy narrative as from peaceful rise, peaceful development and now development cooperation will be discussed. Secondly, the aggressive interpretation of China's grand strategy will be presented under the headline of offensive grand strategy. The discussion on China's assertive rise will be exemplified by the works of foreign observers and think-tanks. For an original contribution to the academic literature, this thesis built its arguments on a third approach, by using both defensive and assertive arguments on China's grand strategy. Defensive assertiveness grand strategy argues that China has a solid defensive foundation in its grand strategic preferences which consists of defensive core. However, in the past decade, there has been an assertive turn in grand strategic understanding. Since the impact of this assertive turn will be analysed in the following section, this part only focus on domestic and systemic impetuses on grand strategic preferences to enable such adjustments.

3.1.1. An Introduction: Does China have a Grand Strategy?

Does China have a grand strategy and why do we need to question its existence? Any answer requires a short reference to the creation of grand strategy as a concept. Since the concept was crafted as *the* grand strategy for *the* grand army, it is considered as a suitable conceptual explanation for the actions of a great power in its political adaptation. In 1950s, China had reintegrated into world politics as a great power by the end of the internal turmoil and its role in the Korean War.[306] However, these studies focusing on grand strategy have shown lack of interest on the case of China, unlike to Western great powers. This was due to China not being considered as a great power until the late 20th century as well as a focus on Western-oriented grand strategy studies.[307]

In recent studies on grand strategy, the scope of research has extended not only non-Western great powers but all states regardless of powerful or weak. China, in that regard, have a special place of being both a great power and a non-Western case in the research agenda. A comparative study on great power politics, including China, may produce enriched arguments on grand strategy concept. By the extension of its scope of research, the questioning of the existence of China's grand strategy become less relevant. If all states regardless of its power projection, have a grand strategy, then China certainly has.

The second aspect requires the evaluation of China's grand strategy in a chronological way. The very first examination on grand strategic persistence is based on identifying how far we must trace back its roots and implementations. Is it a newly developed strategic framework or shows some consistencies in the history? This discussion on grand strategy will clarify whether Chinese political leaders have a comprehensive plan for the long-term political direction of their country.[308]

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[306] J. David Singer, "Peace in the Global System: Displacement, Interregnum, or Transformation?" in **The Long Postwar Peace: Contending Explanations and Projections**, Charles W. Kegley, Jr. (ed.), HarperCollins, 1991, p.56-84 from Randolph M. Siverson, Michael D. Ward, "The Long Peace: A Reconsideration", **International Organization**, Vol. 56, No. 3, Summer 2002, pp.682.

[307] As an example on grand strategy study on Western countries see: Steven E. Lobell, **The Challenge of Hegemony Grand Strategy, Trade, and Domestic Politics**, University of Michigan Press. 2003. Barry Posen, **The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars**, Cornell University Press, 1984.

[308] Angela Stanzel, Nadège Rolland, Jabin Jacob, Melanie Hart, **Grand Designs: Does China have a 'Grand Strategy**, The European Council on Foreign Relations, October 2017, p.1-2.

Secondly, a critical aspect is necessary to emphasize how effective China's grand strategy is considering its aspirations and achievements. It requires a detailed knowledge of national interests, the leader's political objectives, foreign policy choices, and domestic and international stimuli for analysing its overall success. Thirdly, the liveliest debates on China's grand strategy are about arguing changes or shifts in political priorities. What matters in that context is about detecting the reason behind political shifts if there is any; otherwise it is just casting a big shadow on minor changes through conclusion reached on the basis of exaggerated meaning of contemporary reactions.

Much of the debate about China's grand strategy has evolved around two issues: the trajectory of China's rising power and influence in world politics and the different scenarios for the rest of the world, particularly the US, in responding to the rise of China. These were pointing two dimensions on a grand strategy debate as articulating the contemporary achievements within the country's long-term objectives and how other countries perceived these achievements.

Since the early 1990s, the limits and capabilities of this rising power had been examined but debates concerning China's grand strategy gained momentum in the 2000s with its emergence as a global power, its rapid integration to the world economy and international institutions, and the impact of the 2008 crisis in order to highlight the country's developed position among other major economies. In this way, an assessment of China's grand strategy increased in importance to understand not only the national interests or leader's political objectives but also the impediments and limits of its aspirations.

The issue in searching the adjustment of China's grand strategy is about identifying the motivation behind this change. The reason for such a change could be domestic re-evaluation of national interests, systemic pressure, the new choices of a political leader, or a different reason to adjust the overall political objectives. The point is to identify the concrete evidence on grand strategy adjustment found in official documents, policy papers, and the discourse of political elites. On the other side, the continuum of grand strategy preferences has to show a pattern in different periods. In that regard, the discussion on China's grand strategy has to deal with both changes and continuities in order to present a long-term political perception.

Those factors that shape grand strategy preferences can be group into two categories. The first is the material sources of grand strategy that determines the political, economic, and military means for achieving the ends of overall political objectives. The second is the ideational factors that prompt those means for the specific political, economic, or military ends within the framework of cultural basis, reasoning, and ideological legitimization. The first has been excessively reviewed by the classical realist school in defining capabilities for reaching a state's national interests. The second has been analysed in detail by constructivist theory but the neoclassical approach of realism also acknowledges the significance of domestic variables through the concept of strategic culture and the role of the political leader. This section will briefly discusses the material sources of China's strategic preferences before going into the details of China's strategic culture and the impact of Xi Jinping's leadership.

3.1.2. Material Sources of China's Grand Strategy

The material sources of grand strategy can be group into four sections. These are some basic elements that shape a country's capability in reaching political, economic and military ends. An overall examination of the material sources of China's grand strategy needs to look into geopolitical, socioeconomic, political/ideological, and military factors.

3.1.2.1. Geopolitical Factors

China has vast control over East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region with the longest land border and one of the most disputed maritime areas along its coastline and beyond. With its nearly 9.6 million sq.km total area (more than 6% of the world' landmass) China is the second-largest country in the world. It shares borders with fourteen states, more than many other country. From the Eurasian heartland to the Pacific coast of Asia, China has been on the edge of the Old World for centuries as one of the oldest civilizations in the world. China has diverse geographical features from deserts to subtropical forests. However, its population as well as the economic

capability of the country lies in the eastern side of the country, predominantly along its coastline. Today, more than 90% of the Chinese population live on the eastern side of the Tengchong-Heihe Line. The east of this line covers great agricultural basins of the Yellow River and the Yangtze River, which have been determined agricultural productions, so that densely populated settlement due to geographical-gravity of industrial facilities. This part of China has the most significant cities for population density, trade connections, development investment, infrastructure, and production hubs which are located alongside the 18500km long coastline of the country.[309]

China's border disputes are closely connected with its territorial/maritime claims or political control of autonomous regions. Even though China came to an agreement in some controversies, it has still unresolved territorial disputes with Bhutan and India, maritime disputes as on Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands or the Scarborough Shoal.[310] Beijing's concern in special administrative regions, especially Hong Kong, and the national *re*unification goal with Taiwan have also been intensifying tensions in the East Asia region.

The geographic position shapes the basis of threat perception of the political leadership. The geopolitical blueprint of China has always influenced the reasoning of the Chinese political elite. Since the name of country refers to being at the centre of the world, one can trace back the reflection this mind-set on China's role in global affairs. The intensity of strategic assets on the coastline makes China vulnerable not only to external threats and invasions as the country had experienced many times during the Century of Humiliation, but also to more contemporary issues like the density of pollution in its crowded cities and the effects climate change. In that historical period, China's strategic perception of the neighbouring states changed from a tribunal system like historical allegiances to the need for protection from the aggression of Western powers and Japan.

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[309] Wang and Aubrey clarify that; China's coastline could reach 33.000 km by the combination of both the mainland coast and the shores of nearly six thousand islands in total. Ying Wang, David G. Aubrey, "The characteristics of the China coastline", **Continental Shelf Research**, Vol. 7, No.4, 1987, p. 329.

[310] Fravel explains these compromises with the insecurity of the communist regime. M. Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes", **International Security**. Vol.30, No.2, Fall 2005, p.46-83.

This geographic position shapes the cognitive process of grand strategic preferences. As in Mao's anti-hegemonic global geopolitical definition, *Three Worlds Theory*, China was placed as a distinct world, being an active recipient of the balance of power along with the US and the USSR as another world.[311] In line with Mao's Three Worlds Theory, Deng placed the USSR as a hegemonic threat to China along with the US, both compose the first world, while reshaping the perception of external threat and domestic Chinese politics in the aftermath of Mao.[312] Those developed countries, mainly in Europe, were placed in the second world while the developing nations in Asia, Latin America, and Asia, as an intermediate zone, were placed in the last group.

Considering grand strategy preferences under Xi Jinping, this intermediate zone is critical to reaching the developing world in the concepts of "sharing the common future", "a community of shared destiny", and "win-win relations by the Chinese investment for development". It sustains the challenge to the hegemonic order in those countries while intensifying the influence of China, even when faced with accusations of plundering other nation's resources for "Chinese neo-imperialism" or "Chinese colonialism". In the end, its vast territorial and maritime control on the world surface requires a strong military capability. Considering those border disputes with neighbouring countries, such as India, or rising trends in the maritime claims in the South and East China Sea, the geopolitics factors could legitimize any development and investment in security and shape grand strategic preferences.

3.1.2.2. Socioeconomic Factors

China is the most populous nation on earth with an estimated population of 1.4 billion, which is nearly 20% of the world's population. Even though population growth is under strict state control at around 0.5% and life expectancy is increasing with the overall development of the country, an aging population is a systemic

[311] Jun Niu, **The Cold War and the Origins of Foreign Relations of People's Republic of China**, Yijing Zhong (trans.), Brill, 2018.
[312] Herbert S. Yee, "The Three World theory and post-Mao China's global strategy", **International Affairs**, Vol.59, No.2, 1983, p.242.

problem since the share of age-under-14 declining to 17% while the share of age-65-and-over is increasing to 12%.[313] China was an agrarian society which used to shape the means of production. Therefore, the first adaptation of socialism in the China had highly affected by this feature, which would also affect the ideological and political agenda of the country such as the Great Leap Forward. Today, its urban population amounts to 60% of the total population. That is a remarkable turn for an agrarian society, yet such rapid transformation unable to resolve a widening gap between the upper, middle, and lower classes. This demonstrates how economic development affected the social structure of Chinese society as well with the expansion of the middle class, expansion of industrial cities, and the national goals to reduce poverty in the country.

China had the largest economy in the world until the Industrial Revolution. When the country had been experiencing a significant decline of its share during the Century of Humiliation, the industrialized world had rapidly advance its share in global economy. China became the world's second-largest economy through Deng Xiaoping's opening and reform agenda on economy and politics. It is one of the main indicators of "the Rise of Asia" phenomenon, and was later overshadowed by the "the Rise of China". The success story in economic growth and development is mainly due to the abandonment of Mao's and orthodox socialist principles and the adoption of a mixed economic model, called market socialism or Chinese capitalism.[314] The official statistics of China, especially on the economic data, have started from the year 1978; as another milestone for the country by Deng's reforms. Lin notes that the key feature of this economic performance was the gradual dual-track nature of these reforms, which were based on stimulating the development of private enterprises in market while supporting state-owned firms as in a planned economy.[315] The success of China's economic performance effectively uses the strengths of the country, such as vast population, production of raw materials, and rigid state control on economic apparatus. These features enable a cheap labour for

[313] "Age Composition and Dependency Ratio of Population" in **China's Statistical Yearbook 2019**, National Bureau of Statistics of China.
[314] Samir Amin, "China, Market Socialism, and U.S. Hegemony", **Review**, Vol.28, No.3, 2005, p.259-279.
[315] Justin Yifu Lin, **Demystifying the Chinese Economy**, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.154-155.

the emerging industrial sector, the massive scale of production, an undervalued currency and effective endeavour on saving millions of citizens out of poverty.

This success based on rapid growth through the boost of economic capability had already attracted attention throughout the 1990s but the real peak was its position during the 2008 global economic crisis. In 2008, China passed the US as the world's largest manufacturer and Japan as the world's second-largest economy. However, the structural challenges have also intensified such as China's aging population, the decline in GDP growth, the need for further investment, the transformation to an economy based on higher value-added production and sustainable demand, and meeting the new economic and social expectations of the new middle class. China has a remarkable growth in GDP as well as an increased growth rate till the end of the 2000s. In 1990, the GDP of China was 360.86 billion dollars while it increased to 1.211.35 in 2000, 6.087.16 in 2010, and more than doubled in the aftermath of 2008 global finance crisis to reach 13.894.82 billion dollars in 2018.[316]

Grand strategy preferences are highly dependent to socioeconomic capabilities of the country. The economy has the highest priority in elaborating strategic means and the limits of grand strategic preferences. In that framework, the Belt and Road Initiative or the foundation of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank would find its meaning through China's own need to effectively use its economic capability. These projects under the BRI and further bilateral collaborations for development and investment, as in the exemplary success of the Sino-Pakistan cooperation and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, have transformed economic potential into political influence. Moreover, China 2030 is an overall development path for China by the World Bank and the Chinese leadership which covers a wide range of issues from innovation, green development, reforming governance, strengthening the fiscal system, to achieving mutually beneficial relations with the rest of the world, known as the win-win relation.[317] It is expected that the new struggle for power both in terms of economic and security will be in the new phase of the technologic revolution, in the field of innovation. As Yan suggests, the new-

[316] World Bank China Profile Statistics. 2018.
[317] World Bank and the Development Research Center of the State Council, P. R. China. 2013, **China 2030: Building a Modern, Harmonious, and Creative Society**. World Bank, 2013.

Cold War strategic competition would be in the field of innovation, befitting to the digital era rather than the ideological or geopolitical ones.[318] In conclusion, Xi Jinping's administration marks the sustainability of economic growth as a priority for the future power projection of the country through economic capability, development, and domestic and global status.

3.1.2.3. Political and Ideological Factors

Chinese officials often note that there are eight minor political parties in the Chinese political system such as the Democratic League of China and the Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party, to answer critiques on one-party rule. However, all of these parties are the members of the United Front and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in order to follow same ideological preferences to the Chinese Communist Party without having the overwhelming membership of the CCP. The Communist Party of China has been the true leading political party since the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949 and the communist victory in that war. Despite opening up the market economy and the rise of nationalism among the Han-Chinese population, the CCP is still considers its political ideology to be socialism with Chinese characteristics. Each political leader of China shapes these characteristics within a symbolic framework like Jiang Zemin's Three Represents, Hu Jintao's Scientific Outlook on Development. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, the state apparatus is also strengthening the personal cult of the leader through the institutionalization of Xi Jinping Though like Mao himself, retracing the footsteps of Deng Xiaoping by a "southern tour" in the early days of his rule, and the elimination of competitive political figures.[319]

The Communist Party of China adapts Mao's Thought as an integration of universal Marxist-Leninist ideology with the unique experience of the Chinese revolution. Therefore, the stability of the political regime and the rule of the CCP have the highest importance in grand strategic preferences. The utmost importance of the stability of the CCP ruled regime shapes grand strategy preferences as well as the

[318] Yan Xuetong, "China-US competition in digital era", **Global Times**, 21 January 2020.
[319] "'Xi's 'Four Comprehensives' A strategic blueprint for China's future", **The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China**, 20 March 2017.

threat perception of the political elites towards the sustainability of the political system. It was often thought that the opening of the economy would eventually have a spill-over effect on the political side of the regime through democratization and further adaptation of the Western values on human rights. However, the Tiananmen Square Protests revealed that the trajectory in China would not result in a way that the liberalism has expected.[320] In addition to the failure of the expectation of liberalism, those external criticisms have escalated due to the violation of human rights, the minority issues, and the suppression of peaceful protests. The authoritarian rule of the regime would face criticism on a wide range of issues from environmental problems, intellectual property theft, to the indoctrination of the minority population of the autonomous regions. Therefore, after the stability of the CCP rule, those issues related to domestic politics –or Chinese self-perceived reunification issue- gained the highest priority among political and ideological sources of grand strategy preferences. Since the Tiananmen Square protests, any discussion or critique of its domestic problems such as Tibet, Hong Kong, or Xinjiang have been officially regarded as a direct threat to the CCP party rule as much as the sovereignty of China. This political attitude has been described with regime insecurity due to domestic threat perception to the party rule as well as with strategic pragmatism to use these upheavals in order to tighten internal control. Thus, China demands even from its best partners, to stay away from any domestic issues in order to advocate the non-interference to others' domestic affairs.

3.1.2.4. Military Factors

The very foundation of grand strategy studies is based on military capability. Therefore, the hard power based of the military is a fundamental material resource of the grand strategy. Considering the timeline from the Chinese Civil War to the foundation of the People's Republic of China, the role of the military has always been significant in order to challenge domestic upheaval and foreign aggressions. However, military capability was the last priority among the "four modernizations"

[320] Minxin Pei, "The Lasting Tragedy of Tiananmen Square", **Project Syndicate**, 31 May 2019. (https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/tiananmen-massacre-30-year-legacy-by-minxin-pei-2019-05)

of Deng Xiaoping's list of four areas of development falling behind agriculture, industry, and science and technology. Thus, the rapid modernization efforts had the upmost priority in reformist agenda.[321] The People's Liberation Army has a comprehensive reform and modernization agenda until the centennial goal of 2049 to be a worthy military for the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.[322] On the basis of socialism with Chinese characteristics, after the 19th CCP National Congress, Xi Jinping publicly announced that the military ambition of his administration on modernizing and reforming the military was to build a strong and loyal army.[323] In his vision, a strong army and a wealthy society are inseparable bipartite for the future projection of the country. To this end, the official military budget had raised nearly nine-fold, from $20 billion in 2002 to $178.2 billion in 2020, yet still only one-third of the US.[324] Although there is no denying the military reform under Xi Jinping, the Chinese side often notes the increase in other countries' military budget in order to answer those critiques on Chinese military spending.[325] The real emphasis of this official discourse is about the share of military expenditure in GDP, which also covers the increase in budget.

These modernization efforts and the expansion of Chinese military capabilities are closely studies by other states' reports and academic works.[326] As

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[321] James Char, "The People's Liberation Army in its Tenth Decade: Assessing 'Below the Neck' Reforms in China's Military Modernizations", **Journal of Strategic Studies**, Vol.43, No.1, 2020, p.141-148.

[322] The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, **China Defense White Paper: China's National Defense in the New Era** 2019.

[323] Simon Rabinovitch, "'Strong army' Xi: The other side of China's reformer", **Financial Times**, 12 December 2013. "Xi calls for building a strong army", **Xinhua**, 26 October 2017.

[324] Even though these are the official numbers, there are further estimations on Beijing's expenditures on defence budget. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates actual spending to have been much higher up to be $261 billion and The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) estimates military spending to be $225 billion in 2019. "The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2020", **SIPRI,** (https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex). Meira Nouwens, "China's defence spending: a question of perspective?", **IISS**, 24 May 2019.

[325] "U.S. obsession with military hegemony threatens world peace", **China Military Online**, 1 November 2020. "UK approves largest defense budget to revive past glory", **China Military Online**, 24 November 2020. "China's military reform in past 5 years", **CGTN**, 1 August 2020.

[326] The US Office of the Secretary of Defense annually prepared a report to the US Congress. Department of Defense, **Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020**. Moreover, Japan's National Institute for Defense Studies annually publishes a report with a theme on security. **China Security Report 2021: China's Military Strategy in the New Era**, The National Institute for Defense Studies, 2020. Mark Episkopos "China Has Big Aircraft Carrier Dreams (As in 6 Carriers by 2035)" **The National Interest**, 11 December 2020. Michael S. Chase, Jeffrey Engstrom, Tai Ming Cheung, et.al. **China's Incomplete Military Transformation Assessing the Weaknesses of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)**, RAND Corporation, 2015. Andrea

Fravel denotes the new outline in November 2020, the PLA has changed its operational doctrine for the fifth time since 1949, while there has been no change for nearly two decades.[327] It marks a new reform of the military that will begin to clarify what the top-class Chinese military objectives require. Yet, it is often emphasized in the new doctrine that the new operational logic follows the same line with Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese characteristics. The strong army for the strong nation is the key component for grand strategic thinking of the CCP under Xi's leadership. Consequently, this strategy acknowledges national aspirations to "regain" China to a position of great power with military capability and a prosperous economy, influence in foreign affairs, and leadership with "Chinese characteristics" on the world stage.

3.1.3. China's Strategic Culture

The ideational drivers of grand strategy are largely determined by the cultural drivers of a society. Thus, grand strategy is capable of characterising a particular strategic culture since it can shape the order of preference in the mind-set of decision makers. Strategic culture can provide a particular route in their strategic thinking, directing to a choice among alternatives or restricting strategic behaviour from alternative preferences. Its effect has to be persistent across different periods and strategic contexts, which has to be traced back to official documents unless there is a fundamental change in other variables such as the new leadership, domestic transition, or a significant internal or external crisis.[328] Its implementation in political analyses demonstrates the significance of strategic culture. It is important to find a way to balance generality and specificity in adapting strategic culture into a political analysis. As Booth notes, the significance of strategic culture works for eroding ethnocentrism and internal-external distinction in policy making.[329] Therefore, it

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Ghiselli, "The Chinese People's Liberation Army 'Post-modern' Navy", **The International Spectator**, Vol.50, No.1, 2015, p.117-136.

[327] M. Taylor Fravel, **Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949**, Princeton University Press, 2019.

[328] Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture", **International Security**, Vol.19, No.4, Spring 1995, p.53.

[329] Ken Booth, "The Concept of Strategic Culture Affirmed", in **Strategic Power: USA/USSR**, Carl G. Jacobsen (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, 1990, p. 125-126.

reveals the formation of threat perception since it works for learning those unknown features of others, even enemies by understanding the historical references on self-image or motivations of irrational political behaviours.

In China's case, this thesis considers strategic culture as a mitigating factor in limiting the choices of decision makers, sustaining the main pillars in foreign policy, and allowing a limited adjustment of grand strategy between its defensive and realpolitik strands. It will be argued that Chinese leaders will likely be influenced by both Confucian and realpolitik strands in strategic cultural preferences. These two perceptions work for choosing defensive and offensive strategy in relation to high or low external threat conditions. For the purpose of analysing the defensive assertive feature of grand strategy, this study relies on three units of analysis: historical and geopolitical sources, a philosophical framework, and the role of elites in interpreting those features.

This section presents the sources of China's strategic culture by first analysing the sources of China's strategic culture and contemporary factors. It provides a linkage between a conceptual framework of strategic culture and the normative asset of the Chinese case. Secondly, the interpretation of the strategic culture aspect of Chinese politics would be analysed while critically elaborating the literature on that issue in regard to foreign affairs and grand strategy preferences. It has also present the defensive foundation even though there is an assertive turn in China's grand strategic preferences. In the last section, the mitigating role of strategic culture was explained concerning the role of political elites. Therefore, this section links the elements of strategic culture with the decisions of political elites and the leadership of the country whereas the impact of Xi Jinping's leadership will be analysed through Sino Middle East relations in the last chapter.

3.1.3.1. Sources of China's Strategic Culture

The sources of strategic culture shape the formation as well as the implementation of political behaviour. It requires a detailed search on the key elements of strategic thinking since these are often derived from fundamental elements before going into the details of what kind of strategic culture that China

has. An integrated approach is required in order to analyse philosophical, ideological, geographical, historical, and contemporary features rather than a distinctive approach to each component. As the culture itself can be considered to a social being and a living organism, it must represent all those elements on the latest outcomes, eventually. For this reason, historical, economic, philosophical, and geopolitical features have to be considered as sources of strategic culture. These are fundamental factors influencing strategic thinking both in terms of strategic culture and the adjustment of grand strategy.

First, the geographical features of the country play a significant role in shaping the traditions and thinking of a society. Its geographical place as the heartland of East Asia had provided an isolated as well as preserved position in comparison to other civilizations. Zhang addresses the importance of this core as "For roughly two millenniums… the central goal of China's security strategy had been defending the economic, political, social and cultural heartland of China".[330] With the exception of the western and northern frontiers of Mainland China, the stopping power of water, which is based on considering large bodies of water as a formidable obstacle that causes significant power-projection problems for an offense, provided security in a Mearsheimerian sense, until the nineteenth century.[331] The Century of Humiliation, in that sense, began with the elimination of this protection by Western and Japanese pressure along the northern and eastern maritime frontier while facing plenty of military invasion since the Asian mainland was open for invasion from abroad. China has altered its greatest security concerns from its continental borders to maritime borders since its economic development primarily dependent on the great commercial and industrial centres on the coastal areas. As Zhang notes, the vulnerability of China's coastline to foreign intervention is still shaping threat perceptions in order to protect stability and being ready to resist any foreign pressure.[332] This is one of the reasons for the change to active defence from a previous passive defence. It would explain China's rights/claims on the South China

[330] Tiejun Zhang, "Chinese Strategic Culture: Traditional and Present Features", **Comparative Strategy**, Vol.21, No.2, 2002, p.74.
[331] John J. Mearsheimer, **The Tragedy of Great Power Politics**, W. W. Norton & Company, 2001, p.44.
[332] Shu Guang Zhang, "China: Traditional and Revolutionary Heritage", in **Strategic Cultures in the Asia Pacific Region**, Ken Booth and Russell Trood (eds.), Macmillan, 1999, p.46.

Sea mean more than territorial and maritime claims but an extension of national security.

China's geographical place has often regarded as geographical and ideological limitations on both action and thinking. That's why any attempt to go beyond those geographical limitations, such as the expedition of Zheng He to the Indian Ocean (known as the Western Ocean in China back then and the expedition did not have offensive purposes) and the Arab Peninsula, continues to be lauded. His expedition is not only important in terms of a geographical expedition as in commemorating the 600th anniversary of Zheng He's voyages, but also retains a significant place in shaping collective memory as Maritime Day in China is celebrated on 11 July, the date is devoted to the memory of Zheng He's first voyage. This geographical position means being at the centre of wealth, knowledge, and richness for centuries as found in the popularity of Marco Polo's travels to the Silk Road references. The country's name, Zhōng-guó (中国), means central country or middle empire and refers the lower reaches of the Yellow River and later those lands of the Central Plain controlled by the Qin dynasty. In fact, the Sino-centric aspect also refers to being the centre of the civilization, and at the heart of the world, and ruled by the Celestial Empire. This etymological source also demonstrates a Sino-centric self-interpretation of being at the heart of administration. It places the neighbouring regions like a periphery of this civilizational core as reflections can be found in some ancient economic and diplomatic practices such as the tributary system.[333] Therefore, many regions around Mainland China such as Korea, and Vietnam proclaimed themselves to be the Little China (like Sojunghwa) in emulating or inheriting this heavenly rule and central image after the collapse of the Han-ruled Ming dynasty by the Manchu-ruled Qing Dynasty.[334] This imperial legacy would raise a comparison between the Imperial China that had achieved superiority in Eastern Asia and the contemporary China that strives for hegemony on the Eastern periphery with a global status.

[333] For a detailed analysis, see also Zhou Fangyin, "Equilibrium Analysis of the Tributary System", **The Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol.4, No.2, 2011, p.147–178.
[334] Michael Kim, "Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Transnationalism in Korean History", **Journal of Contemporary Korean Studies**, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 2014, p.19.

The Yellow River and the Yangtze River are natural cores of agriculture, trade, transportation, and settlement; hence major cities were established around the rivers such as Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuhan, Lanzhou, Zhengzhou, and Jinan. Today, more than % 90 of the Chinese population is still living on the eastern side of the Tengchong-Heihe Line. It has also been suggested that two great agricultural basins, the Yellow River and the Yangtze River shaped not only the economical and agricultural production but also the components of social structure. An agrarian community had long been at the centre of Chinese society due to the geographical advantages of fertile river basins, traditional relations of agrarian productions, and historical trajectory. The defensiveness in strategic thinking may have also found its roots in an agricultural basis of Chinese society. As Hu refers, China's defensive posture was determined by the diversity between agricultural and nomadic societies.[335] The fundamental difference in life style and production determine the reactions of society whether offensive or defensive in nature. A settled civilization and stable social order has been provided by an earthbound society. The main focus of this plan relies on rural society in order to realize an agrarian socialism instead of the emphasis on industrial urban force. Furthermore, Chinese scholars ranked the farmer just below their highest position in the traditional society- the ranking was like the labourer, the farmer, the artisan, and the merchant.[336] Farmers the fundamental actor in the economy since they are the very source of production, have often been considered as simple-minded and ready to follow orders. In Chinese philosophic tradition, that makes it important to have a virtuous, benevolent ruler upon them to seek the good of the people and provide them peace, justice, and harmony. This perception would strengthen the administration of the emperor. It would be a basis for a monist political authority play through the paramount leader understanding. The agricultural nature of society would also shape Mao's Second Five-Year Plan, known as the Great Leap Forward, to reconstruct that agrarian society by agricultural collectivization.

[335] Shaohua Hu, "Revisiting Chinese Pacifism", **Asian Affairs: An American Review**, Vol. 32, No. 4, Winter, 2006, p.275.
[336] Herrlee Glessner Creel, **Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Tse-Tung**, University of Chicago Press, 1953, p.119-124.

The Han majority in the heartland territories have also shaped the vision of different ethnic populations, especially the nomadic tribes in the north and west. The myth of cultural attraction, in particular to those nomadic tribes and neighbouring states, has coincided with the settled people around the core of the centre region of the country, the Han population and so that the attraction of Han identity. China's historiographical rhetoric refers having a unique, unitary cultural-political entity, ruled by a paramount leader. There was no example of having imperialist aspirations while attempting to downplay imperial legacies for managing contemporary ethno-national diversity.[337] In that regard, one of the contemporary discussions around the Han identity also refers to the rise of Chinese nationalism based on Han identity, the assimilation of ethnic minority groups, and an internal discussion on the promotion of Chinese culture, especially against Western cultural influences.

The philosophical or religious background of the society is one of traditional sources shaping the strategic culture. In China's case, the circular thinking pattern is quite different from the Western origins of philosophical thinking. One needs to search for the roots in the transition from Daoism to the dominance of Confucianism along with Mencius' teaching. Daoism restricts a person's mind with whatever is present around to enjoy since it suggests avoiding worry and requiring nothing more than those few things around them.[338] Thus, Daoism also standing aloof from activism in the political realm, which is suitable with the grand characteristic of the Tao, "inaction" or "action without effort" understanding of the *wu wei*.[339] Moreover, Daoism restricts the use of violence against human beings. Since the use of force has considered as an ineffective means of statecraft, that perception result in an anti-militaristic stance in the political realm.[340] Confucianism, on the other hand, has become the dominant philosophical teaching that actively interacts with both political and military domains. Confucianism was adopted as the state ideology

[337] James A. Millward, "Qing and Twentieth-Century Chinese Diversity Regimes", in **Culture and Order in World Politics**, Andrew Phillips, Christian Reus-Smith (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2020, p.71-72.
[338] A quotation from Szu-ma Ch'ien in Gung-Hsing Wang, **The Chinese Mind**, John Day Company, 1946, p.56.
[339] James Legge, **The Sacred Books of China The Texts of Taoism**, Oxford University Press, 1927, p.142.
[340] Arthur Waldron, "Chinese Strategy from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries", in **The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War**, Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.-102.

during the reign of Han Wudi of the Western Han Dynasty. Instead of clear restrictions, Confucianism tolerates the use of violence as a least-favoured means to protect individuals and the society. Confucianism seeks to rule nature while Daoism suggests living alongside nature. Even though Zhang argues that the use of force, or at least the threat of force, is central to the nation's history of warfare, it simply refers as a last choice in order to secure protection and the right of the Mandate.[341]

The two-thousand years-long dominance of Confucianism has played a central role in shaping the cognitive process of political elites from the emperor himself to the lowest officials. Since this philosophical teaching became the central basis of a good education and a qualification for selecting civilian and military officials.[342] It came to strengthen the totalitarian power of the emperor by hailing his centralized authority, his exemplary conduct in administration, and his personal virtue. The cultural codes in Chinese civilization tend to emphasize non-violence means over the use of force. Unlike the clear rejection of action and violence in Daoism, Confucianism uses force in rather excessive conditions as in the just war exception within Mencius' teaching. Mencius strengthened Confucian thinking by focusing on how to be a righteous person and a virtuous ruler. He was among the most significant contributors to the teaching, leading to the term the Confucian-Mencian tradition. Mencius's contribution to the Confucian teaching is that the morale of an army is even more important than its armament; which paved a way for righteous wars through moral instruments not only the moral of an army but also the reasoning of violence.[343] The righteous war has justified the protection of these virtuous norms and the elimination of those threats that harm the well-being of the people. So, the use of force is restricted to the defensive purposes. However, the use of defensive legitimization was often interpreted in each case's rhetoric in order to undertake offensive operations as well, such as the unification of the people under

[341] Shu Guang Zhang, "China: Traditional and Revolutionary Heritage", in **Strategic Cultures in the Asia Pacific Region**, Ken Booth and Russell Trood (eds.), Macmillan, 1999, p.31.
[342] There are Four Books as the basis of Confucian canon: Analects of Confucius, Great Learning (Daxue), Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong), and Mencius. There are also Five Classics of Confucian canon as Book of Poetry (Shijing), Book of Rites (Liji), Book of History (or Book of Documents, Shangshu), Book of Changes (I Ching), and Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu). The rank of the Classic of Music is controversial. Moreover, the Seven Military Classics were also read in the Ming period among scholars, civil or military officials, and political elites including the emperor. Daniel K. Gardner, **Confucianism: A Very Short Introduction**, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.81.
[343] Herrlee Glessner Creel, **Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Tse-Tung**, University of Chicago Press, 1953, p.81.

the righteous leadership and achieving the national unity. In any case, the use of force would not provide security. Therefore, that does not refer to the aggressive use of force but being reluctant to use force to resolve security issues while stressing the primacy of defence and defending national sovereignty. In that regard, Confucianism has been considered the philosophical basis of strategic culture that has reflected pacifism, anti-militarism, restricted aims in just war theory, and defensiveness in grand strategy.[344]

All these strategic outputs are based on the central norms of Confucianism such as virtue, benevolence, and righteousness for seeking the best for its people. It is rather similar to the national character approach. The mainstream scholarship on China used to apply these features to the national character of the Chinese people as a peace-loving nation that always opposes the excessive and offensive use of force. However, that should not mean that there were no crises in Chinese history that contradict the dominant pacifist philosophical teaching. In fact, the researches on the Chinese history and strategic culture started to challenge that orthodox view on only pacifist narrative.[345] If politics is highly connected with morality, the use of power has been understood as the demonstration of virtue itself in philosophical terms.[346] Zhang points to the impact of Confucian teachings on strategic culture can be regarded as fundamental principles and cultural moralism, instead of Johnston's cultural realist emphasis. Waldron also points to the misinterpretation of solely realist assumptions through Wang's arguments on military operations as the response to the anarchic system; instead, the real determinant was the recovery of lost territories.[347]

Zhang also argues that both Johnston and Zhang overemphasize the impact of the traditional sources of strategic culture on its present role while downplaying the

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[344] Yuan-kang Wang, **Harmony and War: Confucian culture and Chinese power politics**, Columbia University Press, 2011, p.14-19.
[345] Jonathan N. Lippman, Stevan Harrell, **Violence in China: Essays in Culture and Counter Culture**, State University of New York Press, 1989. Mark Edward Lewis, **Sanctioned Violence in Early China**, State University of New York Press, 1990.
[346] Rosita Dellios, "Chinese Strategic Culture: Part 1 - The Heritage from the Past", CEWCES Research Paper, April 1994. Rosita Dellios, "Chinese Strategic Culture: Part 2 - Virtue and Power", CEWCES Research Paper. November 1994.
[347] Yuan-Kang Wang, **Harmony and War Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics**, Columbia University Press, 2011. Arthur Waldron, "Harmony and War: Confucian Culture And Chinese Power Politics By Yuan-Kang Wang", **The Journal of Asian Studies,** Vol.70, No.4, 2011, p.1147.

role of Confucianism in general.[348] His arguments are rather close to the pure pacifist and only defensive elaboration of China's strategic culture, which has raised criticisms. Miracola argues that Johnston's active defence mentality ignores Chinese strategy which is also deeply committed to the development of aggressive or offensive expansionist policies in history.[349] The interpretation of strategic culture has been researched through the operational code of the political or military elites and the use of force in detail. These two issues have studied whether the Confucian-Mencian culture has able to constrain the use of force practices of China in the past or would it in the future.[350]

Furthermore, the ideology of the political regime is also an important element besides religion, philosophy, and other normative elements of the nations. The People's Republic of China has a unique experience in both having a socialist state following an imperial past and rather different conditions with an agrarian society in comparison to the European experiences of socialism. Even though Chinese regime holds its ideological ground as defining itself with the Socialism with Chinese characteristics, Bell argues the disrepute of ideology because of losing legitimacy in society by misuses, and especially by the further promotion of Confucian values.[351] On the other hand, the regime has also incorporated its ideological stance with its global role in the liberal world order. However, Socialism with Chinese characteristics is still an important element in shaping strategic positioning on different issues.[352] Xi Jinping, in that regard, incorporates that label with his Chinese Dream objectives to securing the success of these achievements and reaching a new era as he defines national rejuvenation.[353] Whether there is Chinese-style Socialism that could reflect traditional ways or not, it is the key element of the authoritarian

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[348] Tiejun Zhang, "Chinese Strategic Culture: Traditional and Present Features", **Comparative Strategy**, Vol.21, No.2, 2002, p.73-76.
[349] Sergio Miracola, **Chinese Strategic Culture: Origin, Organization, Operationalization, and Evolution of the People's War Doctrine**, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 2018, p.86.
[350] Huiyun Feng, **Chinese strategic culture and foreign policy decision-making: Confucianism, leadership and war**, Routledge, 2007.
[351] Daniel A. Bell, **China's New Confucianism Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society**, Princeton University Press, 2008, p.8-9.
[352] For further discussions on domestic politics see also: John Garrick, Yan Chang Bennett (eds.) **China's socialist rule of law reforms under Xi Jinping**, Routledge, 2016.
[353] Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era", The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, 18 October 2017.

rule in the country. It builds a narrative on ideological achievements and the Chinese Dream objectives in order to legitimize the new leader's political decisions.

