Chinese expansion: a considerable dilemma

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CHINESE EXPANSION: A CONSIDERABLE DILEMMA
The study of variance is one of the milestones of the scientific process. In the field of knowledge of International Relations, it means the identification of possible discontinuities in the international system. Weighting the rise of China, which is marked by inexorable expansionist ambitions, both at geoeconomic and commercial and at strategic and military levels – already defined as “Sino-globalization” – takes on, in this context, an urgency that requires careful reflection. Now, in the effort to problematize the factors of international change and of the growing sense of uncertainty, as in the case at hand, it is crucial to operationalize accurate conceptual frameworks always keeping in mind the theoretical and methodological pluralism of the scientific area of International Relations. Thus, embarking on an ambitious enterprise, the current R:I issue encompasses six relevant contributions that explore different aspects and dimensions of the current international conjuncture, marked by the hegemonic claims of a China manifestly intent on becoming the dominant power, but which questions the premise and the stability of an open world marked by the advent of democracy, by freedom of navigation and the free movement of goods over the last seventy-six years. Such is the considerable dilemma that is being outlined at the international level.

Luís Lobo-Fernandes, who also coordinated this issue of R:I, explores the construction of a rational problematic on China’s growing expansion by revisiting the related issues of long cycles, hegemonic transitions and the so-called “Thucydides trap”, among other dimensions of analysis, based on some of the most important theoretical formulations by Thucydides, Kautilya, Organski, Modelski, Gilpin and G. Allison. In the construction of a problematic concerning the rise of China, which serves in some way as the background of this exercise, the author outlines four interconnected vectors of understanding which he designates as the criterion of the method: 1) nexus, continuities and transformation; 2) the fundamental nature of the international arena; 3) some effects on the status quo ensuing from China’s expansionist ambitions; and, 4) a conclusion that points to the advent of a new era of strategic containment. Among other hypotheses he builds, the author considers that the international subsystem of the Indo-Pacific largely reissues the European balance of power of the 19th and early 20th-centuries in
which the security dilemma is a central factor. In this subsystem, as was the case in that period, which would lead to World War I, ideology plays a totally marginal role in determining the state of relations between the main powers. The probability of open conflicts in that space is not at all an impossibility, fueled by outbreaks of tension and macro-regional factors of great instability. As Metternich always pointed out, in a system of powers, the maintenance of the regional balance of power is the only real guarantee of international peace and security. This element is, moreover, a particularly important quality of the model, which has prevented, inter alia, the imperialization of the international environment. In exploring the dynamics of change, perceptible in the current scenario, Lobo-Fernandes awards special relevance to the question of how this system of hegemonic stability of a liberal nature will evolve, mainly led by the United States and its allies and which has, for all purposes, ensured the freedom of trade and navigation in the oceans since the end of World War II. Based on the comparative analysis of several historical scenarios of hegemonic transition, in which the important study of Graham Allison and the central dilemma of the so-called “Thucydides trap” stand out, the author argues that if China continues to act as a revisionist power with the intention of projecting and expanding its economic and military power in an excessive and threatening manner, already apparent in the attempt to create spheres of influence and in the establishment of military bases and ports scattered around the globe – a course of action that he considers reckless on the part of China – the possibility of a containment war may therefore be on the horizon. The deliberate formulation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) strategy, articulated exclusively around a single center – Beijing – conveys an expansionist logic that the author configures in the framework of his tendentially realist reflection, in terms of neo-imperialism, with typological correspondence in Morgenthau’s well-known taxonomy of the politics of imperialism, as opposed to the politics of the status quo or even of prestige. In the case of Portugal, which exhibits one of the highest rates of Chinese penetration in the European Union as a whole (EU), with a special focus on the key sector of energy infrastructure, Lobo-Fernandes considers that this situation seriously affects the strategic autonomy of the country, increasing its potential vulnerability, and that such processes constitute, moreover, a strategic error unparalleled in the past.

The theme proposed by Vasco Rato addresses the first year of Biden’s foreign policy, identifying an ample continuity with the main guidelines of the orientation of the Donald Trump Administration regarding Beijing. Indeed, it was up to the Trump Administration to undo the so-called “China consensus” and break up with the benign expectations underlying the engagement. However, the defense of democracy and human rights now emerges as a structuring pillar of the United States’ foreign policy, to the extent that these dimensions are now understood as part of the broader strife between pluralist regimes and authoritarianism, that is, Sino-American rivalry takes on universal contours. Like his predecessor, Biden identifies China, North Korea, Iran and Russia
itself as geostrategic adversaries. And given that the Indo-Pacific has become increasingly the center of global geopolitics, and also today the most dangerous region on the planet, it is in the American interest that the region is free and open, anchored in the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. On this specific issue, Taiwan’s political integrity and freedom of navigation in the South China Seas are of central importance. However, according to Rato, China now faces the dilemma of not being able to alleviate pressure in the Taiwan Strait under penalty of compromising its credibility; this is a dynamic fraught with dangers, as any miscalculations increase the chances of a serious conflict. Now, Rato argues, China’s emergence requires henceforth a global strategic response that involves the reconfiguration of alliances and the securitization of trade and scientific relations. Biden emphasizes, in particular, the reestablishment of partnerships with European allies, who welcome the return of multilateralism without, however, seeming to find so far a coherent strategy that, in any case, excludes confrontation with China and the logic of a new Cold War. Thus, the United States have already moved forward with allies more inclined to consider a containment strategy, which is patent in initiatives such as the Quad or the Aukus. Assuming that the direction of the relationship will not be determined exclusively by the American side, the expectation is that over time Biden’s Chinese policy could become, according to Rato, less confrontational or, alternatively, more unilateral.

Maria Raquel Freire reading of the relationship between Russia and China questions whether this bond constitutes a strategic partnership or rather an instance of convenience or even consequence. The evolution of Russia’s relations with China has deepened in the present context of somewhat difficult relations in the West; however, the expansion of China’s great economic dynamism to other areas also requires caution on the part of Moscow. The narrative of Russian foreign policy is based on the idea of a multipolar world in which the hegemony of the United States is deemed limited, being accompanied by actions aimed at an alternative order while, at the same time, aspiring to an increased recognition in this international cycle. As pointed out by Freire, whose perspective articulates a material and ideational framework in which decisions and actions are pondered, Moscow’s orientation has been very consistent in its goal of affirming Russia as a great power, noting that Russian foreign policy has exhibited a pattern at once markedly revisionist and militarized. China has always been on Moscow’s agenda and the issue of managing an enlarged space in which the former has taken on an increasing presence, discernible in Central Asia, becomes even more relevant. In China, on the other hand, relations with Russia are defined as adhering to the three no’s policy: non-aligned, non-confrontational, not directed against third parties. This reading is relevant to the debate on the issue of a possible Sino-Russian alliance. However, if in many respects these two actors share a convergent international vision, in as many others the differentials are blatant, pointing to existing ambivalences (for example, the Indo-Pacific macro-region is understood differently by Russia and China, which
highlights the distinct geopolitical reading they make of this space). On another level, although China is Russia’s largest trading partner, this issue is apparently secondary in Beijing’s view to the maturity of the partnership, while in Moscow the issue of the major imbalances between the two countries is also avoided, especially the security dimension of the relationship. However, Freire stresses, Russia’s scant level of economic performance is clearly hampering its capabilities, representing, in Beijing’s eyes, a possible source of instability insofar as Moscow emphasizes the military and security dimension in the framework of its policy. The so-called ‘Asia pivot’ project, launched by Moscow, was part of a concern with rebalancing sought by Russia in its affirmation of identity and power, counterbalancing its European dimension. However, the accelerated development of military technological capabilities in China has reduced the possible advantages that Russia might obtain in this scope. Moscow is aware of the imbalance entailed by a bilateral relationship and does not intend to become a minor partner. Lastly, Freire considers that, despite the immediate gains that closer proximity to China could bring, associated costs are also very much a possibility, which remains a considerable dilemma for Russia. The logic of double strategic containment, both in relation to the United States and the West, and with regard to China, is illustrative of Moscow’s current concerns and caution, Freire points out.

The contribution of Pedro Farrajota Ramos is a comparative case study covering Chinese investment in Portugal and in Italy and its repercussions on the EU. The author raises the question of the extent to which dependence on Chinese capital and the control of strategic assets affects the whole and the ability to achieve consistent answers from the EU. Indeed, discussions around Chinese investments include the perception of their negative effects on the EU’s strategic autonomy, which would eventually lead to initiatives to protect the interests of the Member States. Justifiably, China not being a EU ally, its investments on European soil raise doubts about its real intentions, i.e. whether they are spurred by economic or geopolitical reasons; even private companies themselves have strong links to the government and the Chinese Communist Party, enabling them to obtain financial benefits denied to many Western companies in their home countries. The entry of large amounts of Chinese investment into the EU had a higher impact in the post-economic crisis period of 2011, peaking in 2016. It is note-worthy to mention that Portugal and Italy are the two countries in Southern Europe that have received the largest share of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from China over the last decade. Some publications go so far as to label these two countries as ingenuous friends of China. Farrajota Ramos’ study focuses, on the one hand, on the observation of the foreign policy responses of Portugal and Italy and the communication strategies adopted by both countries with respect to the attraction of Chinese investment, and, on the other hand, on the EU’s responses to the dynamics imposed by Chinese investment. It should be noted that Portugal was the first eurozone country to issue public debt in renminbi, in addition to 16 other bilateral agreements signed during Xi Jinping’s visit in 2018.
Despite this, Lisbon has tried to lead a more moderate communication strategy when compared to Italy’s, stating that China is not an ally of Portugal and stressing that its foreign policy objectives are aligned with the EU and NATO, which shows concern about the potential negative effects of the already sizable scale of Chinese investments in Portuguese territory. Italy has shown greater ambivalence, notably when the EU’s mechanism named European Union Foreign Investment Screening Regulation (EUFISR) was created in 2020. The study indicates that Italy’s communication strategy has affected, at least to some extent, EU’s capacity, weakening its negotiating position with China. Portugal, on the other hand, has preserved a more restrained rhetoric that will not have affected the overall community interest in the same way, apparently managing to balance the investment from China and its own image within the EU.

In turn, Xintong Tian and Carmen Amado Mendes reassess the nature of Chinese foreign aid and the historical tax system from a relational, constructivist perspective, which has been somehow neglected in literature, building an innovative hypothesis founded in the idea that both are, in essence, a special type of public goods. Specifically, they consider that studies on China’s foreign aid have not paid due attention to the several centuries over which diplomatic relations in East Asia were regulated by the tax system, adding that this is ascribable, in their view, to substantialist approaches according to which the concepts of foreign aid and tax system are recurrently based. The line of analysis they explore withholds, on the other hand, that these notions rely on voluntary participation and on reciprocity, the result of a relational way of thinking intrinsic to traditional Chinese culture. An approach to this topic from a relational perspective would make it possible – the authors claim – to ascertain the extent to which external aid is based more on reciprocity and on a concern with the strengthening of ties, that is, on a valorization of what they call the relational experiences of nations during transactions, which would hold a higher value than the potential economic benefits. Therefore, the authors propose a shifting of the focus of research from mere fact recording to the analysis of behavioral patterns of donation, as well as of the ideas underlying them. They stress that, in the current international context, in which the United States and China are fiercely competing for strategic power, foreign aid is an indispensable tool that each uses to make allies and secure support, while raising the question – perhaps more intricate – of whether Beijing will use its aid programs to hasten the transition from a Pax American to a Pax Sinica. At this level, they show how China has increased aid amounts exponentially over the past two decades, becoming one of the major global actors, a trend that has attracted growing attention. The authors point out that, as an emerging donor, Beijing’s foreign aid is not as normalized and institutionalized as OECD’s so-called Official Development Assistance (ODA), highlighting, moreover, that the Chinese Government has never committed to an official outline of its foreign aid, although some Chinese authors argue that Beijing’s foreign aid is largely carried out in a logic of South-South cooperation. Tian and Mendes recognize that their essay may
somewhat betray a measure of skepticism regarding the definition of external aid, which can be explained through the difficulties involved in testing notions such as reciprocity and moral debt; in this regard, they claim that their proposed reading of Chinese foreign aid is not a ‘new measuring ruler’, but rather a lens that may help to differentiate several aspects of this important dimension of international relations without, however, failing to wrap up with the overall strategic importance of foreign aid policies. They conclude by stating that the relational nature of Chinese aid is not a guarantee of immediate benefits for Beijing to the extent that, as they put it – using an image withdrawn from game theory – the establishment of solid relationships is only possible after many rounds.

Lastly, Luís Tomé’s article, which contains a set of six relevant contributions to the Chinese problem, explores central questions about Beijing’s grand strategy which he considers crucial for an understanding of its stance and course of action, namely: what are China’s goals and ambitions, what means, policies and strategies does it employ in order to fulfil its purposes? The author states that none of the theories of International Relations is able, by itself, to encompass the entire international reality, articulating what he calls an eclectic approach in the context of the so-called theories of complexity. In this sense, the line of thought he proposes values the assumption of nonlinearity, that is, that the result of behaviors and interactions is essentially unpredictable, also emphasizing the notions of co-adaptation and co-evolution of the actors and the system. His premises explore several aspects: firstly, the goals of the People’s Republic of China, which are tied up with those of the Chinese Communist Party and which have once more gained huge prominence with the leadership of Xi Jinping; secondly, he surveys China’s comprehensive national power and Beijing’s growing self-confidence; the third aspect of the article addresses Xi’s foreign policy, showing that what he calls “xiplomacy” is actively committed to reshaping the international order, investing in the construction of a Sino-centric world based on soft power, relying mainly on a wide range of bilateral, trilateral and multilateral trade mechanisms; in the fourth part, he argues that Xi-led China adopted a blatantly confrontational wolf warrior strategy which spans from economic and diplomatic coercion to threat and use of military force. One of the lines of understanding proposed by Tomé stresses the concentration of power in Xi himself and an ideological orthodoxy unparalleled since Mao, showing impatience with the current status quo, while the same time displaying a high and unexpected tolerance to risk, wagering the cult of personality and a notorious urgency in China’s international affirmation. Indeed, as the author maintains, Xi’s China has abandoned the low-profile stance inherent in the “24-character strategy” of its predecessors since Deng Xiaoping, to venture into a much more assertive, challenging line that neither shies away from nor conceals an idea of open confrontation, in an attempt to hasten the pursuit of its goals, sanctioning his detractors and trying to conquer spheres of influence. Tomé points out that while Xi’s strategy seems unrelentless,
it faces enormous challenges both internally and externally. The new superpower status can attract a few friends, but it also carries costs and exponentially increases the attention and concern of rivals. Now, his assertiveness and haste are eliciting adverse reactions on a scale that Beijing had not fully anticipated. On this question, despite the deep interdependencies and the many issues involving mutual articulation and compromise, the United States seem ultimately committed to China’s policy of neo-containment. Tomé concludes that Xi’s grand strategy for China appears to show some rashness if not indeed recklessness, and questions if he may have gone too far – and also too quickly – wondering, finally, whether time and momentum will remain on Beijing’s side.

Regardless of the diversity of perspectives and corresponding propositions explored by the authors and researchers in the scientific area of International Relations coming from several Portuguese universities, the core conclusion seems to point to the idea that the current international system has already entered, in one way or another, a new era of strategic containment. Here it is, therefore, available to the specialized public, but also to wider audiences, given the timeliness and relevance of the theme, the current issue of R.I, which represents an important contribution by IPRI to the analysis and clarification of what will be, with great probability, as we had the opportunity to point out, one of the main international dilemmas in the course of this century.

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**ENDNOTES**

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INTRODUCTION: METHOD AND INTERNATIONAL THEORY

According to Kevin Rudd, new strategic factors with great destabilizing potential have been observable in the Indo-Pacific macro-region since 2014, warning of the real possibility of profound changes with great impact on the international system as a whole. The appraisal of China’s rise marked by inescapable expansionist ambitions, both at geo-economic and commercial level and at the strategic and military level – already defined as “Sino-globalization” – assumes, in this context, an urgency that requires careful reflection. As Billeter points out, when the current Chinese regime evokes longingly China’s “grandiose past”, it is the Empire it has in mind, that is, the “imperial greatness it intends to restore”. Moreover, since the 1990s, according to Friend and Thayer, a new form of Han-centric “identitarian” and “chauvinistic hypernationalism” has increasingly defined Beijing’s policy, with serious consequences for the future of international politics. In this sense, in an ambitious enterprise to go further in the theorization effort on the issue of Chinese expansion, we point out the following preliminary assumptions:

• Firstly, all theories possess strong and weak elements. What we define as a scientific theory, that is, a coherent set of propositions which have among themselves dete-

ABSTRACT

This article attempts to build a rational case about China’s burgeoning expansion, revisiting the interrelated questions of the long cycles, hegemonic transitions and the so-called “Thucydides’s Trap” among other analytical dimensions, drawing mainly upon some of the most important theoretical propositions from Thucydides, Kautilya, Organski, Modelski, Gilpin, and G. Allison. The conclusion points to the idea that the current international system already reveals a new phase of strategic containment.

Keywords: China, United States, Europe, strategic containment.

RESUMO

O presente artigo explora a construção de uma problemática racional sobre a crescente expansão da China, revisitando as questões conexas dos ciclos longos, das transições hegemônicas e da chamada “armadilha de Tucidides”, entre outras dimensões de análise, na base de alguns dos mais importantes delineamentos teóricos de Tucidides, Kautilya, Organski, Modelski, Gilpin e G. Allison. A conclusão aponta para a ideia de que o atual sistema internacional já revela um novo estágio de contenção estratégica.

Keywords: China, Estados Unidos, Europa, contenção estratégica.
minable relations, is always subject to the proof of deduction and experience. They are provisional stipulations. They aim to approximate and locate causal links. But there is another equally important aspect: as Kenneth N. Waltz (1924-2013) highlighted, being in possession of a series of facts is of no help if we think about these facts in the wrong way. Waltz emphasized, in particular, that the researcher’s work only begins when the theoretical questions themselves are posed, in the sense that the theoretical exercise aims to methodically isolate a phenomenon from others, so as to make it intelligible.

• Secondly, the need to distinguish the notions of internal validity and external validity of theories. The first concerns the quality of the concepts, which Plato called stable referents or purity of forms. External validity, on the other hand, has to do with the degree of generalization, that is, the ability to account for a large number of phenomena, cases or situations. Typically, that capacity diminishes whenever we attempt to include too many propositions in the same theory. When this occurs, the explanation loses sharpness and becomes less consequential, wherefore theoretical acuity gives way to description, however interesting the latter may be. A theory establishes hierarchies, therefore it cannot “include everything”.

• Thirdly, it is important to be aware that refuting a theory (or a theoretical model) is potentially more important than confirming it. The case of the exoplanets is one of the most interesting examples: should the hypothesis of their existence not be confirmed, we may be faced with a different type of star or other cosmic formation heretofore unknown, that is, we may be discovering something truly new.

• Fourthly, the scientific character is usually based on a combination of two strategies: induction and deduction. What we want to emphasize is that the “final” construction of a theoretical proposition will always derive from the crossing of these two paths in order to produce an axis of thorough and internally coherent explanation about a particular phenomenon, that is, to achieve as robust a theory as possible.

• Fifth, echoing Einstein, to mention that error is perhaps the most important element in the scientific process, right from the theorization process. Why is that? Because it indicates what remains unknown, that is, the distance that lingers between the observer and the object of analysis.

• Sixth, it is equally important to underline that the analytical exercise in Political Science and International Relations is especially arduous. This scientific area deals with political dynamics, power relations, choices, and untimely incidents, which implies that – methodologically – it confronts “moving” objects or targets. Unlike with natural or physical sciences, in international politics we operate with calculations, strategies, tactical or strategic movements, individual or collective psychologies, contradictions, whims, vanity and often lies and conspiracies which escape the account of events or
the historical documents of the chancelleries. In this regard, the psychological conception formulated by Robert Jervis in his works on the logic of images and the problems of perception in International Relations takes on special importance. The obstacles facing researchers are quite formidable. It is worth noting, by way of illustration, that in 2021 not all documents on World War II were made available by the English, American and Russian governments for free consultation. We must therefore be especially aware of the class of phenomena we are given to analyze in the field of International Relations. On the other hand, as the great Hellenistic scholar Jacqueline de Romilly (1913-2010) pointed out, “un train peut en cacher un autre”, that is, the true cause of a given event may be hidden by another equally important one, but which is not the main one. There is a hierarchy that needs to be assessed, so it is mandatory to look into it more than once. Lastly, it is essential to always keep in mind that in advanced studies of International Relations other analytical opportunities present themselves, namely the so-called non-Western epistemologies. Let us mention to this purpose, for instance, the contribution of the great Indian thinker Kautilya (350 a.C.-275 a.C.), also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta, who lived a century after Thucydides (455 a.C.-399 a.C.), and who bequeathed us a remarkable work entitled Arthashastra, in which he reflects on the fundamental traits of interstate relations from a protorealist perspective. In particular, his “circle theory of states” is a fascinating proposition about the logic of alignment and the policies of alliances. Reflecting empirically on the interstate dynamics which he observed in the context of the Indian subcontinent, Kautilya spotted a recurring pattern: neighboring states were, as a general rule, enemies, and the survival of a particular state was contingent on the establishment of alliances on the periphery of its neighbors, a subject we shall delve into further ahead apropos of the ongoing realignments in Southeast Asia.

In the construction of the present argument concerning the rise of China, in addition to this introduction, we raise four main vectors, interconnected, which we shall designate in this instance as the criterion of the method: 1) nexus, continuities and transformation; 2) the fundamental nature of the international arena; 3) some effects on the status quo ensuing from China’s expansionist ambitions; and, 4) a conclusion that points to the dawn of a new era of strategic containment.

**NEXUS, CONTINUITIES AND INTERNATIONAL TRANSFORMATION:**

**THE LONG CYCLES OF MODELSKI**

The end of the Thirty Years’ War, enshrined in the Treaties of Westphalia of 1648, opened a long international period marked by the centrality of the Territorial State. George Modelski (1926-2014)
would formulate an evolutionist theory of International Relations precisely from the patterns identified in the Westphalian system, relying primarily on three hypotheses articulated on a long-cycle basis:

- **1st long cycle - 500 years on average.** It involves large-scale social or historical formations, currently the modern system of States. In the previous period, the historical formations of reference were mainly the empires, or more particular cases such as the Hanseatic League. It should be noted, however, that in the context of the present international cycle other subtypes of political communities, such as confederations, have coexisted. But what most specifically raises this hypothesis by Modelski? The significant time elapsed since Westphalia – 373 years – may suggest that the interstate historical system could have already entered its declining phase.

- **2nd long cycle - 100 years on average.** It corresponds to phases of hegemony or international leadership and bears particular relevance and interest to the present case. What does, therefore, the hypothesis expressed in Modelski’s 2nd long cycle point to? It implies the likeliness of periodic changes or alterations in the hegemonic element – or in a given hegemonic arrangement – within the international system, raising the fundamental problem of hegemonic transitions. Moreover, in international systems, historically, the major powers, due to their relative power, hold the primary “responsibility” of leadership.

- **3rd long cycle - 30 years on average.** It relates to specific phases of international politics: the Cold War, the post-Cold War period, or the post-post-Cold War, an ongoing period that has already been referred to as a “new Cold War”.

THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA:
DECENTRALISATION, SELF-HELP SYSTEM
AND THE SECURITY DILEMMA

The Westphalian system is characterized by the lack of an authority or structure above the States, in itself indeed a negative formulation. But we ought to be aware that, unlike excessively straightforward readings, that same system is very fragmented. An atomization which globalization – only partial in any case – has not phased out, and which, on the contrary, the particular case of sub-Saharan Africa has made especially manifest. In fact, the differences as to development and prosperity are ‘laid bare’ – actually they become more transparent and immediate – as an extraordinary result of combining the computer with the satellite. The decentralized nature of the system suggests that States operate in an environment of *anarchy*, which forces them to anchor themselves or to sustain themselves, *prima facie*, in their relative power. This structural condition has not changed in essence. The system is thus defined by the concept of *self-help*. Even the United Nations Security Council – which has held the exclusive prerogative of the use of force in international relations, according to the UN Charter, since 1945 – is contingent upon the prior agreement, or the lack of opposition, of its five permanent members.
It should be noted that the Security Council was virtually paralyzed during the Cold War, a period during which there were more than 190 vetoes. As States are forced to seek more security in this potentially hostile environment, this need creates a persistent problem of insecurity: the so-called security dilemma. A simple definition could be phrased as follows: when a State increases (or strives to increase) its security it almost automatically generates a sense of mistrust and disadvantage in third parties – often the mere perception of it is sufficient – which typically skew arms race, active defense or even offensive actions, and the possible escalation of hostilities, with the potential to significantly affect the status quo. Thucydides (455 a.C?-399 a.C?) revealed for the first time this dilemma – which we might call the true “hallmark” or “watermark” of a self-help system – in its pivotal History of the Peloponnesian War: the growth of Athens’s might as a result of its commercial and military expansionism elicited an undisguised fear of disadvantage in Sparta, the main rival and leader of the Peloponnesian league, a dynamic that made exponentially increase the likeliness of war. This is the scenario defined by the so-called Thucydides’s Trap, in the well-known phrasing of Graham Allison. It should be noted, however, that war was not inevitable, a proposition that Thucydides is particularly zealous to safeguard. Let us be reminded of the famous challenge of the delegates of Sparta to the Athenians, demonstrating the will to avoid war: “Give us a sign of temperance, tear down at least part of the walls!” (Thucydides was referring to the imposing wall of protection between the port of Piraeus and the city of Athens.)

The modernity of Thucydides – which we have had the opportunity to highlight in recent years – is expressed in the so-called doctrine of causality, which already pointed to a world that could be explained without reference to mystical or esoteric claims. His philosophical basis was influenced by the great Democritus (460 a.C?-370 a.C?), deemed one of the forerunners of scientific research, and also by Hippocrates (460 a.C?-377 a.C?), a contemporary of both. When we speak of Thucydides’s remarkable pioneering effort in building a science of political phenomena, we refer in particular to the profoundly innovative attitude of the researcher of interstate dynamics, in a show of intellectual confidence unprecedented in his History, which he himself presents as a “possession for all times.”

Thus, the decentralized nature of the international system and the ensuing security dilemma will generate a permanent concern for survival. To a large extent, we are faced with a precarious system of armed peace – a notion anticipated by Nicolas Oresme (1323?--1382), perhaps the greatest European intellectual of the 14th century – or insecure peace, which in turn will lead to balance of power dynamics, in order to ensure the preservation of its components. The balance of power model relies on three main propositions: to prevent
the preponderance of a single State (or a group of States); to preserve States and their territorial integrity; and, also to ensure the preservation of the system of States as a whole. This last element is a particularly important dimension of the model, as it prevents the imperialization of the international arena.

And it is this feature of the international system what helps to explain, for instance, the existence and survival over time of micro-states. The question of the distribution of power in the system is therefore a central element in the concrete assessment of any period or international situation. By the same token, this requires, for the most part, that those same States protect their interests and safeguard their integrity – a typical behavioral dynamic in a self-help system.²⁰

HOW CAN WE DIG DEEPER INTO THE CHALLENGE THAT CHINA’S EXPANSION REPRESENTS NOT ONLY FOR THE UNITED STATES, BUT ALSO FOR THE OVERALL OPEN INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM?

THE EFFECTS ON THE INTERNATIONAL STATUS QUO ARISING FROM CHINA’S EXPANSIONIST AMBITIONS.

A FEW HISTORICAL SCENARIOS OF HEGEMONIC TRANSITION

How can we dig deeper into the challenge that China’s expansion represents not only for the United States – the leading liberal power in the current cycle – but also for the overall open international system? As Gilpin has highlighted, the liberal powers have since 1945 guaranteed the essential conditions for both the international regime of free trade and the freedom of navigation on the high seas – the so-called admiralty realm – and the security of freights and foreign capital²¹. I therefore propose to take a look at some historical scenarios of hegemonic transition. According to Graham Allison, the United States and China may eventually avoid engaging in war if they address two prior issues: first, in the current trajectory, the war between the two is not only possible, but much more likely than is recognized (in fact, by underestimating the real danger of such an event occurring, the risks increase); secondly, war is not necessarily inevitable to the exact extent that the great powers are able to “manage” their relationship with their main rivals without resorting to armed conflict, even in the face of threatening signs. However, this was only the case in four of the sixteen situations detailed in Allison’s aforementioned study²². Indeed, in that thorough exercise of applied history, it is revealed that in twelve of these sixteen processes of challenge to the structure prevalent in the international relations the outcome was war, that is, in 75% of the cases. The high likelihood of war in similar episodes notwithstanding, Allison “invites” the reader to reflect on the four periods in which the results did not translate into open conflict: Portugal and Spain at the end of the 15th century (Treaty of Tordesillas in 1484); the United Kingdom and the United States at the beginning of the 20th century²³; the most extreme and paradigmatic case of the “balance of terror” during the Cold War (peace ensured by the MAD doctrine); and the post-1990 European scenario shaped by the complex challenge that Germany’s reunification posed to both France and the United
China’s expansion and the construction of an argument

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Kingdom. In those four historical instances, the respective contemporary powers managed to elude the “Thucydides’s Trap”, therefore deserving special attention in the context of current Chinese ambitions. They are evidence that war is not inevitable, as Thucydides took it upon himself to stress in respect of the conflict between Sparta and Athens – a war avowedly undesirable for those powers. This is, moreover, an essential point of Thucydides’s argument, of remarkable scientific value, insofar as it refutes predetermined epilogues or inconsistent determinisms, and which the four historical analogies explored by Allison make plain. As can be read in the author’s insightful comments, “only those who fail to dig deep into the tragic circumstances of the past are condemned to repeat them”24. To this extent, the record of successes and failures offers important lessons for policy makers.

It is precisely in the thorough study of those sixteen historical instances of severe structural stress – as Allison himself designates them – that his work is especially incisive for the current international cycle. In particular, Allison’s 7th scenario is particularly useful for interpreting the present moment, that is, the period between the late 18th and early 19th centuries when revolutionary France openly challenges the then preponderant power on land and at sea – Britain. While it is a fact that the Napoleonic affront to British leadership at the international level will provoke a period of widespread wars on the European continent and in the surrounding oceans, the long cycle that follows, after 1815, of mostly systemic peace, requires a closer attention. In this regard, Henry A. Kissinger’s doctoral dissertation – published under the title A World Restored in 1957 – highlighted how post-revolutionary France is integrated into a new security architecture by the more “conservative” European powers (or powers of the status quo, perhaps more appropriately)25. The main protagonists of the Vienna Congress (1814-1815) – the Austrian chancellor Metternich and Britain’s Robert Stewart Castlereagh – would structure a virtuous system of balance of power that largely enabled the continent to maintain a systemic peace for nearly a century. It should be noted, in the construction of this system in particular, the literal invention of a buffer state – Belgium – with the function of “halting” France’s access to the North Sea. This maneuver eventually resulted in the division of Flanders in three, a division that is still in place today: Dutch Flanders, Belgian Flanders, and French Flanders. The English never “forgot” Napoleon’s illustrious statement about the strategic importance of the great port of Antwerp: “Anvers est un pistolet braqué sur le coeur de l’Angleterre”.26 In Hedley Bull’s formulation (1932-1985), the said system power balance has fulfilled three essential functions in the modern system of States: 1) it has prevented its capture and transformation into a universal empire; 2) regional balances of power have protected the autonomy and the territorial integrity of States; and, finally 3) it has provided the conditions for the development of other institutions essential for the maintenance of the system itself, such as diplomacy, flexible alliances, crisis management, sanctions, international law and war as a legitimate means to prevent expansionist policies or hostile actions of conquest.27 With
regard specifically to the logics of (re)alignment underway in the Southeast Asian region, the significant reorientation of alliance policy by China’s neighboring states can be illuminated by Kautilya’s pioneering modelling, i.e. the so-called “circle theory of States” we initially referred to, and which the following scheme helps enlightening: 28

**Figure 1** > Theoretical scheme of the circle of states and the logics of alignment

![Diagram of the circle theory of States](image_url)

Figure adapted from Finley and Hovet, 1975. 29

Taking as reference, by way of example, this outline of five concentric circles with State A at the center, Kautilya considers that this same State is more likely to ally itself with State C. In fact, should it feel threatened by State B₁, the likelihood is that State A will establish alliances with States C₁, C₂ or C₁₂ against State B₁. State A may make a temporary alliance with B₂ and B₆ against B₁ but, Kautilya warns, these cannot be long-term agreements. According to Kautilya’s model, in the example above, the alliances may involve circles A, C and E in opposition to circles B and D. The author therefore concludes that any State in position A can discern its logical allies in circles C and E. Kautilya’s argument, transposed into the present scenario of Southeast Asia, makes it to some extent possible to better relate the dynamics that are seen there in the framework of which China’s neighboring states seek to establish or strengthen alliances in the most distant circles, in order to mitigate the potential threat posed, in their view, by the great power, and to maintain the regional balance of power which, as Metternich always stressed, was the “only guarantee” of international peace and security. 30

We can say that the international subsystem of the Indo-Pacific largely reissues the 19th-and early 20th-century power balance Europe, in which the security dilemma is a
central factor. In this subsystem, as was the case in 1800-Europe, ideology plays a marginal role in determining the state of relations between the main powers. The likelihood of open conflicts between strategic rivals (China, Japan, the two Koreas, India, Pakistan, Russia and a few others) is not at all an impossibility, fueled as it is by significant outbreaks of tension and macro-regional instability factors – the more pressing cases being the Korean peninsula, Taiwan, and the Southeast Asian seas. It should be noted that the United States as the only power still genuinely global is also – et pour cause – an Asian power working as the key balancer on the Asia-Pacific geostrategic chessboard. On this specific point, the question therefore arises as to how the model of liberal hegemonic stability will evolve, led chiefly by the United States and its allies, and which has, for all its purposes, ensured freedom of trade and navigation on the oceans over the last seventy-six years. It is also a fact that this international subsystem shows a low density in terms of regional organizations, as can be said with regard to institutional links or the absence of significant dialogue forums between the countries concerned.

