

China: Challenging the United States?

The Threat of Offensive Realism in the age of Sino-American Rivalry

Author: Sebastian Galea
Student Number: 569262

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Erasmus University Rotterdam

Supervising Lecturer: Dr. Yuri van Hoef
Second Reader: Professor Dick Douwes

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To Mum and Ollie, thanks for everything.

To Katya, 您帮了我们大忙, 费心了.

Sebastian M. Galea, 28 June 2021

ABSTRACT

Does China pose a threat to the United States? Offensive realism, the theory increasingly on display in Washington and Beijing maintains structural reasons render conflict inevitable, and deteriorating Sino-American relations serve as proof. Analytical eclecticism is employed to disprove offensive realist thinking by analysing contemporary military, economic and domestic issues. A range of primary sources regarding foreign policy from both countries are utilised to assess the Sino-American rivalry, and theories from both countries are employed for a better coloured analysis and understanding of Chinese policy. Offensive realist thinking both creates new tensions and exacerbates existing ones, rendering opportunities for conversation, cooperation and compromise more difficult. Crucially, it overlooks domestic issues in either country, which blinds America to important internal threats, overvalues military and economic ones, while undervaluing issues regarding human rights.

KEYWORDS: *China, America, Sino-American relationship, offensive realism, hegemony, analytical eclecticism, human rights.*

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---------------|--|
| AI | Artificial Intelligence |
| AIIB | Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank |
| BRI | Belt and Road Initiative |
| CCP | Chinese Communist Party |
| CNKI | Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (database) |
| ECSC | European Coal and Steel Community |
| EEZ | Exclusive Economic Zone |
| EU | European Union |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| INSSG | Interim National Security Strategic Guidance |
| IPS | Indo-Pacific Strategy |
| IR | International Relations |
| IRT | International Relations Theory |
| NSS | National Security Strategy |
| NDS | National Defense Strategy |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation Development |
| PRC | People's Republic of China |
| TPP | Trans-Pacific Partnership |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCLOS | United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea |
| US | United States |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |

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Introduction

“Cooperation between China and the United States should be an anchor of global stability and a propellant of world peace” – Xi Jinping, 2013.

“The United States welcomes the rise of a China that is peaceful, stable, prosperous, and a responsible player in global affairs” – Barack Obama, 2015.

***All words like Peace and Love,
all sane affirmative speech,
has been soiled, profaned, debased,
to a horrid mechanical speech.***

W. H. Auden

“We Too Had Known Golden Hours”

‘Does China challenge the US militarily, economically, and by way of its domestic system?’ China’s stability throughout the 2008 global recession which decimated Western economies fundamentally changed China’s perception of itself, increasing confidence in its political and economic model and sparking vociferous debate about its international role.¹ Nye noted this relative strengthening of China led some Chinese policy makers to believe their time as a great power had come.² In the last decade China has been increasingly assertive on the world stage and the world’s attention has moved from the Middle to the Far East, mirroring Obama’s 2012

¹ On Chinese scholars and policymakers debating China’s status and role in the world since 2008: Thomas J. Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015), 3-8; Minghao Zhao, “Is a New Cold War Inevitable? Chinese Perspectives on US–China Strategic Competition” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 12, No. 3 (August 2019): 373; On the financial crash boosting Chinese confidence in their economic and political model: Xiaoyu Pu, “Controversial Identity of a rising China”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 10, No. 2 (May 2017): 147.

² Joseph Nye, “American and Chinese Power after the Financial Crisis”, *The Washington Quarterly* Vol. 33, No. 4 (Autumn 2010): 143-153.

‘Pivot to Asia.’³ The same year saw Xi Jinping’s promotion of the ‘Chinese Dream,’ referring to national glory and prosperity, and an implicit challenge to the faltering ‘American Dream.’⁴ Since Xi Jinping’s 2017 re-election China’s behaviour has grown more belligerent, characterised by ‘wolf warrior diplomacy’ and a new confidence and nationalism expressed in ‘Xi Jinping’s Thought on Diplomacy,’ adopted in 2018.⁵ Most polled Americans now view China as a threat, and though Donald Trump was defeated in November concern about China was a bipartisan topic, and the rivalry is expanding to new frontiers, the last G7 summit planning huge spending plans to counteract China’s infrastructural and ideational projects.⁶

Yoder describes the current ‘strategy of unconditional containment,’ and Zhao claims ‘competition—comprehensive, long-term, and global’ captures the current US zeitgeist.⁷ Growing Sinophobia is visible in numerous state documents⁸, espoused by politicians⁹ and

³ The term first appeared in: Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>.

⁴ Robert Lawrence Kuhn, “Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream”, *The New York Times*, June 4, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/05/opinion/global/xi-jinpings-chinese-dream.html>; Xuetong Yan, “From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 7, No. 2, (April 2014): 153-182.

⁵ Zhiqun Zhu, “Interpreting China’s ‘Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy’”, *The Diplomat*, May 15, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/interpreting-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>; Jiechi Yang, “Studying General Secretary Xi Jinping’s Thought on Diplomacy”, *Qiushi*, October 2017, http://english.qstheory.cn/2017-11/28/c_1122007258.htm.

⁶ Polls on rising dislike and fear of China among American citizens: Laura Silver, Kat Devlin and Christine Huang, “U.S. Views of China Turn Sharply Negative Amid Trade Tensions”, *Pew Research Centre*, August 13, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/08/13/u-s-views-of-china-turn-sharply-negative-amid-trade-tensions/>; Bradley A. Thayer and Lianchao Han, “Biden must mobilize America to counter the China threat”, *The Hill*, December 21, 2020, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/530526-biden-must-mobilize-america-to-counter-the-china-threat>.

⁷ Brandon K. Yoder, “How Credible are China’s Foreign Policy Signals? IR Theory and the Debate about China’s Intentions,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 13, No. 4 (December 2020): 602; Zhao, “Is a New Cold War Inevitable?”, 372.

⁸ **State Documents:** (Transcript of Donald Trump’s 2017 National Security Strategy. Original copy taken down from the White House and NSS archive websites). “Brookings experts on Trump’s National Security Strategy”, *Brookings Institute*, December 21, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/brookings-experts-on-trumps-national-security-strategy/>; Jim Mattis, “Summary of the 2018 National Defence Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge”, *Department of Defence*, January 19, 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>; “2020 Annual Report to Congress”, *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, December 1, 2020, <https://www.uscc.gov/annual-report/2020-annual-report-congress>.

⁹ **Politicians:** Adam Shaw, “Pompeo warns of Chinese threat to US colleges, says many ‘basically bought’ by Beijing”, *Fox News*, December 9, 2020, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/pompeo-chinese-threat-us-colleges-beijing>; Catie Edmondson, “China Hawks See Opening to Push for Punitive Measures Against a Nation”, *The New York Times*, April 14, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/10/us/politics/coronavirus-congress-china.html>; Jonathan Martin and Maggie Haberman, “G.O.P. Aiming to Make China the Scapegoat”, *The New York Times*, April 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/18/us/politics/trump-china-virus.htm>; Josh Hawley, “End ‘Forever Wars’ and Face China’s Threat”, *The Wall Street Journal*, November 24, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/end-forever-wars-and-face-chinas-threat-11574634656>; “Vice President Mike Pence’s Remarks on the Administration’s Policy Towards China”, *Hudson Institute*, October 4, 2018, <https://www.hudson.org/events/1610-vice-president-mike-pence-s-remarks-on-the-administration-s-policy-towards-china102018>.

policy makers¹⁰, and displayed in reportage which – implicitly or explicitly – adheres to offensive realist doctrine.¹¹ Despite varied academic opinion, Zhao Tingyang describes an approaching consensus in Washington which heeds the words of the hawkish.¹² These voices make violence more likely, spread fear and exacerbate already tense relations. This thesis examines the perceived military and economic threat before analysing domestic issues, overlooked by offensive realists.¹³ While analysing the Chinese threat, offensive realism draws the eye to how the US threatens itself, due to the theory’s blinkered doctrine. While China may be pursuing regional hegemony, the drastic action prescribed is unnecessary.¹⁴ The Sino-American relationship largely defines the structure of the international system and therefore confers a special responsibility of acting in the interests of the wider international community.

Research Question

‘Does China challenge America militarily, economically, and by way of its domestic system?’

This thesis employs analytical eclecticism to disprove offensive realist thinking by analysing contemporary military, economic and domestic issues. The hypothesis is that even if China’s strategy is one of power maximisation, an offensive realist response is ultimately self-sabotaging. Much contemporary American thinking about China, characterised best by authors

¹⁰ **Policy makers & diplomats:** “Dealing with China, America Goes for Confucian Honesty”, *The Economist*, October 4, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/china/2018/10/04/dealing-with-china-america-goes-for-confucianhonesty>; Ely Ratner, “The China Challenge, Part I: Economic Coercion as Statecraft”, *Testimony before US Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, July 24, 2018, https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/072418_Ratner_Testimony.pdf; Aaron L. Friedberg, “Strategic Competition with China”, *Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee*, February 15, 2018, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20180215/106848/HHRG-115-AS00-Wstate-FriedbergA-20180215.pdf>; Terri Moon Cronk, “China Poses Largest Long-Term Threat to U.S., DOD Policy Chief Says”, *U.S. Department of Defence*, September 23, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1968704/china-poses-largest-long-term-threat-to-us-dod-policy-chief-says/>.

¹¹ **Reportage:** Fareed Zakaria, “The New China Scare: Why America Shouldn’t Panic About Its Latest Challenger”, *Foreign Affairs*, December 6, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-12-06/new-china-scare>; Ana Swanson, “A New Red Scare Is Reshaping Washington”, *The New York Times*, July 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/20/us/politics/china-red-scare-washington.html>; Odd Arne Westad, “The Sources of Chinese Conduct: Are Washington and Beijing Fighting a New Cold War?”, *Foreign Affairs*, August 12, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-08-12/sources-chinese-conduct>; Nikki Haley, “How to Confront an Advancing Threat From China: Getting Tough on Trade Is Just the First Step”, *Foreign Affairs*, July 18, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-07-18/how-confront-advancing-threat-china>.

¹² Zhao, “Is a New Cold War Inevitable?”, 373.

¹³ John J. Mearsheimer, “Structural Realism” in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (Oxford University Press, 2016), 52.

¹⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 223; Ionut Popescu, “American Grand Strategy and the Rise of Offensive Realism”, *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 135, No. 4 (September 2019): 375-405.

such as Mearsheimer and Popescu, risks conflict while rendering US consternation hypocritical and misplaced.¹⁵

Chapters 2 and 3 on the military and economic rivalry reflect offensive realism's hard power focus, enabling analysis on contemporary geo-political hotspots such as the trade war and South China Sea. Chapter 4 examines both countries domestically, overlooked in offensive realist analysis and again allowing inspection of important areas, such as human rights violations in China, and US domestic unrest.* Finally, two US futures are analysed, the first domestically reformed and internationally revitalised, and the second unreformed and susceptible to turmoil and tyranny, utilising classical realist analysis regarding the link between domestic and international politics.¹⁶ It is written in such a way that the chapters can be read as three academic articles, together answering my overall research question.

This tripartite structure mirrors the liberal internationalist grand strategy set out by Brooks, Ikenberry and Wohlforth when advocating – against retrenchment – for a three-tier strategy involving managing national security threats, promoting a global liberal economic order, and improving the global institutional order to secure necessary interstate cooperation.¹⁷ This thesis shows offensive realist thinking left America vulnerable, caused an internecine Sino-American economic conflict carrying extensive military risk, and exacerbated domestic fissures, incalculably damaging America. In other words, 'security, prosperity, and domestic liberty' is the framework employed to analyse offensive realism's failings.¹⁸

Structure

Chapter 2 answers 'Does China challenge the US militarily?' It claims China's strategic thinking represents offensive realism, the 'Century of Humiliation' and Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' motivating military and economic supremacy.¹⁹ I extend Ionut Popescu's analysis of Trump's offensive realist grand strategy, expanding zero-sum relations from great-power rivals to allies and middling powers, repelling allies and strengthening China's military challenge.²⁰ Responses to Biden's election from world leaders are argued to reflect a desire for US

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Richard Ned Lebow, "Classical Realism", 37.

¹⁷ Stephen G. Brooks, John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment," *International Security* Vol. 37, No. 3 (2012): 7-51.

¹⁸ Ibid, 11.

¹⁹ See footnote 5.

²⁰ Popescu, "American Grand Strategy", 375-405.

* At the time of writing Donald Trump was refusing to guarantee a peaceful transfer of power.

leadership, and China's response to this indicates considerable consternation over a united liberal coalition.

Chapter 3 analyses the trade war, financial institutions and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to answer 'Does China challenge the US economically?' I utilise David Lake's analysis of the link between economic decoupling and war as proof of offensive realist folly, and while Chinese economic practice is often questionable, the US taught China much of the unilateralism it now uses against them. The BRI – a conscious creation of an economic sphere outside American control – was incentivised by the refusal of the US to accommodate China, and I utilise Mahbubani's concept of a changing world and static world order to illustrate China's economic motivations.²¹ The BRI may in time represent a simultaneous economic, military, ideational and geopolitical challenge, though its effectiveness is currently questionable.²² I update Ikenberry's concept of binding to suggest a de-escalation of the techno-economic dimension of the Sino-American rivalry, arguing that agreeing on shared goals could precede greater cooperation.

Chapter 4 claims China's domestic system reveals their behaviour when strong and analyses how they promote their model for export, to answer 'Does China's domestic system challenge the US?' I reverse classical realist thinking to show how domestic politics can be manifested from above with the requisite technology, analysing how *Tianxia* provides a theoretical underpinning for dystopian uniformity. I use China's periphery as a chilling case-study, contributing to Hun Joon Kim's critique of Chinese IR.²³ This question is then reversed, allowing for American introspection, asking whether America's internal divisions represent a greater threat to the liberal world, overlooked – and I claim exacerbated by – offensive realism, exemplified under Trump's tenure, during which offensive realism intensified domestic fissures, almost torpedoing the liberal internationalist project.

²¹ On financial competition see: Rudolf Moritz, "China's shadow world order", in *Connectivity Wars: Why Migration, Finance and Trade are the Geo-economic Battlegrounds of the Future*, ed. Mark Leonard (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2016): 83-92; Kishore Mahbubani, "Can the world order catch up with the world?", *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, January 17, 2020, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/can-the-world-order-catch-up-with-the-world/>; On the BRI and Indo-Pacific Strategy: Zhao, "Is a New Cold War Inevitable?", 384.

²² Tanner Greer, "One Belt, One Road, One Big Mistake", *Foreign Policy*, December 6, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/12/06/bri-china-belt-road-initiative-blunder/>; Lee Jones, "China's Belt and Road Initiative Is a Mess, Not a Master Plan", *Foreign Policy*, October 9, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/10/09/china-belt-and-road-initiative-mess-not-master-plan/>.

²³ Hun Joon Kim, "Will IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics be a Powerful Alternative?", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 9, No. 1, (January 2016): 75.

Chapter 1

Theory & Method

1.1 Main Theoretical Concepts

This thesis is predicated on the assumption that all-encompassing theories are inherently dangerous. While offensive realism exemplifies this, concern regarding absolutist thinking is extended to reliance on any one theory. Therefore, the thesis utilises Peter Katzenstein's framework of analytical eclecticism, employing 'middle-range theoretical arguments that potentially speak to concrete issues of policy and practice,' addressing complex problems and combining analyses from fields usually used in isolation.²⁴ This thesis rejects 'excessive simplifications which fail to grasp real complexities,' and hermetic adherence to a single theory.²⁵ Analytical eclecticism is 'oriented more toward social commentary and political action than toward inter-paradigm debates,' and this thesis is intended to affect policy more than to contribute to theoretical debates in IR.²⁶

The main theory criticized in this thesis is offensive realism. Its creator, John Mearsheimer, argues an anarchical world binds great powers in a ceaseless power-maximising competition, and in 2018 updated his argument for China, writing that the US should 'make sure that no other power dominates its region.'²⁷ The theory is not structural but tautological – a choice made and applied in error. If acted upon, states are bound into a pattern of escalation in which cooperative opportunities are limited and the situation must deteriorate, forcing an equal and necessary reaction from the rising power. This thesis claims applying offensive

²⁴ Peter J. Katzenstein and Nobuo Okawara. "Japan, Asian-Pacific Security, and the Case for Analytical Eclecticism", *International Security* Vol. 26, No. 3 (2002): 412.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 21; Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 223.

realism is ineffective for the future development of Sino-American relations, while also exacerbating America's already greatly diminished reputation as a benevolent hegemon.²⁸

Nevertheless, certain merits of a realist approach are acknowledged in this research, namely, the idea that domestic and international politics are inherently linked. Thucydides and Morgenthau argued weak communal bonds made violence more likely, and I extend, reverse, and make cyclical this theory to describe the danger of an authoritarian techno-state capable of manipulating public opinion and manifesting domestic politics.²⁹ If this model can be legitimised and exported then this danger outweighs current US consternation. This analysis is extended to domestic fissures in the US, pernicious elements in both countries' domestic politics constituting the greatest threat to liberalism worldwide. This thesis argues – alongside Fukuyama, Colgan and Keohane – that the more insidious threats come from within democracies, the storming of the Capitol elucidating this fact.³⁰

The overall alignment of this thesis is closest to liberalism in its affirmation of cooperation as the main processes dominating IR, as well as the peace-promoting effects of democracy and economic interdependence.³¹ A positive-sum Sino-American relationship is possible, and this thesis emphasises a liberal concern for human rights and the terrifying combination of authoritarianism and technology.³² The potential for good is greater in democracies, despite America's multitudinous failings, and America should rediscover and represent liberalism's benefits, in part by increasing, rather than decreasing, interdependence and cooperation with China.

Utilised from constructivism is how language shapes interests and ideas – especially bellicose state language shaping popular opinion. Wendt claimed 'people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of meaning that the objects have for them.'³³ If the meaning of either country becomes synonymous with hostility, this can become – and is increasingly becoming – reality. Another crucial constructivist point in understanding both countries' policy

²⁸ John Ford, "The Pivot to Asia Was Obama's Biggest Mistake", *The Diplomat*, January 21, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/the-pivot-to-asia-was-obamas-biggest-mistake/>.

²⁹ Richard Ned Lebow, "Classical Realism" in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (Oxford University Press, 2016), 37.

³⁰ Francis Fukuyama, "Francis Fukuyama on the State of Democracy in 2020 and Beyond", *The Wall Street Journal*, December 15, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/francis-fukuyama-on-the-state-of-democracy-in-2020-and-beyond-11608051600>; Jeff D. Colgan and Robert O. Keohane, "The Liberal Order Is Rigged: Fix It Now or Watch It Wither," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 96, No. 3 (May/June 2017), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2017-04-17/liberal-order-rigged>.

³¹ Bruce, Russett, "Liberalism." In *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith," Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) 68-87.

³² Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom. Russia, Europe, America*, (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018).

³³ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 396.

is the importance of historical, cultural, and political factors, which explain China's desire for strength and US fear of a rising, quasi-communist state.³⁴

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Historiography

Academic writing on the Eastern threat is not new. In 1997 Bernstein and Munro advocated for derailing China's hegemonic attempts.³⁵ Johnston questioned whether China was a status quo power in 2003, and in 2005 Kaplan questioned not if but how the US would fight China.³⁶ In 2006 Mearsheimer declared the probability of war, and is audible as ever today, giddy with the prospect of being proven right.³⁷ Zakaria warned of a 'fierce but fragile superpower' in 2007 – a term taken up in Washington – and in 2008 questioned whether America could survive the 'rise of the rest'.³⁸ In 2008 Ikenberry questioned whether liberal internationalism could survive China's rise, and Layne described their challenge to US hegemony.³⁹ In 2009 Johnson discussed how China's strategic culture shapes their foreign policy, updating Alastair Johnston's earlier work.⁴⁰ In 2010 Buzan argued China should declare its regional intentions to ensure a peaceful rise, while Mearsheimer described China's regional challenge.⁴¹ The 'Thucydides Trap' was conceptualised in 2012, employed extensively today when describing Sino-American relations,

³⁴ K. M. Fierke, "Constructivism" in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (Oxford University Press, 2016), 163.

³⁵ Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, "The Coming Conflict with America," *Foreign Affairs*, March, 1997, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1997-03-01/coming-conflict-america>.

³⁶ Alastair Iain Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?" *International Security* Vol. 27, No. 4 (2003), 5-56; Robert Kaplan, "How We Would Fight China", *The Atlantic*, June 1, 2005, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/06/how-we-would-fight-china/303959/>.

³⁷ John J. Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise", *Current History* Vol. 105, No. 690 (April 2006): 160, <https://online.ucpress.edu/currenthistory/article/105/690/160/108268/China-s-Unpeaceful-Rise>; John J. Mearsheimer & Hugh White, "China Debate", *Centre for Independent Studies*, August 12, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRlt1vbnXhQ>;

John J. Mearsheimer & Kishore Mahbubani, "Has China Won?", *Centre for Independent Studies*, May 11, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnkC7GXmLdo&t=3095s>.

³⁸ Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of a Fierce Yet Fragile Superpower," *Newsweek*, December 31, 2007-January 7, 2008, online at www.newsweek.com/id/81588; Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of the Rest", *Fareed Zakarai* (website), May 12, 2018, <https://fareedzakaria.com/columns/2008/05/12/the-rise-of-the-rest>.

³⁹ John G. Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?" *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 87, No. 1 (2008): 23-37; Christopher Layne, "China's Challenge to American Hegemony", *Current History* Vol. 107, No. 705 (2008): 13-18.

⁴⁰ Kenneth D. Johnson, "China's Strategic Culture: A Perspective For the United States", *Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College*, (June 2009): 1-21; Alastair Ian Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁴¹ Barry Buzan, "China in International Society: Is 'Peaceful Rise' Possible?", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 3, No. 1 (March 2010): 5-36; John J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 3, No. 4 (December 2010): 381-396.

Kirshner claiming Allison misses Thucydides's crucial insight about hubris and the 'arrogance of power,' reflected in Sino-American belligerence and offensive realism itself.⁴²

In 2015 Liu Mingfu advocated for the end of American unipolarity, marking for some a declared desire for Chinese global dominance.⁴³ In 2018 the Trump administration labelled revisionist powers the greatest threat to US security and prosperity.⁴⁴ The year prior, a US investigation into China's economic practices sparked the Sino-American trade war.⁴⁵ In November 2020 the US administration published the 'Elements of the China Challenge,' claiming that 'In the face of the China challenge, the US must secure freedom.'⁴⁶ Evident is how historiography accelerates alongside China's continuing economic miracle, US consternation increasing in tandem with China's strength. China's confidence grows alongside US self-doubt and bellicosity, to the point that in December, John Ratcliffe, director of national intelligence, claimed 'Beijing intends to dominate the U.S. and the rest of the planet economically, militarily and technologically.'⁴⁷

1.2.2 Offensive Realism

The main theory critiqued is offensive realism, John Mearsheimer's claim that power-maximising revisionist states seek hegemony as the ultimate form of security in an anarchical world.⁴⁸ The theory is both descriptive and prescriptive; states should behave this way 'because it outlines the best way to survive in a dangerous world.'⁴⁹ In 2006 Mearsheimer claimed China will vie for regional domination, causing 'intense security competition with considerable potential for war.'⁵⁰ Offensive realism, he argues, proves the sound strategy of China attempting regional domination, and preventative US responses.⁵¹ Mearsheimer updated his argument in

⁴² Graham T. Allison, "Thucydides's trap has been sprung in the Pacific", *Financial Times*, August 21, 2012, <https://www.ft.com/content/5d695b5a-ea3d-11e1-984b-00144feab49a>; Graham T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017); "The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?", *The Atlantic*, September 24, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>; Jonathan Kirshner, "Offensive realism, Thucydides traps, and the tragedy of unforced errors: classical realism and US-China relations", *China International Strategy Review* Vol. 1, No.1 (2019): 55.

⁴³ Mingfu Liu, "The World Is Too Important to Be Left to America", *The Atlantic*, June 4, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/06/china-dream-liu-mingfu-power/394748/>.

⁴⁴ Mattis, "Summary of the 2018 National Defence Strategy".

⁴⁵ Hung Kwan Chi, "The China-US Trade War: Deep-Rooted Causes, Shifting Focus and Uncertain Prospects", *Asian Economic Policy Review*, 15 (2020): 55-72.

⁴⁶ Office of the Secretary of State, "The Elements of the China Challenge", *US Department of State*, November 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20-02832-Elements-of-China-Challenge-508.pdf>.

⁴⁷ John Ratcliffe, "China Is National Security Threat No. 1", *Wall Street Journal*, December 3, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-is-national-security-threat-no-1-11607019599>.

⁴⁸ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 21, 29.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 11-12.

⁵⁰ Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise", 160.

⁵¹ Ibid, 162.

2018, supporting Trumpian isolationism for its open hostility to liberal internationalism, which he critiques as militaristic, undermining human rights and domestic liberties.⁵² However the same predispositional flaw is inherent in offensive realism – which increases the likelihood of great-power conflict – and four years of offensive realism did not result in an effluence of domestic liberties, nor enhance US strength, standing, or – neorealist’s primary concern – security.

Today Mearsheimer labels the Sino-American conflict inevitable, his circular reasoning endorsing any US action to hinder China’s rise.⁵³ This epistemology increasingly defines contemporary US strategy and binds both nations in a political straitjacket, with cooperation increasingly difficult. Kirshner criticises offensive realism’s disastrous policy implications, condemning Mearsheimer’s ‘illogical predictions about, and, worse, dangerous and self-defeating policy prescriptions for, both China and the US.’⁵⁴ This risk becomes existential in an age of nuclear weaponry, William Perry explaining the folly of presidential omnipotence regarding nuclear weapons, new technological dangers, and archaic policy.⁵⁵ Bad ideas cause irrationality in rational actors, and offensive realism irrationally suggests great powers should risk stability for hegemony and the existing hegemon, even if largely unthreatened, should expend every effort to thwart that bid. Popescu reiterates support for a grand offensive realist strategy, arguing Sino-Russian revisionism proves the theory’s rectitude.⁵⁶ He claims nationalism’s recrudescence is necessary to counteract Chinese nationalism, whereas this thesis assumes international and domestic nationalism exist on a dangerous continuum, closer to tribalism than to international cooperation.⁵⁷

Global problems require global solutions, impossible when distracted with great power politics and Cold War thinking. These bad ideas – and a bad theory – ensnare American policy makers, first seen in Obama’s ‘Pivot to Asia’ and exacerbated by Donald Trump, whose Sinophobia is mirrored in US state documents.⁵⁸ It is also the view espoused by former American diplomat Michael Pillsbury, whose book displays an archetypal hawkish American diplomat’s view on China’s rise, Pillsbury describing the regnant hawkish (*yingpai*) behaviour

⁵² Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, 1-5, 82, 223.

⁵³ John J. Mearsheimer & Hugh White, “China Debate”, *Centre for Independent Studies*, August 12, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRlt1vbnXhQ>; Mearsheimer & Mahbubani, “Has China Won?”

⁵⁴ Kirshner, “The tragedy of offensive realism: Classical realism and the rise of China”, *European Journal of International Relations* Vol. 18, No.1 (2012): 63.

⁵⁵ William J. Perry, *The Button: The New Nuclear Arms Race and Presidential Power from Truman to Trump* (BenBella Books, 2020).

⁵⁶ Popescu, “American Grand Strategy and the Rise of Offensive Realism”, 31.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 30.

⁵⁸ See footnote 8.

in Xi Jinping administration, increasingly dominating the more moderate faction.⁵⁹ His book links ancient Chinese thinking regarding subterfuge and Sun Tzu's *Art of War* with modern Chinese strategy, depicting unwavering Chinese realpolitik from ancient times now weaponised against the US. While Pillsbury's claims novelty is linking ancient thinking to modern times, this widespread practice among prominent IR scholars discussing China's rise, and three are analysed in this thesis, reflecting their importance. As Kim notes, 'Chinese IR, in a way, is part of a broader discussion of *how* China will be a world power.'⁶⁰

1.2.3 Chinese International Relations

In his analysis of Chinese strategic thinking, Pillsbury identifies legalism, concerned with the centralisation of power in the state, order and stability, and seen through a Western lens as realist or Machiavellian, concerned with consolidation of wealth and power in the state.⁶¹ Xi Jinping has quoted from legalist author Han Fei, emphasising the rule of law in his anti-corruption drive within the CCP.⁶² Systematic rewards and punishments in legalist ideology mirrors modern Chinese economic practice, Reilly labelling China's economic statecraft as 'selective application of economic incentives and punishments designed to bolster Beijing's diplomacy.'⁶³ With its focus on a strong state, rewards, punishments, and centralisation of power, this might be the best way of understanding contemporary Chinese statecraft. As Schneider argues, Xi's appreciation of legalism is mirrored in the centralisation of power in Beijing, the party, and in Xi himself.⁶⁴

Zhao Tingyang has modernised another ancient theory – that of *Tianxia* (all under heaven), defined by four key points: (i) non-exclusion; the inclusion of everyone in the world; (ii) international democracy, claiming its absence causes imperialist hegemony; (iii) harmony and interdependence; and (iv) the world institution, not the nation-state, as the correct unit of

⁵⁹ Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (Henry Holt and Co., 2015), iii-xii.