Economic factors are often regarded as an important element in implementing the strategy through the available sources and means of the country. However, the economic condition of the country itself would be a strategic cultural ground as well. China, with all those narratives on its bourgeoning economy, would be an example of how economic development itself has been regarded among the key sources of strategy. In relations with other elements such as having an agrarian based rural economy for centuries, or the moral ground of Confucian understanding that prioritize equality, hard work, social responsibility, peace and harmony, and family instead of the free market.[354] Moreover, China has a socialist market economy, which was promoted by the *Boluan Fanzheng* (return to normal) political agenda and the Opening-Up economic policy and reform programs of Deng Xiaoping. These policies adopted some elements of market economy and capitalist practices for the purpose of a political end. The economic construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics, in that regard, studied in detail in order to explain China's economic conditions.[355]

Economic conditions have a wide range of effects on the legitimacy of the party rule, the living condition of the masses, the economic expectations of the expanding middle classes, the development goals of the regime, the global ambitions of the administrations based on economic capabilities such as the BRI, and the vital need for sustaining economic growth. In addition, the economic source of strategic culture means coming to terms with the Century of Humiliation. This can be achieved by attaining sufficient financial strength to prevent such threat and hailing the progress and achievements, especially under the PRC rule, which China has attained since then. Even though Xi Jinping's era has been criticized for rolling back those reforms by de-liberalization and increased state/party control of the economy, the economic growth is the fundamental issue in securing the party rule, domestic development, and international influence as the second-largest economy in the world.

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[354] Kazimierz Poznanski, Confucian economics: how is Chinese thinking different?", **China Economic Journal**, Vol.10, No.3, 2017, p.362-384.
[355] Yongxin Cao, "Socialist Factors in China's Economic Miracle and Development Achievements", **International Critical Thought**, Vol.10, No.1, 2020, p.1-17.

It has been argued that Xi's economic policies are changing the global power balances in China's favour. While Xi is building his personal leadership cult, his leadership is advocating an adjusted vision of his predecessors for the sake of "global" common prosperity. Therefore, China can reshape global trade relations and production patterns in a way that particularly benefits the Chinese state-owned sector.[356] Moreover, the BRI, as the trademark of Xi's global economic vision, has already brought back the economic factor of strategic culture in contemporary discussions on whether it affects China's strategic preferences.[357]

Political history is an important element in the formation of strategic culture. The historical background of the country including its traumas and victories shape the strategic imperatives of any country. The interpretation of the history through political narrative is as important as experiencing these different conditions. The narrative of those facts is critical in shaping the understanding of the elements pertaining to strategic culture in general. The historical experiences of the people, in that regard, are the most suitable ground for rebranding, recreating, promoting, or degrading historical facts in relation to the political agenda of the leadership. In the contemporary history of China, there were significant developments for almost two hundred years like the Century of Humiliation, the disastrous events of the World War II, the Civil War and Mao's Long March, armed conflicts with neighbouring countries such as India, and Korea, and more than two decades-long non-recognition of the PRC by the majority of the world.

The foreign relations of China reflect the closer historical bonds of the country in both discourse and action. That makes the historical background highly relevant to the formation of strategic culture as well as grand strategic preferences. The Century of Humiliation is crucial in understanding China's perception. This term refers to the era between the First Opium War until the end of China's Civil War in 1949 covering the Taiping Rebellion, the Boxer Uprising and the invasion of China, the Sino-Japanese War, Russian expansion in Manchuria (also known as sixty-four villages), the humiliation of missionary courts, the Chinese Civil War, and the

[356] Andreas Møller Mulvad, "Xiism as a hegemonic project in the making: Sino-communist ideology and the political economy of China's rise", **Review of International Studies**, Vol.45, No.3, 2019, p.449–470.
[357] Ume Farwa, "Belt and Road Initiative and China's Strategic Culture", **Strategic Studies** , Vol. 38, No. 3, Autumn 2018, p. 40-56.

Japanese invasion until the end of World War II, including the Massacre of Nanking.[358] Chinese foreign policy narrative emphasizes that China does not have any colonizer or imperialist ambitions but being a victim of them, so that, it builds its argument on the constant threat perception on Western and Japanese imperialism in the case of any weakness. This coincided with raising nationalism and national objectives of the new leadership. It may even explain any irrational political reactions through seeking revenge for what occurred in those decades of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Yet, this kind of historical experiences link internal weakness and external meddling in the eyes of society with the lively image of the political narrative on maintaining stability (as well as the regime itself) at home at whatever cost. It also makes each success in achieving political, economic, social, and cultural objectives much more valuable since each step forward has been considered as a glorifying accomplishment after such disastrous traumas in the history of China. This political narrative on being the victim of imperialism has been the backbone of China's foreign policy discourse in reaching those countries in the Third World since the Bandung Conference until now. It answers those criticisms of imperialism or colonialism with Chinese characteristics.[359] The theme of shared imperialist pressure and exploitation is one of the primary discourses in the exemplary Chinese-African dialogue and partnership.

What is significant for this study is addressing both domestic and foreign audiences through that political and cultural narrative on the Century of Humiliation. It keeps alive not only the emotions of hatred and humiliation but also the search for salvation among the domestic audience, especially in the formation period of the PRC. Moreover, national objectives can be legitimized through historical references like regaining the lost territories in the name of national interests. The recurring

[358] See also: David Scott, **China and the International System, 1840–1949: Power, Presence, and Perceptions in a Century of Humiliation**, State University of New York Press, 2008. Zheng Wang, **Never Forget National Humiliation Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations**, Columbia University Press, 2014. Martin Fromm, "Invoking the Ghosts of Blagoveshchensk: Massacre, Memory, and the Post-Mao Search for Historical Identity", in **China's Rise to Power**, Joseph Tse-Hei, Lida V. Nedilsky, Siu-Keung Cheung (eds.), Palgrave, 2012**,** p.139-163.

[359] "China's BRI – a new way of colonialism?", **Financial Times**, 7 May 2019. Anthony Kleven, "Belt and Road: Colonialism with Chinese characteristics", **The Lowy Institute for International Policy**, 6 May 2019.

humiliation theme provides a legitimizing ground for any revolutionary actions such as the "Great Leap Forward" or the "Cultural Revolution" since one can claim that those would serve to mitigate previous national traumas. This is one of the reasons for the Xi administration referring to the centennial goals of the country, which has to be achieved until 2049. In foreign relations, a simple example would explain how that trauma is still alive or being kept alive in diplomatic channels. Any visit of Japanese officials to the Yasukuni Shrine has met with a Chinese diplomatic reaction arguing that such a move is honouring Class-A war criminals of World War II and whitewashes Japan's war of aggression.[360]

As Callahan notes, national humiliation also enables a national salvation by the current leadership which also stems from the dichotomy of having security after previously living in insecurity.[361] It is the very foundation for achieving influence and regaining its self-interpretation of global status. The major example would be the PRC's widely recognition by international society in order to retake the permanent seat in the UNSC in 1971. These were regarded as overcoming the remnants of national humiliation for Beijing. It has also strengthened the cult of defence, the goal of national unification, and avoiding aggressiveness in realpolitik, not only in philosophical thinking. Finally, one of the major impacts of this factor shaping both strategic culture and grand strategic preferences is about Chinese expectations for equal treatment. If the Westphalian system was created through respect to sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and non-interference; the horizontal relations of China in the global system have to be established through that normative ground, equally among great powers.

[360] "The Statement by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang on Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Visit to the Yasukuni Shrine", 26 December 2013. "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Remarks on the Visits to the Yasukuni Shrine Made by Some Members of the Japanese Cabinet", 15 August 2014.

[361] William A. Callahan, "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism", **Alternatives**, Vol.29 2004, p.203.

3.1.3.2. Grand Strategic Preferences and China's Strategic Culture

The first generation of strategic culture discusses national character, which is the primary focus of each cultural approach. It highlights these elements shaping strategic culture as the sources of China's political outcomes. The second generation of strategic culture is critical in a post-structural nature, thus the concept has been regarded as an instrument to justify strategic behaviour. The second generation criticizes these cultural elements in order to show their limits of impact and justifier role due in political narrative. It is useful in a critical approach towards Chinese statecraft due to ideological differences from Mao to Deng and the trajectory of the rapid economic rise under an authoritarian regime. However, both generations examine cultural variables without differentiating strategic culture and strategic behaviour. The third generation of strategic culture scholars differentiate strategic behaviour as their trademark in order to study the relationship between culture and behaviour. Those scholars from the third generation specifically focus on the Chinese example in their explanations such as in Johnston's work. However, both Johnston and Scobell's argumentations are static and deterministic due to their positivist approach.[362] All scholarly approaches to China's strategic culture provide insights regarding Chinese decision making and political behaviour.

In searching for the defensive assertive feature of China's grand strategy, the political and strategic outcome of the cultural aspect has to be analysed critically since strategic culture shapes political behaviour in characteristic ways. It could present those reasons behind the defensiveness and assertiveness of grand strategic preferences by looking at how it reflects foreign policy and those debates in the literature on that subject. The political matters are dominant in the literature on Chinese history and military up until the cultural dimension that came into prominence by the 1990s. It is also important to note that, this cultural turn was also chosen by those studies on grand strategy that focus on the ancient dynasties of Chinese civilization. If the character of the nation has been shaped by it permanent

[362] Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture", **International Security**, Vol.19, No.4, Spring 1995. Andrew Scobell, "China's Real Strategic Culture: A Great Wall of the Imagination", **Comparative Security Policy**, Vol.35, No.2, 2014.

pacifist focus, that should be revealed in both historical and contemporary matters. This focus present a fertile ground in discussing the incorporation of strategic culture, foreign policy analysis, and grand strategy. Those works research on the relation between Chinese culture and military history, demonstrate the strategic and political behaviour of China primarily through its military.[363] It must be noted that, the end of the Cold War would further enable the cultural dimension on political analysis. China, thus, became the significant subject of those studies after the rising trends on studies on great power politics, the rapid political, social and economic transition since the death of Mao, the Tiananmen Square Protests, the debate on the communist regime's future after the dissolution of the USSR, and its rising power projection in that new global order, which would later called be as the rise of China phenomenon.

Those critics on having cultural emphasis will be presented before discussing those arguments on China's strategic culture. There was a significant turn in order to have a more realist emphasis by challenging the direct correlation between historical and cultural elements with contemporary developments, and the dominant narrative on China's strategic culture as pacifist. Some of those works denote the inconsistencies in the theoretical and philosophical framework and the political behaviour of the state throughout history. A comparison of the traditions between Chinese and other civilizations, especially Western, on the culture-strategy relationships is the first step of this cultural focus. The concept itself is also regarded as a clear differentiation between Chinese and other civilizations, especially with differences from the "Western" strategic culture. Through that concept, one might emphasizes that China is culturally different (might lead to superior self-perception) and has a natural position in the global environment as it was the "Middle Empire" of the world.

The military aspect is the first example to research the role of cultural factors on behaviour. Zhang and Yao, as an early example, argue that Chinese military thinking placed a priority on the human factor in society-military relations instead of

[363] Hans J. Van de Ven (ed.), **Warfare In Chinese History**, Brill, 2000. Bruce A Elleman, **Modern Chinese Warfare, 1795-1989**, Routledge, 2001. David Andrew Graff, **Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300-900**, Routledge, 2002. Peter Allan Lorge (ed.), **Debating War In Chinese History,** Brill, 2013.

weapon/military factor while prioritizing the justice over interest.[364] However, there are other arguments that reject the explanatory power of strategic-culture assumptions about having a Chinese-way of war-making in foreign disputes. Twomey explains his arguments on this subject through six themes as:

> *Chinese fears regarding the security implications of weakness at home; Chinese views regarding the hierarchical nature of international relations; Chinese preferences for offensive strategies; Chinese preferences for defensive strategies; risk acceptant Chinese strategy toward crisis management; Chinese propensity to strike first in military operations*.[365]

In any case, war has been considered offensive, costly, and destructive but there is an important mission for safeguarding territorial integrity. Consequently, China has to sustain a unified domestic structure in confronting any external threat or intervention in strategic thinking, which paves a way for as a legitimizer of all kind of action for that purpose.[366]

Nevertheless, the historical approach to finding a pattern of strategic thinking has failed to demonstrate that kind of continuum of a singular understanding. Yet, it has opened a way for incorporating cultural elements with political issues, starting from the field of security. Those pioneers of strategic culture studies on China had also searched not only military aspect in foreign relations but also political dimension of warfare. Those studies on strategic thinking emphasize the strength of the deeply rooted defensive Confucian tradition. However, there were eventually realist expectations for an aggressive and revisionist turn. Even though their expectations may differ on the same issues, it was a noteworthy turn in incorporating strategic cultural dimensions with grand strategy and foreign policy analysis. This has been highlighted in the internal dynamics of the Chinese state, especially the military, in order to understand not only the factual outcomes but also rhetoric and symbolism due to strategic cultural elements embedded in action and decision making process.

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[364] Zhang Junbo, Yao Yunzhu, "Differences Between Traditional Chinese And Western Military Thinking and Their Philosophical Roots", **Journal of Contemporary China**, Vol.5, No.12, 1996, p.209-221.
[365] Christopher Twomey, **Chinese Strategic Culture: Survey and Critique**, prepared for DTRA, October 2006, p. 5.
[366] Thomas G. Mahnken, **Secrecy and Stratagem: Understanding Chinese Strategic Culture**, The Lowy Institute for International Policy, February 2011, p.13-16.

China's strategic culture has been referred to as a predominantly defensive oriented, pacifist, and non-expansionist. China's strategic culture has been considered through six traditional Confucian themes as benevolence (ren), propriety (li), virtue (de), harmony (he), respect (xiao), and moral righteousness (junzi). Those arguments on protective and defensive attitude refer to the fundamental traditional sources of Chinese culture as the driving force of this political outcome. Some contemporary examples can be found to support those arguments such as China's declaration of the no-first-use policy on nuclear weapons on the same day, 16 October 1964; when it concluded its first nuclear test.[367] It was the first among nuclear powers to openly-declare its nuclear weapons were only a deterrent. Nevertheless, there are many critiques on those monistic perceptions and deductive results. Chen separates those strands into three as virtuous (the rule of Emperor), pragmatic (interpretation and flexibility), and force (hegemonic power). His classification is based with one differing solely based on force or shaping with the combination of virtue and force.[368] Johnston rejects that solely defensive oriented narrative due to Confucian-Mencius tradition. Even though defensiveness, anti-militarism, and minimal or non-violence themes of the Confucian-Mencian tradition were highly stressed; he argues that there were two dimensions of strategic culture that can be found as rooted in Chinese strategic tradition. This nature of strategic thinking provides flexibility in his argument for Chinese leadership in determining reactions according to adversaries' capabilities. The first one has indeed philosophically justified political behaviour by prioritizing the use of non-violence measures such as diplomacy or economic incentives to prevent such a threat. It is rather referred to acting strategically by "a long-term, deeply rooted persistent and relatively consistent set of assumptions about the strategic environment and about the best means for dealing with it".

Yet, there is a second strand that contradicts this stereotype by proposing that the ultimate way of dealing with threats is the elimination of them without disregarding the offensive strategies while prioritizing the efficacy of military

[367] Zhenqiang Pan, "A Study of China's No-First-Use Policy on Nuclear Weapons", **Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament**, Vol.1, No.1, 2018, p.115-116.
[368] Chen Xiangyang, Zhongguo Mulin Waijiao: Sixiang, Shijian, Qianzhan (China's 'Good Neighbour' Diplomacy: Thought, Practice, Prospects), Shishi chubanshe, 2003, p. 54-55, 77–79. from Zhu Zhongboy and Wang Ning, "Discourses on Salt…", p.282, footnote 50.

preparations and the application of violence to resolve these conflicts. It implies that the offensive or defensive behaviours of the state can be decided according to a rational calculation. In the Chinese case, his parabellum explanation has a realpolitik ground in practice and at the core of operational China's strategic culture. Johnston argues that there was no solely pacifist bias in that since it enables realpolitik measures, even as a dominant tendency.[369] Furthermore, Johnston also suggests that the Maoist period and its aftermath also affected China's strategic culture with their strategic commitments such as the centrality of class struggle and the notion of anti-imperialism, have demonstrated a degree of continuity in Chinese realpolitik strands.[370] Thus, one needs to assess critically the soft interpretation of the philosophical framework from Confucius to Sun Tzu. There could be further accomplishments as spreading the virtue of this philosophical tradition into the periphery. Yet, it does not conclude with offensive, aggressive, or "China Threat" type of outcomes as some realists would expect.[371]

Scobell denotes the references on Confucian understanding in China's strategic culture with the "Cult of Defence" theme. He argues that the decision making process of the Chinese elites has been affected by those six principles of China's Cult of Defence as domestic chaos-phobia, the concept of active defence, the Confucian just war theory, the goal of national unification, the heightened threat perception, and the emphasis on the welfare of the community.[372] Many of those elements may constitute every state's perception, so these are not unique to China's strategic sensitivities. Nevertheless, the importance of his arguments is not about those principles but the elaboration of the defensiveness theme through philosophical tradition. Scobell agrees with Johnston's arguments on the differences between the strategic cultural dimensions with Confucian-Mencius and Realpolitik aspects; however, unlike Johnston, it is not necessary to highlight one by choosing among

[369] Alastair I. Johnston, **Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Ming China**, Princeton University Press, 1995.
[370] Alastair Iain Johnston, "Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China", in **The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics**, Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), Columbia University Press, 1996.
[371] To found that realist tendencies in political analysis over the Rise of China phenomenon, see also: Thomas J. Christensen, "Chinese Realpolitik", **Foreign Affairs**, Vol.75, No.5, September 1996, p. 37-52. Daniel Lynch, "Chinese Thinking on the Future of International Relations: Realism as the Ti, Rationalism as the Yong?", **China Quarterly**, No. 197, March 2009, p. 87–107.
[372] Andrew Scobell, "Strategic Culture and China: IR Theory Versus the Fortune Cookie?", **Strategic Insights**, Vol.6, No.10, 2005, p.4.

alternatives. Scobell's argumentations based on both of these strands are operative and they constitute the dialectic nature of the cult of defence, together. Furthermore, he critically assesses the promotion of such a defensive-oriented nature and a narrative on cultural aversion to using force by the Chinese elites, which could concealing the offensive aspect of the Chinese military culture.[373] Johnston fails to explain why strategic culture evolves and how it influences the state's foreign policy behaviour, besides arguments driven by just behavioural patterns during wartime.[374] Scobell, however, has mainly focused on China's use of force during wartime so there is no possible ground for testing it since China has not been involved in any armed conflict since the end of the Cold War.

Feng and He also note the coexistence of those two strands in Chinese foreign policy orientation. What makes the difference is the perceived threat perception from the external threats. If China faces a low-level external threat, the Confucian-oriented political behaviour would shape non-violence, peaceful settlement means, and a high level of morality. On the other hand, the realpolitik strand will prevail over the Confucian one, encouraging more offensive and even risky pre-emptive behaviour in the case of China faces a high-level threat as noted in the geopolitical basis of China's strategic culture.[375] This approach coincides with neoclassical realism since its explanation on policy behaviour emphasizes all types of structural incentives and domestic intervening variables, both Confucian and realpolitik. The common themes of these two strands of strategic culture emphasize the grand strategic preferences. According to Zhang, these similarities are restraints on the use of force, self-sufficiency, defensive emphasis on security strategy, and the pursuit of comprehensive national power.[376]

Strategic culture refers to persistent preferences, yet it does not always refer to the unchangeable nature of the concept. Grand strategy also shares the same point by hard-to-change conceptual features yet does not logically require that it never

[373] Andrew Scobell, "China's Real Strategic Culture: A Great Wall of the Imagination", **Comparative Security Policy**, Vol.35, No.2, 2014, p.223.
[374] Andrea Ghiselli, "Revising China's strategic culture: contemporary cherry-picking of ancient strategic thought", **The China Quarterly**, No.233, 2018, p.168.
[375] Huiyun Feng, Kai He, "A dynamic strategic culture model and China's behaviour in the South China Sea", **Cambridge Review of International Affairs**, Vol.34, No.4, 2021, p.526.
[376] Tiejun Zhang, "Chinese Strategic Culture: Traditional and Present Features", **Comparative Strategy**, Vol.21, No.2, 2002, p.66.

change. Any change in strategic culture would have an explanatory power in the adjustment on grand strategic preferences, as neoclassical realism identifies it as a domestic intervening variable. It explains the continuum of grant strategic elements as well. The high threat perception on external pressure or development highlights the realpolitik strand due to the geopolitical and domestic security and the stability and development concerns of the country. On the other hand, the defensive oriented, so-called pacifist strand would prevail in the case of a stable environment without external pressure on those delicate matters. In the end, we need to adopt a dynamic approach to China's strategic culture that has a flexible nature depending on the trajectory of events. It is important to note that, both strands of strategic culture matter, but they interact with another realist variable, threat perception in influencing China's foreign policy behaviour. In this thesis, we adopt two strands of strategic culture in order to explain both the defensiveness and assertiveness of grand strategy under the Xi Jinping rule.

3.1.3.3. The Role of Political Elites on China's Strategic Culture

In the midst of all those discussions on strategic culture, in particular to the Chinese case, Hudson's review notes a critical element in the role of agents in the sense that culture lives only through human beings and what they believe must be the prior concerns of those scholars work on strategic culture.[377] There are two sides of the human factor in analysing the role of elites. First, the role of elites reveals the impact of leadership on political institutions.[378] Thus, the neoclassical realist approach also ranks the institutional behaviour and bureaucratic politics among other domestic elements in analysing foreign policy through the lenses of intervening variables. Second, the political elites have to be placed as a transmission belt with interests in linking those elements with society, institutions, political agenda, and domestic and foreign policies. Therefore, the Chinese state apparatus would see its place in the global order through the conception of the world in the eyes of Chinese

[377] Valerie M. Hudson, "Where Is Strategic Culture to Be Found? The Case of China", **International Studies Review**, Vol. 10, No. 4, December 2008, p. 785.
[378] As a detailed analysis on the relationship between politics and leadership in China, see also: David M Lampton, **Following The Leader**, University of California Press, 2014.

elites. As an historical example from Chinese understanding of the world order, the only a son of the Heaven can rule all under the Heaven. So, the scope of pun covers both China as the core of the world, as well as the whole world around that. Therefore, the order of the world has to be Sino-centric since the Chinese civilization is seen to be superior to non-Chinese cultures, mainly nomadic tribes around the civilizational core. The tributary system was also based on that overwhelming benevolence of the emperor in return to others consent and tribute to this superiority.[379] Those "barbaric" tribes around its continental borders have a whole different narrative on the same era. The Mandate of Heaven might not be perceived by different people, religions as having an attributed sense of superiority to Chinese people or benevolence to the Chinese emperor. If any Chinese world order had present in history; it is indeed shaped by the perception of Chinese elites of that time, rather than reached by the consent of all.

It must be noted that, this relationship between elites and strategic culture is not a one-sided interaction but a mutual one. Those individuals who serve as political elites have also shaped their ideas with the very outcomes of the cultural elements. In that regard, the second factor is to consider that those elements of strategic culture also shape the cognitive process of the elite's perception, either in supportive or critical ways. This is related to the long discussion about cultural factors shaping the decision making process, the objectives of political leaders, the role of institutions, and the limits of agents' role. Therefore, strategic culture has been regarded as emerging from two levels. The contextual basis of the socio-economic, geopolitical, historical, and philosophical factors form the first level of that. The latter is considered as instrumental beliefs of those cultural elements.[380] As Murray and Grimslay summarize, ideology and culture are not the only factors generate threats; instead, the perception derived by culture, usually shapes the choosing among

[379] Mark Mancall, "The Ch'ing Tribute System: An Interpretive Essay", in John King Fairbank, **The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations**, Harvard University Press, 1968, p.63-89. John K. Fairbank, "The Early Treaty System in Chinese World Order", in John K Fairbank, **The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations**, Harvard University Press, 1968, p.264.

[380] Alexander L. George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making", **International Studies Quarterly**, Vol.13, No. 2, June 1969, p.190–222.

alternatives.[381] The key role of political elites crystalizes in that exact selection moment, promoting or disregarding any options.

The role of elites has significance in shaping all other elements of strategic culture in the realm of politics. As Mao stated, "use the past to serve the present; the foreign to serve China", the political elites have an important place in reconciling the history and elements of strategic culture with pragmatic political outcomes.[382] It signifies authoritarian control not only on the narrative of history but also intellectual space before CCP rule since history could have a legitimizer role for any kind of political regime. All elements of strategic culture from historical backgrounds to philosophical understanding can be either promoted or degraded according to the latest political agenda. Moreover, the political elites promote their own way of understanding those features pertaining to strategic culture as from the ancient practices to the contemporary understanding. Therefore, Zhu and Wang also address the difference between two different manifestations of Confucian thought: one is the official ideology of Confucian culture; the other is the philosophical manifestation of Confucian culture.[383] It is the exact point where Chen refers to the formation of pragmatic kingship, a combination of virtue/justice and power/interests by the transition of ministers' idea from philosophical ground to practical official ideology, yet still misses the role of literati in interpretation.[384] The interpretation of political elites have been shaping, even the most well-known arguments on strategy and cultural elements to legitimize a new political action, an adjustment of political orientation, to keep alive some popular grievances, or mobilize popular support for a specific cause. In that regard, there is a trend in academia to review cultural background through philosophical and official texts such as semi/official articles,

[381] Williamson Murray, Mark Grimsley, "Introduction: On strategy", in **The Making of Strategy : rulers, states, and war**, Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, Alvin Bernstein (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.2

[382] For further details on this word, see also: Tina Mai Chen, "Use the Past to Serve the Present; the Foreign to Serve China", in **Words and Their Stories Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution**, Ban Wang (ed.), Brill, 2011, p.205-226.

[383] Zhu Zhongboy and Wang Ning, "Discourses on Salt and Iron and China's Ancient Strategic Culture", **Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol. 2, 2008, p.283.

[384] Chen Xiangyang, Zhongguo Mulin Waijiao: Sixiang, Shijian, Qianzhan (China's 'Good Neighbour' Diplomacy: Thought, Practice, Prospects), Shishi chubanshe, 2003, p. 54-55, 77–79. from Zhu and Wang, "Discourses on Salt…", p.284, footnote 53.

school books, or education materials of military officials.[385] Lynch notes the careful examination of these texts is required due to the overwhelming realist tendencies and securitization approach on cultural ground. These perceptions produce two typologies as China is still has a weakened position, so it is under threat; or China should adapt more assertive stance in international relations regarding its rise, sufficiently.[386]

Authoritarian regimes can quickly able to crystalize any rapid transformation regarding the change of domestic/global circumstances and the transition of leadership. Chinese political history demonstrates such rapid rise and fall of political elites due to their positioning to changing political narrative. The most prominent ones were happened in the rise and fall of the Cultural Revolution, the elimination of the Gang of Four, the leadership transition from Mao to Deng, and lately, anti-corruption campaign of Xi Jinping.[387] In the aftermath of the fall of Gang of Four from power, which included leading political figures such as Mao's last wife, the *Boluan Fanzheng* (return to normal) political agenda and Opening-Up economic reform programs of Deng Xiaoping have been promoted. The normal, in that regard, could be redefined by political transition by the new leadership in each time. Today, we can detach when those political agendas have been promoted such as the Great Leap Forward, or when they tried to forget some undesired outcomes such as the Great Famine of China by the instrumental use of narrative by the political elite.

Society is the most important keeper of the cultural features, so that political elites have to persuade the perception of the society. This persuasion attributes the highest priority to the role of political elites since they act as a transmission belt between the cultural artefacts and society in the interpretation of strategic culture and the promotion of cultural elements in accordance with contemporary political agenda. Furthermore, it is not only limited to the promotion of cultural elements but attributing those with the cult of the leader. So, the image of Xi Jinping refers to

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[385] See also: Ghiselli, 2018. Robert Weatherley and Coirle Magee, "Using the Past to Legitimise the Present: The Portrayal of Good Governance in Chinese History Textbooks", **Journal of Current Chinese Affairs**, Vol.47, No.1, 2018, p.41-69.

[386] Daniel C. Lynch, "Securitizing Culture in Chinese Foreign Policy Debates: Implications for Interpreting China's Rise", **Asian Survey** , Vol. 53, No. 4, July/August 2013, p. 630.

[387] Chi Hsin, **The Case of the Gang of Four**, Cosmos Book, 1977. Following the fall of the Gang of four in October 1976, this book was published by Chi Hsin, a pen name of a group of Chinese writers and journalists.

Confucian type benevolent, virtuous, and paramount leadership when he initiated anti-corruption campaign and legitimizing his political choices in grand strategy adjustment. In an internal education campaign aimed at improving the ethical conduct of party officials, "Three Sticks and Three Honests" may have roots in philosophical notion regarding honesty in decision making, personal behaviour and pursuit of a career as well as being strict in self-discipline, moral conduct and use of power. The anti-corruption campaign helps in building the cult of leader, virtuous image as well as eliminating opponents and rising corruption. Therefore, Xi's leadership has questioned whether his era revives a neo-Maoist experience in the 21st century considering his references to Mao's legacy.

The role of elites has a significance since there was a constant questioning of the previous era by the latest political leadership's such as Deng's and Zemin'a critiques on Mao's "serious mistakes", or in the latest, Xi Jinping's elaboration on the legacies of his predecessors, especially Mao himself as Gewirtz points out.[388] This thesis considers the Xi Jinping era as the third transition period of Chinese politics and China's grand strategy after Mao's and Deng's. His leadership promotes a new global vision for foreign relations as well as new objectives to mobilize the domestic the population like the centennial goals of China on 2021 and 2049, the centenary of the founding of the CCP, the end of the century of humiliation and the proclamation of the PRC, in achieving the "Chinese Dream". The role of political elites is also important to indoctrinate the legacies of predecessors, and motivate the society in order to support new political objectives and self-ascribed global role. The cultural narrative also shapes the self-image on its global role, which may be driven by Middle Empire perceptions. French considers new political and economic objectives as Chinese leaders' belief in a historical 'tributary system' like relations in a broadly defined neighbourhood.[389]

In conclusion, Chinese leaders will likely be influenced by both Confucian and realpolitik culture and prefer a limited and self-constrained offensive strategy under neither high nor low external threat conditions. In that regard, that neutral condition prioritizes the role of the leader more significantly. The political elites also

[388] Paul Gewirtz, "Xi, Mao, and China's Search for a Usable Past", **ChinaFile**, 14 January 2014.
[389] Howard French, **Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power**. New York, Knopf, 2017.

promote specific elements of strategic culture and the leaders' image for reshaping cultural elements before persuading the society through education, media, and all means of the state apparatus. China, like many other countries with a revolutionary past, has constructed and reconstructs its history to reach a usable past, which best serve its political purposes and promote an image of continual progress. Xi Jinping's proclamation of the Chinese Dream, and his political vision through national rejuvenation is just the latest part of that cultural articulation of historical experiences and ideological basis. It signifies that cultural, ideological, and philosophical elements are not monolithic and rigid since they can be reconstructed to best serve the purposes of today's conditions. Therefore, the mitigating role of strategic culture on grand strategy could be seen in relation to the role of decision makers and political leaders since they link the limits of leadership in promoting and degrading those elements depending on the political circumstances.

3.1.4. The Making of China's Grand Strategy

China's grand strategy preferences have gradually eliminate the remnants of bipolar systemic determinants by the 1990s. Even that bipolar world order, China had stand as a regional polar in his region, so that its political and economic preferences have gained much more attention. This China-focus has already began due to the opening up reforms, the expectation of liberalism for political liberalism after economic one. However, the widespread series of protests and demonstrations, which reached its zenith by the Tiananmen Square Incident, backlash such expectations. Yet the economic integration to the globalized world has not interrupted on the economic ground. One of the pioneer studies on China's post-Cold War grand strategy starts with the historical patterns in the country's political history.[390] Johnston connects strategic preferences in Chinese history, especially towards the Mongols in the Ming era, with the strategic culture and pattern in political objectives. The debated upon typologies of grand strategy are limited with the basic definitions of aggressiveness or defensiveness. Even though Johnston's arguments on offensive oriented realpolitik preferences with criticisms, his

[390] Alastair Iain Johnston, Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History, **Princeton University Press**, 1995.

deductions on the strategic preferences in the Ming era could be a first step towards founding the roots of grand strategic choices in strategic culture.[391]

In the early 1990s, China's grand strategy had prioritized repairing the country's reputation following the army crackdown on the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and reducing the ideological isolation following the decline of the bipolar conjuncture.[392] Beijing has developed a policy guideline that continued since that day. This guideline looks to establish stable bilateral relations by making official visits routinely but without intervening others' domestic issues. In addition, these official visits look to promote partnership by emphasizing shared interests, and develop of economic relations.[393] The aim is to depict an alternative great power image to work within the post-Cold War era. In that sense, economic growth and modernization enables a new momentum to increase Chinese economic capability in order to intensify political, diplomatic, military and economic capabilities.

For this reason, there is an ongoing debate on the trajectory of China's rise. As China has become the world's second-largest economy, Beijing's grand strategy policy that is based on foreign policy objectives through its own prioritization of national interests and means to pursue them, has expected to be more realistic and self-ascribed. In fact, a discussion surrounding China's grand strategy had already attracted scholarly attention in the early 2000s by not only revisiting a potential great power competition but also analysing the logic and implementations of *peaceful rise / development*, a home-grown label for the phenomenon of the rise of China. The first aspect of the debate on China's grand strategy concerns whether China has developed a grand strategy at all? The argument of incoherent foreign policy is the source of this critical comment on the existence of a grand strategy. These authors, who argued the lack of grand strategy, could be separated into two groups. The first group has mainly consisted of foreign experts on China which argue that China has been just responding to forthcoming issues in a complex manner without having a long-run plan or not even thinking about the repercussions or outcomes of its

[391] Huiyun Feng, **Chinese Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy Decision Making Confucianism, Leadership, and War**, London, Routledge, 2007, p.4. Tiejun Zhang, "Chinese Strategic Culture: Traditional and Present Features", **Comparative Strategy**, Vol. 21, No. 2, April 2002, p.73-90.
[392] Avery Goldstein, "The Diplomatic Face of China's Grand Strategy: A Rising Power's Emerging Choice", **The China Quarterly**, Vol.168, Dec. 2001, p.838.
[393] **Ibid.**, p.847.

reactions.[394] Thomas Christensen, for example, points out the contradicting and complex nature among the domestic and international security goals and strategic priorities of Beijing, for strengthening the arguments on the lack of a single integrated grand plan among alternatives.[395] The real problem in those critiques is the ambiguity of the future of China's political priorities. This stance could be interpreted as an endeavour against unpredictable great power moves of China as well as not being caught on the back foot, as an incompetent or unprepared response of other actors towards China.

The second group, on the other hand, largely consists of Chinese experts who shared the same view on the lack of a grand strategy and the reactive foreign policy orientation without a coherent foreign policy vision. The general opinion of Chinese scholars is that China was still a regional power in the Asia-Pacific region while a few of them defined its status as a global power.[396] When this position evolved through reclaiming great power status or a rising assertiveness, their standpoint emphasized adapting a great power activism. Zhu highlights the difference from the previous eras in order to legitimize the argument on the time has come for China to determine a global strategy. In fact, the real problem in such argumentation is about the need for building such coherent foreign policy and well-oriented grand strategy based on long-term fundamental national objectives.[397] That's why the major universities have established IR centres or respected journals such as World Economics and Politics (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), Journal of International Studies (Beijing University), Contemporary International Relations (China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations), or Quarterly Journal of International Politics (Tsinghua University) for developing, debating and promoting new perspectives.