How to accommodate China’s new prominence in the construction of this argument? The first requirement for a “Metternich-type” solution relied on the previous defeat of the revisionist power – a notion established by Kissinger – and the resolution of the then known as “French problem”, a France which was consigned to the “natural” borders of the Hexagon. Indeed, it was only after the Napoleon disaster in Russia in 1812 that there was occasion for the diplomatic developments that would lead to the so-called Concert of Vienna. The question emerging today, which is more complex – and, we might say, especially intricate – is whether it is possible to achieve, without a “Chinese defeat”, a diplomatic arrangement that secures international peace. As Kissinger suggested in his thesis, in the diplomatic bargain leading to peace in Vienna the essential element of the “new balance” was for France to renounce expansionist claims or even to exert undue hegemonic influence. In the present case of China, the challenge of a more ambitious diplomatic opening will require the identification of the critical interests of the key powers and the points of convergence and divergence, assuming, a fortiori, that reason will prevail on all sides. On the other hand, it may well be that the ongoing ‘dialogue’ lays bare the impossibility of achieving an updated version of the understanding reached in Vienna. This would be bad for all parties and, let it be said, for the world.

The layout of an international theory attempted here – combined with the botched cases pointed out in Allison’s important study – seems to suggest that if China continues to act as a revisionist power with the intention of expanding and projecting its economic and military power in an immoderate or intimidating fashion, already apparent in the attempt to create “spheres of influence”, then the possibility of a containment war may be on the horizon. But this course of action would, in our view, be profoundly wrong on China’s part – as was Napoleon’s unwise decision to exacerbate French aspirations and march on Moscow. As Robert Gilpin (1930-2018) pointed out, the first way to “deal
with" a serious imbalance between an existing structure and the process of redistribution of power is a hegemonic war. In the perhaps more precise definition of Raymond Aron (1905-1983), a war of hegemony is a type of conflict which determines which State or group of States will prevail. This is therefore the ultimate test of change in a system of powers, gauger of a possible hegemonic transition.

What can we make out of the current ‘Chinese problem’? In an increasingly Westphalian Asia, the United States still have the key role of balancer. They are simultaneously the most important ally of Japan and South Korea – and, let it be said, Taiwan – and a partner of China, a historical situation comparable to that in which Bismarck, who held a very keen sense of the balance of power system, made an alliance with Austria shortly assuaged by the signing of a treaty with Russia. Paradoxically, it was this “constructive ambiguity” – in Kissinger’s well-known expression – that preserved the flexibility of the European balance. On the other hand, it would be its relinquishment that would trigger a cascade of confrontations culminating in World War I. We have in mind, in particular, the continentalization of London’s foreign policy from 1899 onwards – consummated in the Entente Cordiale with France on 8th April 1904, followed, towards the end of 1907, by the creation of the Triple Entente constituted by Great Britain, France and Russia, with a view to serving as a counterweight to the Triple Alliance already in place and formed by Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. The rigid logic of these alliances would make it especially difficult to halt the course of events which eventually materialized in 1913-1914. Now, in the case in China, the deterioration and unchecked aggravation of Sino-American relations might lead to the two States falling into the “Thucydides’s Trap”, representing in all likelihood the catalyst for a large-scale conflict.

According to Tammen et al. – in the context of the important studies on power transitions by A.F.K. Organski (1923-1998) – the potentially “most dangerous condition” of the international system occurs when a country at the top of the global hierarchy is overtaken by a rapidly rising nation with a substantially larger population; such “overreach” exponentially increases the likelihood of a large-scale conflict. And, as Mearsheimer reminds us, the great powers are never willing to let other great powers gain power at their expense.

CONCLUSION: A NEW ERA OF STRATEGIC CONTAINMENT

Elements of empirical evidence are numerous and especially revealing, attesting, in one way or another, to the markedly expansionist – not merely emerging or rising – profile of China. The deliberate formulation of a strategy called Belt and Road Initiative, articulated exclusively on the basis of a single center – Beijing – includes two components: the “belt” (a term in itself somewhat dubious and suspicious), which refers to the land route, and the “route”, relating to the sea route, representing an expansion strategy which we address, in the context of this tendentially realist reflection, in terms of neo-imperialism. It should be noted that a third “polar route” is indeed already being cham-
pioned by Beijing. According to Brands and Gaddis, China aspires to a “hybrid hegemony of an unprecedented scale”, they stress, “never attempted by the Germans or the Russians with such ambition and specificity”. In the well-known typology of Morgenthau, shaped by a conception of power as a critical manifestation of international politics, the hypothesis we raised would have correspondence in the taxonomy of politics of imperialism, in contrast to the politics of the status quo or even to the politics of prestige. The neo-colonial contours are already patent in several instances: from the construction of air and naval infrastructures in the South China Sea and bases and naval infrastructures in Kiribati, Cambodia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka (the deep-water port of Hambantota and also in the huge new port of Port City in Colombo), Djibouti, and Tanzania, to the establishment of trade positions of enormous scope and even economic dominance in Africa (Zambia being possibly one of the most striking cases, among others), in South America and, perhaps more unexpectedly, in Europe. As regards EU’s economic relations with China, the former appears to be the “worst-off bloc”, raising the question of the true scope of its autonomy regarding Beijing; examples of China’s growing influence and penetration are the obtainment of control and management positions not only in Adriatic ports, but also in the ports of Genoa and Piraeus. Eastern Europe is even seen as a “pivot of China’s”, the significant “Chinese penetration” in countries such as the Czech Republic or even Belarus deserving special highlight. As far as Portugal is concerned, indeed one of the Member States of the European Union (EU) with the highest incidences of Chinese penetration according to an important study by François Godement and Abigaël Vasselier, the explicit inclusion of the deep-water port of Sines in Beijing’s strategy, as had already been the case regarding the port of Lisbon, denounces the potential vulnerability of the country; T. J. Lowi, who suggested the concept of the penetration factor in his pertinent reflection on globalization, considers that its effects are not the same as simple interconnectivity. This conceptual image foreshadows a negative impact on the relative autonomy of the State and on the whole of Portuguese economy. In this context, Severiano Teixeira points out that it is crucial taking into account that “Xi Jinping’s China is more authoritarian at the domestic level and more aggressive at the international level”. Warning of the need for greater prudence regarding the investment agreement between the EU and China signed in December 2020, the author enquired: “To what extent might short-term trade advantages translate into long-term political and strategic losses?”.
this period. Moreover, as Lee Kuan Yew – Prime Minister of Singapore from 1959 to 1990 – pointed out, the Chinese empire of the past “did not have to worry about the rest of the world”; in present times, on the other hand, “without access to the resources such as oil, nickel and other essential raw materials, its growth will simply stall”. At the general level of geopolitics – and in the face of the new international scenario in place, which we have endeavored to highlight – the Western subsystem’s concern about the Chinese orientations is discernible. The new developments establish China as the main strategic competitor and contribute to giving effective expression and content to a new phase of international politics – in the Modelski model operationalized in this paper – which we conceive of as a new era of strategic containment. Indeed, in his first major address – as US Secretary of State for the new Biden Administration – Antony Blinken reaffirmed the United States’ vision of China as “the greatest geopolitical challenge of the 21st century”, adding that “China is the only country with the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to seriously challenge the stable and open international system – all the rules, values and relationships that make the world work the way we want it to be” [added italics].

In the same vein, the EU avowedly regards China as a systemic rival. The dilemmas of how to deal with this great emerging power are increasingly evident, as the French Foreign Minister points out: “the EU must be firm with China but avoid the risk of confrontation.” But it is not only Europe, the United States and the whole of the Western political subsystem – with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand deserving special reference – who put themselves in a clear position of overt alertness. The same is true of countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam or Malaysia, and, a fortiori, India. Of particular significance in the macro-region of the Indo-Pacific were the “warnings” against China’s “neo-colonialist” practices uttered by the experienced former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, betraying the “unrest” and “dread” that Beijing’s policy has elicited. Symptomatic of these moves and of the new strategic game, which “provoke resistance on the part of anxious neighbors”, and their respective “realignments” taking place in the seas of Southeast Asia – in Kautilya’s conceptual projection – was also the docking, for the first time since 1975, of an American aircraft carrier in Vietnam in March 2018. In turn, at the cybersecurity level, “malicious activities” from the Chinese territory are also a source of growing concern for the EU. In this domain, the innovative theoretical developments proposed in particular by Fischerkeller and Harknett and by Harknett and Smeets, anchored in the concept of persistent engagement (PE) maintain, on the one hand, that “deterrence is not a credible strategy for cyberspace” and, on the other hand, that what is observed in so-called cyberoperations “are primarily attempts to achieve strategic objectives without the need for armed attacks”; the argument used by these authors is, therefore, that the ongoing surveillance effort in cyberspace will henceforth require persistent engagement strategies, increasingly central to the containment of cyberthreats.
In the context of Modelski’s evolutionary model – which conceptually provides the organization and framing of relevant international phases, as observed – we note that roughly thirty years have actually elapsed since the beginning of the post-Cold War period in 1989, thus suggesting the advent of a new cycle of international policy defined mainly by the rise of China. Giving expression to this new phase, the most important change in the US concept of national security strategy is patent in the Blueprint report of December 2017, which no longer places terrorism and low-intensity conflicts at the top of the scale, prioritizing instead the challenge posed by China. The document also highlights strategic concerns regarding Russia, but underlines above all the “Chinese problem”. In the same vein of inescapable concern about China’s growing economic and military might, NATO – at its 20 November 2019 meeting – decided to expand its defense perimeter to include space, complementing the measures it has been pursuing in recent years on cybersecurity. We might say that this is the return of high politics “at full throttle”. The perennial logics of the so-called reason of State – ragion di stato, an expression coined by the great Italian Renaissance intellectual Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540) – continue to define the international reality, now marked by the hegemonic ambitions of an increasingly authoritarian China at the internal level, overtly intent on becoming the greatest power in the international system, while challenging the premise and stability of an open world shaped by the advent of democracy, freedom of navigation and the free movement of goods. Such is the considerable dilemma looming at the international level.

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ENDNOTES

1 A Portuguese version of this paper was first published in Relações Internacionais, No. 71, September 2021.


9 A 2019 publication by Deepshikha Shahi on Kautila’s important work – in terms of a non-Western formulation – is precisely titled Kautila and Non-Western IR Theory. LondResP: Palgrave Pivot, 2019.


14 A usual feature of dilemmas is the absence of optimal solutions.


20 Any system has two fundamental dimensions: structure and process. In the scope of International Relations Theory, the term structure is commonly used to refer to the distribution of capabilities among States; in turn, process relates to the ways or patterns according to which States relate to one another.


22 ALLISON, Graham – Destined for War...


24 Cf. George Santayana as quoted by Allison, Graham, op. cit., p. xvii.


26 Antwerp is a shot aimed at the heart of England.


29 Subtitle proposed by FINLAY, David J.; HOVET, Jr., Thomas – 7304..., p. 30.

30 Cf. David J.; HOVET, Jr., Thomas – 7304..., pp. 29-31. Perhaps one of the most paradigmatic illustrations of Kautila’s model is the Luso-British alliance dating from the end of the 15th-century and materialised in the Treaty of Windsor, in which Portugal – country A – sought alliances in circle C with a view to mitigate the potential threat posed by its neighbour State and ensure the maintenance of the regional balance of power.


32 Check GILPIN, Robert – War and Change in World Politics. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 197 (see moreover the important discussion on the hegemonic transition in chapter 5, «Hegemonic war and international change», pp. 197-209, and in the final chapter, «Epilogue: Change and war in the contemporary world», pp. 231-244).


36. MEARSHEIMER, John J. - «The inev-
itable rivalry: America, China, and the tragedy of great-power politics». In For-

37. Cf. BRADY, Anne-Marie - China as A Polar Great Power. Cambridge, UK: Cam-


39. Apores of the remarkable value of these Morgenthau taxonomies, see in par-
ticular JUTERONKE, Oliver In WILLIAMS, Michael C., org. - Realism Recon sidered: The Legacy of Hans J. Morgenthau in Inter-
national Relations. New York: Oxford Uni-

40. More recently, in the Atlantic, China likewise aims to obtain permission to establish naval bases to ensure «repair and «support» to its naval fleet, as is the case of the southern coast of Namibia. MILKOVIC, Kyle. - “China is trying to build an Atlantic naval base”. Popular Mechanics, May 11, 2021. Available in: https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/a63585283/ china-trying-to-build-atlantic-naval-base/.

41. «EASTERN Europe’s China pivot». In Financial Times (James Kyenge and Michael Peell, 28 November 2017, p. 7.

42. Check GODEMENT, François; VAS- SELIER, Abigael - «La Chine à nos portes: Une stratégie pour l’Europe». Paris: Odile Jacob, 2018, p. 201. Regarding Chinese penetration in Portugal, it is worthy point-
ing out the dominant positions held by companies of the Chinese State in the sector of electrical infrastructure in Por-
tugal – largely considered strategic errors - but also in the water sector, a somewhat worrying situation that seri-
ously affects the strategic autonomy of the country. Likewise, China has long launched “scientifc” expeditions in the Azores Sea that probably warrant closer monitoring by the Portuguese authorities. See, in addition, «ESTUDOS europeus seg-
undo Luis Lobo-Fernandes». In CAMERLO, Marcelo; MALAMUD, Andrs; VAZ-PINTO, Raquel, org. - Ciência Política & Portu-


44. Check TEIXEIRA, Nuno Severiano - “Are these Euros ‘real’?”. In Fashion Public. December 30, 2020, p. 8. Considering the crucial issue of the integrated circuits, in truth, a genuine tipping point on the technological scale, between the three blocs – the United States, China and the European Union – Europe is the worst- off geopolitical bloc – with only 10% of the world’s semiconductor production. Check FERRAND, Victor – «Dependence on Asian integrated circuit has become a key to sovereignty». In Public. 15 March 2021, p. 25.

45. Check YEW, Lee Kuan – The Grand Master’s Insights on China, the United States, and the World. Cambridge, Mas-

46. Check «PC CHINESE technology and repression in Hong Kong». In Daily News (César Avval), March 4, 2018, p. 21.

parceria-ou-rival.shtml.

48. Check «A UE TEM de ser firme com a China, mas evitar o risco de confronto». In Diário de Notícias (Helena Tecedor), 4 November 2021, p. 20.

49. In the face of the growing Chinese naval power, Japan decided to build an aircraft carrier for the f rst time since World War II. «JAPAN commissions new 100-ton carrier» by Tatsuo ADACHI, 9 December 2018. Available in: https:// global. Asahi.com/mundo/japan-compa-
ry-mais-de-100-caças-terra-porta-
avio-pela-1-vez-desde-segunda-guerra/.

50. India is also no stranger to the arms race in the macro-region of the Indo-
Pacifrm and presented the frst aircraft carrier built in the country. Check «INSIDE India’s aircraft carrier: frst move. Vikrant in new avatar ready for frghter jets to take off». In India Today. 14 August 2021. Available in: https://www.indiatoday.in/
india/story/vikrant-inside-indias-air-
craft-carrier-frst-sea-trial-done-1840846-2021-08-14.

51. Check also «MAHATHIR Mohamad warns against “new colonialism”…».


53. Check also «U.S.-China strategic competition in South and East China seas…».

on-behalf-of-the-eu-urging-china-to-
take-action-against-malicious-cyber-
activities-undertaken-from-its-territory/.

55. Check, in a formal statement from the United States Department of Justice, it is likewise expressly referred to as being the target of commercial espionage by China. Check “EUA acusa a empresas chinesas de robar secretos com-

56. FISCHERKELLER, Michael P.; HÅRKENN, Richard J. - Deterrence is not a credible strategy for cyberspace».

57. See also «U.S.-China «credible strategy-cyberspace»…».


59. HÅRKENN, Richard J.; SMEETS, Max - «Cyber campaigns and strategic out-
comes». In Journal of Strategic Studies. No. 10, pp. 1-35. It must be pointed out that the author of this article was a student of Richard J. Harkin’s at the University of Cincinnati between 1991 and 1995, the year in which he integrated his doctoral examin-
ation jury (PhD in Political Science (1995). Since then, he has collaborated extensively with Professor Harknett, the current director of the Department of Political Science who, by the High Representative of the new School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA) of the University of Cincin-
nati is currently underway.

transcript-remarks.


TECEDEIRO, Helena– «A UE TEM de ser firme com a China, mas evitar o risco de confronto». In Diário de Notícias. 4 November 2021, p. 20.


XIAOHUI, Su – «Thucydides trap can be avoided». In China Daily. 25 June 2013.


Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo recently suggested that the ongoing Sino-American rivalry is considerably more dangerous than the competition that pitted the United States against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The remarks seem to attest that American foreign policy elites no longer believe that engagement with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is sufficient to open China to pluralism, democratization and a “peaceful rise”. Pompeo’s statement is additional evidence of the breakdown of the broad bipartisan foreign policy consensus dominant before Donald Trump’s presidency. Indeed, Bill Clinton’s enlargement strategy remained – albeit with nuances and variations – virtually unchanged during the Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations. The approach led Americans – and Europeans – to conclude that China could emerge as a stakeholder in the international liberal order and, rather more optimistically, move towards democratic politics. Yet, rather than hampering China’s emergence, Western policy options effectively accelerated the country’s rise to peer competitor status. The vertiginous collapse of the Soviet Union necessarily provoked a modification of America’s Cold War grand strategy. Viewing the United States as the “indispensable nation”, the Clinton Administration shaped a new, broad consensus meant to enlarge the “community of free nations” and thus make the United States “safer, more prosperous and influential”. That new bipartisan consensus postulated that globalization, understood mainly

**ABSTRACT**

Donald Trump upended America’s long-standing, post-Cold war bipartisan China consensus. Initially focused on trade issues, particularly trade imbalances, Administration policy moved toward a more confrontational approach encompassing major security initiatives in the neighborhood. Focusing on the first year of Joe Biden’s China policy, this article seeks to demonstrate the broad continuity between the Biden and Trump Administrations approach to Beijing.

Keywords: United States, China, Donald Trump, Joe Biden.

**RESUMO**

A política chinesa de Biden

Donald Trump produz uma volte-face na política chinesa dos Estados Unidos. Inicialmente centrada nas questões comerciais, particularmente nos elevadíssimos desequilíbrios do défice comercial externo, a Administração republicana evoluiu para uma posição mais confrontacional, passando por importantes iniciativas de segurança, incluindo a recuperação do Quad. Este artigo trata o primeiro
in terms of market liberalization and the extension of free trade, generated social changes fostering democracy that would ultimately consolidate US national security. As a result, Russia and China, described by President Clinton as “our former adversaries”, would invariably be absorbed into the “international system as open, prosperous and stable nations”.

Engagement with the PRC, including through Western investment in the Chinese market, was seen as the vehicle for promoting the emergence of Chinese democracy. Armed with these convictions about the direction of political change, national interests and principles naturally aligned and no discernable contradiction existed between the promotion of democracy and the satisfaction of the vital US and Western national interests.

By discarding this view, Donald Trump consummated a vertiginous turn in US policy toward China. Initially focused on issues of trade inequity, particularly the colossal deficits accruing from trade imbalances between the two countries, the Administration’s increasingly confrontational stance led to promotion of important security initiatives such as the resumption of the dormant Quad. By the time Trump departed the White House, relations had morphed into a tense, unceasing global rivalry. Since the President’s orientation mirrored new international realities produced by the growing assertiveness of Chinese might, his China policy mirrored structural changes in the international environment. The change did not, as Trump’s critics charge, reflect the mere whims of a mercurial chief executive; rather, the President broke with an antiquated post-Cold War “normality” beyond restoration. Indeed, the first year of the Biden Administration’s posture toward China – the subject of this article – pointed to a tremendous continuity with Trump’s much maligned policy.

**TRUMP’S POLICY TURN**

Once in the Oval Office, Donald Trump rapidly set out to undo the “China consensus”, denounce the benign expectations underlying US engagement policy and, ultimately, reverse the nation’s “decline” by adopting policies designed to “Making America Great Again”. These broad aims were articulated when, in June 2015, Trump formally announced his candidacy for the Republican Party’s presidential nomination. At that point, a host of foreign policy priorities were outlined: the cessation of ending undocumented immigration, the renegotiation or abandonment of existing free trade agreements, the reversion of the country’s de-industrialization, the recovery of American jobs and the war on terrorism. In effect, he pledged to wrestle US foreign policy from the traditional political-cultural elitism of an unresponsive, alienated establishment entrenched in the country’s universities, think tanks and federal agencies.

Perhaps no so surprisingly, Trump refused to allocate blame to China for the industrial devastation he attributed to globalization. Maintaining that Beijing was simply pursuing
its vital interests, the candidate censured Obama for not revising – or simply abandon-
ing – “unfair” international trade agreements of the 90s at the root of America’s decline. However, he did denounce Chinese manipulation of trade rules and the multiple obst-
tacles confronting US companies seeking to enter the Chinese market: discriminatory practices and barriers, forced technology transfers, intellectual property theft and the absence of reforms in the Chinese state sector. Curiously, 70 years after the abolition of the ‘unequal treaties’ imposed on China during the ‘century of national humiliation’, an American President found himself protesting “unfair treaties” and demanding bilat-
eral trade reciprocity. When the Chinese authorities failed to correspond to Administra-
tion demands, trade tensions morphed into a general, full-spectrum geostrategic rivalry. Arriving at the White House, the President abandoned ongoing talks on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), thus fulfilling a campaign pledge made on June 6, 2016, when he characterized the proposal as “another disaster done and pushed by special interests who want to rape our country, just a continuing rape of our country. That’s what it is, too. It’s a harsh word: It’s a rape of our country.” As part of his general revision rela-
tions with Asia, the President-elect, mere days after defeating Hillary Clinton, accepted a phone call from Taiwan’s Tsai Ing-wen, thus affording her the status of a head of state rather than that of the leader of a “Chinese province.” Following the 1979 normal-
ization of Sino-American relations, no US president had spoken directly to Taiwan’s chief official. Beijing could hardly ignore such an explicit diplomatic signal, not least because, during the campaign, Trump professed not to understand the need to maintain the “one China” policy if other matters, including trade, could not be negotiated with the communist government. Crucially, because he also admitted the possibility of aban-
doning the status quo guiding Washington’s policy since Richard Nixon’s 1972 meeting with Mao Zedong, the Tsai Ing-wen phone call was a harbinger of things to come. Trump’s assertiveness in relation to China largely mirrored the national Zeitgeist. An August 2019 Pew Research survey revealed that a full 60% of Americans no longer viewed China as benign; while an impressive 24% identified it as the most significant threat facing the United States. This outlook was mirrored in the White House’s December 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States. that “China and Russia chal-
lenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity”, the document defined the PRC as a ‘competitor’ and a ‘revisionist power.” China’s emergence on the world stage therefore required a still-absent stra-
tegic response encompassing, inter alia, the reconfiguration of alliances and the secur-
itization of commercial and techno-scientific flows. Cognizant of the structural shift in the international system, the Biden Administration did not introduce significant discontinuities with Trump’s Chinese policy. In the imme-
diate aftermath of the March 2021 Alaska summit, Secretary of State Antony Blinken succinctly summarized the Administration’s approach in the following terms: “the United States’ relationship with China will be competitive where it should be,
A YEAR AFTER PRESIDENT BIDEN’S SWEARING-IN, RIVALRY AND CONFRONTATION CONTINUE TO DOMINATE SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS AS WELL AS BIDEN’S GENERAL PARTIALITY FOR ALLIANCES AND MULTILATERALISM.

THE ROAD TO ANCHORAGE

When Joe Biden took the oath of office, it was hardly a forgone conclusion that he would decide to pursue the main tenets of his predecessor’s China policy. During the 2020 presidential campaign, the Democrat expressed reservations over Trump’s dire reading of the challenge posed by the PRC. For instance, in May 2019, he criticized the President’s trade war, arguing that the inherent strength of America’s political and economic systems prevented China from being “competition for us.” On the same day Biden entered the Oval Office, Antony Blinken and Janet Yellen – respectively nominated Secretary of State and of Treasury – indicated the President would pursue a multilateral path in close coordination with Washington’s Asian and European allies, seeming to confirm a less unilateralist approach to the PRC.

Yet, regarding strategic goals, Biden signaled his unwillingness to depart from Trump’s general orientation during his first telephone conversation with Xi Jinping. On February 10, when the long-delayed call was finally made, the President expressed his “fundamental concerns about Beijing’s coercive and unfair economic practices, crackdown in Hong Kong, human rights abuses in Xinjiang, and increasingly assertive actions in the region, including toward Taiwan.” Rather unsurprisingly, his Chinese counterpart replied that “while the two sides may differ on some issues, it is crucial to show mutual respect, treat each other as equals, and properly manage and handle the differences in a constructive fashion,” adding – crucially – that “Taiwan, Hong Kong and Xinjiang are China’s internal affairs and concern China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the that “the US side should respect China’s core interests and act prudently.” The parameters of the bilateral relationship for the next few years were thus starkly outlined by both sides.

The first indications as to the broad outlines of Biden’s China policy emerged with the publication of the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance. Understood as an interim ‘roadmap’, the document highlighted three strategic priorities: the security of the American people, the expansion of opportunities and economic prosperity and the defense of the democratic values underpinning the American way of life. Like Trump, Biden identified China, Russia, North Korea and Iran as geostrategic adversaries. Evincing
a turn to realism, the Obama Administration’s aim of “building deeper and more effective partnerships with other key centers of influence” such as China and Russia was noticeably absent from the text.\textsuperscript{21} In point of fact, the new “roadmap” noted that the PRC had become more “assertive” and added that Beijing and Moscow were pursuing strategies meant to “prevent us from defending our interests and allies around the world”.\textsuperscript{22} Distinguishing Biden from his predecessor, the document proclaimed that “America is back” and assured that the new President would reaffirm US leadership through strengthened alliances and multilateralism.\textsuperscript{23} Relegated to a secondary priority by Trump’s National 2017 Security Strategy, the defense of democracy and human rights emerged as a fundamental pillar of Biden’s China policy. Because the Sino-American rivalry was understood as a dispute between democracy and autocracy, it assumed a universal dimension.

Once the Administration defined its strategic guidelines, consultations with America’s Asian allies began in preparation for the first high-level meeting with Chinese authorities, scheduled for March 18-19, 2021, in Anchorage, Alaska. On the eve of their departure for Asia, the Secretaries of State and Defense published a major policy article in The Washington Post, where they sought to convey to Indo-Pacific states that

> “the United States is now making a big push to revitalize our ties with friends and partners — both in one-to-one relationships and in multilateral institutions — and to recommit to our shared goals, values and responsibilities.”\textsuperscript{24}

Both Cabinet officials reiterated the conviction that alliances were “force multipliers” and, thus, it would be “a huge strategic error to neglect these relationships”.\textsuperscript{25} Stressing the need for a “fundamental debate” on “whether democracy or autocracy offers the best path forward”, the article called for unity among democratic countries and, evoking Harry Truman’s 1947 containment speech before Congress, stressed the Administration’s commitment to the defense of pluralist values “wherever they are challenged”.\textsuperscript{26} Blinken and Austin concluded that since the ‘Indo-Pacific is increasingly the center of global geopolitics’, American interest lay in the establishment of a region “free and open, anchored by respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law”.\textsuperscript{27} No less important, the authors note that some states “seek to challenge the international order” and that “China in particular is all too willing to use coercion to get its way.”\textsuperscript{28}

Faced such a considerable threat to international order, China would be held accountable “when it abuses human rights in Xinjiang and Tibet, systematically erodes autonomy in Hong Kong, undercuts democracy in Taiwan or asserts maritime claims in the South China Sea that violate international law.”\textsuperscript{29}

The publication of the article coincided with statements made before Congress by Indo-Pacific Commander Admiral Phil Davidson, warning that China may attempt to control Taiwan in six years as part of its effort to “supplant the United States and our leadership
role in the rules-based international order, which they’ve long said that they want to
do that by 2050.” Admiral Davidson’s words were representative of military concerns
and easily dovetailed with The Administration’s view of China as a global challenge to
the liberal international order created by the United States and its European and Asian
allies in the wake of World War II. If President Trump had been ambivalent about
the extent to which that liberal order promoted vital US interests, the new Admin-
istration entertained no qualms on the matter.
A few days prior to the Anchorage meeting, the semi-official Global Times published an
editorial rebuking Washington’s use of Indo-Pacific allies as “strategic bargaining chips”
in its dealings with China. Playing down Blinken and Austin visits to South Korea and
Japan, the editorial claimed that “what Washington sees as a real threat is China’s
growing economic development,” adding
that Americans “indulged into the belief
that the problems of the US’ problems were
primarily China’s fault, and that contain-
ment and decoupling from China would
restore US’ absolute dominance in the
world.” Insisting that the real problems
confronting the United States stemmed from the “decline in its competitiveness in the
era of globalization”, the articled claimed Washington was “too addicted to military
and financial hegemony” while the “speed of innovation is declining, and its labor force
as a whole is becoming lazy”. America’s problems were domestic in nature. Scape-
goating China may have been convenient, but if Washington failed to alter its strate-
gic posture relative to Beijing, it would “inevitably face problems in the long run”. On
March 17, 2021, the day before talks in Anchorage got underway, Lloyd Austin,
asked about the purpose of the visit to Japan and South Korea, replied that consulta-
tions were a part of a broader effort to “make sure we have the capabilities and the
operational plans and concepts to offer credible deterrence to China or anybody else
who would want to take on the U.S.” At the same time, Blinken criticized Beijing’s
aggression and urged Seoul and Tokyo to work with Washington to prevent a “danger-
ous erosion of democracy” in the region. Put differently, the expansion of Chinese
might in the region raised the danger of bandwagoning; that is, of allies succumbing
to the temptation of allying with the emerging power so as to to maximize gains. In
light of this possibility, Blinken and Austin were unequivocal: Washington understood
its network of alliances in the Indo-Pacific as an asset in the competition with Beijing
and intended to strengthen them so as to consolidate a robust, close-knit coalition
capable of countering China.
On the same day that Blinken and Austin clarified Administration intentions, Wash-
ington imposed punitive sanctions on 24 Chinese citizens linked directly to the
suppression of Hong Kong’s democracy movement. Foreign financial institutions
engaging in transactions with the individuals targeted would also become subject to sanctions. That same day, invoking national security concerns, the telecommunications regulator – the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) – opened an investigation to determine whether the commercial licenses attributed to China Unicom Americas, Pacific Networks and ComNet should be revoked. Earlier, in December 2020, the FCC had launched a similar inquiry aimed at withdrawing the 2007 authorization allowing China Telecom (Americas) – China’s largest state-owned telecommunications company – to operate in the U.S. market. Faced with these significant setbacks, China’s Ambassador in Washington, Cui Tiankai, warned that “unilateral pressure and sanctions only lead to a dead end” and, thus, called for “constructive bilateral communication” in Anchorage.39

Yet, the profound differences separating Washington and Beijing during the first session of the Alaska summit elicited mutual recrimination rather than constructive communication. The parties brought to the venue expectations that were largely irreconcilable. Before talks began, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan admitted the meeting would enable the US to address Beijing from “a position of strength”, but insisted that no regular dialogue would be resumed.40 Indeed, Blinken and Sullivan understood the summit as a one-off encounter providing them with an opportunity to articulate American concerns regarding the rollback of democracy in Hong Kong, human rights abuses in Xinjiang, tensions in the Taiwan Strait, Chinese economic coercion against Australia and incursions into waters disputed with Japan. For the American side, these issues required full clarification if improvements in the bilateral relationship were to be considered.