⁶⁰ Kim, "Will IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics be a Powerful Alternative?", 78.

⁶¹ Chris Fraser, "Major Rival Schools: Mohism and Legalism" in *The Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy*, ed. Jay L. Garfield, William Edelglass (England: Oxford University Press, 2011): 59, 64, 66; Ross Terrill, Märt Läänemets, *The New Chinese Empire* (New York: Basic Books; New edition 2004), 68.

⁶² Chris Buckley, "Leader Taps Into Chinese Classics in Seeking to Cement Power", *The New York Times*, October 12, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/12/world/leader-taps-into-chinese-classics-in-seeking-to-cement-power.html>; Ryan Mitchell, "Is 'China's Machiavelli' Now Its Most Important Political Philosopher?", *The Diplomat*, January 16, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/01/is-chinas-machiavelli-now-its-most-important-political-philosopher/>.

⁶³ James Reilly, "China: Turning money into power", in *Connectivity Wars: Why Migration, Finance and Trade are the Geo-economic Battlegrounds of the Future*, ed. Mark Leonard (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2016), 190.

⁶⁴ David K. Schneider, "China's New Legalism," *The National Interest* Vol. 143, No. 143 (2016): 19.

analysis.⁶⁵ *Tianxia* has three meanings, physical (all under heaven), psychological (a choice made and felt by all) and political (a global system).⁶⁶ The theory's universality is unproblematic, Yuval Noah Harari writing extensively about needing global solutions to global problems.⁶⁷ However problems abound with a modern application of *Tianxia*. Its insights are taken from the Shang dynasty, when China had little conception of life beyond its borders, and the system disintegrated into the Warring States period, suggesting its practical failure.⁶⁸ Zhang Feng also critiques *Tianxia*'s 'failure to outline any clear pathway that might lead to the creation of the world institution of the *Tianxia* system.'⁶⁹ However its idealism and universality conceals a more dangerous precedent. Wang Gungwu highlights the propensity for violence alongside *Tianxia*, noting its historical exportation through conquest.⁷⁰ More worrying are the consequences for those rejecting homogeneity – visible in China's periphery – Callahan describing *Tianxia*'s potential as a forcibly assimilating Sinocentric hegemonic instrument.⁷¹

Yan Xuetong is sceptical of *Tianxia*'s theoretical and practical applicability. To a realist epistemology he adds a focus on morality. Ethics, Yan claims, are crucial for the rise of any great power to have the necessary support to rule and to manage global anarchy.⁷² His claim that the morality of superpowers shapes global order and stability is a condemnation of the US and is therefore consistent with my argument regarding America rediscovering its better self. However moral realism can also be redirected towards China, and while perhaps only nebulous criticism can be directed towards the Chinese government, the theory must nonetheless be analysed as it is, unfortunate realities aside. That moral realism can be directed against both China and America highlights the tendency of offensive realism to make China and America adopt similarly internecine positions, expending time and resources which could otherwise be used productively.

⁶⁵ Tingyang, Zhao, *Tianxia tixi: Shijie zhidu zhexue daolun* (The *Tianxia* System: A Philosophy for the World Institution) (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005); *Tianxia de dangdaixing: Shijie zhixu de shijian yu xiangxiang* (A Possible World of All-under-heaven System: The World Order in the Past and for the Future) (Beijing: Zhongxin chubanshe, 2016).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018).

⁶⁸ Amitav Acharya, "From Heaven to Earth: 'Cultural Idealism' and 'Moral Realism' as Chinese Contributions to Global International Relations", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 12, No. 4 (December 2019): 475.

⁶⁹ Feng Zhang, "The *Tianxia* System: World Order in a Chinese Utopia", *China Heritage Quarterly* Vol. 4, No. 4 (December 2009): http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/tien-hsia.php?searchterm=021_utopia.inc&issue=021.

⁷⁰ Gungwu, Wang, "Tianxia and Empire: External Chinese Perspectives", *Inaugural Tsai Lecture*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University (May 4, 2006).

⁷¹ William A. Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony?", *International Studies Review*, December 2008, 10(4), 759.

⁷² Amitav Acharya, 'From Heaven to Earth', 471.

Table 1: An Overview of Chinese IR

| <i>Type</i> | <i>Key Elements</i> | <i>Sphere</i> | <i>Applications</i> | <i>Problems</i> |
|---------------|---|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Moral realism | Global leadership requires morality Morality as important as capabilities Morality shapes strategy Morality as interest Maximisation | International | Utilised in official documents Used to critique the US and promote Chinese leadership | Often defined in terms of national interest and national morality Does not fit with China's military aggression |
| Legalism | A system of rewards and punishments The centralisation of wealth and power in the state state should focus on agricultural and military matters | Originally domestic; now both | Used in modern Chinese economic interactions with other countries Power increasingly centralised both in Beijing and Xi Jinping himself | Size of economy is utilised politically Endorses a focus on hard power consistent with Offensive Realism |
| Tianxia | A global system International democracy Harmony and interdependence Interdependence Minimising mutual hostility | Originally domestic; now both | Used in China's periphery to 'minimise hostility' Also evident in suppression of dissidents and those critical of the government | Linked to aggressive Sinicization Ancient theory initially spread via conquest and 'voluntary submission' is ahistorical |

1.2.4 On the Rise of China and the American Response

In 2007, David Kang offered a constructivist critique of balance-of-power theories, claiming extensive East Asian harmony is afforded by shared Confucian values and traditional Sinocentrism.⁷³ Kang's perspective contrasts against the fearful Western cacophony, claiming Sinophobia is erroneous; Beijing's focus is domestic and the region is peaceful, with Asian countries seeking diplomatic solutions.⁷⁴ This thesis underscores Kang's argument that America should economically and diplomatically engage China, rather than employ combative economics and a military-first approach.⁷⁵ Yet a flaw in his argument is his equation of peace

⁷³ David Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (Columbia University Press, 2007), 9.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 118.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

with no traditional warfare, overlooking human rights issues and subtler, more modern displays of military bullying. In 2017 Kang underlined Asia's lack of increased military spending to suggest regional harmony, despite increased Chinese power projection.⁷⁶ This overlooks countries' reliance on America for defence spending, and the fact that regional countries now engage in other types of balancing: between costs and opportunities in regions like the South China Sea, and between two superpowers with geopolitical designs in the Indo-Pacific.⁷⁷ Sino-Indian border clashes are unthinkable using Kang's analysis, while countries are increasingly repelled by China's expansionism. These criticisms are tangential. Kang argues US strategy is wrong as a peaceful Asia reflects regional harmony. This thesis shows US strategy is wrong as it is tautological, a greater danger lurking domestically, in China from human rights violations and dictatorship for export, and in America from zero-sum thinking transferred from the international to the domestic, resulting in hyper-partisanship and anti-democratic coups.

Whereas Kang envisions an unthreatening China, Kishore Mahbubani asks whether China has won, examining pitfalls to both countries' potential supremacy. He shares with this thesis a claim that unilateralism alienates traditional allies and weakens America, pushing hegemony upon China, regardless of their intentions.⁷⁸ Similarly, refusing to accommodate China's moulds an enemy in its own image. This parallels this thesis's hypothesis that the US has forgotten its liberality, stretched incredibly thin since 9/11, partially reasserted under Obama and thereafter discarded for isolationism. Mahbubani's analysis that a coercive US strengthens China was evident under the Trump administration, and for countries caught in-between a Sino-American geopolitical contest, both countries look increasingly disreputable. Mahbubani's book encourages cooperation, noting the US and China account for only 25% of the world's population and an interconnected world will not tolerate extreme irrationality from either superpower, supporting this thesis's claim that great-power rivalry should be and transcended in favour of multilateralism and cooperation.⁷⁹

Expanding on this, John Ikenberry argues that the American-led liberal international order – among the most secure and prosperous in history – has lost considerable legitimacy following 9/11.⁸⁰ Refining his argument in 2020, Ikenberry addresses chinks in the liberal

⁷⁶ David Kang, *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 20, 40-43.

⁷⁷ Bert Chapman, "China's Nine-Dashed Map: Continuing Maritime Source of Geopolitical Tension", *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 8, no. 1 (2016): 159-161.

⁷⁸ Kishore Mahbubani, *Has China Won? The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy* (PublicAffairs, 2020), 7; Chapter – "America's Biggest Strategic Mistake".

⁷⁹ Ibid, 21-22.

⁸⁰ John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2011), xii, 30, 357.

internationalist armour, but his argument remains consistent; modern problems require cooperation, and a reformed America should embrace liberalism; American unilateralism fundamentally threatens itself, if its aims are unaligned with the international community.⁸¹ His argument that America should represent a liberal leviathan is central to this thesis's argument that the crucial difference between China and America is democratic, affording the US opportunities to reform and significant assets which China cannot replicate.⁸² One such asset is that of soft power, introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990.⁸³ Nye claims that despite active efforts in Beijing to create soft power through, for example, Confucian Institutes, their attempts fail as soft power is 'inconsistent with their domestic realities.'⁸⁴ This thesis expands upon this, using the importance of the link between domestic and international politics inherent in classical realist writers such as Morgenthau to suggest that this should constitute the centre of America's concern.⁸⁵ If China's politics are coercive and ruthless internally, then this strongly indicates how they would rule internationally.

The US has limited influence on China domestically, but American illiberalism damages their soft power, where they hold the clearest advantage over China, a fact that will become startlingly clear should current trends continue. China can challenge America but only the US can defeat itself. Whereas Ikenberry, Brooks and Wohlforth argue for a continued grand strategy of deep engagement, this thesis advocates for domestic reform, preceding international rejuvenation.⁸⁶ Continued preoccupation regarding China ignores internal US threats, Donald Trump more symptom than cause of an America requiring dispassionate introspection and careful rehabilitation. While the US should 'seek to lead the international order,' this must be preceded by an internally healthy America, rather than through suppressing rival powers at all costs.⁸⁷

1.2.5 Contemporary Debate

This literature review has focused on larger foundational texts regarding IR theory and the Sino-American rivalry, but contemporary academic debate abounds in *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*. Christopher Layne argues America must yield hegemony in East Asia to

⁸¹ John Ikenberry, *A World Safe For Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order* (London: Yale University Press, 2020)

⁸² Ibid, 353-356.

⁸³ Joseph Nye, "Soft Power", *Foreign Policy*, No. 80 (1990): 166.

⁸⁴ Joseph Nye, "China's Soft Power Deficit", *Wall Street Journal*, May 9, 2012, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304451104577389923098678842>.

⁸⁵ Richard Ned Lebow, "Classical Realism", 37.

⁸⁶ Brooks, Ikenberry, Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home, America", 7-51.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 14.

prevent a ‘hot war’ with China, advice unheeded by the most recent G7 declaration outlining their infrastructural and ideational riposte to China’s economic model and the BRI.⁸⁸ He writes China’s success threatens America not only militarily and economically but ideologically, undermining US potential for ‘ideological and economic penetration.’⁸⁹ This thesis claims that to the extent that this is true, it is multiplied by American unilateralism. Layne draws attention to the fluidity of terms like realist and liberal, blaming liberalism for the cause of American hubris and overreaching.⁹⁰ While true that liberalism and self-perceived American exceptionalism contributed to overreaching, the hubris of stymying China in the Indo-Pacific comes directly from realists such as Mearsheimer who’s policy, Layne rightly claims, ‘is a recipe for conflict.’⁹¹ Layne argues that the improving relations from ceding Far-Eastern hegemony would enable conversation on a plethora of issues, such as regarding human rights, while this thesis claims the same is true from reduced bellicosity and increased cooperation.⁹²

Zhao Minghao disagrees with Layne’s assumption that the Sino-American Cold War is inevitable and underway, despite US reluctance to cede primacy, and against the prevailing view of many Chinese analysts.⁹³ He argues China needs to offer public goods and build international confidence, claiming the BRI has partially achieved this, a claim contested in Chapter 2.⁹⁴ He claims both countries ‘need to enhance their communication and collaboration in addressing global challenges,’ traversing and overcoming the ideological rivalry.⁹⁵ Echoing Mahbubani, he notes much of the world is caught in the crossfire of these two superpowers, and therefore they must cooperate responsibly.⁹⁶ Whereas other scholars such as Kai He offer a neoclassical binary layout of only competition or cooperation, Zhao suggests a policy of competitive coexistence to reassure the rest of the world.⁹⁷ The first two chapters of this thesis support this argument, arguing that in military and economic matters, the Sino-American rivalry is easily tempered, with opportunities for cooperation available.

⁸⁸ Christopher Layne, “Preventing the China-U.S. Cold War from Turning Hot”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 13, No. 3, (September 2020): 343–385; “2021 G7 Leaders' communiqué: Our shared agenda for global action to build back better”, *European Council*, June 13, 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/50361/carbis-bay-g7-summit-communique.pdf>.

⁸⁹ Layne, “Preventing the China-U.S. Cold War from Turning Hot”, 381.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid, 383.

⁹² Ibid, 385.

⁹³ Minghao Zhao, “Is a New Cold War Inevitable? Chinese Perspectives on US–China Strategic Competition”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 12, No. 3 (August 2019): 371.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 394.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Kai He, “Explaining United States–China relations: neoclassical realism and the nexus of threat–interest perceptions”, *The Pacific Review* Vol. 30, No. 2 (2017): 133–151.

Pu Xiaoyu analyses Chinese academia debating what type of power and identity China should claim – socialist country, rising power, great power, or East Asian regional power.⁹⁸ This is important as contemporary US coverage unanimously paints an aggressive, revisionist power, a view typified in offensive realism.⁹⁹ Pu claims some Chinese eschew terms like superpower and hegemony, others considering China unready for global leadership, unhappy with this external labelling of China.¹⁰⁰ While Pu argues that China should decide on an identity, this thesis suggests US policy shapes Chinese identity in its own current image, unilaterally, competitively, and cooperatively unwilling. Pu says China should status-signal both domestically and internationally, so necessary parties can be aware of China's intentions.¹⁰¹ This concept is extended to America, which should signal a less bellicose policy, reaffirming its democratic and multilateral commitments.

Brandon Yoder highlights the changing zeitgeist in Western views towards China – what this thesis claims and rejects as offensive realism – the optimists' numbers dwindling in response to China's increasing assertiveness.¹⁰² Yoder argues diplomatic signals become obfuscated during intense strategic rivalry, when intentions are difficult to gauge and the security dilemma renders each action zero-sum.¹⁰³ He notes that while China may be revisionist in some key areas, this does not equate to an overall strategy of revisionism. This highlights a theme running throughout this thesis as the US increasingly exhibits binary thinking, missing opportunities for cooperation and coexistence. He argues that American policy post-Trump has increased China's insecurity so even benign acts are perceived as aggressive or non-cooperative.¹⁰⁴ Unconditional containment on the part of America makes both countries insecure and uncertain and this thesis claims the resulting milieu makes violence more likely, while offensive realism reflects US insecurity and changing identity, reflected in its domestic fissures.

David Lake highlights the historic link between economic decoupling and war, condemning offensive realism for encouraging economic isolationism.¹⁰⁵ Li Wei and Yan Xuetong echo Lake, identifying technological decoupling as equally important as the trade war.

⁹⁸ Xiaoyu, Pu, "Controversial Identity of a Rising China", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 10, No. 2 (May 2017): 131–149.

⁹⁹ See footnotes 8–11.

¹⁰⁰ Pu, "Controversial Identity of a Rising China" 132–133.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 148.

¹⁰² Brandon K Yoder, "How Credible are China's Foreign Policy Signals?: IR Theory and the Debate about China's Intentions", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 13, No. 4 (December 2020): 578.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 579–580.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 602.

¹⁰⁵ David A Lake, "Economic Openness and Great Power Competition: Lessons for China and the United States", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 11, No. 3 (July 2018): 238–239.

Li describes the tangential fears of AI and cyber-security, while Yan envisions a grim future of cyber-warfare and technological threats.¹⁰⁶ Lake notes competition is a choice, not a necessity, and claims if China liberalises economically and the US eschews protectionism, the relationship will improve and opportunities for cooperation will expand.¹⁰⁷ This thesis goes further, saying the dangers of advanced technology must be realised and shared goals agreed upon as a step towards détente and cooperation. The countries are interdependent whether they like it or not. Nationalism in today's world is a false promise and the Pandora's box of globalism cannot be unopened. Neither side's economy is strong enough to ignore the other, and isolationism is an internecine endeavour concealing substantial military risk.

Deborah Welch Larson analyses moral realism and assesses the feasibility of Yan Xuetong's 'humane authority.'¹⁰⁸ She stresses Yan's focus on the importance of human choice and a shared, implicit agreement exists about the folly of purely structural thought in her article, Yan's book and this thesis. She argues transnational and existential issues mandate the subordination of economic and ideological differences to shared goals, with a strategy of social cooperation and spheres of pre-eminence tempering the rivalry.¹⁰⁹ While Yan considers war unlikely, this thesis shares Larson's concern about the component of human error, which offensive realism simultaneously manifests and represents.¹¹⁰ Larson's concern about international authority is shared in this thesis's argument that the US should regain lost prestige and legitimacy, not via Mearsheimerian hard power, but from a moral, multilateral authority. An anticipated criticism of this thesis would be that affirming democratic and American values while critiquing China's human rights record is – at best – myopic. However, US failings are extensively analysed, and this thesis condemns prevailing US policy by claiming a protracted economic rivalry and military build-up is both immoral and ineffective.

Yuan and Fu write that when challenged, the US constructs a self-other story in which the other is antithetical to American rectitude.¹¹¹ They discuss the role of narrative in the Sino-American rivalry, and highlight the role of victimhood in US accounts of their rivals, notable

¹⁰⁶ Li Wei, "Towards Economic Decoupling? Mapping Chinese Discourse on the China–US Trade War", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 12, No. 4, (December 2019): 520; Xuetong Yan, "Bipolar Rivalry in the Early Digital Age", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 3, (June 2020): 325.

¹⁰⁷ Lake, "Economic Openness and Great Power Competition", 269.

¹⁰⁸ Deborah Welch Larson, "Can China Change the International System? The Role of Moral Leadership", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 13, No. 2, (February 2020): 163–186.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 185–186.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 181–182.

¹¹¹ Zhengqing Yuan and Qiang Fu, "Narrative Framing and the United States' Threat Construction of Rivals", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 13, No. 3, (July 2020): 419–453.

during Trump's tenure, but also historically with Japan and the USSR.¹¹² Kristen Hopewell underscores this argument, offering an economic dimension which the US uses for political ends.¹¹³ This thesis underlines the core argument with some textual analysis of increasingly belligerent language in US state documents. The thesis shows how differences between countries narrow as they act and react according to offensive realism's tautological tenets. Even with legitimate grievances, the US strategically painting an enemy lacks legitimacy under offensive realism.

This thesis aims to tell the story not only of US hypocrisy and offensive realist naivete, but the under-emphasised threat from decrepit domestic politics plaguing both countries. This thesis contributes to debate on status and ideological rivalry, economic interdependence and decoupling, and threat construction and de-escalation, utilising Chinese and Western academics which illustrates the diversity of academic opinion, seemingly – and sadly – absent in Beijing and Washington.

1.3 Scientific Novelty

Analytical eclecticism, alongside both Chinese and Western academics are utilised to analyse the specifics of Chinese diplomacy, following Katzenstein's writings about the necessity of combining different theoretical elements in his research.¹¹⁴ Chinese academics and IR theories provide greater understanding of Chinese policy, while analytical eclecticism enables utilising the link between domestic and international politics and how history, language, and culture shape geopolitical contests. Against scholarly consensus Chapter 2 contends Chinese state documents reveal them as offensive realists, and adds a fifth column to the four identified in Popescu's analysis of Donald Trump's offensive realist grand strategy – zero-sum relations extended from great-power rivals to all countries.¹¹⁵ Constructivist analysis of rival creation in state documents is utilised before claiming international responses to Joe Biden's election show desire for responsible US leadership, motivated by China's increasing aggression. Chapter 3 updates Ikenberry's 'binding' concept for 2020, claiming the techno-economic rivalry can be tempered, evidencing the US and USSR as fiercer rivals agreeing on shared principals and the

¹¹² Ibid, 451-452.

¹¹³ Kristen Hopewell, "Strategic Narratives in Global Trade Politics: American Hegemony, Free Trade, and the Hidden Hand of the State", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 14, No. 1, (March 2021): 51-86.

¹¹⁴ Peter J. Katzenstein, and Okawara Nobuo, "Japan, Asian-Pacific Security, and the Case for Analytical Eclecticism", *International Security* Vol. 26, No. 3 (2002): 153-85.

¹¹⁵ Popescu, "American Grand Strategy", 375-405.

need for de-escalation.¹¹⁶ Chapter 4 inverts classical realism's link between domestic and international politics, showing how China's can manifest a jingoistic domestic sphere, adding to Hun Joon Kim's concerns about Chinese IR the Orwellian prospects of technologically enforced homogeneity, unrefuted by *Tianxia*.¹¹⁷ I contend Trumpian hyper-realism contaminated the domestic sphere, conflated domestic and international nationalism, inflamed domestic tensions and reduced US soft power, an arena of clear American dominance. Throughout the thesis the framework of Brooks, Ikenberry and Wohlforth is employed, revealing how offensive realism exacerbated issues relating to 'security, prosperity and domestic liberty.'¹¹⁸

1.4 Sources and Methods

Table 2: Consulted Primary Sources

| <i>Type</i> | <i>American</i> | <i>Chinese</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Speeches & Dialogue | 6 | 16 | 4 |
| Government Publications | 15 | 7 | 6 |
| Research Data | 16 | 1 | 27 |
| Reportage | 58 | 31 | 64 |
| Videos & Podcasts | 7 | 1 | 2 |

Obvious concerns about bias and nationalist epistemologies are endemic in state sources and must be analysed and contrasted against provable fact and governmental action.¹¹⁹ The US

¹¹⁶ John Ikenberry, "Reflections on After Victory", *British Journal Of International Politics and International Relations* Vol. 21, No. 1 (February 2019): 11-12.

¹¹⁷ Hun Joon Kim, "Will IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics be a Powerful Alternative?", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 9, No. 1, (January 2016): 75.

¹¹⁸ Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home, America, 11.

¹¹⁹ For example, Speeches: Yi Wang, "Study and Implement Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Conscientiously and Break New Ground in Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, July 20, 2020,

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1799305.shtml; Mike Pompeo, "Communist China and the Free World's Future", *US Department of State*, July 23, 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/communist-china-and-the-free-worlds-future-2/index.html>; State documents and reportage: see footnote 8.

ranks 44th and China 177th (third lowest) on the press freedom index, but what they reveal, intend, admit, and obfuscate remains ripe for analysis.¹²⁰

Table 3: Consulted Secondary Sources

| <i>Type</i> | <i>American</i> | <i>Chinese</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Books | 22 | 10 | 15 |
| Articles | 21 | 20 | 17 |
| IR Theory | 10 | 8 | 8 |

***Some sources fell into multiple categories.**

In addition to books and journal articles, theoretical texts – both Eastern and Western – are utilised as a lens to help analyse the Sino-American relationship, and their aims and intentions. A challenge was navigating the disconnect in Chinese IRT between espoused Confucian pacifism and political realpolitik seemingly governing Chinese policy. A final point about secondary sources is that the expert authors are rarely key decision makers. More diverse opinion circulates in academic journals than occupies modern reporting, and Washington’s doves are silent.¹²¹

This thesis relies primarily on literature research. Primary sources are subject to textual and qualitative analysis, while secondary literature helps explain China’s momentous rise and whether they threaten America, supporting a two-fold analysis of Chinese intentions and capabilities, and misguided US policy. Primary sources date from Deng Xiaoping’s 1978 reforms, the vast majority since Xi Jinping’s election and the 2012 Pivot to Asia. Explored in the literature review, secondary sources include contemporary academic research, older foundational texts and theoretical works, all subject to close textual analysis, comparative analysis between both countries’ publications, and case study analysis.

A challenge was remaining alert to major developments in the Sino-American relationship. It remains unclear whether America’s catastrophic response to the coronavirus will be viewed in Beijing as was the 2008 financial crash. At the time of writing, China’s economy is growing, while many Western countries will face the biggest recession since the Second

¹²⁰ “China ranks 177/180 on the World Press Freedom Index”, *Reporters Without Borders*, accessed on January 25, 2021, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>.

¹²¹ See footnotes 8-11.

World War.¹²² Changing US administrations did not lead to détente, disrupting China the sole bipartisan issue.¹²³ Despite more formality and less antagonism, the general trend of competition has not changed with the Presidency, in a relationship intertwined with Asia's rise, Western decline, and the nationalism, xenophobia, illiberalism and bellicosity increasingly defining our times.*

¹²² 'COVID-19 to Plunge Global Economy into Worst Recession since World War II', *World Bank*, June 8, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/08/covid-19-to-plunge-global-economy-into-worst-recession-since-world-war-ii>.

¹²³ Gerald F. Seib, 'Amid Polarization, Bipartisanship Emerges on China', *Wall Street Journal*, June 10, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/amid-polarization-bipartisanship-emerges-on-china-big-tech-11560177194>.

*Yet there has been a reversal in America's treatment of its allies and respect for the liberal international order under the Biden administration.

Chapter 2

Does China Challenge America Militarily?

一山不容二虎 *Two tigers cannot live on one mountain – Chinese proverb*

*Refuge and prospect are opposites: refuge is small and dark; prospect is expansive and
bringt... We need them both and we need them together.*

Grant Hilderbrand

This chapter begins by assessing whether China's claims to Taiwan and in the South and East China Seas constitute a military challenge to the US. Section 1 argues that Chinese strategic thinking eschews Yan Xuetong's theory of moral realism in favour of offensive realism, the desire for prosperity and an unrivalled military fuelled by narratives of humiliation and rejuvenation. While China's land grabs do challenge the US to a limited extent, the greater threat lies in China's application of offensive realist thinking, which necessitates conflict, framing powerful competitors as enemies. Section 2 updates Popescu's analysis of Trump's offensive realist grand strategy, arguing that zero-sum thinking was extended from great powers rivals to include erstwhile allies, greatly strengthening China's challenge by alienating US allies and eschewing leadership. Section 3 argues that international responses to Biden's election reveals a desire for US leadership, contending a liberal internationalist and offensive realist grand strategy, outlined by John Ikenberry and John Mearsheimer respectively, can be remarkably similar in their military response to China, revealed in Biden's early China strategy. Where the strategies differ is your treatment of friends and allies, and this leads to a stronger, united coalition with which to face China, the nucleus of which is already visible.

2.1 China's Perspective

In August 2019 Mearsheimer claimed that the three areas with the greatest potential for an eruption of violence were the South China Sea, East China Sea, and Taiwan.¹²⁴ These are areas of strategic importance in which there is military overlap, valuable resources, international trade routes, and various security alliances. China's territorial claims are analysed alongside their strategic thinking and the 'Chinese Dream' – their journey from national humiliation to rejuvenation – and their methods for growing militarily strong while eschewing major conflict. Yan Xuetong's theory of moral realism is contrasted with offensive realism, before showing that China's elite and policy makers abide by the latter theory of IR, rather than as defensive realists, as commonly argued. China's claims in this region are analysed in relation to internal balancing, before weighing the physical and theoretical challenges to the US.

2.2.1 Chinese Expansionism in the Indo-Pacific

China's infamous nine-dashed line delineates China's claims in their southern sea, encapsulating 90% of the area, overlapping with the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of six other countries.¹²⁵ The claim dates from 1958, Gao Zhiguo and Bing Bing Jia arguing that the nine dashed line has historical legitimacy, grounded in international law.¹²⁶ The PRC describes the South China Sea as 'non-negotiable,' as important as Tibet and Taiwan, undoubtedly due to its resources and increasing importance for global trade.¹²⁷ The Senkaku/Diaoyu islands were claimed by Japan and China in 1895 and 1970 respectively, China's claim coinciding with the

¹²⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, "Can China Rise Peacefully?", *Centre for Independent Studies*, August 20, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsFwKzYI5_4&t=1837s.