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[394] Gerald Segal, "East Asia and the 'Constrainment' of China", **International Security**, Vol. 20, No.4, Spring 1996, p. 132. David Shambaugh, "China's security policy in the post-Cold War era", **Survival**, Vol. 34, No.2, Summer 1992, p. 93.

[395] Thomas Christensen, **The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power**, W. W. Norton & Company, 2015.

[396] Zhu Liqun, "China's Foreign Policy Debates", **European Union Institute for Security Studies**, September 2010, p.37.

[397] Shi Yinhong, "The rising China: essential disposition, secular grand strategy, and current prime problems", in Sasakawa Peace Foundation, **Asian voices: promoting dialogue between the US and Asia**, 12 February 2002.

Morgan-Owen acknowledges that an indirect attack on a grand strategy, especially the "need of a grand strategy" often implies criticism an official policy, which demonstrates the strategic incoherence of the administration's policies with a reference to the incapability to pursue a consistent policy.[398] Even though all these committees and party mechanisms that the official Chinese discourse notes, such an open criticism on an overall strategic vision would not be possible as open. However, such Chinese assessments often intend to lead present day foreign policy elites by proposing a policy framework either from referring to the history of the country or pointing a route for the future. Historical analogies could be manipulated in an instrumental way which may show similarities for today's political ends. Xi Jinping himself often used historical and cultural references to be more persuasive in explaining his administration's stance either on domestic or foreign policy.[399] As Breslin and Ren notes, the leader-influenced scholarship increases its chance to obtain funding for research that primarily works as an academic promotion of a leader's vision since they often match with the newly implemented policies.[400] The best example of these political/academic efforts can be seen in the establishment of the *Research Center for Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy*.

A first step towards discussing an existing grand strategy begins by claiming it as a global vision for progress. Grand strategy refers to the comprehensive logical framework behind the political vision of the regime or leader. However, China's case, it is quite contradictory to argue when exactly this global vision became apparent. One could go back to the transition from Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping to find the very first pattern of evolving foreign policy. The phrase, *keeping the low profile* was used by Deng Xiaoping as part of a clear description of both China's foreign policy as well as the country' political stance following the end of ideological isolationism. It marks the *24-character strategy* in foreign affairs to demonstrate an idealized foreign policy guideline based on the principles "observe calmly, secure our position, cope with affairs calmly, hide our capacities and bide our time, be good

[398] David Gethin Morgan-Owen, "Contemporary Issues in Historical Perspective History and the Perils of Grand Strategy", **The Journal of Modern History**, Vol. 92, June 2020, p.351.
[399] Lu Xinning, **Xi Jinping Anektodlar (Anecdotes and Sayings of Xi Jinping)**, Giray Fidan (tra.) Kopernik Kitap, 2019.
[400] Shaun Breslin, Ren Xiao, "Introduction: China debates its global role", **Pacific Review**, Vol.33, No.3-4, 2020, p.360.

at maintaining a low profile, and never claim leadership". The Cold War era, indeed, had a huge impact on the state's foreign affairs. Thus another significant time could be pointed as the post-Cold War era due to the collapse of the bipolar status quo and Beijing's need to put a positive spin on its global image and foreign affairs.

The early 2000s have been a significant time due to the unilateral world order discussions by the military interventions of the US on one side and China's decision to join international organizations such as World Trade Organizations (11 December 2001) to further open up its economy. A document-oriented aspect could underline the exact dates of the White Papers of the Chinese governments in 2005 and 2011 that continually set out a world vision as Peaceful Development. An economy oriented researches underscore the 2008 financial crisis in order to explain China's ascend in world politics and the success of its long-standing economic rise.[401] The other focus of research may emphasize the role of leader in the rule of Xi Jinping and how it shapes the grand strategy vision by looking at Xi's domestic reforms or foreign policy preferences. Regardless of the exact date of its emergence from obscurity, there has been an ongoing debate on China's grand strategy.

Goldstein underscores the 1990s as a period in which China's grand strategy which had already started in the mid-1980si inevitably was updates in two main ways: establishing multiple channels, dialogue, and diplomacy for partnerships, as well as activism in foreign affairs to better suit great power responsibilities and reputation.[402] In fact, these broad components are still one of the uninterrupted bases in Beijing's foreign affairs in addition to its acting as an influential and responsible international actor for the reduction of concerns on China's rise. Goldstein's study specifies four grand strategy options, which are hegemony, balancing, bandwagoning, and isolationism, and he explains the belated choice of Beijing in terms of shortcomings connected to all alternatives.[403]

What is important in this study is not the limiting of Beijing's grand strategy craftsmanship with these four alternatives. Instead, it points to the use of transitional

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[401] John G. Glenn, **China's Challenge to US Supremacy Economic Superpower versus Rising Star**, Palgrave, 2016. Brantly Womack, "International Crises and China's Rise: Comparing the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the 2017 Global Political Crisis", **The Chinese Journal of International Politics**, 2017, p.383–401. Eric Helleiner, **The Status Quo Crisis: Global Financial Governance After the 2008 Meltdown**, Oxford University Press, 2014.
[402] Goldstein, **op.cit.**, 2005, p.29-30.
[403] **Ibid.**, p.30-40

strategy as an alternative strategic option, which China has followed until it regained its true great power status. It is argued that there is a constant need for a peaceful environment and an ambiguity in the future of this strategic option if it will be successful. The grand strategy in progress in that regard refers to the era after China was positioned as great power in world politics. On the contrary to Goldstein's accommodationist strategy, the studies of Sutter and Wang denote the sense of vulnerability in the mind of political leaders with the result of this reactive foreign policy orientation.[404] Given the highest priority in terms of regime security, the post-Cold War conjuncture creates an insecure environment for the CCP in the decline of communism, a new wave of democratic transition, and nationalism on the rise. These factors have challenged the administration's ability to manage Chinese foreign policy by creating a constant threat perception on the part of the CCP rule with an increasing sense of vulnerability and insecurity.

Heath's article traces grand strategy formulation from the official documents of the Communist Party of China, especially policy documents and speeches in the 2007 Party Congress.[405] There is no alternative except to build a national strategy that works for the survival of the CCP. Therefore, its political guidance on strategic alternatives has to be analysed to demonstrate strategic objectives of the party alongside the country. There is no end to the party's thinking of the future policies, and therefore Heath's position inevitably continues to see the grand strategy as in progress. Zhang adapts a more theoretical approach to this debate suggesting us to neither prioritize domestic over international factors nor the opposite as in general IR theories.[406] His study connects the process of grand strategy formation to the changing character and nature of the country's interests, and thus he argues for a view of China that has not developed a premeditated grand strategy during this period due to the changing nature of the elements in China's foreign policy.

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[404] Robert G. Sutter, **Chinese Foreign Relations: Power and Policy Since the Cold War**, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012, p.12. Fei-Ling Wang, "Beijing's Incentive Structure: The Pursuit of Preservation, Prosperity, and Power," in **China Rising: Power and Motivation in Chinese Foreign Policy**, Yong Deng and Fei-Ling Wang (eds.), Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005, p.19-50.

[405] Timothy R. Heath, "What Does China Want? Discerning the PRC's National Strategy", **Asian Security**, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2012, p. 54–72.

[406] Zhang Feng, "Rethinking China's grand strategy: Beijing's evolving national interests and strategic ideas in the reform era", **International Politics**, Vol. 49, No.3, 2012, p.318–345.

The era of the opening up reforms, therefore the changing dynamics in grand strategy formation, starts with the 1980s. The passive reactive nature of strategic choice continued until it was transformed into a proactive reactive category. Much research marks the era as from 2008 as an economic cornerstone pointing to the global financial crisis and the organization of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and the Shanghai Expo 2010.[407] It is suggested as the beginning of a new grand strategy in progress in its being a transition from a proactive reactive strategy choice to a redefinition of the new era. However, the new grand strategy has argued for having an assertive turn while it has no clear evidence in terms of national interest, strategic ideas, or policy approaches but is rather based on recent Chinese behaviour having multiple and contradictory factors in policymaking.

Considering its critical timing, Wang's article could stand out as a Chinese pre-emptive response to the escalation of threat perception and an overall reaction to the debate on China's grand strategy.[408] His article is important in three ways. First, it has aimed at reaching a foreign audience and politicians since was published in English and in a prominent journal of the US, namely Foreign Affairs. Secondly, Wang Jisi was not an ordinary researcher, but was prominent in the academics of Beijing University, as well as being a foreign policy adviser to the Hu Jintao administration. In fact, he commented on the grand strategy debate in an interview in 2008 as:

> *I do not deny the importance of a 'grand strategy', but at present there is no strategy that we could come up with by racking our brains that would be able to cover all the aspects of our national interests, so we can only determine priorities in a general manner*.[409]

Thirdly, the article has emphasized that there are components for the evolution of a grand strategy while repeating that there is no official declaration of a finalized, comprehensive strategic vision but also suggests that other parties, especially the US, might coexist with this grand strategy projection. It frames potential threats and opportunities through possible reactions on the re-birth of a

[407] Pu Xiaoyu, "China's International Leadership: Regional Activism vs. Global Reluctance", **Chinese Political Science Review**, Vol.3, No.1, 2018, pp.48-61.
[408] Wang Jisi, "China's Search for a Grand Strategy A Rising Great Power Finds Its Way", **Foreign Affairs**, Vol.90, No.2, March/April 2011, pp.68-79.
[409] Wang Jisi, "US Power / US Decline and US-China Relations", **The Asia-Pacific Journal**, Vol.6, No.11, 01 November 2008.

great nation and how the rest of the world has to perceive of the rise of China as not being a threat. According to Pu, the domestic audience could be more important for rising powers than the international one in such status signalling behaviour.[410] Yet such a publication emphasizing the ascent of a great power, better influences target audiences considering the contradicting global strategic choices and the prospects on great power competition.

From the discussion so far it can be demonstrated that the argument of an incoherent global vision would lead to a study on contradictory political objectives in different directions. First, it might hold that the policy making process remains steady and incompetent due to contradictory factors when a decision was needed in the practice of foreign policy. One could emphasize having a grand strategy in flux as a weakness in articulating coherent policy since the very basic core has been the deficit as being a struggle within itself.[411] Qin tries to overcome this critique by suggesting a middle way approach between the pragmatic and contradictory nature in Beijing's grand strategy. His study has pointed the Zhongyong dialectic, which suggests taking a middle course is more appropriate than any extreme behaviour that might disable a step back. This distinctive adaptation has a middle way approach in order to be promoted based on the core considerations of the Chinese mind-set and Confucian philosophy.[412] The contradicting nature of grand strategy would result in a deficit in pursuing policy since each decision might be a step forward for one objective but backward step for another. If it is not possible to overcome the contradictory elements in the global vision, it might require the sorting out of priorities in order to improve the country's means to reach national interests.

Secondly, the remaining pragmatic nature could be its strong suit in terms of policy orientation and the articulation of foreign policy in a flexible way either for the adjustment or continuity of grand strategy.[413] This attitude can also be seen as

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[410] Pu Xiaoyu, **Rebranding China: Contested Status Signalling in the Changing Global Order**, Stanford University Press, Year: 2019, p.28.

[411] For an analysis that points out this contradicting nature, see: Buzan, **op.cit.**, 2014, p.381-420. Denny Roy, "China's Grand Strategy Not Absent, Just Contradictory", **Asia Pacific Bulletin**, No.292, December 2014.

[412] Qin Yaqing, "Continuity and Change: Background Knowledge and China's International Strategy", **The Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol. 7, No. 3 2014, p. 285-314.

[413] For an example of implementation of this argued pragmatic stance on boundary disputes, see: Eric Hyer, **The Pragmatic Dragon China's Grand Strategy and Boundary Settlements**, UBC Press, 2015.

China's calculative grand strategy, when China's decisiveness in sustaining its transition from a relatively weak position to being a great power status without creating a threat perception to other countries is considered. Even though these pragmatic and calculative features do not enable all-encompassing rapid shifts, each option would be available for such a vision. These options are that this strategy might evolve in time into a more assertive behaviour if China increases its capabilities enough. Thus, this pragmatic nature has become a difficult search for a conditional global vision, which is contrary to the unsteadiness of the first path. These multiple identities of China work for multiple audiences, both domestically and internationally because of the pragmatic nature creates varied political dimensions.[414] This aspect also explains the reasons behind the coexistence of contradicting standpoints that simultaneously have multiple perspectives which makes it difficult to define its interests coherently and to implement a decisive policy. However, Pu argues that such a pragmatic nature works for the overcoming of the pressure coming from these different audiences to project different images.[415]

Thirdly, an incoherent global vision causes constant debate as to what political shift is possible for any kind of contemporary development. However, in search of such a grand strategy, we need to take notice of long term political objectives and national interests instead of daily debates on ordinary issues. However, what makes Yan's arguments interesting is his calling such a shift from a weak position to a great power status as an achievement that has to be reached.[416] Whether it requires a selective engagement with problematic issues, especially national objectives or a constant endeavour for this achievement, a foreign eye could easily consider *striving for achievement* as another ambitious attempt or inevitable assertive turn in regaining a great power status.

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[414] Li Shaojun, 'China's Dual-Identity Dilemma and Its Countermeasures" in Shao Binhong (ed.) **The World in 2020 According to China Chinese Foreign Policy Elites Discuss Emerging Trends in International Politics**, Brill, 2014, p.51-68.

[415] Pu Xiaoyu, "Controversial Identity of a Rising China", **The Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol.10, No. 2, 2017, pp.48-61.

[416] Yan Xuetong. "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement." **The Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol.7, No.2, 2014, p.153-184.

3.2. DEBATE ON CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY: "OFFENSIVE" OR "DEFENSIVE"?

The significance of China in world politics has been branded as the key factor shaping international affairs in the 21st century. However, global affairs in the contemporary world order and regional affairs in the Asia-Pacific have not only been shaped by China's decisions but also by others' perceptions of Beijing's policies. Thus, these actions and other states' perceptions can be seen in the debate on China's grand strategy. There are two primary labels for China's grand strategy, which deserve attention. In this section, two prominent arguments on China's grand strategy will be analysed. Studies on China have to move beyond the rising label since China is a country that has already risen to great power status considering the country's achievement for decades, yet the distinction between peaceful rise and assertive rise (mainly aggressive assertiveness) could denote positive and negative interpretations of the choices of a rising power. It can be understood as two possible paths of a status quo challenger, a future hegemon, or just a country following a developmental path for its future. This distinction can be found in the seminal work of Galtung as a negative peaceful rise and positive peaceful rise.[417] The first requires an environment of military confrontation, rising trends in threat perception, and even the use of force, while the second path could be followed in a peaceful and friendly environment with mutual trust.

Buzan and Cox, like Galtung, clearly name the two scenarios for a rising power as the warlike rise and the peaceful rise.[418] Their explanation was shaped by the examples of some rising powers of the past, especially Japan and the European powers. The Chinese official discourse to avoid such a warlike trajectory as in such examples also affected the arguments of China. Miller extends such a dichotomy in explaining the positive and negative meaning with rather neutral standpoints such as normal peace and cold peace in between the two poles.[419] The Cold War has brought the temperature metaphor into prominence, and the Cold Peace definition

[417] Johan Galtung, "Foreign Policy Opinion as a Function of Social Position", **Journal of Peace Research**, Vol.1, No.3-4, 1964, pp.206-230.
[418] Buzan and Cox, **op.cit.**, 2013, p.111-115.
[419] Benjamin Miller, **States, Nations, Great Powers**, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.42-48.

demonstrates the tension in great power politics. Buzan's study also adapts a temperature metaphor in the guise of "hot, warm and cold" while modelling different degrees of tension in the international environment. His study suggests a "warm peaceful rise" for China despite China's being more inclined to "the cold peaceful rise" designation.[420]

Even though some Chinese scholars advocate the sustaining of an underdog position, the existence of competition, problematic issues, and threat perception are real. Therefore, many studies of Chinese scholars which have a more optimistic outlook in comparison to those predicting a new Cold War, call for a new model in competitive co-existence, avoiding destructive competition with the effective settlement of disputes, and the reassuring of the rest of the world.[421] Moreover, the official discourse among Chinese foreign policy elites clearly rejects any path that leads to another conflict and confrontation as seen in State Council or and Foreign Minister Wang Yi's words:

> *China will not condone those people, who want to drag China and the US into renewed conflict and confrontation and plunge the world into chaos and division again. We reject any attempt to create a so-called "new Cold War", because it contravenes the fundamental interests of the Chinese and American peoples and the global trend toward development and progress. The Cold War, which inflicted great suffering on the world, should not be allowed to repeat itself. Peace and development is what all countries aspire to. Anyone who tries to start a new Cold War in the 21st century will be on the wrong side of history and will only be remembered as the one who has upended international cooperation*.[422]

Thus, the peaceful rise and assertive rise perspectives present the most contradicting scenarios in explaining the possible options for China to follow. However, another Cold War dichotomy and USSR-China comparisons are not productive analogies but rather merely a good reminder as to whether similar logical evidences are present enough in China's ascendance. In this section, I will analyse the arguments and critiques of two main options in defining China's grand strategy before adapting a middle way in between which is defensive activism.

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[420] Buzan, **op.cit.**, p.403-419.
[421] Minghao Zhao, "Is a New Cold War Inevitable Chinese Perspectives on US–China Strategic Competition" **The Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol12.No.3, 2019, pp.371–394.
[422] "Interview on Current China-US Relations Given by State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Xinhua News Agency", **Xinhua**, 5 August 2020.

3.2.1. The Defensive Grand Strategy Aspect: Peaceful Rise/Development

The economic success story of China is a fact that has gained attention for decades. Its reflections on the country's foreign relations have been in question in terms of whether it causes an assertive turn or sustains a stance in the way of peaceful coexistence. In that regard, Beijing has persistently rejected the term of "*the rise of China*". Instead, Chinese officials, especially Premier Wen took the initiative to spread the peaceful rise concept by first using the term in a speech at Harvard University and continually using the *peaceful* adjective in defining his country's political position.[423] Even though the label of the country's foreign affairs has changed many times, such as peaceful development, peaceful relations, peaceful coexistence, peaceful rise, or peaceful reunification, yet the manner is stable until its removal gained attention under the Xi administration.[424] We can see a similar confusion resulting from the use of multiple terms for different issues such as the names of the Belt and Road Initiative or defining centennial goals. Also, such an emphasis on words and definitions reveals that Chinese self-perception still emphasizes being in the condition of a developing country, which has a long way to go towards reaching a developed country level. The need for a peaceful environment is a key factor in order to strive for achievement, avoid unnecessary threats in the era of weakness and vulnerability, and to avoid creating a threat perception in the minds of others to sustain its development. Therefore, Wen firstly stated the essence of the peaceful rise and development is based on a dedication to peace, increase in the quality of the population and scientific research, investing in innovation and improving the market economy by expanding the market, improving savings and solving environmental problems.[425]

As the source of a grand strategy vision, the roots of a principle of peaceful relations could be found since the 1950s. The resolutions of the Bandung Conference and the ideals of the Non-Aligned Movement laid the foundation for Beijing's first

[423] Wen Jiabao, "Turning Your Eyes to China", Speech by Premier Wen Jiabao at Harvard University, 10 December 2003. "Premier Wen: China on the Road of Peaceful Development", 14 March 2006. "Wen: China will focus on peaceful development", **China Daily**, 24 September 2010. Even the removal of that adjective has gained attention under the Xi administration.
[424] "China drops word 'peaceful' in latest push for Taiwan 'reunification'", **Reuters**, 22 March 2020.
[425] Wen Jiabao, "Turning Your Eyes to China", Speech by Premier Wen Jiabao at Harvard University, 10 December 2003.

steps towards the Third World during the Cold War. The foreign policy ideals based on mutual trust, peaceful coexistence, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression and non-intervention into domestic affairs, and partnership and mutual benefit (the win-win concept) are still being emphasized in an effort to demonstrate the good intentions of China in its bilateral relations. Unlike the pursuing of the same ideological priorities of the Mao era, his successors sustained a peaceful stance in foreign affairs while promoting a new path for China's global vision. For the purpose of solving the domestic and international problems of the country, Deng Xiaoping's new foreign policy doctrine has changed grand strategy paradigms from revolution and struggle to peace and development with an emphasis on economic development and stability for its region and the world.[426] The essence of this defensive mentality can be found in the 24-Character Strategy, which Deng promoted, and is based on holding position, hiding capabilities and biding time. China could follow a unique path not only in terms of modernization and development but also in having a sense of Chinese nationalism and independence in the approach called "keeping a low profile" and "building socialism with Chinese characteristics". Thus, the legacy of Deng has shaped China's view of the world, economic priorities, and conduct of diplomacy through landmark reforms that shift grand strategy preferences.

Zheng Bijian, another advisor of Hu, and an intellectual figure within the CCP, introduced the term "peaceful rise" for the first time in the plenary session of the Bo'ao Forum for Asia on 3 November 2003.[427] His publications and speeches aim to reach the foreign audience following the same pattern of Wang's publication on China's grand strategy.[428] Zheng's arguments have started by demonstrating the change in China's economy, infrastructure, and social development since the 1970s. His standpoint is based upon these developments, which are based upon an open economy, social welfare, and a growing market, which must be seen as the correct

[426] Zhang Feng, "Rethinking China's grand strategy: Beijing's evolving national interests and strategic ideas in the reform era", **International Politics**, Vol. 49, No.3, 2012, p.322.
[427] Zheng Bijian, "A New Path for China's Peaceful Rise and the Future of Asia", in **China's Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian 1997-2005**, Brookings Institution Press, 2005, p.14-19.
[428] Zheng Bijian, "China's New Road of Peaceful Rise and Chinese-U.S. Relations", in **China's Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian 1997-2005**, Brookings Institution Press, 2005, p.1-13.Zheng Bijian, "China's "Peaceful Rise" to Great-Power Status", **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. 84, No. 5, September-October 2005, pp.18-24.

targets of the country's global vision of rising in peace with its commitment to and participation in economic globalization. The essence of this change could be found in grand strategic preferences as a result of the historic opportunity created by Deng Xiaoping and following leaders, by shifting the country's priorities and grand strategy towards economic prosperity and development. In addition to that, his article also indicates that China could seek three different grand strategies. Unlike the mentalities of the old great powers, Beijing should avoid industrialist/capitalist ambitions as well as ideological hegemonic challenge for the sake of building a harmonious society and sustaining its peaceful rise through economic development.

Danner criticizes this study in that it underscores multiple choices of grand strategy based on multiple characters of China. Domestically and internationally driven policy orientations should be differentiated from well-established grand strategy components. Among Zheng's choices, as depicted above, only the second one, an ideological hegemonic challenge, could be seen as a proper grand strategy rather of domestically driven visions in others.[429] The main argument of Zheng's study presents a need to counter rising concerns on the rise of China phenomenon by promoting a kind of assurance about China's peaceful rise. It refers to Beijing's lasting commitment to peace as in its long route from an underdeveloped background, and its continuing emphasis on being a developing country. Therefore, there is no need for other great powers to develop a threat perception in response to a country that is still on the route of being a developed country. China also maintains a close rapport with other developing states by presenting itself as a success story and a model for cooperation. The absence of a colonizer background or an imperialist agenda has been constantly emphasized in describing relationship frameworks. It also works for Pu's argument on grand strategy implementations for multiple audiences in depicting itself as the voice of the developing world or underdeveloped Global South.

However, the term of peaceful development would be promoted instead of a peaceful rise no later than a decade in accordance with this apprehension on terminology. This wordplay might be seen as a terminological pun but it aims to get rid of any offensive meaning that could come from the word rise. Luttwak argues

[429] Lukas K. Danner, **China's Grand Strategy, Contradictory Foreign Policy?** , Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p.35-37.

that a common theme can be found in a pattern of global vision even though such a terminological flow is present in discourse. His study summarizes that what this grand strategy offers is six guarantees, which also work for the ruling out of threatening possibilities such as not seeking to shape the world system but to coincide with what the international system demands in order for China to join it; not to seek a regional or global hegemonic role, to avoid the use of force to realize its territorial or maritime claims, not to seek such an ascent in military capability as achieved in the economic field, to abide by the existing common rules and norms, and to seek a peaceful solution for Taiwan as well as in other long waited but peaceful returns of territories.[430] All of these six guarantees that Luttwak notes are about concerns as to the possible transition of the economic success story of China into a military capability as well with assertive and hegemonic ambitions in relations to the world order.

Buzan's study on peaceful development as a grand strategy starts with a straight answer as to whether China has a grand strategy. Buzan argues that China indeed has a grand strategy with a comprehensive vision on how the world system works and how China should built its self-image in consideration of others' perception and its own priorities in terms of development.[431] Buzan categorizes that key components of this grand strategy into two groups. What China aims to achieve in its peaceful rise grand strategy is to maintain economic development, to establish cooperative relations starting from its neighbours, and to achieve a more multipolar world order by reducing US domination.

What China tries to avoid in this global vision is eliminating any challenge towards regime security, domestic stability, and territorial integrity, as well as to turn other states' perception on its threatening status. While old powers are declining to a certain extent, new powers are able to emerge with their own style due to the conditions of the evolving global order. Beijing, in that regard, chooses a path that avoids unnecessary confrontations and contradictions due to the peaceful rise concept for now. To address the future projection of this situation, the most significant indicator of assertiveness would be China's vision to modify the global

[430] Edward N. Luttwak, **The Rise of China vs. the Logic of Strategy**, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012, p.274-276.
[431] Buzan, **op.cit.,** 2014, p.387.

order or to what extent it can sustaining its development within the existed framework.[432] These critiques of the peaceful rise perception precisely point out this transformation in Chinese discourse to safeguarding its interests. In that regard, the limits of the peaceful rise grand strategy can be seen when such a confrontation becomes necessary to protect national interest.

Moreover, this stance is not limited to self-defined policy orientation but also includes advice that can inform others political perception on world politics and on bilateral relations with China itself. As an example, the Chinese State Counsellor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi has argued that:

> *Cooperation is the best and only viable option for China and the US. We urge the US to get cool-headed, put its China view and world view in proper perspective. Let its China policy back to correct track, work for a relationship of no conflict, no confrontation mutual respect and win-win. We should jointly find a way of peaceful coexistence and mutual benefit between two great nations on this planet with different social systems, development paths, histories and civilizations*.[433]

As seen in the official statements and white papers, China has sustained its evolving but firm commitment to the peaceful rise/development perspective up to today.[434] The official discourse emphasizes China not being a threat but rather a partner in win-win cooperation, safeguarding international order underpinned by international laws and norms, and placing its grand strategy rationale on backdrop of domestic economic development and mutual benefit with partners.[435] These factors empower arguments viewing China's grand strategy through the lens of a peaceful rise perception, besides increasing expectations of leaving behind a revolutionary revisionist vision order to be a responsible, status quo-oriented world power that joins and works with the international community.[436]

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[432] Thomas J. Christensen, **The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power**, W. W. Norton & Company, 2015.
[433] Wang Yi, "Wang Yi talks about 2019 China-US Relations: China-US should jointly find a way of peaceful co-existence", **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC**, 13 December 2019.
[434] **White Paper on China's Peaceful Development Road**, Information Office of the State Council, 22 December 2005. **White Paper on China's Peaceful Development**, Information Office of the State Council, 9 September 2011.
[435] Dai Bingguo, "We must stick to the Path of Peaceful Development", **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC**, 6 December 2010. Wang Yi "China voices support for multilateralism at UN conference", **Xinhua** 17 July 2020.
[436] Alastair Iain Johnston, **op.cit.**, 2003, p.50.

3.2.2. The Offensive Grand Strategy Aspect: Assertive Rise

Assertiveness has commonly referred to having a self-assured stance without being aggressive, so that it has become a common descriptor in commentaries on China. These different features of power that a country possesses, projects, and professes, constitutes the assertiveness of how a country claims rights over something, along with how others perceive that overall capability.[437] Chinese leaders and academics have always attached importance to *overall national strength* in spite of referring constantly to the peaceful ends of development in their speeches or studies.[438] Deng's emphasis on socialist modernization and living standards in explaining the overall strength of a socialist state transforms into the significance of development with the role of science, technology, and innovation in the era of Jiang and Hu.[439] In relation to Deng's famous motto, hide your strength and bide your time, China indeed put priority on its economic development. However, that should not mean a total sacrifice of its military capabilities in order to focus on economic priorities. On the contrary, this economic success would work both as a display for the country's success story and kind of a cover for military capability and armament efforts. Since the 2008 global financial crisis, many studies have begun to question the expiration date of Deng's cautious and defensive mentality pointing to the change in the distribution of power, the emergence of new economic interests, and new domestic expectations after thirty years of transformations. Chen and Wang's article presents a comprehensive analysis, surveying the assertive turn by leaving behind this cautious dictum and also presenting the domestic discussion over the modification of the principles.[440]

Research on China's assertive turn in grand strategy focus on three core variables in explaining political and economic objectives, domestic needs, and strategic impediments: national power, territorial claims, and strategic culture.

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[437] Stephan De Spiegeleire, **Great Power Assertivitis**, HCSS StratMon 2016, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2016, p.17-18.
[438] Honghua Men, **China's Grand Strategy A Framework of Analysis**, Springer, 2020, p. 35-37.
[439] Jiang Zemin, **On the Development of China's Information Technology Industry**, Academic Press, 2009. "China Focus: Xi calls for developing China into world science and technology leader", **Xinhua**, 29 May 2018.
[440] Dingding Chen, Jianwei Wang, "Lying Low No More?: China's New Thinking on the Tao Guang Yang Hui Strategy" **China: An International Journal**, Vol.9, No.2, September 2011, pp. 195-216.

National power constitutes the material basis of assertive grand strategy whether it signifies capability in terms of the military, economic, technologic, innovative fields or of the attractiveness, influence, and agenda setting as an end of a soft power. In the wake of the introduction of the Chinese Dream, the role of the PLA became more significant in the reaching of this concept's objectives.[441] This means that the Chinese Dream is also a strong-army objective and vice versa. The recent climax of these efforts for a strong army was crystalized by Xi's remarks on reforms and his vision for his country with both a prosperous economy and a strong military.[442] Ideas embedded in strategic culture, on the other hand, constitute both ideological and cultural motivations behind the actions of political elites and decision makers in terms of promoting them as well as avoiding others. Thus we can evaluate the importance of strategic culture whether seen in the policy perception of political leaders, foreign policy elites, domestic institutions, military bureaucracy, or ideas driven by the strategic culture of the country. Territorial claims and maritime disputes have been used to strengthen the China Threat narrative and arguments on its revisionist agenda, in terms of disrespect to other states' national sovereignty even though the capability to realize such claims raised high concerns among researchers.[443] Yet, the roots of such claims also demonstrate the historical continuity within the ideas of centrality, superiority, and the cultural background of the country's policy perception on the regions around its borders as being the middle of the earth. It can be found in the very name of China, *Zhongguo*, means *the central state, or the middle kingdom* in Mandarin.

Xi's vision for his country has been considered the start of a new and complex assertiveness for the pursuit of strategic objectives in the long run while adapting more coercive measures against other countries rather than sharing mutual benefits.[444] In that regard, the security dilemma would be a useful theoretical ground in order to explain the assertive rise perception of China's grand strategy. The

[441] Liu Mingfu, **The China Dream: Great Power Thinking & Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era**, CN Times Books, 2015, p.167-190.
[442] "Xi calls for building a strong army", **Xinhua**, 27 October 2017. "China unveils military reforms to realize 'dream of strong army'", **DW**, 2 January 2016.
[443] Dragan Pavlicevic, Agatha Kratz, "Testing the China Threat paradigm: China's high speed railway diplomacy in Southeast Asia" **The Pacific Review**, Vol.31, 2018, p.151-168.
[444] Aaron L. Friedberg, "The Sources of Chinese Conduct: Explaining Beijing's Assertiveness", **The Washington Quarterly**, Vol.37, No.4, 2014, p.146.

accumulation of economic power would easily pave the way for an increase in other aspects of hard power mainly through armament, innovation, communication, and other technological investments. Because of the huge potential of development for the military, the threat perception of China would evolve with any Chinese investment or development in the military or armament. The security dilemma refers to an increase in military strength and making of alliances in an anarchic environment in a way that would cause others to follow the same path, while maintaining the assumptions of an endless great power competition for superior position and assuming the worst case scenario in political logic. The core assumptions of the security dilemma are based on uncertainty about the intentions of others and how one state perceives others from friendly to threatening. Thus, a state takes measures to protect itself, even to the extent that it requires spending for unnecessary defences based on illusory threats or mere distrust. Unlike a realist conceptualization based on Hobbesian fear and worst case thinking, Wendt also points out the intersubjective understanding of security threats, trust and distrust and thus the socially structured meaning of the security dilemma.[445] Even though the inescapable nature of the security dilemma in confrontation with warlike results face criticism, the drive for security would result in a race for a higher sense of security either feeling its need or facing the malpractice of other states.[446]

One of the most significant parts of the literature on China's grand strategy describes it as assertive while attributing to it the meanings of threatening, negative, aggressive, or offensive. Chen and Pu differentiate the assertive adjective with the sub-types of offensive, defensive, and constructive, based on whether assertiveness is used in a coercive way for its interests and assuming a leadership role in global issues. They suggest that China's assertiveness should be viewed as defensive with an evolving constructing feature in its foreign relations, yet the pursuit of an offensive assertiveness is inevitable due to domestic issues such as the rise of Chinese nationalism.[447] However, such assertiveness while attributing offensive

[445] Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics", **International Organization**, Vol. 46, No. 2, Spring 1992, p. 397.
[446] John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma", **World Politics**, Vol.2. 1950, p.157. Robert Jervis, **Perception and Misperception in International Politics**, Princeton University Press, 2017, p.64.
[447] Chen, Pu, and Johnston, **op.cit.**, p.176-180.

features has two main concerns. The first one is about the transition of that accumulated power into actions based on a revisionist agenda in neighbouring regions. The second concern is much more related to tension among great powers in reaction to the rise of China. This revisionism does not have to be seen in territorial or maritime issues at first; instead, it has to start with critical thinking on present grand strategy preferences. As seen in the revising international norms with *Chinese characteristics*, the diplomatic ground of grand strategy explains much of this quiet adjustment in strategic thinking.

First, these studies on the assertive trajectory of China's rise start with the accumulation of power over the last decades as from its economic and social development. Then, an inevitable transition of this economic capacity into both hard and soft power has followed in these arguments. Hard power is easily traced back to material factors as China openly shares its military capability and armament efforts with the world. As an example, the spending in the defence budget has doubled over the last decade according to the official numbers, which sustains the PRC's position as the second-largest military spender in the world after the US. China has been using its economic development as leverage for improving and modernizing its power components, including the PLA. To that end, China has been developing a national defence and military policy and reforming its decision-making and implementation system since Xi Jinping took office. The latter, soft power has such significance in the literature considering its economic leverage in social, cultural activism and influence in international relations. The 2008 global financial crisis was depicted as having an accelerated effect on the country's relative power and encouraged the burst of Chinese assertiveness with economic leverage on hard and soft power. Moreover, China has not had a peaceful history neither at home nor in the neighbouring region considering the civil war, the Korea War, Sino-Indian Wars during the Cold War period, the role of Japan in the century of humiliation and the disasters during the Second World War, as well as the role of the US and the USSR in the suppressed international role of China until the 1970s. These issues are even discussed as a trigger for such an assertive turn due to domestic pressure through the rise of nationalism, sometimes used as a synonym for anti-Americanism, in China

during the last decades.[448] This is in spite of the fact that Chinese officials often emphasize years of over half a century of being free of military conflicts when they acerbically refer to the military interventions of the US. Yet, these disputes or traumas are eventually considered as a motivation for Chinese statesmen to assert territorial claims, maritime disputes, or pursue a policy of regaining lost territories. The increase in military capability provides a liable argument for having an assertive and revisionist agenda since the Chinese side has often repeated its core interests in the neighbouring regions, having a significant part within its centennial goals.