The gap in expectations as to the nature of the summit was stressed by Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian when he claimed that “at the invitation of the United States” China “will have a high-level strategic dialogue with the US side in the coming days” to set the way to resume engagement41. Zhao further suggested that his country’s understanding of “normal ties” meant that “both sides must respect each other and treat each other as equals, enhance mutual understanding through dialogue, manage and dissolve differences, and bring China-United States relations back to the right track.”42 Represented in Anchorage by Yang Jiechi and Wang Yi, Beijing saw the meeting as an opportunity for the parties to redefine their bilateral relationship and, consequently, articulate the outlines of a new international order incorporating PRC core values and interests. Washington retorted that Beijing’s call for a broad redefinition of bilateral relations was contingent upon a shift in Chinese behavior that, in Blinken’s view, “threatens the rules-based order that maintains global stability.”43 Since the world would be ‘much more violent and unstable’ in the absence of these rules, the concerns raised by the United States were not “merely internal”; that is, they were not matters pertaining to Chinese sovereignty alone.44
FROM ANCHORAGE TO KABUL

Whereas – at least formally – the Chinese side hoped to restore “normality” to the bilateral relationship, it became increasingly evident that Chinese and American views on the nature of international order were not coincidental. During the March 18 opening session of the Anchorage Summit, Blinken made it abundantly clear that the Biden Administration regarded China as its main geopolitical rival and expressed his “deep concerns with actions by China, including in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan, cyber-attacks on the United States, economic coercion against our allies.” In response to these observations, Yang Jiechi accused the United States of being “condescending” and of using its military and financial might to obstruct trade flows and incite anti-China sentiment. In short, he maintained that unlike the United States “we do not believe in invading by the use of force, or to topple other regimes through various means, or to massacre the people of other countries, because all of those would only cause turmoil and instability in this world.” As direct as it was uncompromising, the statement was tantamount to a generic condemnation of post-Cold War, unipolar U.S. foreign policy. Rather unexpectedly, the Chinese delegation then hardened their discourse by pointing out that recent Black Lives Matter demonstrations and America’s legacy of “institutional racism” – openly acknowledged by the Biden Administration – demonstrated Washington’s naked hypocrisy in the realm of human rights. Fundamental disagreements were acknowledged with regard to Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan, but the parties pledged themselves to identify areas in which limited cooperation could be achieved, including climate change and a host of geopolitical challenges posed by Iran, North Korea, Myanmar and Afghanistan.

Sino-American tensions were accentuated following the calamitous extraction of US forces from Afghanistan. Conducted in the absence of substantial consultations with European and Asian allies, the troop evacuation could not but generate mistrust among the America’s allies, which the Chinese immediately sough to exploit. In the course of the withdrawal, the semi-official Global Times warned the Taiwanese of the dangers inherent in their dependence on Washington. Suggesting that Tsai Ing-wen and the “separatists” accompanying her “must have been nervous and have an ominous presentiment” and “should have known better in secret that the US is not reliable”, the article concluded that events in Afghanistan should lead Taipei to “realize that once a war breaks out in the Straits, the island’s defense will collapse in hours and the US military won’t come to help.” With China sensing that the credibility of US security guarantees had been shaken, Blinken, summoned before Congress to clarify the impact of the Afghan withdrawal, reiterated America’s commitment to the terms of the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979.

Shortly after, on 15 September 2021, Joe Biden relaunched the “Asia pivot” by way of a new Indo-Pacific security pact – Aukus – encompassing the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. In a virtual ceremony gathering the US President and Prime
Ministers Boris Johnson and Scott Morrison, Biden described Aukus as an investment “on our greatest source of strength – our alliances”, in need of updating to “better meet the threats of today and tomorrow” and to “connect in new ways” the United States and its Pacific allies. Addressing the House of Commons, Boris Johnson acknowledged that Aukus was understood by his government as a “new pillar of our strategy demonstrating Britain’s generational commitment to the security of the Indo-Pacific”. Scott Morrison, for his part, announced his willingness to discuss the initiative with Xi Jinping, although adherence to Aukus meant Canberra sided with the US against China in the Indo-Pacific and thereby was abandoning the hedge strategy that convinced Kevin Rudd to withdraw Australia from the Quad in 2008.

Meeting at the 2017 ASEAN Summit, Malcolm Turnbull, Shinzo Abe, Narendra Modi and Donald Trump agreed to resume the dormant quadrilateral dialogue. Xi Jinping’s assertiveness, rivalries in the South China Sea and Beijing’s use of the Belt and Road Initiative to consolidate positions in neighboring countries drove the revival of the Quad, increasingly seen as an instrument for safeguarding common political values and preserving regional order. However, the main reason for Quad’s reactivation was the change in orientation defined by Trump’s National Security Strategy; that is to say, the call for “increased quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia and India.” The decision to reengage with the broad Indo-Pacific came after Trump abandoned the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a decision that raised substantial doubts as to Washington’s commitment to the regional order. Overcoming numerous ambiguities, advances and setbacks, enhanced quadrilateral cooperation denoted the profound changes in America’s commitment to the Indo-Pacific.

The three Aukus leaders did not specify the nature of the “threats” justifying the new pact. Perhaps it was unnecessary to do so because it was clear that the Aukus constituted a response to PRC assertiveness and evolving military capabilities. According to the Aukus agreement, by 2040 Canberra was to be in possession of a fleet of nuclear submarines capable of patrolling the region, including vast stretches of the South China Sea falling within the “nine-dash line” unilaterally demarcated by Beijing. The three allies also pledged to enhance the exchange of intelligence and share innovation in critical areas such as artificial intelligence, cybernetics and quantum computing. Such a commitment reflected the awareness that rivalry with China required adequate responses to the challenges posed by technical-scientific competition and the Belt and Road Initiative.

China’s official reaction to Aukus was as swift as it was resolute. Speaking for the Foreign Ministry, Zhao Lijian declared that supplying Australia with nuclear technology was “extremely irresponsible”, not least because of the eventual implosion of the bilateral
relationship, an outcome the Chinese attributed to the Australian side.\textsuperscript{58} Zhao also maintained that Aukus was a destabilizing development to the extent that it “seriously undermines regional peace and stability, intensifies the arms race and undermines international non-proliferation efforts.”\textsuperscript{59} The following day, China’s Ministry of Commerce launched a diplomatic counter-offensive by announcing it would seek membership in the 11-nation Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for the Transpacific Partnership (CPTPP), the successor to the TTP previously abandoned by President Trump.\textsuperscript{60} Having joined the Comprehensive Regional Economic Partnership (RCEP), Beijing in this fashion signaled its readiness to pull US allies into its geostrategic orbit and thus foster coalitions contesting Washington’s regional leadership.\textsuperscript{61} These moves were in conformity with China’s determination to be recognized as a great power, an aim evinced by the 2019 Defense White Paper (China’s National Defense in a New Age). Describing the People’s Liberation Army as “a staunch force for world peace, stability and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind”, the document emphasized the country’s benign intentions and, thus, reassured neighboring states fearful of the growth of Chinese military might.\textsuperscript{62} In 2014, responding to changing regional realities driven by an increasingly robust Chinese military, the Trump Administration strategy for the Indo-Pacific area defined the PRC as a “revisionist” power that did not uphold the core principles underpinning the regional order.\textsuperscript{63} Accepting this framework, the Biden White House understood the Quad as a component of a broader strategy congregating the region’s democratic states under American leadership. A different challenge, of course, was countering China’s strategic assertiveness stemming from its colossal economic power in the region.

**TAIWAN: THE DANGER**

Because the risk of a military clash with the PRC in Taiwan and the South China Sea cannot be dismissed, the Indo-Pacific is now the most dangerous region on the planet. Describing Taiwan as a “renegade province”, the 2019 Defense White Paper recalled that “we make no promise to renounce the use of force, and reserve the option of taking all necessary measures” to prevent the territory’s independence.\textsuperscript{64} This military component of Xi Jinping’s broader “Chinese Dream” was highlighted by the document’s call for the Taipei government to respect the 1992 Consensus and the “one-China” principle it enshrines.\textsuperscript{65} Taiwan is accused of blatantly pushing for gradual independence – for a de jure independence –, of intensifying “hostility and confrontation” and of “borrowing the strength of foreign influence”, an indirect albeit unequivocal reference to American support for Formosa. As a result, the text concludes that Taiwanese “separatist forces remain the gravest immediate threat to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the greatest barrier hindering the peaceful reunification of the country.”\textsuperscript{66} As for a lasting resolution to a problem dating to Chiang Kai-shek’s 1949 defeat, the White Paper held that “the complete reunification of the country is in the fundamental interests
of the Chinese nation and is essential for achieving national rejuvenation”; in other words, reunification is understood as a precondition for the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) transformation of the country into the world’s foremost power. As a matter of fact, President Xi’s “national rejuvenation” project will remain incomplete unless Beijing succeeds in achieving the country’s full “reunification” by 2049, the centenary of Mao Zedong’s proclamation of the People’s Republic. To ensure this goal, and with a view to strengthening the legitimacy of the communist regime through nationalist mobilization, Xi intensified pressure on Taipei by deploying missiles capable of targeting the island, air raids and intimidatory naval exercises. On the broader international stage, Chinese diplomatic and economic influence has been relentlessly employed to isolate Taipei. As time passes and the Taiwanese develop a distinct identity, independentist sentiment will deepen and peaceful reunification will become an increasingly problematic outcome.

Concomitantly, Formosa’s phenomenal economic and political success refutes the CCP’s claim positing the impossibility democracy and non-statist capitalism taking root on Chinese soil; that is, democratic Taiwan effectively confirms the existence of an alternative development model from that of the CCP. Year after year, it becomes increasingly arduous to claim that Taiwanese democracy lacks legitimacy, particularly after Beijing stifled the freedoms enshrined by Hong Kong’s special status agreement on the transfer of sovereignty. Predictably, since the Hong Kong model would be extended to Formosa following reunification, Xi’s repression of that territory augments Taiwanese vulnerabilities and the political chasm separating the two sides of the Strait. While Beijing continues to frame the Taiwan issue in terms of separatism, Taipei’s skepticism as to the viability of the “one country, two systems” model makes formal independence an increasingly attractive option.  

Contrary to Beijing’s expectations, the deepening of economic interdependence between Taiwan and the PRC of recent decades has failed to bring the parties closer together. Taiwan emerged as an important link in international value chains and thus its forced integration into the People’s Republic cannot be achieved unless Beijing is prepared to undergo severe trade disruption and diplomatic isolation. Faced with such limited options, the communist authorities cannot readily step back from the belligerent rhetoric and military pressure of recent years. Unable to ensure unification except perhaps through the use of force, Xi may yield to temptation and invade should the United States signal that it will refrain from assisting Taiwan. Avoiding war therefore requires a robust American strategic posture in the region, particularly in the South China Sea and the East China Sea, where Chinese assertiveness, if not firmly countered, may lead Beijing to conclude that a military attack will not entail high costs.
Predictably, Beijing sought to undermine US credibility in the Indo-Pacific by exploiting the difficulties faced by the Biden Administration in Afghanistan. Chinese intimidation of Taiwan was in evidence in the first days of October 2021, as the PRC celebrated the anniversary of its founding. On October 1, Beijing ordered the first of a series of sorties within Taiwan’s air defense identification zone (ADIZ). In response, the US State Department issued a statement conveying that the United States were “very concerned” about Beijing’s “provocative” maneuvers, seen as a “destabilizing action that risks miscalculations and undermines regional peace and stability.” Calling for the cessation of “military, diplomatic and economic pressure and coercion” against the island, the statement added that “we will maintain our commitments” and “continue to assist Taiwan in maintaining a sufficient self-defense capability”. Although no bilateral defense treaty has been celebrated with Taipei, Washington reiterates that the commitments enshrined in the Taiwan Relations Act remain “rock-solid.” In fact, as early as March 2021, Antony Blinken expressed concern over PRC assertiveness toward Formosa, warning that it would be a “serious mistake” for any power to seek an alteration to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait through the use of force.

The incisiveness of the State Department caused tremendous consternation in Beijing. The communist authorities respond by way of yet another editorial in the Global Times arguing that the expression “rock-solid” can “deceive and appease radical forces in the island of Taiwan, but can never deter” Beijing, which “will resolutely continue strengthening its military preparation to gain decisive and overwhelming leverage to finally resolve the Taiwan question.” Reasserting Chinese resolve, the editorial counseled the Taiwanese “not to believe in the ‘rock-solid’ promise of the United States, because Washington will never fight to the death with China for the island’s secession.”

Once again, in marked contrast with Beijing’s iron will to reunify the country, suspicion was cast relative to the reliability of American security guarantees. Given the atmosphere of uncertainty in the aftermath of Biden’s Afghan withdrawal, it became necessary to signal in no uncertain terms that a military onslaught against Formosa could trigger a catastrophic regional war. Following the Afghan débâcle, US credibility and, above all, its security guarantees made no allowance for hesitation and ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait. At the same time, the harshness of the US position indicated that President Biden’s attempts to appease Beijing – during a phone call with Xi he reaffirmed the “one-China” policy and in a September 2021 United Nations General Assembly speech rejected the prospect of a new Cold War – produced no practical effects. One day after the publication of the State Department statement, diplomatic failure was evinced as an even greater number of fighters and bombers, some nuclear-capable, again penetrated Taiwan’s ADIZ.
The long-standing modus vivendi in the Strait therefore remains unaltered since the parties cannot envision an alternative capable of safeguarding each nation’s prestige and credibility. Xi will order an invasion if Taiwanese officials declare independence, even if such a decision means entering into war with the United States. This is the red line established by Beijing that cannot be violated under any circumstance. Since Xi may be tempted to invade if the United States demonstrated reluctance to defend the island, avoiding war then obliges the US to maintain a credible strategic posture, enhanced by regional allies prepared to counteract Chinese assertiveness and intimidation. American alliances – the Quad, the Aukus, as well as bilateral treaties with Australia, Japan and South Korea – are meant to convince Beijing that a military onslaught against Taiwan will be countered with a robust response. However, under penalty of compromising the prestige and credibility of the communist regime, China cannot alleviate pressure exercised in the Strait. Since miscalculation may inadvertently lead to war, regional dynamics are fraught with colossal danger.

CONCLUSION

The Alaska Summit demonstrated that Sino-American relations have failed to return to the “normality” of post-Cold War engagement. To a large extent, China policy guidelines determined by the Trump Administration persist and the shift of American focus to Asia will augment the transfer of military resources from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific. As part of this effort, the Biden Administration has deepened high-level contacts with the Formosa and supplied it with weapons in conformity with the Taiwan Relations Act. In the economic sphere, tariffs imposed by the Trump Administration, criticized by candidate Biden during the presidential race, have not been eliminated. Recently, Katherine Tai, the United States Trade Representative, signaled her willingness to negotiate a new understanding with Beijing, but insisted that “it is increasingly clear that China’s plans do not include meaningful reforms to address the concerns that have been shared by the United States and many other countries.” Cooperation between China and the United States has been largely limited to climate change, with Xi Jinping attending Biden’s virtual April 2021 Summit on Climate. The essential question remains unanswerable: for how long can the two countries pursue a simultaneously confrontational and competitive relationship? As Biden emphasizes rebuilding partnerships with allies to contain China, those same allies – particularly European ones – welcome the “return” to multilateralism but eschew confrontation and the “logic” of a new Cold War. For the time being, Washington and its allies have not found a coherent strategy capable of reconciling cooperation pertaining to global public goods with containment in the defense and security spheres. In view of this
difficulty, the United States has sought to define new structures, such as the Quad and Aukus, to incorporate allies willing to pursue a containment strategy. Allies rejecting such a path will find themselves increasingly marginalized by a great power ever more focused on the Indo-Pacific and the challenges to the liberal order posed by the People’s Republic of China.

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ENDNOTES

1 A Portuguese version of this paper was first published in Relações Internacionais, No. 71, September 2021.


3 For the development of this argument, cf. RATO, Vasco – From Mao to Xi: The Resurgence of China. Lisbon: Alêtheia Editores, 2020, pp. 157-188.


5 In the same speech, proposing a continued engagement, Clinton added that “what is the best thing to do to maximize the chance of China going the right way and that because of that, the world will become freer, more peaceful and more prosperous in the 21st CENTURY? I don’t think we can bring about change for China if we isolate China from the forces of change.” Cf. “REMARKS by the President on foreign policy. Grand Hyatt Hotel, San Francisco, CA» The White House. February 26, 1999. Available in: https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/clintfps.html.

Expressing this view, Bill Clinton in 1997 stated that China’s “isolation is impractical, counterproductive and poten- tially dangerous. Military, political and economic measures to do so would find little support among our allies in the world and, more importantly, even among the Chinese themselves who work for greater freedom. Isolation would encourage The Chinese to become hostile and adopt poli- cies in conflict with our own interests and values. It will make it difficult, not to facili- tate, cooperation in the context of the proliferation of weapons. This would hin- der, would not help, our efforts to promote stability in Asia. It would exacerbate, not improve, the situation of dissidents. That would close, not open, one of the most important markets in the world. This would make China less, and no longer, likely to follow the rules of international conduct and be part of an emerging international consensus.” Cf. “REMARKS by the President in Address on China and the national interest”. The White House. Voice of America. Washington, DC. October 24, 1997. Available in: https://1997-2001.state.govregions/eap/F71024_clinton_china.html. On the issue of interdemocratic peace, see RATO, Vasco – “But are they even more peaceful?”. In International Politics. No. 18, autumn-winter 1998, pp. 93-114.


news/2017/jan/23/donald-trump-first-orders-transport-pacific-partnership-tpp. Trump wasn't the only one criticizing Chinese behavior. Hillary Clinton denounced Beijing's human rights abuses and gender equality weaknesses. Although responsible for implementing the 'pivot', in early October 2015, he makes a volte-face and declares his opposition to THE TPP, suggesting that the agreement did not coincide with the national interest of the United States.


12 Cf. GASPAR, Carlos – «Return of Anarchy: The United States, Russia, China and the International Order. Lisbon: All The Futures, 2015. The understandings between Americans and Chinese regarding Taiwan date back to Richard Nixon's visit to RPC in February 1972. As a result of this move, the Shanghai Communiqué announced the parties' intention to normalize the bilateral relationship. Nixon did not contradict the communist authority that "the one China" was "the only legal government" in the country and that "the Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait claim that there is only one China and that Taiwan is part of China." It also excluded Taiwan's independence but bypassing the problem of how would rule "a unified China." Later, the 1992 Consensus confirms the status quo and Washington continues to foster a privileged relationship with Taipei. This reality leads Bill Clinton – during his June 1998 VISIT TO THE RPC – to declare that "we do not support the independence of Taiwan, or Taiwan, one China. And we do not believe that Taiwan should be a member of any organization for which state membership in "is an requirement." Clinton added: "three no's"aimed to freeze an increasing unsatisfactory status quo for both Beijing and Taipei, where independence sentiment is on the move. The "China's strategic ambiguity" was also maintained, that is, ambiguity as to the nature of the response to be given by the White House if there were no unified force. It was precisely this state of things that Donald Trump challenged when he agreed to receive a phone call from Tsai Ing-wen. Cf. Kan, Shirley A. – "China/Taiwan: evolution of the "One China" policy – key statements from Washington, Beijing, and Taipei." CRS Report for Congress, Updated March 12, 2001, p. CRS-39. Available in: https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc9896/m1/1/high_res_d/RL30341_2005sep07.pdf.

13 The field survey was conducted between May 13 and June 18, 2019, a period marked by increased trade tensions between the United States and China. Both Democrats and Republicans expressed unfavorable views, though "the Republican opinion is a little more negative: 70% of Republicans and independents who support Republicans have an unfavorable opinion, compared to 59% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents." Cf. SILVER, Laura; DEVLIN, Kat; Huang, Christine – "US views of China turn sharply negative amid Trade tensions". Pew Research Center: Global Attitudes and Trends. Available in: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/08/15/u-s-views-of-china-turn-sharply-negative-amid-trade-tensions.


23 Ibid.


25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.


32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.


42 Ibid.

43 Ver, MARTINA, Michael; TIAN, Yew Lun; PAMUK, Humeyra – «Bolstered by allies…».


46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.


59 Ibid.


65 Ibid., n. p.

66 Ibid., n. p.


68 «INCREASING People’s Republic of China military pressure against Taiwan...

69 Ibid.


72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.


China-Russia relations in a framework of strategic containment

Maria Raquel Freire

INTRODUCTION

This article examines Russian foreign policy in its Asian dimension, placing Russia’s relations with China in the broader framework of Russia’s foreign policy “Asia Pivot” strategy. In recent years, particularly after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russian foreign policy has been marked by a more pragmatic, revisionist and militarized mold. This mold reflects the wider foreign policy goal of asserting its status in the international system, as well as the tensions that this goal suggests, for instance, regarding a West increasingly criticized as hostile, or a China whose economic buoyancy, to be expanded to other areas, requires prudence. The Russian narrative underlines a multipolar world, in which the hegemony of the United States is restricted and accompanied by revisionist actions aimed at an alternative order and a differentiated recognition of Russia in this new order. The more militarized Russian interventions, as in the case of Syria, evince this willingness to equate speech with action, thus materializing the purpose of international affirmation and recognition. When approaching Russia’s relationship with China, an analysis of Russian foreign policy is essential for understanding the material and ideational framework in which decisions and actions are pondered. In fact, China has always been on Moscow’s foreign policy agenda, and the issue of managing an enlarged space where this actor has increasingly taken on a crucial presence, as is visible in Central Asia, for example, becomes relevant. However,

ABSTRACT

This article analyses Russian foreign policy in its Asian dimension, placing Russia’s relationship with China in the broader framework of Russia’s foreign policy “Asia Pivot” strategy. The study concludes with a cautious reading of this relationship, anchored in the notion that, underneath the layer of greater closeness and intensified collaboration, lies a relationship of double strategic containment, both regarding the US and the West, and between these two giants. For Russia, the relevance of China in political and economic terms is evident and clearly assumed, but the fear of imbalances resulting from substantive differences between the two has held back a number of actions, while encouraging others in a logic of much-needed refo- cusing and rebalancing for Moscow.

Keywords: Russia, foreign policy, Asia pivot, China.

RESUMO

As relações China-Rússia num quadro de contenção estratégica

Este artigo analisa a política externa russa na sua orientação para a Ásia, situando as relações da Rússia
if in many respects these two actors share a common vision, in many others the existing differentials are clear. Is this relationship a strategic partnership or rather a partnership of convenience, or even a consequence? This article analyses Russia’s relationship with China, in the scope of which the “Asia pivot” strategy and regional spaces and organizations – such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – understood also in the broader context of their relations with the United States and its Western allies, are relevant matter. The article begins by analyzing Russian foreign policy in its Asian dimension and subsequently discusses the more or less formal regional integration dynamics in order to understand Russia-China relations both in a bilateral and multilateral context. The broader framework of difficult relations with the United States and the West will also serve as a backdrop to this study, especially since in normative and material terms the opposition to a U.S.-led order has been the basis for a contestation narrative by Russia and China. The article engages with the debates that still pervade reference bibliography between those who deem that tense relations to the West are fostering a greater closeness between Russia and China and even, for some, the possibility of the formation of a Sino-Russian alliance, while others understand that this is an overly benevolent reading of the relationship between these two actors, which in fact must deal with structural differentials. The study concludes with a cautious reading of this relationship, understanding that beneath the layer of greater closeness and intensified collaboration lies a relationship of double strategic containment, both regarding the United States and the West, and between these two giants. For Russia, China’s political and economic relevance is indisputable and clearly acknowledged, but the fear of imbalances resulting from substantive differences between the two has curtailed some courses of action and encouraged others, in a logic of recentring and rebalancing greatly needed by Moscow.

RUSSIA’S ASIAN POLICY IN A CONTEXT OF STRATEGIC CONTAINMENT

Russian foreign policy has been highly consistent in its goal of affirming Russia as a great power, finding novelty essentially in the dimension of discourse, increasingly critical of the West, and in the sphere of implementation in which the militarization of foreign policy has been patent. The revisionist inclination acquired an even greater preponderance with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the military intervention in Syria in 2015. Russian foreign policy reference documents describe Russia as a relevant actor pursuing policies that allow it “to achieve strong positions of authority in the world.
community that best meet the interests of the Russian Federation as one of influential centers in the modern world.” The documents underline Russia’s status as one of the “leading states of the world” and its “increased responsibility for setting the international agenda and shaping the system of international relations”, consolidating “the Russian Federation’s position as a center of influence in today’s world”. This narrative of power and of Russia as a great power is accompanied by the national-patriotic conservative approach that Putin has instilled in his policies, combining the realpolitik and identitarian dimensions. This course of affirmation has been anchored in a society defined as multi-ethnic, in the civilizational, historical and traditional values framing the evolution of policies, and in the distinctive character of Russia, as underlined in the foreign policy’s strategic documents. In terms of discourse, this trend is emphasized by the post-annexation of Crimea “new normal”, in which the civilizational discourse and the propensity for the use of force arise in the political rhetoric and foreign policy performance with a new clothing of justification, legitimation and affirmation of power. The trend towards militarization has been particularly reinforced in the last decade, including the reform of the armed forces, investment in the development of new military capabilities and technologically advanced equipment, as well as more robust interventions. The normative dimension rooted in this narrative of civilizational and traditional values, and the mission which it entails, are interwoven with the question of status – which implies a reconfiguration of Russia’s place in the international system – and with the identitarian dimension, which embodies the uniqueness of Russia, built between Eastern and Western influences. These normative, status and identitarian dimensions have accompanied Russian foreign policy throughout time.

The new Russian strategic security document, published in July 2021, asserts Russia’s status as a major power and has a clear focus on internal dynamics (demographics, political stability and sovereignty, economic development, among others). The definition of the international context follows, unsurprisingly, the line of “strategic containment”, by identifying the international system as increasingly marked by greater tension with the United States and the West in general. These are labelled as hostile and undervalued in their importance within the framework of Russian strategies, as patent in the emphasis on traditional Russian values and on their distinctiveness vis-a-vis the Western narrative, and in the identification of technological development or environmental issues as pressing on the agenda.

Nothing in this alignment is new, although the tone is more forceful in asserting Russia’s status with its own place in the international system, and in discarding the “liberal phraseology of the 1990s”, underlining instead its own principles and values not necessarily coincident with the Western ones. Western actions, including the use of new technologies, propaganda and disinformation, are considered part of Russia’s containment policy. China and India are identified as Russia’s strategic partners, and multilateral institutions such as SCO, institutional cooperation formats such as BRICS, and even those of a more informal nature, as in the scope of the Russia-China-India trio, are highlighted.
This alignment was also quite present in Putin’s annual address to the Federal Assembly in April 2021, with a clear focus on internal issues, in which the context and impacts of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic occupy a major part of the discourse. However, the speech did not fail to mention the response to all those who “cross the red line” in their dealings with Russia, without being specific, and stressed the relevance of all regional processes – SCO, Eurasian Economic Union, Collective Security Treaty Organization, BRICS – as an essential part of an integrated development strategy, in which infrastructure investment is key. In the two references made to the West, in his speech, the criticism is blatant: in the interference in Belarusian policies and in the rejection of Russian proposals for international dialogue on communications and cybersecurity. The Eurasian dimension of foreign policy acquires prominence, while relations to the West are barely mentioned.  

The evolution of Russia’s affairs with China has intensified in this context of challenging relations to the West. The increase in the number of agreements signed between Russia and China is evident, reflecting the very evolution of a policy of noticeable rapprochement in the late 1980s, which evolved into a strategic partnership in the mid-1990s and the signing of the Treaty on Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation in 2001, establishing the foundations of the relationship. After twenty years, the parties believe that a solid foundation has been built for the bilateral relationship. The legal basis of this relationship is evident in these multiple agreements, accompanied by regular meetings and several joint working committees, as well as in the context of collaborations in multilateral forums such as SCO. Russian and Chinese official statements highlight that, while not aiming for an alliance, their positions on key global issues are “one of the core elements of regional and global stability” and that the two countries “draw from each other’s support” as they face global challenges. At various times, Chinese and Russian leaders have stressed the relevance of the strategic relationship while avoiding referring to it as an alliance. In China, relations with Russia are defined as adhering to the three ‘nos’ policy: non-aligned, non-confrontational, not directed against third parties. This understanding is relevant to the debate on a likely Sino-Russian alliance, which in political discourse is downplayed in favor of strategic cooperation or strategic partnership. In the context of the 20th anniversary of the Treaty on Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation, in August 2021, a statement from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioned that the parties agree that, given the complexity and volatility of the regional and international situation, they will maintain regular communication on multilateral and bilateral affairs. Along the same lines, Putin commented that relations are at an “unprecedented level of cooperation”, also stressing the importance of this relationship in a context of international instability.
In fact, a Russia-China military alliance would have implications for the outline of multipolarity and might not be favorable to Russia, implying that principles of equality in confronting the enemy (a reference to the United States) would have to be applied 17. David Kerr, quoted in Wishnick 18, warns moreover that “the compatibility of Russian and Chinese views on these political constructions [as with regard to their position vis-à-vis the hegemony of the United States or in the scope of the SCO, for instance] does not preclude the interaction of their interests.” And, in fact, logics of resistance and different understandings have been perceptible in the relations between these two major actors. Some authors go so far as to argue that it is not in the interest of the United States to foster this rapprochement, so that a separate policy for Russia could be important in managing this relationship 19. Still others counter that the United States would have nothing to gain from a rapprochement to an autocratic Russia, and that the compromises potentially involved in this rapprochement, for example with regard to Ukraine, would be too heavy 20. And there are authors who alert to the implications of this rapprochement between illiberal powers, which should raise concern in the West, since this is no mere relationship of ‘convenience’, but also geopolitical at its core. 21

One of the preferred areas of articulation, as visible in the signed agreements, has been the dimension of counterterrorism, laying bare the fear of threats to the regime and of internal instability. The dimension of military cooperation, however, has been less present, except for the agreements on non-use of force and arms sales 22. Still relevant, as Thomas Ambrosio’s study shows 23, is the disconnection between bilateral agreements and those which are negotiated in the framework of the SCO. Clearly, the parties prefer bilateral agreements to this multilateral environment. In the opinion of Verlin and Inozemtsev 24, it seems that these relations are informed by the expression “noise above, silence below”, given the frequent dialogue and regular meetings, and the signing of various agreements when confronted with the realities of this relationship. In fact, the

“SCO ends up working as an instrument of double containment: mutual containment between China and Russia, and containment of the United States’ involvement in the area. It also reveals that the strategic relationship that both states pursue is imbued with mistrust, limiting the scope of the bilateral relationship itself, and makes it clear how it emerges at various times as an ‘axis of convenience’ 25, working more in an instrumental than in a strategically pondered fashion.” 26

These reflections reveal the intense debate between different understandings of Russia’s international position and its articulation with China, swaying between a more benevolent reading highlighting common traits underlying the relations between these two actors, and a more critical reading that questions the existing differentials and how they can hamper strategic cooperation. In the face of a revisionist Russia and a more assertive China at the international level, how can we understand the relationship between these two giants?
RUSSIAN REVISIONISM AND CHINESE ASSERTIVENESS:
POINT OF CONVERGENCE OR OF CONFRONTATION?

The reading that can be made of Russia-China relations shows how in fact the various points of convergence and of confrontation are unfolding. Very clear on the agenda of both these actors is the counterpoint to neoliberal hegemony led by the United States and its Western allies, a position that is no novelty, but which has acquired clearer outlines in recent years. Already in the 2001 Treaty of Good-Neighborliness, the goal of developing a fair and rational international order based on strict compliance with the principles and norms of international law is mentioned. The principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity of states and non-interference in internal affairs are shared, and Russia-China alignment in these matters is clearly observable at many times, for example within the framework of the United Nations Security Council. In fact, as far as political discourse is concerned, Russia and China refer to their relationship as central in a multipolar international order, for the promotion of peace and stability and for the projection of a fairer, more peaceful and balanced order. It is not, therefore, a zero-sum relationship, as understood by the parties, but rather an affable coexistence between two world powers.

The arguments pertaining to Russia and China’s readings of the ‘other’ highlight the aspects repeatedly presented by analysts, such as the idea of containing the United States in the context of a multipolar order; the sharing of concerns in the fight against extremism and terrorism, which have played a prevalent role in the framework of the SCO; the maintenance of the political regimes while avoiding internal or external challenges to the status quo; economic and trade cooperation, essential to Russia’s economic performance and important for the supply, in particular, of energy resources to China. Zuenko even speaks of the importance of this logic of rapprochement in the context of the post-annexation of Crimea (2014) as a way of making it possible to compensate for the sanctions imposed to Russia by the West, helping Russian economy to recover, given that China is Russia’s largest trading partner. However, this argument is not linear. In China, the economic issue is deemed secondary to the maturation of the partnership, and, in Russia, the matter is altogether circumvented by stressing the security dimension of this relationship. In fact, the economic differential is huge in China’s favor. However, the lack of Chinese investment in Russia and the low trade levels, which for years were referred to as limiting Moscow’s capabilities, have changed. This state of affairs even led Russian authorities to emphasize the security and military dimension, turning Russia in Beijing’s eyes a possible source of instability in the Asia-Pacific region, given the revisionist slant of Russian policies. The instance of the natural gas agreement signed between Russia and China...
in May 2014, amounting to US$400 billion over thirty years, illustrates the existing ambivalences. On the one hand, it seemed to offer, after years of negotiations, an openness for greater collaboration between the energy parties; on the other, it turned out to be a cautious move on the part of China, in its support to Russian projects such as the Western corridor, which was understood as a political project with a limited cost/efficiency ratio. Despite this, the provision of energy supplies has not been stagnant, as shown by the Power of Siberia gas pipeline and the idea of a new project through Mongolia, Power of Siberia 2. What’s more, and despite these differences, China’s position in Russian trade increased from 10.5% in 2013 to 16.7% in 2019 and 18.3% in 2020, even in the context of a pandemic. This substantial increase is reflected in the decline in Russia’s trade relations with the European Union, which in the same periods fell from 49.4% to 41.6% and in 2020 to 38.5%. Chinese investment policy is also consolidating. However, despite the discernible alignment between these two major actors, some consider this reading too benevolent, overlooking flaws in the consolidation of this partnership. The next section analyses these differentials, in an attempt to understand how logics of strategic containment take shape.