¹²⁵ On the infamy of the nine-dashed line: Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "Hollywood Is Paying an 'Abominable' Price for China Access", *Foreign Policy*, October 23, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/23/abominable-china-dreamworks-propaganda-hollywood/>; On territorial disputes with Brunei, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam see: "Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea", *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 25, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea>; Hannah Beech, "Just Where Exactly Did China Get the South China Sea Nine-Dash Line From?", *Time Magazine*, July 19, 2016, <https://time.com/4412191/nine-dash-line-9-south-china-sea/>.

¹²⁶ "Declaration of the Government of the People's Republic of China on China's Territorial Sea", *People's Republic of China Foreign Ministry*, September 4, 1958, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/xwlb_663352/W020140608617876545470.jpg; Zhiguo Gao, and Bing Bing Jia, "The Nine-Dash Line in the South China Sea: History, Status, and Implications," *The American Journal of International Law* Vol. 107, No. 1 (January 2013): 98-99

¹²⁷ David Pilling, "China's Spreading 'Core Interests'", *Financial Times*, September 13, 2011, <https://www.ft.com/content/7aadb36-bdd2-373e-98f6-3d9e46547e7c>; On resources in the region see: "South China Sea", *U.S. Energy Information Administration*, October 15, 2019, https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/South_China_Sea. The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) estimates there are 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of gas in the South China Sea, whereas the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) estimates 125 billion barrels of oil and 500 trillion cubic feet of gas. On regional trade see: Chapman, "China's Nine-Dashed Map", 151. The South China Sea also sees half of the annual tonnage of trade pass through the region, as well as 'nearly 1/3 of global crude oil and over 1/2 of global liquefied natural gas (LNG) trade'.

discovery of oil reserves, which both countries claim.¹²⁸ Japan conquered and held Taiwan from 1895-1945, before becoming the redoubt of the Kuomintang after mainland defeat to the Communists. Both countries claim legitimacy and the territory of the other, named the ‘One China Principle’ by the CCP, who favour peaceful methods yet always threaten violence, promising the Hong Kong model, reflecting the unlikelihood of Taiwan retaining its own model indefinitely.¹²⁹

The US is implicated due to its regional alliances. The US-Japan military pact covers the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and China responded to Biden’s recent affirmation of the treaty by increasing their regional military presence, in addition to its existing air identification zone.¹³⁰ The US does not support Taiwanese independence to avoid conflict but arms them and represents them in international organisations.¹³¹ In 2020 Trump’s pugnacity and a popular democratic Taiwanese government heightened tensions, continuing into Biden’s administration.¹³² In January, defence spokesman Wu Qian claimed military encroachments on Taiwan were defensive, reaffirming that ‘Taiwan independence means war.’¹³³ Since 2013, China has been building and expanding islands in the SCS, subsequently fortifying them, dubbed the ‘Great Wall of Sand’ by U.S. Admiral Henry Harris.¹³⁴ These islands – especially the Spratly and Paracel – are equipped with extensive military facilities to strengthen China’s territorial claims.¹³⁵ The 1982 United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

¹²⁸ “Tensions in the East China Sea”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, accessed on March 3, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/tensions-east-china-sea>; Lee Seokwoo, *Territorial Disputes Among Japan, China and Taiwan Concerning the Senkaku Islands* (United Kingdom: International Boundaries Research Unit, Department of Geography, University of Durham, 2002), 11-12; Yuanyuan Wang, “China to submit outer limits of continental shelf in East China Sea to UN”, *Xinhua*, September 16, 2012, https://web.archive.org/web/20121105191846/http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-09/16/c_131853714.htm; “Diplomatic Bluebook 2006”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, archived on December 8, 2013, 43, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2006/index.html>.

¹²⁹ “The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue”, *PRC Taiwan Affairs Office and the Information Office of the State Council*, May 17, 2004, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceno/eng/ztxw/twwt/t110655.htm>.

¹³⁰ Robin Harding and Demetri Sevastopulo, “Biden says US-Japan defence treaty applies to disputed Senkaku Islands”, *Financial Times*, November 12, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/3aec3bbd-a86d-4eef-9cf4-4b5e8f190013>; ; Chapman, “China’s Nine-Dashed Map”, 155; Jeremy Page, “The A to Z on China’s Air Defence Identification Zone”, *Wall Street Journal*, November 26, 2013, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-CJB-19746>.

¹³¹ Chris Horton, “Taiwan Set to Receive \$2 Billion in U.S. Arms, Drawing Ire From China”, *The New York Times*, July 9, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/09/world/asia/taiwan-arms-sales.html>.

¹³² Yun Sun, “Top Conflicts to Watch in 2021: The Danger of U.S.-China Confrontation Over Taiwan”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 22, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/top-conflicts-watch-2021-danger-us-china-confrontation-over-taiwan>.

¹³³ “China warns Taiwan independence ‘means war’ as US pledges support”, *BBC News*, January 29, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-55851052>.

¹³⁴ Alexander Neill, “South China Sea: What’s China’s plan for its ‘Great Wall of Sand’?”, *BBC News*, July 14, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53344449>.

¹³⁵ “China Island Tracker”, *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, accessed on February 5, 2021, <https://amti.csis.org/island-tracker/china/>.

states that a country's territory extends to 200 nautical miles from the coast.¹³⁶ China justifies the nine-dashed line by attempting to utilise UNCLOS, but their 2009 appeal was rejected, and this militarisation attempts to bypass international law, thereby ensuring access to nearby resources.¹³⁷

The growing importance of the South China Sea was highlighted by Zheng Wang's research on the frequency of this topic in academia by utilising the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI).¹³⁸ Extending this rubric reveals the relative importance of these three locations, and how the South China Sea has risen in relative importance, though most scholarship still concerns Taiwan. The existing US alliance system combined with aggressive land-grabs from China suggest that China may contest America militarily, while extensive scholarship reveals the value China attributes to these areas. Observing China's colonial past and strategic thinking reveals more about whether they intend to challenge America.

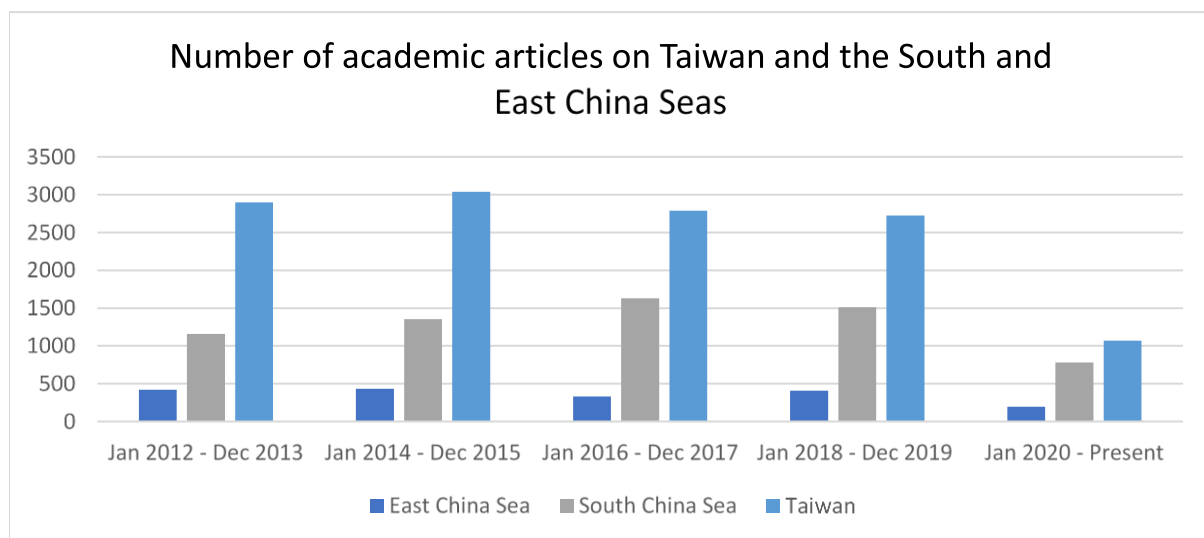


Figure 1: Data taken from the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure: <https://global.cnki.net/index/>

2.1.2 Chinese Strategic Thinking

The two main drivers behind Chinese claims to these islands are the century of humiliation and the 'Chinese Dream,' Xi Jinping's plan to become rich and prosperous by 2049, the centenary of China's communist revolution.¹³⁹ William Callahan described the extent to which national

¹³⁶ "United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982

Overview and full text", *Oceans & Law of the Sea: United Nations*, accessed on February 10, 2021, https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_overview_convention.htm

¹³⁷ Chapman, "China's Nine-Dashed Map", 150.

¹³⁸ Zheng Wang, "Chinese Discourse on the 'Nine-Dashed Line:' Rights, Interests, and Nationalism," *Asian Survey* Vol. 55, No. 3(May/June 2015): 510–511.

¹³⁹ Manoranjan Mohanty, "Xi Jinping and the 'Chinese Dream'", *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 48, No. 38 (2013): 34.

humiliation has been stressed in Chinese ‘textbooks, novels, museums, songs and parks,’ and the locations mentioned are incendiary because of this humiliation.¹⁴⁰ Taiwan was conquered by Japan, and the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands invoke memories of Japanese colonisation and wartime atrocity, while China’s weak navy saw the South China Sea become a pathway for Western imperialism, gunboat diplomacy, Opium Wars and unequal treaties. The Chinese Dream now focuses on strength – especially military strength – and the prerequisite need for a strong economy, while Keshin and Braun note that the CCP’s domestic legitimacy rests on their ability to provide prosperity and affluence to its people.¹⁴¹ Therefore challenging the US displays military strength while securing valuable resources and strategically important areas, while also correcting for China’s humiliating colonial past.

China claims these are internal matters, falling back on territorial sovereignty and condemning international criticism as interference in internal affairs, whether in Tibet, Hong Kong, or these maritime territories.¹⁴² China employs ‘historical statecraft’ – the strategic utilisation of history to legitimise themselves as the central, global power.¹⁴³ Ancient maps, artifacts and even shipwrecks are used to stake territorial claims.¹⁴⁴ Xi often references Ming admiral Zheng He, invoking cooperation and friendship* in a 2015 speech, unilaterally asserting China’s ownership of the South China Sea while advocating for regional ‘peace, security and stability.’¹⁴⁵ Another speech by Xi reveals more about China’s ambitions. In a 2013 CCP Central Committee meeting purportedly concerning ‘mankind’s harmony with the sea,’ the speech focused on China becoming a maritime power, affirming that East Asia’s seas belong to China.¹⁴⁶ This suggests China intends to challenge America, due to an expanding military and either sincerely held territorial beliefs, or surreptitiously employed realpolitik to claim territory and resources.

¹⁴⁰ William A. Callahan, "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism", *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* Vol. 29, No. 2 (2004): 199.

¹⁴¹ Graham Allison, "What Xi Jinping Wants", *The Atlantic*, May 31, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/05/what-china-wants/528561/>;

¹⁴² "Statement of the Government of the People's Republic of China on China's Territorial Sovereignty and Maritime Rights and Interests in the South China Sea", *Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China*, July 12, 2016, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/nanhai/eng/snhwtlcwj_1/t1379493.htm.

¹⁴³ Maximilian Meyer, "China's historical statecraft and the return of history", *International Affairs* Vol. 94, No. 6, (November 2018): 1217-1218.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 1229.

¹⁴⁵ Xi Jinping, "Reuters interview ahead of Xi's UK state visit", *China Daily*, October 18, 2015, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016-07/06/content_25989430.htm.

¹⁴⁶ Xi Jinping, "Building China into a Maritime Power", *China News and Report*, July 30, 2013, www.china.org.cn/report/2013-08/30/content_29871583.htm.

*For more on political friendship see the entire oeuvre of A-list academic Yuri van Hoef.

2.1.3 Moral Realism or Offensive Realism?

Analysing Yan Xuetong's theory of moral realism enables insight into whether China's harmonious language is sincere or cover for furtive neorealism. Moral realism adopts the perspective of a rising power and maintains several realist principles, noting world politics is 'characterized by the struggle between states for power, prestige, and wealth amid global anarchy,' but that morality shapes strategic preferences and is 'of equal importance to policy making as are power, capability and interest.'¹⁴⁷ Yan's notion of 'governmental morality,' intended to 'achieve interest maximisation' is problematic from a Western perspective, Yan claiming 'Pre-Qin thinkers' notion of construction of ideas is from top to bottom, from strong to weak,' raising questions about governmental morality's legitimacy as it could be usurped by an elite.¹⁴⁸

Nonetheless Yan labels this morality 'a public rather than a private morality, as well as a universal rather than a national morality.'¹⁴⁹ China's actions in the disputed islands cannot reasonably coexist alongside the notion of universal morality as other claimant countries condemn these actions. At other times Yan's morality is explicitly nationalist, described in terms of 'national interests and national capability.'¹⁵⁰ Through this lens of national utilitarianism China's territorial claims make sense as the resources gained would fund China's economic projects and improve living standards, but a national morality is untenable in an increasingly interconnected world. While Yan's notion of governmental or national morality is problematic, it is unlikely practiced by Beijing's elites. This is because international leadership requires trust, which attracts allies, thereby increasing your own military capabilities, and the highest form of international leadership – Yan argues – is humane authority; being seen as both credible and trustworthy.¹⁵¹ Widespread regional discontent with China's expansionism suggests – contrary to David Kang's envisioned regional utopia – that China's realism is more offensive than moral.¹⁵² Similarly, Larson notes how this theory highlights 'the need for a great power to adhere to international norms rather than acting on the basis of short-term self-

¹⁴⁷ Xuetong Yan, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 477, 206, 6-7.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 7; Xuetong Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 68.

¹⁴⁹ Yan, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*, 24

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 7.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 20, 40-41, 43-44, 48-49.

¹⁵² Kang, *China Rising*, 9; Kang, *American Grand Strategy*, 20, 40-43.

interest.¹⁵³ Clearly, Chinese aggression and violation of international law is incongruous alongside Yan's assertion that to be a humane authority, war with the US must be avoided.¹⁵⁴

Wang Yuankang argues Confucian language is political camouflage for realpolitik, or legalism, and to the extent moral realism is considered in Beijing, it is used as Wang claims, as cover for less principled realism.¹⁵⁵ This suggests offensive realism is being applied and practiced in China. Xi's 'Chinese Dream' entails the 'great revival of the Chinese nation,' and in 2017 at the 19th National Congress of the CCP Xi discussed 'China moving closer to centre stage and making greater contributions to mankind,' while calling for a world-class military which could 'fight and win.'¹⁵⁶ A year later at a foreign affairs conference, Xi claimed China would lead the reform of the global system.¹⁵⁷ Larson, describing this change, notes how China's ambitions expanded from rejuvenation to international prominence to leadership of global reform.¹⁵⁸ As Fareed Zakaria writes, 'capabilities shape intentions'.¹⁵⁹ Offensive realism certainly has a utility in describing China's expanding aims, Wang claiming 'China tended to adopt an offensive grand strategy when its power was relatively strong and a defensive one when its power was relatively weak'.¹⁶⁰ While labelled a mere 'returning power' by war criminal Henry Kissinger, at its peak China never had an advanced navy, overseas military bases and intercontinental interests, rarely looking beyond their immediate borders, and so this view can be discarded, as Kissinger should be by the US political establishment.¹⁶¹

Xi has referenced realist concepts himself, cautioning that both countries 'need to work together to avoid the Thucydides Trap'.¹⁶² While a classical realist concept, there is good reason

¹⁵³ Larson, "Can China Change the International System?", 185.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 163.

¹⁵⁵ Yuankang Wang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 20-21.

¹⁵⁶ Mohanty, "Xi Jinping and the 'Chinese Dream'", 34; Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era", *China Daily*, October 18, 2017, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm; Allison, "What Xi Jinping Wants".

¹⁵⁷ "Xi urges breaking new ground in major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics", *Xinhua*, June 24, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-06/24/c_137276269.htm.

¹⁵⁸ Larson, "Can China Change the International System?", 169-170.

¹⁵⁹ Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 9.

¹⁶⁰ Wang, *Harmony and War*, xiii.

¹⁶¹ Henry Kissinger, "The Future of U.S.-Chinese Relations: Conflict Is a Choice, Not a Necessity", *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 91, No. 2 (2012): 44-55.

¹⁶² Mark J. Valencia, "China needs patience to achieve a peaceful rise", *South China Morning Post*, February 7, 2014, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1422780/china-needs-patience-achieve-peaceful-rise?page=all>; for the original use of the term see: Allison, *Destined for War*.

to believe Xi thinks as an offensive realist, contrary to scholarly consensus.¹⁶³ Zhang Baohui highlights the centrality of military power to the Chinese Dream, labelling Xi's assertion that 'backwardness invites aggression' an overtly offensive realist epistemology, which Zhang claims is predominant amongst China's political elite.¹⁶⁴ The Chinese Dream is echoed in the book title of retired PLA colonel Liu Mingfu, which advocates for martial spirit and military supremacy, eschewing a peaceful rise.¹⁶⁵ Liu claimed Xi shares his vision, and the book is officially endorsed in a foreword by political commissar Liu Yazhou.¹⁶⁶ The book references lessons to be learnt from previous hegemonies, such as internal balancing and the Monroe Doctrine (*MenluoZhuyi*).¹⁶⁷

Internal balancing is the process by which a state builds economic power before increasing military capabilities, Chinese expansionism revealing this as an ongoing process.¹⁶⁸ Militarising this region secures resources to develop China's military and economy, especially as this region is central to the BRI, examined in Chapter 3. This ongoing and accelerating process mirrors China's general strategy, consistent but not unchanging, exemplified in two quotes by Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping, the former expressing the famous dictum of 'hide your capabilities and bide your time,' while in 2017 the latter declared it was China's time 'to take centre stage in the world.'¹⁶⁹ Xi's bellicosity, in comparison to Deng's comparative placidity suggests a continuous offensive realist strategy relative to China's power, but always eyeing a return to international pre-eminence. This also suggests that as China's growth continues, so will their pugnacity. A general weakness of offensive realism is its archaic focus on territorial conquest, and while Mearsheimer rightly notes China is more likely to subtly accrue power, the theory fits here.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶³ For Xi Jinping as a defensive realist see: Shipping Tang, "From Offensive to Defensive Realism: A Social Evolutionary Interpretation of China's Security Strategy", in *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*, ed. Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng (New York: Cornell University Press, 2015); Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, "China's Rise: Offensive or Defensive Realism", *Strategic Studies* Vol. 39, No. 1 (2019): 41-58; Klaus Heinrich Radtke, "China's Shifting Behaviour in the South China Sea: A Defensive Realist Perspective", *American Journal of Chinese Studies* Vol. 22, No. 2 (2015): 309-28.

¹⁶⁴ Baohui Zhang, "Xi Jinping, 'Pragmatic' Offensive Realism and China's Rise", *Global Asia* Vol. 9, No. 2 (2014): 74.

¹⁶⁵ Mingfu Liu, *The China Dream: Great Power Thinking & Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era* (New York: CN Times, 2015).

¹⁶⁶ Zhang, "Xi Jinping, 'Pragmatic' Offensive Realism and China's Rise", 75.

¹⁶⁷ Liu, *The China Dream*, 151-158.

¹⁶⁸ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Boston: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1979), 168.

¹⁶⁹ Charles Clover, "Xi Jinping signals departure from low-profile policy", *Financial Times*, October 20, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/05cd86a6-b552-11e7-a398-73d59db9e399>.

¹⁷⁰ John J. Mearsheimer and Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Clash of the Titans", *Foreign Policy*, October 22, 2009, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/22/clash-of-the-titans/>.

Menluozhuyi refers to the US policy of opposing European colonialism in the Americas, a byproduct of which was ensuring no European powers could intervene in – let alone dominate – the region. If Liu’s book reflects the views of China’s political establishment, then China’s expansionism and military challenge to the US could be viewed in these terms, expelling rival great powers from the Indo-Pacific, as Mearsheimer predicted they would.¹⁷¹ Michael Pillsbury supports Zhang’s claim that offensive realist hawks dominate in Beijing, and China likely views US regional interference in these terms, the hegemon stymying any rival power, which likely shaped Chinese thinking both recently and over time.¹⁷² If Xi thinks as an offensive realist, then this surely permeates throughout government, considering the deification of ‘Xi Jinping Thought’ now visible in state documents.¹⁷³ This suggests China is challenging America as the Chinese elite think in terms of zero-sum politics and of America as a coercive hegemon, and their actions in disputed territories may be applying two offensive realist lessons: *Menluozhuyi* (Monroe Doctrine) and internal balancing.

China often describes their moves as preventing US encirclement, claiming a policy of ‘active defence.’¹⁷⁴ In 2015 the Maoist term reappeared in ‘Chinese Military Strategy,’ declaring they will not attack but ‘will surely counterattack if attacked.’¹⁷⁵ Yet this declared passivity does not match their actions in the contested islands, nor their modernising military and growing bellicosity. An egregious example is the Maritime Police Law passed on 22/01/2020, authorising the Chinese Coast Guard to fire on foreign vessels in waters ‘under China’s jurisdiction’ which, for reasons examined, is a porous and problematic definition.¹⁷⁶ Similarly military exercises near Taiwan and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands may be ‘active defence’ of territory China perceives as its own.¹⁷⁷ China’s characterisation of the US as aggressive in their 2019 Defence White Paper could also be construed as a prerequisite for

¹⁷¹ John J. Mearsheimer, “The Rise of China Will Not Be Peaceful at All”, *The Australian*, November 18, 2005, <https://www.mearsheimer.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/The-Australian-November-18-2005.pdf>.

¹⁷² Pillsbury, *The Hundred-year Marathon*, 16-18; This is the view adopted by Wang Jisi and Kenneth Lieberthal, who argue that the Chinese elite and Chinese policy makers view things in these terms. See: Jisi Wang and Kenneth G. Lieberthal, “Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust”, *Brookings Institute*, March 30, 2012, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/addressing-u-s-china-strategic-distrust/>.

¹⁷³ Wang, “Study and Implement Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy.”

¹⁷⁴ Donald K. Emmerson, “Why Does China Want to Control the South China Sea?”, *The Diplomat*, May 24, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/05/why-does-china-want-to-control-the-south-china-sea/>.

¹⁷⁵ “China’s Military Strategy”, *The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China*, May 26, 2015, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content_20820628.htm.

¹⁷⁶ Shuxian Luo, China’s Coast Guard Law: Destabilizing or Reassuring?”, *The Diplomat*, January 29, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/01/chinas-coast-guard-law-destabilizing-or-reassuring/>.

¹⁷⁷ James Kynge, Kathrin Hille, Christian Shepherd and Amy Kazmin, “China’s great power play puts Asia on edge”, *Financial Times*, September 16, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/de4df609-2599-47cb-ba37-0b754d4f3b57>.

‘defensive’ aggression.¹⁷⁸ Yet this only shows one side of the rivalry. Equal – or greater – responsibility is conferred on the US whose response to China reveals their own offensive realism, which necessitates a challenge while undermining their military capabilities.

Table 4: Chinese Expansionism

| <i>Motivations</i> | <i>Strategy</i> | <i>IR Theory</i> | <i>Challenging the US?</i> |
|------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Century of Humiliation | Militarising islands | Moral Realism | No |
| Chinese Dream | Claiming resources | Offensive Realism | Yes |
| Strong army and navy | “Active Defence” | | |

2.2 The Rise of Offensive Realism in America

This section observes the Trump administration’s response to China’s military aggression, closely inspecting the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) and 2018 National Defence Strategy (NDS), analysing how the language constructs an enemy and reduces opportunities for cooperation, while closely resembling key tenets of offensive realism. The documents’ self-proclaimed ‘principled realism’ is critiqued and paralleled with Yan’s moral realism, which in both cases resemble political camouflage for offensive realist thinking. To Ionut Popescu’s four pillars of Trump’s offensive realist grand strategy I add a fifth – the extending of zero-sum thinking from rivals to neutral countries and allies. This alienated US allies, preventing an effective anti-China coalition forming, while pushing undecided parties towards China.

2.2.1 The Trump Administration’s Response

The NSS and NDS identify China as America’s chief concern and the Indo-Pacific as the main geopolitical theatre, elevating the US above the liberal and democratic world order. The NSS begins by repeating Trump’s promise to make America great again, affirming the ‘America first’ spirit of the document.¹⁷⁹ The first threat discussed is China, who, the document claims, ‘challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity,’ and ‘shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests.’¹⁸⁰ That China is

¹⁷⁸ Anthony H. Cordesman, “China’s New 2019 Defense White Paper”, *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, July 24, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-new-2019-defense-white-paper>.

¹⁷⁹ White House, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” *Trump White House Archives*, December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

¹⁸⁰ White House, “National Security Strategy,” 2, 25.

the main concern is reflected by the space devoted to them; China is mentioned 33 times to Russia's 19, and of the concatenation of threats attributed to China, the primary concern is military. It claims China is 'developing advanced weapons and capabilities' and is 'building the most capable and well-funded military in the world', while growing and diversifying its nuclear arsenal, to 'reassert their influence regionally and globally' and 'change the international order in their favour'.¹⁸¹ The NSS notes how China's militarized outposts in the South China Sea endanger free trade, 'threaten the sovereignty of other nations, and undermine regional stability.'¹⁸² The NSS promises to 'provide for Taiwan's legitimate defence needs and deter coercion,' assist Japanese missile defence, and more generally maintain a forward military presence, strengthen its military relationships and encourage a strong defence network with allies and partners.¹⁸³

The NDS followed, attempting to translate the NSS grand strategy into clear priorities and actionable goals. It begins by mentioning military forces and security, reflecting their paramount importance, before describing China's 'military modernisation programme' which contests US military superiority in 'air, land, sea, space and cyberspace.'¹⁸⁴ It is noteworthy that this defence strategy gives offensive capabilities pre-eminence, claiming 'the surest way to prevent war is to be prepared to win one,' in a single sentence describing the neorealist security dilemma.¹⁸⁵ The document clarifies that the 'central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security is the re-emergence of long-term, strategic competition by what the National Security Strategy classifies as revisionist powers,' and argues extensive military investment is required.¹⁸⁶ Other responses to China followed the documents' release, including continuing Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea, sailing within 12 nautical miles of the Spratly Islands, reviving the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which met five times between 2017–2019, and removing China's invitation to Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) multinational military exercises.¹⁸⁷ The economic and military rivalries are also intertwined, as advanced

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 8, 25, 27.

¹⁸² Ibid, 46.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 47.

¹⁸⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States," *Department of Defence*, 2018, accessed at <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

¹⁸⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, "National Defense Strategy", 5.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 1-2.

¹⁸⁷ Ankit Panda, "US Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation Near China-Held Features in Spratlys", *The Diplomat*, July 15, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/us-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation-near-china-held-features-in-spratlys/>.

technology blurs the lines between civilian and military technologies – to be examined in Chapter 3.¹⁸⁸

Despite both documents' clearly stated self-interest, the NSS claims a strategy of 'principled realism', principled because 'advancing American principles spreads peace and prosperity around the globe.'¹⁸⁹ This self-interest disguised as universalism is remarkably similar to Xi's quasi-moral realist speeches, such as when claiming realising China's rejuvenation will help build 'a community with a shared future for humanity.'¹⁹⁰ This reveals how offensive realism narrows differences between countries, both simultaneously claiming pluralism and condemning the other, while their ceaseless condemnation increases the perceived military challenge from the other. Alexander Wendt argues that 'structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces' and that 'identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature', and the language in these documents foregoes opportunity for cooperation while heightening Sino-American tensions.¹⁹¹ Analysing this language, Yuan and Fu illustrate US construction of rivals, from the USSR to present-day China, portrayed as 'antithetical to the (American) self.'¹⁹² America, they claim, will 'invariably adopt a zero-sum mindset in making a diametrical self-other story for any country...that might threaten its hegemonic identity.'¹⁹³ Evident under Trump, this reflects an offensive realist grand strategy which reduces possibilities for cooperation, exacerbates existing conflicts, and heightens the perceived challenge from China.

2.2.2 An Offensive Realist Grand Strategy

Ionut Popescu describes the four pillars of the Trump administration's offensive realist grand strategy: (i) 'Revisionist great powers pursuing regional hegemony' representing the greatest challenge, (ii) 'Preserving and extending America's pre-eminence in military power' as paramount, (iii) Great-power politics as zero-sum conflict, not international and institutional cooperation, and (iv) 'Security interests trumping economic and ideological ones; hard power, not soft power, defines international politics.'¹⁹⁴ This is evident in the quotes analysed from both the NSS and NDS, clearly corresponding to Mearsheimer's *Tragedy of Great Power*

¹⁸⁸ James McBride and Andrew Chatzky, "Is 'Made in China 2025' a Threat to Global Trade?", *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 13, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/made-china-2025-threat-global-trade>.