Secondly, the grand strategy study inevitably refers the possible results of a new rising power in great power relations and politics. The realist assumptions, especially the offensive realist arguments and power transition theory strengthen the revisionist projection on the future of Chinese political choices. Jack Levy describes the dominance of power transition theory as "probably the most widely used by scholars seeking to understand the likely dynamics and consequences of the rise of China in the contemporary global system".[449] Moreover, the pattern of great power relations supports such an element on assertiveness with the rising intensity of tensions over a variety of bilateral issues such as the trade wars, espionage, technology theft, and the escalation of daring comments on both sides. In some analyses, research tries to free this discussion from the lenses of great power politics by pointing out the different impediments such as the role of regional conditions, or international institutions. Even though Acharya's study underscores the possibility of regional constrains on emerging hegemons in their beings as a paradigm shift, regional hegemony is also conditioned with presenting an alternative for a struggle on regional hegemony.[450] Acharya's perspective of consociational security order with the balance of power, interdependence, and role of institutions, explains Beijing's restraint in foreign relations while accepting the role of strategic calculations in Beijing's assertiveness. In spite of such an extended scope, great

[448] Robert S. Ross, "Chinese Nationalism and Its Discontent", **National Interest**, 25 October 2011, p.45-51. Jessica Chen Weiss, "Beijing's Self-Defeating Nationalism" **Foreign Affairs**, 16 July 2020.Alastair Iain Johnston and Daniela Stockmann, "Chinese attitudes toward the United States and Americans" in **Anti-Americanism in World Politics**, Peter J. Katzenstein and Robert O. Keohane (eds.), Cornell University Press, 2006, p.157-195.
[449] Jack Levy, "Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China", in Robert S. Ross, Zhu Feng (eds.), **China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics**, Cornell University Press, 2008, p.18.
[450] Acharya, **op.cit.**, p.158–173.

power politics has an overwhelming predominance in explaining an assertive China due to the result of the narrative and the intensity of the production of knowledge in both sides of Asia-Pacific. It has to be taken into consideration that the Chinese side is welcoming great power debates even though its politicians emphasized they need to work harder on the path of social development. However, such discussions on great power relations reproduce China's global status that it once strived for, with each discussion and put the country on equal terms with the US at least in the narrative.

The trajectory of China's rising power status has been elaborated within three main frameworks. The first one is built upon more neoclassical realist assumptions with the role of domestic factors alongside systemic ones. In the Chinese case, domestic incentives are the need for the sustainability of economic development, the rise of Chinese nationalism, reclaiming long-disputed lands and maritime areas, and the call of political elites to pursue global leadership. The second one is more related to the shortcomings of the global order either based on the decline of US superiority, lower trust in status quo institutions, or the inefficiency of established economic models with widespread inequality. The third is focusing on rather different systemic factors based on assumptions about the rise of Asia, the rise of the multipolar world order, and efforts of China to regain its global great power status by a playing leadership role on the international stage. In the aftermath of the Cold War, scholars and policymakers have debated whether China could turn into a challenger to US power. In the lens of great power competition, US academia and think thanks have become the very source of high concern in terms of the assertive turn in China's global vision. For almost two decades, the US-led vision on China was shaped by labelling China as a strategic competitor instead of a strategic partner by containing and engaging in its evolving capacity for the future of geopolitical struggle, known as the congagement policy.[451] In fact, Beijing's foreign policy strategy had been considered a calculative cover for its ascent into a position of economic, military, and

[451] Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest", **Foreign Affairs**, Vol.75, No.1, January-February 2000, pp. 56. Zalmay Khalilzad, et.al., **op.cit.**. Clinton, **op.cit.**,p.56-63.

political strength, a more assertive China has been expected to emerge even before the peaceful rise discourse came into prominence.[452]

In examining the future course of a "more assertive" China, Swaine's series of articles makes a good contribution in elaborating origins, determinants, and characteristics of assertive rise grand strategy. His study presents a hard power oriented realist analysis on the case of an authoritarian political system, and points out the role of the army in foreign affairs and its critical impact on the decision making process.[453] However, his first article can be seen as a guideline to understand the real concerns of assertive interpretations of China's rise. According to this stance, Beijing is becoming more assertive in articulating its "core interests" and pursuing related goals as foreign policy objectives.[454] The real problem is about the definition of these Chinese interests in the future when they contradict with others, especially with the US in a challenging way. The core of the debate on China's assertive rise grand strategy lies in the trajectory of China's rising power and different scenarios for the rest of the world, especially the US, to respond to this phenomenon. It is important to research assertive incentives, when others perceived of China as threatening.

This is the key issue in explaining the assertive image of grand strategy, which also matches with two level strategic predicament of the security dilemma that Booth and Wheeler underline.[455] According to their study, the first level refers to the interpretation of intentions, motivations, and capabilities and the second level attributes importance to determining the most appropriate response towards a perceived threat. Of course, this has to work on both sides of this relation, China and the rest of the world. China's perception of other states' intentions is as significant as how others have perceived China's motives according to its grand strategy before discussing the second level of the security dilemma. Therefore, the assertive grand

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[452] Michael D. Swaine, Ashley J. Tellis, **Interpreting China's Grand Strategy: Past, Present and Future**, RAND Corporation, 2000.

[453] Michael D. Swaine, "China's Assertive Behaviour Part Three: The Role of the Military in Foreign Policy", **China Leadership Monitor**, No.36, 28 November 2011. Michael D. Swaine, "China's Assertive Behaviour Part Four: The Role of the Military in Foreign Crises", **China Leadership Monitor**, No.37, 4 April 2012.

[454] Michael D. Swaine, "China's Assertive Behaviour Part One: On "Core Interests"", **China Leadership Monitor**, No.34, 15 November 2010.

[455] Ken Booth, Nicholas J. Wheeler, **Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics**, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

strategy claims to take two main issues as their premises: the dissatisfaction of China from its current position in world affairs and scepticism of the US and other countries in regards to revisionist claims.

On the other hand, the increase in China's military capability is also an important element in reflecting on great power confrontation. This would be explained by the Chinese sense of containment due to the role of the US in the Asia Pacific region, its alliances with the neighbouring countries, and arms sales starting from Taiwan and Japan. These factors on containment and on US involvement in national concerns are not new for the Chinese side considering the US-China communique in which the Chinese side reiterated its view on Taiwan as being part of China's internal affairs while reasoning with the US on reducing its sales of arms to Taiwan gradually and to not carry out a long-term policy of arms sales to Taiwan for almost forty years.[456]

Even though China seeks to integrate its economy into the world system by sustaining its general policy of reform and openness, actively participating international organizations, and promoting free trade and investment, there has been a huge concern as to the results of the future by transforming this economic potential on military capabilities, irredentist, aggressive or at least assertive nature in foreign relations and its impact on the security order starting from the Asia-Pacific region. In parallel with assertive or irredentist predictions, the offensive realist perception explains the trajectory of China's foreign relation through the lenses of seeking dominance and regional hegemony, eventually.[457] Furthermore, Xi's assertive claims in neighbouring regions have been labelled as an Asian or Chinese Monroe Doctrine, which is still trying to explain and liken an Asian case with the Western experiences.[458] In the promotion of the "greater periphery" and "new model of big power relations" concepts, the Xi administration is strengthening projections of

[456] **Joint Communique of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China**, 17 August 1982.
[457] Mearsheimer, **op.cit.**, 2001, p.140-143.
[458] Suisheng Zhao, "President Xi's Big Power Diplomacy: Advancing an Assertive Foreign Policy Agenda", in **Mapping China's Global Future Playing Ball or Rocking the Boat**, Axel Berkofsky and Giulia Sciorati (eds.), Ledizioni Ledi Publishing, 2020, p.35-36.

China with significant responses such as major country diplomacy, while burying low profile diplomacy.[459]

Great power rivalry between the US and China might be considered as on the rise, which would also test the limits of the peaceful rise discourse. Whether the real cause behind this tension is either the dissatisfaction of China or the revisionist scepticism of the US, is the key point. Both incentives might lead to an assertive interpretation on the accumulation of Chinese power. However, there is also a number of scholars who argue that even though Beijing is pushing its own priorities in its foreign policy agenda, there was not a turning point of such an assertiveness in foreign policy behaviour. Johnston's articles critically analyse each case, which were mainly related to maritime disputes, armament or territorial claims that were used for claiming a kind of assertive policy orientation. What is significant in his conclusion is about how such cases were cherry-picked for demonstrating Beijing's assertiveness. Thus the selection of cases and evidence for an assertive turn is problematic and does not reflect its status quo-oriented stance more than any time in the history of the PRC. Thus the new phenomenon is in fact based on a mixture of old and new assertiveness, usual responses, and predictable reactions.[460]

Even though Chen and Pu's sub-types in assertiveness present reliable typologies, there is also an important critique in elaborating the assertive narrative of China being mistaken or at least exaggerated. It is argued that China does not have confidence in its offensive, assertive grand strategy and instead having a deep sense of insecurity due to the Asia Pivot strategy and its reactive major country diplomacy. So it is counterproductive to challenge China in East Asia, which might work in the opposite direction such as the rising nationalist sentiments and instability in the region.[461] These explanations evolving around the assertive rise arguments and rising trends of threat perception, have been exaggerating change and disregarding continuity, so that misguiding the pattern in Beijing's foreign policy behaviour and

[459] 'Xi Jinping urges breaking new ground in major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics", **Xinhua**, 24 June 2018. Wang Jianwei, "Xi Jinping's 'major country diplomacy': a paradigm shift?", **Journal of Contemporary China**, Vol. 28, No. 115, 2019, p.15-29. Suisheng Zhao, "A New Model of Big Power Relations? China–US strategic rivalry and balance of power in the Asia–Pacific", **Journal of Contemporary China**, Vol.24, No.93, 2015, p.377-397.

[460] Johnston, "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?", **International Security**, Vol. 37, No. 4, Spring 2013, p.31-32.

[461] Robert S Ross, "The Problem with the Pivot Obama's New Asia Policy Is Unnecessary and Counterproductive", **Foreign Affairs**, Vol.92, No.6, November/December 2012, p.70-82.

intensifying distrust among states. Jerdén's critical attitude on the conviction of the assertiveness idea and the role of the epistemic community with policymakers are important.[462] The production of knowledge is highly prone to politicisation. So, politicized China research is not unknown, since the narratives on China's ascent are directly or indirectly affected by political influence and ideological mind-set. What is important in his research is about pointing out the reproduction of the offensive assertiveness narrative and the China threat notion in the present information in the area of expertise. It might not be possible to erase assertiveness for all but as Jerdén notes:

> *China's new assertiveness existed only as a social fact within the bounds of the intersubjective knowledge of a particular discourse, and not as an objectively true phenomenon external to this discourse. Thus, China's new assertiveness as a behavioural fact evidently did not cause rebalancing, which suggests that the rebalancing was a proactive policy*.[463]

Nevertheless, the future prospects for Sino-US strategic competition have already started to discuss the highest tension as in official meetings debates on the conditions of hot war, cold war, or cold peace, even there is so-called détente in some research.[464] Yet, it all starts with the definition of the "hot economics cold politics" dichotomy in others relations with China when having an incremental trade but still an uncompromising political agenda. What would also intensify this offensive assertive perception of China is the turning of great power competition into an ideological rivalry between US-led liberalism and Chinese communism. Nevertheless, this competition is more likely to turn into a confrontation against authoritarian regimes with economic success.[465] Exaggerated comments on the assertive rise of grand strategy accelerate not only tension in bilateral relations, regional and global affairs but also intensify the emphasis of offensive assertiveness

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[462] Björn Jerdén, "The Assertive China Narrative: Why It Is Wrong and How So Many Still Bought into It**", The Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol.7, No.1, 2014, p.47–88. Björn Jerdén, "Security expertise and international hierarchy: the case of 'The Asia-Pacific Epistemic Community'", **Review of International Studies**, Vol.43, No.3, 2017, p.494–515.

[463] Jerdén, **op.cit.**, 2014, p.87.

[464] Zhao, **op. cit.**, 2019, pp.371–394. "Chinese Vision Drives East Asian Détente," **IISS Strategic Comments**, Vol.20, No.9, 8 December 2014, p.vi-viii.. The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, **Hearings on *"The Chinese View of Strategic Competition with the United States***, 24 June 2020. "Reviving the Cold War is Anachronistic – Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng's Exclusive Interview", **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC**, 12 August 2020.

[465] Christopher Layne, "How America Can Stop Its Rivalry with China from Spinning into War" **The National Interest**, No.169, September/October 2020.

among academics, journalists, and policymakers. In conclusion, the China Threat narrative has to be well considered since the assertiveness in China's grand strategy and the rise of China phenomenon remain highly politicized issues in shaping the perceptions of others and creating an ideological, strategic, and economic threat beyond its present conditions as in the return of dragon metaphor.[466]

3.1.2. The Defensive Assertiveness Grand Strategy

This thesis focuses on the defensive assertiveness aspect in research on China's grand strategy. Studies on the issue swing in between two concepts, the "China Threat" and "Peaceful China". The grand strategy preferences of Beijing have not embodied aggressiveness or irredentism that much as would be seen in the assertive rise concept, neither have they embodied benevolence nor the solitary prioritization of shared interests, interdependence, and the cautious dictum as in the peaceful rise. If these perceptions mostly reject each other's assessments on China's relationship to the international order and other states, a third way is needed to explain the grand strategy by taking into consideration both sides' arguments. A "third way" has to be placed in between these two ideological blinders thereby preventing criticism focusing on temporary changes in the conjuncture. The thesis has adapted defensive assertiveness, to understand China's contemporary grand strategy while keeping Johnston's critique on the term and multiple types of assertiveness in mind.[467]

Defensive assertiveness incorporates components from both perspectives with a general understanding of offensive attitude/discourse for defensive purposes. It would place a distinctive emphasis on the interplay between domestic and foreign relations. Having an assertive stance in foreign affairs creates deterrence with its firm stance on foreign relations but also provides an internal source of ideological and/or nationalist legitimacy if it faces growing domestic criticisms or even legitimacy

[466] Emma V. Bloomfield, "Perceptions of Danger: The China Threat Theory", **Journal of Contemporary China**, Vol.12, No.35, 2003, p.265-284. Renée Jeffery, "Evaluating the "China threat": Power Transition theory, the successor state image and the dangers of historical analogies", **Australian Journal of International Affairs**, Vol.63, 2009, No.2, p.309-324.
[467] Alastair Iain Johnston, "Debating China's Assertiveness", **International Security**, Vol. 38, No. 3, Winter 2013, p. 180-181.

problems. The fundamental defensive attitude would secure its domestic concerns while preventing further tensions in foreign policy issues unless they are part of core national interests. A growing number of studies also point out the need for going beyond the threat-cooperation dichotomy in explaining the overall responsive foreign affairs of a great power. The juxtaposition of the two contradicting perspectives would create a fruitful ground for scholarly research. Therefore, defensive assertiveness would argue that there is a strong sense of continuity in peaceful development preferences as in the usual emphasis of Xi's predecessor, but still reflect upon Xi's leadership through a more assertive grand strategy orientation.

It is now fruitless to discuss China within the framework of a rising power as the country has already risen to a great power status. Assertiveness has become a prominent discursive element in the US through commentaries on China's great power status, Yet, the defensive nature has shaped Xi's policy orientation even though assertive rhetoric and policy can be seen in prominence. The era of Xi Jinping does not mark a fundamental departure from previous policies despite the growing capacity of the country, as well as bold statements on the part of the foreign policy elites. An adjustment of Chinese policy during the Xi era should not be seen as constituting an offensive assertive shift. Instead, a Chinese overreaction to other's policies has to be regarded as an instance of a usual defensive nature, or what Turcsányi calls normal assertive behaviour.[468] The new era of Chinese activism appears to signal a more complex, flexible, and challenging phase of assertiveness but still within the framework of defence. It can pave the way for further cooperation in order to fulfil national interests or for further escalation in order to advocate strategic objectives. Beijing still puts a huge emphasis on its closest geographic circle due to its concerns about critical national interests. In line with defensive assertive perception, foreign policy activism can be seen as an answer to challenges that are driven mostly by internal limitations and domestic concerns. In some of the latest research, the top priority of Chinese leadership is demonstrated by how it has paved a

[468] Richard Q. Turcsányi, **Chinese Assertiveness in the South China Sea Power Sources, Domestic Politics, and Reactive Foreign Policy**, Routledge, 2016, p.13-14.

way for the sorting out of critical issues with neighbour regions before paying attention to the extended neighbourhood and far sea interests.[469]

In that regard, one of the main conclusions about China's rise is that its increased activism in foreign relations pertains to the political, economic, social, cultural aspects of China. Yet, China's wealth and influence in world affairs generates interests on multiple types of activism which having the potential of a great power in world affairs. In line with this, one can see China's contribution to international efforts in global issues such as climate change, environmental problems, especially through its leading role in international organizations. In this defensive assertiveness perspective, it has to be paid attention to its maintaining a flexible stance in foreign affairs in order to conduct different relations with different partners according to the interests of its grand strategic goals. As Johnston suggests, China interacts differently with different world orders according to determinants of defensiveness. Therefore, it maintains a supportive attitude towards orders that work for its interests and influences them as well due to its being one of the permanent members of the UNSC-and having veto power and the regulations of the World Trade Organization. Yet, China also has an unsupportive stance on contradicting norms or international orders such as the right of self-determination, the jurisdiction of International Criminal Court, and International Court of Justice.[470]

These determinants of defensive incentives are not just driven by foreign relations. In fact, these are also based on a wide range of threat perception regarding its maritime and territorial claims, safeguarding territorial integrity, avoiding debate on domestic issues, and the sustainability of economic and social development. On the other hand, the aggressive rhetoric and claims in foreign affairs could be legitimized through rising nationalist sentiment, public pressure on reclaiming disputed territories, or historically driven national grievances.[471] These factors make China's external behaviour contingent to domestic politics and highly reactive in terms of these critical issues. Because of this, the possibilities of foreign collusion with domestic unrest or foreign intervention in toppling the CCP's rule have been the

[469] Shi and Langjia, **op.cit.**, p.81, Andrew S. Erickson, "China", in Balzacq Dombrowski, and Reich (eds.), **op.cit.**, 2019, p.78-80.
[470] Alastair Iain Johnston, **op.cit.**, 2019, p.12.
[471] Denny Roy, "Assertive China: Irredentism or Expansionism?", **Survival**, Vol.61, No.1, February-March 2019, p.66.

utmost concerns of Chinese policy since the Cold War. Such outsider threats could also be instrumentalized as a useful adversary for mobilization to support grand strategy and gaining legitimacy in the confrontation of actions instead of an external militancy. It has always made sense when analysing Mao's articulation of a reactive policy against ideological crusades of the Cold War or how Deng fortified the one-party rule and transformed an ideological basis towards a developmental nationalism in handling the stresses of rapid modernization.

Furthermore, positive input in domestic politics and the stance in foreign relations reflects inward-looking, reactive, and domestically problematic policy rather than an aggressive, offensive, or self-confident one.[472] Echoing Beijing's defensive assertive stance in foreign affairs, this is not limited to the actions in international relations. It also shapes the discourses of high concern, such as the labelling of China's ascent by foreign eyes as the promotion of a peaceful development rather than a peaceful rise. Therefore, this defensive attitude makes China sensitive to the reality of their ascendance as well as others' perception more than any other great power in history.[473] In the end, China is pursuing a grand strategy without eliminating its top priorities but pursuing an active policy around critical issues while securing its interests and actively engaging in issues of foreign affairs in accordance with its prior national concerns.

China is pursuing an active policy around critical issues with a defensive mind and cautious dictum without projecting aggressiveness in practice; even it could be seen in rhetoric. This thesis surveys China's grand strategy by analysing its defensive assertive motivations through issues in Sino-Middle Eastern relations. In that regard, claims on assertiveness can be seen as matching China's activism while the defensive impetus would have more elements from security concerns, and determinants of peaceful development. What has been observed in this defensive assertive perception is to demonstrate that the offensive-labelled activism indeed works for defensive purposes in grand strategy. Even though Wang argues that China's grand strategy is more defensive than offensive by nature due to political economic determinants, this grand strategy is not limited to the developmental

[472] Sørensen, **op.cit**, p.380.
[473] Denny Roy, **Return of the Dragon Rising China and Regional Security**, Columbia University Press, 2013, p.153-154.

factors.[474] It also has to cover defensive reactions on the international stage while being driven by domestic security concerns as well as cultural-ideological threat perception. This extended scope has been adapted in my analysis of Sino-Middle Eastern relations to analyse the offensive for defensive dictum in a wider perspective. Even though economic relations have been regarded as the key factor in China's relations with the region, these elements that pertain to the geopolitical, social, diplomatic, even domestic spheres are highly relevant to the adjustment of Beijing's policy towards the region. These factors besides economic ones can be seen as much more important in relations with some countries, especially those having less economic concerns.

[474] Yong Wang, "Offensive for Defensive: The Belt and Road Initiative and China's New Grand Strategy", **The Pacific Review**, Vol.29, No.3, 2016, p.455-463.

CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYZING THE THREE FACETS OF XI JINPING'S GRAND STRATEGY ADJUSTMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The research on the impact of China's grand strategy on Sino-Middle Eastern relations and regional issues is the analysis part of this thesis. In terms of grand strategy, this section built on three different aspects of the concept in accordance with Silove's compartmentalization.[475] Grand strategy is defined as a logic on intentional and coherent political choices in order to reach the highest political objectives/interests at global or domestic levels. Therefore, its analysis have to cover three separate features in analysing its political outcomes. First, grand strategy refers a grand principle that organizes the normative foundation of the political results like an organizing principle, a policy guideline in decision making. Secondly, grand strategy can be traced back as a grand plan that draws a detailed trajectory of the deliberate political actions. Lastly, grand strategy can be understood as a grand behaviour, which may shows consistency in policy making and reveal a pattern of behaviour in accordance with political objectives and national interests. Even though there was neither a defined hierarchy nor an interconnected nature among them in Silove's study, this thesis elaborates three facets have to acknowledge the same trajectory to depict an overall framework.

These three facets, eventually, have to reflect the political, economic, social, military, or diplomatic outcome in accordance with the mind-set of grand strategy. Thus, grand strategy has to lead and shape grand principle, grand plan, and grand behaviour since it refers the strategy of strategies, the meta-strategy. This thesis argues that there is an adjustment in China's grand strategy towards an assertive direction during the era of Xi Jinping yet Chinese politics is still preserving defensive foundation in line with strategic culture impediments. In this final chapter of the thesis, the impact of China's grand strategy adjustment is analysed by questioning Sino-Middle Eastern relations and China's entanglement in the Middle East issues. To limit the scope of analysis, the defensive assertive adjustment will be analysed by

[475] Silove, **op.cit.**, p.27-57.

searching the effects of China's foreign policy outcomes in the region, instead of listing bilateral interactions among states.

Therefore, this final chapter is divided into three parts since the defensive assertiveness adjustment has to be demonstrated in three facets of China's grand strategy as grand principle, grand plan, and grand behaviour. The grand principle aspect will be analysed through the principle of non-intervention. Considering the domestic debate over the principle and the Chinese contribution to the discussion on the international stage, China's evolving perception on the principle will be demonstrated. Then, the impact of grand principle on Middle East issues will be analysed by presenting the Chinese voting pattern in the United Nations Security Council Resolutions regarding those crisis in the region. The political outcome of grand principle has to be shown on those vetoed or passed resolution, mainly through Syrian and Libyan crises.

The grand plan aspect is reviewed through the Belt and Road Initiative and its impact on the regional politics. This major project that covers investment, infrastructure, trade and development cooperation has to be analysed by looking to its economic and political outcomes. Yet again, the analysis of this grand plan has to move beyond from economic figures and trade volumes but towards a meaning of such vast promises, expectations and the capabilities of this economic might on the region in line with defensive assertiveness adjustment. The role of the economic ground has to be related with political, social, diplomatic, and even military aspects, too.

Finally, the last part of the analysis has to focus on grand behaviour which is chosen to examine China's security cooperation in the Middle East. Therefore, this part analyses the security issues in Sino-Middle Eastern relations even though there were no Chinese military force on the ground without the UN enforcement. This part explores the meaning of military cooperation, joint army drills, the trajectory of the arm sales between states, the unprecedented Chinese base and military presence in the region, and the security-related relations within the framework of defensive assertiveness. The real objective in this section is to demonstrate the changing pattern in Chinese behaviour from solely economic or commercial interests towards further entanglement in the region including the military relations.

4.1. CHINA'S GRANG PRINCIPLE: THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-INTERVENTION

In recent years, Chinese involvement in international conflicts has grown beyond expectation when considering the country's accustomed low profile on the international stage. China as one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council has more and more involvement and interests in international crises even taking pride in being the largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping operations. However, China's international behaviour has become increasingly complicated in regards to the international conflicts even if Beijing is taking sides with the governments in power. Based on the country's enhanced policy on non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states, its foreign policy decisions should not be understood as indifference to those crises but a deliberate choice to keep its strategic principle in diplomacy. Nevertheless, China has been standing aloof from Middle East conflicts unless those conflicts affect its economic interests or energy security. Even though Syria has never been a close economic or political partner of Beijing, an unprecedented Chinese engagement in the Middle East issues was also marked by the Syrian crisis while Beijing has been emphasizing respect to sovereignty, regional stability, and combating terrorism. Yet, China has gained comparatively little attention in analysing the Syrian crisis, although the roles played by regional or global actors have been discussed in academic literature and media.

Building on a brief analysis of China's reactions to international conflicts while keeping in mind Beijing's commitment to respecting national sovereignty, this section of the last chapter examines China's role in the Middle East conflicts within the framework of the principle of non-intervention. It begins by exploring Chinese reactions to the normative discussion on the international community with both domestic and international arguments in reshaping the Chinese perception. Then, it focuses on China's foreign policy orientation regarding the Middle East issues, mainly the civil wars in Libya and Syria through China's voting pattern on UN Security Council resolutions. The last part investigates the media representation of China over its casted votes/vetoes to analyses how its role over this specific conflict has been received and perceived by the international audience. Media coverage in the

aftermath of each UN Resolutions concerning those issues whether adopted or vetoed by the Security Council will reflect both the defensive foundations and assertive turn of the assertive defensiveness grand strategy adjustment. The main argument in this chapter emphasizes that China's overlooked role in those Middle East crises is the result of China's relatively new policy to engage in Middle East issues and a reflection of China's diplomatic priorities. That new policy is based on standing aloof from military confrontations and not challenging the principle of non-intervention but still establishing its own sphere of influence through political, economic and diplomatic means. In addition, an active engagement with other great powers in relation to the Syrian and Libyan crises also intensify China's low profile clearer while defending the principle of non-intervention on normative grounds.

4.1.1. China's Approach to the Principle of Non-Intervention

China's unprecedented economic growth leads to a discussion on the role of Beijing in world politics as most of China's global activism, influence, and foreign policy choices are closely related to its economic development and needs. This rising power image has officially been framed within the discourse of "peaceful rise / peaceful development". It has lately been defined as "international development cooperation" with an undertone of rising to deter adversarial reactions in building a win-win partnership for sustainable development".[476] The main objective of this political stance is to "promote development and harmony domestically and pursue cooperation and peace internationally" according to the White Paper on China's Peaceful Development in 2011.[477] While economic development brought wealth and new capabilities to China, two identities have been developed.

The first identity of China pursues a great power status in foreign affairs due to the new type of relationship between great powers openly professed by Xi.[478] The second emphasizes that China is a developing nation belonging to the third world in

[476] Xi Jinping, "Seeking Mutual and Sustainable Development and Becoming Win-win Cooperation Partners", the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, 26 September 2015.
[477] Information Office of the State Council, **op.cit.**,2011.
[478] Xi Jinping, "Work Together for a Bright Future of China-US Cooperative Partnership", Speech at the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations and U.S.-China Business Council Luncheon, Washington, D.C., 15 February 2012. Qi Hao, "China Debates the 'New Type of Great Power Relations,'" **Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol.8, No.4 2015, p.350.

solidarity with other developing nations. Moreover, China often prides itself as the voice of the underdeveloped global south.[479] As Pu points out, China's narrative is deeply related to the objectives and audience whether it is domestic or different types of international ones.[480] The relationship between discourse and foreign policy choices can demonstrate consistency in foreign policy principles and behaviour. Yet, it might create contradicting stances in praxis when facing any crisis. These contradicting or concurring images of China in international conflict can be traced back by searching how China is represented in the media when a message is expressly sent to which audiences. Because, the adjustment of China's grand strategy pays attention to the others perception driven by the defensive foundations as found in the discussions on the peaceful grand strategy narrative.

The role of China the world of conflicts is not limited to economic relations but also covers political, diplomatic, and military activities. While Deng Xiaoping's foreign policy legacy dictates "never claiming leadership and maintaining a low profile", China under Xi Jinping demonstrates further engagement with international issues. To begin, Chinese engagement started with a discussion as to how China can comply with the basic rules and principles of the liberal international order if it will strive for leadership within it as like other emerging powers.[481] Furthermore, the limits of Westphalian norms about the primacy of national sovereignty have been discussed through China's reactions to the international crisis when its own strategic interests relating to interventionism are challenged. As a champion of the principle of non-intervention, China has adhered to the principle even more since the Tiananmen Square Protest in 1989 and further foreign criticism of the country's human rights record as well as its policies in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong. The principle of non-intervention is a major rhetorical and diplomatic tool of Beijing to repel critiques that take hard-line in its domestic affairs. The principle keeps the moral high ground in diplomacy to oppose interference in the internal affairs of states, primarily its own.

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[479] Peter Van Ness, "China as a Third World State: Foreign Policy and Official National Identity," in **China's Quest for National Identity**, Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim (eds.), Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993, p.196.
[480] Pu, **op.cit.**, p.14-15.
[481] John Ikenberry, "The future of the Liberal World Order: Internationalism after America" **Foreign Affairs**, Vol.90, No.3, May/June 2011, p.57. Johnston, **op.cit.**, 2013.

Non-intervention is adapted as the basic principle of China's foreign policy since China's initiation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. It protects China's core interests mentioned as "state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development" in the aforementioned White Paper on China's Peaceful Development in 2011.[482]

There are three political advantages in championing the non-intervention principle in China's foreign affairs. First, it would defend the traditional primacy of state sovereignty and keep out foreign interference in those issues related to its domestic affairs and national security. Then, China's moral commitment to the non-intervention principle would be favoured in many developing states by its references to anti-imperialism and having an official narrative on Chinese history without European colonization alike practices. Finally, such discourse would gain credibility for China's peaceful development cooperation discourse by avoiding hegemonic behaviour in the eyes of foreign audiences. In that regard, Beijing's commitment to the principle has been tested in many crises due to its having a permanent member seat in the UN Security Council. When further engagement with international issues is required, China's reaction to the problem would be determined by the general principles in of foreign policy as well.

Nevertheless, there is another dimension that criticizes this political stance. It argues that the persistent advocacy of the principle turns into an impediment for Beijing to make more contributions to global issues. The pioneering role of Chinese companies triggers a discussion on how China would intervene in support of them when their interests were needed to be defended.[483] It would lead to a pragmatic adjustment in maintaining the principle on the moral ground. However, it also meets challenges by selectively engaging with risks incurred in protecting China's interests overseas. Several suggestions have been made on the pragmatic adjustment of the policy such as "constructive involvement", "creative involvement", or "responsible

[482] The Information Office of the State Council, **op.cit.,** 2011.
[483] Mathieu Duchâtel, Oliver Bräuner, Zhou Hang, **Protecting China's Overseas Interests: The Slow Shift away from Non-interference**, SIPRI Policy Paper No. 41, 2014, p.13-14.

protection" instead of sustaining the "passive" interpretation of the principle.[484] In reaching a flexible implementation of the principle, reflections on domestic and international audiences are particularly important. This is because the new pragmatic adjustment should not be perceived as a threat that damages China's relationship building and Xi's self-proclaimed China image in world politics.

The above discussion can be summarized in terms of three outcomes in regards to shaping China's image in the eyes of foreign audiences and the durability of the principle of non-intervention as a foreign policy pillar in particular. To begin with, the traditional commitment to the Deng-ist principles such as keeping a low profile does not serve the purpose of avoiding great power confrontation or shaping the perception of others on the rise of China.[485] Many states, especially the US considers China to be a significant challenge regardless of keeping its low profile, instead, Beijing has been labelled as a free-rider because of its avoiding bigger responsibilities in global issues. That does not serve the purpose of Xi Jinping's strategic intentions, if China established a major country status with Chinese characteristics to reform the international system and global governance.[486]

Furthermore, China uses diplomatic tools for the peaceful settlement of disputes to act as proactive peacemaker in the eyes of both domestic and foreign audiences when regional or international crises occurred. China's diplomatic tools coincided with the zero enemy policy and the diplomacy-first approach in facing the challenges of a dispute.[487] China's efforts in conflict mediation can demonstrate the level of interference in domestic affairs through testing the limits of the principle of non-intervention.

The next outcome is the ascension of the Chinese presence in international missions for global peace engagement. China has found a legitimate ground in UN authorizations for intervention in international conflicts through its financial support and military participation in peacekeeping missions, humanitarian aid operations, and

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[484] Chen Zheng, "China debates the non-interference principle", **The Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol.9, No.3, 2016, p.357-358.
[485] Yan, **op.cit.**, p.158.
[486] Xi Jinping, "China's Diplomacy Must Befit Its Major-Power Status," **The Governance of China II**, Foreign Languages Press, 2017, p.483. Masafumi Iida, "Xi Jinping's diplomacy and the rise of his political authority", **Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies**, Vol.9, No.2, 2020, p.138-139.
[487] Degang Sun and Yahya Zoubir, "China's Participation in Conflict Resolution in the Middle East and North Africa: A Case of Quasi-Mediation Diplomacy?", **Journal of Contemporary China**, Vol.27, No.110, 2018, p.242.

international disaster relief missions.[488] China's military engagement in international crises through its expanding UN presence is a major shift from keeping the dictum of having low profile and abstained votes regarding the UN Security Council resolutions rather than exercising their veto power in a successive fashion. In fact, the Chinese right to veto had been used as leverage in other political and economic negotiations. Although China points out that the use of force is an ineffective tool of conflict resolution, the real objective is preventing the humanitarian intervention instrument from turning into a solely US-led practice of the use of force authorized by the Council.[489]

Furthermore, China has increased its contribution to international involvement in any humanitarian crisis instead of being an outsider, which might be considered a form of benevolent hegemony as claimed by Danner and Martín.[490] That does not only cover China's active military involvement in the UN humanitarian missions but also refers to the Chinese contribution to the normative discussion by proposing "responsible protection" like a norm maker.[491] It can be argued that, Chinese attachment to a normative basis makes Beijing a relevant player in discussions on humanitarian intervention and in the Middle East politics as well.

Even though Sørensen suggests there is a growing domestic expectation of regaining international status and respect for China as a great power, humanitarian intervention does not seem to be a way of realizing these voices since any calls for international intervention does not come from Chinese society but comes rather from political and academic circles.[492] But the adjustment in grand strategy also covers social reactions and human security of its own citizens since there has been a

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[488] Zhao Lei, "Two Pillars of China's Global Peace Engagement Strategy: UN Peacekeeping and International Peacebuilding", **International Peacekeeping**, Vol.18 ,No.3, 2011, p.344-362

[489] M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Attitude toward U.N. Peacekeeping Operations since 1989", **Asian Survey**, Vol. 36, No. 11 Nov., 1996, p.1115.

[490] Lukas K. Danner and Félix E. Martín, "China's hegemonic intentions and trajectory: Will it opt for benevolent, coercive, or Dutch-style hegemony?", **Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies**, Vol.6, No.2, May 2019, p.196-197.

[491] Allen Carlson, "More than just saying no: China's evolving approach to sovereignty and intervention since Tiananmen" in **New directions in the study of China's foreign policy,** Robert S Ross and Alastair Iain Johnston (eds.), California: Stanford University Press, 2006, p.234-235. Catherine Gegout and Shogo Suzuki, "China, Responsibility to Protect, and the Case of Syria: From Sovereignty Protection to Pragmatism", **Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organization**, Vol.26, No.3, 2020, p.379-402.

[492] Camilla T. N. Sørensen, "That Is Not Intervention; That Is Interference with Chinese Characteristics: New Concepts, Distinctions and Approaches Developing in the Chinese Debate and Foreign and Security Policy Practice", **The China Quarterly**, Vol.239, 2019, p.598.

different voices on China's perception to international crisis and humanitarian intervention discussions, which has been occurred by the Arab Uprisings. These upheavals in many Middle East states threatened the investments, energy supply, and financial interests of Chinese companies, as well as the security of Chinese citizens that work abroad due to the escalation of violence, military clashes, and instability.