DOUBLE CONTAINMENT?
For Mastanduno, the element repeatedly referred to as an aggregator of understanding – opposition to US leadership in the international system – is itself infused with differences. For this author, American hegemony is more enduring in Europe than in East Asia. Although Russia seeks to undermine US relations with their European partners by interfering in electoral processes, for instance, its capacity has proved limited since it has found it difficult to offer an alternative to the current hegemonic order. China presents different challenges: it is center of the regional economic order in Asia; some of its regional security initiatives have led some states, such as Singapore and Vietnam, to reach out to the United States, but, in the case of others, such as the Philippines, to chart a course of rapprochement with China. Moreover, China, unlike Russia, has the capacity to undermine US partnerships in Asia, and former US President Donald Trump’s withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) reinforced China’s perception of itself as the central actor in the region. For Pavel Baev, one of the factors that explain this differential has to do with the interpretation that both parties make of multipolarity. While, for China, multipolarity supports its own peaceful growth, which does not violate its principles, adding it to the legitimate centers of power, for Russia, on the other hand, in line with the revisionist logic it has pursued, multipolarity implies competition and, if necessary, a greater propensity for the use of force. This reflects the distinct priorities and views sustained by these two actors regarding international order. Indeed, as Baev points out, Russia has shown willingness to use its military capabilities, as in the case of Syria and even in the context of Ukraine, always with a strong anti-US/West angle. This tendency imparts an exceptional importance to
the security dimension, which is a matter of concern for China, which prefers to control any escalation of tensions in the South China Sea, for instance, revealing mistrust of Russia’s capacity for moderate management of instability in this context. In Kaczmarski’s words,

“China supports economic globalization, even though it continues to protect large chunks of its economy. In many ways, Beijing prefers the maintenance of the status quo for the sake of predictability and stability. Russia, on the other hand, seems to turn more towards protectionism and finds regionalization a better way for maintaining its position in the international pecking order.”

And the author further argues that China “appears to be genuinely interested in contributing to political and economic stability, while Russia seeks first and foremost the symbolic confirmation of its great-power status and does not mind playing the role of an occasional spoiler”. The dynamics in the multilateral context help to better understand the logic of strategic containment accompanying this relationship, as analyzed below.

**THE INDO-PACIFIC AND THE REGIONAL ARRANGEMENTS: PERCEPTIONS OF (IN)SECURITY**

The Indo-Pacific region is understood differently in both Russia and China, which highlights the distinct geopolitical readings that these actors make of this regional space. China promotes a geoeconomic vision of the Indo-Pacific centered on the BRI, while Russia seeks to promote a reading of this space focused on Eurasian integration and the concept of Greater Eurasia. Moreover, Russia openly criticizes the US policy of renaming the Asia-Pacific region as the Indo-Pacific, deeming it necessary to take into account the interests of all parties in the area. According to Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu, the artificial expansion of spheres of cooperation for the so-called Indo-Pacific aims to create lines of division, fostering tension among the countries of the Asia-Pacific and ultimately compromising regional development (cited in Denisov et al.). The authors proceed to argue that Russia fears a military alliance involving the United States, India, Japan and Australia – the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) – which might eventually contribute to increase US influence in the area, in line with its multipolar understanding of the international order. For Lukin and Torkunov, quoted in Denisov et al., in Moscow the concern is that the design of an Indo-Pacific bloc by the United States could take on an anti-China tone, in addition to undermining Russian cooperation plans in the Eurasian region. The shift in relations that might
result from an initiative such as this, for instance by relegating Russia to a less priority position on India’s agenda, would have important regional implications. As stated by Denisov et al.46, a strategic partnership between Russia and China promotes the rapprochement of the countries of Asia to the United States, just as Russia’s confrontation with the West promotes Russia’s rapprochement with China. Kazantsev et al.47 also make this rebalancing point. This logic of pursuing new balances recreates a realistic reading of the international system in which alliances, even if informal, are readjusted according to the distribution of power, and identities are relaxed in favor of national interest. In these new arrangements, the institutional weakening of the ASEAN or China’s containment mechanisms are not favorable to Moscow. The Indo-Pacific Development Strategy should be, in Moscow’s understanding, inclusive, not based on blocs, and an opportunity for Russia to play a central role in the management of the Eurasian area. And it is precisely in this context that Russia remains extremely attentive to the recent Aukus defensive alliance, presented in September 2021 and involving Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States48. Aukus envisions the acquisition by Australia of nuclear-powered submarines, and principles of interchange of technology and know-how, collaboration in cybersecurity and artificial intelligence matters, endowing Australia with differentiating capabilities in the region. Clearly underpinning this new initiative is the goal of increasing the influence and presence of the United States in the Indo-Pacific, giving substance to strategic foreign policy principles previously outlined and committing to China’s containment agenda. Russia sees this new arrangement as challenging the status quo in the Indo-Pacific, along with other initiatives such as the Quad, for example. Already described as “prototypes of an Asian Atlantic Alliance” in Russian political media, they reveal, in Moscow’s view, a stance of hostility and containment by China in particular, but also on the part of Russia, promoting a regional policy of rearmament and transforming the Indo-Pacific into an area of tension and insecurity49.

With Aukus, not only does unpredictability increase, the view of the “West” also finds disagreements between the United States and old allies such as France, but also difficulties in articulating the transatlantic relationship. If, for Moscow, the weakening of the West is seen as favorable to its own projection of power, on the other hand, a West that is “compartmentalized” into different arrangements with varied compositions represents a challenge. Adding to the criticism, Moscow also underlines the question of the implications of this agreement on the nuclear non-proliferation regime, disapproving the followed approach as promoting deviations from the regulation. But Russia also believes that the new status quo resulting from these developments can eventually be harnessed in a positive way, allowing it to enhance negotiation of its nuclear technologies with other partners, using this understanding as a precedent in the matter50.

In other formats, BRICS sought to incarnate the intent of opposing the dominant order, translating the need for greater integration of developing countries into the global economy, thereby shifting Western hegemony in the control of financial institutions,
for instance, and the strengthening of relations in the context of the global South. At
the various summits of the group, this alternative order is always referred to as a form
of promoting the creation of a fairer international order, which implies greater repre-
sentation of developing countries in international institutions\textsuperscript{51}. The principle of coe-
xistence is presented by some as translating the aggregating element that allows a
strategy relying on the creation of a system based on standards to co-lead the interna-
tional order. This principle recognizes that different States can legitimately pursue their
own economic and political interests, but that they must do so within these rules which
ensure peaceful coexistence\textsuperscript{52}. However, the narrative repeated at the annual summits
and even the investments that have been made in this context do not blur the existing
differentials – both in political and ideological terms –, the geographical dispersion
and distinct regional contexts, the huge disparity in terms of economic capacity between
these five States and the difficulty in promoting a collective vision of the international
order that seem to curb the potential of the BRICS in promoting an alternative order\textsuperscript{53}.

Very close to this discourse are clearly the opposition to the United States and the
principles of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, as well as
non-interference in internal affairs and the principle of non-use of force, very strong
in the framework of the BRICS and reiterating the guiding principles of these rela-
tions. The joint declarations echo this normative very clearly, affirming a multipo-
lar world and a new order – also through articulation within the United Nations to
curb the hegemony of the United States – and identifying mechanisms for settling
border disputes and regarding the presence of armed forces along borders\textsuperscript{54}. Kaczmarski,
quoted in Ambrosio\textsuperscript{55}, goes as far as arguing that the changes in the material capabi-
lities of these actors have been understood as part of a process of peaceful transition
of power, which consolidates the basis of these relations.

In this context, several authors refer to SCO as a mechanism which is central to the
bilateral and multilateral cooperation that promotes the strengthening of China-Russia
relations. Furthermore, the involvement of Central Asian countries in this organization
allows for an easier management of regional disputes and a likely benevolent strategic
containment, which indeed involves the redefinition of areas of influence as a more
flexible concept. China’s growing economic presence in Central Asia has carefully
avoided challenging Russia’s political presence and security projection in this space.

There is definitely at stake here a sensitive management of spaces of influence.
The core objectives of the SCO are political cooperation based on equality between its
members, the security dimension being under a great deal of pressure\textsuperscript{56}. Russia has
endeavored to integrate security elements into the agenda, in addition to the fight
against extremism and terrorism, taking care that its leadership role in the Collective
Security Treaty Organization, of China is not a part, is not downplayed. As Chao argues\(^{57}\), China is intent on dealing with border and territorial disputes in Central Asian States, maintaining stability in Xinjiang, and securing energy resources by means of its leadership. Central Asia is, in this context, understood as a source of diversification of resources vis-à-vis the Middle East and Africa. Terrorism and extremism are a priority on the agenda, and once again in this dimension cooperation with central Asian countries is deemed highly relevant in the containment of terrorist groups. Chinese authors consider that China already possesses considerable influence and leadership capacity in the SCO, having adopted several of the structuring concepts advanced by Beijing, such as the “Spirit of Shanghai”, which has translated into mutual gains, equality, dialogue, respect for cultural differences and aspiration for joint development\(^{58}\).

In the framework of the SCO there has been military cooperation, the first joint exercise having involved all members in 2007 – the Peace Mission, as it was called – an exercise that focused on fighting counter-terrorism activities. Several joint military exercises have taken place with the engagement of all the members or a share of them, allowing the training and preparation of forces. These exercises, whether in the framework of the SCO or in bilateral Russia-China format, have already become a substantive and recurrent part of military cooperation year\(^{59}\). This year, the Peace Mission 2021 exercise took place on Russian territory in September, with a focus on counterterrorism action in the context of the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan\(^{60}\), and Sibu/Cooperation-2021 drills were conducted on Chinese territory, signaling the consistency of military cooperation between Russia and China\(^{61}\). More recent highlights are the joint naval exercises in the Mediterranean, Baltic and the South China Sea, with the most recent naval exercise being conducted in the Sea of Japan in October 2021\(^{62}\). It is interesting to note, in this context, as Baev argues, that the Russian pivot to the Asia-Pacific was accompanied by the strengthening of Russian military capabilities and a greater openness of its armaments industry. In fact, Moscow has changed its policy on this matter, following the view that it can benefit more by its presence in this market than by protecting its research/production in the face of technological developments in Chinese armaments. This shift does not mean, however, that Moscow has put behind its fears regarding its strategic position in the Asia-Pacific, which is perceived as subdued in the face of the growing Chinese presence\(^{63}\).

But SCO also has a relevant economic dimension, in which energy resources have taken on a measure of centrality. The basic assumption is that economic development promotes stability. Investments in energy allow China to reduce its dependence on Russia by increasing its influence in the Central Asia region. Projects under the BRI illustrate it amply\(^{64}\). At the same time, the fact that Central Asian countries have their own agendas for the potential diversification of their external relations means that the articulation between Russia and China in terms of their policies for this area is relevant as a way to minimize challenges to logics of integration\(^{65}\). It is worth noting that Central Asian...
states did not acknowledge the annexation of Crimea, nor the independence of Abkazia and South Ossetia after the war in Georgia, nor did they replicate the sanctions that Russia imposed on the West in response to Western sanctions after the crisis in Ukraine and the destabilization of the Donbass. In concrete terms, this means that Russia needs greater integration within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union and stable agreements with the countries of Central Asia to promote its agenda there. Moreover, as Samokhvalov argues, in Central Asia the Russian presence has built up in the form of regionalism led by the hegemonic power (“hegemon-sponsored regionalism”, as Alison named it in 2004). China’s economic expansion in Central Asia did not challenge Russian symbolic dominance in the region. However, the BRI undermined Russia’s role as a civilizing power in the Eurasian area, leading Russia to seek a policy of balance relying on the inclusion of Central Asian States in the Greater Eurasia project. But China also faces challenges within the framework of the Organization, which Chao summarizes in how it manages relations with India, Pakistan and Russia; in the response to calls to turn the SCO into a political and military quasi-alliance; in the management of Russian suspicions in the face of a greater Chinese presence and influence in this space which is a part of the Russian “vital space”; and in the management of relations so as to avoid interference in the internal affairs of the Member States. These multilateral integration dynamics lay bare what is also evident in the logic of cooperation/competition accompanying Russia-China relations. There is indeed some difficulty in articulating the central themes of the agendas, whether these are political-security or economic, for instance, because the existing imbalances are manifest. The logic of containment takes place, therefore, at these various levels: in the relationship with the United States and the West, in the relationship between Russia and China, and in the multilateral frameworks in which they are integrated.

CONCLUSIVE NOTES: RUSSIA’S DILEMMA

The Russian goal of affirming itself as a great power remains well present on the foreign policy agenda, which, in a context of hostile relations with the West, has unfolded, in the Asia option and in particular in the relationship with China, as the viable alternative to power reconfiguration. The Russian project ‘Asia pivot’, in this context, was part of a rebalancing effort that Russia sought in its affirmation of identity and power, counterbalancing its European dimension and thereby allowing it to conquer space in international affairs. However, these options have a cost. Russia-China relations are marked by various imbalances that are deepening. If previously the economic dimension was the most discernible, the development of military technological capabilities in China decreased the advantages that Russia had in this matter, emphasizing the asymmetry. At the political level, the common rhetoric aggregating principles which both consider central to international relations – visible in the alignments so often present in the UN Security Council, in underlining national sovereignty and the principle of non-inter-
vention, as well as in contesting an international order which they deem hegemonic and unfair, around the United States and Western values – is an important pillar of this relationship. But it also shows, as seen above, the often disparate interpretations underlying these (dis)alignments. While Russia’s tighter relationship with China is crucial to Moscow’s policies, in a context of counterweighting the West and strengthening its international presence, on the other hand, Moscow is well aware of the imbalance that this relationship entails and does not intend to become a “minor partner” at key decision-making moments on the international order. This ambivalence is notorious. Despite the immediate gains which this close relationship may bring, the costs that may be associated with it, including in the perception of Russia’s international status, are still part of an important dilemma. The visible containment logics illustrate clearly the Moscow’s current concerns.

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END NOTES

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INTRODUCTION
Will China use its foreign aid to reframe the international political order into one dominated by Pax Sinica? As a result of its rapid economic growth and social transformation, China has significantly enlarged the amount of its foreign aid in recent two decades to become a major player in the international aid system. Beijing’s role as an emerging donor with distinct aid principles, policies and practices that differ from those of traditional donors has attracted widespread attention. In today’s international political context, when China and the U.S. compete fiercely with one another for strategic power, foreign aid is undoubtedly an indispensable tool in each’s “policy kit” to make allies, and to secure their support.

In an effort to understand the motive and impact of Chinese foreign aid, previous studies were mostly empirical studies that relied on the direct experience and indirect observations of researchers. The most representative work of this kind is Brautigam’s book “The dragon’s gift: the real story of China in Africa”. On multiple occasions, she undertook fieldwork in warring African countries, visited the sites of Chinese aid projects, and interviewed both Chinese and African officials involved in aid management. It was in this way that she managed to explain how Chinese aid agencies planned and managed their aid programs in African countries. There are other studies utilizing the same analytical methods used by Brautigam to investigate other contentions concerning China’s aid program, for example, its size, geographical distribution, and popularity among local people.

ABSTRACT
Did China provide what can be termed foreign aid to neighboring countries in ancient times? This is a fascinating but largely neglected question. Previous studies on China’s foreign aid generally didn’t pay significant attention to the many centuries when diplomatic relations in East Asia were regulated by the tribute system. In this article, we argue that this omission lies in the substantialist metaphysics on which the concepts of foreign aid and the tribute system are grounded. Modern research has paid too much attention to their substantial components, like norms and managing institutions, with the result that the psychological experience agents invested in the process have been neglected. By taking a relational perspective, we test the view that the Chinese tribute system and foreign aid are of one and the same fundamental nature, characterized by voluntary participation, reciprocity and relation-orientation.

Keywords: China; Foreign aid; Tribute system; Relational Theory.
In sum, previous studies generally revolved around the discovery of basic facts about China’s aid, but this research approach entails several problems. The first is that information about China’s foreign aid operation is rarely accessible and doing fieldwork across Africa, as Brautigam did, is not always possible either. Besides, Beijing is commonly regarded as an “emerging donor”, which means that its foreign aid is not as highly normalized and institutionalized as the Official Development Assistance (ODA) of the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). Aid policy varies a lot over time and in different places. Furthermore, China’s foreign aid has been experiencing profound changes since the establishment of the China International Cooperation Agency — the first ministerial-level department especially created for coordinating foreign aid issues. Taken together, these developments have raised new challenges to the study of China’s foreign aid and indicated that the research focus should be shifted from the registration of facts towards discovering behavioral patterns of aid-giving and the underlying thought beneath them. In other words, setting aside questioning what assistance China gives and how it helps beneficiaries, we should also question why China has provided assistance in the specific manner that it has. When defining the object of study, previous research has had its limitations. For example, researchers have struggled with the problem of how to distinguish China’s foreign aid from its foreign investment, a challenging task that every researcher encounters at the beginning of their study in the field. As will be further discussed in the following section, the Chinese government has never announced any official definition regarding its foreign aid. Consequently, researchers have turned to indicators of different natures and dimensions when choosing their research objects. This inconsistency has not only created statistical confusion, but also undermined the general credibility of Chinese foreign aid studies because research without an agreed common basis can lead to widely diverging findings.

In this article, we argue that the origin of this problem lies in the metaphysical basis of the analytical approach, which is ontologically substantialist and empirically individualist. It is this metaphysical basis that leads us to simplify foreign aid as a unidirectional action of giving that can be defined by a series of indicators, such as the ODA’s requirement for concessional elements. To surpass these limitations, it is necessary to change the metaphysical basis of the research methodology from substantialism and individualism to one characterized by relationism. When considering the topic from a relational perspective, we can ascertain the extent to which Chinese foreign aid is...
underpinned by reciprocity and consideration for relational improvement. In other words, the relational experiences nations undergo during the interchange of aid is of more value than the created economic benefits. When foreign aid is viewed independently of its outer form of officially supported financial support, and regarded as a means for relation management, it becomes possible to enlarge the scope of the research field to history before the Opium War, when the countries of East Asian interacted under the Chinese dominated tribute system. This article proposes that, driven by the profound relational thinking embedded in the Chinese culture, the interchange between China and what have been termed ‘vassal countries’ during the tribute process, presented the same behavioral pattern of reciprocity, and a preference for relational improvement rather than economic benefit.

This article is composed by four sections, including the introduction. The second section expands our knowledge of foreign aid beyond the common perception that it consists of one country providing resources to another. By revealing the substantialist metaphysical basis of previous studies, we argue that it is necessary to adopt a relational perspective towards Chinese foreign aid because, in fact, it was not a matter of one-way giving, but reciprocal exchange aimed at improving mutual relations. In the third section, we investigate the common opinion that the tribute system only served China’s hegemonic dominance in East Asia. We find that the system was, to a definite degree, reciprocal and driven by a relational thinking, in the same way as foreign aid. Therefore, we argue that they are actions of a similar nature. This article ends with a brief conclusion in the fourth section.

LITERATURE REVIEW: A SUBSTANTIALIST AND INDIVIDUALIST INTERPRETATION OF FOREIGN AID

Before explaining why China’s contemporary foreign aid and pre-modern tribute system, two seemingly disparate things, are in fact related, we need to clarify what we know about them. A literature review reveals to us the metaphysical basis of previous studies. After discussing the problematic substantialist approach to Chinese foreign aid, we move on to take a constructive perspective towards tribute and aid to illustrate their reciprocal and relational nature.

Previous studies on Chinese foreign aid are, in essence, based on a substantialist approach. One proof of this is that researchers, without exception, are troubled by the problem of defining foreign aid in a Chinese context. On the one hand, the Chinese government has not announced an operational definition for its aid. On the other hand, China is currently establishing a foreign aid management system under the leadership of the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA). The content of foreign aid will naturally vary considerably during the formation of the system. Despite the complexity of the task, defining foreign aid has been considered as an inevitably necessary task by researchers who want to proceed further in Chinese aid
studies. Without an understanding of its principles, there appeared to be no way to explore the Chinese aid system and measure the scale of the officially supported financial grants. That is to say, defining foreign aid was not an end in itself. It has been seen as only the first step for researchers in their quest to evaluate Chinese aid effectiveness and social impact.

There are some scholars, such as Dreher et al.⁶, Kitano and Harada⁷, Brautigam⁸ and Strange et al.⁹ who have attempted to resolve the problem by proposing a definition with proxies for an “ODA-like aid”. But this reconciliation between Chinese foreign aid and the OECD’s ODA is problematic. On the one hand, different researchers have included indicators of different natures and dimensions in their definitions, creating an inconsistency in what can be counted as aid. For example, military aid with any related development intent is not regarded as foreign aid by most researchers, except Austin Strange¹⁰ who established the data collection standards for the famous database AidData. On the other hand, as Sears¹¹ critically noted in an article, “dependence on one proxy over another could introduce bias”. Reconciliation could obscure the peculiarities of Chinese foreign aid from our vision so that, in the end, what would be counted as foreign aid would only be that which was in accord with our expectations for ODA.

Chinese scholars have attempted to view the problem from a Chinese perspective. As Huang Meibo and Hu Jianmei¹² have noted, Chinese scholars, based in China, have a deeper understanding of the speeches of Chinese leaders, government policies and aid projects, such that their understanding complements western studies on Chinese foreign aid. For example, Ren Xiao and Liu Huihua, Zhang Caisheng and Chen Yougeng¹³ have attempted to redefine “foreign aid” through an analysis of its nature and characteristics. Many scholars have brought new perspectives to research on how aid programs are designed and managed¹⁴. Some have pointed out that China’s foreign aid is carried out, to a great extent, within the framework of South-South cooperation¹⁵. However, it is difficult for them to distance themselves from official Chinese policy framing, a challenge commonly faced by Chinese political academics¹⁶, and experience difficulties in reaching a worldwide audience. The reality is that neither the Chinese government, nor Chinese scholars, have been able to promote a definition that has been sufficiently influential to challenge the hegemonic position of the OECD definition to ODA.

Compared to western researchers, Chinese scholars attach more importance to ideational factors in aid policy formulation. Firstly, some researchers have reviewed China’s foreign aid system and its evolution since the foundation of the country until today¹⁷. The developmental pattern that China emphasizes in its aid projects is another topic addressed by many Chinese researchers¹⁸. Others have noticed the impact of the incum-

THE REALITY IS THAT NEITHER THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT, NOR CHINESE SCHOLARS, HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PROMOTE A DEFINITION THAT HAS BEEN SUFFICIENTLY INFLUENTIAL TO CHALLENGE THE HEGEMONIC POSITION OF THE OECD DEFINITION TO ODA.
bent political leader’s personal style of government on Chinese aid policy*, but their study interest is restricted to a review of the aid policy pursued during the mandate of one specific leader. Changes in the mode, regulation and scale of aid remain at the center of such studies. In contrast, which policies remain unchanged and why they remain unchanged over decades are questions that have largely been neglected. In other words, both Chinese and non-Chinese scholars have attached too much attention to the substantial aspect of foreign aid, to the extent that its mode and scale have almost become the whole story of foreign aid studies.

The question is how this came to pass. In the opinion of most researchers, it is a necessity rather than an option to spend considerable effort to qualify and quantify foreign aid, because substantialist metaphysics requires that before one starts research, one should first define what the research object actually is. The research object must be ontologically true, which means that it is necessary to draw a line between the research object and other issues. This dividing line should be stable and objective, and independent of one’s will. For a project to be recognized as foreign aid, it is not enough that the Chinese government simply affirms that it is, but the project must contain some elements that determine its nature as foreign aid. To identify these elements, researchers have no alternative but to dig in established norms, written policies, assigned contracts and statistics of aid finance, even though there is relatively little access to such information.

This requirement for a stable and objective definition of foreign aid leads Chinese foreign aid studies in general to value substantial factors and devalue ideational factors. Furthermore, this substantialist approach will lead us into a paradox. If foreign aid is a particular way of transferring resources from one country to another under established norms, then it is not essentially different from international investment, because what makes a project recognizable as foreign aid comes from man-made standards instead of any objective quality. Taking turnkey projects as an example, they are excluded from the category of development assistance according to OECD’s definition but included in China’s foreign aid lists simply because China’s understanding of foreign aid does not require a grant element of at least 25% of the total.

An associated problem of substantialist thinking is that researchers unconsciously run into a thinking set that equates foreign aid as unilateral giving, because the existent regulations on foreign aid are all drafted for its implementation. There is no special arrangement prepared for after-aid relationships. People tend to think of foreign aid as a contract between the donor country and the recipient country, which ends as soon as the donor country fulfills its obligation of providing support. However, Marcel Mauss* and Emma Mawdsley* indicate that although foreign aid is discursively constructed as a free gift, even the most generous humanitarian aid “extracts a price from its recipients”. Unlike loans, the recipient country is explicitly exempt from any obligation to repay but implicitly bears a moral deficit, or moral imperative, to return the favor in multiple ways.
Liu Yi has demonstrated that foreign aid is a special form of global public goods, seen through the lens of social exchange theory. No public good is absolutely free of charge, including the seemingly most altruistic foreign aid, which is a combination of two opposite aspects, namely altruism and self-interest. The altruistic aspect attracts countries to consume the public goods (i.e., by accepting aid projects), while the self-interested aspect helps goods-providers to recover their costs and secure profits. Both donor country and recipient country are aware that a repayment for consumption will come sooner or later. But unlike other public goods, altruism and self-interest become more interdependent with each other in the case of foreign aid, which in practice encourage donors and recipient countries to manage their relationship from a long-term relational viewpoint.

Liu adds that implementing an aid project with better performance in the economic development of a recipient country helps the donor country to consolidate mutual confidence and improve the purchasing power and the business environment of recipient country. The repayment comes in the form of a larger market share in the recipient country. Funding aid projects as a gift to developing countries is also a gesture of goodwill, in exchange for the recipient country’s friendship and public support in international affairs. As for security cooperation, strategic patience is more necessary because the repayment usually comes over a longer period of time. Foreign aid, through reciprocity, continues to exist as a social bond which relationally unites donor country and recipient country after the transaction is completed. The donor country is obviously conscious of the repayment, to the extent of regarding it as a potential profit derived from delivering aid. It is this expectation for reciprocity that consolidates the relationship in the after-aid period and encourages the two nations to enter another round of cooperation.

Thus far, there must be a certain amount of skepticism about the more generalized definition of foreign aid this article proposes. People will possibly have two doubts. Firstly, reciprocity and moral deficit cannot be tested. Therefore, the definition cannot be proven to be either true or false. Secondly, will taking reciprocity as a fundamental element once again confuse foreign aid with international investment?

Our answer to the first question is that this article has no intention of offering another operational definition of foreign aid, but we try to redefine it by its nature. It is not our interest to fabricate a new “ruler” with a special unit of measurement for people to quantify aid, but a “prism” that reflects and differentiates for us the various aspects of foreign aid. In relation to the second question, we note that foreign investment differs from foreign aid because, in the first case, the investor country has a very clear idea of what it expects to gain from the transaction. The profit is guaranteed by the contract and by laws.
But a donor country doesn’t know when and how the reciprocation will occur because the recipient country only bears a moral imperative, instead of one in a legal sense. As Mauss and Maudsley indicate, foreign aid “must be conducted as voluntary and disinterested”. To sum up, donor countries agree to give aid not just for altruistic reasons, but anticipate repayment from the recipient country, even though the return may come indirectly and not immediately. In the recipient country’s point of view, it gains more than financial support, but also a psychological experience with the donor, which may in turn result in more cooperative opportunities with the donor country. When a resource transference between two countries is not unidirectional but a reciprocal exchange, not purely for economic benefits but aimed at creating opportunities for future cooperation, without a guarantee of profit but with an unspecified expectation of reciprocity, we argue that this resource transference can be named foreign aid. It is also the adoption of this relational perspective towards foreign aid that paves the way for us to rediscover “aid-like” elements in the ancient tribute system.

**TRIBUTE AND AID: TWO SIDES OF A COIN**

According to the white paper on China’s foreign aid issued by the State Council in 2011, Beijing began to provide development and technical assistance to other countries in the 1950s. This is an assertion on which the academic circle has reached a consensus. However, we must note that the term “China’s foreign aid” used here, in fact, refers specifically to the aid provided by the People’s Republic of China. For a country with a long history of upholding a Sino-centric regional system, the 1950s is certainly not the date of the origin of its foreign aid. However, ancient China’s assistance to other countries remains a relatively unexplored issue in Chinese foreign aid studies. The reason for this blank space has two causes. First, China itself did not recognize providing resources to another nation as foreign aid; consequently, there was no specific institution or norms for foreign aid prepared for its management. Even records about “aid-like” behavior were relatively rare and integrated in the records of Chinese emperors receiving and sending back envoys. This has significantly increased the difficulty for researchers to notice “aid-like” behavior. The second is associated with the nature of the international context in which China’s intercourse with other countries took place. The regional order in East Asia before the eruption of Opium war in 1839 was sustained by the Sino-centric tribute system. Unlike today’s world order where countries see themselves as being in an equal position with other countries, the tribute system was characterized by a profound asymmetry between China and other countries.
characterized by a profound asymmetry between China and other countries. China, at a superior level, dominated the entire mechanism and received tributes from so-called vassal countries\textsuperscript{28}, while such countries were ranked differently in the system depending on their relational intimacy with China\textsuperscript{29}. The fundamental hierarchical nature of the system basically neglects the idea of all kinds of intercourse between China and other countries being voluntary and disinterested. It is this idea of the tribute system being oppressive and exploitative that hinders researchers from finding parallels to “foreign aid” in the history of East Asia.

Whether the tribute system was exploitative or reciprocal is the first puzzle we must examine. To this question, Fairbank\textsuperscript{30} answered that the tribute system was explicitly hierarchical, but implicitly a trade mechanism, bringing economic benefits for the vassal countries. By giving tribute and observing rituals, the vassal country showed respect for China’s superiority and acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the Chinese emperor as the Son of Heaven. In turn, the Chinese emperor bestowed investiture in the form of an official seal or imperial edict, as a signal that the vassal country was permitted to enjoy prosperity and security under China’s protection. Therefore, Fairbank concluded that vassal countries accepted the tribute system as a “cloak for trade”. By performing tribute rituals, they were permitted to trade goods, and acquire products otherwise unavailable to them, in China.

For realists, the tribute system served China’s regional hegemony. For example, Taylor\textsuperscript{31} and Wills\textsuperscript{32}, suggest that vassal countries were reluctantly involved in the tribute system out of fear of Chinese military hegemony. They accepted the humiliating tribute rituals, like the kowtow since they were not powerful enough to protect themselves from China’s military invasion. Their proof was that whenever there was a change of dynasty, or China’s military hegemony was challenged by an external power, vassal countries would quickly suspend their tribute relations with Beijing. As we have seen, Pax Sinica quickly crumbled after western countries pushed their way into East Asia with advanced weaponry in the 19th century.

However, both the functionalist and realist interpretations are incomplete since they are applying ideas based on western (mostly European) socio-economic experiences to explain the East Asian reality. In Western stereotypes, tribute was a policy tool for governments to collect resources from the societies under their control. After studying tributary relations in Mongolia, Athens and England, Tarschys\textsuperscript{33} defined tribute as “levies exacted at irregular intervals […] common in primitive and belligerent states”. In transfers of this kind, there is normally a combination of two opposite elements, “On the one hand an expression of friendship, devotion and submission, and on the other, a sense of fear and insecurity”. Of the two opposite elements, the repressive machinery was the fundamental impulse for vassal countries to provide tribute. There may have been voluntary gifts conveyed in the hope of obtaining favors from the recipient country, but submission was the defining feature of tribute. Previous accounts of the Chinese
tribute system were more or less affected by this perspective from the western hemisphere. It was regarded as unidirectional giving — but in a different direction to that of foreign aid — being from vassal countries to China.