¹⁸⁹ White House, "National Security Strategy," 55.

¹⁹⁰ "Xi urges breaking new ground in major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics"

¹⁹¹ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

¹⁹² Yuan and Fu, "Narrative Framing", 452.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Popescu, "American Grand Strategy and the Rise of Offensive Realism", 383-399.

Politics, sharing a concerned understanding for the desire for regional hegemony, the primacy of military power, the zero-sum nature of great power politics and the preference for hard power over soft power.¹⁹⁵

Mearsheimer's more recent work argues America should 'jettison its grand ambitions of liberal hegemony,' praised Trump for revealing its vulnerability, and endorsed Trump basing policies on the single criterion: 'what is best for the American people?'¹⁹⁶ This aligns perfectly with the NDS and NSS, suggesting an overtly offensive realist Trumpian grand strategy. I identify a fifth column in Trumpian offensive realism which extends zero-sum competition from between adversarial great powers to allies and smaller democracies. As Ikenberry notes, 'Trump is the first post-war American president who is actively hostile to liberal internationalism,' his unilateralism affecting 'alliances, arms control, environment, pandemic disease, human rights and democratic solidarity.'¹⁹⁷ This alienates allies and has military implications; in undervaluing soft power offensive realism decimated America's reputation and alienated the very allies needed to resist China's challenge in the Indo-Pacific.

2.2.3 A Squandered Opportunity?

The NSS rightly asserts that China's assertiveness meant many looked West for sustained leadership.¹⁹⁸ Yet the folly of offensive realism is revealed – alongside the zero-sum reality transparent in both principled and moral realism – in simultaneously contesting China's rise while pressing allies such as Japan and South Korea to renegotiate military cost-sharing agreements, the US even threatening withdrawing regional forces in an attempt to gain favourable terms.¹⁹⁹ This reflects the paradox of offensive realism employed in the age of Sino-American rivalry. You need allies to help contain a perceived potential regional hegemon, but the prescribed self-interest pushes prospective allies away, even as China's own offensive realism angered regional countries, Vietnam's issuing of their first defence white paper in ten years contradicting the regional Shangri-la Kang envisions.²⁰⁰ Cooper and Poling, describing

¹⁹⁵ Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 34-35, 41 (regional hegemony), 56-57 (military power), 18, 34 (zero-sum politics), 46-48 (preference for hard power).

¹⁹⁶ Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*, 217, 230-31.

¹⁹⁷ John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars, New Edition* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019), 10; John Ikenberry, "America's Asia Policy after Trump", *Global Asia* Vol. 15, No. 4 (December 2020), https://www.globalasia.org/v15no4/focus/americas-asia-policy-after-trump_g-john-ikenberry.

¹⁹⁸ White House, "National Security Strategy," 46.

¹⁹⁹ Kurt M. Campbell and Rush Doshi, "How America Can Shore Up Asian Order", *Foreign Affairs*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-01-12/how-america-can-shore-asian-order>.

²⁰⁰ Paul Haenle and Lucas Tcheyan, "How the World Is Responding to a Changing China", *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace*, June 10, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/10/how-world-is-responding-to-changing-china-pub-82039>; Kang, *American Grand Strategy*, 20, 40-43.

this contradiction, write that Trump's 'administration may have put America first, but it has left its South China Sea allies and partners behind.'²⁰¹ In helping its allies, the US helps itself, but the offensive realism's self-interest retards this process, damaging their 'most abiding strategic interests in the region: rules, relationships, and resources.'²⁰² Trump's strategy also failed to stop China claiming regional resources, successfully ignoring UNCLOS and undermining US standing worldwide.²⁰³ China often paints America as a paper tiger, and this does seem to adequately describe Trump's China policies – the fake strength of a fake strongman. Offensive realism can be criticised on similar grounds; a theory in which weakness masquerades as strength, and self-interest mendaciously claims mutual benefit.

It appears the perception of the US as a paper tiger permeates beyond China. A recent survey by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute polled 1,008 respondents from government, business and academia in South East Asia, the results showing a majority believed US regional influence was decreasing, one third having 'little or no confidence in the U.S. as a strategic partner and provider of regional security.'²⁰⁴ This is despite the fact that under 10% viewed China as a benign power, suggesting China's offensive realism could have formed a strong anti-China coalition, but America's own neorealism squandered this opportunity, thereby increasing China's military challenge.²⁰⁵ The structuralism of offensive realism is a myth. It is a choice made and erroneously applied, as is the hyper-charged extension of zero-sum thinking to

Table 5: US Offensive Realist Response

| <i>Strategy</i> | <i>Results</i> | <i>Security</i> | <i>Prosperity</i> | <i>Domestic Liberty</i> |
|-----------------------------|--|--|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Stymie China militarily | Repelled allies | Undermined - weakened military alliances | N/A | N/A |
| Reduce military expenditure | Pushed undecided parties towards China | | | |

²⁰¹ Zack Cooper and Gregory Poling, "America's Freedom of Navigation Operations Are Lost at Sea", *Foreign Policy*, January 8, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/08/americas-freedom-of-navigation-operations-are-lost-at-sea/>.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Patrick Cronin, "China Is Waging a Maritime Insurgency in the South China Sea. It's Time for the United States to Counter It," *National Interest*, August 6, 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/china-waging-maritime-insurgency-south-china-sea-its-time-united-states-counter-it-28062>.

²⁰⁴ Jack Kim and Simon Lewis, "Southeast Asia wary of China's Belt and Road project, skeptical of U.S.: survey", *Reuters*, January 6, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asean-singapore-idUSKCN1P00GP>.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

erstwhile allies, and Biden's early reversions of his predecessor's policies have yielded superior results in his short time in office.

2.3 The Return of Liberal Internationalism

Offensive realism and liberal internationalism can, although born of different concerns, exhibit remarkably similar foreign relations with China, while the latter reduces the weight of China's military challenge. Joe Biden has adopted a liberal internationalist grand strategy, this section highlighting the continuities and discontinuities between US administrations' military policies regarding China. The key difference is the treatment of allies needed to counter China's military aggression in the Indo-Pacific, and this thesis extrapolates what Biden's policy will be from statements to regional allies and the administration's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance document (INSSG). Language from US allies and China's response to Biden's early moves is analysed to suggest that demand for US leadership persists due to Chinese aggression, and that China fears this early formation of a more solid alliance which will weaken their regional military challenge.

2.3.1 A Liberal Internationalist Grand Strategy

Reverting to liberal internationalism incalculably strengthens America, enabling a strong coalition to form and greatly diminishing China's military challenge while adopting a similarly severe response to Chinese expansionism. Popescu highlights the difference between an offensive realist and liberal internationalist grand strategy, championed by writers such as Ikenberry who claims the US should be a liberal leviathan, concerned with human rights, international trade, environmental protection and international law, and Brooks and Wohlforth, who advocate against US retrenchment.²⁰⁶ As Ikenberry notes, America has 'organized and led an extended political system built around multilateral institutions, alliances, strategic partners, and client states...built on strategic understandings and hegemonic bargains'.²⁰⁷ Ikenberry and Mearsheimer both use the nomenclature 'liberal hegemony' to describe the same set of concerns, but the latter argues successive American governments have caused costly wars abroad and undermined domestic rights and institutions.²⁰⁸ This is sound analysis, but Mearsheimer overlooks how both grand strategies respond to China similarly, shown by

²⁰⁶ Popescu, "American Grand Strategy", 375–378; Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, 1-2; Brooks, Ikenberry and Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home, America", 7–51.

²⁰⁷ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, 2.

²⁰⁸ Ibid; Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*, vi-viii.

successive American administrations. Offensive realism mandates Sino-American competition from the self-interested viewpoint of preventing China achieving Indo-Pacific hegemony, while liberal internationalism elicits a similar response due to China's disregard for human rights, violations of international law, and coercive diplomacy.

Ikenberry claims 'America's goal should be to see that Chinese power is exercised as much as possible within rules and institutions that we have crafted...and in which we ourselves want to operate, given the more crowded world of the future.'²⁰⁹ He notes that if China eschews multilateralism, this necessitates a deeper conflict with the institutionalised world order, which is much stronger with a willing and responsible US at the helm.²¹⁰ This critiques the Trump administration's unilateralism while suggesting a certain conflict with China is necessary, as they increasingly violate international law, indicating US strategic rivalry with China will continue. Though Biden will expend considerable effort undoing his predecessor's work, reversing zero-sum relations with friends, revitalising the spirit of multilateralism and restoring belief in a predictable if imperfect US, the response to China's Indo-Pacific military challenge will show remarkable continuity. The difference is revealed by the level of multilateralism displayed. As Ikenberry notes, 'the best way to engage China will be from a position of strength, and this can only be achieved if the US gathers together its allies and partners, rebuilds old coalitions and creates new ones.'²¹¹ As such the main difference between offensive realism and liberal internationalism when regarding China is one of values, most visible when observing how the US treats its allies.

2.3.2 Biden's Early Response

Biden's incipient actions reflect bipartisan belief that China represents a military challenge, while change is most evident in US treatment of its allies, this strategy appearing likely to solidify US-Asian alliances, ameliorating China's military threat. Taiwan is an area which sees large continuity across administrations, Biden signalling he would continue the steadfast defence of the island. On 21/01/2021, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the US had not halted their arms sales – as it had done to Saudi Arabia and the UAE – which had risen under the Trump administration.²¹² Three days into Biden's presidency, the state department released a statement condemning Beijing's 'attempts to intimidate its neighbours, including

²⁰⁹ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, 349.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 346-347.

²¹¹ Ikenberry, "America's Asia Policy after Trump."

²¹² Yi-hsuan Lu and Kayleigh Madjar, "US has not halted arms sales: MOFA", *Taipei Times*, January 29, 2021, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2021/01/29/2003751385>.

Taiwan.²¹³ The new administration went further, implicitly suggesting Taiwanese independence was possible by avoiding mentioning the one-China concept, prompting Wu Qian, China's defence ministry spokesman, to reaffirm that 'Taiwan independence means war.'²¹⁴ Furthermore Kurt Campbell, architect of the Pivot to Asia, is now prominent in the Biden administration, recommending expanding the Quad – already reformed under Trump – to contain China.²¹⁵

Regarding Chinese incursions and bullying in the East and South China Seas, the new administration has rapidly reasserted American multilateralism and leadership in the Indo-Pacific, also expressed in state documents which are grounded in the language of democracy, peace and stability, and appear more credible in comparison to the doublespeak of the NDS and NSS.²¹⁶ Secretary of State Antony Blinken stressed the importance of the US-Philippines Mutual Defence Treaty, reaffirmed the strength of the US-Thailand alliance and reasserted commitments to Japan and South Korea, reversing Trump's position on burden-sharing.²¹⁷ Biden also assured Japan that their security guarantees applied to the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, a clear warning to Chinese expansionism in the East China Sea, while Blinken repeated and underscored US rejection of China's claims in its southern sea.²¹⁸

Furthermore, plans are in motion to reclaim US legitimacy and leadership, uniting a concert of nations with which to face the Chinese challenge. One such plan is to expand the G7 into the D10, adding Australia, India and South Korea, representing the world's ten leading democracies and including key Indo-Pacific allies.²¹⁹ Ikenberry hopes the D10 can 'reclaim the liberal internationalist vision,' suggesting the liberal democratic order should be more like exclusive clubs, rather than a shopping mall in which illiberal nations can pick and choose

²¹³ Ned Price, "PRC Military Pressure Against Taiwan Threatens Regional Peace and Stability", *U.S. Department of State*, January 23, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/prc-military-pressure-against-taiwan-threatens-regional-peace-and-stability/>.

²¹⁴ Tony Munroe and Yew Lun Tian, "China sharpens language, warns Taiwan that independence 'means war'", *Reuters*, January 28, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-taiwan-idUSKBN29X0V3>.

²¹⁵ Campbell and Doshi, "How America Can Shore Up Asian Order."

²¹⁶ Price, "PRC Military Pressure Against Taiwan Threatens Regional Peace and Stability".

²¹⁷ Ned Price, "Secretary Blinken's Call with Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Locsin", *U.S. Department of State*, January 27, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-call-with-philippine-secretary-of-foreign-affairs-locsin/>; Antony J. Blinken, "Reaffirming and Reimagining America's Alliances", *U.S. Department of State*, March 24, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reaffirming-and-reimagining-americas-alliances/>; Ned Price, "Secretary Blinken's Call with Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai", *U.S. Department of State*, January 27, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-call-with-thai-deputy-prime-minister-and-foreign-minister-don-pramudwinai/>.

²¹⁸ Demetri Sevastopulo, "Joe Biden reaffirms commitment to defending Senkaku Islands", *Financial Times*, January 28, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/5f142efe-4d4d-4d5a-b42e-eddcdb3a5df8>.

²¹⁹ Erik Brattberg and Ben Judah, "Forget the G-7, Build the D-10", *Foreign Policy*, June 10, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/10/g7-d10-democracy-trump-europe/>.

which institutions to join or reject.²²⁰ Campbell also supports liberal internationalism's unique blend of realism and liberalism, noting the Indo-Pacific requires three things: 'the need for a balance of power; the need for an order that the region's states recognize as legitimate; and the need for an allied and partner coalition to address China's challenge to both.'²²¹

It appears Biden's administration understands this. In a speech entitled 'Reaffirming and Reimagining America's Alliances,' Blinken noted the US needs its allies, not in the simple bilateral relationships Trump attempted to form, but in wide, interwoven, multilateral webs to ensure a 'healthy Indo-Pacific region, unconstrained by coercion, and anchored by democratic values.'²²² The administration's interim security strategy underlines the importance of alliances and liberal multilateralism:

When we strengthen our alliances, we amplify our power and our ability to disrupt threats before they can reach our shores. When we invest in the economic development of countries, we create new markets for our products and reduce the likelihood of instability, violence, and mass migrations. When we strengthen health systems around the world, we reduce the risk of future pandemics that can threaten our people and our economy.²²³

Conventional military measures to combat China's aggression also exist, Kurt Campbell recommending moving away from conventional military metrics such as aircraft carriers towards asymmetric methods which China uses such as long-range, high-speed strike weaponry.²²⁴ Yet far more effective than this is preserving extensive alliances with friendly, democratic nations, which by working together greatly diminishes the Chinese military threat.

2.3.3 A More Successful Approach?

Despite little time in office, it is possible to extrapolate whether Biden's approach will be successful by analysing responses to his election and incipient actions, as well as China's reaction, while comparing them with the results of his predecessor, to assess whether China resembles a greater or diminished challenge. The phone calls and messages to Biden following

²²⁰ John Ikenberry, "The Next Liberal Order: The Age of Contagion Demands More Internationalism, Not Less", *Foreign Affairs*, July 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-09/next-liberal-order>.

²²¹ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, xiv; Campbell and Doshi, "How America Can Shore Up Asian Order".

²²² Blinken, "Reaffirming and Reimagining America's Alliances".

²²³ Joseph R. Biden, "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance", *The Whitehouse*, March 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

²²⁴ Campbell and Doshi, "How America Can Shore Up Asian Order".

his election are telling. President Modi referred to Biden's election as a 'testament to the strength and resilience of democratic traditions in the United States,' while Scott Morrison described American leadership as 'indispensable to meeting these challenges and upholding the rules, norms and standards of our international community.'²²⁵ Prime Minister Suga hoped the US-Japanese alliance could 'ensure peace, freedom, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond,' while Moon Jae-in discussed gathering the forces of 'democracy, peace, human rights, international solidarity and multilateral cooperation.'²²⁶ Congratulating the president elect is not unusual, but the repeated references to multilateralism, democracy, and US leadership indicate a thirst for this, suggesting a resentment for its absence in the prior administration. It also reflects dissatisfaction with Chinese offensive realist aggression, and a willingness to face China together.

There are also signs that China fears a united front forming under willing US leadership in response to China's expansionism, diplomat Yang Jiechi claiming America should 'rise above the outdated mentality of zero-sum, major-power rivalry and work with China to keep the relationship on the right track.'²²⁷ The word cooperation featured 24 times in a speech which argued for 'no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation.'²²⁸ While some zero-sum relations will continue alongside a level of necessary cooperation under Biden, the zero-sum mentality extended to allies under Trump is surely at an end – a necessary precondition of resisting China's military challenge. Only five days into Biden's presidency Xi Jinping declared that 'multilateralism should not be used as pretence for unilateralism' and that 'the strong should not bully the weak,' perhaps indicating a fearful realisation that Biden could form a concerted coalition with which to confront China.²²⁹

²²⁵ "In Phone Call, Modi Calls Biden Victory 'Testament to Strength of US Democratic Tradition', *The Wire*, November 18, 2020, <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/narendra-modi-joe-biden-phone-call-us-president>; Katharine Murphy, "Scott Morrison congratulates Joe Biden on US election win and flags Australian visit in 2021", *The Guardian*, November 8, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/nov/08/scott-morrison-congratulates-biden-on-us-win-while-malcolm-turnbull-declares-what-a-relief>.

²²⁶ "Japan PM Suga congratulates Joe Biden for election", *Reuters*, November 7, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-election-japan-suga/japan-pm-suga-congratulates-joe-biden-for-election-idINL4N2HQ0NR>; Sangmi Cha, "South Korea's Moon congratulates Biden, to ensure no gap in U.S. alliance", *Reuters*, November 9, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-southkorea-idUSKBN27P02T>.

²²⁷ Jiechi Yang, "Dialogue with National Committee on U.S.-China Relations", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, February 2, 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1850362.shtml.

²²⁸ Yew Lun Tian, "Top Chinese diplomat calls for China, U.S. to mend relations", *Reuters*, February 2, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-usa-idUSKBN2A2061>.

²²⁹ Xi Jinping, "Let the Torch of Multilateralism Light up Humanity's Way Forward", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, January 25, 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1848323.shtml.

Trump's America was more coercive empire than liberal hegemon, narrowing the difference between them and China for third parties. The Philippines for example, were pushed towards China when Trump tried to improve the military deal and pulled towards China by promises of investment.²³⁰ Ikenberry rejects this accusation of empire, claiming America 'is a hierarchical order, but one that enshrines democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Sovereignty, liberalism, and multilateral cooperation coexist with power, inequality, and domination'.²³¹ Under Trump the pact with America became truly Faustian while an offensive realist grand strategy floundered. Kurt Campbell himself claimed US strategy failed due to unilateralism, noting that Trump 'strained virtually every element of the region's operating system', leading to Indo-Pacific instability.²³² Yet benefits of US leadership have been highlighted both by Trump's presidency and China's growing belligerence, explaining the renewed inclination for responsible American leadership. Whether Biden's approach is ultimately successful remains to be seen; China is still an aggressive power, and managing the military threat is no simple task, but united democratic nations are undoubtedly better placed to check China than a unilateral America trying to prevent China's rise while concurrently retreating from the outside world. It is early days, but that the first leader-level meeting of the Quad occurred on 12/03/2021 and that European warships are now in the region simultaneously

Table 6: US Liberal Internationalist Response

| <i>Strategy</i> | <i>Results</i> | <i>Security</i> | <i>Prosperity</i> | <i>Domestic Liberty</i> |
|---|---|--|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Form a coalition with which to face China | Alliance forming under American leadership | Enhanced - allies working with America | N/A | N/A |
| Reassure allies | Chinese consternation over a united Western coalition | | | |

²³⁰ Andree Calozzo, "Philippines' Duterte tests Trump with move to unravel decades-old alliance", *Japan Times*, February 14, 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/02/14/asia-pacific/philippines-duterte-trump-alliance/>.

²³¹ Ikenberry, "Reflections on After Victory", 15.

²³² Campbell and Doshi, "How America Can Shore Up Asian Order"; Michael J. Green, "Biden Makes His First Bold Move on Asia", *Foreign Policy*, January 13, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/13/kurt-campbell-biden-asia-china-appointment/>.

reflects this spirit of cooperation, affirms liberal internationalism, and implicitly condemns the regency of offensive realist thinking under Xi and Trump.²³³

2.4 Does this challenge America?

While Chinese military aggression and expansionism in the Indo-Pacific presents a military challenge to America, the greater threat is an offensive realist mindset evident in Beijing, which necessitates continuous expansion and suggests their militarised territorial claims are part of an ongoing process of internal balancing, fuelled by a self-perceived humiliating colonial history and the perception of a US attempting to undermine their momentous rise. Yet the challenge is limited, Larson and Lake both noting the main contest is over status rather than ideology or military strength, reducing the existential stakes.²³⁴ While China will grind against America's hub and spoke regional alliance system, the bigger challenge appears to be theoretical. If a true moral realism was practiced in China and in the disputed regions discussed, the challenge to the US and its allies would be reduced, but the apparent conscious practicing of offensive realism suggests China will increasingly challenge America, and that the militaristic process of internal balancing will continue, heightening the risk of military conflict in the region.

Key documents from the Trump administration reveal that the American perspective perceived China's challenge as paramount, with the military threat the greatest part of that. The language in these documents reveals a remarkable similarity with Xi Jinping's strategic thinking, simultaneously claiming morality while vilifying the other, foregoing de-escalation and cooperative opportunities and therefore solidifying the challenge. The more insidious threat to America therefore came from within, Trump's offensive realist grand strategy discarding allies and narrowing the difference between the two powers, whose zero-sum thinking came to strongly resemble that of each other. Trump's grand strategy amounted to offensive realism on steroids, extending zero-sum thinking to allies, and receiving some early support from Mearsheimer himself for the attempted immolation of liberal internationalism.²³⁵ While China's offensive realist thinking may have birthed a newfound thirst for US leadership, America's own offensive realist grand strategy squandered this opportunity, lowering America's international standing, repelling allies, and not achieving any notable results regarding China's military

²³³ Ralph Jennings, "Western Countries Send Ships to South China Sea in Pushback Against Beijing", *Voice of America*, February 22, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/voa-news-china/western-countries-send-ships-south-china-sea-pushback-against>.

²³⁴ Larson, "Can China Change the International System?", 176; Lake, "Economic Openness and Great Power Competition: Lessons for China and the United States", 239.

²³⁵ Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*, 152.

threat. Trump's extension of zero-sum thinking to allies undermined America's reputation, and to the extent that a coalition formed against China in the Trump era, this is simply more proof of the self-sabotaging effects of the application of offensive realism, serving to alienate China's neighbours and near abroad.

A liberal internationalist grand strategy applied to an aggressive China can be equally severe as offensive realism, but is far more effective, and the difference is revealed in how one treats its allies. Biden's early presidency suggests a desire for responsible US leadership, and China appears to fear a united coalition forming against them, which would significantly weaken the military challenge they pose to America. As Yan Xuetong's moral realism helps explain, if you command authority and are considered trustworthy, you maintain effective leadership and extensive alliances, thereby increasing your own military capabilities.²³⁶ However the military contest and Chinese land grabs in their nearby seas is only a fragment of the larger Sino-American contest. A much greater arena is the economic rivalry which has the potential to exacerbate or ameliorate existing tensions, either making gains co-dependent on each other, or continuing the zero-sum thinking which defined the Trump and Xi administrations.

²³⁶ Yan, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*, 22, 40–1.

Chapter 3

Does China Challenge America Economically?

“China is not a superpower, nor will she ever seek to be one... If one day, China should change colour and turn into a superpower, if it should play the tyrant in the world, subject others to its bullying, aggression and exploitation, the people of the world should identify it as social-imperialism, expose it, oppose it and work together with the Chinese people to overthrow China” – Deng Xiaoping, 1974.

“A fool lies here, who tried to hustle the East.” – Rudyard Kipling

The Naulahka

The military competition is encapsulated within and fuelled by the economic rivalry. As David Lake argues, ‘economic competition is a cause, an accelerant, and, perhaps, even a product of great power rivalry.’²³⁷ Section 1 claims the Sino-American trade war is practically as well as theoretically bankrupt, and David Lake’s open economics and Dale Copeland’s trade expectations theories are utilised to suggest economic decoupling – encouraged by offensive realist thinking – risks military conflict, while Ikenberry’s idea of binding is modernised to suggest technological existential dangers can be mitigated by agreeing on shared goals. Section 2 analyses Rudolf Moritz’s labelling of China’s ‘shadow institutions’ and whether this challenges the US economically. While these institutions may themselves be multilateral, they can be employed for a greater offensive realist strategy, such as the AIIB helping the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which itself challenges the US. Kishore Mahbubani’s concept of a static, uncompromising world order, and Kristen Hopewell’s analysis of US protectionist elements are utilised to suggest they carry responsibility for creating a rival, while laying the foundations

²³⁷ Lake, “Economic Openness and Great Power Competition”, 246.

of Trump's trade war and Chinese desire for their own exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Section 3 analyses the BRI, and the multiplicity of challenges it poses: economic, military, ideational, and geopolitical. The project's staggering scope is contrasted against the great geopolitical theories, before observing whether offensive realism is ultimately self-sabotaging, as its unilateralism and zero-sum thinking is often directed against partners and allies.

3.1 The Sino-American Trade War

Li Wei labelled the Sino-American trade war the 'most far-reaching adjustment to the United States' China policy since 1972,' ending economic engagement, the cornerstone of Sino-American relations.²³⁸ US grievances with China's economic practice are explored, before observing the theoretical aspects of protectionism and how EEZs are inherently dangerous. The trade war is critiqued through this lens, and the claim made that the US is threatened more by offensive realism than Chinese protectionism. Placing aside the greater theoretical danger, the thesis illustrates the trade war's failure by its own metrics, resulting in job losses and increased deficit for America, while China appeared more economically resilient and did not liberalise as hoped. The prospects of techno-economic decoupling are then examined. Given the existential risks posed by technology, and the boundless possibilities for human flourishing offered by artificial intelligence (AI), China and America should agree upon shared goals, learning both from the Cold War and Ikenberry's concept of 'binding', which necessitates an admission both of 21st century technological dangers, and the possibilities of de-escalation between great adversaries.

3.1.1 Protectionism and the Sino-American Trade War

Despite joining the WTO in 2001, China remains a relatively closed economy, the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) ranking China the most restrictive country for foreign investment, while the US–China Business Council found barriers to trade in over 100 industries in China.²³⁹ This view of pernicious trade with China is a bipartisan issue, revealed in a 2015 congress report expressing considerable consternation about China's economic practices, despite considering trade a net-positive.²⁴⁰ Lake notes China's high-tech sectors do not 'face the same import-competition they would otherwise without government

²³⁸ Li Wei, "Towards Economic Decoupling? 520.

²³⁹ Thilo Hanemann, Daniel J. Rosen and Cassie Gao, "Two-Way Street: 25 Years of US–China Direct Investment", *Rhodium Group*, November 14, 2016, <https://rhg.com/research/two-way-street-25-years-of-us-china-direct-investment/>; Wayne M. Morrison, "China–U.S. Trade Issues", *Congressional Research Service*, July 30, 2018, 25, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33536.pdf>.

²⁴⁰ Morrison, "China–U.S. Trade Issues", 29

restrictions, subsidies, and infringements on intellectual property.²⁴¹ America also responded to technology theft, stopping sales to telecom giant ZTE, Chinese scholars such as Yan and Li now claiming technology is central to the rivalry, with tangential fears of national security, cyber-attacks, and AI.²⁴² American determination to halt the ‘Made in China 2025’ plan reflects US economic concern over China’s rapid technological development, Senator Marco Rubio claiming the success of this plan ‘would be an unacceptable outcome for American workers.’²⁴³

Lake describes the invidious nature of protectionism and EEZs, revealing a far greater threat to the US. He notes countries desire economic regional predominance and that domestic forces such as large firms and political groups can seek economic protectionism.²⁴⁴ In China this rent-seeking comes from state subsidies for high-tech industries and state-owned enterprises while the US exhibits economic nationalism in response to globalisation.²⁴⁵ Describing the Cold War ‘economic exclusion or fears of possible exclusion drove political hostility, and political hostility spurred economic closure, creating a spiral of economic and political competition that threatened to spill over into actual conflict.’²⁴⁶ The alternative is open trade, geopolitical rivalry avoidable ‘if the declining power is confident in the liberal intentions of the rising power.’²⁴⁷ As with the security dilemma, Dale Copeland’s ‘trade expectations’ theory reveals even the fear of unilateral economic privileges can spark economic closure, the EEZs, nationalism and military competition of the 1930s reflecting this trend’s nadir, to which the Sino-American rivalry is again sliding towards.²⁴⁸ US consternation with perceived Chinese economic malpractice, and both countries seeking regional economic advantage – indeed even the fear of this – leads to dangerous zero-sum competition, accelerated and exacerbated by Donald Trump’s offensive realism.