It started to question China's perception of the principle but also the efficiency of its military capabilities such as the PLA's military organization other than war, guarding interests abroad, and its understanding of security in general.[493] To sum up, there is no static non-intervention approach on the part of China in order to be active and selective in its engagement with international crises, guiding with regional or international organizations, and defending the normative basis of intervention in relation to different perceptions of Western states.[494]

4.1.2. The Principle of Non-Intervention and the Middle East Crises

China's Middle East policy has been driven by its economic interests since the country became a major oil importer from the region in the mid-1990s. Those kinds of close economic and energy relations require regional stability and reliable relations with partners. Even though China's military role in the region can be expected to develop due to its desire to secure its economic interests and oil supply from the region, Beijing stands aloof from regional confrontations beyond calling for dialogue, diplomatic solutions, and the peaceful settlement of disputes in times of crisis, especially in the Arab Uprising. China's position in regional affairs has been criticized as being a free rider of the security network, which has been established, financed, and sustained by the US.[495] In accordance with the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states, China adheres to the respect of sovereignty in seeking collective good in its relations and social harmony in the region. This has resulted in keeping friendly relations with all parties in the region even they confront each other, until the point that China needs to choose one over

[493] Andrea Ghiselli, **Protecting China's Interests Overseas: Securitization and Foreign Policy**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021, p.183-232.
[494] Chin-Hao Huang, "Principles and Praxis of China's Peacekeeping", **International Peacekeeping**, Vol.18, No.3, 2011, p.267.
[495] Shambaugh, **op.cit.**, 2011, p.23.

another to protect its strategic interests. Furthermore, China's reaction to the instability of the Arab Uprisings and the armed conflict in many states faced criticism for not acting as a responsible great power. This political stance has been explained by China opposing humanitarian intervention because China also shares solidarity among authoritarian regimes.[496]

However, this claim is problematic as there is no ideologically bipolar order in the contemporary world order and even Mao's selective engagement with the ideological groups has already been forsaken. China did not actively support other regimes whether authoritarian, non-democratic, or communist, for the sake of an ideological commitment. The real determinant is related to China's sensitivity to regime change since the regime security has the utmost importance for the CCP. This is why they take such a defensive attitude in regards to foreign support on regime change. Moreover, China supports regimes for defending its normative commitment to the non-intervention principle, which was described by Dittmer as "a principled consistency" in constructing a self-image. That position also sustains its pragmatic, case by case approach to protect Chinese interests as it used to doing.[497] The Chinese government did not change its policy towards the Arab states as Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi stressed in China's fundamental position in the region through the "four supports":

> *China supports Arab states in following their chosen paths, supports Arab states in resolving the region's hotspot issues through political means, supports Arab states in achieving a win-win and common development with China, and supports Arab states in playing a bigger role in regional and international affairs and in more effectively safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests.*[498]

Relations between China and Libya have always been an uneasy one considering Libya's approach to the PRC while having diplomatic ties with Taiwan even before the Gaddafi came into power. In fact, Gaddafi regime had been accusing of both China and the US in having different approaches on global competition, yet

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[496] Muhamad S. Olimat, **China and the Middle East: From Silk Road to Arab Spring**, Routledge, New York, 2013, p.100.

[497] Lowell Dittmer, "On China's Rise" in **China's Rise in Historical Perspective**, Brantly Womack (ed.), 2010, New York, Rowman & Littlefield, p.41. Mordechai Chaziza, "China's Economic Diplomacy Approach in the Middle East Conflicts" **China Report**, Vol.55, No.1, 2019, p.25. Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt, Andrew Small, "China's New Dictatorship Diplomacy", **The New York Times**, 28 January 2008.

[498] Wang Yi, "China Will Uphold "Four Supports" for Arab States", 6 January 2014.

aiming the same objective, "to colonize Africa", in 2007. This was one of the significant African critiques direct to China's carefully crafted approached to the continent, because Beijing depicts itself as a partner without a colonizer background, in establishing mutually beneficial engagements with African states, later described as development cooperation and win-win relations. Considering Libya's oil reserves, Libyan oil exports to China have reached its peak by %13 just before the Libya episode of the Arab Uprising has started. Even though, China was not a significant energy player in Libyan energy supply since the %85 of Libyan oil exports directed to Europe, the oil industry, Chinese investments in Libyan infrastructure and energy sector, and technology transfers were the real assets in Sino-Libyan relations.[499]

The threat was occurred by the Libya Civil War to destroy those operations and moreover, directed to the Chinese workers in the Libyan soil, which has become the major priority to evacuate them from the conflict area. Even though China contacted both sides of the conflict and relied on the guaranteed security of by the Gaddafi regimes, there was a spill over of threat from small project to major investments in a short time of period by the intensified armed clashes. China stand aloof from any military engagement in Libya as in armed conflicts in the other Middle East states, but Libyan documents proved the Gaddafi regime seek to make a $200 million arms deal with three Chinese companies, China North, China Precision Machinery, and China Xinxing Import and Export Corporation.[500] China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied such agreements and shipment of weapons, yet noted the visit of Libyan delegation has took place without the knowledge of the government.[501]

Regarding Sino-Syrian relations, Syria has never been a strategic priority nor is a close partner for China due to their limited economic and political relations, as well as its lack of major oil or natural gas reserves. When protests in Syria turned into a civil war, China kept a rather low profile in comparison to other great powers' ascending military involvement. Yet, that does not mean that Beijing has been indifferent to the crisis as its permanent seat in the UN Security Council requires it to

[499] Obert Hodzi, **The End of China's Non-Intervention Policy in Africa**, Palgrave, 2019, p.109-10.
[500] David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, **China and Africa: A century of Engagement**, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012,p.240.
[501] Michael Wines, "Secret Bid to Arm Qaddafi Sheds Light on Tensions in China Government",' **The New York Times**, 11 September 2011.

choose at least a diplomatic stance on the issue. Therefore, China has developed four main objectives to secure its interests and political stance in general. First, China aims to build a constructive relationship with all sides of the crisis including the Assad regime, different parties of the opposition groups, major powers, and other regional countries. China has displayed an unwavering commitment to promoting and supporting peace talks, which fits with its diplomacy-first approach, but has gone so far as to assume a good mediator role between the government in Damascus and other parties. Thereof, there was no active Chinese military engagement to those crisis and deliberately avoided taking sides in all Middle East civil wars but just call for political dialogue as China is even not a host of that conversation.

The second objective is to reject any kind of foreign intervention in the crisis by reaffirming and even defending respect for state sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention. China's expanding discourse has deliberately framed humanitarian intervention as seeking "regime change" by Western powers.[502] Iranian and Russian military involvements on the side of the Assad regime have been considered by China the decision of a legitimate government that calls for foreign help. As Wang Yi stressed in his latest visit to Damascus on 18 July 2021, China strongly supports Syria in safeguarding its state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national dignity, and opposes any attempt that seeks "regime change" in Syria.[503] The use of weapons of mass destruction has become a symbol of the inaction of the Obama administration in arguments in favour of intervention. When the Assad regime accepted the deal agreed by the US and Russia, in order to turn over its stockpiles of chemical weapons for destruction, the main reason for the US-led military intervention was removed, as that main reason was a red line in regards to the WMD.

Then, the main concern of the international community has begun to shift to the fight against terrorism and extremism caused by the rise of ISIS. From the beginning of the crisis, China paid much attention to the humanitarian situation, access to aid and workers for the efficiency of the humanitarian relief efforts, and calls for a cessation of hostilities in Syria, rather than referring military means. It is

[502] Courtney J. Fung, "Separating Intervention from Regime Change: China's Diplomatic Innovations at the UN Security Council Regarding the Syria Crisis", **The China Quarterly**, No.235, September 2018, p.693-712.
[503] "Syria unconditionally supports China on Taiwan, Xinjiang, HK issues, Assad tells visiting FM Wang Yi", Global Times, 18 July 2021.

one of the main reasons why China has been criticized for being an outsider in such humanitarian crisis, which Shichor associates that with the philosophy of Wu Wei (inaction, effortlessness) by adapting rather a neutral position.[504] The Chinese diplomatic stance might not be interpreted as direct support to the regime in Damascus in the broader scheme of neutral diplomatic position and multilateral efforts in the region. However, the inaction when the action has been needed in such a crisis would change the balance of power in favour of a particular side, in this case, tacit support for the pro-Assad forces.

As a matter of security interests, another objective has occurred in response to the presence of Uyghur foreign fighters among the opposition groups.[505] Moreover, the rise of ISIS became a concern of the world as well as China in particular because the terrorist organization threatened Beijing to retaliate against its policies in Xinjiang. Although China has avoided any direct military involvement in the conflict, such a security threat shapes the Chinese approach to the crisis into a more military-oriented way as the PLA pledged military assistance along with humanitarian assistance.[506] In accordance with the CCP's "three evils" defined as terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism, China intensifies its support to combat terrorism and international law enforcement cooperation. In addition to that threat directed at the mainland, the Uyghur foreign fighters issue has been considered not only as an extremist or separatist menace but also as a potential terrorism threat to Chinese interests overseas and especially on the Belt and Road Initiative.[507]

China's consistent approach to the conflict made the final objective of their foreign policy clear in that they sought to support the post-war rebuilding of Syria by the quasi stability provided by the government's superiority in the conflict. China's cautious but pragmatic diplomatic engagement in Syria has lead Chinese economic might into being a significant contributor to the reconstruction of the country. A

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[504] Yitzhak Shichor, "Wu Wei (Do Nothing): China and the Syrian crisis", Roundtable No.6 of the China Observatory, 23 November 2015.

[505] Sheena Chestnut Greitens, Myunghee Lee, Emir Yazici, Counterterrorism and Preventive Repression China's Changing Strategy in Xinjiang", **International Security**, Vol.44, No.3, Winter 2019/2020, p.32-37.

[506] Liu Zhen, "Chinese military to provide 'aid and training assistance' to Syrian government", **South China Morning Post**, 16 August 2016. https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2004676/chinese-military-provide-aid-and-training-assistance

[507] Mathieu Duchâtel, "China's Foreign Fighters Problem", **War on the Rocks**, 25 January 2019. https:// warontherocks.com/2019/01/chinas-foreign-fighters-problem

decade-long conflict in Syria displaced around 12 million Syrians internally or externally. Moreover, the estimated cost of damage is more than $388 billion including damaged infrastructure and housing stock of the country, according to the World Bank report.[508] So, the reconstruction of the country is a huge burden for the government in Damascus that can only be realized with foreign assistance and credits, and this is where China can be an important provider. China's economic capability enables infrastructure investments and an economic partnership compatible with grand strategic plans as the Belt and Road Initiative despite the threat of the Western sanctions and adverse effects of ongoing risks.

Such a grand plan would cast a giant shadow to create high expectations on China's imminent role in Syria and the Middle East. Ghiselli and Al-Sudairi note China's role has to show consistency with the political and economic realities of Sino-Syrian relations, instead of having an exaggerated narrative.[509] It can be argued that this exaggeration is a deliberate choice for both sides to project the potential as being larger than the reality. On the Syrian side, Chinese involvement in the reconstruction process and national reconciliation for a political solution are requested. It signifies foreign support to the regime, a commitment of an economic giant to Syria's reconstruction, but also a bargaining chip in order to tempt other great powers. On the Chinese side, Syria could be an example of the advancement of the BRI in the most difficult political environment with a cautious attitude for great risks and benefits.[510] Moreover, China can also overstate its great power status and the image of great plans such as the BRI to a foreign audience, even though the reality could not reach that level of political, economic, or military engagement.

[508] The World Bank, **The Toll of War: The Economic and Social Consequences of the Conflict in Syria**, World Bank Group, Washington DC, 10 July 2017.
[509] Andrea Ghiselli and Mohammed Al-Sudairi, "Syria's "China Dream": Between the Narratives and Realities", **Commentaries KFCRIS**, 15 September 2019.
[510] Guy Burton, Nick Lyall, and Logan Pauley, "The Limits on China's Role in Syria", **The Diplomat**, 3 June 2021.

4.1.3. Implementing Grand Principle: UN Security Council Resolutions

Chinese foreign policy behaviour is traced back through its voting patterns in the United Nations. In the post-Arab Uprisings period, China has had little impact on the conflicts while facing the need to realign its Middle East policy regarding to its own diplomatic and economic capabilities and the political and military realities on the field. China has not actively used its veto power in the UN Security Council compared to the veto records of the US and the USSR/Russia. Since Beijing replaced Taiwan at its permanent seat, China casted sixteen vetoes in total. However, there has been a boost in Chinese vetoes by the Syrian crisis to the level of ten out of sixteen vetoes, all together with Russia. In the latest decade, Russia issued a veto on sixteen draft resolutions concerning the situation in Syria in accordance with ascending Russian involvement on the field and the discussion on using chemical weapons. Considering Russian and Iranian supports for the Assad regime, or the Western support for the opposition in order to oust the regime, China's impact was limited to joining Russia in the United Nations Security Council to thwart a regime change by framing humanitarian intervention as foreign interference. All vetoed drafts were criticized by the Chinese ambassadors for paving the way for interventionism by Western states, which would not provide an inclusive solution to the crisis.

On the Libya Crisis, China's decision to cast an abstained vote in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 has been regarded as a significant decision.[511] Before that, China has also abstained the UN Security Council Resolution 1970 on 26 February 2011, which points the Gaddafi regime responsible on turmoil in the country by stating that:

> *Deploring the gross and systematic violation of human rights, including the repression of peaceful demonstrators, expressing deep concern at the deaths of civilians, and rejecting unequivocally the incitement to hostility and violence against the civilian population made from the highest level of the Libyan government…*
>
> *Recalling article 16 of the Rome Statute under which no investigation or prosecution may be commenced or proceeded with by the International*

[511] U.N. Security Council, 66th Year. Summary Report of the 6498th Meeting. 17 March 2011 (S/PV.6498).

Criminal Court for a period of 12 months after a Security Council request to that effect…[512] *(S/RES/1970 (2011)*

Considering the strict implementation of the principle of non-intervention in those discussions, China legitimizes its veto decision on normative ground. Moreover, China has developed an attitude as "against embargoes" in those issues in Zimbabwe, North Korea, or Burma by advocating that imposed sanctions is against the principle of non-intervention to others domestic affairs and have no good outcomes in conflict resolution, end of human rights violence, and persuade all parties for political dialogue. Instead, Beijing built its decision in favour of sanctions in the Libya case, upon the calls from regional organizations such as the African Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the Arab League for the purpose of bringing the Gaddafi regime to the table for political solution and negotiations. However, another aspect can be argued that, Chinese vote on UNSCR 1970 is driven by its own interest rather than calls from regional organizations. The resolution was "urging the Libyan authorities to ensure the safety of all foreign nationals and their assets and facilitate the departure of those wishing to leave country".[513] This article was reflecting China's concerns on the security of Chinese investments and nearly 40.000 Chinese nationals working in Libya.

On 17 March 2011, the United Nations Security Council passed another resolution regarding the situation in Libya while Russia and China again abstained. This resolution 1973 includes:

Taking note also of the decision of the Council of the League of Arab States of 12 March 2011 to call for the imposition of a no-fly zone on Libyan military aviation, and to establish safe areas in places exposed to shelling as a precautionary measure that allows the protection of the Libyan people and foreign nationals residing in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya…

Authorizes Member States that have notified the Secretary-General, acting nationally or through regional organizations or arrangements, and acting in cooperation with the Secretary-General, to take all necessary measures, notwithstanding paragraph 9 of resolution 1970 (2011), to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, including Benghazi, while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory…(S/RES/1973 (2011)

[512] U.N. Security Council, 66th Year. Summary Report of the 6491st Meeting. 26 February 2011 (S/PV.6491).
[513] U.N. Security Council, 66th Year. Summary Report of the 6491st Meeting. 26 February 2011 (S/PV.6491).

As a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, abstained votes of China and Russia paved the way for the implementation of Western interpretation of the responsibility to protect and the military intervention by NATO. Yet, the resolution just referred to the no-fly zone over the country as a military means and clearly noted excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory. This has become the major examples in the China's official discourse in the following UN Security Council meetings and resolutions on how the Western interpretation might turn such void description into a leverage for a regime change. After the Libya experience and the implementation of the UNSCR 1973, China has a consistent approach on further draft resolutions, especially on Syrian Civil War.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Libya, the UN Security Council has adopted thirty-one resolutions, the last on 1 October 2021. United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) has established by the UN Security Council Resolution 2009 on 16 September 2011. The first phase mainly related to the establishment of the UNSMIL and ensuring the non-proliferation of the armed conflict. The second phase includes call for political solution to the crisis and the formation of Government of National Accord (such as UNSCR 2259), along with the extending the mandate of the UNSMIL. The third phase mainly refers the second phase of the Libyan Civil War after the toppling down the Gaddafi regime by calling for ceasefire, welcoming any effort for political solution, noting the deteriorating humanitarian situation, and still extending sanctions, and the mandate of the UNSMIL.

Due to the deadlock in the Security Council regarding the Syrian crisis, unlike the Libyan one, the UN General Assembly has passed nonbinding resolutions on the Syrian Crisis. These nonbinding resolutions such as "The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic" (A/RES/66/253) on 21 February 2012, the "Situation of Human Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic" (A/RES/72/191) on 19 December 2017, and most recently "Situation of Human Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic" (A/RES/77/193) on 16 December 2020 have adapted in spite of China and Russia voting against. Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun explained China's position in UNGA resolutions in the same vein of vetoing the similar drafts in the UN Security Council. He notes that a foreign intervention could become a tool of the West instead of having room for

peaceful dialogue and political solution and emphasizing "previous cases show that blatant external intervention has provided few episodes of peace and prosperity, as promised by the West".[514] China aims to prevent condemnation and sanctions against Syria while rejecting pressure on the government in Damascus because all these draft resolutions have been considered by those against such UNSCR, as a way for regime change and a violation of the principle of non-intervention, respect to sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, the UN Security Council has unanimously adopted eighteen resolutions, except Resolution 2209, up until December 2021. The first phase was mainly related to the implementation of the UN Special Envoy and the deployments of missions to observe the ceasefire. It should be noted that all resolutions reflect Chinese concerns on respect to sovereignty, the principle of non-intervention, and territorial integrity while emphasizing the political solution instead of military means or sanctions. As seen in the titles of those resolutions, the main objective has shifted from violence and conflict resolution to the humanitarian relief missions and extension of formalities over years by the deadlock of the political solution. So, the second phase is mainly based on the organizing humanitarian access, calling for a ceasefire, and monitoring civilian evacuations on different occasions.

Chinese activism in the UN has been highlighted as being an unprecedented in disarmament and arms control under international law by the Chinese media.[515] In the eyes of both domestic and international audiences, coverage focuses on Chinese support for humanitarian relief efforts in line with these resolutions.[516] This is because humanitarian aid became one of the significant concerns of the international community by the deadlock of the political solution process.[517] Chinese efforts to keep any reference to intervention and military means out were praised in order to counter the violation of international law and protecting the principle of non-intervention and respect to sovereignty. However, in time, it was depicted as an

[514] "Justification for China's vote against UN Syria resolutions" **Xinhua**, 19 February 2012.
[515] "For the first time in 30 years, China proposes and promotes adoption of a resolution on international arms control and disarmament issues in the UN", **Global Times**, 4 November 2021.
[516] "China supports UN Security Council's Syria aid resolution: FM", **Global Times**, 24 February 2014.
[517] "U.N. Resolution on Syrian Aid", **The New York Times**, 14 July 2014. "UN Security Council extends Syria cross-border aid", **Al Jazeera**, 9 July 2021.

arbitrary act of "punishment" on the part of the West against a country "close with Russia and China".[518] In the Western media, a veto decision was given much more attention than a passed resolution in order to question Russian and Chinese intentions. It should be noted that Russian interests are clearer than Chinese ones in the eyes of the Western media, so the explanations on the Chinese position are given much more attention and understood through different arguments.[519]

On the other hand, many draft resolutions have not been adopted, owing to the negative vote of permanent members of the Security Council. It has to be noted that, there was no security council resolution have been vetoed by the permanent representatives regarding the Libya crisis but many on the Syrian crisis. That demonstrates the ongoing contested nature of the Syrian conflict on one side and the impact of the NATO intervention and further disability and split in the Libya without confrontations in the UN Security Council on the other. On 4 October 2011, China and Russia vetoed a resolution (S/PV.6627) regarding the situation in Syria, which would have described as a threat to international peace and security, called on the government in Damascus to immediately cease its mass killings and violence to have an inclusive Syrian-led political process conducted in an environment free from violence, condemn the continued grave and systematic human rights violations and the use of force against civilians by the Syrian authorities and issued sanctions for the oppression.[520] Li Baodong, the Permanent Representative of China to the UN, makes statements following China's against vote by noting:

> *Respect Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity… to defuse differences through political dialogue and contribute to the maintenance of peace and stability in the Middle East. Most important, it should depend upon whether it complies with the Charter of the United Nations and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States… sanctions or the threat thereof does not help to resolve the question of Syria and, instead, may further complicate the situation..*[521] *(S/PV.6627)*

Li also called for political dialogue and reform and outlined that any action has to respect the aforementioned principles, as well as comply with the UN Charter and the mediation efforts of the relevant countries and organizations in the region.

[518] "UN resolution on Syria tainted by geopolitics", **Global Times**, 25 November 2020.
[519] Damian Grammaticas, "China's stake in the Syria stand-off", **BBC**, 24 February 2012
[520] U.N. Security Council, 66th Year. Summary Report of the 6627th Meeting. 4 October 2011 (S/PV.6627).
[521] U.N. Security Council, 66th Year. Summary Report of the 6627th Meeting. 4 October 2011 (S/PV.6627).

The same concerns were put forward in explaining the second Chinese veto in addition to the good office efforts of the Arab League instead of complicating the issue (S/PV.6711).[522] In spite of normative reasoning in the Chinese statements, Vitaly Churkin, the Permanent Representative of Russian Federation to the UN, also referred to the military realities on the field such as calling for the Syrian opposition to distance itself from extremist groups that are committing acts of violence and ending attacks by armed groups on State institutions, in order to further support Russian perspectives on their involvement to the crisis (S/PV.6711).

The media coverage of the aforementioned vetoes has two different facets. On those news at the Chinese media, China's reasons have associated with acting as a responsible great power calling for a political solution instead of complicating the issue and seeking a regime change.[523] Furthermore, the statement of Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun, a special envoy of the Chinese government, was singled out to argue that China has casted its veto power in an effort to seek a reasonable political dialogue, not to support the Assad regime.[524] Another emphasis was that there would not be any negative impact caused by the Chinese attitude on the Syrian crisis on Sino-Middle Eastern relations in general.[525]

It should be noted that, Chinese media also notes China's concerns along with Russian ones while highlighting the Russian effort to amend the draft resolution.[526] Even though there was a reference in official statements and media coverage to the mediation efforts and peace plan of the Arab League, there was no emphasis on Syria's suspended memberships and sanctions on Syria approved by regional organizations, unlike media from the region.[527] On the other side of the story, coverage in the Western media, as well as regional media except Iranian and Syrian ones, explains the issue as being the resistance of the Russian-Chinese axis to

[522] U.N. Security Council, 67th Year. Summary Report of the 6711th Meeting. 4 February 2012 (S/PV.6711).
[523] "China opposes forced "regime change" in Syria", **People's Daily**, 17 February 2012.
[524] "China's vote against Syria resolution shows responsibility", **People's Daily**, 19 February 2012.
[525] "Chinese UN veto won't upset Arab ties", **Global Times**, 5 February 2012.
[526] "Russia, China use double veto to block UN draft on Syria", **Global Times**, 5 February 2012.
[527] "Arab League Approves Syrian Sanctions", **The New York Times**. 17 November 2011.

Western intervention.[528] Russian presence in the region has been regarded as more important leverage than of China, which perceived solely on economic interests.[529]

The Western media directed the pressure of the international community (that raised concerns in violence, mass killings and instability in Syria) to vetoes of Russia and China. The inaction of the UN has been explained through Chinese and Russian attitudes to the crisis without discussing the outcomes of the concurrent intervention in Libya.[530] However, the UN Security Council Resolution 1973 authorised a no-fly zone for Libya, NATO uses this article in order to legitimize its military intervention to unseat Gaddafi regime. It strengthens Chinese suspicions on Western efforts and is further used as an example of how UN authorization can be interpreted in order to realize regime change.[531]

The following drafts China voted against were on July 2012 (S/PV.6810), May 2014 (S/PV.7180), December 2016 (S/PV.7825), February 2017 (S/PV.7893), September 2019 (S/PV.8623), December 2019 (S/PV.8697), and July 2020 (S/2020/661, S/2020/693). The second phase of Chinese vetoes continue to reflect normative concerns, and delegitimize regime change efforts, in addition to prioritizing humanitarian crises and the actions of terrorist organizations. All parties were called to respect Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity by the Chinese diplomats.

In addition to that, the worsening humanitarian situation in the country has been explained as terrorist organizations attempting to spread their influence. Chinese media and official narratives continued to frame the Chinese position on the Syrian crisis as an act of a responsible power.[532] Furthermore, Western pressure for intervention has been depicted as a remnant of the unipolar world order.[533] Therefore, a firm Chinese commitment against such efforts became significant in challenging the unipolar system habits in order to regain great power status in line

[528] Pepe Escobar, "It's Pentagon/NATO versus the BRICS", **Al Jazeera**, 30 November 2011.
[529] "Success of Annan's peace plan for Syria hinges on Russia", **Al Arabiya**, 4 April 2012.
[530] "Russia and China Block U.N. Action on Crisis in Syria", **The New York Times**, 4 February 2012.
[531] Courtney J. Fung, **China and Intervention at the UN Security Council**, New York, Oxford University Press, 2019, p.128.
[532] "China remains a responsible power around the world, says Chinese FM", **Xinhua**, 23 October 2019.
[533] Clifford A. Kiracofe, "Syria targeted by US advocates of unipolar global order", **Global Times**, 13 June 2013

with Xi Jinping's major power diplomacy. In response to China's responsible power image, the Western media has criticized Russian and Chinese positions by arguing that such decisions cause "the most vulnerable suffering for the political gains of those at the top".[534]

Moreover, China's concerns on radicalization and the spread of terrorism in connection with Uyghur foreign fighters were not only mentioned in Chinese media coverage but also were noted by the Western media.[535] China's persistent rejection of any foreign interference has been connected to a focus on its own domestic issues to prevent foreign critiques from the beginning of the crisis.[536] China has also brought the post-war reconstruction of Syria and its economic and social development to the forefront, which would affect its benevolent provider image and the potential Chinese contribution to the process (S/PV.8623).[537] This benevolent image and moral high ground in the normative discussions also coincided with some Confucian themes as benevolence (ren), harmony (he), and moral righteousness (junzi). All media coverage, Chinese, regional, and Western, focused on statements as to whether the motivations of China are foreign support for an underdeveloped and ruined economy or an ambition to expand its influence in Syria.[538]

China's role in UN Security Council discussions on those Middle East crises works to achieve three outcomes. First, China can delegitimize arguments in favour of foreign intervention as an act of regime change. It is explaining its position in the eyes of other states and domestic, regional, and international audiences, especially after the Libya case.

This is because the Libya case makes clear how the Western powers can interpret the UN Security Council resolutions for the purpose of regime change and

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[534] "With a U.N. Veto, Russia and China Add to Syria's Misery", **The New York Times**, 20 July 2020.
[535] "China state media blames Syria rebels for Xinjiang violence", **Reuters**, 1 July 2013. Lin Meilian, "Xinjiang terrorists finding training, support in Syria, Turkey", **Global Times**, 1 July 2013.
[536] Eddie Walsh, "China in Syria Series: III", **The Diplomat**, 29 August 2011.
[537] U.N. Security Council, 74th Year. Summary Report of the 8623rd Meeting. 19 September 2019 (S/PV.8623).
[538] "China Eyes Role Rebuilding Syria While Putin Spars With West", **Bloomberg**, 21 December 2017. Erika Solomon and Nazih Osseiran, "Lebanon hopes Syrian reconstruction will lure Chinese investment", **Financial Times**, 26 July 2017. "China to play bigger role in Syria's reconstruction, development process: ambassador", **People's Daily**, 12 February 2018. "Syrian economy lies in ruins and China sniffs opportunity", **The Guardian**, 21 July 2021. "China builds ties with Syria helping Assad withstand US financial warfare", **Al Arabiya**, 24 July 2021.

foreign military interference. There was not social pressure from all of the neighbouring countries and regional organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League in the Syrian crisis like the Libya case and the call of the Arab League and the African Union for the establishment of a no-fly zone over Libya. Although China abstained during the vote on Resolution 1973 concerning the Libya crisis, China did not make same decision in regards to resolutions concerning the Syrian crisis after what was implemented in Libya.

Moreover, China's arguments were strengthened by the lack of unanimous support on the part of numerous regional actors for intervention, as well as what has been experienced in Libya and in many regional states in regards to the fade-out of the Arab Uprisings. It has to be noted that, all these armed conflicts and civil wars have changed enormously due to domestic, regional and international determinants, so what is discussing today is way different than the reasoning during the first days of these crises. So, those conflicts have forced China to reorient its regional policy from primarily economic and commercial priorities towards further political and military tensions, regional dynamics, and other great powers entanglement in the region.[539]

Secondly, one of the major intentions of Beijing has been to stand aloof from armed conflict and the use of military means unless the instability threatened vital economic interests or the security of Chinese citizens rather than participating in military conflict, despite rumours of pro-Assad or pro-Gaddafi military support. As seen in the early stages of the Libya Civil War, China has denied any military supply to the parties, especially in Libya since the UN Security Council Resolution has imposed sanctions. Moreover, Libyan officials contact to the Chinese companies were also denied to result in any kind of arm shipment to the parties in Libya, even though the visit was confirmed yet noting without the knowledge of the Chinese authorities. Chinese entanglement in Libyan and Syrian crises can be expected to increase due to the investments of Chinese companies for the reconstruction of the countries. China has already has an investments in many different Libyan infrastructure and industry, especially in energy sector. Further economic and trade

[539] Guy Burton, "Chinese Conflict Management in Libya, Syria and Yemen after the Arab Uprisings", **Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies**, Vol.13, No.1, 2019, p.34.

relations would also points those investments as a priority for the future economic relations.

Finally, the Chinese position in these conflicts promotes a norm maker role by discussing the concept of responsible protection into diplomatic discourse instead of implementing the vague definition of humanitarian intervention.[540] This explains Chinese vetoes as the decision of a responsible power to avoid any foreign interference. In the early stages of the upheaval, Zhao Lei pointed to a developing Chinese attitude as being a "significant shift in Chinese strategic culture from passively following international norms to actively making them… Chinese leaders… emphasize 'discourse power' and the principle that a great power should constructively set agendas, not just follow the rules set by others".[541]

The evolving role of China in global affairs demonstrates the changing Chinese attitude towards international norms, from passive compliance to proactive contribution and participation in the norm-shaping debate. It functions along the lines of the great power diplomacy of Xi Jinping and the self-ascribed norm-maker agenda of a great power identity. Both the benevolent credit provider promises for the reconstruction of those ruined countries and the moral high ground in the normative discussions whether on rejecting foreign intervention or discussing the principle of non-intervention coincided with some Confucian themes as benevolence (ren), harmony (he), and moral righteousness (junzi).

In conclusion, all these civil wars in Syria, Libya, and even Yemen was not the primary concerns of Beijing. China's role might be overlooked by its rather neutral, passive but efficient involvement in those crises in comparison to other great powers' entanglement. It demonstrates the changing Chinese attitude towards international norms, from passive compliance to active participation in norm-shaping debate whether there is a clear rejection or a proactive contribution. It works for the great power diplomacy of Xi Jinping and self-ascribed norm-maker and norm-shaper agenda as an emerging great power in reinterpreting international norms. Even though "hide and bide" is no longer an indisputable guideline in evolving foreign

[540] Ruan Zongze, "Responsible Protection: Building a Safer World", **China Institute of International Studies**, May/June 2012. Andrew Garwood-Gowers, "China's 'Responsible Protection' Concept: Reinterpreting the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and Military Intervention for Humanitarian Purposes", **Asian Journal of International Law**, Vol.6, 2016, p.115.
[541] Zhao, L., **op.cit**., p.351.

policy logic of China, it can still affect cautious but efficient direction through China's strategic culture over grand strategic preferences instead of other great powers' direct engagements into such conflict.

As seen in a recent survey, China has a much more positive view in the eyes of the public opinion of the Middle East.[542] The second identity of China as a developing nation certainly does not hurt in that process, so it can sustain a "win-win" partnership in the Middle East and a contribution to the reconstruction of Syria despite its equal responsibility as a great power. Finally, the China-based media coverage has to be noted as effective as their Western counterparts in making the Chinese rationale heard by the regional and international audience. It would be the key determinant for convincing the audience by communicating China more efficiently in terms of whether it engages in conflict resolution or relationship building. The perception of others is the significant part in the adjustment of grand strategy in accordance with those concerns driven by strategic culture and defensive foundations of the assertive turn.

4.2. CHINA'S GRAND PLAN: THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

On 7 September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled his grand plan for the future of China's investment, trade, and development cooperation abroad, namely as Silk Road Economic Belt. The name of this grand plan has changed many times as Silk Road Economic Belt, Silk Road in 21st Century, One Belt One Road (OBOR), but the official name stands as *Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road Development Strategy*. It is mostly shorten as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) after multiple changes occurred in labelling and the scope of this strategy. Just in his first year as a president, Xi Jinping announced China's objective to "jointly build an economic belt along the Silk Road" for the purpose of deepening cooperation, forging closer economic ties, and expand development in the Eurasian region.[543] This declaration was made in Astana, Kazakhstan as a major crossroad of

[542] Li-Chen Sim, Lucille Greer, "What does the Arab Street think of China and Russia? The answers may surprise you", **The Atlantic**, 15 June 2021.
[543] Xi Jinping, "Promote People-to-People Friendship and Create a Better Future", Xi Jinping's speech at Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev University, 7 September 2013.

the historical Silk Road as well as a centre of contemporary geopolitical system of Central Asia that connects China to Middle East and Europe.

The meaning of "belt" and "road" are mostly confused and getting lost in translation since Belt refers to Silk Road Economic Belt connecting China with Central Asia, Russia, Southeast Asia and the Middle East through different land routes. Whereas, Road stands for the maritime routes of 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which was also announced in October 2013 during Xi Jinping's visits to Indonesia, as China's significant partner in Southeast Asia and the part of *the Malacca Dilemma*.[544] So that, Xi's vision and outlook not only suitable for China's economic interest but also aims to solve a huge problem of his predecessors as President Hu Jintao called China's overreliance on the Malacca Strait for trade, by relieving the Malacca dilemma.

China has already become the world's second largest economy with a great success in development, growth, production, trade, investment, and technology. The BRI has appeared as the outcome of that unprecedented economic capability with the ambitious intentions of Xi Jinping leadership. Since the unveiling of this grand plan, it was noted as the most prominent feature of China's assertiveness in economic domain as well as the economic objective for Xi Jinping's vision, known as Chinese Dream. The defensive assertiveness of Xi Jinping's adjustment in China's grand strategy can be traced back in this grand plan. First, the Belt and Road Initiative has its own agenda for the China's interest in trade, finance, investment and many fields of economic relations in general. This assertive output has always been referred with the defensive posture of China's foreign relations as previous chapters summarize that as in the peaceful rise narrative on grand strategy. Secondly, the BRI stands as a huge opportunity for the developing world in accordance with China's discourse on south-south relation and development cooperation between China and the developing world. It serves the lucrative transition of wealth accumulated in China by investing in foreign states.

However, the assertiveness of these defensive interests have revealed in time since the economic and social burdens of loans, credits, investments, Chinese foreign workers would cause the discussion on China's debt trap diplomacy, as all credits

[544] Shaofeng Chen, "China's Self-Extrication from the 'Malacca Dilemma' and Implications", **International Journal of China Studies**, Col.1, No.1, January 2010, p.1-24.

eventually increase the lender's political leverage.[545] Even, the discussions on the BRI and debt-trap diplomacy have been referred Chinese Tributary System and Chinese strategic culture through a modernized version of *Tianxia (Land under Heaven)*, China's understanding of being at the centre of the world, being the core of world domination.[546] The Silk Road, in that regard was an example of Chinese power reflecting its grip over the trade partners alike to having such tributary relationship with the Southeast Asia for ages. Moreover, the debt trap critiques with cultural and historical references are parts of an assertive outlook on China's unique approach to the world system and international relations in general to develop a distinctive approach with increasingly Chinese characteristics.[547]

Therefore, this part analyse the Belt and Road Initiative as a grand plan of Xi Jinping's grand strategy adjustment. The first section places the BRI within the political vision of Xi Jinping leadership, Chinese Dream, to understand the significance of this major prospect as a grand plan. Secondly, the role of the Middle East in the Belt and Road Initiative will be analysed while emphasizing defensive assertiveness grand strategy adjustment. It will present both the economic focus on Sino-Middle Eastern relations in the latest decade as well as the impact of the BRI on China's global and regional affairs. In the last section, the challenges and opportunities of the BRI in Sino-Middle Eastern relations will be discussed as the future trajectory of the grand plan.