Post-modernists, like Hevia and Kelly, critiqued academic works that took the tribute system as a concept a priori without detailed examination of its content. This article is also opposed to the view that the tribute system was uniquely oppressive and exploitative. On the one hand, power relations in East Asia were distinct from those in the west. The relationship between European nations after the Westphalian Peace was marked by a universal recognition of equality and the absence of a superior authority. As Krasner observed, “every international system or society has a set of rules or norms that define actors and appropriate behavior.” There being no country with an absolute advantage in material resources and military strength, the behavioral logic of each country was to extract all accessible resources in order to defend itself from potential attacks. The European continent, as a result, witnessed balance-of-power politics and incessant armed conflicts among its states. In East Asia, however, the influence of anarchy was diminished as China assumed the role of authority in the region. China was to a high degree self-sustaining, and consequently felt no need to expand its territory by incorporating neighboring countries that had fewer natural resources than itself. It was the regional hegemonic power but, in practice, China “did not seek to translate its dominant position into a systemwide empire by force of arms.” The tribute system effectively safeguarded peace in East Asia. According to David Kang, between 1368 and 1841, there were only two wars of conquest between China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam. China did not dispatch troops to force a country to present tribute to the court. Japan, for example, was regarded as a notoriously stubborn country that did not present tribute routinely, sometimes suspended dispatching envoys to China for decades, and even attempted to disrupt the tribute system by invading Korea. But even toward this recalcitrant country China did not resort to the threat of force to compel it to participate in the system. Other vassal countries, similarly to Japan, enjoyed substantial latitude in their behavior.

On the other hand, no tributary voyage returned home empty-handed, even though China had no obligation to provide return gifts. If submission was the defining feature of the western tribute relationship, the Chinese tribute system was characterized by reciprocity. The Ming Dynasty stipulated that “whenever there comes a tribute envoy, the envoy should be properly taken care of; whenever a tribute envoy brings goods to sell, their goods should be bought at a double price.” Besides, presenting tribute to the court brought more profits to the tributary countries than to China, even if we only count the value of imperial gifts bestowed by the Chinese emperor. Korea sent falcons and white cranes three times in one year to congratulate the Chinese emperor on ascending to the throne, but their gift was rejected on the last occasion because the Chinese court understood that their Korean counterparts only wanted to obtain generous rewards. Not only the Koreans but even the Japanese realized that giving tribute to
China was profitable. In 1532, two Japanese tributary envoys from different provinces arrived at the port of Ningbo at the same time. They argued with each other about who was the real tributary envoy, and the argument ultimately escalated into an armed clash. This history vividly illustrates that vassal countries sought participation in the tribute system. In his analysis of the costs incurred by the Ming Dynasty in sustaining the tribute system, David Kang argues that China spent more than 25 million taels of silver in receiving tributary envoys, a sum equivalent to seven years of the national income. A number of scholars have explored the role of tribute system in providing public goods. For example, Gao Cheng and Shang Huipeng have argued that China was the leading force in ancient East Asia and the only country capable of providing public goods for the entire region. The Chinese writing system, Confucianism, laws, religion, and production techniques were all transported to vassal countries by their tributary voyages back from China. Apart from cultural public goods, China also undertook the responsibility for safeguarding regional order. Ming and Qing dynasty emperors sent armies to keep the tributary sea routes and land roads safe and unimpeded, helped Vietnam and Korea to suppress revolts and resist invasion, and even set up norms and institutions for marine salvage.

Fairbank also noted that the tribute system was a net loss for China. But since his research was concerned with the use of tribute rituals, he did not pay attention to the significance of reciprocity. We should remember that China, as the only superpower in the hierarchical system, could exempt itself from the obligation of returning gifts. Adhering to the principle of strict reciprocity in managing its tribute relations was not in line with China’s national interests. Even when providing assistance to vassal countries, China still insisted on the principle of reciprocity, as it does today when offering foreign aid. One example occurred when the king of Korea wrote a letter asking for help to the emperor of the Qing dynasty after a severe famine affected his kingdom in 1696. In his reply to the Korean king, the Chinese emperor expressed his sympathy with emotional words, writing that he considered the sufferings of the Korean people as his too. He also ordered that thirty thousand dan, of rice be transported to Korea, of which ten thousand were a gift, and that the remaining twenty thousand were to be sold at the market price. People will immediately perceive that the ten thousand dan of rice were very close to what we consider today as humanitarian aid, but the most interesting part of this history is that the remaining twenty thousand dan of rice were sold at the market price. The profit from selling the rice, in fact, can be regarded as Korea returning the favor to China. This indeed looks very similar to the way China provides foreign aid today, often in the form of a mixture of assistance and trade.
Adherence to reciprocity is a result of the relational thinking rooted in Chinese culture. Zhai Xuewei\(^4\) has analyzed how reciprocity works in Chinese society. He argues that the psychological experience is more valuable than the exchanged resource itself because maintaining a relationship means potential chances of profits for both the giver and the receiver. The “residual value” and the “sense of deficit” constitute the driving force towards more material and relational interchange. Rewarding the giver with resources of the same value does not advance their relationship. On the contrary, countries will make sure the deficit is not exactly paid so as to create a firmly knotted emotional bond between them. This is why we saw, in the tribute system, that no matter how small the vassal country was, its envoys always presented a specially prepared gift to the court, and the Chinese emperor returned the favor with a gift of much larger value. It is also the embedded reason that China stridently advocates mutual benefits, even when lending a helping hand to other developing countries.

There was also a direct correlation between the frequency of tribute missions and the country’s position in Chinese relational web of stratified proximity\(^4\). Vassal countries with a closer relation with China were allowed to present tribute to the court with higher frequency. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, Korea and the Ryukyu kingdom sent envoys to China rather frequently, usually once a year, or once every two years. But for countries like Siam and Holland, the regulation was that tribute submission was allowed once every three years, and even as infrequently as once every eight years\(^5\).

However, this does not mean that China’s return gift to countries with which it had a closer relationship was of greater value. Instead, the reward could be of more long-term strategic importance than any immediate economic benefit. In 1369, a group of Korean envoys came to the Ming court for an audience. The Chinese emperor asked: Has your King regulated customs? Has he constructed city walls? Has he produced armaments? Has he constructed residences? The envoys replied that city walls had not been constructed, that there were weapons but that the imperial guard was not combat-ready, and that although there were residences, there was no place for the king to hold court. The king solely enjoyed the company of Buddhist monks. The Chinese emperor expressed his worry and rewarded the envoys with nothing but books on governance, the Confucian Classics, and ancient Chinese history for the Korean king to study\(^6\). Similarly, China’s foreign aid to a country with which it is not familiar usually commences from small-sized grants. As their relationship deepens, the assistance begins to transit from areas of low politics to areas of high politics, such as technology transference, training courses for government officials, and even military assistance (for example, to Pakistan).

**CONCLUSION**

This article was inspired by the world-wide concern that exists about China’s expanding influence in developing countries through its foreign aid. Its emergence has set off an intense discussion among researchers on whether Beijing will use aid programs to
accelerate the transition from Pax Americana to Pax Sinica. However, it is not easy to answer this question because our knowledge about China’s foreign aid is limited to the time period after the foundation of the People’s Republic of China. In other words, when we refer to “China’s foreign aid”, we are in fact talking about “foreign aid granted by the People’s Republic of China”. This article has considered China’s aid, and its behavior regarding aid, during the time when East Asian order was dominated by the tribute system.

Before going into the tribute system, we first analyzed why previous researchers did not achieve insights from the use of history. We found the occurrence of a blank space related to the definition of foreign aid, which is conceived in modern terms and with strict standards on the aid’s financial component, form, and grant elements. The emphasis on the substantial aspect of foreign aid has caused a problem since the psychological experience that the donor country and the recipient country gain through the implementation of aid programs has been largely neglected and, consequently, this has obscured the relevance of China’s aid-like behavior before 1949.

Therefore, we have rethought foreign aid and the tribute system from a relational perspective. In doing so, we found that they are, in essence, a special type of public goods. Resource transference within both the foreign aid and tribute system was not, and is not a unidirectional donation but a reciprocal exchange. China, holding the dominant position, could exempt itself (in the case of tribute system) and the recipient countries (in the case of foreign aid) from the obligation of repayment, but on the contrary, it has insisted on reciprocity, even though the resource that was repaid did not come to the same value as the resource provided. What to reciprocate and how to reciprocate were and are both oriented by a relational thinking. On the one hand, the exchange process consolidates the emotional bond between the giver and the receiver. They both always make sure that there is a residual value after the repayment so that the sense of deficit will drive the counterpart into another round of exchange. On the other hand, China reciprocates to countries of different relational closeness to itself with different gifts. To countries that occupy a central place in the Chinese relational web, rewards are given more frequently. They may not be as valuable as gifts to other countries, but they are, in fact, of strategic importance.

As for the question raised at the very beginning of the article, we must first emphasize that reframing the world order into Pax Sinica does not mean the revival of ancient tribute system. Even though the tribute system may not have been as oppressive or exploitative as many people think that it was, its hierarchical form of organization renders it inadequate for a world where equality has been accepted as a general principle. Consequently, our answer to the question is that foreign aid can be a policy tool for China to make and retain allies, but that it does not constitute any direct challenge to the present international system. The relational and reciprocal nature of Chinese foreign aid determines that it scarcely brings any immediate and predictable benefits.
to Beijing. Establishing a solid relationship with a single recipient country is only possible after many rounds of reciprocal exchange. In other words, it is not a rational choice for a country to attempt to build a new world order on the basis of the unpredictable moral obligation of favor-returning.

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ENDNOTES

1 A Portuguese version of this paper was first published in Relações Internacionais, No. 71, September 2021
2 The U.S. Secretary of State criticized China’s aid to African countries as “empty promises and tired platitudes”. As a counterattack to the U.S.’s accusation, China said that “the U.S. has no right to point a finger at China-Africa friendship” and “slander China-Africa relations won’t make the U.S. great again”. Such fierce confrontations, which were rarely seen in the past, are becoming the new normality of the bilateral relations between the two powers.
6 Before the establishment of CIDAC in 2018, China’s foreign aid was mainly coordinated by the Ministry of Commerce. In 2011 and 2014, the Chinese government released two white papers in which it introduced China’s foreign aid policy, financial resources, forms, distributions and management of foreign aid. In Aug. 2021, CIDAC published a new Administrative Measures for Foreign Aid. It not only clarified the goals of China’s foreign aid, but also the duties of each department during project implementation. Moreover, it enlarged the forms of aid from five items to eight items.
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INTRODUCTION
The entry of large amounts of Chinese investment into the European Union (EU) occurred primarily in the post-economic crisis period of 2011, reaching its peak in 2016 and has beginning to decline sharply since then, reaching its lowest point in the last ten years in 2020. Portugal and Italy are the two Southern European countries that received the most foreign direct investment (FDI) within the last ten years, the downward trend in investment being similar to that felt in other States in general. Both have a high external debt and are usually labeled by the press and political actors as “naïve friends” of China, something that, in the future, could have harmful consequences in the EU due to issues related to capital dependency and control of strategic assets. A number of academic papers have previously focused on addressing how Chinese investment might give rise to this potential dependency and consequently affect the EU. This article strives to complement these discussions, seeking, through the study of the cases of Italy and Portugal, to help enlightening how Chinese investment is able to stimulate behaviors that cause the union or distancing of states in the creation of collective responses to the challenges posed by this very investment. Underpinned by a comparative study, this article focuses primarily on the observation of the foreign policy responses of Portugal and Italy and the communication strategies adopted by both with respect to the attraction of Chinese investment, subsequently trying to

ABSTRACT
The debates around Chinese investment and the detrimental effects that it might have on States on the receiving end of it have led the European Union (EU) to pursue initiatives intended to protect the national interests of its countries. The emergence of populism in Italy, together with a growing Euroscepticism and political instability, decisively influenced Italy’s foreign policy on Chinese investment-related matters, which led its communication strategies to affect the EU at some points. Alternatively, Portugal’s internal stability and favorable opinion of the EU enabled this country to manage its relations with China while generally taking into account the preservation of the European vector’s stability.

Keywords: Chinese investment, Portugal, Italy, European Union.

RESUMO
Investimento chinês em Portugal e na Itália e as suas repercussões na União Europeia

Os debates em torno do investimento chinês e dos efeitos nega-
discern how these factors affect the EU’s ability to respond in a coherent way to the challenges posed by that very investment. We argue that Italy’s foreign policy decisions and communication strategies have affected, and have a greater potential to continue to affect, the country’s ability to achieve coherent responses on the part of the EU to the challenges posed by Chinese investment than those of Portugal. To arrive at these conclusions, this article relies fundamentally on the observation and analysis of government documents, foreign policy decision-making and public statements by political actors.

In the first instance, a discussion is initiated about some of the problems involving FDI in the EU, in attempt to explain how Chinese investment can be understood either as a challenge or as an opportunity. Because China is not an ally of the EU, its investments on European soil generate discussion about the real intentions behind them, and it is difficult to discern whether they are based on purely economic or also geopolitical reasons. To assess the conditions under which Chinese investment can represent a challenge or an opportunity, the article explains what specifics make it unique in relation to that of other countries and how these features can render it more or less dangerous for states and the EU. In this context, two main issues arise: the type of companies that invest on European soil and the type of investment they make. As for the type of companies, while Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOE) might present challenges, due to being larger than EU ones, not being necessarily oriented towards positive economic and financial results and having links to the Chinese Communist Party, private companies may also pose difficulties due to potential lingering ties with the Chinese Government and financial advantages that may arise from that association. As regards the types of investment, greenfield investments are usually seen in a more positive light because they generate new jobs and investment from scratch, while mergers and acquisitions and mergers (M&A) are sometimes seen as predatory investments because they acquire a share or the totality of European companies.

Next, after a brief description of the evolution of the EU’s responses to the challenges posed by Chinese investment, the article explains, by means of a comparative study, how foreign policy and communication strategies adopted by both Italy and Portugal have affected these joint European responses. It is observed that the emergence of populism in Italy, coupled with government instability and growing Euroscepticism in the country, emerged as the great differing factor leading to Italy adopting a behavior that affected the EU in a more negative manner. However, the consequences of this behavior had more to do with laying bare the disunity of EU states than with unambiguous
opposition to European policies. Portugal, for its part, despite its positive relations with China, has typically sought to adopt a more moderate communication strategy that would preserve its image within the EU without compromising its links with China.

**CHINESE FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT IN THE EU, CHALLENGE OR OPPORTUNITY?**

The literature has been discussing for several years the problematics involving Chinese investment in the EU, and it is observable that tendentially there is a higher number of academic papers seeking to identify the potential risks that Chinese investment entails for the EU and for each country individually\(^8\), than studies dwelling on the benefits that this same investment brings and is able to bring\(^9\). Although there are other types of Chinese investment, such as portfolio investments,\(^10\) those who have elicited the most concern fall into the FDI category because they imply some degree of control of the assets. The concern about the creation of a possible economic dependency of EU countries on China is something that goes beyond what can be gathered from statements by political actors, the media or the general population, the same being observable, with similar traits, in the academia.\(^11\) It is advocated that because China is an emerging and less advanced economy than some of the countries in which it invests, its investments may not bring the usual spillover benefits\(^12\). Moreover, and in addition to the fact that China is not an ally of the EU, it is acknowledged that its unique political-economic system could bring to its state-owned enterprises (SOE) competitive advantage over European companies, notably due to economic and financial incentives granted by the state.\(^13\) However, it is important to note that Chinese investment also brings benefits to the countries that receive it, such as the maintenance of jobs that would be lost in the case of companies in an imminent bankruptcy situation and therefore requiring intervention. It is crucial that not only political actors but also society, the media and academics realize that Chinese investment does not represent solely a source of risks, but also a number of advantages for the States that receive it. Otherwise states and businesses may lose opportunities that would be beneficial to them. In fact, there has already been a decline in Chinese investment worldwide, the most prominent evidence of which being the increasing restrictions imposed by the Chinese Government on the channeling of capital to investments abroad, due to issues such as money laundering or the depreciation of the Chinese currency.\(^14\) It has also been postulated that the increase in adverse policies and rhetoric has contributed, in cases such as that of the United States, to this same decline.\(^15\) Zhang, regarding Chinese investment in the EU, also conducted a study that explores how heuristics influence both public opinion and political actors, shaping positions that are more grounded in the intuitive perceptions of the potential harms that Chinese investment can bring to the states that receive it, than in concrete data and evidence that support this assumption.\(^16\) Studies such as this are important, even for political actors and analysts who predict, in their personal opinion, the darkest scenario that sees Chinese investment as a weapon of geopolitical
control, since they signal cognitive prejudices created by the intuitive observation of events, thus stimulating the pursuit of a rationale based on data, subsequently enabling decision-making and stand-taking.

Thus, a balanced discussion is required on the topics that most concern analysts and political actors. Two fundamental elements that generate concern with regard to Chinese FDI are identified: the type of investment and the investing entities. First, as for the type of investment, there is usually a listing that subdivides it into M&A – often understood as possibly dangerous for the country that receives them because they imply the acquisition of percentages of existing companies – and greenfield – involving investments from scratch, creators of new companies (usually perceived more positively by the general public for not generating the feeling of loss of national assets). With regard to Chinese FDI, this has come mostly from M&A, something that usually raises more concerns, as it gives Chinese companies the possibility to acquire geopolitical and geoeconomically relevant assets. One of these examples relates to the purchase of companies with innovative technologies, providing Chinese investors with the possibility of taking possession of them and even transferring these companies’ infrastructures to China, causing job losses in Europe. However, even taking into account, as previously discussed, that Chinese investment may not yield the common benefits of technological spillover or imply the entry into the European market of highly state-backed companies, generating unfair competition, M&A can also bring benefits to EU countries, such as job maintenance, increasing international presence or better access to the Chinese market. Other factors that should weigh on the assessment of an M&A’s risk for the EU should be the economic sector of which the company is a part and the strength of the investor after that acquisition. For instance, Otero-Iglesias and Weissenegger show that even though investors have acquired 35% of the Italian energy company CDP Reti, the real power with which investors were left would only give them the possibility of posing a threat to Italy and the EU in the event that, one day in the future, renewable energy might become the main source of energy, there being no foreseeable security threat in the near future for both the country and the EU.

Secondly, as for the entities that invest in the EU, Chinese SOE could represent an additional challenge because they are more powerful than those of the EU, are not necessarily dependent on their economic and financial success to survive (there are several cases of Chinese ‘zombie companies’, which the Government prevents from going bankrupt, due to the potential social consequences that might arise from it) and their managers have links to the Chinese government. A white paper published by the European Commission reflects precisely this concern, indicating that the support given by certain countries to their state-owned enterprises operating in the EU has
decisively distorted the EU market by facilitating “the acquisition of EU undertakings, influenced other investment decisions or have distorted the market behavior of their beneficiaries”. However, Chinese SOE are not the only type of companies that have the potential to negatively affect the EU. Within this logic, it can be further argued that even some private companies, by having relevant links to the Chinese Government, may pose a threat in the spirit of market competition, because they can be given economic and financial incentives by the Government.

It is therefore important, after being made known the main features that can make Chinese investment a challenge or an opportunity, to realize which answers the EU has had in order to subsequently assess how states have acted in conformity or at odds with the objectives of the Europeans.

EU’S RESPONSE TO THE DYNAMICS IMPOSED BY CHINESE INVESTMENT

“In the last few years, non-EU investors have taken over more and more European companies with key technological competences for strategic reasons. At the same time, European investors do not enjoy the same rights in the respective countries of origin as these non-EU investors in the investment-friendly European Union.”

These were some of the words addressed by the French, German and Italian economic ministers in a letter to the European Commission in February 2017. The message, which seems to be mostly addressed to the challenges posed by Chinese investment, reflects, on the one hand, concern about the acquisition of European strategic companies by non-EU investors and, on the other hand, the fact that EU investors do not have the same legal rights on foreign soil that investors from those same countries enjoy in European territories. Following this letter, and in response to the first sentence quoted above, the European Commission proposed in 2017 the creation of the European Union Foreign Investment Screening Regulation (EUFISR), and this mechanism was completed in 2019. The EUFISR emerges from the perception, by both EU countries and institutions, that mechanisms such as the European Program for Critical Infrastructure Protection or the European Union Merger Regulation were not sufficient to protect the EU from the harmful effects of certain foreign investments. As such, EUFISR includes various economic sectors and allows both the European Commission and individual states to be able to express non-binding opinions on any foreign investment in an EU country whenever they feel it has the potential to affect the security of the EU. In this way, both the Commission and the states will be able to work together more thoroughly on these matters, stimulating the exchange of information and opinions.

In the context of the covid-19 pandemic, the European Commission has again expressed its concern about potential Chinese predatory investments and has proposed some
initiatives to this end. On 25 March 2020, the Commission made a communication to its Member States about the pandemic’s potential to lead countries to a situation of economic vulnerability, something that could facilitate further attacks on key European companies. In this way, States should use all European and national means to correctly screen foreign investments in their territories, thereby protecting businesses. Finally, as early as May 2021, the European Commission made a proposal to be able to impose conditions and even veto investments from state-subsidized companies, which could result in a very significant deepening of the EU’s FDI competences.

As for the second sentence of the letter, the Chinese negative list constitutes a major hindrance to the entry of European FDI into China. Indeed, there are a number of hardships that European investors encounter in China, such as sectors completely shut to foreign investment, sectors in which the law requires Chinese participation in a system of equity or joint ventures, and the absence of an alternative dispute resolution body. All this is added, at an informal level, by pressure in various sectors for forced technology transfers. In this regard, the changes in Articles 206 and 207 of the Lisbon Treaty have enabled the EU to gain competences under FDI, which in 2013 enabled it to begin a long negotiating process to achieve the signing of a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) with China. After several advances and setbacks, in December 2020 a principle of understanding was reached with China for the signing of the CAI. The agreement would ideally allow EU countries to have wider access to the Chinese market, to protect their investments and create a dispute resolution mechanism. For China, on the other hand, this agreement would enable it to reach a single agreement replacing the 26 different bilateral treaties it has in place with all EU states except for Ireland. However, a dispute over a Uighur rights case in China led to sanctions by the EU on eleven individuals and four Chinese entities and, subsequently, China’s retaliation against five MEPs, which led the European Parliament to freeze ratification of the agreement until these retaliatory measures were lifted. This way it is impossible to know when this impasse will be overcome, which leaves the second point of concern set out in the letter addressed to the European Commission in 2017 with little practical development.

**Communication Strategies as an Instrument to Attract Chinese Investment and Implications for European Cohesion: Comparison of Results Between Portugal and Italy**

Both Portugal and Italy have been two Southern European countries seeking to attract foreign investment to meet their huge foreign debt, with Chinese investment having taken on large proportions in both countries. Several media and political actors often...
label Portugal and Italy as dangerous “naïve friends” of China, as their relations have
the potential to adversely affect the EU at the security, political and economic level. This article argues that this naïve relationship of friendship is non-existent, but instead a relationship based on calculated economic interests. Indeed, it will be demonstrated that both States fear excessive Chinese power in their territories and that their political actors are aware of this and, to this effect, have at their disposal (like other States) FDI protection mechanisms which may be used whenever they deem it necessary.

It is discernible that, over the past ten years, Italian foreign policy has oscillated between moments of conciliatory rhetoric and seeking unity in the EU to achieve joint responses to the challenges posed by the Chinese FDI and others, seemingly antagonistic towards a multilaterally articulated European response. Cristiani argues that this ambivalence mirrors an Italian strategic culture that has endured at least since the 19th century, with the country seeking to reconcile often antagonistic relations between allies and non-allies for its own benefit, as is the case with its relationship with the EU and China. On the other hand, Portugal has sought to safeguard its interests while remaining more cautious in the defense of its image within the EU. This article contends that the instability of Italian communication strategies when compared with the Portuguese ones can be ascribed to differences in the dynamics of certain internal variables of these countries, which led to different behavioral differences at the level of the foreign policy of both. The next two sections will examine differences in the communication strategy and foreign policy decision-making of Portugal and Italy, explaining the reasons why Italy’s attitudes have the greatest potential to negatively affect the EU’s joint response capacity to tackle the challenges posed by Chinese investment.

ITALY

Chinese investment in Italy takes on an important dimension, having surpassed US$25 billion between 2010 and 2021, totaling 28 acquisitions for more than US$100 million, which mainly covered the transport and energy sectors. In November 2020, the Parliamentary Committee on Security reported that 405 Chinese companies held positions in 760 Italian companies. Relations with China have been decisive for Italy, especially after the effects of the economic crises of 2008 and 2011, having not only allowed capital to enter the country through the acquisition of large companies (such as Pirelli), but also aided the maintenance of jobs through the purchase of companies on the verge of bankruptcy, like Benelli or Ferretti. In addition, China also occupies a relevant position in the ranking of countries for which Italy exports the most, holding, in 2019, the ninth position, having indeed been argued that it may in truth be the fourth, factoring in the data not entering official accounts, such as the sale of Italian products to Chinese customers in countries other than Italy. Because relations with China are so profitable but also, as we have examined above, potentially dangerous, it is important not only to reflect on the evolution of Chinese investment in Italy, but also on the
political response of the Italian governments to the various developments related to that investment. This will make it possible to understand the extent to which the responses by Italian foreign policy to the impetus given by Chinese investment have been aligned with European interests, thus ascertaining whether these responses have positively or negatively affected the EU.

After the economic crises of 2008 and 2011, the Italian governments systematically adopted a strategy of bilateral rapprochement with China aimed at reaping benefits both in the trade and investment dimensions. In this regard, it is noted that between 2011 and 2015 all Italian prime ministers (Monti, Letta and Renzi) visited or scheduled ministerial visits to China. This bilateral strategy of economic diplomacy resulted in the envisaged rapprochement with China, rewarding Italy with large sums of investment. In this regard, the 2014-2015 biennium stands out, a period in which Chinese companies made several portfolio investments that marginally exceeded the 2% of the shares of the companies in question. This is a relevant detail because it is the percentage necessary for the authority overseeing the Italian financial markets (Consob) to be required to report investments publicly. These investments could then be seen as political messages aimed at reaching both the Italian Government and society in general, intended to convey the preponderance of Chinese investment in the country in a troubled economic period.

In 2017, during Paolo Gentiloni’s tenure, Italy joined France and Germany in the aforementioned letter to the European Commission expressing concern about the adverse effects of foreign investment in EU countries. This attitude seemed to align Italy with the widespread concerns of the major EU countries; however, later that year, Gentiloni stood out for being the only leader of a G7 country to be present at the Belt and Road Summit, in a move that sought to keep Italy close to China. After these ambivalent moves, in 2018, a populist coalition formed government in Italy, composed of the Five Star Movement (M5S) and the League, under the slogan “Italy first”, inspired by Trump’s “America first”. Italy’s ambivalent politics had again taken hold, since after political campaigns that had an anti-China component, in order to attract the impoverished middle class, Italy became, in 2019, the first G7 country to sign the Memorandum of Understanding on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Moreover, Italy was, in the same year, the only country, besides the United Kingdom (which was already leaving the EU), to abstain in the creation of the EUFISR, a mechanism for which it had contributed years before. This was part of the most troubled period of Italy-EU relations with regard to matters relating to China. However, it is discernible that the presence of a populist and Eurosceptic government has not changed Italy’s mistrust of the potential negative effects
of Chinese investment. Thus, although Italy views the other EU countries as rivals in the search for investment, its interests in the European and Atlantic vectors have never been neglected, the above-mentioned attitudes representing, rather than threats to the EU’s objectives, a set of communication maneuvers to preserve good economic relations with China and to reiterate, in the face of an increasingly Eurosceptic public opinion, the defense of Italy’s interests. This claim is based on two premises. Firstly, Italian decision-making had no practical consequences for the EU, seeing that, although the abstention in the creation of the EUFISR sent a positive message to China, the mechanism was eventually created (only one vote against could have prevented it), while the memorandum of understanding did not result in significant additions of investment or trade deals. Secondly, the personal opinion of former members of the Italian Government shows that they viewed relations with China in a purely economic sense, sharing the fears of the generality of states with regard to Chinese investment. It will be appropriate, to this end, to examine the information provided by the former Italian Secretary of State, Michele Geraci, deemed the chief responsible for signing the Memorandum of Understanding on the BRI for the establishment of an Italian task force for China and for fostering other initiatives linked, for example, to Chinese tourism in Italy. Geraci postulated, following the signing of the memorandum of understanding, that EU countries were “jealous” of Italy because of its success in negotiating business and partnerships with China. Although the content of this statement revealed a spirit of competitiveness with the other states, seen as rivals (something that was also aligned with the Euroscepticism of the Italian government and society), some European politicians’ accusations that Italy’s relations with China were naïve do not reflect the position of the Italian Government. In a document published on his personal website, Geraci explains his actions as Secretary of State, ascribing his preference for Chinese investment of the ‘greenfield’ type instead of mergers and acquisitions, to the fact that, with the former, “each dollar invested is a dollar for gross domestic product and new jobs”. This is, moreover, as mentioned earlier in this article, the position of most political actors in the EU. Indeed, although there are overt economic interests in Italy-China relations, these same economic interests also exist with the EU and the Atlantic vector, added by security and political interests, reasons that contributed to the Italian communication strategy failing to translate into actions that might prevent the EU from moving forward in the defense of its states against the adverse effects of Chinese investment. Despite this – although, for instance, it did not veto the implementation of the EUFISR – Italy’s unilateral policy had the potential to subjectively affect the cohesion of the EU, as this unilateralism, combined with a rhetoric which displayed a competitive spirit towards other states, contributed to demonstrating disunity among the major EU states, something that might contribute negatively to success in obtaining the common FDI agreement with China.

In September 2019, a new, more moderate coalition was formed between the M5S and the Democratic Party, which shortly after approved the use of Golden Power (the foreign
investment screening mechanism in Italy) for issues related to the implementation of 5G, primarily due to the risks that Huawei’s technology might entail to the country. Golden Power was first effectively used in October 2020, when the Government vetoed a deal that would allow Huawei to supply 5G equipment to Fastweb. Finally, between May and June 2021, the Italian Government, now led by Mario Draghi, authorized Vodafone to use Huawei’s 5G equipment, however imposing strict conditions. Additionally, Draghi also prevented Chinese acquisitions, having used the Golden Power, for example, in the attempted acquisition of semiconductor company LPE SpA in late 2020. It can be observed, with a moderate Italian government taking office and especially with Draghi’s leadership, that Italy grew closer to European multilateralism and, on the other hand, that greater caution was used regarding the negative potential of Chinese investment.

Italian political instability has repeatedly translated into more or less overt opposition to certain European objectives due to the emergence of new opinions and agendas. As far as Chinese investment is concerned, this internal instability has once again led to periods of government transition and weakening of European negotiating capacity. In addition, the rise of social Euroscepticism contributed to governments being able to adopt discourses and measures at odds with the interests of the EU. However, it should be noted that, in general, looking at all the party groups that have gone through the government in the last ten years, they all have remained mistrustful of the negative effects of Chinese investment, with Italy more recently indeed using the Golden Power, something that reinforces the notion that the Italy-China relationship is based on economic interests with calculated risks, with Italy unwilling to go beyond certain limits that might damage its relationship with both the EU and the Atlantic.

PORTUGAL

Like Italy, Portugal is a Southern European country with a high sovereign debt which has received large amounts of Chinese investment, especially during the post-economic crisis period of 2011. Additionally, both countries have been heavily criticized, especially in the media, for their relationship with China, both having signed a memorandum of understanding on the BRI. However, unlike the Italian, Portuguese society has a favorable opinion of the EU and Portugal’s governing stability has relied on governments led only by prime ministers from two parties, the Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Party, both strongly convinced of the importance of the EU vector for Portugal. In fact, compared to Italy, Portugal has had ten prime ministers since 1980, while Italy has had 25. The reasons driving China to invest in Portugal are fundamentally economic, especially the search for access to new markets and the international expansion of its companies.43
The Chinese communication strategy with Portugal is similar in many points to that adopted in other countries such as Italy. As characteristic elements of this strategy, the labeling of relations with Portugal and the highlight of the importance of history in the relations between the two countries stand out. As for the labeling and development of this communication strategy in Sino-Portuguese relations, Portugal currently maintains with China a “global strategic partnership”, the latter having reached another high point with the signing of the memorandum of understanding on the BRI in 2018. As for the role of history in China-Portugal relations, it is mentioned countless times by various political actors, and has also been dissected by several academics.\textsuperscript{44} Another highlight in this regard is the creation of the Forum Macao in 2003, which, despite failing to achieve the relevance desired by Portugal, served, for instance, as a stimulus for the creation of partnerships between Portuguese and Chinese companies in Africa and Latin America.\textsuperscript{45} 

The peak of Chinese investment in Portugal occurs in the period 2011-2015, starting in 2011 with the acquisition of 21% of Portuguese state-owned EDP by China Three Gorges for more than three billion euros. As in the case of Italy, Portugal has also implemented an investment attraction strategy intended to meet its financial commitments. Let us recall that Portugal had to sign a memorandum of understanding with the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund in order to obtain international financial support, which required privatizations worth EUR 5.5 billion.\textsuperscript{46} In addition to the money obtained from the sale of public assets such as EDP or Caixa Seguros, and the investment in Portuguese private companies, Portugal also raked in large amounts of Chinese capital through the introduction of “gold visas” in 2012, which allow, through the investment of certain amounts of money, a residence permit and, subsequently, even Portuguese nationality. With Chinese investment not only helping to achieve, but also to surpass that amount, it is only natural that China should be seen in a very favorable light, especially by a large share of the political class, it being customary to come across commentaries such as that of António Costa, who in 2015 dubbed China a “friend” of Portugal.\textsuperscript{47} Moreover, the fact that Chinese investment has helped expanding Portuguese companies also at international level has made the positive opinion regarding their investment also extend to many companies and to the society at large.