Exiting the trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in January 2017 exemplified Trump’s rejection of multilateral, trade enhancing attempts to contain China, calling it a ‘horrible deal,’ instead seeking bilateral agreements.²⁴⁹ Yet this was merely a precursor to the ensuing trade

²⁴¹ Lake, “Economic Openness and Great Power Competition”, 263

²⁴² Li Wei, “Towards Economic Decoupling?”, 530; Yan, “Bipolar Rivalry in the Early Digital Age”, 325.

²⁴³ Li Wei, “Towards Economic Decoupling?”, 530; Yuan and Fu, “Narrative Framing and the United States’ Threat Construction of Rivals”, 447.

²⁴⁴ Lake, “Economic Openness and Great Power Competition”, 238-239.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 239.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 255.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 260-261.

²⁴⁸ Dale Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 2-3.

²⁴⁹ The 11 other countries were: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam: Peter Pham, “Why Did Donald Trump Kill This Big Free Trade Deal?”, *Forbes*, December 27, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/peterpham/2017/12/29/why-did-donald-trump-kill-this-big-free-trade-deal/?sh=1f5eee054e62>.

war, when in January 2018 tariffs amounting to \$400bn were placed on Chinese goods – from washing machines and solar panels to steel and aluminium – Trump citing ‘unfair trade practices,’ intellectual property theft, and declaring a national security risk.²⁵⁰ Indeed Trump ran on a protectionist platform, promising jobs to low-skilled workers who had suffered the sharper edges of globalisation, Lake labelling economic nationalism the ‘core of his political agenda.’²⁵¹ Li describes technology as the second axis of the trade war, exemplified by the US attack on ZTE and Huawei, many Chinese analysts considering technological decoupling already underway.²⁵² The second item on the NSS shows both axes; addressing trade imbalances, the necessity of maintaining technological predominance, and protecting the economy from ‘competitors who unfairly acquire our intellectual property,’ clearly reflecting America’s zero-sum mindset.²⁵³ China responded by placing tariffs on more than \$185bn on US goods.²⁵⁴ Trade wars carry fundamental theoretical flaws, risking economic decoupling and war, and failing to produce practical results.

3.1.2 The Failed Trade War

The trade war was disastrous for the US. By September 2019 300,000 jobs and between 0.3-0.7% of its GDP were lost, the equivalent of \$1.7tn.²⁵⁵ It also appears that American companies often paid the tariffs, while the US deficit did not decrease.²⁵⁶ While China also suffered from the trade war, it resisted Trump’s demands for major reform, the final January 2020 deal near identical to Beijing’s original proposition, with little headway made regarding China’s

²⁵⁰ Ana Swanson, "Trump's Trade War With China Is Officially Underway", *The New York Times*, July 5, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/05/business/china-us-trade-war-trump-tariffs.html>; Lake, “Economic Openness and Great Power Competition”, 241.

²⁵¹ Lake, “Economic Openness and Great Power Competition”, 241; Hung Kwan Chi, “The China–US Trade War: Deep-Rooted Causes, Shifting Focus and Uncertain Prospects,” *Asian Economic Policy Review* Vol. 15, No. 1 (January 2020): 60.

²⁵² Li Wei, “Towards Economic Decoupling?”, 537; Monan Zhang, “Prepare for the ‘decoupling of science and technology’ between China and the United States”, *China-US Focus*, September 10, 2019, <http://cn.chinausfocus.com/finance-economy/20190909/41509.html>.

²⁵³ White House, “National Security Strategy,” 4.

²⁵⁴ Thomas Biesheuvel, “As China Fires Back in Trade War, Here Are the Winners And Losers”, *Bloomberg*, April 4, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-04/as-china-fires-back-in-trade-war-here-are-the-winners-and-losers>; Ryan Hass and Abraham Denmark, “More pain than gain: How the US-China trade war hurt America”, *Brookings Institute*, August 7, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/08/07/more-pain-than-gain-how-the-us-china-trade-war-hurt-america/>.

²⁵⁵ Mark Zandi, Jesse Rogers and Maria Cosma, “Trade War Chicken: The Tariffs and the Damage Done”, *Moody’s Analytics*, September 2019, <https://www.moodyanalytics.com/-/media/article/2019/trade-war-chicken.pdf>; Shawn Donnan and Reade Pickert, “Trump’s China Buying Spree Unlikely to Cover Trade War’s Costs”, *Bloomberg*, December 18, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-12-18/trump-s-china-buying-spree-unlikely-to-cover-trade-war-s-costs>; Eric Martin, “Trade War Cut \$1.7 Trillion From U.S. Market Caps: Study”, *Bloomberg*, 28 May 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-28/trade-war-cost-to-u-s-market-cap-was-1-7-trillion-study-says>.

²⁵⁶ Mary Amiti, Stephen J. Redding and David E. Weinstein, “Who’s Paying for the US Tariffs? A Longer-Term Perspective”, *National Bureau of Economic Research*, January 2020, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w26610>.

preferential treatment of its companies over foreign competitors.²⁵⁷ Official Chinese statistics are rare, but in 2018 two Chinese academics claimed the worst case scenario – a 1.1% decrease in employment and a 1% GDP loss – was ‘manageable’ for China, their lack of capitulation suggesting this was so.²⁵⁸

The problems with the trade war go far beyond the economic implications, its conduct creating a more permissive international landscape for Chinese aggression. Not only did Trump undermine 75 years of free and open trade, minimising the difference between China and America in doing so, but Trump’s conduct was overtly offensive realist, ignoring the domestic while always focused on military and economic considerations. Thus Xi’s handling of Hong Kong was ‘responsible,’ Trump justifying this abdication of responsibility by explaining ‘we’re working on trade deals right now.’²⁵⁹ Similarly when questioned about Xinjiang he described the concurrent ‘great trade deals he was making.’²⁶⁰ Unilateralism and protectionism hinders the US, and while it damages China their system is more resilient to economic downturn, while hopes China would liberalise were in vain.

Li describes the split in Chinese academia between those supporting a zero-sum offensive realist response, invoking an economic Thucydides Trap, and those favouring economic liberalisation.²⁶¹ While Chinese officials rightly claim that ‘cooperation is the only correct choice for both sides,’ they appear unwilling to reform their own protectionist policies.²⁶² Though Li describes Chinese academia’s intellectual plurality, highlighting the split between the ‘decoupling’ and ‘further links’ schools, there is an admission that the government tried to shape this debate with some success, suggesting Beijing proselytises its zero-sum mindset.²⁶³ Who began the trade war is ultimately irrelevant to this thesis, of which a central claim is that zero-sum thinking narrows important differences between countries, making states act unilaterally, self-interestedly, and given the stakes, foolishly.

²⁵⁷ Hass and Denmark, “More pain than gain”.

²⁵⁸ Terence Tai-leung Chong and Xiaoyang Li, “Understanding the China–US trade war: causes, economic impact, and the worst-case scenario”, *Economic and Political Studies* Vol. 7, No. 2 (May 2019): 185.

²⁵⁹ “Trump says China’s Xi has acted responsibly on Hong Kong protests”, *Reuters*, July 22, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-china/trump-says-chinas-xi-has-acted-responsibly-on-hong-kong-protests-idUSKCN1UH20Q>.

²⁶⁰ “Trump talks trade with China, immigration policy and US economy”, *Fox News*, January 11, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2WpSqbUQTc>.

²⁶¹ Li Wei “Towards Economic Decoupling?”, 555-556.

²⁶² “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian’s Regular Press Conference on January 26, 2021”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, January 26, 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1848597.shtml.

²⁶³ Li Wei, “Towards Economic Decoupling?”, 520, 549; Beijing stifling economically liberal think-tanks is also explored in: Jude D. Blanchette, *China’s New Red Guards: The Return of Radicalism and the Rebirth of Mao Zedong* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

3.1.3 The Folly of Economic Decoupling

The greatest threat posed by trade wars is that they can lead to militarised competition and war. Yan Xuetong notes trade wars and technological rivalry reflects and fuels ‘the principle of unilateralism’ – what this thesis identifies as the prominence of offensive realism.²⁶⁴ Lake notes how ‘despite unprecedented levels of interdependence, the open international economy could rapidly unravel,’ sparking great-power competition over EEZs, offering Germany and Britain in the years preceding 1914 as a parallel.²⁶⁵ He claims great-power conflict is historically preceded by economic decoupling, nonetheless noting conflict or cooperation are choices, rejecting the structuralist narrative increasingly prevalent today.²⁶⁶ As the BRI expands, EEZs are no longer theoretical, with China investing in areas deemed by the West too unstable and politically risky.²⁶⁷ Despite change in the White House, and more multilateralism amongst allies, Sino-American economic competition will continue, Biden’s INSSG linguistically identical to the NSS, noting that in response to Chinese economic protectionism and coercion, America will ‘confront unfair and illegal trade practices, cyber theft, and coercive economic practices that hurt American workers, undercut our advanced and emerging technologies, and seek to erode our strategic advantage and national competitiveness.’²⁶⁸

This zero-sum thinking not only risks war but foregoes an opportunity – that of cooperative de-escalation. Lake echoes Ikenberry when he notes that ‘structure is not destiny.’²⁶⁹ Ikenberry offers the EU as an example of binding, where countries make their gains co-dependent upon each other. For example the EU began as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), aiming to prevent great-power war between France and Germany.²⁷⁰ While hundreds of goods had tariffs imposed, many consider technology to be central to the trade war and indeed the wider Sino-American rivalry, due to its boundless gains and associated risks.²⁷¹ The zero-sum race for AI is described by many experts as the clearest example of a winner-takes-all scenario, and an existential risk due to geopolitical realities, human fallibility,

²⁶⁴ Xuetong Yan, “Bipolar Rivalry in the Early Digital Age”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 13, No. 3 (June 2020): 340.

²⁶⁵ Lake, “Economic Openness and Great Power Competition”, 268.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 239.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 265.

²⁶⁸ Biden, “Interim National Security Strategic Guidance”, 20.

²⁶⁹ Lake, “Economic Openness and Great Power Competition”, 238.

²⁷⁰ Ikenberry, “Reflections on After Victory”, 11-12.

²⁷¹ Zhang, “Prepare for the ‘decoupling of science and technology’ between China and the United States”; Xuetong Yan, “Bipolar Rivalry in the Early Digital Age”; Chi Hung Kwan, “The China–US Trade War: Deep-Rooted Causes, Shifting Focus and Uncertain Prospects”, *Asian Economic Policy Review* Vol. 15, No. 1 (January 2020): 55-72.

and lack of diligent preparation.²⁷² Considering this risk, and the accelerating technological race, the US, China, and the wider international community should modernise the concept of binding for the 21st century.

Where the ECSC laid the groundwork for the EU, in this concept is the foundation for a global society, utilising the boundless technologically generated wealth to enable global flourishing. Yan envisions a more dystopian future of cyber violence replacing traditional warfare, as ‘cyber warfare is far less of a worry to ordinary people than is traditional warfare.’²⁷³ However his claim that cyber war removes ‘political ethical constraints on cyber war’ merits serious revision.²⁷⁴ How would a country react to its internet being shut down for a single day? Imagine the economic impact. He is also wrong that this would be without casualties. While Yan may consider this utopian, shared aims such as pandemic preparedness and environmental goals can be agreed upon, while the existential risk technology poses could incentivise collaboration – as when the US and USSR realised the dangers of the status quo, allowing for inspections and disarmament – perhaps thereafter enabling greater cooperation.²⁷⁵ As Russett notes, sustained commercial interaction results in ‘greater mutual understanding, empathy, and mutual identity across boundaries,’ and the geopolitical context of protectionism, nationalism and increasing hyper-partisanship between both countries necessitates increased economic interdependence.²⁷⁶ While China’s economic practices may challenge the US, the greater threat is from economic decoupling, encouraged, accelerated and exacerbated by offensive realism. The BRI has the potential to become an EEZ of China, preceded by economic malpractice and China privileging its own firms and investors in its sphere of influence, and yet the BRI is a response to US protectionist tendencies, reflected in their financial institutions, which deny China fair and just representation.

²⁷² Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Max Tegmark, *Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (London: Penguin Books, 2018); Sam Harris, “Can we build AI without losing control over it?”, *Ted Talks*, June 2016, https://www.ted.com/talks/sam_harris_can_we_build_ai_without_losing_control_over_it?language=en.

²⁷³ Yan, “Bipolar Rivalry in the Early Digital Age”, 336

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Perry, *The Button*, 138-139.

²⁷⁶ Russett, “Liberalism”, 75-76.

Table 7: The American-imposed Trade War

| <i>Strategy</i> | <i>Results</i> | <i>Security</i> | <i>Prosperity</i> | <i>Domestic Liberty</i> |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Stymie China's economy | US economy undermined | Undermined – economic decoupling risks actual war | Undermined – damaged US economy | Undermined – ignored human rights due to focusing on improving the trade deal with China |
| Preserve America's technological lead | China did not capitulate to America's demands | (Longer term) – technological conflict more likely | (Longer term) – exacerbated deteriorating relations and accelerated technological rivalry | |

3.2 Financial Institutions

This section observes whether China mounts an economic challenge through what Rudolf Moritz calls their 'shadow institutions,' and whether multilateral institutions can coalesce in a larger offensive realist grand strategy. China's economic coercion in dealing with other countries are analysed before suggesting that while this reflects the Chinese philosophy of legalism, legalism shares much with offensive realism, which suggests China is challenging America economically. Kishore Mahbubani's concept of a static world order in a changing world, and Kristen Hopewell's analysis of US economic policies reveal how unilateral US tendencies created a China in its own image, constructed a rival competitor, and provided a platform for Trump's offensive realist trade war, suggesting that once again the US indirectly threatens itself more so than China does directly.

3.2.1 China's Shadow Institutions

Rudolf Moritz describes China's 'shadow institutions,' Asian alternatives to the Bretton Woods institutions, in their attempted move from an 'international rule-taker to an international rule-maker.'²⁷⁷ China remains in existing institutions while creating their own, reducing their dependence on America, with some institutions complementing and others challenging their Western counterparts, Moritz noting that the areas of trade and finance are most ripe for

²⁷⁷ Moritz, "China's shadow world order", 83.

competition.²⁷⁸ Union Pay and Union Credit Rating challenge American credit card companies and rating agencies, Moritz claiming China seeks to break America's monopoly on 'multilateral development institutions in Asia' such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.²⁷⁹ As such, they have set up the New Development Bank for the BRICS and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) – headquartered in Shanghai and Beijing respectively – for infrastructure projects. Christopher Layne labels the AIIB a 'simultaneous challenge to both the US leadership of the global economy and the Pax Americana's institutional foundations,' claiming it also challenges the IMF and World Bank.²⁸⁰ Many perceive the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) – an ASEAN initiative – as a Chinese-led counter-initiative to the American-proposed TPP, including many of the same countries, whose members account for 29% of global GDP.²⁸¹ However, Moritz's claim that China does not question the international system's structure is outdated, China now advocating for, and volunteering leadership of the systems reform, again suggesting offensive realist thinking in Beijing. China gains disproportionally from these projects, and it appears the overarching economic – and institutional – Sino-American relationship is one of competition.²⁸²

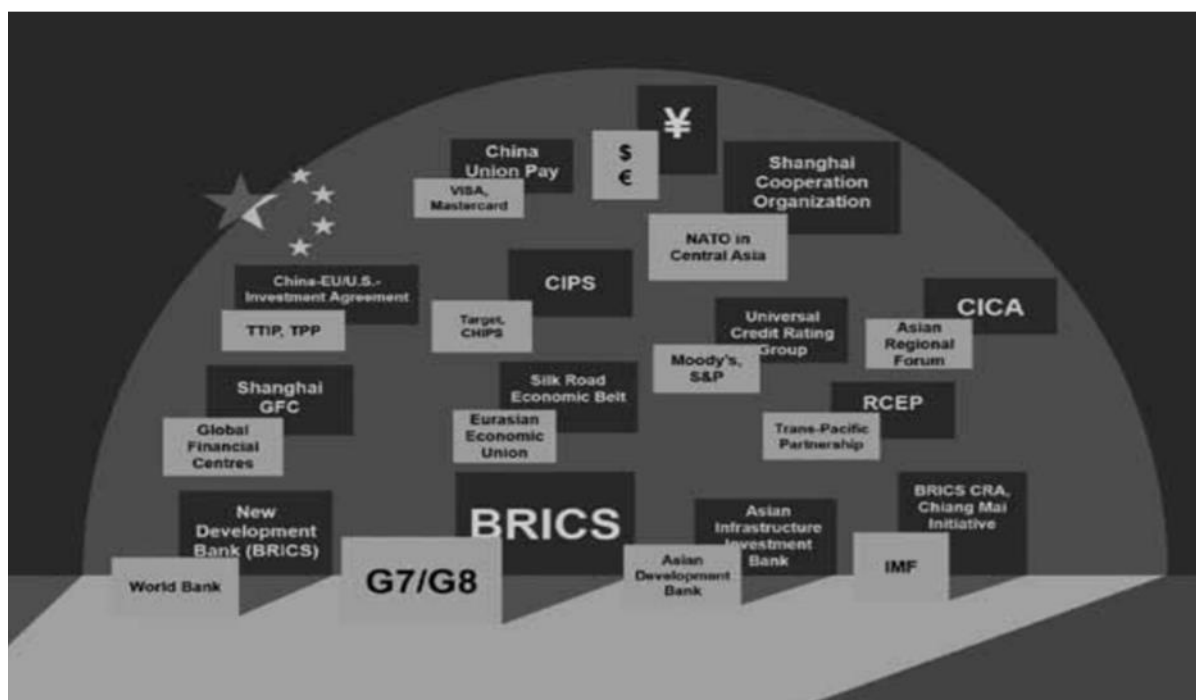


Figure 2: China's Shadow Institutions. Source: Johannes Buckow © - MERICS Berlin
https://merics.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/China_Monitor_18_Shadow_Foreign_Policy_EN.pdf

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 84.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 85.

²⁸⁰ Christopher Layne, William Wohlforth and Stephen G. Brooks, "US Decline or Primacy? A Debate" in *US Foreign Policy (3rd edn)* ed. Michael Cox and Doug Stokes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 403.

²⁸¹ Tim McDonald, "What is the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)?", *BBC News*, November 16, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-54899254>.

²⁸² Moritz, "China's shadow world order", 90.

However, that these new institutions are willing to work within the existing structure suggests China is willing to work and cooperate multilaterally, such as the AIIB working alongside Bretton Woods institutions to provide a developing Asia with infrastructure.²⁸³ Yuan and Fu adopt this view, arguing that the AIIB and BRI represent public goods offered by China.²⁸⁴ This is consistent with Xi Jinping's speeches concerning the AIIB, from his 2016 inaugural speech at its opening to the present, consistently stressing mutual benefit and multilateral development.²⁸⁵ While developmental banks like the AIIB and BRICS may themselves be multilateral, they can be utilised for projects in which the overall aim can be considered offensive realist, such as the BRI – examined in Section 3.²⁸⁶ However, to the extent that they are public goods benevolently offered, they are so in inverse proportion to the degree of unilateralism, which characterises other elements of China's financial policies, and the larger Sino-American geopolitical contest.

3.2.2 Economic Coercion and Legalism

James Reilly describes China's economic statecraft; how they use their incredible wealth to 'exert influence in pursuit of foreign policy objectives...more frequently, more assertively, and in a more diverse fashion than ever before.'²⁸⁷ The China Institute of Contemporary International Relations – a prominent think tank – argues that considering their growing power, they should 'prudently use economic sanctions against those countries that undermine world peace and threaten our country's national interests.'²⁸⁸ This is often achieved through a system of rewards and punishments. David Baldwin lists some examples of China's economic statecraft: banning rare metal exports to Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, ceasing imports from Norway for awarding their Nobel Peace Prize to dissident Liu Xiaobo, and stopping banana imports from the Philippines following the Scarborough Shoal incident.²⁸⁹ That Norway's salmon exports were halved illuminates another strength of China's economic practice, minor changes to China's economic barometer can eviscerate the industries of smaller

²⁸³ Moritz, "China's shadow world order", 85.

²⁸⁴ Yuan and Fu, "Narrative Framing and the United States' Threat Construction of Rivals", 446-447.

²⁸⁵ Xi Jinping, "Address at the opening ceremony of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank", *Xinhua*, January 16, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2016-01/16/c_1117796389.htm; "Remarks by Chinese President Xi Jinping at Opening Ceremony of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank", *Xinhua*, July 28, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/28/c_139246403.htm.

²⁸⁶ Thomas Zimmerman, "The New Silk Roads: China, the U.S., and the Future of Central Asia", *Centre on International Cooperation*, October 2015, https://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/zimmerman_new_silk_road_final_2.pdf.

²⁸⁷ Reilly, "China: Turning money into power", 190.

²⁸⁸ Eric B. Lorber and Peter Feaver, "The Coming Wave of Sanctions", *Foreign Policy*, December 3, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/12/03/the-coming-wave-of-sanctions/>.

²⁸⁹ David A. Baldwin, *Economic Statecraft: New Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 424.

nations. More recently, Beijing has punished South Korea for its implementation of missile defence systems, banning tourism and boycotting products, Xi stating their removal is a precondition to détente.²⁹⁰ South Korean conglomerate Lotte was also targeted, state-run newspaper Xinhua warning that in hurting the Chinese people, Lotte ‘stands to lose Chinese customers and the Chinese market. That would be a large slice out of their economic pie.’²⁹¹

Economists Andreas Fuchs and Nils-Hendrik Klann termed the Dalai Lama effect, in which countries who hosted him saw a 12.5% drop in exports, in France followed by the immediate cancellation of an order of 150 Airbus planes, prompting France to repair relations by recognising Tibet as Chinese territory.²⁹² It is reflective of the wider Sino-American conflict that China is most coercive with regional US allies such as Korea and, more recently, Australia, which drew Beijing’s ire for its invective aimed at China for issues ranging from human rights to Covid-19.²⁹³ Reilly also describes rewards and diplomacy purchased, alongside vague threats and indirect messages, noting that many countries have apologised for offending China.²⁹⁴ The US is not exempt from this, industry examples existing across fashion, sports, automobiles and food – former wrestler John Cena recently body-slammng himself, grovelling for calling Taiwan a country.²⁹⁵ When Houston Rockets’ manager Daryl Morey tweeted in support of the Hong Kong protests, sponsorship and telecast deals were cut in China, the NBA kowtowing due to the weight of the Chinese economy – Chinese NBA viewers outweigh the entire American population.²⁹⁶ Much like how China’s military policy of active defence can be utilised for aggressive actions, their passive aggression when voicing disquiet over perceived slights is more severe than it sounds and is reflective of another Chinese philosophy – that of legalism.

The two central pillars of legalism are a system of rewards and punishments to achieve order, security and stability, and the consolidation of wealth and power in the state, and the

²⁹⁰ Evan A. Feigenbaum, “Is Coercion the New Normal in China’s Economic Statecraft?”, *Macropolo*, July 25, 2017, <https://macropolo.org/analysis/is-coercion-the-new-normal-in-chinas-economic-statecraft/>.

²⁹¹ Bryan Harris, “China warns Lotte over South Korea missile shield”, *Financial Times*, February 20, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/e25eced0-f72b-11e6-9516-2d969e0d3b65>.

²⁹² Andreas Fuchs and Nils-Hendrik Klann, “Paying a visit: The Dalai Lama effect on international trade”, *Journal of International Politics* Vol. 91, No.1, (September 2013): 164-177; Reilly, “China: Turning money into power”, 189.

²⁹³ Reilly, “China: Turning money into power”, 195.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 190, 193-195.

²⁹⁵ Lucas Niewenhuis, “All the international brands that have apologized to China”, *supchina*, October 25, 2019, <https://signal.supchina.com/all-the-international-brands-that-have-apologized-to-china/>; “John Cena: Fast and Furious star sorry over Taiwan remark backlash”, *BBC News*, May 25, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-57241053>.

²⁹⁶ Rosie Perper, “China and the NBA are coming to blows over a pro-Hong Kong tweet. Here’s why.”, *Business Insider*, October 23, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/nba-china-feud-timeline-daryl-morey-tweet-hong-kong-protests-2019-10?r=US&IR=T>.

former can facilitate the latter, as these deals disproportionately strengthen China.²⁹⁷ Whereas Yan's moral realism was either surreptitiously co-opted or subverted for an offensive realist grand strategy, legalism shares a disconcerting similarity with offensive realism. David K. Schneider argues that Xi's 'Chinese Dream' is 'thoroughly consistent with the legalist ideal,' both of which desire a strong, prosperous, unified China.²⁹⁸ My analysis illustrates the Chinese Dream is offensive realism writ large, with its expanding aims and increasing attempts to change the international system. Legalist writer Shang Yang argued politics should only focus on agriculture and war, mirroring Mearsheimer's offensive realism, which prioritises the economy and military over any domestic factors, both writers claiming focusing on anything beyond hard power causes military defeats abroad and poverty at home.²⁹⁹

Schneider also argues that CCP reforms strengthening government administration over the people and the economy is legalist, revealed in documents such as the official communiqué of the Fourth Plenum in 2014.³⁰⁰ Legalism also encourages unity and suppresses subversive ideas, China's infamous document no. 9 reflecting this, condemning pernicious Western values such as constitutionalism, universal values, and press freedom.³⁰¹ This ruthlessness mirrors their economic coercion, and the link between their domestic and economic policies – and the link between legalism and offensive realism – is that the main aim is to strengthen China, suggesting any pronounced multilateralism is a distraction, with the greater aim of economically challenging the US. However, while China's coercive economic practices and shadow financial institutions can be seen as challenging the US and wider international order, and though legalism mirrors offensive realism, China likely learnt from the US much of what they now weaponize against it.

3.2.3 Teaching Offensive Realism?

In refusing to accommodate China in the very institutions they now challenge; ergo refusing to recognise China's growing influence, clinging onto power and fearing a rising hegemon – in other words in thinking and acting as offensive realists – America incentivised the creation of

²⁹⁷ Yuri Pines, "Legalism in Chinese Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, December 10, 2014, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/chinese-legalism/>.

²⁹⁸ David K. Schneider, "China's Legalist Revival", *The National Interest*, April 20, 2016, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/chinas-legalist-revival-15845?page=0%2C1>.

²⁹⁹ Ibid; Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, vi-viii.

³⁰⁰ Schneider, "China's Legalist Revival"; "Communique of the 4th Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of CPC", *China.org*, December 2, 2014, http://www.china.org.cn/china/fourth_plenary_session/2014-12/02/content_34208801.htm.

³⁰¹ "Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation", *China File*, November 8, 2013, <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>.

these parallel institutions. Kishore Mahbubani notes how the world order has not changed to accommodate China, especially regarding fair representation in the Bretton Woods organisations set up by America after 1945.³⁰² This is despite the G20 acknowledging multiple times that senior management at the IMF and World Bank should reflect meritocracy and international plurality.³⁰³ However the heads of these institutions remain overwhelmingly European – occasionally with South Korean or Japanese representation – but with Chinese figures conspicuously absent.³⁰⁴ This speaks to offensive realist tendencies inherent in US policy-making even before Trump, and Mahbubani claims Trump's more overtly bellicose behaviour has simply made 'undeniable what was already obvious' – American unilateral behaviour.³⁰⁵ Similarly, IMF director Christine Lagarde claimed in 2017 that the IMF headquarters *could* be based in Beijing in a decade's time if China's economic growth continues, as the IMF legislates that their head office should be in the largest member economy, despite China already fitting this description.³⁰⁶

It is likely that this hypocrisy and unwillingness to share power has in some way osmosed onto China. Moritz claims sluggish Bretton Woods reform incentivised China, US refusal to share power crystallised when in addition to not offering China fair representation in its own institutions it attempted to prevent its allies joining the AIIB.³⁰⁷ Former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers claimed the failure of this attempt may become 'the moment the US lost its role as the underwriter of the global economic system.'³⁰⁸ Mahbubani claims US institutions change the goalposts, echoing former vice-minister of commerce Wei Jianguo, who offered the analogy of a sports game in which America makes all the rules, concluding that ultimately 'the US just wants to exclude China from the game.'³⁰⁹ Moritz claims China views the US as attempting to 'defend its dominant role in the global economy,' warning that these

³⁰² Mahbubani, "Can the world order catch up with the world?"