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[545] Brahma Chellaney, "China's Debt Trap Diplomacy", **Project Syndicate**, 23 January 2017. (https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-one-belt-one-road-loans-debt-by-brahma-chellaney-2017-01)

[546] Y. Y. Chang, "Understanding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) An Initiative to Make China Great Again?", **European Journal of East Asian Studies**, Vol.18, No.1, 2019, p.7-35. Mark Beeson and Corey Crawford, "Putting the BRI in Perspective: History, Hegemony and Geoeconomics", **Chinese Political Science Review**, 2022, p.1-18. Yuan Jiang, "Unpacking the Belt and Road Initiative: Does Its Public Diplomacy Narratives Match Its Implementation?", **East Asia**, 2022, p.1-17. Rajiv Narayanan "The China Dream, Tianxia and Belt and Road Initiative:'Pax Sinica' or Middle Power Coalition for Asia-Pacific?", **Journal of the United Service Institution of India**, Vol.147, No.608, April-June 2017.

[547] Yaqing Qin, "Development of International Relations theory in China: progress through debates", **International Relations of the Asia-Pacific**, Vol.11, No.2, 2011, p.231-257.

4.2.1. Chinese Dream and the Belt and Road Initiative

In the Chinese politics, slogans and names that promote CCP's objectives for the future of China's economics, politics, social life and development path in general convey leader's vision for the country and foreign relations. In that regard, each slogans and names matter in describing defensive and assertive nature of political ideology about the leadership. Xi Jinping described his vision with the words of Chinese Dream in his inaugural policy statement that he summarizes this overall objective as *the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nations* in reference to the elements in Chinese strategic culture. Chinese Dream stands more comprehensive and assertive ideal in expressing with a catchy sound when it compares with Xi Jinping's predecessors' slogans such as Jiang Zemin's the Three Representatives and Hu Jintao's the Scientific Outlook on Development. As the new paramount leader of China, the use of the word "dream" in Xi Jinping's first policy declaration is also significant since none of his predecessors used such word, which has that much reference to the Chinese strategic culture. Chai and Chai highlight that deliberate choice as unprecedented in Chinese leadership since 1949, besides the word "dream" may refer both Confucian ideals and contemporary Chinese style socialism/capitalism.[548] Since China can dare to dream, the first reaction to that phrase was about whether such vision paved a way for more aggressive, even offensive China for solving its problems by the use of force, which is clearly denounced in the Confucianism. Xi Jinping's vision on "Community of Shared Future" has interpreted in accordance with Chinese *He-he* culture (the goal of harmony and the solution of syncretism) as a geo-civilization strategy by the BRI.[549]

Moreover, the dream of a future prospect has already mentioned in the poem of "Flowing Spring" by saying "Hearts full of the Dream of Central Kingdom (China)" to refer national salvation ideal against foreign aggressions in the late 13th century.[550] The rejuvenation is a massage to overcoming the century of humiliation,

[548] Winberg Chai and May-lee Chai, "The Meaning of Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream", **American Journal of Chinese Studies**, Vol.20, No.2, October 2013, p.97.
[549] Yiwei Wang and Xuejun Li, "Is the Belt and Road Initiative a Chinese Geo-Political Strategy?", **Asian Affairs**, Vol.50, No.2, 2019, p.265.
[550] Wang Qiangan, "The Origin of the Words China Dream", **Contemporary China History Studies**, Vol.20, No.6, 2013, p.110-116.

and now having a further objective for the Chinese nation. As Mao Zedong mobilized the Chinese youth in his political initiatives primarily in the Cultural Revolution, Xi Jinping also calls for the youth population to contribute to realization of his political vision.[551] The references to the strategic culture and pioneer political leaders also intensify Xi Jinping's personal cult in the early stages of his leadership.

With the 19th Communist Party Congress in October 2017, Xi Jinping's *Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era* was incorporated into the constitution. The Belt and Road Initiative is also a significant part of the implementation of this referred Chinese characteristics in economic relations as a part of *Chinese Dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*. Since Chinese Dream has no territorial bound like the American Dream, the most significant thing to be benefitted from such future prospect is about to be participate that grand vision. The same feature can be applied to the participation to the BRI in order to take advantage of world society and shared prosperity of development cooperation. The Chinese media hails the unwavering leadership of Xi Jinping and efforts to build his leadership in a way to supress even Deng Xiaoping's opening up reforms, in reaching 21st century.[552] Therefore, the discussion on China's grand plan is not free from the notion of assertiveness since Xi Jinping described his vision on Chinese Dream in 2013 when he was elected as the President of PRC at 12th National People's Congress as:

> *We must make persistent efforts, press ahead with indomitable will, continue to push forward the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and strive to achieve the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. To realize the Chinese dream, China must take the Chinese way. To realize the Chinese road, we must spread the Chinese spirit, which combines the spirit of the nation with patriotism as the core and the spirit of the time with reform and innovation as the core.*[553]

Xi Jinping states in the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China as "realizing our great dream demands a great project", the Belt and Road

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[551] "Youth urged to contribute to realization of 'Chinese dream'", **Xinhua**, 5 May 2013.
[552] Eric X. Li, "Under Xi, a Chinese Renaissance is assured, contrary to what the West believes", **South China Morning Post**, 1 November 2017. William Zheng, "China growth model shows Xi Jinping's vision will outshine that of Deng Xiaoping, and the world can profit " **South China Morning Post**, 2 November 2017.
[553] "President vows to press ahead with 'Chinese dream'", **12th National People's Congress**, Beijing, 17 March 2013.

Initiative itself was described as the grand plan to fulfil Chinese Dream in Xi Jinping's future prospect.[554]

The Belt and Road Initiative is used to refer as the New Silk Road at the early stages of the grand plan. This name indicates that the source of all this initiative is driven by Chinese economic, financial and investment capabilities, yet Chinese officials have always been avoiding such Sino-oriented emphasis in accordance to the peaceful rise, peaceful development and finally development cooperation grand strategy outlook. What is stressed the official narrative is about being a joint effort of developing countries for the development cooperation. As summarized in the Peaceful Rise section of this study, it refers China's self-ascribed position in the world both being a responsible global actor in world politics and still being among the developing nations of the world economy. Therefore, the name of this grand plan has to avoid any confrontations with other states, especially other great powers. Moreover, the initiative should not sound like a global ambition of Chinese interests in order to not being perceived as a hegemonic intention. Instead, the win-win relationships have to be promoted in describing this development cooperation initiative, which would serve both parties' interest, even all parties involved. China still describes itself as a developing nation that has a long route ahead to reach developed nation status fully since the spread of wealth and development has to reach every corners of the country and each levels of society as it can pull the majority of its population out of poverty within a few decades.

In foreign relations, China's focus is primarily on the global south since the leadership notes its commitment to development cooperation and multilateralism with fellow developing nations. Therefore, China did not reject the reality of its rising power status but rather evolved it to be a global leader, instead of *the* global leader. The official discourse deliberately acknowledges the fact that China is a developing nation instead of labelled as revisionist, aggressive power that seeks regional and then global hegemony. Both narratives on Chinese Dream and the BRI are parts of major strategy for the consolidation of power as well as the most sustainable and influential way for social orientation. As Loh notes, the defensive reaction of Chinese grand strategy also changes the emphasis on these two major

[554] Xi, **op.cit.**, 2017, p.13.

trademarks of Xi Jinping era since the academic research among Chinese scholars on Chinese Dream has gradually declined within three years whereas the number of researches on the BRI have increased steadily since the first day of its declaration because the promotion of this grand plan takes the upmost priority.[555]

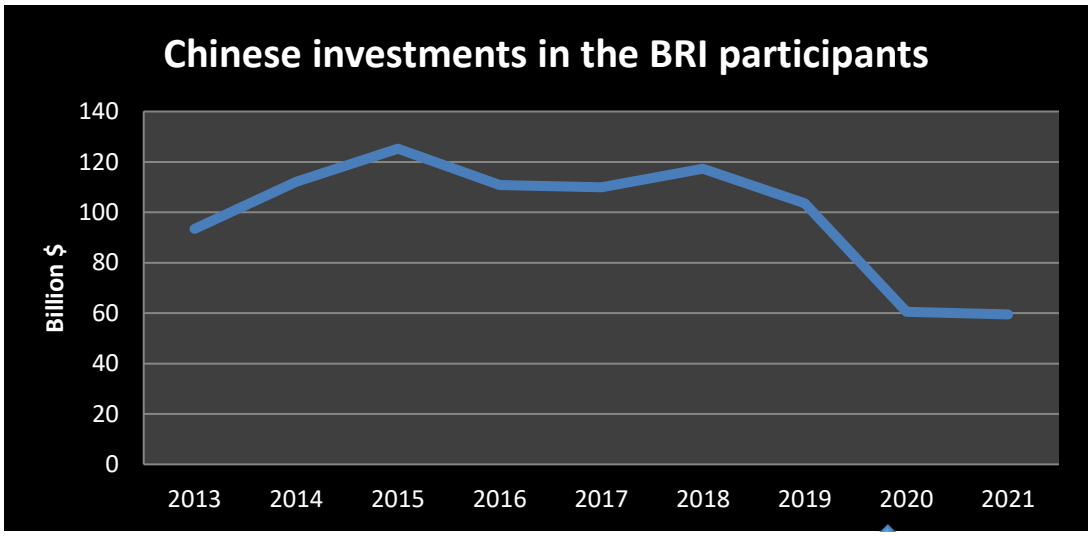
As China has changed the discourse on the rise of China phenomenon, from peaceful rise, to peaceful development and lastly, development cooperation; the name of initiative has transformed alike process in reaching the official name as *Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road Development Strategy*. The aims of the initiative extend from sharing the prosperity from highly developed shores of China to underdeveloped inner and western parts of the country, and then expanding the cooperation network with the rest of the underdeveloped or developing countries. The name of this grand plan has changed many times as Silk Road Economic Belt, Silk Road in 21st Century, One Belt One Road, and finally the Belt and Road Initiative. These changes are deliberate choices the vast collection of development and investment projects would extend from Southeast Asia to Africa, the Middle East and Europe would not be perceived as a threat. This precision in the name of the grand plan indicates the defensive foundation in promoting the initiative from the first stage as well as surpassing the emphasis on Chinese Dream. The name of the Belt and Road Initiative, which highlights neither the source nor the receiver; but the route of interaction itself, has decided in order to offer governments in different regions a more appealing relationship without a threat perception on the development cooperation.

Launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, the Belt and Road Initiative has often questioned on being an assertive plan reflecting Chinese ambitions to be a hegemonic power, a norm-maker starting from economic governance and investment interactions, and a major credit lender to the global south that could turn into an economic, political, and security leverage in foreign affairs. Xi Jinping leadership aims to construct a Sino-centric regional order by transforming China's role in global affairs as a developed nation with growing influence and further investments funded

[555] Dylan M. H. Loh, "The 'Chinese Dream' and the 'Belt and Road Initiative': narratives, practices, and sub-state actors", **International Relations of the Asia-Pacific** , Vol.21, No.2, 2021, p.181.

by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.[556] However, China has multiple identities in world politics which all serves in criticizing and defending those arguments on China's actions in global affairs, and hegemonic intention.[557] Thus, the economic and political leverage of the BRI suits the multiple identities of China being both developed nation and developing nation. In other aspect, there is a growing official narrative complies with the notion that China is still a developing nation and does not have hegemonic intentions. So that, the BRI does not work for the purpose of a developed nation with growing power, instead it is rather a framework for China's mind-set on neighbouring regions such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization provides a platform on an institutional basis for further cooperation.[558]

Figure 8: Chinese Investment in the BRI Participants (2013-2021)



Source: Statista, Chinese Investments in Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative 2013 – 2021.

Therefore, the BRI stands as a response to economic, social, and security challenges that have to be overcame on the development path of the Chinese nation. Since the development and economic growth are arguably the most important pillars

[556] Sinem Ünaldılar Kocamaz, "The Rise of New Powers in World Politics: Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", **Uluslararası İlişkiler**, Vol. 16, No. 61, 2019, pp. 135.
[557] Veysel Tekdal, "China's Belt and Road Initiative: at the crossroads of challenges and ambitions", **The Pacific Review**, Vol.31, No.3, 2018, p.379-384.
[558] Anchi Hoh, "China's Belt and road Initiative in Central Asia and the Middle East", **Digest of Middle East Studies**, Vol. 28, No.2, 2019, p.241-276.

of regime security of the CCP, domestic stability, and economic prosperity of China, the BRI stands as a protective and defensive solution to domestic problems of the second largest economy of the world.[559] Those critiques have to be expected inevitable reactions towards a rising power in the world history. However, such an assertive turn in facing domestic, regional, and global challenges is Xi Jinping's preference in counterbalancing US reactions (as in Obama's Asia Pivot and Trump's Trade Wars) to China's economic rise as well as effective use of overcapacity and foreign exchange reserves for lucrative investment and credit while initiating a response to economic slowdown, energy interdependence, and trade imbalance.[560]

Even though the grand plan just slowed down by the Covid-19 pandemic since 2020, Chinese investments to the BRI participant countries have reached more than 800 billion in total over a decade. In line with defensive aspect of the grand plan, Wang summarizes major goals of the BRI as "promoting policy coordination, facilitating connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds".[561] For these major goals, the geopolitical importance of the Middle East, both in implementing in MENA states and using the route through the region became significant for such grand plan.

4.2.2. The Belt and Road Initiative and the Middle East

By March 2022, 139 states have signed Memorandum of Understanding with China to be a part of the BRI by the majority participation from Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. In the Middle East, the majority of states have signed Memorandum of Understanding to participate the BRI, with the exception of Israel, Palestine, and Jordan as of March 2022.

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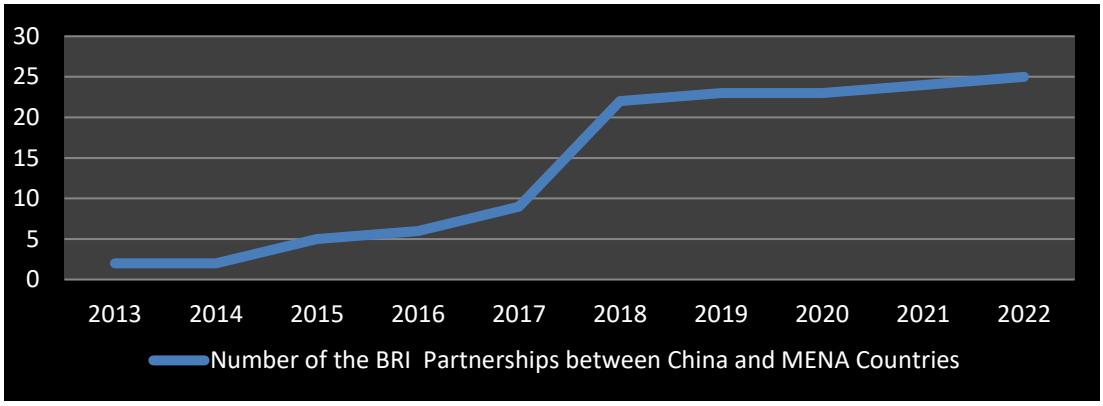
[559] Huiyao Wang and Miao Lu, **China Goes Global: The Impact of Chinese Overseas Investment on its Business Enterprises** London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p.182. Longmei Zhang, "Rebalancing in China Progress and Prospects", **IMF Working Paper**, No.183, 2016.

[560] Peter Ferdinand, "Westward ho-the China dream and 'one belt, one road': Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping", **International Affairs**, Vol.92, No. 4, July 2016, p.941-957. Wang Dong, "Is China Trying to Push the U.S. out of East Asia", **China Quarterly of International and Strategic Studies**, Vol.1, No.1, 2015, p.59-84. Michael Clarke, "Beijing's Pivot West: The Convergence of Innenpolitik and Aussenpolitik on China's 'Belt and Road'?", **Journal of Contemporary China**, Vol.29, No.123, 2020, p.336-353.

[561] Wang, Y., **op.cit.**, 2016, p.457.

As demonstrated in the charter and the table on the BRI participant MENA states, the majority of participation were realize after the China's Arab Policy Paper was published in 2016. Thus, the image of the Initiative will not only depend on the planning and execution of the investment and construction through the BRI but also welcoming all participants for the sake of development cooperation in the global south.

Figure 9: Changes in the Number of BRI Partnerships in MENA



Source: Christoph Nedopil, "Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative", Green Finance & Development Centre, FISF Fudan University, 2022.

Even though some Chinese scholars argue that, China has to approach the region in a distinct way by focusing on key players in the Middle East such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran; or just oil-rich rentier states of the Gulf sub-region; Chinese decision makers did not adapt the Middle Eastern exceptionalism in their motivation.[562] Furthermore, China has sustained its cautious attitude in regional context to avoid taking sides in any regional confrontation. Thus, the BRI participation of almost all countries in the Gulf region was realized in 2018 including Iran and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the problematic relationship between South Sudan and the Sudan was also taken into account in their participation alike to the Libya Civil War shapes Libya and its fellow Maghreb neighbours participation to the BRI in the same year. The Qatar Crisis was also delayed the signing of the Memorandum

[562] Anchi Hoh, **op.cit.**, p.252.

of Understanding between China and Qatar in order to not fall into that regional confrontation. These delays or sub-regional concerns demonstrate that, China still stick to the defensive features in its regional policy even in the most assertive grand plan interaction with the region.

Table 5: The BRI Participant Countries in the Middle East

Year of Memorandum of Understanding	The BRI Participant MENA Countries
2013	Afghanistan, Pakistan
2015	Iraq, Turkey, Somalia
2016	Egypt
2017	Lebanon, Morocco, Yemen
2018	Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Iran, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, South Sudan, Tunisia, UAE
2019	Qatar
2021	Eritrea
2022	Syria

Source: Christoph Nedopil, "Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative", Green Finance & Development Centre, FISF Fudan University, 2022.

Chinese imports have been increasing in the neighbouring regions starting from Central Asia, Asia-Pacific and Southeast Asia. The Middle East is a latecomer in comparison to China's interaction with other parts of Asia if the energy relations could be excluded in that analysis. However, the BRI comes across the geopolitical significance of the Middle East. It gives a special priority to the region regardless of China's accustomed low-profile before in the regional affairs. The Middle East region has a vital connection in 21st Century Maritime Silk Road considering the Suez Canal, Gulf of Aden, and the Bab al Mandab Strait as well as important ports on the maritime route such as Gwadar, Karachi, Djibouti, Massawa, Mogadishu, Haifa, Ashed, and Istanbul. One of the Westward belts of the BRI, China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor also goes through Iran and Turkey in connecting China to the Middle East and Europe. In fact, this economic corridor stands as the

major route of the Silk Road Economic Belt. Therefore, the cumulative notional amount of Chinese investment in BRI-participating economies (278,5 billion $) is almost surplus China's investment in North America (224 billion $) and EU (298 billion $).[563] The following data-set highlights the boost in trade relations in between China and Middle East states before China's accession to the WTO in 2001 to 2017 by comparing the changes in the percentage of imports from China and the percentage of debt to China in the country's GDP.

Table 6: MENA States Imports from China & Debts to China

Country	Imports from China (% of GDP) 2000	Imports from China (% of GDP) 2017	Debt to China (% of GDP) 2000	Debt to China (% of GDP) 2017
Djibouti	9,7	108,4	0	79,2
Egypt	0,8	4,9	0	2,8
Ethiopia	0,7	3,5	0	17,2
Iran	1,8	8,4	0	2,1
Iraq	1,3	4,4	0	-
Israel	0,5	2,6	0	-
Jordan	2,4	7	0	3,8
Kuwait	0,8	2,6	0	-
Lebanon	1	3,8	0	0,1
Oman	0,4	3,3	0	-
Qatar	0,2	1	0	-
Saudi Arabia	0,6	2,7	0	0,4
Turkey	0,4	2,1	0	0,5
UAE	2	7,6	0	0,6
Yemen	1,8	3,5	0,7	0,3

Source: Council on Foreign Relations, Belt and Road Tracker, May 2019.

Over a decade, the MENA region became the most significant recipient of the Chinese investment and cooperation due to the BRI plans and projects in comparison to other regions of the world. While many Middle East countries were developing their own national development goals such as Saudi Vision 2030, Turkey's Vision

[563] OECD Business and Finance Outlook 2018, **China's Belt and Road Initiative in the Global Trade, Investment and Finance Landscape**, Paris,2018, p.23.

2023, UAE National Development Vision 2021, Qatar National Vision 2030, and New Kuwait Vision 2035, the BRI enables cooperation basis for bilateral interaction in many fields.[564] These MENA states with such major visions for the future of their country views China as a good partner for development cooperation, source of investment and economic partnership in addition to the traditional partners in the West.[565] The financial needs for such comprehensive visions on national development have to be realized by geopolitical pivots to Asia such as Turkey's Asia Anew and Middle Corridor Initiative.

On the contrary to replace traditional bonds to the Western or Russian ties in economic relations, the economic pragmatism is essential in diversifying and increasing source of foreign investments, which credits, loans, and investments of Chinese state, Chinese companies, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank can provide further funding to major development projects.[566] However, there is always a problem of illusion for such major opportunity that can cast giant shadow than the reality, as Syria's expectation for the BRI and Chinese involvement to the reconstruction to the country indicates.[567]

China welcomes all participants to its grand plan but it is far less interested in some MENA countries than those MENA states expect are in China since the trade volumes, economic engagement, and oil interdependency does not necessitate advancement of cooperation. In that regard, the Middle East became the recipient of 28,5% total Chinese BRI investment while East Asia can gets 20,43%, Sub-Saharan Africa receives 19,01%, and Europe 13,19% from the total share. Furthermore, the balance between the value of import and exports to and from the Middle East states are mostly in favour of China, with the exception of oil-rich states such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, and Iraq. Therefore, Chinese investments by MENA

[564] Sıla Kulaksız, "Financial Integration via Belt and Road Initiative: China–Turkey Cooperation", **Global Journal of Emerging Market Economies**, Vol.11, No.1-2, 2019, p.48-64. Mordechai Chaziza, "China's Strategic Partnership with Kuwait: New Opportunities for the Belt and Road Initiative", **Contemporary Review of the Middle East**, Vol.7, No.4, 2020, p.501-519. Dongmei Chen "China's Belt and Road Initiative and Saudi Vision 2030: A Review of the Partnership for Sustainability", **KAPSARC**, May 2021.

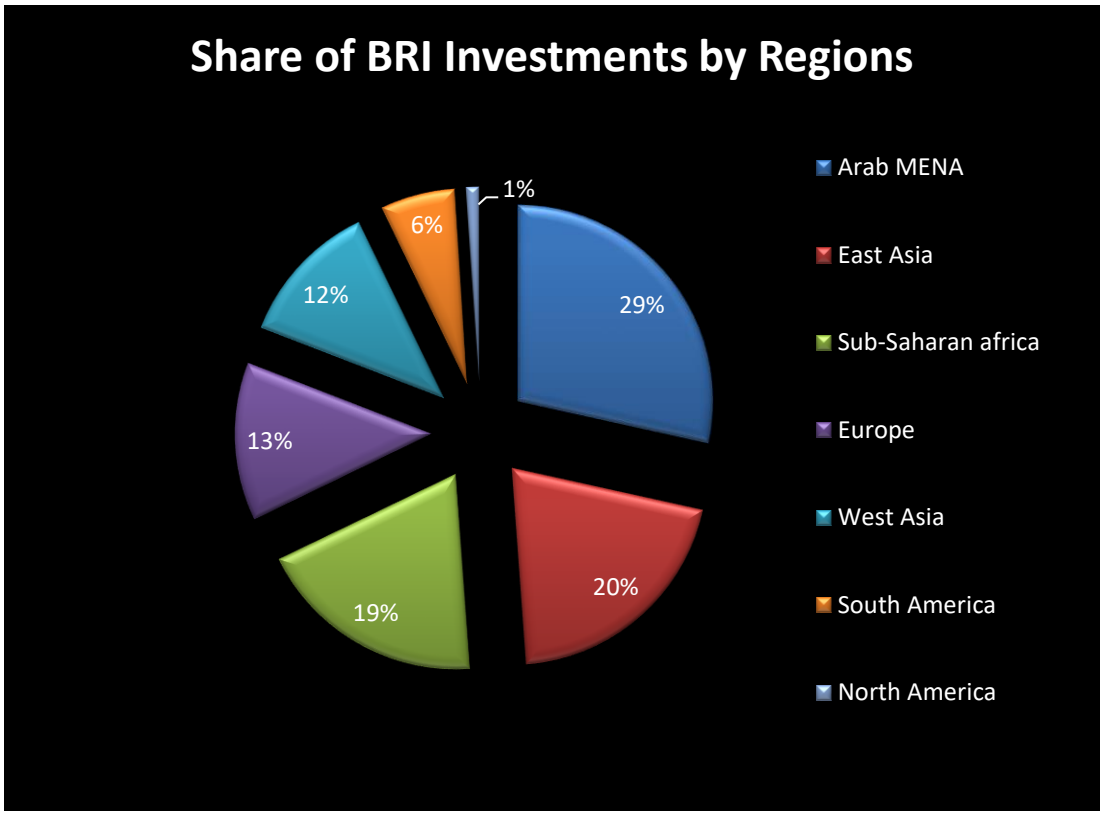
[565] Altay Atlı, "A View from Ankara: Turkey's Relations with China in a changing Middle East", **Mediterranean Quarterly**, Vol.26, No.1, 2015, p135.

[566] Seçkin Köstem, "Turkey and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: Economic Pragmatism meets Geopolitics", **Global Policy**, Vol.10, No.4, November 2019, p.650.

[567] Ghiselli and Al-Sudairi, **op.cit.**, p.3.

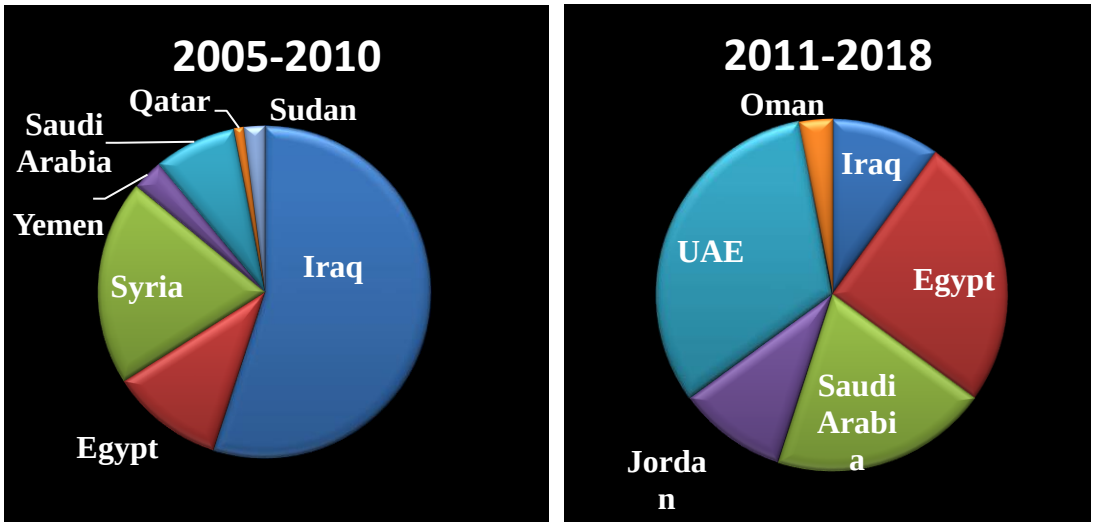
countries have shifted towards the larger share of oil-rich countries in percentage while the total sum of investment was also increasing.

Figure 10: Share of BRI Investments by Regions



Source: Christoph Nedopil, "Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative", Green Finance & Development Centre, FISF Fudan University, 2022.

Figure 11: Share of MENA States in BRI Investments



Source: Chinese Investments by MENA Countries. Chinese Global Investment Tracker.

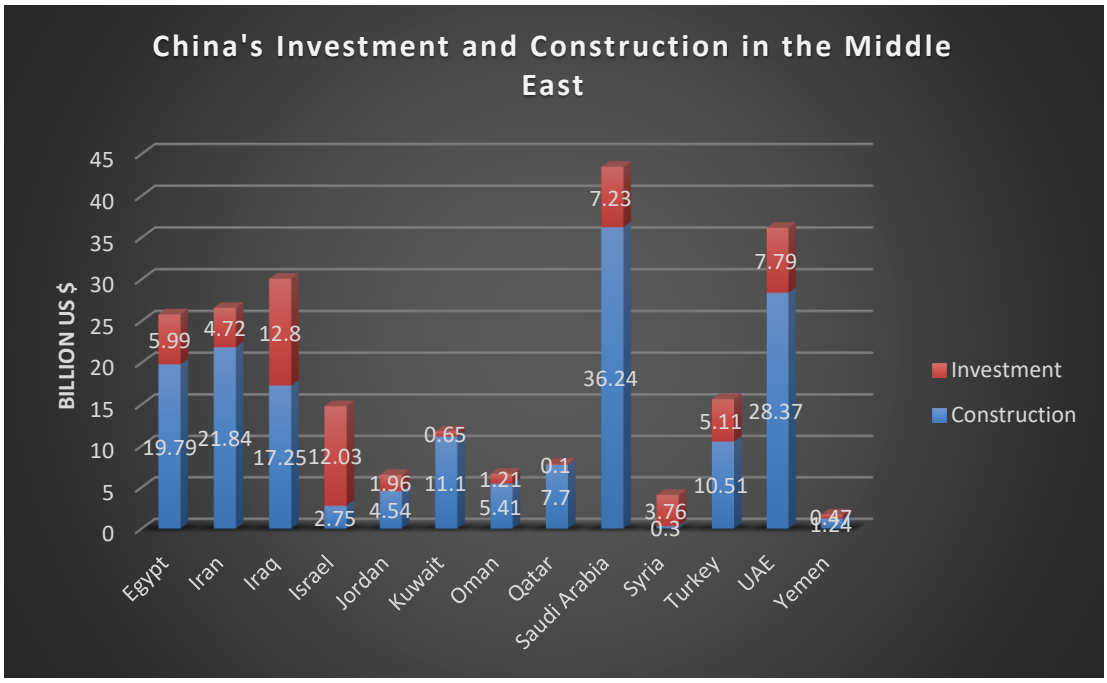
Chinese engagements through the Belt and Road Initiative extend to the different sectors from logistics investments to agricultural products, tourism, and technology. However, the major sector that drives China's both investment plans and construction projects is energy sector with the largest share in total economic engagement. Therefore, China's economic engagement with oil-rich countries such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iraq, and Iran take the lead in China's not only investment plans but also construction projects to extract oil and natural gas, to develop high-tech petroleum facilities, and stable transportation lines for energy supply. The share of the Middle East in China's crude oil import is 44% and 9% natural gas import as of February 2020 which placed region as a vital source of energy consumption.[568] Although China has sought to diversify its sources of petroleum, the region continues to be the most important in China's development, which its dependency to total energy imports, is expected to rise from 65% in 2016 to nearly 80% in 2035.

As an example, Sino-Iranian relations are benefitted from these energy relations when Chinese-Iranian trade has increased from 5.6 billion $ (2003) to 51.8 billion $ (2014) over a decade. China's share in Iranian trade has risen from %15 in 2010 to be the top trading partner with the share of 31,9 % in 2015, and 33,4% in

[568] US Energy Information Administration, **Country Analysis Executive Summary: China**, 30 September 2020. https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/China/china.pdf

2020 even the sanctions on Tehran backlash further cooperation.[569] Furthermore, this dependency between China and MENA encourages Beijing to pursue energy transition from fossil fuels to green and renewable energy along with environmental concerns, pollution, and efforts against the climate change.[570] The Middle East states also welcome such cooperation in the field of renewable energy. Even though China aims to diversify its energy resources, the Middle East, and especially the Gulf region and the Strait of Hormuz, remains as strategic as the Strait of Malacca for Chinese trade routes and energy consumption. Turkey, Israel, and Egypt as non-rentier states in the Middle East, follow these oil-rich countries to acquire Chinese loans, credits, and investments in accordance with their regional importance, technological development cooperation, and global share in world economics.

Figure 12: China's Investment and Construction in the Middle East



Source: China Global Investment Tracker (China's Investment and Contract in the Middle East 2005-2021).

MENA has the leading role in energy sectors and infrastructure project of the BRI. The transportation projects take the second largest share in China's BRI

[569] IMF, **Direction of Trade Statistics**, 2021.
[570] Downs, **op.cit.**.

engagement followed by investment and constructions in metals sector, real estate, and utilities. China's decision to invest in energy and transportation demonstrates that, Beijing has a defensive priority for its interests in the region as it has always prioritizes regional stability and energy security for reliable energy supply from the region. The most significant success of BRI in the Middle East would be demonstrating Chinese ability to eliminate security threats and to reduce the risk of political instability that challenge China's political, economic, and energy interests in the region. This extends the economic engagement in specific to the energy sector investments and construction projects, even in that grand plan. Arab MENA and West Asia regions are not free from the backlash of Covid-19 pandemic but the largest growth of investment part of Chinese BRI engagement and the second largest increase in construction part has witnessed in these regions. It also signifies how China transformed its indifferent stance on the Middle East issues towards assertive entanglement with these states as a partner in deepening cooperation and expanding development in the Eurasia region.

Table 7: BRI Engagements of MENA States

Growth/Decline of BRI Engagements (%)		**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**
Arab MENA	Construction	9	59	-23	43	-28	-44	116
	Investment	-	742	85	11	52	-96	361
West Asia	Construction	84	-46	41	-45	20	-56	-3
	Investment	51	-46	-49	84	42	-48	-70

Source: Christoph Nedopil, "Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative", Green Finance & Development Centre, FISF Fudan University, 2022.

4.2.3. Challenges and Opportunities of the Belt and Road Initiative

Domestic decisions are not the sole determinants in realizing of a country's grand plans. In terms of the Belt and Road Initiative and its implications abroad is not free from domestic, regional and global challenges ahead. The Middle East in particular would be a litmus test in realizing the BRI cooperation and securing Chinese investment since the region has been witnessing major upheavals in the latest decade while China has been pursuing a proactive engagement with the region. This new Chinese entanglement with the Middle East issues does not limited to the economic relations but also witnessed in diplomatic, political, and security relations as well. The first section on the analysing grand principle discussed the political and diplomatic facets of China's grand strategic adjustment while the last section will explore China's emerging security entanglement in the Middle East. This section analyse the role of the Belt and Road Initiative as a part of Xi Jinping's grand strategy adjustment, Chinese Dream vision, and the further economic cooperation with MENA states. It aims to demonstrate how China pursues such grand plan in an assertive way while still securing its defensive foundations in grand strategy.

The defensive basis can be seen in China's preference to focus on oil-rich countries due to its dependence of Chinese consumption to the stable flow of oil supply from the region. While avoiding any regional confrontation even in the participation of regional parties to its Initiative, China repeats its known emphasis on the development cooperation on the basis of win-win relationship in Global South without taking sides in regional confrontations. It coincides with China's self-perceived global role for being the leader of development cooperation and on route of developing nations. It sustains the responsible global power image with initiating a grand plan to realize its interests, influence, and multi-layered relationship. Beijing also uses its economic capability and benevolent image in foreign relations to demonstrate its global role to both domestic and foreign audience.

Thus, Beijing's growing economic and strategic influence has enhanced by such cooperation and development oriented narrative on the BRI. However, the assertive nature of the latest development cannot underestimate since data, tables, and figures throughout this section aims to demonstrate China's unprecedented

economic engagement in the Middle East. Almost all MENA states have joined the Belt and road Initiative with signing Memorandum of understanding with China. Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Israel, Egypt, and Qatar are among the top thirty shareholders of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, as the multilateral financial institution of the BRI. Furthermore, the share of BRI investments by region shows that, Chinese investments in the MENA region surplus any other region that being involved to that grand plan. Even though there is still a Chinese emphasis on oil-rich countries, the constructive engagement has spill over to other sectors as well as non-oil suppliers in the region such as Turkey.