However, although sound relations between Portugal and China are still in place, Chinese investment declined in Portugal after the post-economic crisis period of 2011, as was the case in most countries. This decline was due not only to the aforementioned Chinese internal policies to contain investments abroad, but also to the lack of oppor-
opportunities identified in Portugal. If, on the one hand, the need to privatize state-owned companies has ceased, on the other hand, Chinese investors also no longer find many business opportunities in Portugal. This idea was corroborated by the Deputy General Manager of the Department of Financial Institutions of the Bank of China, Wendy Min, who argued that there are few projects with potential in Portugal. Businesses that might have the geopolitical potential to negatively affect Portugal, the EU and even the United States have been identified in particular. Standing out among the businesses with greater potential are some of those mentioned by the American ambassador in Portugal, George Glass, namely the purchase of a higher percentage of EDP, the 5G auction or the new terminal at the port of Sines. There are currently no immediate prospects of any worrying developments for both the United States and the EU. EDP’s €9 billion OPA did not fall through, operators in Portugal do not intend to use Huawei as a supplier (although the Government has not effectively banned it) and the port of Sines, after an extended auction, found no bidder.

Compared to Italy, Portugal, despite continuing to further its relationship with China, has adopted a more moderate communication strategy. It has used as a strategy to preserve its good relations with China two principles enshrined in its Constitution, namely non-intervention in the internal affairs of other States and cooperation with all people for the emancipation and progress of humanity. Portugal and China have continued to deepen their relationship, the highlights of this relationship being Xi Jinping’s 2018 visit, which led to the signing of the memorandum of understanding on BRI, as well as 16 other bilateral agreements that, for example, made Portugal the first Eurozone country to issue public debt in renminbi currency. However, the communication strategy adopted by Portugal with the EU and its allies has been much more moderate, which ended up having a lesser impact on the cohesion of the EU’s response to the challenges posed by its relationship with China. For example, at the time of the creation of the EUFISR in 2019, although António Cost mentioned the importance of distinguishing between measures to protect strategic sectors and pure protectionism, measures similar to those implemented by Italy never seemed to be on the table on Portugal’s side. It is also worth mentioning the several statements made both by members of the Government and the President of the Republic himself, who have always made a point of stressing that “China is not an ally of Portugal”, so as to send a message conveying Portugal’s commitment to its foreign, European and Atlantic policy vectors. In fact, the document “We, Europe and China” published by Foreign Minister Augusto Santos Silva illustrates the caution Portugal has maintained in its relationship with China. First, the document states that the period in which Chinese investment was channeled for the acquisition of companies is over, and investors should now develop the companies already acquired in Portugal and create new investments from scratch. Moreover, the conditions provided by the ‘gold visas’ would have to be (and have) been changed due to the new dynamics of the real estate market in Portugal.
Finally, Santos Silva says that Portugal-China relations should be pursued in abidance with EU rules and “with due respect for issues of national security, legal competition and environmental and financial sustainability”.

It is patent, therefore, that both the governments of Portugal and Italy have always preserved a measure of concern about the potential negative effects of Chinese investment in their countries, a sentiment also shared by most EU countries. The most striking difference in the responses by the two countries to the stimuli ensuing from Chinese investment lies indeed in the communication strategies they adopted, something which has had, by the same token, different effects on the EU. This contrast has to do with the fact that some aspects of Portugal’s and Italy’s internal dynamics are quite distinct, which means that so is their foreign policy towards China and the EU. The opposite perceptions of Portuguese and Italian societies regarding the EU, as well as the level of governance stability in both countries, are identified as decisive points of difference.

**CONCLUSION**

Chinese investment was very important for the EU, especially while the most serious effects of the economic crises of 2008 and 2011 persisted. This investment made it possible to rescue companies that were at risk of bankruptcy, to protect jobs and even launch others to the international scene, generating better results and consequently more benefits for states. In addition, the idea of large amounts of capital entering the countries remains an enticing prospect, driving states to further pursue a strengthening of their relations with China in order to recover or maintain the Chinese investment flows of the post-crisis period. However, Chinese investment also has the potential to create challenges for states and the EU as an organization, especially due to the perception that China is not an ally of the EU. As far as challenges are concerned, investments made through M&A are sometimes perceived as predatory, which, together with the fact that they make up the majority of investments, results in them being perceived by the generality of states in a less positive light than the root investments. Moreover, the entities that invest in the EU are SOE for the most part, companies usually larger than their European competitors and often not required to be financially profitable, mainly because they are linked to the Government. Even private companies themselves often have links to the Chinese Communist Party, which allows them, for example, to secure financial concessions from Chinese banks which many Western companies are unable to secure in their home countries.

Following the challenges identified above, the EU sought to strengthen its capacity to respond to potential problems caused by Chinese investment. In 2019, EUFISR was created, an investment screening mechanism that, in addition to fostering communication between countries, allows the EU as an organization, and individual states, to make recommendations regarding any FDI proposal addressed to an EU Member State. In addition, and after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, measures were taken to protect
Europe’s largest assets from predatory investments, and in May 2021 the Commission proposed strengthening its powers to protect states from the potential negative effects of certain foreign investments. Also, after a process that lasted almost ten years, it was possible to reach an “in principle” agreement for the signing of the CAI in 2020; however, this agreement is currently frozen due to sanctions imposed by both the EU and China between themselves following controversies surrounding human rights violations in Xinjiang. This agreement would allow states greater access to the Chinese market, as well as new types of protection for their investments, something that might help balance investments and generate more income for the EU.

Key elements for the success of EU’s responses have always been the responses of the States themselves, as well as the communication strategies the latter have adopted regarding both the EU and China. Although it is already possible to find studies assessing the potential (positive and negative) effects of Chinese investment on the cohesion of the EU and its policies, there are not many thorough analyses addressing the case of specific countries in order to judge in which situations and in what way Chinese investment is acting as a triggering element of division or union of states and the EU around common objectives. This article endeavored to contribute, through a comparative study of the cases of Portugal and Italy, to fill this gap with a view to understanding, with regard to these two cases, not only how Chinese investment has contributed to the union or division of states and the EU, but also the factors that encourage political actors to make decisions.

Both Portugal and Italy seek to maintain healthy relations with China as a way to keep in the open the possibility of receiving large amounts of investment, preserving and improving their trade relations and more easily accessing the Chinese market. Compared to Italy, the Portuguese communication strategy and its political actions at the international level have had a much less harmful effect on joint EU developments to counter potential negative effects of Chinese investment. Portugal, with a strategy that has sought, at various times, to reassure its allies of its alignment with the objectives of the EU and NATO, has tried to manage its relationship with China not only on the basis of the historical connection between the two countries and the deepening of their bilateral ties, but also refraining from comments on controversial issues that may, for instance, be perceived as their exclusive business by the Chinese Government. As for Italy, its communication and foreign policy strategies have shown ambivalence, regardless of the governments in power. Examples include Gentiloni’s presence at the BRI Summit in the same year that the creation of the EUFISR was proposed to the European Commission, or the abstention regarding the creation of the said mechanism and the signing of the memorandum of understanding on the BRI following anti-China political campaigns. Therefore, and although Italy has never opposed any EU protection measure on Chinese investment, it is possible to conclude that its communication and foreign policy strategy has affected the EU’s image as a cohesive bloc, weakening it in its
negotiations with China. On the other hand, Portugal, by adopting a more moderate policy and rhetoric, did not impact the EU in the same way, managing to balance its need for investment and its own image within the EU.

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ENDNOTES

1. A Portuguese version of this paper was first published in Relações Internacionais, No. 71, September 2021.


3. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines foreign direct investment (FDI) as a category of investment that reflects the objective of establishing a lasting interest by a resident in one economy (direct investor) in an enterprise (direct investment enterprise) that is resident in an economy other than that of the direct investor. The lasting interest implies the existence of a long-term relationship between the direct investor and the direct investment enterprise and a significant degree of influence on the management of the enterprise. The direct or indirect ownership of 10% or more of the voting power of an enterprise resident in one economy by an investor resident in another economy is evidence of such a relationship.» ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT – «Glossary of foreign direct investment terms and definitions». Retrieved: October 11, 2021. Available in: https://www.oecd.org/daf/inv/investment-policy/2487495.pdf.


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9 On mergers, the Organization for Eco-

nomic Cooperation and Development says that “A merger refers to the combination of companies to share resources in order to achieve common objectives. A merger implies that, as a result of the operation, only one entity will survive and frequently occurs following an acquisition». An acquisition, on the other hand, is defined as « a transaction between two parties based on terms established by the market where each company acts in its own interest. The acquiring company purchases the assets and liabilities of the target company. The target company either becomes an associate or subsidiary of a subsidiary of the acquiring company». ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERA-

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INTRODUCTION
China is a true country of superlatives and, at the same time, a Civilization-State and a Nation-State. Its resurgence is striking and impactful, being today central in the calculations, behaviors and interactions of all regions and all other international actors, also contributing decisively to the centrality of the Asia-Pacific in world economy and geopolitics. But what are China’s goals and ambitions? What means does it possess to promote its interests? And what policies and strategies does it employ to accomplish its goals? These questions are decisive for understanding the stance and direction of the current People’s Republic of China (PRC), but the abundant literature on the country often fails in giving them due attention and to link the various dimensions involved. This article endeavors to answer those questions in an articulate manner, on the assumption that China’s current grand strategy is inseparable from its “comprehensive national power”, the perspectives of the dominant Communist Party of China (CPC) and, in particular, Xi Jinping, Secretary General of the CPC and President of the PRC since 2012. Our purpose is, therefore, to examine and explain the grand strategy of Xi’s China.

Like other notions in the field of International Relations (IR), the concept of “grand strategy” is used with different meanings. For example, Nina Silove unveils three meanings for “grand strategy” regarding which scholars disagree, labeling them ‘grand plans’, ‘grand principles’ and

ABSTRACT
What are China’s goals and ambitions? What means does it use to promote its interests? And what policies and strategies does Beijing employ to accomplish its goals? In this article we seek to answer these questions by analyzing the grand strategy of Xi Jinping’s China. Regarding the analysis, it appears that the grand strategy of Xi’s China has gone too far too fast and that perhaps time and momentum are not yet on China’s side.

Keywords: China, Xi Jinping, grand strategy, world order.

RESUMO
A grande estratégia da China de Xi Jinping
Objetivos, poder nacional abrangente e políticas

Quais são os objetivos e ambições da China? De que meios dispõe para a promoção dos seus interesses? E quais as políticas e estratégias que emprega na implementação dos seus fins? Neste artigo procuramos responder a essas questões, analisando a grande estratégia da China de Xi Jinping. Com a análise efetuada, parece-nos que a grande estratégia da China...
‘grand behavior’. Despite this distinction, the author considers that these three meanings are structurally similar in two important aspects: first, since they derive from the concept of strategy, they all involve two central elements, ends and means; second, they include three features that justify the sense of ‘grand’, i.e. long-term, holistic and important. Thus, N. Silove concludes that despite the differences between the theorists, the basic outlines of grand strategy not only complement each other but are relatively convergent in essential aspects.4 Rebecca Friedman Lissner identifies three other approaches in literature: “grand strategy as variable”, which studies the origins of state behavior; “grand strategy as process”, concerning both strategic government planning and the more general form of decision-making; and “grand strategy as blueprint”, offering broad views with a view to understanding and/or influencing future behavior.5 In operational terms, we employ the expression “grand strategy” here on the basis of two definitions: that of Hal Brands, who considers that “a grand strategy represents an integrated scheme of interests, threats, resources, and policies. It is the conceptual framework that helps nations determine where they want to go and how they ought to get there”;6 and that of Peter Layton, who defines a grand strategy as “the art of developing and applying diverse forms of power in an effective and efficient way to try to purposefully change the relationship existing between two or more intelligent and adaptive entities”.7

At the theoretical level, we follow an “eclectic approach”, reaching out to the contribution of complexity theories. Above all, we draw from the theories of complexity the assumption of “nonlinearity” – that the result of behaviors and interactions is “naturally unpredictable” – and the notion of “complex adaptive systems”, emphasizing the ideas of complexity, co-adaptation and co-evolution of actors and the system. The “eclectic approach” assumes that none of the conventional theories of IR alone and by itself can encompass and explain the entire international reality which, by nature, is complex, dynamic, unpredictable, adaptive and coevolutionary. This assumption is even more relevant given the opposing views and proposals with often divide liberal, realist, constructivist, systemic, critical and other Western-based theories with regard to the behavior and interactions of non-Western actors such as China. Therefore, limiting the risk of alienating a priori aspects and variables that may be crucial, with pragmatism and prudence, the eclectic approach goes beyond the “natural expectations” of conventional theories, combining different explanatory hypotheses and taking advantage of the potential of complementarities.8 At the same time, the eclectic approach facilitates and favors inclusive links with non-Western IR theories, including Chinese.9

In methodological terms, the article relies on a descriptive-analytical model, based on the analysis of official speeches and documents, and drawing on specialized literature on the transformation of China and illustrative data and examples.
The text is organized in four parts, along which we also explain our arguments. The first part analyzes China’s goals, showing how these matches those of the CPC and how they have grown in ambition with Xi Jinping’s leadership. The second surveys China’s comprehensive national power, justifying its economic base and Beijing’s mounting self-confidence. The third is dedicated to Xi’s international policy for China, showing that “xiplomacy” is actively committed to creating a Sinocentric world and remaking the international order, based on soft power and on multiple free trade agreements and different bi, tri and multilateral mechanisms. In the fourth and final part, we demonstrate and argue how Xi’s China has adopted a much more assertive and confrontational “wolf-warrior” strategy, from economic and diplomatic coercion to the threat and use of military force. And in the closing remarks, we summarize our arguments and question whether the grand strategy of Xi’s China has not gone too far too fast and whether time and momentum remain on China’s side.

AMBITIONS AND GOALS OF THE CPC AND OF XI’S CHINA: TO REALIZE COMMUNISM IN A NEW ERA AND THE CHINESE DREAM, ACHIEVING A DOMINANT POSITION

To understand China’s grand strategy, it is crucial to begin by ascertaining its ambitions and objectives. To do so, we must consider the fusion between the interests and goals of the State and of the dominant CPC, as indeed ensues from Article 1 of the Constitution of the PRC: “Leadership by the Communist Party of China is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics. It is prohibited for any organization or individual to damage the socialist system.”

Now, according to the Constitution of the CPC itself, “The Party’s highest ideal and ultimate goal is the realization of communism”.

This “ultimate goal” is pursued through what the Party calls the ‘basic line’, and which serves as a reference both for its mission and for the formulation of its policies:

“The basic line of the Communist Party of China in the primary stage of socialism is to lead all the people of China together in a self-reliant and pioneering effort, making economic development the central task, upholding the Four Cardinal Principles, and remaining committed to reform and opening up, so as to see China becomes a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful.”

First voiced by Deng Xiaoping and then inscribed in the Constitution of the CPC, these Four Cardinal Principles are “to keep to the path of socialism, to uphold the people’s democratic dictatorship, to uphold the leadership of the Communist Party of China, and to uphold Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought”, principles that also form ‘the foundation for building the country’. From the party’s perspective, its leading role is the only way to restore China’s strength, prosperity and prestige – in what is also the CPC’s “original aspiration” and “mission,” according to Xi Jinping.
This precept is part of the logic of “historical continuity” which the party also underlines when stating that the “guidelines of its action” are the doctrines of the five consecutive top leaders of popular China:

“Mao Zedong Thought by combining the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism with the actual practice of the Chinese revolution... Deng Xiaoping Theory... shifted the focus of the whole Party’s work onto economic development and introduced reform and opening up... Jian Zemin Theory of Three Represents... Hu Jintao Scientific Outlook on Development...[and] Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.”

At the same time, Chinese leaders glorify China’s history and the Party’s “revolutionary tradition”, inscribing their efforts in the endeavor to “restore” China’s central position after what they characterize as the “century of humiliation”, which began in the mid-19th century with the opium wars and the ‘unequal treaties’ and lasted until the proclamation of the PRC in 1949. Indeed, since its creation in 1921, the CPC has portrayed itself as a champion of the cause of China’s reconstruction and resurgence. In short, as Xi Jinping repeatedly says, echoing his predecessors, “only socialism can save China – and only socialism with Chinese characteristics can develop China.”

On the other hand, China’s grand strategy must be understood in the light of two central ideas. The first is that of ‘comprehensive national power’, an expression that guides the development of Chinese capabilities in all areas, in an articulated way, also enabling the assessment of China’s evolution and its comparison to other powers in the international system. The second is the “strategic configuration of power”, underpinning the idea of “propensity of things”, and Chinese leaders describe the late 20th-century and early 21st-century as a “period of opportunity”. To this purpose, China would not need to force and even less impose its own emergence, it sufficing to take advantage of the “propensity of things” and the opportunities offered to naturally and gradually increase its broad national power and thus rise in the hierarchy of global power. It is therefore a long-term strategy that sets out the major objectives, priorities and milestones in all dimensions. Beijing characterizes its grand strategy as a national effort extending within the scope and reach of the transformation of China and, in turn, of the world. For Chinese leaders, “China is still in an important period of strategic opportunity.”

Since the reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping from 1978, which have been responsible for China’s resurgence, the major goals have been outlined around the overall ambition to build a “moderately prosperous society in all aspects” by the mid-21st century. On the other hand, cultivating the idea of China’s “peaceful rise” and “win-win” cooperation, Beijing has generally pursued the so-called “24-character strategy”: observe quietly; maintain our position; engage in matters prudently; hide our capabilities and wait our turn; be good at keeping a low profile; and never claim the leadership. This formula was enunciated by Deng Xiaoping in 1990, in the wake of the tensions caused by the
‘Tiananmen tragedy’, followed by Jiang Zemin and then by Hu Jintao who, in 2009, changed the last characters to simply “keep a low profile” and “actively accomplish something”. This last part can also be translated and interpreted as “displaying your prowess” and “assuming your responsibilities”,

“denoting an adaptation to China’s growing comprehensive national power and a response to international pressure, notably from the United States, for China to take on its responsibilities as a great power and “responsible stakeholder”. Overall, Xi Jinping’s predecessors believed that China should wait patiently for its turn, ensuring the necessary conditions to continue on the path of economic development – the key source of power serving all other domains – and constantly promoting the expansion of China’s influence through tactical integration into the current world order.

This relatively low-profile stance of the PRC changed with Xi Jinping’s rise to the leadership of the party and the State in 2012. Xi has centered power in himself and expressed an ideological orthodoxy unparalleled since Mao; he is impatient with the status quo, has a high tolerance for risk, promotes the “cult of personality” and is in a hurry to ensure China’s international affirmation.

Jude Blanchette argues that Xi’s calculations are determined by his timeline, “because he sees a narrow window of ten to 15 years during which Beijing can take advantage of a set of important technological and geopolitical transformations, which will also help it overcome significant internal challenges.”

The Chinese Government itself acknowledges that “China entered a new era after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2012. President Xi Jinping has considered China’s responsibilities from a global perspective.” And at the 6th Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee which took place between 8 and 11 November 2021, the CPC adopted a resolution revising the official narrative of its history for the third time only since 1921, cementing the position of Xi Jinping and his “Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era”, deemed the “quintessence of Chinese culture and soul” and reflecting “the common will of the Party, the armed forces, and the Chinese people of all ethnic groups, and is of decisive significance for advancing the cause of the Party and the country”.

That change is notorious, to begin with, in the new ambitions expressed around key ideas such as the “New Era” and “Chinese Dream” or in public references to China’s “leading” and “dominant” position. In a landmark speech to the 19th CPC Congress in 2017, which sums up much of his doctrine, Xi Jinping declared that China had achieved “a leading position in terms of economic and technological strength, defense capabilities, and composite national strength.”

It thus justifies “Chinese socialism’s
entrance into a New Era “, which, according to Xi, “it is of tremendous importance”.26 New Era “means that scientific socialism is full of vitality in 21st century China.... blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization. It offers a new option for other countries and nations.”27 Basically, what Xi’s New Era means is that China is on the threshold – to be crossed in the next three decades – of the realization of the “Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation”. And, in simple terms, “the Chinese Dream is to make the country strong”.28 Therefore, the chief goal of the CPC and of the Chinese Government, in the words of Xi Jinping, is “to build a socialism that is superior to capitalism and laying the foundation for a future where we will win the initiative and have the dominant position”.29

Xi’s China has kept modernization at the heart of its action, but by implementing a new philosophy around the “Five-Sphere Integrated Plan” (to promote coordinated economic, political, cultural, social and ecological progress) and the “Four-Pronged Comprehensive Strategy” (to complete the construction of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, to deepen reforms, advance law-based governance and strengthen the party’s self-governance), so called since the 18th CPC National Congress of November 2012. In pursuance of its ambitions, Beijing establishes long-term phased plan, defining concrete goals and priorities for each of them. For its Strategy in the New Era, Xi’s China has drawn up a vast plan around two symbolically representative centennial landmarks:

“China’s national strategic goal is to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2021 when the CPC celebrates its centenary; and the building of a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by 2049 when the People’s Republic of China (PRC) marks its centenary.”30

And unambiguously, at the ceremony that marked the 100th Anniversary of the CPC on July 1, 2021, Xi Jinping declared that China had already achieved the great goal of the first centenary, thus entering a new phase.31

In the time gap between the ‘two centenarians’, Xi’s China outlined intermediate goals for 2035 and established a comprehensive ‘two-phase’ modernization program to be accomplished by 2049. In the first phase, from 2021 to 2035, Beijing wants China to “basically” reach the initial levels of a “great modern socialist country”, and economic development remains a “central task”.32 By 2035, China will also seek to improve its “rule of law” status and internal governance systems, increase its technological strength to become a “global leader in innovation” and “basically” complete its military modernization. It also intends to develop a “major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics” and “move closer to the center of the world stage”.33

In the second phase, from 2035 to 2049, Beijing aims for China to complete its development and achieve “national rejuvenation”, i.e., become “prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious”. Among other goals, China intends to have,
at that point, “world-class” Armed Forces and enjoy a position of “leadership” and “dominant” in a world order recast according to the vision of a “Global Community of Shared Future”.

THE “COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL POWER” OF THE NEW SUPERPOWER
China is the largest beneficiary of the post-“double Cold War” world order and the great winner of globalization. Even though Xi Jinping says that “there is no fundamental change in the trend towards a multipolar world”, the growth of its broad national power makes China a true emerging superpower and gives the world power structure a more bipolar configuration. Beijing declares that “the world is undergoing the greatest changes in a century” and considers that “the configuration of strategic power is becoming more balanced”. For its part, Washington recognizes that “the distribution of power across the world is changing... China, in particular, is the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system”.

The basis of this Chinese resurgence is economic. With continued and sharp growth over the past few decades, China has become the world’s second largest economy in nominal terms and the largest in purchasing power parities (ppp), with a share in world GDP in ppp jumping from 4% in 1990 to more than 19% in 2021 – period during which the United States’ share dropped from 22% to less than 16%. Meanwhile, China became the largest exporter and also the world’s largest importer, with shares of 17.81% in world exports and 14.74% in global imports, and the chief trading partner of more than 120 countries, including the other major economies: by 2020, for example, China was the first partner of the U.S. (representing a share of 11.9% of total U.S. exports and imports), Japan (with a share of 23.4% in overall Japanese foreign trade), India (12%), South Korea (25.3%), Australia (37.3%), the ASEAN10 group (24.4%) or the EU27 (surpassing the US for the first time and with China representing a share of 16.1% of all external trade of the EU).

“World’s factory”, China is the largest supplier of many products and components, but also of certain strategic and sensitive resources: for example, a recent report by the European Commission shows that China alone accounts for 52% of the total amount of imports from the European Union (EU) of strategic products from third countries, also representing 80% of the US imports and 98% of EU imports of “rare earths”– composed of 17 metals used as vital components for all types of high-tech products.

At the same time, China is the largest market for almost everything from agricultural products to cement, from drugs to cars, computers or mobile phones – crucial, therefore, to the production and exports of developed and developing countries.
At the same time, China has become the world’s largest consumer and importer of energy, which, if, on the one hand, brings new risks and challenges to China’s economic development and conditions Beijing’s external relations in the search for safe suppliers and routes, on the other hand, makes China a particularly attractive partner for many exporters of raw materials, oil and natural gas, with China today being a key player in the global geopolitics of energy and in various regions of the globe rich in energy resources. Similarly, China has become the largest CO2 emitter, accounting for about 30% of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions – which negatively impacts China’s global image and has forced Beijing to accelerate energy transition and environmental protection measures, but also makes China inescapable in the global efforts against climate change.

China’s economic, commercial and industrial power enables Beijing to develop Chinese power in all other dimensions, from culture to defense, science, technology or diplomacy. For example, China is now a major technology power, having dethroned the U.S. from the top position among countries with the highest patent registration for the first time in 2019, to which must be added the four Chinese conglomerates in the top 10 of patent registering companies in the world in a ranking led throughout consecutive years by China’s Huawei Technologies. China has also expanded its cultural presence: for example, in 2000, China had no cultural institutes in Africa, currently having the second largest number of these institutes (Confucius) on the African continent, surpassing the British Council, the German Goethe Institute and the American centers. Similarly, greater economic resources have allowed Beijing to significantly increase its defense budget, usually in the order of double digits annually (and always above Chinese GDP growth), Chinese military spending having increased by 76% in the 2011-2020 decade alone, according to SIPRI. Although far from the U.S. defense budget, China is rapidly increasing its share of total global military spending (13% by 2020) and increasingly distancing itself from other major powers. At the same time, the PRC – a nuclear power since 1964 and whose People’s Liberation Army (EPL) is the largest army in the world, currently relying on nearly two million active troops – has carried out a broad “revolution in military affairs with Chinese characteristics”, strengthening and modernizing its capabilities, namely sea, air, missile, nuclear, transport, communications, space and cybernetics. For example, according to the Pentagon, in its “anti-access” and “area denial” strategy, the PRC aims to quadruple the number of long-range missiles and increase the number of nuclear warheads from 300 to 1,000 over the next ten-fifteen years. According to the Japanese Ministry of Defense, between 1991 and 2021, China went from zero to 1,1 fourth- and fifth-generation fighters, from zero to 51 modern submarines or zero to 71 frigates and modern destroyers. The U.S. Department of Defense recognizes, moreover, that
“China has already achieved parity with – or even exceeded – the United States in several military modernization areas... RPC has the world’s largest navy... China is the world’s top ship-producing nation by tonnage and is increasing its shipbuilding capacity and capability for all naval classes.”

Meanwhile, the Chinese regime has been highly committed to the development of civil-military fusion, notably with efforts in the merger between defense and civil industrial and technological bases. On the other hand, China has increased its influence on the global arms market: although more self-sufficient, it remains a major importer (fifth in the period 2016-2020) and has also become one of the largest arms suppliers (also fifth in that ranking). The strengthening of China’s “comprehensive national power” enables Beijing to have more and better means to promote its ends. At the same time, it also makes Xi Jinping’s China more self-confident and assertive in its ambitions and claims.

«XIPLOMACY»: CREATING A SYNOCENTRIC WORLD AND REMAKING THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER UNDER CHINA’S LEADERSHIP

Xi’s China continues to claim that its foreign policy is based on the traditional Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (mutual respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of each, non-aggression, non-interference in home affairs, equality and cooperation for mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence), pursues a “peaceful development” and a “peaceful rise”, and “will never seek hegemony”. This is constantly reiterated in the most varied official documents and speeches, including the China and the World in the New Era white paper published in 2019 on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the proclamation of the PRC, specifically “to respond to the world’s questions about China”. The same ideas are reaffirmed by Xi Jinping, as he did in his address at the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2021, the year in which the centenary of the CPC was celebrated and also the 50th anniversary of popular China’s accession to the UN:

“we must strengthen solidarity and promote mutual respect and win-win cooperation in conducting international relations... China has never and will never invade or bully others, or seek hegemony... China will continue to bring the world new opportunities through its new development.”

At the same time, as part of the narrative of the New Era and the Chinese Dream, Beijing promotes what it calls the “Community of Common Destiny for Humanity” or “Global Community of the Shared Future”:

“China’s proposal to build a global community of shared future aims to solve the practical issues facing the world today and realize the peaceful and sustainable development
of humanity. The proposal pursues the goal of universal harmony and the principles of cooperation and mutual benefit, while opposing the law of the jungle, power politics and hegemonism.”

However, these principles and rhetoric do not inhibit Xi from also assuming, overtly, the goal of making China a “global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence”. In fact, alongside the cult of “emperor” Xi Jinping, the “xiplomacy” marks a new approach to Chinese foreign policy which is much more affirmative, proactive and assertive both for the benefit of a Sinocentric Asia and world and for the recasting of the international order.

Asia is, of course, the priority region of Chinese foreign policy, towards which Xi Jinping declares a kind of ‘Monroe Doctrine with Chinese characteristics’ and of ‘Asian co-prosperity sphere with Chinese characteristics’:

“In the final analysis, let the people of Asia run the affairs of Asia..., The outside countries, on their part, should respect the diversity of our region and do their part to facilitate its development and stability»;

“Asian countries have advanced regional economic integration and worked in union to pursue both economic and social development... As an important member of the Asian family, China has kept deepening reform and opening-up while promoting regional cooperation...the extraordinary journey of China...has exerted a significant influence in boosting development in Asia and beyond.”

In this line also are slogans such as “New Concept of Asian Security”, “Asia for Asians”, “Asian Dream”, “Global Asia” or “Asian Community of Shared Destiny”, which have helped promote Xi’s Asian vision and policy since 2012, appearing to be part of a strategy to rebuild a Sinocentric Asian order.

On the other hand, Beijing makes a “distinction between three elements of the ‘U.S.-led world order’: ‘the American value system’, ‘the U.S. military alignment system’; and ‘the international institutions including the UN system’.” Thus, when Chinese leaders, and Xi specifically, talk about “supporting the international order”, they are referring solely to the third of those elements:

“There is only one international system, i.e. the international system with the United Nations at its core. There is only one international order, i.e. the international order underpinned by international law. And there is only one set of rules, i.e. the basic norms governing international relations underpinned by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.”

This support for the UN is evinced, for instance, by the fact that China has become the only one of the five permanent members of the Security Council to be simultaneously
positioned among the largest financial contributors to the UN’s peacekeeping budget (second place in that ranking) and the largest contributors with military personnel in UN missions (tenth in that ranking).61

But not only that. Xi’s China intends, moreover, to change the international system and order and claims “taking a lead in reforming and developing the global governance system.”62 And for this reform, Beijing uses all the instruments of its soft and hard powers.

FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS: EXPANDING SOCIALISM
WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS THROUGH
THE CHANNELS OF CAPITALISM

China uses the weight of its economy and the size of its market to exercise its power of attraction and influence. In addition to China’s bilateral partnerships – of diverse types and scopes – with dozens of countries and organizations from all regions of the world, Beijing has established free trade agreements with Cambodia, Mauritius, the Maldives, Georgia, Australia, South Korea, Switzerland, Iceland, Costa Rica, Peru, Singapore, New Zealand, Chile, Pakistan and ASEAN. On top of this, the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA) and ongoing negotiations with a view to other free trade agreements with the Gulf Cooperation Council, Sri Lanka, Israel, Norway, Moldova, Panama, Palestine, Colombia, Fiji, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Canada, Bangladesh and Mongolia, as well as the China-Japan-South Korea trilateral one.63

Taking advantage of “contexts of opportunity”, the PRC seized, for example, the 1997-1998 economic and financial crisis in South-East Asia, as an opportunity to increase its influence over these countries, as subsequently it also exploited the difficulties of many States, including Europeans, following the 2008-2010 global economic crisis, to promote their investments, credits and free trade agreements, expanding China’s omnipresence and soft power. Similarly, the crisis caused by the covid-19 pandemic has favored and accelerated the economic and commercial centrality of Xi’s China, forthwith because among the major economies it was the only one that recorded GDP growth in 2020, and one of those expected to grow the most in 2021 and in the following years64 – which is rather paradoxical, considering that this pandemic originated in China. Beijing does indeed show a particular ability to take advantage of all opportunities and, for instance, in the context of the protectionism inherent in President Donald Trump’s “America first” slogan, China’s support for economic globalization and free trade has repeatedly been pointed out: “Economic globalization is an irreversible consequence of global economic development... Some countries have...resorted to unilateral, protectionist, and hegemonic actions...driving the world economy towards the ‘recession trap’.”65

More recently, in the period between Trump’s defeat and President Biden’s inauguration, Xi’s China signed with 14 other Asia-Pacific partners – ten countries from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN),64 Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand – on 15 November 2020 the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP),
establishing the largest free trade area in the world; and on December 30, 2020, China and
the EU reached an agreement in principle on the bilateral Comprehensive Agreement on
Investment (CAI). Meanwhile, on September 16, 2021, the day after the announcement of
AUKUS (a new alliance between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States),
China formalized its application to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific
Partnership (CPTPP or TPP 11) – established in 2016 by the United States and 11 other Pacific
coastal countries,\textsuperscript{67} but from which President Trump had withdrawn the U.S. in 2017.
All this is a symptom of Chinese soft power, but also of an increasingly Sinocentric
globalization and remaking of the international system, including mechanisms and areas
of free trade in which China is present with a leadership role and the U.S. simply is not.