³⁰³ "Communiqué: Meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, Melbourne, Australia", *G20 Information Centre*, November 19, 2006, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2006/2006communiqué.html>; "Communiqué: Meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, Kleinmond, South Africa", *G20 Information Centre*, November 18, 2007, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2007/2007communiqué.html>.

³⁰⁴ Kishore Mahbubani, "Can the world order catch up with the world?"

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ "IMF could be based in Beijing in a decade: Lagarde", *Reuters*, July 24, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-imf-china-lagarde-idUSKBN1A922L>.

³⁰⁷ Moritz, "China's shadow world order", 83-84; Layne, Wohlforth and Brooks, "US Decline or Primacy? A Debate", 403.

³⁰⁸ "Lawrence Summers says U.S. may just have lost its role as underwriter of the global economic system", *Financial Post*, April 6, 2015, <https://financialpost.com/news/economy/lawrence-summers-says-america-may-just-have-lost-its-role-as-the-underwriter-of-the-global-economic-system>.

³⁰⁹ Jamil Anderlini, "Big nations snub Beijing bank launch after US lobbying", *Financial Times*, October 22, 2014, <https://www.ft.com/content/41c3c0a0-59cd-11e4-9787-00144feab7de>.

attempts will backfire and ‘reinforce Chinese determination to build alternative structures.’³¹⁰ Kristen Hopewell highlights similarities between the two powers, noting that like China, the US is also guilty of protectionism and unfair trade deals intended to preserve their dominant position, offering an economic dimension to Yuan and Fu’s argument when she claims America constructs a self-other narrative employed for political ends.³¹¹ She argues that not recognising this exacerbates the Sino-American rivalry by painting two completely different economies, fuelling notions of a Cold War, foregoing opportunities for cooperation, and suggesting the inevitability of conflict, echoing Mahbubani when she notes this also helped Trump in disregarding the WTO and beginning the trade war with China.³¹² Once again it appears that the US is the greater threat to itself, its refusal to share power incentivising China, while its unilateral tendencies contributed to Trump’s larger offensive realist strategy, beginning the internecine trade war, risking actual war, and feeding China’s desire for an economic zone beyond Washington’s reach.

Table 8: China’s Economic Practices

| <i>Motivations</i> | <i>Strategy</i> | <i>IR Theory</i> | <i>Challenging the US?</i> |
|------------------------------------|--|-------------------|--|
| Global fiscal responsibility | Create institutions | N/A | Yes – BUT incentivised by the US refusing to accommodate China in the global financial order |
| Economic strength | BRI | Offensive Realism | |
| Utilise economy for political ends | Coerce countries with carrots and sticks | Legalism | |

3.3 The Belt and Road Initiative

Perhaps in response to an unaccommodating US, China – utilising its financial institutions – has begun a staggering geopolitical project. The first public announcement of the Silk Road Economic Belt was given by Xi Jinping on 07/09/2013, at Kazakhstan’s Nazarbayev University.³¹³ Xi voiced the idea of a modernised Maritime Silk Road a month later, addressing the Indonesian parliament, these two speeches representing the initial contours of the BRI,

³¹⁰ Moritz, “China’s shadow world order”, 91.

³¹¹ Hopewell, “Strategic Narratives in Global Trade Politics”, 51-86.

³¹² Ibid, 58.

³¹³ Xi Jinping, “Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, September 8, 2013, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1078088.shtml.

referring to two projects.³¹⁴ The continental belt links China to the Middle East and Europe, while the maritime road links China with Africa, the Middle East and Europe through the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. In 2017 the BRI was enshrined in the CCP's constitution, becoming Xi's flagship project, and placing him on equal footing with Mao and Deng.³¹⁵ The declared multilateralism of the project is first examined, before zooming out to see how the project is not only an economic challenge to America, but a geopolitical and ideational one. Finally, China's own zero-sum mentality employed against America is shown to be evident in the BRI, again revealing offensive realist tendencies as ultimately self-sabotaging.

3.3.1 A Multilateral Undertaking?

Consisting of huge infrastructure projects, primarily in Asia, Europe, and Africa, China now claims the BRI spans 138 countries.³¹⁶ Jonathan Hillman describes the project's fluidity, calling the BRI a 'moving target, loosely defined and ever expanding,' from hard infrastructure to cyberspace and outer space.³¹⁷ Camille Lons claims the BRI is 'designed to place China as the centre of global trade networks,' while Nadege Rolland described it as part of the 'Greater Western development,' bringing economic development from coastal to central China and beyond, linking China with the places they seek to develop, in time bringing wealth and development back to China.³¹⁸ The most apt and succinct definition comes from Meyer, who calls the BRI an attempt at spatial and temporal rescaling that 'animates a process of naturalising China's position as a legitimate world power and guides Chinese foreign policy.'³¹⁹ This project most explicitly challenges America and has the most chance of succeeding.

However upon initial inspection, a project aiming to modernise and industrialise underdeveloped places seems perfectly benign. Xie Tao notes that 'initiative' suggests cooperation, and Beijing claims the project is cooperative and mutually beneficial, Xi stressing

³¹⁴ Jiao Wu, "President Xi gives speech to Indonesia's parliament", *China Daily*, October 2, 2013, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013xiapec/2013-10/02/content_17007915.htm.

³¹⁵ Wade Shepard, "Why China Just Added The Belt And Road Initiative To Its Constitution", *Forbes*, October 25, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2017/10/25/why-china-just-added-the-belt-and-road-initiative-to-its-constitution/?sh=20de6a3342ab>.

³¹⁶ Christoph Nedopil, "Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative", *Green Belt and Road Initiative Centre*, accessed on December 2, 2020, <https://green-bri.org/countries-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative-bri?cookie-state-change=1608206376759>.

³¹⁷ Jonathan E. Hillan, "How big is China's Belt and Road?", *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, April 3, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-big-chinas-belt-and-road>.

³¹⁸ Camille Lons, "China's Evolving Role in the Middle East", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, October 21, 2019, https://ecfr.eu/publication/china_great_game_middle_east/; Nadege Rolland and Brad Carson, "The Geo-Economic Challenge of China's Belt and Road Initiative", *War on the Rocks*, March 5, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/03/jaw-jaw-the-geo-economic-challenge-of-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/>.

³¹⁹ Mayer, "China's historical statecraft", 1228.

this at multiple international conferences.³²⁰ Xi promoted the BRI at the annual Boao Forum in March 2015, highlighting the project's multilateralism and cooperation in Asia's financial institutions to create a 'community of common destiny.'³²¹ The first major document outlining the implementation of the BRI highlighted political cooperation and coordination, interconnected infrastructure, free trade, financial integration and closer personal bonds.³²² In May 2017, Xi Jinping chaired the BRI International Forum, to which were invited 30 heads of state, as well as UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, World Bank President Jim Yong Kim and IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde. The outcome of this forum was a signed document, outlining principles of balance and stability, harmony and tolerance, equal consultation and mutual benefit.³²³ More recent documents stress the key core concerns already outlined, one notable change being more discussion of sustainability and 'green' projects, but all documents encouraging a spirit of cooperation and multilateralism, with no direct economic challenge to the US evident.³²⁴

3.3.2 How the BRI Challenges America

The BRI may over time challenge America in numerous ways: economically, militarily, ideationally, and geopolitically, the recent G7 declaration appearing to realise the extent of these entwined challenges.³²⁵ Energy supply is central to China's growing economy, Jonathan Fulton noting that China requires an increasing amount of oil to fund its projects at home and abroad – the BRI most prominently – almost doubling its oil imports from Saudi Arabia between August 2018 to July 2019.³²⁶ China's need for oil is reflected in their 2016 Arab Policy

³²⁰ Tao Xie, "Is China's 'Belt and Road' a Strategy?", *The Diplomat*, December 16, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/12/is-chinas-belt-and-road-a-strategy/>; "Xi Jinping attended the opening ceremony of the 6th Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab Cooperation Forum and delivered an important speech", *Xinhua*, June 5, 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-06/05/c_1111002498.htm; "Foreign Minister Wang Yi Talks about President Xi Jinping's Attendance at the G20 Summit and Visits to Three Countries Including Australia", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, November 23, 2014, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpxcxesgjtldrdjcfhdadlyxxlfjxgsfwbtptyjjdglrdhw/t1214285.shtml.

³²¹ Jacob Mardell, "The 'Community of Common Destiny' in Xi Jinping's New Era", *The Diplomat*, October 25, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/the-community-of-common-destiny-in-xi-jinpings-new-era/>.

³²² Xiaoming Liu, "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road", *Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, March 2015, <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/eng/zywl/t1251719.htm>.

³²³ "Joint Communiqué of the Leaders Roundtable of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation", *Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation*, May 16, 2017, <http://2017.beltandroadforum.org/english/n100/2017/0516/c22-423.html>.

³²⁴ Xi Jinping, "Working Together to Deliver a Brighter Future For Belt and Road Cooperation", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, April 26, 2019, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1658424.shtml.

³²⁵ "2021 G7 Leaders' communiqué: Our shared agenda for global action to build back better".

³²⁶ Ibid.

Paper which outlines China's regional interests, placing energy as paramount, preceding even the BRI, suggesting the latter is in part made to optimise the former.³²⁷ China became the world's largest oil importer in 2013, lowering its energy vulnerability by diversifying trade routes, reducing its reliance on the Straits of Malacca, through which the vast majority of China's oil imports travel.³²⁸ Fulton argues China is 'concerned that Washington could put pressure on them to disrupt the flow of oil into China,' especially as they control the crucial shipping lanes.³²⁹ The security dilemma tells us that China reducing its vulnerability to America can be perceived as becoming more of a threat, thus suggesting a challenge from the East.

The project also carries military benefits. While China seeks to reduce its reliance on the Straits of Malacca, they have also militarised the Pakistani port of Gwadar, near the Straits of Hormuz and Bab el-Mahded, crucial maritime chokepoints.³³⁰ The US state department expressed concern that China's construction of a port at Haifa could allow for cyber espionage of the US 6th Fleet.³³¹ Naser Al-Tamimi describes how Chinese expansion is linked to the 'ambitious plans of Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia to build new ports or increase the capacity of existing ones in the region,' and commentators have noted how commercial ports can be easily militarised.³³² China established its first military base overseas in Djibouti in 2017, its strategic importance increasing alongside the BRI's development, Djibouti itself located by one of the busiest global shipping lanes, linking Europe, the Asia-Pacific, the Horn of Africa and the Persian Gulf, through which 40% of China's oil imports pass.³³³

³²⁷ "China's Arab Policy Paper", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, January 13, 2016, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1331683.shtml.

³²⁸ Shannon Tiezzi, "Revealed: China's Blueprint for Building Middle East Relations", *The Diplomat*, January 14, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/01/revealed-chinas-blueprint-for-building-middle-east-relations/>; Javier Blas, "China becomes world's top oil importer", *Financial Times*, March 4, 2013, <https://www.ft.com/content/d33b5104-84a1-11e2-aaf1-00144feabdc0>; Rolland and Carson, "The Geo-Economic Challenge of China's Belt and Road Initiative".

³²⁹ Jonathan Fulton, "China's Challenge to US Dominance in the Middle East", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, October 21, 2019, https://ecfr.eu/publication/china_great_game_middle_east/.

³³⁰ Tyler Headley, "China's Djibouti Base: A One Year Update", *The Diplomat*, December 4, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/12/chinas-djibouti-base-a-one-year-update/>; Lons, "China's Evolving Role in the Middle East."

³³¹ Office of the Secretary of State, "The Elements of the China Challenge", 23.

³³² Naser Al-Tamimi, "The GCC'S China Policy: Hedging Against Uncertainty", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, October 21, 2019, https://ecfr.eu/publication/china_great_game_middle_east/; Jamil Anderlini, "China's Middle East strategy comes at a cost to the US", *Financial Times*, September 9, 2020, <https://www-ft-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/content/e20ae4b9-bc22-4cb5-aaf6-b67c885c845c>.

³³³ Mordechai Chaziza, "China Consolidates Its Commercial Foothold in Djibouti", *The Diplomat*, January 26, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/01/china-consolidates-its-commercial-foothold-in-djibouti/>.

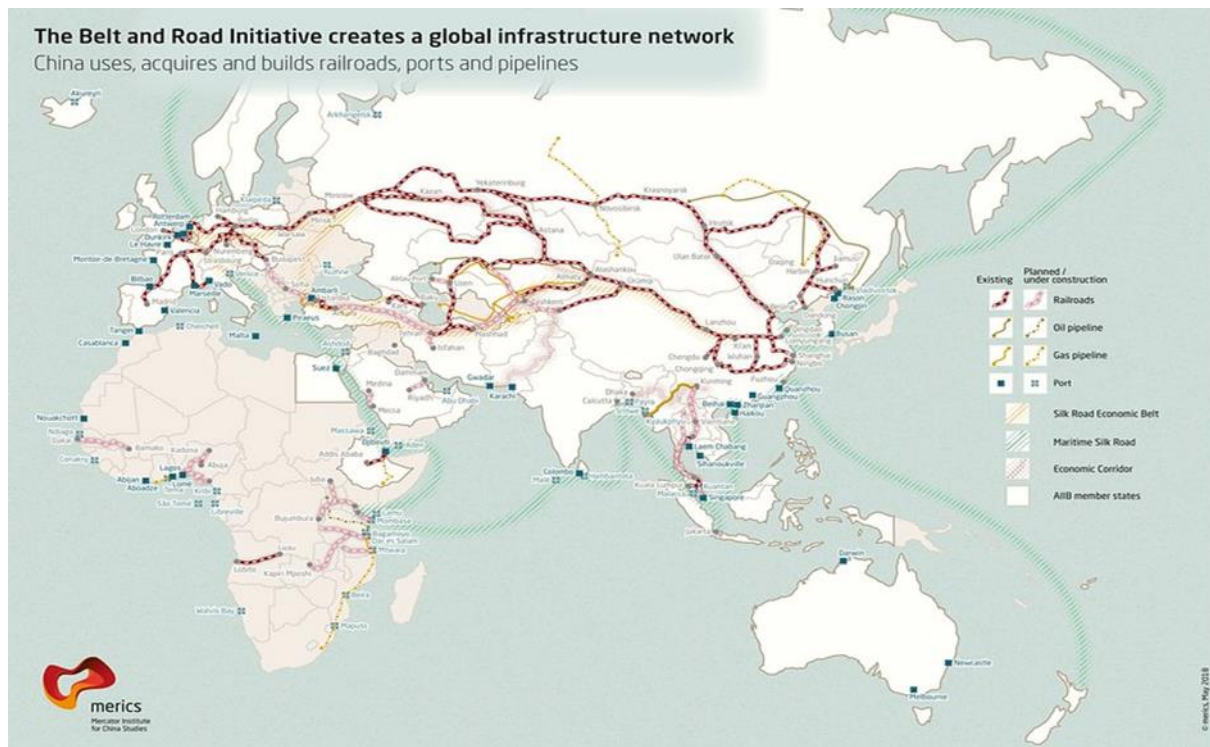


Figure 3: Ninian Reid via Flickr [CC BY 2.0]: https://www.flickr.com/photos/ninian_reid/49444239927

An ideational challenge comes from offering unconditional developmental projects to underdeveloped countries, whereas US support is conditional and liberal values are often imposed by the sword. China's developmental peace theory, their 'belief that economic development can cure all ills, whether in Xinjiang, Mali, or Afghanistan,' is a clear challenge to liberalism's democratic peace theory.³³⁴ Here China utilises the peculiar soft power of not being the US, whereas Fulton describes the 'political baggage' of former colonial powers.³³⁵ Sun explicitly contrasts China's developmental bottom-up approach with US top-down imposition of democracy, Chinese reconstruction efforts juxtaposing the recent history of the US in the region.³³⁶ Hui Wang contrasts the BRI with European colonialism and 'any expansionary imperialist model in modern times', emphasising the Chinese concept of *Datong* (Great Harmony), throughout.³³⁷ Snyder criticises the narrow military scope of offensive realism and Toft claims this myopia misses 'a host of other ways of gaining and exercising

³³⁴ Shannon Tiezzi, "What Is China's Plan for Fighting Global Terrorism?", *The Diplomat*, November 27, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/11/what-is-chinas-plan-for-fighting-global-terrorism/>.

³³⁵ Jonathan Fulton, "China's Changing Role in the Middle East", *Atlantic Council*, June 5, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/china-s-changing-role-in-the-middle-east-2/>.

³³⁶ Degang Sun, "China and the Middle East security governance in the new era", *Contemporary Arab Affairs* Vol. 10, No. 3, (August 2017): 354-371; Fulton, "China's Challenge to US Dominance in the Middle East".

³³⁷ Hui Wang, "Liang yangzhi jian de xin datong xiangxiang" [New imagination of Datong between two oceans], *Ai Si Xiang*, November 12, 2017, <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/106828.html>.

influence', as this peculiar instrument of Chinese power suggests.³³⁸ Yet Nye notes that soft power is not antithetical to realism, and is simply a means to achieve required outcomes.³³⁹ This part of the BRI shows how China utilises soft power based on a lack of controversial history in the region, to offer an ideational challenge to America, offering public goods without liberal and democratic demands.

However the main challenge from the BRI is not necessarily from direct financial gains to China, military bases abroad, or increased prestige from the offering of public goods. The most striking aspect of the BRI is the complete ostracization of the US.³⁴⁰ The bid to control the Eurasian landmass has led some political analysts to cite Mackinder's Heartland Theory – that whoever controls this area controls the world island.³⁴¹ However this theory is inadequate for the extraordinary scope of the BRI, which also desires pre-eminence in Eastern Europe and the seas, suggesting China, knowingly or otherwise, also subscribes to Nicholas John Spykman's Rimland theory – which gives global strategic prominence to the Russian borderlands – and Alfred Thayer Mahan, who claimed control of the sea confers global domination.³⁴² China may feel it needs naval prominence and economic primacy in Asia, Europe and Africa to challenge America. While legalism traditionally centralised the state's wealth and power in its leaders, this theory can be modernised to suggest China is reconfiguring the world to a Sinocentric one, consolidating wealth and influence from all countries covered by the BRI.³⁴³ However offensive realism also fits equally well, and while for Mearsheimer global hegemony is neither achievable or advisable, and while the BRI does not attempt this, it does seek to give China economic primacy and centrality in Afro-Eurasia, to the explicit

³³⁸ Peter Toft, "John J. Mearsheimer: an offensive realist between geopolitics and power", *Journal of International Relations and Development* Vol. 8, No. 4 (December 2005): 381–408; Glenn H. Snyder, "Mearsheimer's World-Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security: A Review Essay", *International Security* Vol. 27, No. 1 (2002): 171–172.

³³⁹ Joseph Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 81–82.

³⁴⁰ The same map is found in: Frank Holmes, "China's Belt And Road Initiative Opens Up Unprecedented Opportunities", *Forbes*, September 4, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2018/09/04/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-opens-up-unprecedented-opportunities/?sh=1d070be83e9a>.

³⁴¹ Francis P. Sempa, "China and the World-Island", *The Diplomat*, January 26, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/china-and-the-world-island/>; Robert Daly, "China's Global Dreams Give Its Neighbours Nightmares", *Foreign Policy*, March 12, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/12/chinas-global-dreams-are-giving-its-neighbors-nightmares/>; James Stavridis, "China and Russia Want to Control the 'World Island'", *Bloomberg*, June 10, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-06-10/china-and-russia-want-to-control-the-world-island>.

³⁴² H. J Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History", *The Geographical Journal* Vol. 23, No. 4 (1904): 421–37; Francis P. Sempa, "Nicholas Spykman and the Struggle for the Asiatic Mediterranean", *The Diplomat*, January 9, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/01/nicholas-spykman-and-the-struggle-for-the-asiatic-mediterranean/>; Francis P. Sempa, "The Geopolitical Vision of Alfred Thayer Mahan", *The Diplomat*, December 30, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/12/the-geopolitical-vision-of-alfred-thayer-mahan/>.

³⁴³ Yuri Pines, "Legalism in Chinese Philosophy".

detriment of America.³⁴⁴ As Camille Lons writes, ‘the BRI not only promotes global trade and connectivity but also creates an economic system outside Washington’s control.’³⁴⁵ Lake notes how the ‘most significant military crises have, historically, been over where to draw the boundaries between economic zones and subsequent challenges to those boundaries’, and while the BRI is still embryonic, the geopolitical ostracization of the US may in time threaten America’s economy and lead to military conflict.³⁴⁶

3.3.3 Offensive Realism: A Self-Sabotaging Theory

There is some evidence that the zero-sum mentality evident in the Sino-American rivalry also plagues much of China’s BRI policy, thereby weakening its flagship project. China has been accused of debt-trap diplomacy, termed by Brahma Chellaney to describe predatory lending practices in which poor countries are overburdened with debt and consequently have to cede strategic assets to China.³⁴⁷ For example China claimed 1,158 km² of territory from an indebted Tajikistan in 2011, and China’s first overseas military base in Djibouti is in the very country which owes its annual GDP in debts to China.³⁴⁸ However Chellaney’s theory has been contested by academic institutions and think tanks as hypocritical, exaggerated, politicised and even false.³⁴⁹ Clear are the political interests of Mike Pompeo in describing China’s ‘empire of bribes,’ and 16 senators condemning China’s debt-trap diplomacy, while hypocrisy is evident when considering that China’s debt practices borrow largely from the World Bank and IMF.³⁵⁰

Yet Covid-19 revealed unfavourable terms of BRI-related deals. In April 2020 Tanzania’s president cancelled Bagamoyo’s \$10bn port project, saying it could only have been signed by a drunkard (his predecessor), as China would gain full control of the port with a 99-

³⁴⁴ Mearsheimer, “China’s Unpeaceful Rise”, 160.

³⁴⁵ Lons, “China’s Evolving Role in the Middle East.”

³⁴⁶ Lake, “Economic Openness and Great Power Competition”, 239

³⁴⁷ Brahma Chellaney, “China’s Debt-Trap Diplomacy”, *Project Syndicate*, January 23, 2017, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-one-belt-one-road-loans-debt-by-brahma-chellaney-2017-01?barrier=accesspaylog>.

³⁴⁸ Bob Rehorst and Wouter Kuijl, “Tajikistan’s Catch-22: Foreign Investment and Sovereignty Risks”, *The Diplomat*, March 24, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/tajikistans-catch-22-foreign-investment-and-sovereignty-risks/>; “The pandemic is hurting China’s Belt and Road Initiative”, *The Economist*, June 4, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/china/2020/06/04/the-pandemic-is-hurting-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative>.

³⁴⁹ Shahar Hameiri, “Debunking the myth of China’s ‘debt-trap diplomacy’”, *The Lowy Institute*, September 9, 2020, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/debunking-myth-china-s-debt-trap-diplomacy>; Kisaram, “Bumps Along The New Silk Road: Are They As Big As We Think?”, *American Foreign Policy*, January 8, 2019, <https://afp.princeton.edu/2019/01/bumpsalongthenewsilkroad/>; Agatha Kratz, Allen Feng, and Logan Wright, “New Data on the ‘Debt Trap’ Question”, *Rhodium Group*, April 29, 2019, <https://rhg.com/research/new-data-on-the-debt-trap-question/>.

³⁵⁰ Scott Morris and Mark Plant, “China’s New Debt Sustainability Framework Is Largely Borrowed from the World Bank and IMF. Here’s Why That Could Be a Problem”, *Center for Global Development*, July 19, 2019, <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/chinas-new-debt-sustainability-framework-largely-borrowed-world-bank-and-imf-heres-why-could>.

year lease.³⁵¹ In May, Nigeria reviewed all Chinese loans, saying they were agreed on unfavourable terms, and both these cases reflect zero-sum thinking in Beijing.³⁵² Furthermore, in response to the pandemic, the G20 announced in June they would suspend debt payments from the world's poorest countries – an action also taken by the IMF – while China only suspended interest-free loans for 'relevant African countries,' amounting to only 3% of China's loans to Africa since 2000.³⁵³ This poor treatment towards erstwhile allies is reminiscent of America under Donald Trump, yet another reminder how zero-sum offensive realism makes great powers behave the same.

A recent study interviewed 1,200 policymakers, academics and business and media representatives from stakeholder countries, and while 17.8% believed the BRI imposed a net cost on their country, 41.6% claimed the opposite.³⁵⁴ Responding to claims of debt entrapment, 42% rejected the alarmist narrative, while 30.6% felt otherwise.³⁵⁵ Perhaps some element of sunk-cost fallacy taint these results, but it seems that while the BRI is in some instances characterised by zero-sum thinking, the US narrative overstates the problem. Yet the BRI is fluid, Covid-19 affording China an opportunity to jettison the more controversial BRI projects while focusing on more benign ones, their reputation boosted through BRI-branded medical supplies, and a new focus on clean energy and sustainability.³⁵⁶ If the BRI adopts a more multilateral approach it should rightly be lauded, though it is difficult to assess the degree to which these are public goods benevolently offered, or tools with which to build influence and challenge America, economically, geopolitically, and ideationally – or both. To the extent that it is the former, it would be in inverse proportion to how strictly the project adheres to offensive realism.

³⁵¹ "The pandemic is hurting China's Belt and Road Initiative".

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Xi Jinping, "Defeating COVID-19 with Solidarity and Cooperation", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, June 17, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1789559.shtml; Scott Wingo, "How will China respond when low-income countries can't pay their debts?", *Washington Post*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/06/30/how-will-china-respond-when-low-income-countries-cant-pay-their-debts/>.

³⁵⁴ Pradumna B Rana and Xianbai Ji, "Belt and Road Stakeholders Don't Believe China Uses 'Debt-Trap Diplomacy'", *The Diplomat*, November 6, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/belt-and-road-stakeholders-dont-believe-china-uses-debt-trap-diplomacy/>.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ "The pandemic is hurting China's Belt and Road Initiative"; Xi Jinping, "Working Together to Deliver a Brighter Future For Belt and Road Cooperation"; Xi Jinping, "Defeating COVID-19 with Solidarity and Cooperation".

Table 9: The Belt and Road Initiative

| <i>Motivations</i> | <i>Strategy</i> | <i>IR Theory</i> | <i>Challenging the US?</i> |
|---|--|-------------------|--|
| Economic independence | Creating an economic sphere outside US control | Offensive Realism | Yes – ostracising the US from global trade routes, giving economic primacy in Afro-Eurasia |
| Reduces energy vulnerability | Provides public goods via hard infrastructure projects | | Developmental Peace Theory as an alternative to Democratic Peace Theory |
| Gives China military bases at crucial chokepoints | | | |

3.4 Does this challenge America?

While China does economically challenge the US, and despite genuine economic grievances, the trade war – which this thesis posits as offensive realism in practice – damages America more than China. The greater threat to America, China and indeed the world comes from the prospect of economic decoupling which – as Lake and Copeland explain – precedes major conflict. Unilateralism foregoes multilateralism and the stakes of AI make it imperative that great powers must agree on certain shared aims and work together to reduce existential risk, with Ikenberry's concept of binding renewed and digitised for the present day. In a 2019 speech Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the UN expressed fears shared by this thesis:

the possibility of a great fracture: the world splitting in two, with the two largest economies on earth creating two separate and competing worlds, each with their own dominant currency, trade and financial rules, their own internet and artificial intelligence capacities, and their own zero-sum geopolitical and military strategies.³⁵⁷

While China's parallel institutions can certainly be viewed as a challenge towards America, they also have a degree of multilateralism when interacting with other countries, enveloped within the Sino-American rivalry. Other aspects of China's economic interactions are coercive, and reflect the Chinese philosophy of legalism, which shares an uncanny resemblance to

³⁵⁷ Antonio Guterres, "In 'world of disquiet', UN must deliver for the people", *UN News*, September 24, 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/09/1047172>.

offensive realism, in its unrelenting focus on hard power. However, it appears that US refusal to accommodate China in its institutions caused the creation of parallel ones, and more generally zero-sum tendencies in US economic practice has taught China what it now uses to challenge the US, again revealing America as authoring its own decline. While offensive realism was most evident in Trump's trade war, unilateral tendencies inherent in US economic policy made this possible and were partially responsible for China's attempts to create an EEZ outside America's control – the Belt and Road Initiative.