There are some global, regional and domestic challenges to the BRI. China's ability to maintain a strategy which balances regional and global actors in confrontation is the most challenging aspect in the future. Since China declares itself as a responsible global actor with significant economic capability, norm-shaper role and great power status, its economic interest whether under the BRI or not can be under pressure. Nevertheless, Beijing continues to engage the Middle East issues among the BRI partners in order to provide connectivity and sustain shared future vision of the BRI with an inclusive approach. Since the BRI has to succeed in each of its cooperation, the MENA region could have the most challenging step of this grand plan. The most significant challenge is about the sustainability of major investment and cooperation between parties. As the Libya case demonstrates, the lack of order and stability could harm not only Chinese investment but also threaten Chinese citizens work abroad, the financial prospects of Chinese firms, and push Beijing to take sides in armed conflict. Even though the regional upheaval had already started by the Arab Uprisings before Xi Jinping came to power, the ongoing civil wars, regional confrontations, and unresolved disputes still pose threats to regional stability, energy supply, and the spread on non-traditional security threats such as piracy and transnational terrorism and extremism.[571]

All these security concerns have economic outcomes on both Chinese interest and the prospects of the BRI, therefore described as China's strategic balancing,

[571] Ibrahim Fraihat and Andrew Leber, "China and the Middle East after the Arab Spring: From ststus-quo observing to proactive engagement", **Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studie**s, Vol.13, No.2, 2019, p.1-17.

strategic hedging, or soft balancing in facing these security challenges.[572] Still, China avoids any regional confrontations between regional actors as in the Qatar Crisis and Saudi-Iranian struggle for power and influence in the Gulf, or the Eastern Mediterranean conflict between MENA states.[573] Beijing's solution to that challenge is to integrate both private and public companies and multilateral and regional agencies such as the World Bank, the AIIB, and the ADB to not shoulder the full risks ahead. On the other side of this relation, China presents not a replacement to the Western hegemony but an alternative to diversify the economic engagements of MENA countries with another great power. MENA states use their economic visions to attract Chinese investment to develop new economic sectors beside the energy driven ones and uses their strategic position on the route of global trade to enhance closer relationship with China.[574]

China is well aware of the significance of energy supply to its economy, development goals, and even energy security for stable growth as a part of regime security. Oil supply is still the key economic interaction of China with the MENA state because this relationship between China and Middle East states provides a major customer for the oil-rich countries in the region, fulfils the energy need of China, as well as neutralizes the US oil weapon by China's increasing role in global economy and energy interdependence with those MENA countries.[575] As the emphasis in China's BRI interaction with the MENA states, oil-rich countries have the leading role acquiring Chinese investment and construction projects through the BRI framework. It suits both defensive and assertive features of grand strategy adjustment. The rapid growth of bilateral trade and energy deals between parties, China has developed interdependence with the region even though Beijing seeks to diversify its energy resources.

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[572] Henelito Sevilla, "The Turbulent Middle East: Analysing Security Issues facing China's Belt and Road Initiative towards the Region", **Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies**, Vol.13, No.2, 2019, p.208.

[573] Jeremy Garlick and Radka Havlová, "China's "Belt and Road" Economic Diplomacy in the Persian Gulf: Strategic Hedging amidst Saudi–Iranian Regional Rivalry", **Journal of Current Chinese Affairs**, Vol.42, No.1, p.82-105. Radka Havlová, "Sino-Qatari Relations after the 'Qatar Blockade' in the Context of the Regional Implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative", **Central European Journal of International and Security Studies**, Vol.4, No.2, 2020, p.4-24.

[574] Anu Sharma, "An Analysis of 'Belt and Road' Initiative and the Middle East", **Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies**, Vol.13, No.1, 2019, p.43-44.

[575] Jennifer Lind and Daryl G.Press, "Markets or Mercantilism? How China Secures Its Energy Supplies", **International Security**, Vol.42, No.4, 2018, p.202.

Therefore, the BRI is not offering economic benefits to MENA partners but also extends Chinese involvement to their economy. If China has the upper hand in its interdependent relation with the region, which the deepened engagements and cooperation in many different field could be a political, economic, diplomatic, and even security leverage if any problems will be occurred. On the other hand, the BRI's emphasis on energy sector has a defensive foundation because as Lee suggests that, China has already eager to establish partnerships with, to give aid to, and pay high level official visits to oil-rich rentier states since energy security is more than a simple economic interaction but a matter of regime stability and national security through energy security.[576]

In conclusion, the Belt and Road Initiative realizes as a response to domestic challenges in Chinese economy. It works as a defensive instrument to realize the stable growth rate by rebalancing the growth model, finding a new export markets and a reliable partner for investment, and shift its overcapacity abroad through the BRI's investment and trade connections. The BRI projects also reshape China's energy engagement by investing oil and natural gas fields, petrochemical industry as well as providing alternative routes such as China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which eliminate the Malacca Strait Dilemma for China's energy and trade dependence to that passage by providing an alternative to that vital maritime route.

These can be considered as economically defensive features of China's grand plan but the BRI has also assertive features since the grand plan perceived as a part of China's regional hegemony and global ambitions. The establishment of the AIIB, the interactions of China Development Bank and Xi Jinping's advocacy of globalization against Trump's trade wars through development cooperation were just parts of how China plays a great role in sustaining and reforming global economic governance.[577]

There is always an opportunity for economic interaction to be transformed into political, diplomatic and even security leverage. China has always been using these instruments starting from the One China policy. The Middle East in particular

[576] Chia-yi Lee, "China's Energy Diplomacy: Does Chinese Foreign Policy Favor Oil-Producing Countries?", **Foreign Policy Analysis**, Vol.15, No. 4, October 2019, p.585.
[577] Selim Öterbülbül, "Rebranding China's Global Role: Xi Jinping at the World Economic Forum", **e-International Relations**, 20 February 2021. (https://www.e-ir.info/2021/02/20/rebranding-chinas-global-role-xi-jinping-at-the-world-economic-forum/)

has political and security dimensions as well considering the Beijing's threat perception to extremism and terrorism. Therefore, the BRI can be China's leverage in its neighbourhood to not challenge Beijing's arguments such as in the South China Sea, in Hong Kong protests, the human rights violations in Xinjiang, or even environmental concerns on highly-polluted industry of Chinese investment abroad. Although Chinese officials constantly reject any claim on the BRI will be used as China's leverage for political objectives, China's Sino-centric strategic culture also displays same instruments to highlight China oriented world perception.[578]

Lastly, the BRI can be interpreted as China's challenge to the US dominance in the global South. Even though Chinese officials constantly reject such claims on pursuing hegemonic intentions, China's approaches to Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and the Middle East are perceived more ambitious and multi-layered on economic, political, security issues. Without interfering domestic affairs or criticizing rule of law and human rights issues, China stands as a predictable great power, which enhancing its economic and political influence in the region. Furthermore, most of the BRI engagements referred as the final stages of this opportunist approach in taking advantage of the decline of the US presence and already established security network before going into Beijing's own security cooperation with MENA states. In the following section this challenge / opportunity for China and MENA states will be discussed within the framework of grand behaviour facet of Xi Jinping's adjustment and security cooperation with the Middle East.

4.3. CHINA'S GRAND BEHAVIOUR: SECURITY COOPERATION

Sino-Middle Eastern relations are often analysed through the lenses of economy, trade, investment and energy relations. However, there is a growing security aspect within this economic interaction and also a distinct security cooperation between states. In the specific context of the Middle East, China is not a new actor in regional security. In the aftermath of opening up reforms, the Middle East region presented vast opportunities to establish relationships in different sectors

[578] Tekdal, **op.cit.**, p.381-382.

and fields. Security and military cooperation was one of the fields that China and Middle Eastern states initiated close relations in regards to arms sales, technology development, and military cooperation. As a new great power in global affairs, China's development and technology cooperation, nuclear technology, and arms sales to Middle Eastern regimes demonstrated Beijing's role in the future of regional security. When China adjusted its political and economic stance with the Deng Xiaoping's opening up decision, Beijing's arms transfers became a profitable trade business in contrast to Mao's donations and military assistance to revolutionary groups in developing countries.

Therefore, China became an important supplier to the Middle East arms market when there were an ongoing conflicts such as the Iran-Iraq War (as nearly 60% of China's arms sales to the Third World goes to these two rivals) and the Lebanon War. In addition to these conflicts, China stands as an alternative arms and technology supplier to Middle Eastern regimes that were restricted from purchasing arms from Western partners (such as the Congressional pressure in observing the US arms sales to Middle Eastern regimes) in order to modernize and enlarge their stockpiles of weaponry, as well as their general arsenal. Even though Beijing has participated in major international treaties for arms control (such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons) in the early 1990s, the real change was due to the US imposition of cutting or reducing military/security and technology ties with Beijing to its partners in the region. This call coincided with both the end of Cold War and the US military intervention in the Gulf War. So that the major share of China's arms sales to the Middle East was limited to "rouge states" of the West such as Syria, Iran, and distinctly Pakistan, North Korea, Myanmar and Thailand due to traditional bonds.[579] This backlash against China's role in the arms market is also related to China's low profile in Middle Eastern conflicts over the decades. Chinese strategic culture still holds to the dominant neutral perception with the result of China's being rather indifferent throughout the 1990s and 2000s when the Middle East was experiencing more and more instability and foreign interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Second Intifada, the instability in Lebanon, and the Houthi rebellion in Yemen. However, China's policy towards the Middle East has

[579] Nazir Kamal, "China's Arms Export Policy and Responses to Multilateral Restraints", **Contemporary Southeast Asia**, Vol.14, No.2, September 1992, p. 134.

dramatically changed under Xi Jinping since China has reoriented its cautious attitude from complete wariness of getting involved in regional issues to having a proactive relationship in foreign affairs in the region.[580]

The matter of security has gradually become one of the main headlines of transformation in the guise of the assertive outcome during the last decade. The Western media notes the impartial Chinese efforts in the field of military and security, namely Beijing's joint efforts with Saudi Arabia to build a new facility of ballistic missiles, its investment and security agreements with Iran that mitigate the US sanctions on the Iranian economy, and future prospects for having more military base in the region after its first overseas base in Djibouti.[581] Although China varies in having a softer military presence in the Middle East in comparison to the US military deployment and bases in the region, this growing Chinese military presence has been regarded as a part of its growing influence and interests as well as its increased role in regional security affairs.[582] This soft military presence perspective highlights China's emphasis on having a temporary, mission-oriented military deployment that conducts missions in the areas of humanitarian relief, peacekeeping, or action against non-traditional security threats such as piracy without having a permanent military base.

This brief introduction shows that China's security entanglement with the Middle East was not a new phenomenon but was nevertheless restricted for different reasons. After experiencing security entanglement with the Middle East during the 1980s and 1990s, China re-joined the Middle East security market with newly developed technology for arms sales, modernization cooperation, surveillance exchange, and security concerns. This started a new phase in accordance with China's defensive assertive grand strategy. Still, China holds its defensive ground in building security and military relations but even these constrained relations seem to have an assertive turn in China's military and security engagement with the region. The grand behaviour aspect of the grand strategy adjustment focuses on security

[580] Anchal Vohra, "Xi Jinping has transformed china's Middle East policy", **Foreign Policy**, 1 February 2022.
[581] Craig Singleton, "Beijing eyes new military bases across the Indo-Pacific", **Foreign Policy**, 7 July 2021. "Work on 'Chinese military base' in UAE abandoned after US intervenes", **The Guardian**, 19 November 2021.
[582] Degang Sun, "China's Soft Military presence in the Middle East", **Middle East Institute**, 11 March 2015.

cooperation as a least emphasized subject in Sino-Middle Eastern relations. It starts with the intensified efforts to have a political framework for cooperation regarding the strategic partnerships of China with Middle Eastern states. After the role of security was highlighted in these agreements, the impact of China's domestic concerns on terrorism, extremism and separatism were emphasized both in China's defensive posture and its assertive attitude in establishing closer security ties in the region. Then, the second section analyses the interaction between China and the Middle Eastern countries through arms sales and technology cooperation for security and surveillance. The final section of this part analyses China's unprecedented military presence in the region under the guise of UN Peacekeeping missions and China's first military base abroad, in Djibouti, as the first time in Chinese history.

4.3.1. China's Partnerships and Counter-Terrorism Activities

The economic aspect of Sino-Middle Eastern relations has been elaborated in many studies. This aspect enables multi-layered cooperation between China and MENA states in many different fields of economic cooperation including bilateral trade, investment, infrastructure, energy interdependency, communication, technology sharing, industrial cooperation, as well as many other sectors. However, there is a growing security aspect between parties starting in the 1980s. The White Paper on China's Arab Policy Paper gives a specific section to "cooperation in the field of peace and security" noting that the concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security in the region, while simultaneously supporting the efforts of MENA states to build an inclusive and shared regional collective cooperation security mechanism.[583] Military cooperation including the exchange of military personnel, weapons and technology is also noted to include joint military exercises. Furthermore, there is a special section on fighting against terrorism, intelligence exchange and counter-terrorism cooperation, which also makes up the largest subpart of this headline.

The cooperation between China and MENA states require a comprehensive framework for establishing mechanisms to institutionalize the sustainability of

[583] **White Paper on China's Arab Policy Paper**, Information Office of the State Council The People's Republic of China, Beijing, January 2016.

development, deepening of relations and reinforcing joint efforts for cooperation. As seen in those agreements between China and the Middle Eastern countries, regardless whether they are named a partnership, strategic partnership, or comprehensive strategic partnership, there exists a strong political will to improve bilateral relations in many fields.[584] It is in the Middle East extension of global networks of partnerships that China's partnership diplomacy has extended itself since the early 1990s.[585] These cooperation agreements started with the declaration of a Strategic cooperation Relationship between China and Turkey in 2010, but rapidly extended to China's strategic, comprehensive strategic, cooperative strategic, innovative comprehensive partnerships with other Middle East states after Xi Jinping came to power and declared the White Paper on China's Arab Policy as a general framework for Sino-Middle Eastern relations.

Table 8: China's Partnership Types

Partnership	Objectives
Comprehensive Strategic Partnership	Full pursuit of cooperation and development on regional and international affairs
Strategic Partnership	Coordinate more closely on regional and international affairs, including the military
Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership	Maintain sound momentum of high-level exchanges, enhanced contacts at various levels, and increased mutual understanding on issues of common interest
Cooperative Partnership	Develop cooperation on bilateral issues, based on mutual respect and benefit
Friendly Cooperative Partnership	Strengthen cooperation on bilateral issues, such as trade

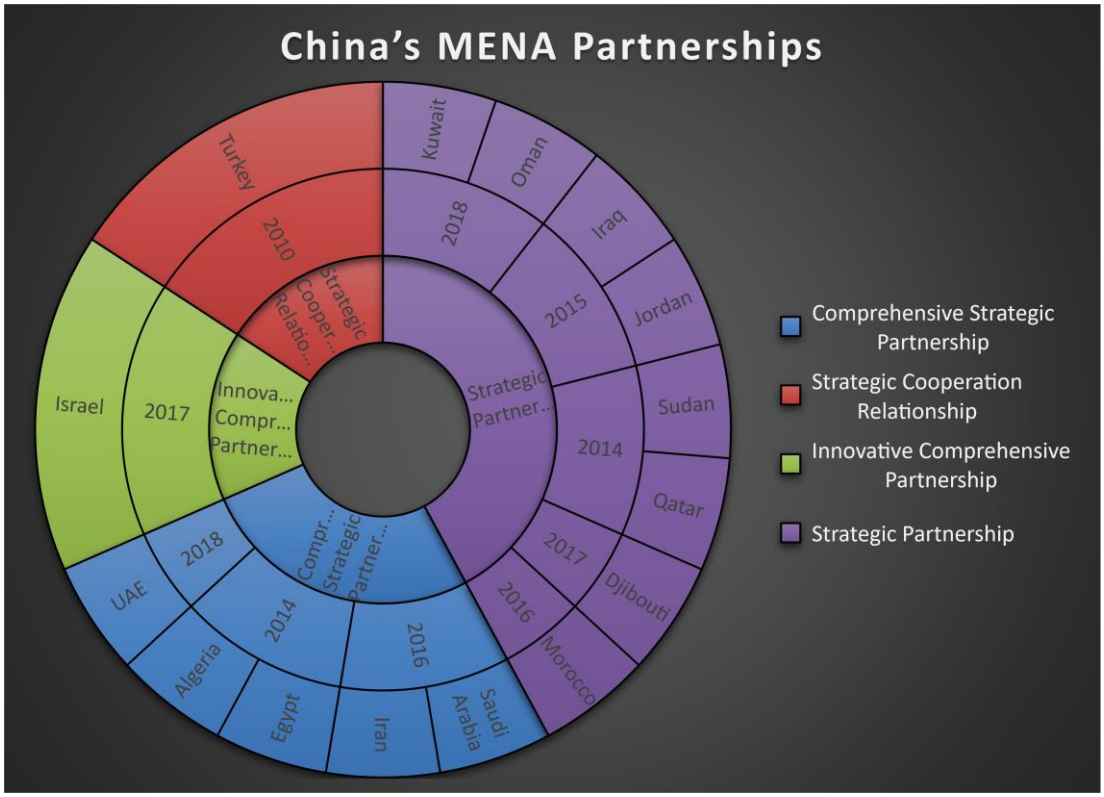
Source: "Quick Guide to China's Diplomatic Levels", **South China Morning Post**, January 20, 2016.

[584] Fulton, **op.cit.**, 2019, p.4. I-chieh Kuo, Weihao Huangi, "Does title or content matter? Examining China's partnerships with text classification", in **China's Contemporary Image and Rhetoric Practice**, Weixiao Wei (ed.), Routledge, 2021, p.5-6.
[585] Degang Sun, "China's partnership diplomacy in the Middle East", in **Routledge Handbook on China-Middle East Relations**, Jonathan Fulton (ed.), 2021, Routledge, p.299-311.

Even though the region has witnessed many events causing for instability, foreign military interventions and diplomatic sanctions or pressures on the regimes in the region, especially from the US, China stands as a reliable partner that does not try to interfere in domestic affairs. The main reason is that China strictly avoids establishing a formal alliance with these partner countries even though they benefitted from the expansion of the bilateral relationship and cooperation. Yet, these partnerships result in an alternative alignment strategy that still enables China to stand aloof from regional confrontation due to its inclusive nature and not bringing about the cost of any third-party.[586] Even though China aims to diversify its energy resources, the Middle East, and especially the Gulf region and the Strait of Hormuz, remain strategic as the Strait of Malacca for Chinese trade routes and energy consumption. Therefore, China avoids to being involved in coercive-driven forms of security alignments which could target other states in the region or built its relations to take sides in regional confrontations. Instead, China's security alignments are mostly determined by its threat perception in relationship to *the Three Evils* but these domestic concerns are not the core elements but only a part of a general framework in the conceptual understanding of China's partnerships with MENA countries.

[586] Georg Strüver, "China's Partnership Diplomacy: International Alignment Based on Interests or Ideology", **The Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol.10, No.1, Spring 2017, p. 35.

Figure 13: China's Partnerships with MENA States



Source: This figure is prepared by the author

The context of these partnerships is contains different fields that to enhance cooperation between parties. As an example, the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement between China and the UAE covers the political, economic and financial fields, as well as the transfer of technology, economic diversification, data exchange, education and science, renewable energy and water, the oil and gas sector, military and law enforcement, security, cultural and humanitarian field, diplomatic consular, and a joint mechanism between partners.[587] Another example between China and Iran also classifies fields of cooperation as part of the political domain, executive domain (the BRI and investment), human and cultural domain, judiciary, security and military domain, and regional and international domain.[588] As seen in these cooperation fields, there is no particular emphasis on a specific field but

[587] "Full Text: UAE-China Joint Statement on Strategic Partnership", **Gulf News**, 21 July 2018. (https://gulfnews.com/uae/government/full-text-uae-china-joint-statement-on-strategic-partnership-1.2254614)

[588] "Joint statement between China and Iran on the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership", **China Daily**, 23 January 2016.

instead, there is an effort to establish an inclusive framework in many fields. Security, in that regard, is one of the major fields that can be traced back in connection with military, law enforcement, judiciary, data exchange, technology transfer. Moreover, there is a growing emphasis on the non-traditional security threats such as piracy and climate change that hereby China includes also renewable energy and water in these partnerships.[589]

These partnerships are part of the Chinese vision of building a new type of international relations with an effort to develop win-win relationships while making use of new theories and practices in diplomacy.[590] The new type of Chinese diplomacy can be seen as beginning in 2014, and the increase in signing partnerships has been an outcome of this new type of diplomacy since that date. By having cooperation partnerships, China works towards having a new type of alignment strategy that covers not only economic and trade relations but also many fields including security without having an alliance like commitment or taking sides in regional issues. It is not only limited to the Middle East but also extends to other regions during the latest decade in establishing regional security dialogues, such as the China and Latin America High Level Defense Forum (2012), Great Wall Counter-Terrorism International Forum (2016), Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism (2016), and China-Africa Defense and Security Forum (2018).[591]

The military and security field in comprehensive partnership agreements emphasizes three issues. Besides calling for high-level visits, close communication, and establishing cooperation mechanisms, the first objective is to enhance cooperation between parties' armies including joint military drills and the training of military personnel. The last part of this grand behaviour section will give further details related to this topic. Secondly, there is a call for further cooperation in military technology and industry. The following part regarding arms sales and technological cooperation will focus on that issue. Lastly, there exists an emphasis

[589] **White Paper on China's Policies and Actions for Addressing Climate Change**, Information Office of the State Council The People's Republic of China, Beijing, November 2011.
[590] "FM Wang Yi's Speech on China's Diplomacy in 2014", **Xinhua**, 24 December 2014. (http://english.www.gov.cn/state_council/ministries/2014/12/26/content_281475029808332.htm)
[591] **White Paper on China's National Defense in the New Era**, Information Office of the State Council The People's Republic of China, Beijing, July 2019.

on counter-terrorism efforts in order to ensure security cooperation for the sake of international peace and security.

Therefore, this security cooperation develops a defensive foundation in the sense of an assertive turn, as the fight against terrorism and extremism became a significant domestic security threat. This issue is not specific to the Uyghur minority because any extremist, fundamentalist or separatist ideology is considered a threat to the stability and territorial integrity of China and the rule of the Chinese Communist Party. However, the Middle East in particular has become a source of extremist religious threats since the rise of ISIS and other terrorist groups that openly call for war against China. Moreover, there has been a number of Chinese citizens who joined these terrorist groups fighting on their side in the civil wars in Arab states.

The Uyghur issue is not a new phenomenon for Beijing as Xinjiang has been a part of perceptions of domestic security threats on the part of Chinese officials as they relate such threats to other major issues in Tibet, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, as well as worries about democratization (Tiananmen), or other threats to the rule of CCP. Therefore, China has issued more than one White Paper regarding the Xinjiang issue in order to explain Beijing's position on that issue as an answer to foreign critiques. These white papers on Xinjiang respond to critical matters like human rights, development, population dynamics, and the fight against terrorism and extremism.[592] As a matter of national security, Beijing's response to the presence of Uyghur foreign fighters among the opposition groups in Syria, as well as terrorist groups, highlights the defensive foundation of China in being included in the fight against terrorism in these cooperation frameworks.[593] Moreover, the rise of ISIS became a concern of the world as well as China in particular because the terrorist organization threatened to retaliate against Beijing's policies in Xinjiang. Although China has avoided any direct military involvement in the conflict, such a security

[592] **White Paper on Human Rights in Xinjiang - Development and Progress**, Information Office of the State Council The People's Republic of China, Beijing, June 2017. **White Paper on The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang**, Information Office of the State Council The People's Republic of China, Beijing, March 2019. **White Paper on Respecting and Protecting the Rights of All Ethnic Groups in Xinjiang**, Information Office of the State Council The People's Republic of China, Beijing, July 2021. **White Paper on Xinjiang Population Dynamics and Data**, Information Office of the State Council The People's Republic of China, Beijing, September 2021.

[593] Greitens, Lee, and Yazıcı, **op.cit.**, 2019/2020, p.9-47.

threat has shaped the Chinese approach to the crisis into a more military-oriented way as the PLA pledged military assistance along with humanitarian assistance.[594]

In line with China's relations with Middle Eastern states, Turkey stands as a significant partner of China. Turkey has historical ties with the Middle East and Central Asia, based on common history, ethnicity, language, culture, and religion. In that regard, Turkey has the capacity to enact a power of attraction on China's Muslim and Uyghur minority. Even though Scobell notes Turkey has been referred to as the best example of secularization and democratization in the Islamic and Turkic worlds, he also notes that turkey can be seen as China's most "fearsome and formidable rival" in both countries' struggle for influence on the Turkic states of Central Asia. The Central Asian power game and Turkic connection can also be extend to the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang region as well.[595] The Xinjiang/Uyghur issue is becoming a major domestic and foreign policy issue for China in that sanctions have been applied by the US and EU on officials responsible for criticism of Beijing. Moreover, the international community is highly concerned about allegations of state suppression, human rights violations, and even the concentration of the Uyghur population.

On the other side, China responds to these critiques by explaining their actions as being part of a fight against terrorism and extremism, which are among the CCP's *three evils* (terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism). Moreover, China's concerns in terms of radicalization and the spread of terrorism in connection with Uyghur foreign fighters, not only shape China's domestic politics but also Sino-Turkish relations as well.[596] Therefore, China has intensified its support in combating terrorism and carrying out international law enforcement cooperation in many ways including in Turkey as well. China's foreign fighters' problem and the Uyghur issue have been considered not only extremist or separatist menace but also a potential terrorism threat to Chinese interests overseas.[597]

The Uyghur issue has mainly been shaped by Chinese concerns about domestic security, territorial integrity, non-intervention into domestic affairs, and

[594] Zhen, **op.cit.,** 2016**.**
[595] Scobell, **op.cit.,** 2018, p.11-18.
[596] Meilian, **op.cit.,** 2021**.**
[597] Duchâtel, **op.cit.,** 2019.

regime stability, even though the combat against terrorism is a shared objective of both sides and is not limited to the foreign fighter issue. Therefore, China uses its capabilities in an assertive way to prevent the Uyghur issue from turning into an asset of Turkey's soft power or an instrument of any foreign state to interfere in its domestic affairs. When the protests in Xinjiang occurred in 2009, the Turkish Industry Minister Nihat Ergün called for a boycott of Chinese goods in protest against the violence in Xinjiang in 2009. Furthermore, a diplomatic crisis was sparked when President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan referred to China's treatment of the Uyghur population as genocide after the July 5th incident when more than 200 people lost their lives in Urumqi, Xinjiang.[598] What is more, thousands of Uygur immigrants and/or exiles have chosen to live in Turkey for years, which means that Turkey has played a role as a shelter for Uyghur activists for a while. These developments are still in line with the defensive nature of China's grand strategy in accordance with China's security engagement with the Middle East. Yet, there has nevertheless been a diplomatic tension between the two countries in the recent period. However, in the latest decade, there is an assertive turn in grand behaviour related to security issues.

Therefore, China has intensified its efforts to eliminate this problem in bilateral relations as well as Turkey's official criticism on that issue. The outcome of this defensive assertiveness can be seen when Turkey has restrained the activities of Uyghur activists who have migrated to Turkey, even deporting Uyghurs to China via third countries.[599] When the US and EU raised criticism on human rights violations in Xinjiang, Turkey pursued a low profile, and even remained silent on the issue. This has brought about harsh criticism arguing that Turkey has turned into a client state of China, and that China has bought Turkey's silence with its economic capabilities because Turkey needs economic investment.[600]

The latest assertive action in regards to security issues can be seen between China and its partners and the Western countries in the war of statements on Xinjiang

[598] "Turkish leader calls Xinjiang killings "genocide", **Reuters**, 10 July 2009. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-china-sb-idUSTRE56957D20090710>
[599] Nicholas Muller, "Are the Uyghurs Safe in Turkey?", **The Diplomat**, 13 February 2021.
[600] Ayça Alemdaroglu, Sultan Tepe, "Erdogan Is Turning Turkey into a Chinese Client State", **Foreign Policy**, 16 September 2020. (https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/16/erdogan-is-turning-turkey-into-a-chinese-client-state)

issues. When the Western countries shared the "Cross-Regional Joint Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Xinjiang", only Turkey joined the statement from the MENA region.[601] Yet, Turkey did not sign such statements in 2019 and 2020 which caused it to face increased pressure from its allies in terms of its being indifferent to the situation instead of taking initiative. MENA states, which also have common religious ties with Uyghur Muslims, have been expected to adapt a critical stance to the issue.

However, they have mostly taken sides with China when Beijing takes initiative in responding to such statements in the United Nations. When China issued a joint statement of 69 countries at the Interactive Dialogue on High Commissioner's annual report at the 47th session of the Human Rights Council on 22 June 2021, most of the MENA states signed the statement in support of the Chinese cause on the issue.[602] Thus, Beijing could prevent the multiplication of criticism by the support of countries in MENA region that have cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic ties with the Uyghur population. As an implication of its grand behaviour on security issues, the framework for cooperation enables the spill over of multi-layered cooperation in the security domain with exceptional outcomes in assertive grand behaviour driven by the defensive impetus of China's security concerns.

4.3.2. China's Arms Sales to the Middle East

The Middle East security domain remains as one of the most militarized and conflictual regions in the world in its being an extent of great power competition, regional conflicts, domestic security concerns, and threat perception in terms of the regime security. The United States and Russia have remained the top supplier of arms to clients in the region whether these are the US allies such as Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, or those with having a historical military/security connection with Russia such as Egypt, Iran or Iraq. In addition to this, European

[601] The US Mission to the United Nations, **Cross-Regional Joint Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Xinjiang**, 21 October 2021.
[602] MENA states that signed that statement: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, and Yemen.

arms exporters namely France, Germany, the UK, Italy, and Spain also participate significantly in the security market.

In this regard, the MENA region in general, is embedded in global arms sale competition among top-ranking arms suppliers and great powers. China has emerged as a relatively new player in the market since the opening up of reforms enables China to arm Middle Eastern clients since the 1980s. China is the world's fifth largest exporter of major arms with at share of 5.2% but also the world's fifth largest importer of major arms with at share of 4.7% in the global market between 2016 and 2020.[603] China used to purchase major arms from Russia but Chinese industry is now able to produce such arms which, both reduce Russian imports but also enable competition with Russia counterparts. States in Asia (76%) and Africa (16%) are the major recipients of the Chinese arms market.

Middle Eastern regimes do not perceive of China as a growing threat to their interest unlike to Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan's increase in arms import. Middle Eastern states have their own domestic and regional threat perception for regime security, which require a steady and orderly arms purchase and modernization yet these relations had interrupted in 1980s by troubled and tense relations with their Western partners. Although Middle Eastern regimes does not have political reservations and restrictions similar to Western countries in purchasing Chinese arms for political reasons, this does not result in the major flow of Chinese arms to the Middle East.

The Middle East security/defence market is a lucrative opportunity for arms suppliers because states in the region still hold strong security and arms/technology bonds with their traditional suppliers and allies. The region is one of the biggest arms markets in the world due to the domestic threat perception, regional confrontations, and ongoing conflicts among neighbours. These reasons justify a huge demand in acquiring more weaponry, technology, and equipment while having a huge income capability to purchase them using oil and natural gas incomes. The top importers of major arms in the region are Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, UAE, Pakistan, Iraq, Israel, Turkey, Oman, and Jordan. The main suppliers, the US, Russia, the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain and South Korea still hold the top three seats in their arms

[603] Pieter D. Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimova, and Siemon T. Wezeman, **SIPRI Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020**, SIPRI, Stockholm, 2021.

supply, with the exception of Pakistan and Algeria who have security ties with China.

Table 9: Share of Arms Import of MENA States

	Global share of arms import (%)	1st supplier	2nd supplier	3rd supplier
Saudi Arabia	11	USA (79%)	UK (9.3%)	France (4%)
Egypt	5.8	Russia (41%)	France (28%)	USA (8.7%)
Algeria	4.3	Russia (69%)	Germany (12%)	China (10%)
Qatar	3.8	USA (47%)	France (38%)	Germany (7.5%)
UAE	3	USA (64%)	France (10%)	Russia (4.7%)
Pakistan	2.7	China (74%)	Russia (6.6%)	Italy (5.9%)
Iraq	2.5	USA (41%)	Russia (34%)	South Korea (12%)
Israel	1.9	USA (%92)	Germany (5.9%)	Italy (~2%)
Turkey	1.5	USA (29%)	Italy (27%)	Spain (21%)
Oman	1.2	UK (47%)	Germany (5.9%)	Italy (2.3%)
Jordan	0.9	USA (36%)	Netherlands (22%)	UAE (11%)

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, March 2021.

China is eager to expand its arms sales in the Middle East and North Africa as the region holds one of the greatest shares of the global market, has ten of top twenty five largest importers of arms, and is one of the most instable regions in that it requires a continuous demand for regime stability and even armed struggle between fighting sides. Despite the limited Chinese slots in the top three arms supplier spots in the region, Beijing has nearly doubled its arms sales to the lucrative Middle East market over the last decade. According to SIPRI Arms transfers database, the Middle East holds 3.8% of Chinese arms exports in the first half of 2010s. However, this share of Chinese arms exports has increased to 7% in the period between 2016 and 2020. This increase also coincided with an ascent in the share of the Middle East market in global arms market.

The Middle East used to have 26% of global arms transfers, which would increase to 33% of global transfers in the second half of the 2010s. The increase of China's share is also works for China's military cooperation framework declared by the White Paper on China's Arab Policy, which calls for deepening cooperation in terms of weapons, equipment and various specialized technologies, and the carrying out of joint military exercises.[604] Despite China's developing role in the security of the region (due to it's assertive turn), the defensive foundation of China's grand strategy brings to the fore China to comply with international regulations and commitments. The White Paper on China's National Defense in the New Era highlights major multilateral treaties and protocols on arms control, disarmament, non-proliferation, and counterterrorism. This has been joined by China categorising these protocols and treaties as nuclear (11), chemical (1), biological (2), conventional (5), counterterrorism (5), and other (6) categories.[605]

Pakistan is a notable example of China's grand behaviour, because its security cooperation with China shows both the defensive and the assertive features of China's grand strategic adjustment. Considering China's historical, military and economic disputes with India, Pakistan remains a strong partner in defending China's national interests. Pakistan in fact is important for Beijing in encircling India from the north and is also significant in expanding China's influence, investment and capabilities to the westward. Both countries are sharing a border, which expands their relationship, which can turn into an exemplary success for the Belt and Road Initiative as can be seen in the CPEC. Security engagement is also a significant part of such a geostrategic alliance with Pakistan, to the extent that Beijing has become the biggest supplier for Pakistan with an enormous share of (74%) of arms imports to the country. Even though Pakistan is an ally of the US, arms sales, the technology transfer of nuclear, biologic and chemical weapons and Beijing's major role in Pakistan's nuclear and missile program have always been watched with cautious distrust on the part of Pakistan's Western partners over years.[606] It can be argued

[604] **White Paper on China's Arab Policy Paper**, Information Office of the State Council The People's Republic of China, Beijing, January 2016.
[605] **White Paper on China's National Defense in the New Era**, Information Office of the State Council The People's Republic of China, Beijing, July 2019.
[606] Daniel Byman and Roger Cliff, **China's Arms Sales Motivations and Implications**, Washington, RAND, 1999, p.14-15.

that, Western concerns have also delayed Sino-Pakistan joint efforts to produce major arms. This is also true for large scale programmes for future imports even though Pakistan has become the most successful and early example of BRI investments and outcomes in China's near neighbourhood.

Economic interaction through the lens of security domain is not limited to arms sales between the parties but also extends to the modernization of weaponry and the transfer of technology in the way of a new generation of technologies for surveillance, counterterrorism, and domestic security.[607] One of the first crises in terms of security/military relations was occurred when China purchased a Kuznetsov-class aircraft cruiser ship Varyag (Riga) now Liaoning 16, which was transported through the Turkish Straits from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean and on from the Suez Canal on its route from Ukraine to China. When the deal was made between Turkey and China, which include tourism and trade concessions in return to ease the tension for safe passage, Beijing was still arguing that Varyag was purchased for $20m in order to convert the ship into a pleasure palace of casinos, restaurants and hotels.[608] Yet, it became the first aircraft carrier commissioned into the People's Liberation Army Navy Surface Force.

The cancelled long range missile deal between Turkey and China stands as an important case in the latest decade to demonstrate how China is eager to penetrate any gap created by the US in the region, even establishing a security relationship with a NATO member. Turkey started negotiations with the US (Patriot), Europe (Samp-T, Eurosam), Russia (S-400), and China (FD-2000) to purchase a missile defence system, making its selections based on price, delivery date, and upmost importance to the joint production and technology transfer. The S-400 missile defence system deal between Russia and Turkey created multiple crises in Turkey's relations with the US even though the US did not agree to sell the Patriot missile system to Turkey for years and withdrew its Patriot batteries alongside with Germany just before Turkey's operations in Syria has started. In fact, the first agreement in terms of a long-range missile defence system was reached between China and Turkey even before the S400 deal negotiations with Russia. The first

[607] Paul Mozur, "Inside China's Dystopian Dreams: A.I., Shame and Lots of cameras", **The New York Times**, 8 July 2018.
[608] "Giant vessel shuts the Bosphorus", **BBC**, 1 November 2001.

attempt was made by a CPMEIC's (China Precision Machinery Export-Import Corporation) offer to jointly develop the HQ-9 surface-to-air missile defence system with Turkey.