MULTILATERALISM AND INSTITUTIONALISM
IN A “TWO-LEG STRATEGY”
In fact, “xiplomacy” has proved very active in the use of multilateral frameworks to
expand Chinese influence and reformulate the international order in a ‘two-leg strategy’:
on the one hand, it performs a diplomacy of “embedded revisionism”, that is, acting
within the scope of the “UN-universe” and the other international organizations of
which it became a member and which were established, essentially, by the US and its
allies and partners; on the other hand, it creates and develops new mechanisms and
institutions centered in China.

Towards the end of the ‘double Cold War’,
the PRC had already been a permanent
member of the UNSC since 1971, and of the
IMF and the World Bank since 1980, when
it took the place previously held by the
Republic of China/Taiwan at these institu-
tions. And despite the tensions caused by the Tiananmen tragedy, it was rapidly inte-
grated into the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1991, the year in which
the China-ASEAN Dialogue was also established. More important, subsequently, would
be China’s membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. China has
also been part of multiple other multilateral mechanisms and dialogues, from the Asia-
Europe Meeting (ASEM) to the G20, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Forum
for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC), to the East Asia Summit (EAS), the
Container Security Initiative (CSI) and “six party talks” on the North Korean nuclear
and missile program. Inevitably, China’s influence on these bodies and frameworks has
been increasing in tandem with the growth of its comprehensive national power – as
At the same time, Beijing has been participating in and, above all, creating “parallel
realities”, i.e., numerous mechanisms for bilateral, trilateral and multilateral dialogue
and cooperation. Examples of this are the China-Russia-India strategic triangle and the
The grand strategy of Xi Jinping’s China: goals, Comprehensive national power and policies

China-Japan-South Korea trilateral dialogue; groups such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), ASEAN+3 (China, South Korea and Japan) and institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), currently with nine members – China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, since 2001; India and Pakistan since 2017; and Iran in 2021 – as well as three “observers” which are now candidates for accession (Afghanistan, Belarus and Mongolia) and nine other “dialogue partners” (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Turkey and, since 2021, Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia).

The “Sinocentric system” also involves the New Development Bank (NDB) set up by BRICS and a number of other dialogue and cooperation frameworks, such as the China-Africa Summit and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, the China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Forum, the China-Pacific Island Counties Economic Development and Cooperation Forum, the Boao Forum for Asia, China International Import Expo, the Hongqiao International Economic Forum, the China-ASEAN Expo, the China-Arab States Expo, the China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo, the Conference on dialogue of Asian Civilizations, the World Internet Conference, the Macao Forum with Portuguese-speaking countries and China+17 countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Greece. The most emblematic of Xi’s China initiatives and its centrality is the “New Silk Road” – Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or One Belt One Road (OBOR) – presented by Xi Jinping in 2013. The BRI/OBOR is a paradigmatic model of xiplomacy, in line with “going out-bringing in” and “the go global”, representing a powerful instrument to strengthen Beijing’s cooperation with countries and regional groups – from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to the EU, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) or the African Union (AF) -, multiplying, moreover, platforms such as Digital Silk Road, Green Silk Road, Polar Silk Road or Health Silk Road. Under the BRI, China has already signed agreements with more than 160 countries and international organizations from all regions of the globe, from Pakistan to Australia, Thailand, Singapore, Portugal, Greece, Turkey and Italy, thus including members of NATO, EU, Quad and the G7.

To financially support BRI’s projects, Xi’s China created the Silk Road Fund in 2014 and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) the following year. When AIIB started operations in January 2016, it had 57 founding Member States; it currently has 91 members and 12 more potential members. Having become the third largest multilateral financial institution in the world after the IMF and the World Bank, AIIB is a catalyst for the formation of a new financial order. In addition, in May 2017 and April 2019, Beijing organized and hosted, respectively, the first and second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF), with representatives from more than 140 States and organizations, including dozens of heads of state and government. The list of results of the first BRF presents a total of 1676 projects and the second BRF includes 283 new concrete projects.
The BRI contributes to Xi’s China’s diversifying supply and distribution routes, increasing its economic, commercial and financial weight in the countries and regions involved, and, of course, increasing its political influence and geopolitical and geostrategic aims. For instance, China possesses more ports in its territory than any other country in the world, and, additionally, Chinese companies, mostly State-owned or controlled by Beijing, have already invested and acquired exploration rights in more than 100 ports in more than 60 countries, including many of international importance such as Hambantota (Sri Lanka), Gwadar (Pakistan), Kyaukphyu (Myanmar), Darwin (Australia), Haifa New Port (Israel), Kumport (Turkey), Piraeus (Greece) or Rotterdam (Netherlands), as well as in about one fifth of African ports.

Since its launch, the BRI has elicited multiple reactions and debates.71 For Beijing, the BRI “contributed to policy, infrastructure, trade, financial and people-to-people connectivity based on the needs of individual countries”,72 Xi insisting that his initiative “pursues development, aims at mutual benefits, and conveys a message of hope”.73 For Washington, however, “Countries participating in OBOR could develop economic dependence on PRC capital and be subject to predatory lending, which the PRC could leverage to pursue its geopolitical interests.”74 Well aware of the powerful instrument that the BRI represents in Xi’s China grand strategy, President Biden suggested to America’s allies and partners that “we should have, essentially, a similar initiative, pulling from the democratic states”.75 And, in fact, the G7 Summit of 11-13 June 2021 agreed on develop an alternative initiative to the New Chinese Silk Road led by democracies.

Both within the framework of the BRI and in all institutions and mechanisms, Beijing endeavors to convey its ideas and promote its messages. Xi Jinping himself stresses this importance: “We should seek other countries’ understanding of and support for the Chinese dream…. We should increase China’s soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China’s message to the world.”76 The declaration of the 2018 Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) reflects the Chinese narrative well: “We applaud that, under the Belt and Road Initiative, the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits is observed”; “we firmly uphold multilateralism and oppose all forms of unilateralism and protectionism”; “we advocate mutual respect and equal consultation, firmly reject Cold-War mentality”.77 And also in the final joint communiqué of the first Belt and Road Forum, the 30 participating heads of State and government avowed “the spirit of peace, cooperation, openness, transparency, inclusiveness, equality, mutual learning, mutual benefit and mutual respect.”78

In another example, the connectivity promoted through the BRI has been displayed by Beijing in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic: “Connecting over 100 cities across
more than 20 countries in Europe and Asia, the China Railway Express to Europe has made an outstanding contribution to stabilizing international industrial and supply chains during the Covid-19 pandemic”.79

The “good Chinese narrative” is also conveyed through vigorous campaigns in State-owned media, cyber social networks and Beijing-controlled influencers or via the publication of a multitude of official English-language white papers – in a total of 76 between 2012 and 2021 alone, in increasing numbers annually and covering a wide range of subjects, from human rights and democracy in China to its relations with the WTO, environmental protection, Tibet and Xinjiang issues, Chinese policies for the Arctic and Africa, the South China Sea or space activities.80

Xi’s China’s soft power inhibits many governments from criticizing Beijing or leads them to support Chinese policies and Chinese candidates for UN agencies and other international institutions. This is noticeable in the many resistances to American pressure stemming from decoupling from China, restrictions on Chinese 5G or Huawei technology, or the lack of cohesion of certain organizations, including NATO, the EU and ASEAN, in assuming unambiguous and tougher positions against Beijing. For instance, in October 2020, in opposition to a 39-country declaration criticizing Beijing for the imposition of the new Hong Kong National Security Law, a group of 54 countries (including 27 African ones) signed a declaration of support for the PRC.

“WOLF-WARRIOR” STRATEGY

In order to achieve the goals under the banner of “socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era”, and in addition to the concentration of power in Xi Jinping, China has been issuing a vast set of legislation which, under the pretext of strengthening the “rule of law” or the fight against corruption and terrorism, almost invariably ends up serving to reinforce the regime’s control and vigilance over businesses, citizens and new technologies.81 Also to this end, there is the tight State control of cyberspace and social networks, the increasingly large-scale coverage of video and audio surveillance, “smart sensors” and “smart cities” or the new “social credit” program with the awarding and withdrawal of points (and subsequent social rewards/punishments) depending on their political and civic behavior. Illustrative of Chinese peculiarity and of the strategy of Beijing’s regime to control the various sectors of society, to silence putative critical movements and to encourage favorable voices, is the promotion of “government-organized non-governmental organizations” or GONGO, in various areas, from the environment to ethnic minorities.82

At the same time, Beijing has stepped up repression in provinces such as Tibet and Xinjiang and has limited the democratic freedoms and autonomy of its special admin-
istrative regions of Macao and Hong Kong – here in particular with the imposition of the new National Security Law on 30 June 2020, to all practical effects putting to rest the principle of “one country, two systems”, in breach of the Hong Kong Basic Law and the commitment with the United Kingdom.

The reinforcement of repressive mechanisms in Xi’s China is in line with a much more assertive and often even confrontational stance in its external relations. Overall, this stance can be referred to as the strategy of the “wolf-warrior”, an expression taken from the series of Chinese films with the same title very popular in China.83

This stance is visible in the more frequent use of economic coercion to sanction condemning governments and certain options of other countries, whether threatening or imposing a ban on imports, increased tariffs, restrictions on investment, suspension of credits, boycotts of products and other measures to change the behavior of those targeted and to discourage others from pursuing similar actions. For example, in 2016, after the Dalai Lama’s visit to Mongolia, Beijing suspended talks on a crucial aid loan, increased import rates on Mongolian minerals and temporarily closed a major border crossing. The following year, it was South Korea’s turn to suffer economic and diplomatic pressure from Beijing after approving the installation on its territory of the U.S. Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system. More recently, after Australia called for an independent investigation into the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic in China, Beijing suspended beef imports from Australian factories, imposed an 80.5% tariff on its barley exports to Australia and also imposed restrictions on Australian coal imports. Private companies too have been sanctioned: after publishing a statement in September 2020 expressing concern about forced labor in Xinjiang, Swedish clothing company H&M was heavily criticized by the Ministry of Commerce and by the Chinese media and was the subject of a widespread boycott of its products in China and banned from several Chinese digital platforms, with a 28% drop in sales and having to close more than 20 stores in China in the first months of 2021 alone.84

In addition to economic sanctions, Beijing has also been reacting harshly via diplomatic and technological boycotts, public accusations and expulsion or a ban on entry into Chinese territory, engaging in successive frictions with a growing number of countries, from the United States to Lithuania, Australia, Canada, the UK or the EU. For instance, at the end of March 2021, in reaction to the EU’s approval of sanctions against four Chinese leaders for violations of Uighur rights in the Xinjiang region (alongside the United States, Canada and the UK, in what were EU’s first sanctions since the Tiananmen tragedy in 1989), Beijing has sharply retaliated with sanctions of its own and a ban on entry into Chinese territory directed at ten European citizens (including five Members of the European Parliament) and four entities (including the EU Council’s Political and Security Committee and the European Parliament’s Subcommittee on Human Rights),85 with a statement from the Chinese Foreign Ministry accusing the EU of “seriously harming China’s sovereignty and interests and maliciously spreading lies
and misinformation” and threatening that “if the EU does not correct its error, there will be more measures”.

On another occasion, in November 2021, Beijing downgraded its diplomatic relations with Lithuania to the “charge d’affaires” level days after Vilnius authorized the opening of a representative Taiwan office with the formal designation of Taiwanese Representative office – instead of “Chinese Taipei” which Beijing accepts and is the name used by most international countries and organizations to avoid offending the PRC –, with the Chinese Foreign Ministry stating that this decision by the Lithuanian Government “undermined China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity” and created a “bad international precedent”.

On the other hand, Xi Jinping states that “One country’s success does not have to mean another country’s failure”, but Xi’s China’s challenging of the United States is no longer “soft” and indirect but rather “hard” and straightforward. Competition between the US and China is not new, and has been fueled for decades by many differences, divergences and disputes, but in recent years relations between the two have deteriorated substantially. For instance, China’s latest defense white paper states that “International strategic competition is on the rise”, directly accusing the U.S. of “adopting unilateral policies”, “provoking and intensifying competition”, “undermining global strategic stability” and seeking “absolute military superiority”.

More confident with the growth of its comprehensive national power and sensing the American decline, Xi’s China began to react to Washington’s policies “in kind”, from tariff warfare to technological boycotts, sanctions on American companies, public accusations using belligerent rhetoric, arrest of alleged spies or expulsion and prohibition of entry into its territory of American citizens, politicians and NGOs. This competitive tension has increased since the Obama Administration, escalating during the Trump Presidency and worsening in 2020 in the context of the pandemic crisis of Covid-19 and the campaign for the U.S. presidential election. Xi’s assertiveness and defiant stance contributed greatly to the bipartisan consensus that emerged in the United States for a tougher approach to Beijing, which rose in tone again during the Biden presidency.

Beijing has reacted with hostility to neo-containment maneuvers promoted by the United States, including accusations that Quad and AUKUS represent attempts to create an “Asian NATO” or that Washington is triggering a “new arms race” and “threatens regional and international peace and stability.” According to Xi Jinping,

“We must not allow the rules set by one or a few countries be imposed on others... Big countries should behave in a manner befitting their status... Attempts to “erect walls” or “decouple” run counter to the law of economics and market principles... We must reject the Cold War and zero-sum mentality and oppose a new “Cold War”... Bossing others around or meddling in others' internal affairs would not get one any support.”

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In fact, Xi and Biden state that they do not wish for a “new Cold War”, but the mere fact that they mention it is by itself highly significant – and in practice they both seem committed to promoting it, for internal and external reasons.

At the same time, Beijing has strengthened its ties and partnerships with countries and regimes outcast by the “American international order”, from North Korea to Myanmar, Cuba, Venezuela or Iran, as well as with partners and allies of the U.S. currently more at odds with Washington, from Pakistan to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey. With Putin’s Russia in particular, Xi’s China nurtures a close articulation that has intensified since Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 as part of the bilateral “comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era.”

Russia is China’s main supplier of energy and arms, and this strategic and military articulation also involves pressures that seem timed, i.e., Moscow’s over Ukraine and Beijing’s over Taiwan, as happened in the spring and fall of 2021. In the same line, Russia basically replicated China’s arguments by criticizing the AUKUS and, in early October 2021, conducted the Joint Sea 2021 bilateral naval exercises in the Sea of Japan, and at the end of that month conducted the first joint China-Russia patrol exercise in the Western Pacific. This PRC-Russia quasi-alliance does not ensue from their condition of members of an “autocratic international”, but from their shared belief that this serves both their respective geopolitical goals: to contain the supremacy of the United States, to divide the West and the democratic powers, to suppress liberal political influences in international organizations and conventions and to change the world order.

The use of the military instrument is, in fact, another feature of Xi’s China grand strategy. Far beyond the promotion of its “contribution” to international security in UN missions or the “low cost, low risk and high performance” strategy in Africa.

For instance, despite repeatedly claiming that it would never have military bases in foreign countries, Beijing established its first foreign (naval) military base in Djibouti, in August 2017, with a contingent of more than ten thousand troops, strategically at the crossroads of the world’s trade and energy routes. And according to the Pentagon,

“The PRC is pursuing additional military facilities to support naval, air, ground, cyber, and space power projection in countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, Angola and Tajikistan.”

Adding to the multiple Chinese incursions into the areas disputed with India and along the extensive Line of Actual Control (LAC), in June 2020, a skirmish between military
personnel on both sides of the Galwan valley, in a Himalayan border region, resulted in the death of 20 Indian soldiers, marking the first loss of lives at LAC since 1975. A few days later, satellite images showed what appear to be Chinese military facilities near the site of this incident, facilities that were not there beforehand. Another example is the establishment, for the first time in November 2013, of a PRC’s air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea, overlapping part of the ADIZ previously outlined by Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, and including in the Chinese ADIZ the Senkaku/Diaoyu/Diaoyutai islands and the Ieodo/Suyan/Socotra Rock whose sovereignty Beijing disputes with Tokyo and Seoul, respectively. Indeed, in recent years, China’s activities in disputed areas in the East China Sea have intensified, including a significant increase in incursions of Chinese aircraft and warships and coast guard into territorial waters and airspace near the Japanese Senkaku Islands, in what Japan and the United States consider to be a Chinese strategy to “unilaterally change the status quo”. The same can be said of Xi’s China’s stance in the South China Sea, which also illustrates the difference between Beijing’s rhetoric and practice. China claims 80% to 90% of the South China Sea on the basis of the “nine-dash line” it drew up unilaterally decades ago on the basis of alleged “historical rights”, including the disputed Paracel and Spratly archipelagos and the Scarborough Shoal Reef/Macclesfield Bank and overlapping both sovereignty areas and territorial waters and the EEZ claimed by several Southeast Asian states – the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam. In July 2016, following a case lodged by the Philippines, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruled that “China’s claims to historic rights, or other sovereign rights or jurisdiction, with respect to the maritime areas of the South China Sea encompassed by the relevant part of the ‘nine-dash line’ are contrary to the Convention [UNCLOS] and without lawful effect”. However, despite constantly claiming to defend a “rules-based order” and being part of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Beijing not only does not respect the decision of the PCA, it has also since then intensified the militarization and the reinforcement of its positions in the South China Sea, including the continued construction of landfills on the islands, atolls and reefs it controls, the expansion of military infrastructure, frequent military exercises, successive incidents with vessels and aircraft from other countries, and the replication of its administration in the disputed islands and reefs, creating de facto situations and appearing to wish to impose some kind of mare nostrum or mare clausum.

Xi’s China has become even more aggressive toward Taiwan, escalating its threats of use of force with activities that include multiple, successive and increasingly powerful military exercises and incursions into Taiwanese airspace and sea. In 2020, Beijing publicly refuted the existence of the “median line” in the Taiwan Strait which had existed...
for decades by tacit agreement with the purpose of reducing the risk of miscalculations and preventing accidents. And, for instance, in early October 2021, in the days immediately following the 72nd anniversary of People’s Republic of China and as part of those celebrations, more than 150 Chinese fighters and bombers entered Taiwan’s ADIZ, sharpening tensions and leading Biden to call his counterpart Xi on the phone and subsequently to the first bilateral summit between the two presidents, which would take place online on November 15th, 2021.\textsuperscript{102} This Chinese military pressure is accompanied by a relentless bellicose rhetoric, as exemplified by the repeated warning that any move towards Taiwan’s independence “means war.”\textsuperscript{103} The menacing tone is verbalized by Xi Jinping himself. For instance, on January 2, 2019, in a speech celebrating the 40th anniversary of Deng Xiaoping’s “Message to the Compatriots of Taiwan”, Xi stressed that “China must be and will be reunified... We make no promise to renounce the use of force and reserve the option of taking all necessary means.”\textsuperscript{104} And in his speech celebrating the 100th anniversary of PRC on July 1, 2021, he reiterated that

“This Resolving the Taiwan question and realizing China’s complete reunification is a historic mission and an unshakable commitment of the Communist Party of China... We must take resolute action to utterly defeat any attempt toward “Taiwan independence”... No one should underestimate the resolve, the will and the ability of the Chinese people to defend their national sovereignty and territorial integrity.”\textsuperscript{105}

\textbf{FINAL CONSIDERATIONS}

Overall, Xi’s China’s goals can be summarized in the following list of priorities: maintaining the CPC’S “leading role” in building “socialism with Chinese characteristics” and “the realization of communism”; preserving Chinese sovereignty against “external interference” in its “internal affairs”; preserving territorial integrity (including in the South and East China Seas and other territorial and border claims) and completing “China’s unification” (Taiwan question); promoting the growth of its “comprehensive national power” and “the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation”; “restoring China’s central position” and “rebuilding” the international system, with China in a “dominant” position; “reforming” the world order and global governance, with China in the “leading” a “global community of shared future”. Meanwhile, Xi’s China has anticipated some of the goals outlined earlier and defined new ones in an ambitious plan linked to two symbolic “centenaries”: that of CPC in 2021 and that of PRC in 2049. According to Xi Jinping, China has already achieved the great goal associated with the first centenary of “completing the construction of a moderately prosperous society in all aspects” thus entering a new phase aimed at “building a modern socialist country” by the second centenary. Xi’s China’s grand strategy for the “New Era” seems to be successful, accelerating the growth of its comprehensive national power and elevating it to the category of new
superpower. Taking advantage of its economic and commercial weight and the opportunities coming its way, “xiplomacy” has been successful in attracting free trade partners and agreements and promoting its influence in international institutions through the “two-leg strategy”: taking action within the organizations created essentially by the U.S. and its allies and partners – from the UN to the IMF, World Bank, APEC and WTO – and, on the other hand, creating new frameworks and mechanisms centered on China, from the BRICS to SCO, BRI, AIIB and RCEP. As a whole, economic and commercial ties and bi, tri and multilateral dialogue and cooperation mechanisms are an exceptional means for Xi’s China to promote not only its development goals but also its geopolitical agenda: increasing influence in its neighborhood and in the world, boosting Beijing’s regulatory role as a producer of alternative rules and principles, nurturing the image of a responsible major global power, coming forth as a model of modernization for developing countries and autocratic regimes, dividing the “West” and discouraging the creation of a large anti-China coalition and logics such as that of ‘anyone but China’.

At the same time, Xi’s China abandoned the low profile stance inherent in the “24-character strategy” of its predecessors since Deng Xiaoping, adopting instead a much more assertive, challenging and even confrontational “wolf-warrior” strategy, in an effort to hasten the achievement of its goals, sanctioning and deterring its detractors and creating an area of influence, whether through economic and diplomatic coercion or by threatening to use military power, particularly in South Asia, the South and Eastern China Seas and against Taiwan.

Xi’s China seems unstoppable, but there are many challenges facing its way, both internally and externally. The new superpower status attracts friends, but also carries costs and attracts the attention of rivals. Its assertiveness is prompting adverse reactions of a magnitude that Beijing may not have anticipated. Despite the deep-seated interdependencies and the many issues involving mutual articulation and accommodation, the United States seem definitively committed to China’s neo-containment. Taiwan is more set on preserving its de facto independence. Several Southeast Asian countries are increasingly willing to counterbalance Beijing in the South China Sea. After years of strategic ambiguity, India and Australia are aligning in counterbalancing China, as is the case with the Quad or the new AUKUS. Several Asia-Pacific countries are increasing their defense budgets and military modernization programs as a counterweight to China. Many economies around the world are limiting Chinese investments in strategic sectors and looking for ways to reduce dependence on Chinese production and supply chains. The 2021 G7 Summit proposed an alternative initiative to the New China Silk Road driven by the democracies, and the European Union launched the new Global Gateway strategy on 1 December 2021 with an ambitious infrastructure financing plan largely competing with the Chinese BRI. An increasing number of States are advancing in technological decoupling from China and also openly and frontally criticizing certain Beijing policies. The EU-China CAI agreement is frozen, and several CPTPP members
In an extraordinarily complex, dynamic, coevolving and profoundly changing international system, it is still too early to discern all the impacts of Xi’s China’s grand strategy, but it is clear that the 21st century world relies heavily on what China wants, does and achieves. Self-assured, Xi Jinping continues to believe that “time and momentum are on China’s side.” But are they really?

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**ENDNOTES**

1. A Portuguese version of this paper was first published in Relações Internacionais, No. 71, September 2021.

2. With the longest uninterrupted history of a political unity in the world dating back about five thousand years, China is the most populous state in the globe with more than 1.440 million inhabitants (18.5% of the world’s population), representing the han approximately 95% of the 56 officially recognized ethnic groups. The PRC is also one of the largest states in geographical area [third or fourth, depending on what is considered Chinese territory] with at least 9600 million square kilometres, situated between Central Asia and the seas of South and East China, South Asia and Indochina to the Korean Peninsula, with a land border totaling 22,457 km with 14 countries (Russia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and North Korea) and a coastline of 14,500 km.


9. See, for instance, HO, Benjamin Tse Ern – «Chinese thinking about international relations: from theory to practice». 


12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Cf. XI, Jinping – “Secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and strive for victory in building a moderately prosperous society…”.

16 COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA – Constitution of the Communist Party of China.. General Program.

17 XI, Jinping – “Study, disseminate and implement the guiding principles of the 18th CPC National Congress. Speech at the first group study session of the Political Bureau of the 18th CPC Central Committee which was presided over.” November 17, 2012; XI, Jinping— “Speech at a ceremony marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China”. 1 July, 2021.


23 The first, approved in 1945, established Mao’s authority over the party four years before china’s takeover. In the second, in 1981, already in the era of Deng Xiaoping, THE PCC recognized the “mistakes” of the Mao era and took over the reforms of economic openness and modernization with the “means of capitalism” to build “socialism with Chinese characteristics”.


25 XI, Jinping – “Secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society…”.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.


29 Xi, Jinping – “Secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society…”.

30 CHINA’S Military Strategy, chap. II.

31 XI, Jinping – “Speech at a ceremony marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China”.


35 XI, Jinping – “Secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society…”.

36 XI, Jinping – “Pulling together through adversity…”.


46 Ibid.


Cf. UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE – Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2021, pp. IV-V.


CHINA and the World in the New Era, Foreword.

Xi, Jinping – “Building a Human Community...”

Xi, Jinping – “Secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous soci-ety...”


Xi, Jinping – “Pulling together through adversity...”


Fu, Ying – Speech by the Chairwoman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chinese National People’s Congress at the 52nd Munich Security Conference. February 13, 2016.

Xi, Jinping – “Bolstering confidence and jointly overcoming dif-...”


IMF – World Economic Outlook.


Brunei, Cambodia, Philippines, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.


Of the 57 founding States of AIIB, 37 were regional and 20 non-regional, including Washington allies such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Australia, Israel or South Korea. Of the 91 current members, 50 are regional and 41 are non-regional. Cf. ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BANK (AIIB) – Members and Prospective Members of the Bank. Retrieved: December 6, 2021. Available in: https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/governance/members-of-bank/index.html.


CHINA’S International Development Cooperation in the New Era, cap. III.

Xi, Jinping – “Pulling together through adversity...”


CHINA’S International Development Cooperation in the New Era, cap. III.


Examples include: the Anti-Spy Law of November 2014; the National Security Law of July 2015 (limiting foreigners’ access to the information and communication technology market in the PRC); the Counter-terrorism Law of December 2015 and the Anti-Terrorism Law of July 2016 (which, among its provisions, require tele-communications operators and internet service providers to provide information, decryption and technical support to public and state security in the prevention and investigation of terrorist activities); the Law for Management of Domestic Activities of Overseas Non-governmental Organizations of January 2017; the Cyber Security Law, which entered into force in June 2017 (and which protects endoge- nous technologies and restricts sales of foreign information and communication technologies in the PRC, while also requiring foreign companies to subject these technologies to the control of Chi-nese security agencies, store data in the PRC and must obtain the approval of the Chinese Government before transferring data outside the PRC); the National Intel-ligence Law of June 2017 (allowing Chi-nese authorities to control and investigate national and foreign individuals and enti-ties and specifically requires them to pro-vide information and access to data, communication devices, vehicles, build-ing and other infrastructure); the new Foreign Investment Law of March 2019 (with the alleged objective of improving the business environment for foreign...
investors and levelling the conditions of competition between foreign companies, Chinese private companies and public companies; or Cryptography Law, adapted in October 2019 and entering into force in 2020. Publishing 2021 requires encryption systems to ensure sufficient security, but without such encryption harming national security or the public good and requiring the State and its agencies to have full access to encryption systems and data protected by those systems.

Examples of this, in the field of the environment, Huai River Eco-Environment Research Center, Center for Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims, Center for Environment Development and Poverty Alleviation, in the area of culture: Rural Development Research Center of Qinba Area, Genuine Love, Beijing Rural Children’s Cultural Development Center; of work and migration: Beijing Yilan Labor Law Aid and Research Center, Suzhou Migrant Workers Home, Shenzhen CNDR&Ceng Labor, Disputes Services Center, Ethnic Minorities: Preserving and Development of Tibetan Culture, Yothok Yonden Gonpo Medical Association, Lanzhou Chongde Women Children Educa-
tion –, DODA –, Rush –, Suisse –
China’s National Defense in the New Era, cap. I.

TOMÉ, Luis – “China and Asia-Pacific in video administration policy: operating a “stable and open international system” and a “free and open Indo-Pacific.”” In International Relations. No. 69, 2021, pp. 55-68.

IX, Jinping – “Bolstering confidence and jointly overcoming difficulties to build a better world.”

China’s new priorities in Africa. The China Africa Co-operation Forum -21: where to next?”. In Afri-


Japan, Ministry of Defense – Defense of Japan, pp. 73-76. In United States Department of Defense – Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2021, pp. 97-106. See also TOMÉ, Luis – “Mares da China: The Bank of Macclesfield is located beyond the territorial sea of any country” and is therefore part of the ‘Taiwan question’. For its part, Scarborough reef is claimed by the PRC, Taiwan and the Philippines. The Paracel Islands [also referred to as ‘Xisha Islands’ by the Chinese and ‘Hoang Sa archipelago’ by the Vietnamese], with about 130 islands, rocks, atolls, coves, sandbanks and reefs – many of which are uninhabited, some submerged at high tide and others permanently sub-
merged – spread over three chains of islands (Pratas, Paracel and Spratly) and part of the south China Sea. In dispute are several of the islands and reefs, particularly the Spratly Islands – which under international law are part of China’s sovereignty. For its part, the Paracel Islands are claimed by the PRC and Taiwan.

In the South China Sea there are several hundred islands, islets, rocks, atolls, coves, sandbanks and reefs – many of which are uninhabited, some submerged at high tide and others permanently sub-
merged – spread over three chains of islands (Pratas, Paracel and Spratly) and part of the south China Sea. In dispute are several of the islands and reefs, particularly the Spratly Islands – which under international law are part of China’s sovereignty. For its part, the Paracel Islands are claimed by the PRC and Taiwan.
Brunei is the only one of the claimants that does not have a military outpost there, although it claims an EEZ in the southeast-ern part of the Spratly Islands that includes the uninhabited Louisa reef. Cf. TÔMÉ, Louis – “Seas of China...”.


100 In April 2020, the PRC’ State Council announced the creation of two new municipal districts, both belonging to the city hall of Sansha city and Hainan Province: the Xisha district, based on Woody Island and managing the whole of the Paracel Islands and also on what the Chinese call the Zhongsha Islands to refer to the Scarborough Reef and the Macclesfield Bank; and the Nansha District, based on Fiery Cross Reef and managing the whole Spratly Islands. Cf. Japan, MINISTRY OF DEFENSE – Defense of Japan, pp. 71-79; and UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE – Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2021, pp. 97-106.

101 Cf. TÔMÉ, Louis – “Seas of China...”.


104 Xi, Jinping – «Speech at gathering marking 40th anniversary of message to compatriots in Taiwan». January 2, 2019.

105 Xi, Jinping – «Speech at a ceremony marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China».


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FU, Ying – Speech by the Chairwoman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chinese National People’s Congress at the 52th Munich Security Conference, February 13, 2016.


BOOK REVIEW
The idea that there is a clear and unequivocal link between health and safety issues is now beyond dispute. The Covid-19 pandemic is part of a long list of epidemic outbreaks at national, regional or global level whose political, social and economic implications have become increasingly evident. In this sense, episodes such as the epidemics of SARS and MERS or the Ebola outbreaks have contributed to reinforce this idea. This is not, however, a recent process. It was only in the past few decades that researchers have begun to look more systematically into the different aspects that make up the link between health and safety, whether in their global, international, regional, national, or even societal and human dimensions. It is precisely in the scope of this literature that João Nunes’ book falls under, published by Routledge in 2014: Security, Emancipation and the Politics of Health: A New Theoretical Perspective. Composed of six chapters and organized into two distinct parts, it offers one of the most sophisticated and important contributions to the study of the relationship between security and health, providing a new understanding of this topic and opening new lines of research for the future. The first part of the book puts forward a new theoretical perspective for the study of security and the second applies this perspective to three important themes of global health: the construction of health...
as a political problem, the effects of this process on the reconfiguration of society, institutions, practices and subjectivities, and, finally, the inherent potential of an emancipatory reading of the relationship between health and security. Given its theoretical depth and the current relevance of health issues to the global security agenda, its argument deserves an analysis guided by the three major debates to which it contributes: critical security studies, theory of security as emancipation, and global health.

**FOR AN INTEGRATED VIEW OF CRITICAL SECURITY STUDIES**

Three major axes guide the main argument of this book and position its contribution to literature. The first has to do with the purpose underlying the emergence and consolidation of Critical Security Studies. Over the past three decades, the agenda of this discipline has been shared by two distinct readings. The first conceptualizes the critical perspective of security in a broadly negative sense, that is, its core objective is to deconstruct the authorization of new objects, referents, logics and security practices and to highlight its historical, social, economic and political impact. In contrast, the second reading offers us a more positive or reconstructive meaning for this agenda, focusing on locating and promoting alternative security practices and discourses, which may contribute to reducing systemic inequalities and promoting the thriving of humankind, both locally and globally. However, as the author points out, the result of this division has been the reification of a negative view of security within Critical Security Studies, where this concept has become systematically associated with a logic of violence and exclusion, suspension of democracy and denial of the values and rights underlying it. Thus, the preponderance of a negative interpretation of security not only contributed to cut short the dialogue between different critical perspectives, but also significantly limited the potential contribution of this project, reifying the two agendas as opposed and irreconcilable.