While the BRI is an evolving project coated in the language of multilateralism, there are multitudinous ways in which it can challenge the US, though the biggest challenge is from ostracising America from global trade circuits. This is inherently dangerous, David Lake illustrating the historic link between EEZs and war. Though the BRI may strengthen China's position against America from a zero-sum epistemology, this thinking damages their relationships with countries party to the BRI, corrupting its multilateral visage. The pandemic allowed China to discard the more controversial projects and revitalise the multilateral image, sharing Covid-19 products with underdeveloped countries. However, in her analysis of the BRI, Nadege Rolland highlights another component which refocuses us to the domestic, suggesting this multilateralism and humanism are parts of a larger project challenging America, and which reveal that when in a position of dominance China acts with extreme ruthlessness. Rolland notes how the BRI is invested in 'securing China's near abroad in terms of the terrorist threat,' settling on a name now practically synonymous with Orwellian surveillance and disregard for human rights – Xinjiang.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ Rolland and Brad, "The Geo-Economic Challenge of China's Belt and Road Initiative".

Chapter 4

Does China's Domestic System Challenge America?

人在做事, 天在看 - "People are doing things, and the sky is watching" – Chinese Proverb

*"What I fear more than the strategies of my enemies is our own mistakes."
– Pericles in his funeral oration as recorded by Thucydides*

This chapter argues that China's domestic system and human rights violations should challenge to America, if it is indeed the champion of liberalism it claims to be. It also reveals the folly of offensive realism in overlooking domestic issues, as this indicates how a great power will behave when unimpeded, whereas for offensive realists, power is the only metric, merits and demerits of a country's domestic system cast aside.³⁵⁹ Section 1 claims China's domestic system indicates the type of order China desires – one of aggressive Sinicization and surveillance. I update Kim's analysis of the problems inherent in Chinese IR to critique *Tianxia* and utilise classical realist analyses to show how a country's domestic sphere can be manifested from above, the technology enabling this now for sale across the illiberal world, challenging the US both morally and practically. Section 2 analyses America's own domestic failings, and I claim zero-sum, offensive realist international relations contaminates the domestic sphere, heightening tensions and making more possible the type of violence which defined the Trump administration, diminishing America's soft power which increasingly represents the clearest difference between the countries. Section 3 analyses the position of liberal internationalism in a diminished, post-Trump US, before advocating for domestic reform to safeguard it against

³⁵⁹ Snyder, "Mearsheimer's World-Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security", 172.

future tyranny and illiberalism. Finally, two US futures are examined, one reformed domestically and safer from China, and the other divided, fractured, vulnerable to charlatans, and delegitimized relative to an ordered and stable China, illiberal realities aside.

4.1 The People's Republic

Chapter 3 showed how technological rivalry – central to Sino-American competition – carries an existential threat given the zero-sum race towards artificial intelligence, Xi Jinping declaring his desire for AI supremacy by 2030, and though the feasibility of this is debated, China's drive towards advanced technological capabilities has far more sinister applications.³⁶⁰ While much of China's periphery can speak to this, the province of Xinjiang provides a useful case study which simultaneously highlights the dangerous link of technology and tyranny while also revealing the theoretical, moral and practical bankruptcy of offensive realism for the lack of consideration it pays to domestic issues, solely concerned as it is with hard power.³⁶¹ Unprecedented levels of surveillance and the eradication of cultural and intellectual individuality is not only a moral challenge but can be utilised by a tyrannical state for militarised ends, while the very technology which makes this possible can strengthen strongmen and dictators worldwide, in time affecting international norms and laws.

4.1.1 The Chinese Panopticon

Since 2017, China has been annihilating Uighur culture, with 16,000 (65%) mosques in Xinjiang damaged and 8,000 demolished entirely, satellite images showing car parks and shopping malls replacing Uighur cemeteries.³⁶² Alongside denial and obfuscation, Chinese officials give several reasons for their increasing presence in Xinjiang. The first is development, officials claiming heritage destruction services modernisation, prosperity and happiness.³⁶³ The second and more likely reason – as explained by a Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region representative – is to combat terrorism, and despite likely exaggerated figures, there is a history

³⁶⁰ Ross Andersen, "The Panopticon Is Already Here", *The Atlantic*, September 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/09/china-ai-surveillance/614197/>; Layne, Wohlforth and Brooks, "US Decline or Primacy? A Debate", 397-414.

³⁶¹ Sarah Cook, "The Battle for China's Spirit", *Freedom House*, February 27, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2017/battle-chinas-spirit>.

³⁶² Nathan Ruser, James Leibold, Kelsey Munro & Tilla Hoja, "Cultural Erasure", *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, September 24, 2020, <http://www.aspi.org.au/report/cultural-erasure>; "Then and now: China's destruction of Uighur burial grounds", *The Guardian*, October 9, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/09/chinas-destruction-of-uighur-burial-grounds-then-and-now>.

³⁶³ Peisong Sun, "Comprehensive governance in Xinjiang has typical significance", *Huangqiu Shibao*, March 19, 2019, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrNkj7QY>.

of separatist terrorist attacks in Xinjiang.³⁶⁴ Alongside this is widespread intangible cultural heritage destruction and Sinicization, most notoriously via re-education camps holding approximately one million Muslims – the largest internment since the Holocaust, with an estimated 5-10% of the adult Uighur population interned.³⁶⁵ China claims they are vocational training centres, preparing attendees for employment, while also claiming they domesticate would-be terrorists.³⁶⁶ The Xinjiang Communist Youth League described the mission to ‘cure ideological diseases,’ while others claim the ultimate goal to be the ‘replacement of religious affiliation and ethnic identity with secular, patriotic political allegiance.’³⁶⁷ Yet for China signs of extremism include praying, fasting and abstaining from alcohol.³⁶⁸ There are numerous accounts of torture, but equally repellent is the mandatory learning of party rhetoric, forced sterilisations, and the presence of CCP workers to replace detained Uighurs in their homes.³⁶⁹ Physical, digital and biological surveillance accompanies this, from monitored phones and police checkpoints to pregnancy tests, blood samples and the ‘mass collection of biometric data,’ from all residents between 12-65 in order to evaluate their ‘threat,’ Andersen claiming Chinese Uighurs are ‘the most intensely surveilled population on Earth.’³⁷⁰

While Sinicization and surveillance become truly grotesque in Xinjiang, they are also pervasive throughout China. A Human Rights Watch report notes how China is ‘using innovative technologies for social control’ in Xinjiang, but this technology permeates far

³⁶⁴ “The spokesperson of the People's Government of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region refutes the New York Times' false report on Xinjiang”, *Guancha*, November 19, 2019, https://www.guancha.cn/international/2019_11_19_525643.shtml; Chien-peng Chung, "China's "War on Terror": September 11 and Uighur Separatism", *Foreign Affairs*, July 2002, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2002-07-01/chinas-war-terror-september-11-and-uighur-separatism>.

³⁶⁵ John Sudworth, “China's hidden camps: What's happened to the vanished Uighurs of Xinjiang?”, *BBC News*, October 24, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/1dt-sh/China_hidden_camps; Rian Thum, “China's Mass Internment Camps Have No Clear End in Sight”, *Foreign Policy*, August 22, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/22/chinas-mass-internment-camps-have-no-clear-end-in-sight/>.

³⁶⁶ “Xinjiang: Large numbers of new detention camps uncovered in report”, *BBC News*, September 24, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-54277430>.

³⁶⁷ “China: Where Are They: Time for Answers about Mass Detentions in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region” *Amnesty International*, September 24, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA1791132018ENGLISH.PDF>; “Eradicating Ideological Viruses: China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims”, *Human Rights Watch*, September 9, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs>.

³⁶⁸ “‘Forgive my children for not fasting’ - Ramadan in Xinjiang”, *Amnesty International*, May 3, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/05/forgive-my-children-ramadan-in-xinjiang/>.

³⁶⁹ Mihrigur Tursun (illustrated by Tomomi Shimizu), “What has Happened to me?”, *The Citizen*, accessed on 13 October 2020, <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/6/17925/What-Has-Happened-to-Me>; Andersen, “The Panopticon is Already Here”.

³⁷⁰ “Eradicating Ideological Viruses”; Andersen, “The Panopticon is Already Here”.

beyond.³⁷¹ The company which built most of Xinjiang's surveillance is active in Zhejiang, Guangdong and Shenzhen, forecasting a nation-wide rollout, enabling ceaseless high-definition footage of every Chinese person's life.³⁷² China's embryonic social behaviour app may not be attempting Sinicization, but like in Xinjiang is meant to quell any perceived threat to the CCP's stability. Your citizen score incentivises 'good' behaviour such as party support, while even minor offences like jaywalking carry severe punishments, and a poor score results in slower internet and visas, and even travel bans outside China.³⁷³ Amnesty International has highlighted the intimidation, imprisonment and torture of those campaigning for freedom of expression and religious freedom, and a citizen score will exacerbate enforced conformity, quelling sedition in its infancy.³⁷⁴ This mirrors measures in Xinjiang which pick 'people with certain behaviour or characteristics that they believe indicate a threat to the CCP's rule,' and Anna Mitchell and Larry Diamond worry that 'citizens will refrain from any kind of independent or critical expression' for fear of punishment.³⁷⁵

The Orwellian long-term concern is that the syntax for dissent will be foreclosed. This is the view shared by one internet privacy expert who claims that China is 'selectively breeding its population to select against the trait of critical, independent thinking.'³⁷⁶ That your score is affected by the score of friends and family is also pervasive, revealing the state's desire for homogeneity, and Sigal Samuel claims some employees must wear helmets which scan brainwaves for anger, depression and anxiety – perhaps an early form of thoughtcrime or 'emotion-crime.'³⁷⁷ Offensive realism is concerned with none of this, Trump's casual disregard during trade talks reflecting the core focus on hard power.³⁷⁸ The theory thus fails from a moral level in ignoring this, but it also fails from a practical level, as in ignoring the domestic, it ignores indications of how a power will operate when strong.

³⁷¹ "China's Algorithms of Repression: Reverse Engineering a Xinjiang Police Mass Surveillance App", *Human Rights Watch*, May 1, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/01/chinas-algorithms-repression/reverse-engineering-xinjiang-police-mass>.

³⁷² Andersen, "The Panopticon is Already Here".

³⁷³ Anna Mitchell and Larry Diamond, "China's Surveillance State Should Scare Everyone", *The Atlantic*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/china-surveillance/552203/>.

³⁷⁴ "China: Human Rights Violations in the Name of National Security", *Amnesty International*, March 1, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA1783732018ENGLISH.pdf>.

³⁷⁵ "Eradicating Ideological Viruses"; Mitchell and Diamond, "China's Surveillance State Should Scare Everyone".

³⁷⁶ Rick Falkvinge, "In China, Your Credit Score Is Now Affected By Your Political Opinions – And Your Friends' Political Opinions", *Privacy News Online*, October 3, 2015, <https://www.privateinternetaccess.com/blog/in-china-your-credit-score-is-now-affected-by-your-political-opinions-and-your-friends-political-opinions/>.

³⁷⁷ Ibid; Sigal Samuel, "China is Going to Outrageous Lengths to Surveil Its Own Citizens", *The Atlantic*, August 16, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/08/china-surveillance-technology-muslims/567443/>.

³⁷⁸ "Trump talks trade with China, immigration policy and US economy".

4.1.2 Tianxia and Nationalism

While moral realism and legalism show *how* China may seek power, *Tianxia* reveals how China behaves *when in power* and shares disconcerting continuity with China's attitude to Sinicization and independent thought itself. Zhao Tingyang describes *Tianxia* as a Chinese-led world system preceding Westphalia concerned with the 'minimization of mutual hostility over the maximization of exclusive interest, in contrast to the individual rationality which gives the priority to the maximization of self-interest.'³⁷⁹ Yet this highlights the doublespeak inherent in *Tianxia*; minimizing mutual hostility can be read as eradicating diversity while 'voluntary submission,' and benevolent leadership is not viewed as such from the Chinese periphery, whether in 900 or 2020.³⁸⁰ It is also an ideational challenge to the Westphalian system which he labels an 'anarchic, zero-sum, military-dominated, amoral system' in comparison to the order, legitimacy and 'voluntary submission' of *Tianxia*.³⁸¹ The system is inherently Sinocentric, comprising the ruler, inner and outer subjects, tributary states, and barbarians, and this view likely persists, given China's centralisation combined with the treatment of those in their periphery. Hun Joon Kim criticises *Tianxia* and Chinese IR more broadly for five flaws: (i) exceptionalism; (ii) dualism; (iii) romanticization of Chinese tradition; (iv) great power conceit; and (v) promotion of national interest.³⁸² To *Tianxia* could be added (vi) homogeneity of thought, opinion, and practice, implemented to an Orwellian degree. Thus, while *Tianxia* envisions 'a world system characterized by harmony and cooperation without hegemony', this becomes inverted when it means individual opinions are persecuted and cultural differences crushed.³⁸³

The combination of mass surveillance and "Sinicization" – effectively the dispelling of independent critical thought – also carries a practical threat. A malleable population can become radicalised and militarised. The prospect of a jingoistic population is explored by Jude Blanchette who identifies the presence of Neo-Maoists, fervently nationalistic and vigilant of internal spies – 'academics, researchers, and intellectuals who oppose China's political leadership by espousing subversive ideas about the rule of law, democracy, and the free

³⁷⁹ Tingyang Zhao, "A Neglected Project for Tianxia System", paper presented to the international conference on 'Global IR and Non-Western IR Theory', *China Foreign Affairs University*, April 24, 2018, 1-2.

³⁸⁰ Kim, "Will IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics be a Powerful Alternative?", 75.

³⁸¹ Tingyang Zhao, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-Under-Heaven' (Tianxia)", *Social Identities* Vol. 12, No. 1 (2006): 29-41

³⁸² Kim, "Will IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics be a Powerful Alternative?", 73-74.

³⁸³ Zhang, "The Tianxia System: World Order in a Chinese Utopia".

market.³⁸⁴ Yet this is still a largely esoteric group in China and not fully aligned with Xi who – Blanchette argues – believes in maintaining ‘vigilance against the Right but primarily against the Left,’ due to their deification of Mao.³⁸⁵ More worrying is engineered nationalism and fervent party support, abetted by technology, as shown by China’s internet trolls reporting ‘negative’ comments and writing nationalist posts, mirrored internationally with China’s wolf-warrior diplomacy.³⁸⁶ While Han Rongbin identifies extensive online activism, and Ci Jiwei argues that there is a thirst for democracy in China, with the CCP under pressure to reform, advanced technology and constant surveillance may eradicate seditious thought and mould anti-American sentiment.³⁸⁷ Nye optimistically parallels the Great Wall practical failure with the possibility that China’s firewall might fail. Yet as technology advances, this becomes increasingly unlikely, unless the US commits to cyber-war with China, making more likely the techno-hellscape that Yan envisions.³⁸⁸

John Keane claims China could legitimise and strengthen from pseudo-democratic mechanisms domestically, but the far greater danger comes from the potential of dystopian technology.³⁸⁹ Pu Xiaoyu discusses how China should signal domestically, so that other states can be aware of China’s intentions, yet this advice is ignored in the CCP’s mendacious claims that Uighurs are the ‘happiest Muslims’ and that ‘people of all ethnic backgrounds respect and love each other and work together for a better life’ in Xinjiang.³⁹⁰ China’s actions regarding uniformity of thought and crushing independent action cannot be blamed on offensive realism, and yet in ignoring domestic factors, offensive realism may overlook exactly what is important to consider in a growing power; that is what attitudes they take towards individual thought and human flourishing. *Tianxia* is a window into how China behaves when near omnipotent and thus the domestic and international are inextricably linked, contrary to structural realist thought.³⁹¹

³⁸⁴ Jude D. Blanchette, *China’s New Red Guards: The Return of Radicalism and the Rebirth of Mao Zedong* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

³⁸⁵ Ibid, 224.

³⁸⁶ David Wertlme, “How to Spot a State-Funded Chinese Internet Troll”, *Foreign Policy*, June 17, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/17/how-to-spot-a-state-funded-chinese-internet-troll/>; Zhu, “Interpreting China’s ‘Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy’”.

³⁸⁷ Rongbin Han, *Contesting Cyberspace in China: Online Expression and Authoritarian Resilience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Jiwei Ci, *Democracy in China: The Coming Crisis* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019).

³⁸⁸ William A. Callahan, “Mearsheimer vs. Nye on the Rise of China”, *The Diplomat*, July 8, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/07/mearsheimer-vs-nye-on-the-rise-of-china/>; Yan, “Bipolar Rivalry in the Early Digital Age”, 341.

³⁸⁹ John Keane, “China’s Galactic Empire: All Under One Heaven”, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, Vol. 145, No. 16 (April 2021): <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/allen-onder-een-hemel>.

³⁹⁰ Pu, “Controversial Identity of a Rising China”, 131-149; “China: Where Are They”.

³⁹¹ Mearsheimer, “Structural Realism”, 52.

4.1.3 Exporting Autocracy

Domestic factors have geopolitical implications, and once more Xinjiang, *Tianxia* and surveillance can serve as an analytical conduit. Andersen notes how China's allies – even in Muslim countries – deport Uighurs back to Xinjiang, in a glimpse of how an authoritarian bloc may function.³⁹² Exemplifying this, Turkey's Erdogan claimed 'residents of various ethnicities living happily in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region...is a hard fact, and Turkey will not allow anyone to drive a wedge in its relations with China.'³⁹³ This was reported in the Chinese media, and Erdogan personally identifies the pre-eminence of good economic relations over matters of morality, leading to Western suggestions that Turkey is now China's client state.³⁹⁴ In the UN 22 states condemning China's actions in Xinjiang were outvoted by 50 states which lauded 'China's remarkable achievements' in 'protecting and promoting human rights through development.'³⁹⁵ Interestingly, 23 Muslim-majority countries back the PRC, including some affected directly by Chinese actions, illustrating China's leverage.³⁹⁶

Surveillance also links China with other autocratic countries. China sells facial recognition equipment, cameras, and other surveillance technologies to repressive governments which weaponize them against dissidents. They are building a smart city in Egypt, have utilised their technology in Zimbabwe to improve identifying dark faces, and make network access part of trade deals if countries default on loans.³⁹⁷ Xinjiang hosted a security expo which sold many of these products which are now offered to countries worldwide, though less overtly pernicious technologies are also making their way to Europe, reflected in the Huawei controversies.³⁹⁸ Andersen claims if China achieves AI supremacy, it will become a more potent geopolitical force as standard-bearer of an

³⁹² Andersen, "The Panopticon is Already Here".

³⁹³ Roie Yellinek and Elizabeth Chen, "The '22 vs. 50' Diplomatic Split Between the West and China Over Xinjiang and Human Rights", *China Brief Volume* Vol. 19, No. 22, (December 2019): <https://jamestown.org/program/the-22-vs-50-diplomatic-split-between-the-west-and-china-over-xinjiang-and-human-rights/>.

³⁹⁴ "Xi, Turkish president hold talks, agreeing to deepen strategic cooperation", *Xinhua*, July 2, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/02/c_138193186.htm; Ayca Alemdaroglu and Sultan Tepe, "Erdogan Is Turning Turkey Into a Chinese Client State", *Foreign Policy*, September 16, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/16/erdogan-is-turning-turkey-into-a-chinese-client-state/>.

³⁹⁵ Yellinek and Chen, "The '22 vs. 50' Diplomatic Split".

³⁹⁶ The 23 Muslim-majority countries were: Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, UAE, Uzbekistan, Yemen, and the Palestinian Authority.

³⁹⁷ Andersen, "The Panopticon is Already Here".

³⁹⁸ Ibid; Tim Bowler, "Huawei: Why is it being banned from the UK's 5G network?", *BBC News*, July 14, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-47041341>; Laurens Cerulus, "Europe's Huawei plan explained", *Politico*, January 29, 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-eu-huawei-5g-china-cybersecurity-toolbox-explained/>.

authoritarian alliance.³⁹⁹ While this appears an economic issue, the matter is inherently domestic, as China's political structure encourages, rather than restrains, technology's worst uses. Zhao Tingyang – *Tianxia*'s main proponent – fears the dangers of AI, outlining four short-term and two long-term technological concerns and his desire for global governance and fears about an intelligence explosion are likely connected.⁴⁰⁰ Yet a fifth short-term worry should be added to his list and it is the same concern added to Kim's list of problems with Chinese IR earlier in this chapter; the terrifying prospect of Orwellian homogeneity, abetted by advanced technology. The concern I have identified is thus applicable to all illiberal countries, but China is the developer, hawk and most egregious applicant of these technologies, and the resulting technological authoritarian bloc, Andersen claims, is a greater threat to America than is the BRI.⁴⁰¹

This is implicated with China's attempts to change international laws and norms regarding human rights, again showing how the domestic has international implications. China considers the US-inspired international landscape 'global hegemony,' picking and choosing when to follow, reflected in their appalling human rights record.⁴⁰² Paul Haenle and Lucas Tcheyan note how China pressures the EU to exempt them from criticism, while Human Rights Watch have revealed China utilising institutions like the UN to shield itself from scrutiny, 'opposing country-specific resolutions, and defending concepts such as national sovereignty at the expense of international human rights monitoring.'⁴⁰³ Robert D. Williams draws attention to China's support of sovereignty but to the relativity of human rights, noting that while international human rights laws remain unchallenged, they promote 'interpretations that render those norms hollow.'⁴⁰⁴ He also described China's development-first model as 'diluting conventional human rights norms,' noting they bolster this model where they have influence –

³⁹⁹ Andersen, "The Panopticon is Already Here".

⁴⁰⁰ Tingyang Zhao, "Near-term Worries and Long-term Concerns of the Artificial Intelligence Revolution: An Analysis of Ethics and Ontology", *Weixin*, June 6, 2018, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzAwNDYzNDI2Ng==&mid=2651908570&idx=1&sn=1af439bb4f763581dbafbc9f999e12d1&chksm=80ccaa2fb7bb23393ac527c1f25576c8b050df112147028824eb408b537b167d9b9d40519f51&mpshare=1&scene=1&srcid=06063yjlFG3wokUvacc6Hlv4&pass_ticket=%2BATm0dDoPkYyiEZhWNx6F%2BBQDYLCaq0e%2BC5WiRETs1EVBRH4FCdiokIpQuXZkUSV#rd.

⁴⁰¹ Andersen, "The Panopticon is Already Here".

⁴⁰² Xiaofeng Liu, "New China and the End of American 'International Law'", *American Affairs* Vol. 3, No. 3 (Fall 2019): <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2019/08/new-china-and-the-end-of-american-international-law/>.

⁴⁰³ Haenle and Tcheyan, "How the World Is Responding to a Changing China; "The Costs of International Advocacy: China's Interference in United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms", *Human Rights Watch*, September 5, 2017, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/chinaun0917_web.pdf.

⁴⁰⁴ Robert D. Williams, "International Law with Chinese Characteristics: Beijing and the Rules-Based Global Order", *Brookings Institute*, October 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FP_20201012_international_law_china_williams.pdf.

such as the BRI – suggesting human rights are merely an afterthought for China.⁴⁰⁵ While it may prove true that development can precede democracy in interesting ways, China itself represents the *reductio ad absurdum* of this, showing the Orwellian uses of the most advanced technology, even as much of the country remains developing. However, under the Trump administration it appears these issues were an afterthought. Despite widespread Sinophobia, America’s own domestic failings reveal international preoccupations, illuminating the administration’s offensive realism, which was a greater threat than that emanating from Beijing.

Table 10: China’s Domestic Failings

| <i>Motivations</i> | <i>Strategy</i> | <i>IR Theory</i> | <i>Challenging the US?</i> |
|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--|
| Reducing terrorism | Aggressive Sinicization | Tianxia | Yes – morally |
| Buttress the CCP | Repressive surveillance | Tianxia | Yes – indicates the ruthlessness China will exhibit internationally Yes – sells the tools of surveillance to dictators around the world |

4.2 The Land of the Free

Mearsheimer claims American fatigue with consistent US foreign policy led directly to Trump, missing a plethora of reasons why he was elected, at the heart of which was a deeply unequal society, far less liberal than Mearsheimer visualises.⁴⁰⁶ He claims liberal hegemony causes wars and a militarised state which undermines peace, human rights and liberal values.⁴⁰⁷ Abandoning liberal hegemony and adopting a more realist position, Mearsheimer argues, will do the opposite, strengthening America and liberalising it domestically.⁴⁰⁸ Yet if America adopts a zero-sum offensive realist outlook internationally, a similar us versus them mentality will begin to define the domestic sphere. This affects America’s international standing, offering China unique opportunities to present themselves as comparatively ordered, benevolent and peaceful.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid; Andréa Worden, “China’s win-win at the UN Human Rights Council: Just not for human rights”, *Sinopsis*, May 28, 2020, <https://sinopsis.cz/en/worden-win-win/>.

⁴⁰⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, “US Foreign Policy under President Biden”, *Institute of International and European Affairs*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaTGGdsomf4>.

⁴⁰⁷ Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*, 2-3.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, 153-154.

US domestic turmoil, aided by offensive realism, also damages their soft power, the area in which they hold the most secure advantage over China, and the most indispensable as this – not the size of one’s military or economy – is what best defines and encapsulates a country.

4.2.1 Liberal America?

Mearsheimer asserts that America is ‘a deeply liberal country’.⁴⁰⁹ This may be true from an offensive realist epistemology, born from a reading of 20th century great-power politics. Yet this renders it archaic, and while historically the US is a uniquely liberal hegemon, compared to other modern Western democracies it is uniquely illiberal. In 2008 David Clark, analysing the deteriorating transatlantic alliance, highlighted huge cultural and political differences between Europe and America.⁴¹⁰ This trend may have since reversed due to China’s rise, yet the differences highlighted have important domestic implications for the US. Clark’s data showed Americans prefer economic freedom over social security and consider God necessary for morality, which cannot be unrelated to a punitive prison system and egregious wealth inequality.⁴¹¹ Reports by Allianz and Pew respectively reveal America has the largest global wealth inequality gap, and that the gap continuously increases.⁴¹² Philosopher William MacAskill notes ‘inequality in America is getting starker over time’ while economist Thomas Piketty suggests American inequality is ‘probably higher than any other society at any time in the past, anywhere in the world.’⁴¹³ A Pew research poll shows how income inequality impacts long-term economic growth, technological change, and domestic politics, overlooked entirely by Mearsheimer’s theory.⁴¹⁴ 2020 Gallup polls showed that conservatives and moderates represent the largest ideological groups in the US, while another study revealed America’s decline in education and healthcare from 6th in 1990 to 27th in 2018, while they retain the highest global prisoner rate.⁴¹⁵ The US must measure itself against higher-aspiring countries, rather than the low-hanging fruit of China or Russia.

⁴⁰⁹ Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*, 6.

⁴¹⁰ David Clark, “European Foreign Policy and American Primacy”, *International Politics* Vol. 45, No. 3 (2008): 276-291.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, 291.

⁴¹² Erik Sherman, “America Is the Richest, and Most Unequal, Country”, *Fortune*, September 30, 2015, <https://fortune.com/2015/09/30/america-wealth-inequality/>; Katherine Schaeffer, “6 facts about economic inequality in the U.S.”, *Pew Research Centre*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/02/07/6-facts-about-economic-inequality-in-the-u-s/>.

⁴¹³ William MacAskill, *Doing Good Better: Effective Altruism and a Radical New Way to Make a Difference* (London: Guardian Faber Publishing, 2016), 19-20.

⁴¹⁴ Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Ruth Igielnik and Rakesh Kochhar, “Trends in income and wealth inequality”, *Pew Research Centre*, January 9, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/>.

⁴¹⁵ Lydia Saad, “Americans’ Political Ideology Held Steady in 2020”, *Gallup*, January 11, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/328367/americans-political-ideology-held-steady-2020.aspx>; AJ Willingham, “In

Mearsheimer is explicit that US domestic illiberalism spreads from warfare, which damages human rights and causes illiberalism at home.⁴¹⁶ This theory fails practically and theoretically, ignoring other factors behind American illiberalism, while offensive realism risks far greater illiberalism in sanctioning great-power conflict. While most modern US wars have been disastrous, offensive realism does not eschew war, endorsing it in ‘distant areas that are either home to another great power or the site of a critically important resource,’ claiming Europe, China, and oil-rich states fall into this category.⁴¹⁷ Aggressive containment of China is mandated alongside a simultaneous assertion that realism is less warlike than liberalism.⁴¹⁸ Yet Mearsheimer’s proposed strategy risks destructive, great-power wars, making others seem negligible by comparison. How would America’s domestic system fare in such conditions? This is not merely academic and has historical precedent. Consider McCarthyism for example, or the arresting of Japanese Americans during World War II, yet the severity of a contemporary great-power war dwarfs these comparisons. Were technology more forgiving, what would be observable over time if states acted according to Mearsheimer’s theory may be less smaller wars, but more global wars of mass destruction, eviscerating domestic liberalism in the process.