Although Turkey has accepted the deal, including high-technology transfers from China and the construction of a technology zone in Istanbul, these concerns and pressures from its fellow NATO members would eventually bring it to cancel that cheaper of the deal. Even though this deal was cancelled, the reasoning has multiple explanations, either it was cancelled by Turkey when China refused technology transfers, Turkey decided to develop its own long-range air and missile defence system with domestic resources, or the cancellation was the result of pressure from other NATO members.[609] As Pan notes, Turkey's initial acceptance of the Chinese offer indicates that China enjoys great global competitiveness in both price and technology in developing long-range missile defence systems.[610]

China's growing role in the security of the Middle Eastern states has intensified since the oppression of states of Arab Uprisings has increased in certain states. Even though China works to promote multilateral efforts to counter terrorist activities and the surveillance of domestic and cross-border threats to peace and security, it also works for regime security, espionage, and the suppression of critical voices.[611] Moreover, it can also affect the definition of crime and criminals to include journalists, political dissidents, or human rights activist into the same category with serious criminals.

The partnership between China and UAE, and China and Saudi Arabia especially come to the fore in this aspect as both states have a strong security dependency on the US and US arms sales while at the same time increasing their security, technology, and surveillance ties with China. It works for both sides to repress dissidents transnationally and to take measures against both opposition and

[609] "Turkey confirms cancellation of $3.4 billion missile defence project awarded to China," **Reuters**, 18 November 2015. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-china-missile-idUSKCN0T61OV20151118

[610] Pan Honghui, "Prospects for Sino-Turkish Relations Unlikely Partnership or Uncertain complex?", **China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies**, Vol.2, No.1, p.114.

[611] Sherry Tseng, "Big Brother in China and the UAE: Surveillance tech's threat to U.S. national security", **Penn Law**, 29 August 2019.

domestic security threats.[612] Based on this, the cooperation of surveillance technology can serves the regime security measures of these states alongside the control of social media, having a developed technology infrastructure, and counterterrorism cooperation between states.

Even though security cooperation has been explained through authoritarian solidarity, this was not the case since China does not have a deliberate choice to establish a relationship with other regimes whether authoritarian, non-democratic, or communist, for the sake of an ideological commitment.[613] Instead, the regime security has the utmost importance for the CCP, and this is why China takes such an assertive stance in terms of defensive reactions while emphasizing its pragmatic, case by case approach to protect Chinese interests as it is used to doing.[614] The Chinese government did not change its policy towards the Arab states and its indifference to their regimes as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed in China's fundamental position in the region through the 'four supports':

> *China supports Arab states in following their chosen paths, supports Arab states in resolving the region's difficult issues through political means, supports Arab states in achieving a win-win and common development with China, and supports Arab states in playing a bigger role in regional and international affairs and in more effectively safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests.*[615]

4.3.3. China's Military Presence in the Middle East

The defensive foundation of China's grand strategy is still strong to avoid any direct Chinese military contract in the Middle East. It also can be seen as fitting into the Chinese commitment into the principle of non-intervention to other states' domestic affairs and not being aligned in regional confrontations and military conflicts. Instead, China has actively participated in the UN Peacekeeping missions

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[612] Rayhan Asat, "China's Transnational Repression gets Saudi backing", **Foreign Policy**, 14 April 2022.

[613] Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt, Andrew Small, "China's New Dictatorship Diplomacy", **Foreign Affairs**, Vol.87, No.1, 2008, p.38-56. Rana Siu Inboden, "China and authoritarian Collaboration", **Journal of Contemporary China**, Vol.31, No.136, 2022, p.505-517. Olimat, **op.cit.**, 2013.

[614] Chaziza, Mordechai Chaziza, "China's Economic Diplomacy Approach in the Middle East Conflicts" **China Report**, Vol.55, No.1, 2019, p.24-39.

[615] Wang Yi, **"China Will Uphold 'Four Supports' for Arab States**, 6 January 2014. (https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/201401/t20140106_678110.html)

in line with presenting itself as a responsible actor in global affairs and even sharing responsibility in Middle Eastern crises. China's contributions to the UN peacekeeping forces in the Middle East consists of 1,152 personnel: United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (2 observers); United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (343 soldiers); United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (444 soldiers, 18 police, and 12 military observers); United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (321 soldiers); and United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (12 military observers).[616]

The White Paper on China's National Defense in the New Era gives details about China's growing participation to the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations that People's Liberation Army Participated in as UNIFIL (Lebanon, April 2006), UNAMID (Sudan, November 2007), UNMISS (South Sudan, January 2012), and MINUSMA (Mali, January 2014).[617] Chinese contributions to the UN Peacekeeping missions has extends to UNMISS (1058), MINUSMA (422), UNIFIL (419), MONUSCO (232), UNISFA (86), MINURSO (10), UNFICYP (4), UNTSO (3), and UNITAMS (1).[618] Chinese troop deployment has reached more than 2000 personnel including experts, staff and individual police contributions.

Chinese escort fleet deployment in the Gulf of Aden, the Bab Al Mandab Strait, the Guardafui Channel, and the Somali Sea have sustained many escort operations by more than 700 troops, missile frigates, supply ship, and two helicopters as they needed to visit Djibouti, Kenya, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan.[619] In a decade, the PLAN fleet has sent out 26,000 officers and soldiers, escorted 6,595 ships and successfully rescued or aided more than 60 Chinese and foreign ships. However, the Chinese anti-piracy task force has faced supply problems, which is related to the larger discussion on the need for a naval facility for anti-piracy and foreign military base in the Middle East. In line with assertiveness for defensive purposes, China negotiated the establishment of a naval base in Obock port, Djibouti.

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[616] **United Nations Peacekeeping 2021, Troop and Police contributions by country and mission**. https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/contributions-country-and-mission

[617] **White Paper on China's National Defense in the New Era**, Information Office of the State Council The People's Republic of China, Beijing, July 2019.

[618] **United Nations Peacekeeping 2021, Troop and Police contributions**. https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors

[619] "China dispatches escort fleet to Somali waters", **Xinhua**, 2 December 2014. http://english.cri.cn/12394/2014/12/02/191s854861.htm.

China has already terminated such a contact with Seychelles a few years ago.[620] Since one third of the world's shipping and nearly 15% of its oil has been transported through Bab El Mandeb Strait, China's decision to establish a foreign naval facility and military base in that strategic corner of the world is significant in all geopolitical ways. Chinese military officials also advocate for advancing overseas naval and military base constructions in line with Xi Jinping's foreign policy priorities, which is related to a continuum of the assertive turn for defensive purposes in the future.[621]

The White Paper on China's National Defense in the New Era lists seventeen Joint Exercises and Training by the PLA and the PAP with Foreign Counterparts, including the Friendship Joint Anti-Terrorism Training (2016) and the Shaheen (Eagle) Joint Training (2018) with Pakistan, and the Joint Anti-Terrorism Training of Special Force (2016) with Saudi Arabia. However, this list does not cover China's participation with the Anatolian Eagle 2010 carried out in Konya, Turkey from September-October 2010. This joint military exercise appears to be the first exercise that involves China and an army of a NATO member state. Despite China's limited participation and Turkey's assurances to not involve the Turkish F-16 fighters' manoeuvres and technologies, the Western allies expressed their concerns about the PLA's and the PLAAF's training with a NATO country, in a NATO country.[622] It was one of the first topic of discussion as to whether Turkey is shifting its political and diplomatic focus to the East, as well as in terms of China's growing prestige in terms of security, even with a NATO member state.[623] This joint exercise is argued to have had a boosting effect on bilateral relations since the exercise took place ahead of Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's visit to Turkey on 8 October 2010 and the declaration of "strategic partnership" between the two countries.[624]

China's security footprint is widening throughout the Middle East for three reasons. First, China has its own global role in being a proactive player in global issues, which would not leave the country free from the instability in the Middle

[620] James M. Dorsey, **China and the Middle East Venturing into the Maelstrom**, Palgrave, 2019, p.213-214.
[621] Jeremy Page, "China builds first overseas military outpost", **The Wall Street Journal**, 19 August 2019.
[622] "China mounts air exercise with Turkey, US says", **Reuters**, 8 October 2010.
[623] Honghui, **op.cit.**, 2016, p.102.
[624] Chris Zambelis, "Sino-Turkish Strategic Partnership: Implications of Anatolian Eagle 2010", **China Brief**, Vol.11, No.1, January 2011.

East. This self-proclaimed responsible global actor image does not restrict arms sales to the Middle East instead, controlling the flow of arms to the region is an important leverage in times of crises. Yet, Beijing has no intention to be a security provider to the Middle East but its role is likely to grow with further entanglement in regional security issues, its role in the arms sales market, and a self-proclaimed responsible actor image. Furthermore, China has participated in major international treaties for arms control such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the early 1990s and Chinese officials have taken part in the related organization of the UN and other independent international bodies. This allows the voice of China to be heard when the international community is discussing security threats, restrictions, sanctions or regulations regarding the regional or international crises as happened in discussions on humanitarian intervention and Chinese insistence on the non-intervention in others' domestic affairs. Furthermore, these international bodies in which Chinese official take general directorate or secretariat positions are not limited to the field of social issues and economic cooperation but also include security related bodies regarding international crime, transportation, and communication. As an example, Meng Hongwei was the president of Interpol (2016-2018), Liu Fang was Secretary General of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (2015-2021), Houlin Zhao is the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union since 2014, and Qu Dangyu is the Director-General of Food and Agriculture Organization as of 2019. It is important to note that, Chinese officials assume these leading roles as they seek to improve economic and social matters after Xi Jinping's ascension to office.

Secondly, China seeks to strengthen its influence in Asia in expanse to other great powers. The discussion on the decline or deliberate withdrawal of American hegemony in developing its new Asia Pivot strategy is one dimension of China's self-proclaimed global role while discussing the diminishing role of the US in the Middle East. Moreover, regimes of the Middle East can justify their foreign policy arguments through the guise of being the foreign support of a great power, which China presents as an alternative. Another dimension is whether China tries to counterbalance the US and Russia in the Middle East in pursuit of its hegemonic intentions. Xi Jinping calls for an "Asia for Asians" in a way to argue for Asia's

security being upheld by Asian people and Asian states.[625] This mantra clearly excludes the Western powers, especially the US while helping China's grand plans in the BRI, the role of the AIIB, the proactive engagement in the strategic landscape, and its self-proclaimed quest to be a regional power in the both ends of Asia.[626] It has been suggested that, China's participation in multilateral military exercises beyond its periphery are a deliberate choice of military diplomacy to erode the US dominance and to counter the US hegemony, as seen in China's participation in joint military exercise with Turkey in 2010 and China's proposal for a missile defence project in Turkey.[627]

Lastly, the Belt and Road Initiative emerged as an accelerated factor in bilateral relations, which is not limited to the finances. It also has had its own spill over effect into other sectors, especially in the Middle East, from energy relations to infrastructure, agriculture, communications, and transportation. These investments in infrastructure, communications, transportation and surveillance can also be seen as an instrument into security cooperation since this infrastructure can also be used by the military, or used for the purposes of domestic intelligence, and even the suppression of the citizenry. What is commonly disregarded in this initiative is that, it also establishes a framework for further cooperation in terms of arms sales, technology transfers, and the modernization of weaponry as a part of economic interaction even without having military engagement.

In specific regard to arms sales, Sino-Pakistan relations can be seen as an example because Pakistan stands as an exemplary success for the Belt and Road Initiative. The China-Pakistan Economic corridor enables a huge flow of Chinese loans and investments into infrastructure projects in Pakistan during the latest decade. In correlation with the close interaction with the BRI, Chinese arms exports to Pakistan have increased to be more than double what they were before. Pakistan's share in Chinese arms exports to the Middle East was around 35% in 2013 when Xi Jinping announced the BRI. Even though it did not have a stable ascent in percentage, the share of Pakistan has increased to 45% in 2017 and to %74% in 2020

[625] Paul R. Burgman Jr., "Xi Jinping's Asian Security Dream", **The Diplomat**, 8 July 2016.
[626] Teddy Ng, "Xi calls for Asian people to uphold Asia's security' as he aims to sideline US", **South China Morning Post**, 21 May 2014.
[627] Wilson Chun Hei Chau, "Explaining China's Participation in Bilateral and Multilateral Military Exercises", **Security challenges**, Vol.7, No.3, Spring 2011, p.66-67.

within the Middle East share of Chinese arms exports.[628] Saudi Arabia and Algeria nearly had no major arms sales with China during the early 2010s.

However, the share of Algeria increased to 20% in 2016. The share of Saudi Arabia in terms of China's arms sales has increased to 2% (2015), 3,5% (2018), and 5,25% (2020), which can be seen as Chinese penetration into a major US ally's defence and security domains in a few years. In addition to these close ties, there is a growing concern over China's real intentions regarding investment for such major projects. The Gwadar Port in Pakistan is also questioned in terms of whether China seeks to use Gwadar like a military base as in Djibouti as well as against India's investment into Chabahar (Iran) in the future. This perspective is especially common among Indian scholars and the Western press.[629]

Beijing rejects such assessments, showing the decline in China's defence expenditure as a percentage of its GDP from 5.43% (1979) to 1.3% (2001), 1.26% (2017) ; the decline as a percentage of its governmental expenditure from 17.37 (1979) to 7.63% (2011), 5.14% (2017); and ratio of defence expenditures to government expenditures 5.3% in China while this ratio reached 9.8% in the US, 12.4% in Russia, and 9.1% in India.[630] The future of Sino-Middle Eastern security cooperation may flourish due to arms sales, joint production agreements and the Chinese military presence in the region, although Beijing constantly points out that its main objective is to achieve win-win cooperation, common development, and a better future for the strategic and cooperative relations with the Middle East.

[628] **SIPRI Arms Transfer Database**, March 2021.
[629] Alvite Ningthoujam, "The Middle East: An Emerging Market for Chinese Arms Exports", **The Diplomat**, 25 June 2021. Sanatan Kulshrestha, "Three Ports under China's Gaze", **Indian Military Strategy**, Vol.8, August 2017, p.31-32 and 66.
[630] **White Paper on China's National Defense in the New Era**, Information Office of the State Council The People's Republic of China, Beijing, July 2019.

CONCLUSION

Pages full of idle words
Penned with hot and bitter tears:
All men call the author fool;
None his secret message hears

This doctoral thesis has analysed China's grand strategy under Xi Jinping. The main argument of the thesis is that, the era of Xi Jinping signifies a grand strategy adjustment in order to adapt policy orientation towards an assertive nature while still holding its defensive foundations in the Chinese politics. This study provides a thorough understanding on China's grand strategy in order to make a contribution to the IR literature in three ways. First, it has evaluated grand strategy concept by looking to its different components so that finding similar emphasis in all facets. Secondly, it adapts grand strategy concept in order to analyse China's grand strategy under Xi Jinping as defensive assertiveness without having ideological blinders on adapting solely defensive or aggressive interpretations or repeating the US grand strategy typologies. Thirdly, this thesis has focused on Sino-Middle Eastern relations to demonstrate the defensive assertiveness in China's regional politics through three different features of grand strategy namely, grand plan, grand principle, and grand behaviour.

This study is conducted at a time when Xi Jinping has started his second term as the President of the PRC, placing new team of political elites in key positions. He started anti-corruption campaign, initiating new policies and significant plans such as Chinese Dream, the Belt and Road Initiative, Eight Musts, Four-pronged Comprehensive Strategy, and Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy. All of these signify a new political teaching, which later paved the way for the description for Xiism or Xi Jinping's Thought. More importantly, these efforts were the result of consolidation of power and establishing his own leadership presence in the state apparatus over political elites, decision making process, strategic thinking and policy implementation. Yet, the first term of his leadership also signifies the change of leadership to a new generation among the CCP elites. Hu Jintao symbolized the same change but his leadership period did not achieve a keen transition as Xi Jinping has aimed. This new generation also reflects the change of leadership profiles from engineers to entrepreneurs, well-educated university graduates, and more importantly rather young people that born after the Chinese Civil War. This new generation

placed among party members during the transition from Mao to Deng, so they experienced the rapid modernization, economic growth, and opening up during their early years in the CCP instead of living in the isolated Mao Zedong era.

This new generation has with new opportunities as well as new ambitions for their country, in order to interpret the biding its time is no more necessary for Chinese great power. But they did not refer any kind of hegemonic intention since all political elites are aware of the strategic cultural impediments of the country as well as neither global order nor the China's own capabilities are ready for such a hegemony. Instead, as Xi Jinping leadership emphasizes, the new generation has two priorities. First is to stability and order in the country in order to securitize the CCP rule, stability of economic growth, the spread of development in rural China, and fulfil the new expectation of the young generation which desire to live with new opportunities offered by the accumulated wealth. Second, is to realize the great power status of China once again. This can be realized by actively participating not only the global crises but also through discussion in international arena in order to shape international norms and regulations and participated in the mechanism of international organizations.

Therefore, Xi Jinping's China presents a responsible great power image in global crises, such as for dealing with climate change, has actively participated in international organization by financial and human resources including taking the responsibility of leadership mechanisms, and presenting its perspective in global affairs such as South-South cooperation, win-win relations and advocating globalization. When the imbalance in political, economic, and trade relations are highlighted by the Western leaders, especially the US under the Trump administration, Xi Jinping's China became the champion of the free trade and globalization for sustaining their official narrative on China's peaceful rise/development, and later described as China's developmental cooperation with the third world. This is partly the reason why this thesis limits its timeline to Xi Jinping leadership and its adjustment on China's grand strategy. In short, Xi Jinping leadership provides an interesting case to analyse the implementation of grand strategy concept to China case and to examine the broader implications of China's grand strategy adjustment.

The vague definition of the grand strategy concept can be considered as an advantage since it has no definitional boundaries. On the other hand, it also present an impediment on studying grand strategy on a selected case, because it can be adapted without having a defined fashion in terms of definition. In addition to that, a state does not have a well-established grand strategy if those responsible for devising and implementing it cannot articulate what it is. China, in fact, has been developing and transforming its grand strategy since the era of Mao, by the adjustment of Deng and his successors, and now by the assertive turn of Xi Jinping. Where there is great power, even great compassion, error also is great in skill in managing public and foreign affairs. As Fravel notes, China's foreign policy objectives are defensive in nature, or at least not overtly aggressive up until 2000s. So, the cautious dictum of Deng was adverting great faults in political ground but the price of greatness is responsibility. The new generation highlights China's growing power and responsible great power image in order to regain its relatively dominant position in world politics.

This thesis has analysed China's grand strategy through primary sources such as White Papers on selected issues. As Ripsman states, not all states openly shares their documents on grand strategy, and even many of them do not think self-consciously on the concept. So, China embraces the concept of grand strategy and continuously leaves more paper trail in publicly accessible documents. The perception of other states is the main concern of Beijing in order to be seen as a reliable partner and a responsible great power rather than a hegemonic challenger with a new type of exploitation. If truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true; real becomes not-real where the unreal's real, Beijing's perception has to be heard by foreign audience. So that, there is a rising trend during the era of Xi Jinping by the increasing number of official documents regarding domestic issues, China's foreign political approaches and global crises.

In fact, the literature on grand strategy is overwhelmingly focused on the US experiences, the Western examples, and great powers in general. So this old-school approach so far has excluded China and other non-Western countries as well as those small states, for so long. This trend has been changing by the transformation of the mainstream IR discipline and theoretical approaches, by opening the social sciences

into the world, not only the selected part of it. There are recent studies on grand strategy and strategic culture of non-Western states. This thesis contributes to this literature focusing on Chinese grand strategy in the latest decade, Chinese strategic culture, and defensive assertiveness adjustment, comprehensively. The main argument of the thesis is that, the era of Xi Jinping signifies a grand strategy adjustment in order to adapt policy orientation towards an assertive nature while still holding its defensive foundations in Chinese politics. The adjustment that referred in this study does not mean an overhaul of political preferences. It is quite contradictory to the definition of grand strategy in arguing that there is a total and rapid transition since the concept itself requires well-established understanding and long-term implementations unless exceptional developments have occurred.

Recent changes in grand strategy reveal a new understanding on the implementation of strategic priorities. For over two decades, China's grand strategy has been questioning whether it has defensive or offensive codes in nature. Those who argue defensive grand strategy of China refer to strategic cultural elements, official discourse on peaceful rise/development and Beijing's rather neutral position among other great powers in global affairs. On the other side, offensive interpretation dated back to the late 19th century in order to depict China as a potential threat to the Western economic and political system.[631] The contemporary China Threat perspective is mainly built its arguments on the nature of hegemonic intentions of a rising power, a potential challenger to US hegemony, China's evolving discourse on global affairs, and rising economic power, technological capability, and military expenditures in order to result in another Cold War, eventually.

The main argument of this thesis describes China's grand strategy as defensive assertiveness, which refers both assertive turn in political orientation while still emphasizing the defensive logic beneath the assertive surface of Xi Jinping's policy making. This thesis analyses Sino-Middle Eastern relations in order to test its argument on China's grand strategy. Therefore, this thesis attempted to provide an in-depth analysis of the impact of China's grand strategy adjustment in Beijing's foreign policy choices. The grand strategy concept provides a conceptual framework in this study. It has strengths and weaknesses since the research on concept itself as

[631] Lafcadio Hearn, "China and the Western World", **The Atlantic**, April 1896.

well as its adaptation on Chinese foreign policy are rapidly growing. However, it requires a thorough understanding of the nature of foreign policy, elite decision making, regional politics, and the transition of leadership in the Xi Jinping era. A similar trend might be analysed in the transition from Mao to Deng, with respect to its transformative implications on China's foreign policy behaviour. This is the main reason why this thesis limits its scope only to the Xi Jinping era.

For over a decade, Xi Jinping strongly repeats some foreign policy goals while identifying the existing and potential resources in order to achieve the political objectives. As seen in the trade war with the US, crisis management during the Covid pandemic, or new tensions in the South China Sea, these resources directed in order to secure Chinese interests and to cope with new challenges. Moreover, Xi Jinping's definition for China's self-proclaimed global role is significant to understand the logic of new leadership. Chinese Dream for the National Rejuvenation is a comprehensive plan, at least a selection of a roadmap, in order to use these national resources to fulfil these political, social, military, and economic objectives. To meet these goals, Xi Jinping also emphasized a new kind of diplomacy, which later described wolf warrior diplomacy, a new global developmental investment and cooperation by the Belt and Road Initiative, and his own approach to domestic and foreign relations which later labelled as Xiism in Chinese politics. Grand strategy concept covers prioritization of political goals, signalling out of potential national resources and interests, and realization of the strategic plan in order to fulfil these objectives.

In this thesis, grand strategy has been defined as logic on intentional and coherent political choices in order to reach the highest political objectives/interests at global and/or domestic levels. It has deep-rooted elaborations on prioritizing political objectives, and national needs, ideals, ways, and means cannot be changed through minor changes of policy. However, it also enables the process of revision and adjustment in foreign policy if the time and conjuncture require for a proper reconsidered implementation. It particularly covers long term goals and projections which are hard to change within a short period of time without a major incident. It is not conditioned with just the systemic impulse but also reflects, even predominantly, domestic considerations for long term calculations. In terms of China's grand

strategy, Xi Jinping era signifies a new approach to realize long-term objectives. However, it does not mean a rupture for a defensive impetus which is driven by a strategic culture, and the state' known reactions to domestic issues such as the rule of the CCP and regime security, stability of economic growth, and fight against extremism and terrorism. Thus, this thesis argues that this adjustment signifies a new response to meet these challenges with traditional concerns and China's evolving interest in this period.

Xi Jinping leadership initiates an assertive turn in China's foreign affairs since the systemic impetus enables such opportunity by the decline of US hegemony, the upheaval in many regions of the world, the impact of financial crisis and China's unwavering economic rise for over last decades. By focusing on grand strategy of China, the thesis seeks to understand whether China poses a threat to global order by challenging the present one. Since it is argued that the era of Xi Jinping signifies an "assertive activism" for a defensive logic in China's grand strategy, this thesis points out China does not pose a threat to the present global order. Instead, Beijing tries to contribute to the international organizations and international missions more actively while presenting its own perspective on the international mechanisms, rules and regulations more and more. This is the core of the notion for shaping the international norms with Chinese characteristics, as a synonym of the unique result of Deng's opening up in order to define socialist rule with Chinese characteristics. Beside systemic factors, domestic politics also require such a new cloth in foreign affairs since the new approach on China's role in global affairs, its responsibility as a great power in world politics and the new definition of China's interest in foreign relations without standing aloof from those crises also discussed domestically.

This doctoral thesis aims to contribute to the present literature in three ways. First, it has examined the nature of the concept by looking all three facets, as grand principle, grand plan, and grand behaviour, in order to demonstrate, all three points have to point same direction in order to describe a grand strategy, instead of placing each entity separately. Secondly, this thesis adapts grand strategy concept to China by describing its own features and implementations rather than reinterpreting the Western cases. Therefore, this study points out that the era of Xi Jinping signifies a third major turn in grand strategy of China after Mao's foundation period and Deng's

opening up reforms. The role of Xi Jinping era is defined as defensive assertiveness in order to highlight assertive turn as well as defensive foundation together in this new transition. Finally, this study analyses three components of grand strategy and China's latest adjustment. The analysis point has chosen as Sino-Middle Eastern relations in the last decade. The Middle East region has always been regarded as one of the most significant region of the world with deeply-rooted, complex and destabilized issues, a major oil and natural gas supplier, an important market in between Europe and Asia-Pacific. Furthermore, the region is also witnessing a major transition since the Arab Uprisings on political, social, economic, and security grounds. It is the most challenging region to test China's grand strategy adjustment compared to China's well-known interest in its neighbouring regions.

This study makes a contribution to the existing literature on China's grand strategy by incorporating the significance of strategic culture and political elites in order to present the important role of leadership. Moreover, impediments of aggressive policy changes driven by a single leader's decision found its meaning by giving the details of strategic culture, historical background of China's foreign policy, and overall political orientation. The existing grand strategy literature mainly disregards China for so long. When the country became a great power in world politics, the IR literature once again focuses on the case of China with all details, theories and conceptual framework in order to understand the political objectives of this great power. This trend also coincided with the opening of social sciences to other disciplines as well as aiming to free itself from Western-oriented academic endeavour. In many studies, China's grand strategy has been described either with peaceful rise narrative or assertive rise threat perception.

This study sought to place in between two dominant perceptions in order to present defensive assertiveness. This aspect cherish both sides contribution to the discussion while incorporating one's assertive turn argument and the other's defensive reasoning together. Therefore, the era of Xi Jinping realized defensive assertiveness grand strategy for realizing new ambitions in China and abroad, such as Two Centenaries for achieving the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation and realizing Chinese Dream, and the Belt and Road Initiatives, responsible great power role in global affairs, active participation to the UN missions, and opening up its first

overseas military base. Yet, all these ambitious policies, plans and political discourse, is argued to have securitized Chinese interest starting from the critical issues such as the CCP rule, stability of economic growth, fight against separatism and terrorism, and China's great power image by demonstrating the achievement of the CCP and Chinese nation a hundred years after the Century of Humiliation.

To limit the scope of analyses, this study attempted to provide a thorough understanding of the impact of China's grand strategy adjustment in the light of changes in Sino-Middle Eastern relations. The research question of this thesis concerns how defensive nature of grand strategy adjustment affects the foreign policy of Xi's China in the Middle East. These three facets can be chosen as bilateral relations among parties but instead, this thesis sought to contribute the literature by three cases, grand principle, plan, and behaviour, thematically. Therefore, the analysis presented in this study also covers the grand strategy requirements that refer overall logic, coherent political choices, both short and long terms political objectives, and the mate-strategy on political thinking. Moreover, this doctoral thesis makes a contribution not only to the existing literature on Sino-Middle Eastern relations about also to the implications of China's grand strategy studies beyond neighbouring regions or great power competition. This thesis argues that defensive logic can also be found in the trajectory of China's approach to the Middle Eastern affairs. Therefore, Sino-Middle Eastern relations considered as both leverage for assertive objectives as the BRI or intensified security cooperation but also an instrument of the defensive logic of grand strategy that focused on the core national interests.

The first analysis on Sino-Middle Eastern relations built upon the grand principle, which has chosen as the non-intervention principle, since the region present enough evidence to trace back China's position politically and theoretically. On Chinese side, the political elites of China have stick to the narrow definition of this principle in order to avoid any foreign intervention starting from their own state. In terms of the Middle East, the Arab Uprisings paved a way for regional upheaval resulted in toppling down some omnipotent regimes, the resistance of status quo powers, interference of many regional and international great power to each incident and unresolved domestic crises and regional instability. The cases of Libya and Syria

are particularly important to compare and contrast China's involvement to these civil wars. Moreover, two of these cases became the major examples on the discussion of non-intervention principle among domestic audience and on regional and international organizations, primarily the UNSC. China, as having a permanent seat and veto power in the UNSC, made his voice to be heard not only by its voting pattern but also its own arguments and approach to the non-intervention principle itself. The domestic discussion of China also coincided with the systemic pressure in order to revise the state's political orientation, so that there are different perceptions, discussions, and implementations that occurred in Libya and Syria cases.

To sum up, China can delegitimize arguments in favour of foreign intervention as an act of regime change happened by a NATO interpretation in Libya, which has contradicted in case of Syria. Secondly, one of the major intentions of Beijing has been to stand aloof from armed conflict and the use of military means unless the instability threatened vital Chinese economic interests or the security of its citizens. And thirdly, the Chinese position in these conflicts promotes a norm maker role by discussing the concept of responsible protection into diplomatic discourse instead of implementing the vague definition of humanitarian intervention. All three outcomes reflects defensive foundation of China's grand strategy in order to protect its interest, citizens, military personnel, civilians, and legitimate government in these states in order to deescalate military conflict. However, it also reflects assertive turn in China's uses of veto power in the UNSCR presented by the Western powers, especially after the UNSCR 1973, in order to not pave a way for regime change by vague definition of humanitarian intervention in contrast to non-intervention principle. Moreover, China actively participates. Since China has engaged some of these countries in turmoil, the first reaction is to secure its citizens working abroad and investment there. By focusing on the grand strategy of China, the thesis seeks to understand whether China poses a threat to global order by challenging the present one. China's participation in norm making discussions which later described international norms with Chinese characteristics became significant. China tries to shape international system and norms instead of pushing its own perspective but eliminating those clashes with its primary interests.

The second analysis built upon the Belt and Road Initiative and its implications in the Middle East. Since the region is a crossroad between Asia-Pacific and Europe, there would be no successful global project, especially on trade and investment, by disregarding the MENA region. The spread of economic cooperation through the BRI agreements reflects how China perceived the region. Moreover, a defensive attitude can be found in China's approach to the Middle Eastern states in order to sign cooperation agreement while considering interregional confrontations and conflicts among them. On the other side, the initiative itself is regarded as one of the significant example of the assertive turn in China's foreign and economic policies. China is well aware of the significance of energy supply from MENA on its economy, development goals, and bilateral trade, because energy security is also a significant component for having a stable economic growth as a part of regime security. The Belt and Road Initiative can response domestic challenges in Chinese economy and accumulation of wealth for years.

It works as a defensive instrument to realize the stable growth rate by rebalancing the growth model, finding a new export markets and a reliable partner for investment, and shift its overcapacity abroad through the BRI's investment and trade connections. However, this economic interaction also has turned into a leverage in political, diplomatic and even security fields since the BRI is not limited with the intensified Chinese investments and trade relations. The cooperation framework that signed between China and MENA states covers multiple sectors and fields. Therefore, the BRI can be China's leverage in order not to challenge Beijing's concerns in domestic, regional, and international politics. China's strategic culture also displays such leverage in order to highlight China oriented world perception. That's why the assertive turn approach interprets the BRI as an instrument of China's challenge to US dominance in the global South, even though Chinese officials constantly reject such claims on pursuing hegemonic intentions. To sum up, the BRI and its implications in Sino-Middle Eastern relations both demonstrates the defensive foundation and assertive turn of China's grand strategy as a great plan.

The great behaviour is the last part of the analysis on China's grand strategy by focusing on China's security cooperation with the MENA states. As argued in this thesis, China's assertiveness in foreign policy has to be seen as a reflection to cope

with defensive apprehension and response to national concerns that either deep-rooted in strategic culture or have newly arisen through the rise of China phenomenon. The security cooperation presents an example for such issues regarding Beijing's concerns in counter-terrorism and its struggle against the Three Evils. The Uyghur issue is one of the primary domestic concerns that drives defensive foundation of its grand behaviour through security cooperation with MENA, a region connected with religious and partly ethnic bonds with Xinjiang. On the other hand, stability of the Middle East region is vital for Chinese interest in order to achieve goals of the BRI, bilateral developmental cooperation, and energy security. Considering the doubling up the emphasis on the word security in President's report to the 20th National Congress of the CCP as regards to the Report to the 19th Party Congress, the security aspect in China's foreign relations is having a significant importance. Moreover, the emphasis on security has surplus the emphasis on economy/development for the first time in history of CCP Congresses and being at the maximum level as ever.[632] Therefore, Sino-Middle Eastern relations are not able to disregard the security aspect of the relationship in order to build a foreseeable regional projection. As defensive assertiveness grand strategy points out, these Chinese involvements on the ground of security also works for these defensive concerns.

First, China's self-proclaimed responsible global actor role encourage of being a proactive player in global issues. Instead of being indifferent to the Middle Eastern crises and regional upheaval, Beijing points itself as a reliable partner in the solution of crises. Rather than advocating sanctions or restriction to arms sales, this responsible great power prefers to control the flow of arms to the region. Second, China seeks to strengthen its influence in Asia in expanse to other great powers while discussing the diminishing role of the US in the Middle East. Moreover, regimes of the Middle East work with Beijing, which is quite indifferent to their democratization or human rights issues in internal affairs, and presents as an alternative in order to justify their foreign policy arguments. Moreover, the grand plan, the Belt and Road Initiative emerged as an accelerated factor in bilateral relations, which has had its

[632] Bloomberg, "Xi Mentions of 'Security' Eclipse 'Economy' in Historic Shift", 18 October 2022. Bonny Lin, et.al., "China's 20th Party Congress Report: Doubling Down in the Face of External Threats", **CSIS**, 19 October 2022.

own spill over effect from economic and trade into other sectors, especially in the Middle East. Even though these assertive policies have been discussed in security cooperation, the defensive foundation limits China's entanglement with the Middle East issues. Beijing has no intention to be a security provider to the Middle East but its role is likely to grow with further entanglement in regional security issues, its role in the arms sales market, and a self-proclaimed responsible actor image.

As a future projection for China's foreign policy, grand strategy concept is well established and has long-term political implementations. The concept draws a general framework on understanding state's interests, role of political elite, and domestic and systemic impetuses in order to have future projection. In this thesis, defensive assertiveness is defined as China's grand strategy understanding. It can be argued that, the era of Xi Jinping signifies a major change in the trajectory of China's grand strategy alike to Mao's foundation period and Deng's transformative impact, because Xi's leadership signifies new generations so that new ambitions, new objectives but more importantly new capabilities that China enjoys by its opening up and economic rise. The self-perceived global role with being a responsible great power is just the beginning of this new phase. In the future, China might become much more significant actor in the world politics not only challenging the present global order but in order to shape a new directions by criticizing the existing one and proposing and alternative.

In analysing China's reactions to the contemporary issues, whether happened in Ukraine, the South China Sea, or the Middle East, there is a consistency of China's foreign behaviour. On one hand China sustains its defensive attitude, especially on those critical issues such as Taiwan, Xinjiang, stability of its economic growth, and the rule of CCP, Xi Jinping leadership adapts a policy prone to assertive, even offensive reactions in order to secure that. As seen in the diplomatic crisis between China and the US over Taiwan, that assertive attitude has not resulted in military means. Instead, China deliberately avoid such military means for solving its Taiwan issue since the island is regarded as a part of Mainland China by Beijing not today, but since 1949. It can be expected that Xi Jinping wants to be the leader who achieves reunification in Beijing's perspective but there is no need, no rush, as well as no vital interest to achieve it with military means. In addition to that, it leaves

aside all peaceful rise narrative for latest two decades while placing the PRC as a threat to liberal-democratic-free world as a leader of authoritarian side of the world that uses offensive means. Beijing's reactions to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine are described in the same fashion as an authoritarian solidarity. Yet, once again, Beijing explains its political orientation differently.

The main emphasis is about securing its national interest, call for a dialogue for resolution of dispute, but more importantly, there is no need to follow the Western oriented solutions or reaction in order to cope with any crises. The emphasis on having its own instruments as well as own interests is on the main point that China built its own great power projection in global affairs. It sustains assertive reactions in order to secure Beijing's defensive foundations in world politics. The grand strategy concept would provide such general framework in order to eliminate temporary changes in world politics or leaders' decision making in volatile times but having a consistent policy projection. Therefore, it is expected that, China would have more assertive reactions in future foreign policy issues but it should be noted that, all these reactions and adjustment under Xi Jinping signifies a response to meet new challenges for the purpose of defensive manner.

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