For João Nunes, resolving this impasse implies reconsidering the motivation underpinning Critical Security Studies. In his view, this commitment does not lie in mere opposition to positivism or in an aversion to realistic approaches to security. Instead, the cross-cutting feature of the critical project is a shared interest in scrutinizing the different political dimensions of security, from its assumptions to its operationalization, effects, limits and possibilities. The emergence of the critical project thus materializes a rupture with the traditional paradigm, but only in the sense that security studies cease to take on a reactive character and develop instead an essentially reflective posture. In other words, the critical turning point signals a growing trend within Security Studies by rejecting pre-defined ideas about security risks and threats. Within the critical debate, security studies scholars are no longer merely interested in redefining the notion of security or discussing who should be protected, how, by whom and why. Instead, they want to answer a far broader and also more sophisticated set of ques-
tions: how security is constituted and with what effects, but also how security should be practiced and what possibilities are there for its transformation⁴. The critical project therefore involves an analytical, normative and transformative commitment. The first central contribution of the book is to demonstrate that to expand the potential of this project it is necessary to adopt an integrated and cumulative reading of these three dimensions and that this can only be achieved through closer interaction between deconstructive and reconstructive efforts, articulated around their common purpose: the politicization of security.

FOR A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE OF INSECURITY

It is in the wake of this argument that the second contribution falls into place. For João Nunes, while the deconstructive agenda has been systematically developed over the last decades, the reconstructive dimension still lacks the same level of detail and attention, something that not only hampers the reach of Critical Security Studies, but also calls into question the project as a whole.⁵ As an answer, the book offers a reinterpretation of the theory of security as emancipation, an approach according to which the function of critique must permeate the inquiry into existing power asymmetries and contribute, through immanent critique, to its transformation⁶. By reconsidering the individual as the only legitimate referent of security and insecurity as a starting point for the critique, this approach is in a particularly advantageous position to reconcile deconstructive and reconstructive agendas. However, as the author points out, in its current configuration, the theory of security does not yet possess the necessary tools to translate this ambition from theory into practice. This is one of the core goals of this work, to offer an approach that corrects some limitations of security as emancipation and that reflects on the opportunities already in place to overcome them. The book performs this exercise in three distinct movements.

First, the author shows how this theory still preserves an unsophisticated view of the reality of insecurity. His suggestion is to reassess the insecurity that afflicts the most vulnerable groups as the result of a political process and, in this sense, to engage more systematically with the set of processes through which they materialize and are made intelligible, the ideas and practices through which they are represented and problematized, as well as the way that the answers given to this problem are authorized as being necessary and legitimate⁷. Next, the book questions the trend of security as emancipation to define insecurity, its analytical starting point, based on the experience of the victims. Without calling into question the added value of this strategy, João Nunes suggests that it should be integrated into a broader analysis encompassing the processes through which narratives about security replicate certain subjectivities as desirable to the detriment of others. Finally, the author reexamines the notion of power in the theory of security as emancipation, offering a theoretical synthesis articulating three different interpretations of this concept.
to develop a multidimensional perspective of power as domination. Instead of advancing a preconception of power and its effects, this approach explores the different articulations and manifestations of power in specific contexts and, with this starting point, discloses the processes through which it materializes in relations of domination and subordination, thus contributing to placing certain groups and individuals in a position of vulnerability and systemic disadvantage.

This new conception of power allows this theory to expand its capacity to identify the structures and processes that naturalize insecurity, to define the specific meaning of emancipation in different contexts and, therefore, to identify the actors best positioned to promote it. In addition to the analytical and normative benefits, each chapter also explores the opportunities that result from these revaluations, underlining the importance of including in a more systematic way practices of resistance, contestation and subversion in the agenda of security as emancipation.

**FOR AN EMANCIPATORY ANALYSIS OF HEALTH**

Despite the growing importance of the relationship between health and security in the global agenda, both its specific meaning and its practices are not something rigid and predetermined, but rather the product of certain discourses and social and political practices. In other words, the global health or public health approaches that are implemented today derive from a historical process through which different interpretations of health and security have been articulated and challenged, certain actors and ideas have been authorized or marginalized, and certain social and political institutions have been reconfigured. The way health problems are constituted as security issues circumscribes the type of policies and practices that can be adopted, defines the values and individuals that must be safeguarded, and establishes who has the responsibility and authority to protect them. But as the author argues throughout the second part, the construction of health as a security problem is also a political process and, for this reason, open to challenge and modification. The logic of security has an undeniable impact on this process, but there is nothing to prevent health security practices or global public health from contributing to reduce relations of domination and insecurity, contrary to what much of the literature on the subject suggests. What this book adds is the possibility of analyzing each of the dimensions of this process in an integrated and cumulative way, showing how the very idea of security and the theory of security as emancipation offer a advantageous starting point to examine the construction and reconstruction of global health. This is the argument that guides the second part of the book, in which three central dimensions of health are explored. At first, João Nunes uses the perspective previously developed to question the social and political construction of health, demonstrating how the notion of global health has historically been linked to a logic of security based on an imaginary of fear and conveyed by a specific vocabulary articu-
lated through notions such as contagion and infection which, in turn, contribute to propagate a generalized sense of anxiety, dread and insecurity in society. In few situations this is as clearly patent as in the illustration used by the author, focusing on the role of medical discourse in the construction of immigration policies and in the sedimentation of prejudices towards immigrants, often categorized as potential risks to society.

Secondly, the author addresses the effects of the constitution of health as a problem, showing how its association with an imaginary of insecurity contributes to reproduce and transform certain social relationships and subjectivities and, in that manner, redefine the limits of the political community. In addition to discussing the historical function of medical knowledge in the reconfiguration of the State and society, this chapter also illustrates the social and political effects of tropical medicine, which has played a decisive role in the establishment of colonial practices and relations and, concomitantly, in the reification of native peoples as potential hotspots of contagion and insecurity.

Finally, the book addresses the contextual and contingent nature of health practices and their transformative potential. Here, the author uses the idea of “health as a bridge to peace” to illustrate how health ideas and practices can, in certain contexts and circumstances, contribute to the reduction of violence and insecurity. In addition, he elaborates a series of criteria and questions that allow us to understand in which specific cases and conditions health practices can contribute to an emancipatory logic, also indicating the importance of social health movements, strongly focused on democratizing access to health and on articulating alternative, more inclusive and participative views of health problems and of the most appropriate answers to these questions.

In sum, João Nunes’ book represents one of the most important, sophisticated and original contributions of a Portuguese researcher for International Relations. His argument not only offers an innovative reading of Critical Security Studies, but also places the theory of security as emancipation at the center of the debate on the health-security nexus. No less relevant, this work advances a critical and emancipatory reading of this theme that offers us a number of observations crucial to the current conjuncture. In a context in which health issues are increasingly global issues, it is essential to consider the extent to which the practices and discourses through which this process is authorized contribute to reifying the stigma on foreign groups and individuals, historically placed in a position of greater vulnerability, thereby expanding their insecurity and exclusion. On the other hand, by highlighting the historical role of tropical medicine as an instrument of power and domination, this book also alerts us to the lingering preponderance of these assumptions over ideas and practices that are now mobilized in the name of global health*. Finally, it illustrates in a sophisticated and accessible way the possibilities already at hand to develop an emancipatory practice of health security, emphasizing the central role of social movements and the contribu-
tion that Security Studies can make to this process. In an environment in which so many experts rush to say that microbes do not respect borders, the present book brings a truly innovative argument: it shows how health practices often play a central role in their constitution. It also challenges us to reflect on health beyond the themes that are already consolidated in the security agenda, to study the conditions in which the sedimentation of the health-security nexus might contribute to reducing global and local inequalities and, not least, to study the actors, ideas and institutions that are best positioned to promote this process.

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ENDNOTES

1 A Portuguese version of this book review was first published in Relações Internacionais, No. 65, 2020.


5 The need to develop more systematically the ethical and normative dimension of safety studies has since been a central topic for the most recent debates. Nyman, Jonna; BURKE, Anthony – Ethical Security Studies: A New Research Agenda. London: Routledge, 2016.


8 An excellent example of how the idea of power as domination can be applied to health issues is offered in NUNES, John – “Questioning health security: insecurity and domination in world politics”. In Review of International Studies. Vol. 40, No. 5, 2014, pp. 939–960.


The Portuguese at War: From the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day aims to outline an overview of Portugal’s military history from the beginning of the 19th century to the present day without, however, embarking on any exercise of controversy with the published works on the subject. On the contrary, Nuno Severiano Teixeira’s arguments for each of the periods under analysis are supported by the extensive bibliography used (17 of the 259 pages), which also serves as a list of must-read books. Studying the military institution from a historical perspective, analyzing the international social, political, economic and political context helps us to understand how those factors have influenced each other and how important they are in the history of nations. The dynamics resulting from regime changes, regime consolidation, internal social and political conflicts, international situation and position, national strategy and economic and financial situation of a country directly influence the military ethos and the way it expresses itself in politics and campaigns. The link between the military institution and all the factors and circumstances that affect it presented different features in each of the periods, which underlines the importance of the historical analysis undertaken by the author. Even within each political regime the behavior of the institution was not varying, just see the fluctuations during the period of Estado Novo, which the author addresses when dwelling on the Civil War of Spain, in the NATO accession and in the wars of decolonization. The book is divided into eight chapters, which correspond to the periods in which the Armed Forces accompanied the unfolding of an international conflict (chapter 5 – “Estado Novo and the Second World War”, and chapter 6 – “The Cold War and NATO”), were directly or indirectly involved...
in internal conflicts (chapter 1 – “Between Liberal Revolution and Civil Wars”) and in military campaign (chapter 2 – “Building the African Empire”; chapter 3 – “The Republic and the Great War”; chapter 4 – “Portugal and the Spanish Civil War”; chapter 7 – “The End of Empire and the Decolonization Wars”; chapter 8 – “From the War Campaigns to Peacekeeping Operations”). The author provides an excellent framework of the context influencing how politics evolve with direct implication in the military institution. At this point, we have clear evidence of the relationship between politics and war, in line with Clausewitz’s famous aphorism and which gives meaning to the title of the book.

Nuno Severiano Teixeira is Full Professor at NOVA-FCSH and director of the Portuguese Institute of International Relations of NOVA University Lisbon. He is one of the most reputed authors in the area of military history, with extensive published work, having been coordinator of two works of Portuguese military history, the last of which, dated 2017, elaborated together with João Gouveia Monteiro and Francisco Contente Domingues, and encompassing a Portuguese version of this book. The latter is addressed to English-speaking readers and the clear writing, its organization and the questions formulated by the author in each chapter to guide the reader’s focus help us to understand the work’s contribution military history, which for many years was treated as a poor relation of general history.

Of exceptional quality and accuracy, the book presents us with a historical perspective of the military institution in Portugal in the last two hundred years, with emphasis on the recruitment systems, composition, organization and apparatus of the Armed Forces, the evolution of technology and armaments, tactics and military operations. Although the book’s title suggests an analysis of the “grammar of war”, it is, in fact, essentially concerned with carrying out a historical analysis of “war” in its national and international political-strategic, social, economic and even public opinion context. As it is presented, the Severiano Teixeira’s tome is a masterful synthesis of the centrality of the ethos of the military institution in Portugal, which is reason enough for reading it with keen interest.

The book is an excellent contribution to securing a status for military history far beyond a subdivision of history, of the history of battles, commanders, tactics or other piecemeal elements linked to the military institution. It is a broad-spectrum document in which the military institution, historical events, organizational models and human behavior, for example, can be understood, analyzed and framed in an integrated perspective, granting military history the analytical exercise of national and international political dynamics, social phenomena, economy, culture, integrated in an evolutionary scale of military systems in the “long term”. The historical analysis performed lessens the conceptual problem of the historical method, which consists in not possessing methodological instruments that place the facts in the specific situation (experience) of the moment of the event in order to test the hypotheses, reformulate them and present conclusions.
that are valid and tendentially universal. Nuno Severiano Teixeira overcomes by providing an excellent framework for each period analyzed, which enables us to discern the uniqueness of each event and how it is linked to the “short term” and the “long term” of the history of Portugal. The author does not put forward an aggregating thesis of the arguments defended in each chapter, but does not steer clear of the two anchors of Portugal’s history in the last two hundred years: the role of the Armed Forces in the change and consolidation of regimes; and the colonial factor, which from the end of the 19th century becomes the main link between war and politics in Portugal, an exception being only a few moments during World War II. Captured in its colonial dimension, national politics and political-strategic options are a factor of regime reinforcement and change, of an imaginary around national greatness and, above all, a motive for the most varied defense policies. These have translated into policies and systems of recruitment, organization and structure of the Armed Forced, technological development, science and art of war, doctrines, equipment and models of training and instruction, whose maximum expression is reached between 1961 and 1974. Also worth noting is the fact that the book encompasses the contemporary period of late 20th-century and early 21st-century. Chapter 8 examines the period of regime change and democratic consolidation, explaining how the subordination of the Armed Forces to political power and the geopolitical changes resulting from the end of the Cold War led the Portuguese Armed Forces to take on a mission of reinforcement and articulation with foreign policy, which changes Portugal from a mere consumer of international security (the case of the 1960s and 1970s), into an active producer of international security, widely recognized and with more international weight than its apparent political and economic power seem to warrant. Just a final remark on the book’s internal structure. It is understandable that Nuno Severiano Teixeira does not propose to us an explanatory thesis of the role of the military institution in the period in assessment; he could, however, have chosen to offer us a conclusion beyond a mere summary of the arguments dealt with in each chapter and that which might give an outline of the constant factors over time and, in that sense, provide a valuable hint at the future of the military institution in Portugal.
1 A Portuguese version of this book review was first published in Relações Internacionais, No. 67, 2020.
The latest volume of the collection “European Administrative Governance”, published by Palgrave Macmillan and penned by Adrienne Héritier, Katharina L. Meissner, Catherine Moury and Magnus G. Schoeller, discusses the European Parliament’s (EP) strategies of institutional self-empowerment (hereinafter, strategies) in relation to the European Commission and the Council of the European Union, in the procedural context of the European Union (EU). Systematically, the authors begin by creating a theoretical model which they test over six empirical chapters. As proposed by the editors of the collection, we are faced with in-depth knowledge of the specific circumstances of the cases used in support of a causal and explanatory argument – this is what we find in European Parliament Ascendant. This book is not a manual, it’s a study. In the first pages, we realize that this is an irreprehensible example of how to carry out a qualitative research project in the most restricted epistemological frontiers of contemporary political science: in a highly-qualified discourse in which it is evident the methodological rigor and scientific honesty, indisputable the timeliness of the theme and proven the usefulness of the issues it raises, the book offers the reader, in its arguments and conclusions, a competent description revealing the applicability of a parsimonious typology, offering at the same time encouragement for future analysis or even political action. A book by political scientists for political scientists – at
best for specialized students or professional politicians – without being, at any time, pretentious or dull.

**CONJECTURES**

The main theoretical contribution of the work to pertaining literature is the precise categorization of the multiple parliamentarization strategies of European decision-making processes adopted by the Parliament itself, counteracting the path dependency mechanisms generated by written law and procedural habits. One of the starting points of the initial theoretical chapter is neo-institutional rationalism in which, the authors say, the excavation of such strategies is yet to be done. The ‘hypotheses’ or ‘conjectures’ which *ad hoc* fall within what is its preferred theoretical body – the theory of rational choice – validate, in abstract terms, a typology of strategies carried out by Parliament in the context of European politics: purposeful *deferment* of an opinion; thematic *link*, exchanging political concessions for future powers; *sectoral* link, threatening to undermine negotiations in another arena; *alliances* with the executive of member states, national parliaments or non-majority actors; *unilateral* actions, making it difficult to return to the *status quo ante*; and *sanctions*, legal and provided. The reverse, that is, a non-inductive theoretical edification, occurs with the other strategies, in turn coming from the normative aspect of social constructivism applied to institutional relations. Through a brief analysis of the logics of constructivist argumentation and rhetoric, such as the archetypal search for truth as a discursive value and intolerance in the face of conscious incoherence, the authors draw deductively the last three strategies: *expert assessment*, providing and forcing consultation; *blame and shame* in the face of withdrawals of support to the EP; and *mobilization* of external actors or public opinion. Between the rational and normative hypotheses there is a logic of appropriation of values and a relative negotiating power. It is precisely from this friction – as presented by the authors, between rationalism and constructivism – that the first criticism can be directed: the EP’s electoral support base, although present in the last three strategies in an implied way, is too strong not to be featured as underpinning the scale of preferences of the quite complete first list of rational strategies. It is hard to accept that the actors concerned do not believe rationally in their democratic legitimacy and make an exclusively instrumental use of it.

The book, in its following chapters, merely applies – the necessary conditions appraised – the conjectured strategies through the theoretical congruence proven or falsified by process-tracing methods. In short, it tests hypotheses. In certain contexts, under given conditions, certain strategies prove more effective than others. The process, however, is unchanging. The authors present the key concept of *interstitial change* as the cornerstone of one of their main arguments: that in any written norm the EP always pursues its limits and flaws, were not all treaties incomplete contracts. It is in these loopholes that the EP maximizes the law in its favor, causing, through the employment of one or more
of these strategies, indirect changes in the European balance of power. Over time, customary law is, urged by the same EP, converted into a written norm, thus susceptible to being harnessed. It’s a vicious and unbroken cycle.

**THIS TRAIN DOES NOT STOP IN ROME**

The second part of *European Parliament Ascendant* is the most solid of the whole book. In a brief and insightful way, the authors – based on their definition of parliamentary democracy based on the legislative power of parliament, its ability to elect the government and its decisive role in budgetary procedures – present three historical narratives running parallel to the overall integration process. Their purpose, in any case, is to show how the powers of the EP, at the time European Parliamentary Assembly, have not only settled but grown unceasingly since the signing of the Treaty of Rome.

The preference for the theory of rational choice applied to the EU context conveys a message of tangible and official tension between the EP and the Commission or the Council. And, in this way mostly – with opponents on different sides of the barricade, collaborating only in strategic moments – the reader is invited to take the side of the EP; in what has become, through a large part of the book and European institutional history, the struggle for the democratization of negotiation and decision-making bodies.

If we strive for a higher level of abstraction, we can affirm that, in the authors’ rationale, two distinct elements were placed in analytical dialogue: documents (corresponding to critical conjunctures) and subjects (issues or divides). Both, in the right moments of discussion, if tapped by the conjectured strategies in a positive way, led to the strengthening of the EP. Anything goes. Statements, minutes, notes, rules, regulations, drafts, protocols, procedures, projects, amendments, addenda, speeches, resolutions, agreements or treaties. On all occasions – and, justifiably, particularly those which emerged as transformative of the Union’s internal order – the EP sought to incorporate and formalize powers which it possessed informally or wished to possess. From the unsustainability of the Common Agricultural Policy in the 1980s to the discussion of the Multiannual Financial Framework, from the creation of the Common Market to the phases of enlargement to new members, from the fall of the Santer Commission to the creation of a Brexit coordinating position, from the definition of the Ordinary Legislative Procedure to the forced renovation of the Barroso Commission, any subject, especially those with greater public visibility or especially relevant to the effective or symbolic performing capacity of the EP – although the latter of lesser importance for the authors, any sizable material, from Rome to Lisbon, was seen as an opportunity.

The third part of the book is the fieldwork phase. With two general themes, subdivided into highly politicized contemporary case studies, the authors apply the strategies to recent events as if to analyze the current state of affairs. First, driven by the consequences of the financial crisis, they focus on the economic governance of the
Union, particularly the legislative packages (six-pack and two-pack), the European Fiscal Pact, the European Financial Stability Mechanism and the Banking Union. Finally, they move on to the external agreements under the Common Commercial Policy, dealing in detail with the role of the EP in the agreement with the SWIFT cooperative, in the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), in the controversial Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and in the free trade agreement between the Union and Singapore (EUSFTA). For each example, we are confronted with the strategies used – often corroborated by interviews with central decision-making actors– and their possible (in)success in strengthening the formal and formal powers of the EP.

DEMOCRACY?
The authors propose, in a discreet and subliminal tone, an alternative path to address EU’s democratic deficit. It may not be the most efficient one, but it is undoubtedly the most representative of all. The road is long, and its end is not in sight. From the history of defeats and victories in the application of strategies, once can surmise that there is much be accomplished. Spitzenkandidaten’s plan failed. If we currently recognize in the EP a de facto legislative impetus in cultural matters or others not directly affecting the economies of the Member States, the formal right to legislative initiative reserved for the Commission is completely absent. A similar situation occurs with the Council and the Budget. The examples repeat themselves and the pervasive feeling is the same. Why does it seem, then, as the authors mention en passant in the conclusion, that we are moving more quickly towards a deliberative democracy legitimized by the EP than towards a parliamentary democracy? The book’s biggest fault, albeit obvious and close to basic, is that the authors see the EP as a single actor. Unlike the methodological individualism often associated with rational choice, the plot’s main character is a collective actor, an institution. We can always discuss the rationality of an institution, but a priori, it is parliamentarians, committees or parties who are the real interlocutors and applicators of the strategies that form the basis this study. There is an analytical favoring of structural factors to the detriment of tangible agents. It is argued how the “attempts” at top-down democracy are failing because they do not find correspondence at the bases – one only has to observe the abstention in elections from 1979 to 2019. The EP’s closed lists are denounced for punishing or rewarding the parties according to their national performance. Deliberative bodies are accused of overriding the representative ones. The problem is that these accurate criticisms, along with others, arise from a lack of understanding of the central role of European political parties and political groups in mediating the interests of citizenship and, consequently, of popular legitimacy.

In order to gauge how far in the spectrum of parliamentarism does the EU stand, there are countless comparations between the structural role of the EP and its national counterparts in the path of parliamentary democracy, the authors ultimately overlap-
ping heterogeneous party categories; that is, anti-system parties at national level, although of increasing weight in recent years and of varying size depending on the country, constitute still a marginal or at least secondary fraction of party representation. In other parties, however, there is an explicit, constitutional, or tacit, normative, understanding of the ontological pillars of democracy. The same is not the case at European level. If, on the one hand, we have a proportionate expansion of the Eurosceptic and/or anti-systemic representation in the EP, on the other hand, national parties, even the more cartelized ones, which shape the European political groups, do not agree with each other when it comes to how to or why at all move forward in the integrative axis in the Union. It would be difficult to argue that any of them is not favorable more “democracy”, however, as if this concept were not being sufficiently stretched, molded and fiddled with on its own, adding to it the adjective “European” will only make for greater discord. The same applies to executives sitting at the Council table. The Union’s checks and balances, despite consolidating the mechanisms of mutual accountability, have now become denser and more opaque. The system is so peculiar that it would more quickly make sense to have in the Council’s powers a collective head of state, not elected by the Parliament, and in the Commission a government actually “elected” or “approved” by the EP, calling the EU a semi-presidential democracy. But not even this category is fair or indeed valid. This is a unique case.

**PLEASE FINISH, MR. MEP**

Despite other criticisms that might be directed at the macro nature of the institutional understanding of the EP, we shall end with a positive note. The book by Adrienne Hérîtier, Katharina L. Meissner, Catherine Mouri and Magnus G. Schoeller is endowed with overall undeniable elegance in the analysis it carries out, for its conceptual innovation and the not only possible but also recommended applicability of their strategies to other national parliamentary cases. Those are certainly not single instances. We recommend the reading of European Parliament Ascendant to all social scientists who are interested in Union politics in general or who simply enjoy the prospect of acquainting themselves with the outcome of a remarkable research in Political Science. European democracy has become, with a small 200-page step, richer and larger.
A Portuguese version of this book review was first published in Relações Internacionais, No. 64, 2019.
Anywhere the Western Winds Blow'
Diogo Roque

This book by Valentim Alexandre, retired researcher of Instituto de Ciências Sociais (ICS-UL) and the author of reference works on Portuguese colonialism, addresses a historical time period that may be deemed the onset of decolonization; or, put differently, the process that will lead to decolonization. In the decade and a half in question, Valentim Alexandre analyses, debates and describes the subject with great precision.

The “winds” referred to in the title of the work, allusive to the famous “winds of change” mentioned by the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in 1960, first in a speech in Accra and later in Cape Town, relate to the changes that have been felt in the old new territories of the West. The fifteen years preceding Macmillan’s speech correspond to a time when the sovereignties of colonial territories were already under threat. As Valentine Alexander points out, the European powers were not taken by surprise. That is, in a way and ironically, Macmillan does not inaugurate or prophesy anything, because the wind had long been felt, first in Asia and subsequently in Africa.

In turn, the “against” in the title represents the position adopted by the regime in place, which was endorsed elsewhere. Portugal was not alone, nor did it ignore the new times. Salazar, in a speech delivered in 1957, spoke of the “inclemency of our time” that “would prevent us from carrying out our program in Africa”, showing his awareness of what was coming. Likewise,
the major European colonial powers France, the United Kingdom and Belgium, as Valentine Alexandre establishes, sought to maintain their possessions in the short and medium term and build multiracial societies; the unfolding of events was faster than the scheduled time, forcing the colonial powers to skip steps, a process which Estado Novo resisted (p. 763). The author follows and problematizes the changes which were then felt. In the years after the Second World War, the government’s attention “focused mainly on white settlement and the promotion of the economy, which was finally able to start” (p. 78). The issue of overseas industrialization had not been forgotten (pp. 434-436), although it was not followed up and only with the 1959 development plan did a measure of development in the colonies begin to take place. Legally and constitutionally, it evolved first with the constitutional revision of 1951 and its legislative adaptation of “overseas provinces”, in an attempt to elude the UN and its observations on “non-autonomous territories”, and also with the organic law of the overseas in 1953. The system of control and repression accompanied this process with the gradual implementation of the PIDE in the colonies from 1946. And, ideologically, the mythicization of Luso-Tropicalism was beginning. The military also began to prepare for the changes, as Valentine Alexander tells us, in those provinces which had been practically unguarded until the late 1950s. Shyly and tentatively with Santos Costa, more resolutely with Botelho Moniz, but especially from 1958-1960 with reorganizations of the apparatus adapting it to the realities of the territories. The problem of compulsory or forced labor and compulsory cultures, which, like the indigenous statute regime, all other European colonial powers abolished in the years after World War II, is virtually transversal to all the work. The ILO Forced Labor Convention of 1930 was not respected (although it had been signed by Portugal but only ratified in 1956, the same year when the Indigenous Labor Code was published), as shown by Henrique Galvão’s reports cited throughout the book, which denounced the abuses of colonial authorities that, relying on traditional powers, coercively recruited indigenous people whom they called “volunteers” or ‘hired men’ in exchange for reduced or non-existent salaries. Valentim Alexandre lists a number of attempts that were made to change the situation, which however, amounted to no more than inconsequential intentions or words on paper without effect on the ground, demonstrating great resistance to the abolition of the indigenous statute regime. In fact, the excesses that took place led to situations of human abuse differing little from conditions of modern slavery, especially in São Tomé e Príncipe and Timor. In the remaining cases, abuses would still be less harsh than the conditions faced in compulsory military service, as exemplified by Ghana’s complaint that the “hired men” were threatened with military service, which shows that, as a general rule, compulsory work was preferable to it. The exceptions would obviously be São Tomé and Príncipe and Timor. The book, already reviewed by Diogo Ramada Curto, Augusto Nascimento and
Cláudia Castelo, goes down several paths. In essence, it undertakes a profound and detailed analysis of the regime’s dome, solidly documented especially with recourse to the António Oliveira Salazar archive kept at the National Archives of Torre do Tombo (ANTT). Other sources such as enacted legislation, parliamentary debates and memoirs are also used. But it is fair to say that it is almost always in Salazar’s correspondence and notes that the author wanders, scrutinizes and reflects. A work of in-depth research and analysis, perhaps overly focused on the perspective enabled by a single archive and Salazar’s notes, in which the author, aware of the excessive use of that archive, soon alerts that “this is not a work on Salazar and his politics” (p. 25). In parallel, the author carries out a comparative look on the colonial framework in Portugal and in other powers (France, England and Belgium) which greatly enriches the work and its reading.

**EDDIES**

Portugal’s liaison with countries of the Afro-Asian bloc present in the Bandung Conference with which it has maintained good relations or alliances, the case of Pakistan (Mirza’s visit in 1957), Indonesia (Sukarno’s visit in 1960) and Ethiopia (Selassie’s visit in 1959) is left out. The author also delves little into the other emerging powers driven by expansionist and neocolonial ambitions. African, European and Asian. Perhaps a reflection of a postcolonial field of study still too attached to a view of colonialism as an exclusive feature of Western Europe. It would be advisable to begin to include the analysis of the expansionism and ambition of the USSR, China or India in these realities in order to achieve a better understanding of emerging systems of domination, in a less Eurocentric and more global perspective. The author’s consideration that the indigenous “overwhelming majority of the African population of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea” was subject to forced labor and compulsory cultures (p. 752) seems to be exaggerated, as only part of the population deemed “primitive” was employed, and usually in cotton and cocoa growing areas, diamond mining and public works.

The possibility of a referendum put forward by Salazar to resolve the Goa question, which Valentine Alexander sees as a search for “a path of solution” but will nevertheless amount to no more than “testing the waters” (pp. 694-695), raises interpretations that deserve to be explored. Was there a genuine intention to move forward with an unconstitutional plebiscite or was the solidity of the State’s dome being assayed? Was it pure judiciousness a sign of the statesman’s weakness? Or even, more remotely, the envisaged prospect of a future constitutional change? What might have been the point of letting the cat out of the bag?

An analogy between settlement plans in Angola and Mozambique and the “Nazi Germany’s colonization plans for Eastern Europe” (p. 435) is perhaps the less successful point of the work. The description, offered by Valentine Alexandre, of a “precedent that no observer was aware of in Portugal at this time”, is at best a rather
unscholarly comparison. Why not confront other settlement projects like a kibbutz or a moshav in Palestine? Or any other settlement project founded by any other colonial power in Africa? The similitude between Portuguese and Nazi colonialisms suggested by the author appears to be a truncated debate. The absence of an analysis of the Batepá Massacre in 1953, in the colony of São Tomé and Príncipe, is also noticeable.

THE FRAGILITY OF ENGLISH EXCEPTIONALISM

Valentim Alexandre exposes the tensions created by the new waves of European settlers with the Portuguese-African and assimilated elites, an important part of the colonial administration and bourgeoisie (p. 752). The balance of colonial society shifted with the new settlers occupying the best positions and dominating the economy. The pressure of the mass immigration of European women called into question the myth of miscegenation. And new abuses on indigenous peoples were committed, as criticized by the ethnologist Jorge Dias in a report quoted by the author denouncing the “recent behavior of the settlers, who stray from our traditional indigenous policy, giving rise to abuses” (p. 43) and appealing to the re-education of the settler “teaching him to respect the natives” and to suppress the “use of the difference of skin colors” (p. 401). These relations, although mentioned abundantly throughout the work, are deserving of further reflection, especially with regard to the tensions between central power and settlers for more autonomy and less national integration, and on the issue of assimilated people who, despite encountering competition from European settlers from the 1940s, continued to increase in number and influence as the development of the territory boosted opportunities. The nationalist leaders are the sons of assimilated people who do not see tensions eased with teaching and job opportunities alone. The attempt to build multiracial societies in the new colonies promoted by European and American governments failed. In this project, Portuguese colonies, unlike the others, were not eclipsed by internal factors, but by external reasons. The blowing winds that took effect in other colonies had a different outcome in Portugal. As Valentine Alexander writes, this was partly “because there was no full awareness, abroad, of the central role that the Empire had in the nation’s self-image” (p. 23). The difference between Portugal’s upwind movement and the European powers was resistance. While liberal democracies eventually skipped steps and sacrificed interests of colonial communities, moving directly to the neocolonial paradigm in which the “informal exercise of political and economic influence was more relevant than the sovereignty previously exercised over colonial territories” (p. 764), Portugal, authoritarian in public debate and repression, small in international influence, poor and clinging to the historical consciousness of the “sacred heritage”, could not or did not want to do it. This original and solidly documented research falls into an increasingly rare type of work, regrettably. Throughout its reading, it is notorious how the Portuguese
authorities and Salazar were aware of the swift changes experienced in the colonial empires and the fact that it was only a matter of time before they reached Portugal. Meanwhile, the country adopted a resilient stance, and remained unwavering in its pax lusitana based on a policy of repression and reform, the author concludes. The latter being a genuine effort and not merely instrumental. “Two sides of the same political coin, aimed at preserving national sovereignty over the Empire” (p. 774).

An example of how to conduct sound research, with method and distancing, which makes the author and his work a true milestone. We undoubtedly look forward to the new chapters of this masterful reference work for the study of the colonial theme.

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ENDNOTES

1 A Portuguese version of this book review was first published in Relações Internacionais, No. 66, 2020.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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