In condemning liberal internationalism, Mearsheimer ignores other causes of illiberalism. Acting upon realist principles does not guarantee domestic liberalism, and one must only look towards China for ample evidence of a domestically illiberal and internationally realist power. Mearsheimer’s claim that a surveillance state would not have arisen if not for American invasions in the Middle East is too large an intellectual leap to make. It ignores the role of religious violence and the agency of fundamentalists. Moving forward his theory will become more obsolete still, ignoring as it does the rapidly advancing role of technology, enabling lone actors or small groups to create widespread destruction via say, a man-made pandemic, which may be preventable only via surveillance.⁴¹⁹ Mearsheimer considers none of this. For him liberal hegemony alone caused the Patriot Act. Mearsheimer’s theory also overlooks older sources of US illiberalism, such as the decision to hire Reinhard Gehlen, head of Nazi intelligence in occupied Europe, into the CIA. Christopher Hitchens argued this is

1990, the US was ranked 6th in education and health care. Today, it's 27th, a study says”, *CNN*, October 1, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/10/01/health/health-care-education-united-states-27th-world-trnd/index.html>;

“Countries with the most prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants, as of June 2020”, *Statista*, March 30, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262962/countries-with-the-most-prisoners-per-100-000-inhabitants/>.

⁴¹⁶ Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*, 126.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid*, 147.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*, 148.

⁴¹⁹ Rob Reid, “How synthetic biology could wipe out humanity — and how we can stop it”, *TED Talks*, April 2019, https://www.ted.com/talks/rob_reid_how_synthetic_biology_could_wipe_out_humanity_and_how_we_can_stop_it/up-next?language=en.

something America has not even dared to confront, a certain sympathy for fascism within American government.⁴²⁰ Is it not possible that the germ of which may have something to do with the authoritarian undertones of modern America's justice system? Mearsheimer ignores this; for him liberal internationalism is the cause of America's domestic ills, and realism the panacea.

4.2.2 Mearsheimer's Panacea

Mearsheimer claims realism as a solution to liberal internationalism's war, illiberalism, and human rights abuses, expressing early hope in Donald Trump for challenging 'almost every aspect of' liberal internationalism.⁴²¹ Yet Mearsheimer's rubric of peace, liberal values and human rights can be turned against offensive realism which does not ameliorate, but exacerbates each of the above.⁴²² The zero-sum, unilateral and combative nature of offensive realism osmoses onto domestic politics, causing hyper-partisanship and risking violence. Lying and violence exist on the same continuum, philosopher Sam Harris claiming all humanity has is conversation and violence and 'the answer to bad conversation is simply better ones.'⁴²³ The mendacity then, which defined the Trump administration not only risked, but caused violence. The above quote from Harris was in the context of criticising religion as a conversation stopper, yet political allegiance from both sides during the Trump administration came to depict dogma, Steven Pinker describing how 'political ideologies have themselves become secular religions, providing people with a community of like-minded brethren, a catechism of sacred beliefs, a well-populated demonology, and a beatific confidence in the righteousness of their cause.'⁴²⁴ The lies, disinformation, and ideological blinders which defined US politics during Trump's administration in some instances led directly to violence, illiberalism and human rights violations, while in others it exacerbated existing tensions, making them more likely.

Central to this were the lies of Donald Trump, the Washington Post estimating Trump alone told over 30,000 lies or misleading statements during his presidency, not including the many permutations, amplifications, and reconfigurations from official and unofficial media

⁴²⁰ Christopher Hitchens, "Christopher Hitchens on the History of the 20th Century: U.K. and America (1995)", *YouTube*, July 15, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6aKFKIDbQw&t=931s>.

⁴²¹ Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*, 10-11, 152.

⁴²² *Ibid*, 3-5.

⁴²³ Sam Harris, *Making Sense: Conversations on Consciousness, Morality and the Future of Humanity* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2020), xv-xvi.

⁴²⁴ Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2018), 50.

outlets.⁴²⁵ This lying was consistent, from inauguration to insurrection, with 503 untruthful claims on the day preceding the 2020 vote, attempting to subvert democracy and win re-election.⁴²⁶ This culminated in the attack on the Capitol, which left five dead, a tiny amount when considering people stormed the halls of congress and called for the deaths of elected officials.⁴²⁷ Nearly 50% of republicans supported the attack on the Capitol – a disastrous poll for democracy – and a direct consequence of the maddening effects of widespread disinformation, echo chambers, and hyper-partisanship.⁴²⁸ This is not only an American tragedy but a benefit for China, who showed – for the first time – images of a popular uprising. Jude Blanchette and Michael J. Green noted how China presents the US as disordered and chaotic, images of the insurrection evidencing democracy’s failings.⁴²⁹ Chinese state media accurately claimed this event reflected a failure of leadership and deep divisions permeating US society, yet also opportunistically equated this insurrection with the opposition in Hong Kong.⁴³⁰

Inaccurate and politicised reporting was not limited to the right-wing; the zero-sum nature of domestic politics contaminated even the upper echelons of liberal America. Mainstream media’s contribution to the narrative of a fundamentally, institutionally, and irredeemably racist America, which had nonetheless elected a two-term black president not four years prior, also contributed to internecine conversations during Trump’s tenure. Nationwide protests following the murder of George Floyd subsequently devolved into riots, looting and calls to defund the police which – if acted upon – would have led to far more than the 19 deaths caused by the protests. This is not to equate the two incidents. Trump and his enablers knew he lost the election, convinced his audience that democracy had been subverted, and incited them to violence, whereas those protesting racism sincerely believed in an irredeemably racist America. One was a protest gone seriously awry, the other a coup against democracy. Nor is it

⁴²⁵ Glenn Kessler, Salvador Rizzo and Meg Kelly, “Trump’s false or misleading claims total 30,573 over 4 years”, *Washington Post*, January 21, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/01/24/trumps-false-or-misleading-claims-total-30573-over-four-years/>.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ “Capitol assault a more sinister attack than first appeared”, *Independent*, January 11, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/capitol-assault-a-more-sinister-attack-than-first-appeared-donald-trump-nancy-pelosi-mike-pence-capitol-people-b1785254.html>.

⁴²⁸ Gino Spocchia, “45% of Republicans approve of the Capitol riots, poll claims”, *Independent*, January 7, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-election-2020/republicans-congress-capitol-support-trump-b1783807.html>.

⁴²⁹ Jude Blanchette and Michael J. Green, “The Enduring Damage of This Insurrection to U.S. Diplomacy”, *Foreign Policy*, January 9, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/08/capitol-trump-insurrection-world-reaction-china-propaganda-u-s-diplomacy/>.

⁴³⁰ “Capitol mob represents an internal collapse of US political system: Global Times editorial”, *Global Times*, January 7, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1212180.shtml>.

to downplay the role of real and persisting racism in America, exacerbated by both offensive realism and the worst president in modern American history.⁴³¹

Chinese state media reported the protests, foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian condemning the US for its racism.⁴³² Jo Kim notes how China utilises the BLM protests to illustrate a chaotic America, and a deeply divided US is a huge boon to China, Russia, and any nation claiming democracy cannot work.⁴³³ They can claim the dangers of a free press and regarding social media and internet algorithms, there exists a kernel of truth. Timothy Snyder has described ‘cyber-fascism’, the tendency of the internet to illiberalize with an us or them narrative, dehumanising and persecuting differing groups, evident during the Trump administration.⁴³⁴ None of this can be directly blamed on offensive realism, yet in overlooking the domestic it ignores important social issues and fissures. Mearsheimer claims liberal hegemony curtails freedom of speech and press.⁴³⁵ Yet the pervasive zero-sum nature of domestic politics led to the obfuscation of facts and an all-out assault on truth, causing unrest, hyper-partisanship, and violence.

4.2.3 America’s Greatest Weapon

Just as offensive realism erroneously overlooks the link between domestic and international politics, so too in valuing hard power over soft power and ignoring their intimate relation.⁴³⁶ Soft power is *the* difference between the US and China, and this will become increasingly clear if China’s economy and military continues to grow relative to America’s own. Whether this happens is a matter of contestation, Christopher Layne arguing the US is undergoing ‘inexorable decline’ while John Ikenberry and William Wohlforth argue America’s position as sole superpower endures.⁴³⁷ What is undeniable is the soft power gap held over China. Joseph Nye claims a country’s soft power rests on three sources: ‘its culture, its political values, and

⁴³¹ Historian Timothy Snyder has convincingly argued that white supremacy was central to the attempted coup, organised on a ‘big lie’, central to fascism, in this instance that the election was stolen, due to voter fraud, because the non-white vote does not count: “Has the threat of Trump really gone? - Timothy Snyder”, *Channel 4 News*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUZizitn5v4>.

⁴³² “Xinhua Headlines: Outrage over racism combined with COVID-19 woes lead to riots in U.S.”, *Xinhua*, June 1, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/01/c_139105667.htm; “China urges U.S. to eliminate racial discrimination, protect minorities”, *CGTN*, June 1, 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-06-01/China-urges-U-S-to-eliminate-racial-discrimination-in-all-forms-QY4LJpMofe/index.html>.

⁴³³ Jo Kim, “With Support for ‘Black Lives Matter’ China Crosses a Thin Line”, *The Diplomat*, June 30, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/with-support-for-black-lives-matter-china-crosses-a-thin-line/>.

⁴³⁴ Timothy Snyder, “Timothy Snyder Speaks, ep. 13 : Cyberfascism”, *YouTube*, June 3, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAObqEu_tbg.

⁴³⁵ Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*, 122.

⁴³⁶ Snyder, “Mearsheimer’s World”, 172.

⁴³⁷ Layne, Wohlforth and Brooks, “US Decline or Primacy? A Debate”, 397-414.

its foreign policies.’⁴³⁸ Clearly, China’s political values and domestic realities make accruing large amounts of soft power difficult.⁴³⁹ Nye states soft power is not incompatible with realism and yet offensive realism is only concerned with hard power, and in ignoring the former helps facilitate its erosion, reflected domestically during the Trump administration in its illiberalism, chaos and democratic convulsions.⁴⁴⁰

The ignorance of offensive realism was laid bare through Trump’s travel restrictions on Chinese students during deteriorating Sino-American relations. A Google machine-learning scientist described restrictions as ‘one of the largest bottlenecks to our collective research capacity,’ explicitly revealing the relationship between hard and soft power.⁴⁴¹ If the US makes it more difficult for brilliant students to study in their country – if the zero-sum mentality is transplanted onto the domestic sphere, resulting in general Sinophobia or racism – America suffers costs in research, patents, technological breakthroughs and transnational relationships, all of which affect hard power. The pandemic has fuelled xenophobia – a worrying trend – and is undoubtedly linked to the wider Sino-American rivalry.⁴⁴² Leading the vanguard was an offensive realist president, alternating between calling Covid-19 ‘the Chinese virus’ and ‘kung flu.’⁴⁴³ Western xenophobia in response to the pandemic has also aided Chinese nationalism, allowing China to ‘portray itself as the ultimate defender of all Chinese’s interests — including members of the Chinese diaspora and overseas migrant communities,’ revealing the folly of offensive realism in ignoring any connection between domestic and international.⁴⁴⁴

Mearsheimer praises nationalism for its restraining qualities, while condemning ‘hard-edged nationalism that demonizes other groups and countries.’⁴⁴⁵ Yet international nationalism without its domestic cousin is no guarantee as the two spheres are linked, Trump himself providing evidence of their inseparability, both of which humanity must increasingly transcend. This has direct implications for the Sino-American rivalry, as the US loses brilliant students to China. America should trust in its own domestic system to educate and liberalise visiting

⁴³⁸ Nye, *The Future of Power*, 84.

⁴³⁹ Joseph S. Nye, “China’s Soft Power Deficit”.

⁴⁴⁰ Nye, *The Future of Power*, 82; Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 44-46.

⁴⁴¹ Andersen, “The Panopticon is Already Here”.

⁴⁴² “Covid ‘hate crimes’ against Asian Americans on rise”, *BBC News*, May 20, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-56218684>; “Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide”, *Human Rights Watch*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/12/covid-19-fueling-anti-asian-racism-and-xenophobia-worldwide>.

⁴⁴³ Bruce Y. Lee, “Trump Once Again Calls Covid-19 Coronavirus The ‘Kung Flu’”, *Forbes*, June 24, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2020/06/24/trump-once-again-calls-covid-19-coronavirus-the-kung-flu/?sh=390d11201f59>.

⁴⁴⁴ Brian Wong, “How Chinese Nationalism Is Changing”, *The Diplomat*, May 26, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/how-chinese-nationalism-is-changing/>.

⁴⁴⁵ Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*, 153.

students rather than acting from primitive xenophobia, and yet offensive realism – in choosing the latter – drains the vitality of the former. The true horror of offensive realism is that it makes states behave the same way if acted upon, diminishing important differences between the two powers, and acting as a corrosive on US soft power, to which America itself is a greater threat than China can ever be. Yet America’s domestic system gives itself, and has given itself, the possibility of reforming, reclaiming lost legitimacy and realising some of its considerable potential, even during its steady decline.

Table 11: America’s Domestic Failings

| <i>Strategy</i> | <i>Results</i> | <i>Security</i> | <i>Prosperity</i> | <i>Domestic Liberty</i> |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| Employ Offensive Realism in an era of great-power competition | Zero-sum spill-over into the domestic sphere | Undermined – four years of domestic unrest and a coup against democracy (Longer term) – soft power undermined, with military and technological implications | Undermined – in overlooking domestic issues, inequality – a key factor behind domestic turmoil in the US – continues to go unaddressed (Longer term) – soft power undermined, with economic and technological implications | Undermined – competition with China devolves into general xenophobia towards Asian-Americans (Longer term) – no reform may empower demagogues and illiberal and fascist elements in the US |

4.3 Liberal Leviathan

America is the greatest threat to itself in all three realms – militarily, by undervaluing allies, economically, by forgoing cooperation and ignoring the link between EEZs and war, and domestically, by diminishing soft power via domestic illiberalism. Despite continuity across administrations in America’s economic response to China’s rise, there was a key difference in the military response, shown by America’s treatment of their allies. First explored is the mission and difficulties of liberal internationalism in a post-Trump US and bipolar world. The possibility of offensive realism returning due to US domestic problems is then analysed, before two possible futures for America are envisioned, one safe, and one imperilled both from China and from offensive realism itself. This thesis agrees with Ikenberry’s prognosis that the liberal international order requires greater cooperation and burden sharing among its participants, but

claims that to do that, America needs domestic reform, or it will always be vulnerable to illiberalism, or even the recrudescence of fascism, foregoing even the possibility of a position, far less a legitimate one, within the liberal international order.

4.3.1 Liberal Internationalism in Post-Trump America

In *Liberal Leviathan*, Ikenberry defined liberal hegemony as the ‘open and rule-based relations among states,’ America’s leadership offering ‘provision of security, wealth creation and social advancement.’⁴⁴⁶ In the context of the Bush administration in declaring two wars, one limited and the other boundless, alongside the admonishment ‘you’re either with us or against us,’ Ikenberry declared the crisis of liberal internationalism.⁴⁴⁷ As he notes, ‘the reestablishment of the United States as a liberal Leviathan involves the voluntary granting of that status by other states,’ mirroring Yan’s moral realism, and declaring the crisis was one of legitimacy.⁴⁴⁸ Ikenberry argues more imperialism equals less legitimacy, but the crisis of authority exceeds foreign policy blunderings, reflecting power shifts, contested sovereignty, non-state threats and the diversity of participating states.⁴⁴⁹ Yet the scope of transnational threats necessitates international cooperation and ‘multifaceted collective action.’⁴⁵⁰

Ten years later Ikenberry claims the mission of liberal internationalism to be making the world ‘safe for democracy;’ to ‘protect and facilitate the security, welfare, and progress of liberal democracy.’⁴⁵¹ While Ikenberry’s 2011 claim that China is neither an economic or geopolitical bloc is less true today, and may be less so in another decades time, considering the BRI’s potential as an EEZ and tools of dictatorship available for export, it nonetheless remains true that the US is greatly strengthened from a position within the liberal internationalist order.⁴⁵² Modernity – not geopolitics – is identified as the main challenge, which has further eroded US international governance and authority.⁴⁵³ Its role as security guarantor has diminished, while the Washington Consensus – Keohane and Colgan argue – ruptured the social

⁴⁴⁶ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, xi.

⁴⁴⁷ “You are either with us or against us”, *CNN*, November 6, 2001, <https://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/>.

⁴⁴⁸ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, 10, 6.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 107, 6.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 320.

⁴⁵¹ Ikenberry, *A World Safe For Democracy*, xi.

*Ikenberry condemns the expansionist reading of liberal internationalism, while Mearsheimer makes no distinction between the two strands. For a distinction between defensive and offensive liberal internationalism see: Anne-Marie Slaughter, “Wilsonianism in the Twenty-first Century,” in *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. John Ikenberry, Thomas J. Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter and Tony Smith (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 89-118.

⁴⁵² Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, 341.

⁴⁵³ Ikenberry, *A World Safe For Democracy*, 258, 271.

contract underpinning support for the liberal order, echoing this thesis when arguing that ‘today’s crucial foreign policy challenges arise less from problems between countries than from domestic politics within them.’⁴⁵⁴

The solutions offered are consistent. In 2011 Ikenberry argued 21st century problems necessitate ‘sharing authority among a wider coalition of liberal democratic states, advanced and developing, rising and declining, Western and non-Western.’⁴⁵⁵ While China has not deigned to lead as he suggested, the logic that a stronger liberal order can constrain China is sound, whether China is within the order or not.⁴⁵⁶ Ten years later he underscores the argument noting that the international crisis of US governance ‘can be remedied by a redistribution of authority and roles across the system.’⁴⁵⁷ The success of the liberal order has outpaced America’s own, attracting states of different sizes and places, accommodating diverse models of capitalism and development, and ‘its deep logic of open and rules-based cooperation remains intact.’⁴⁵⁸ As Ikenberry argues, ‘In a world of rising economic and security interdependence, it remains the most coherent, functional, and widely acceptable way of organizing international relations.’⁴⁵⁹ US decline makes obvious the value of cooperation, as perhaps was less clear when America was stronger and surer of its own infallibility.

Ikenberry claims the liberal order’s benefits were magnified when Trump attempted to undermine them, revealing the option of building ‘a post-hegemonic consortium of like-minded states that could collectively underwrite a reformed liberal order.’⁴⁶⁰ Similarly, the rise of revisionist states may strengthen the liberal order even while providing an alternative, while China’s illiberalism and militarisation can provide the geopolitical bogeyman necessary for the US to reclaim a measure of international legitimacy. And yet it can only do so by reforming domestically. Timothy Snyder claimed Trump was not a cause but an accelerant of US decline, squeezing forty years of decline into four.⁴⁶¹ This neither liberates it from liberal internationalism, nor invalidates the project, only increasing the necessity of cooperation between liberal states, with power and responsibilities shared, while a weakened America reforms domestically. As with liberal internationalism, Donald Trump has revealed how thin the veneer of US democracy is, while also making undeniable its qualities, the threat of

⁴⁵⁴ Colgan and Keohane, “The Liberal Order Is Rigged: Fix It Now or Watch It Wither.”

⁴⁵⁵ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan* 10.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, 347.

⁴⁵⁷ Ikenberry, *A World Safe For Democracy*, 4.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, 281, 284.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, 6.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid, 303.

⁴⁶¹ “Has the threat of Trump really gone? - Timothy Snyder”.

offensive realism, and the dangers of an unequal and illiberal society in leading to it. Ikenberry claims the mission of liberal internationalism to be confronting ‘dangers that imperil the survival of democracy,’ and they should begin at home, as the greatest threat comes from an illiberal US; the emaciated carcass of a once liberal leviathan.⁴⁶²

4.3.2 Has the Threat of Offensive Realism Gone?

Biden is certainly a liberal internationalist, and yet it is unclear whether he will be able to enact enough change such that the US is secured against the threat of another offensive realist tyrant. Trump is a consequence of an unequal country, the divisions of which outlived and were exacerbated by his reign. Mearsheimer notes how Biden is bringing back the advisors both political parties have used, which he claims resulted in the election of Donald Trump.⁴⁶³ While he correctly identifies the presence of career politicians and diplomats who have been responsible for remarkably similar bipartisan policy, this narrow analysis overlooks a range of domestic grievances behind his election, and his assertion that ‘the public voted for Trump because the public was dissatisfied with American foreign policy’ is myopic.⁴⁶⁴ Snyder highlights growing inequality, absence of welfare, and problems caused by social media as the tripartite reasons behind Trump’s election, claiming Biden’s election is not a solution but a four year window with which to tackle such problems.⁴⁶⁵ In *The Road to Unfreedom*, Snyder explores how the politics of eternity and inevitability can aid fascism; if you cannot envision a future then democratic norms are ruptured; future planning becomes futile.⁴⁶⁶ He expands on this in *Our Malady: Lessons in Liberty from a Hospital Diary* in which he places healthcare as central in his argument that if people are fearful and angry then the future is unimaginable and democracy suffers.⁴⁶⁷ A democracy – he argues – can be torpedoed by creating unnecessary fear, pain and suffering, Russia the prototypical fascist example, but equally applicable to America – Snyder claiming the best way to tackle external threats is to improve your own domestic reality.

Ikenberry, taking a wider view, highlights modernity as behind the crisis of liberal internationalism, labelling it the ‘Jekyll-and-Hyde phenomenon that brings both extraordinary

⁴⁶² Ikenberry, *A World Safe For Democracy*, xi-xii.

⁴⁶³ Mearsheimer, “US Foreign Policy under President Biden”.

⁴⁶⁴ On the unchanging bureaucrats in America see: Michael J. Glennon, *National Security and Double Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Mearsheimer, “US Foreign Policy under President Biden”.

⁴⁶⁵ “Has the threat of Trump really gone? - Timothy Snyder”.

⁴⁶⁶ Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom*, 111-159.

⁴⁶⁷ Timothy Snyder, *Our Malady: Lessons in Liberty from a Hospital Diary* (New York: Crown, 2020).

dangers and great opportunities.⁴⁶⁸ Losing manufacturing jobs was a large factor behind Trump's election. Greater modernity may bring, for example, driverless cars, resulting in another 3.5 million job losses for American truck drivers alone.⁴⁶⁹ Yet Mearsheimer correctly identifies lethargy with a certain type of politician, and insubstantial change in the US will certainly result in another Trumpian figure, perhaps more competent and thus more dangerous, and more likely offensive realist than liberal internationalist.⁴⁷⁰ Much depends then, on what Biden can accomplish during his four years in office, Mearsheimer rightly questioning whether America can repair its international relationships given its domestic fissures.⁴⁷¹ Yet the reverse is also true. Can the US reform domestically such that it is protected from future tyrants, allowing it to regain international legitimacy? If domestic conditions of anger, fear, and disinformation selects for office false friends and tyrants, then democracy crumbles, risking the entire project of liberal internationalism, of which the core aim, Ikenberry argues, is making the world safe for democracy.⁴⁷² "A society grows great when old men plant trees the shade of which they know they will never sit in". Yet to get to this point individuals must be able to envision their own future, and liberalism must first thrive at home if it is to survive abroad; as Ikenberry notes, liberal internationalism is 'deeply tied to domestic social and economic agendas of liberal democracy.'⁴⁷³

4.3.3 Two Possible Futures

If the US does reform internally then there will be less inequality, less division, less corruption, less xenophobia, less ignorance and superstition, and less zero-sum thinking, as millions of Americans will not be living just above the poverty line, fighting over scarce resources, fearful, angry, unable to consider the future, and therefore susceptible to demagoguery. Limits must be put on election funding and campaigning, to keep big-business out of politics, leading to corruption, the selling of assets, and the type of politician that made Trump's rhetoric of 'drain the swamp' resonate with millions, the corruption and mendacity of the Clinton's providing prototypical examples.⁴⁷⁴ Biden occupies a unique position, in part as the turbulence of his predecessor's reign offers him opportunities to reform and respond to threats unaddressed under

⁴⁶⁸ Ikenberry, *A World Safe For Democracy*, 15.

⁴⁶⁹ Andrew Yang, "Andrew Yang: Yes, Robots Are Stealing Your Job", *The New York Times*, November 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/14/opinion/andrew-yang-jobs.html>.

⁴⁷⁰ Mearsheimer, "US Foreign Policy under President Biden".

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ikenberry, *A World Safe For Democracy*, xi.

⁴⁷³ Ibid, 293.

⁴⁷⁴ Christopher Hitchens, *No One Left to Lie To: The Triangulations of William Jefferson Clinton* (New York: Twelve Books, 2012).

Trump's tenure, while he is also hamstrung by policies of the former president.⁴⁷⁵ He is also limited due to the Republican Party method of flooding the system with money, running on emotional issues, and suppressing the vote where possible. Despite Trump's defeat, this proved remarkably successful, keeping the Senate and nearly retaining the House of Representatives. Yet Snyder argues that gaming the system led to attempting to break the system, resulting in the January Putsch, revealing the split in the party between lawful and unlawful republicans – a positive trend.⁴⁷⁶ There are also some moves being made towards antitrust legislation against Facebook, with 46 states suing the company, though Biden's healthcare plans appear to have stalled.⁴⁷⁷ If reforms are successful, particularly in the realm of healthcare, social media, and inequality, then America would have greater legitimacy and strength with which to re-join and perhaps lead the international order.

If America cannot implement domestic reforms the threat of illiberalism and offensive realism – and the domestic ruptures they ensure – are forever present. If America becomes the home of mass unemployment, inequality, and homelessness, of riots, ersatz-dictators, and insurrection, of culture-wars, failed conversations, and hyper-partisanship, and of isolationism, zero-sum thinking and offensive realism, then China is legitimised, and legitimised through America's failings alone, even as a general Sinophobia is the milieu in which all this occurs. This above all threatens the US, as the difference between the countries narrow, and China may begin to appear the more ordered and legitimate of the two superpowers, despite its domestic realities. Mearsheimer claims that 'the vast majority of people around the globe do not care greatly about the rights of individuals in other countries.'⁴⁷⁸ This may be true and yet it has to change, even if the winds of change must begin out of a self-interested realisation that an increasing number of threats are transnational and can only be solved through cooperation; that a diminished US will need its allies in an increasingly interconnected world. Thomas Homer-Dixon, describing such problems – scarce resources, climate change, economic instability, non-state threats – noted how several occurring simultaneously could threaten both US security and the wider global order.⁴⁷⁹ More recently Covid-19 – which should be treated as a (failed) dress rehearsal for the very real possibility of a much more deadly pandemic – made undeniable the

⁴⁷⁵ Trevor Hunnicutt and Simon Lewis, "Analysis: Biden talks down Russia, spurs allies in bid to back Putin into a corner", *Reuters*, June 17, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/biden-talks-down-russia-spurs-allies-bid-back-putin-into-corner-2021-06-17/>.

⁴⁷⁶ "Has the threat of Trump really gone? - Timothy Snyder".

⁴⁷⁷ Kelly Anne Smith, "What You Need To Know About The Facebook Antitrust Lawsuit", *Forbes*, May 17, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/investing/facebook-antitrust-lawsuit/>.

⁴⁷⁸ Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*, 11.

⁴⁷⁹ Thomas Homer-Dixon, *The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization* (Washington, DC: Island, 2006), 16–17.

need for international cooperation in responding to transnational threats. The US must increasingly cooperate not only with other states which make up the liberal international order but with China, and beyond. Yet this spread of cooperation and multilateralism must coexist with – or be preceded by – a spread of liberalism within America, if it is to have any chance of reclaiming legitimacy and vitality as a liberal leviathan.

4.4 Does This Challenge America?

China's domestic system represents a challenge if the US lives up to its ideals. The great strength classical realism holds over its structural cousin is its domestic considerations, which shapes the international landscape through values, norms and rules – even through trade and geopolitics. Offensive realism ignores this, suggesting power is the only metric and the domestic matters not. Clearly this is foolish and if a Scandinavian country had a similar amount of power as China, it would rightly represent a lesser concern, despite historic precedent and despite bringing new problems. China's domestic system reveals how it behaves when strong, how *Tianxia* underpins this, and how they export illiberal technologies to autocratic countries,

Table 12: Two Futures

| <i>Strategy</i> | <i>Results</i> | <i>Security</i> | <i>Prosperity</i> | <i>Domestic Liberty</i> |
|-----------------|-------------------|--|---|--|
| Domestic Reform | A revitalised US | Enhanced – a reformed US leading a strong liberal coalition | Enhanced – more equality; an attractive America continuing to attract the world's best and brightest; decline slowed or even reversed | Enhanced – less xenophobia and hyper-partisan turmoil; US buttressed; its people more secure, and less vulnerable to charlatanism |
| No reform | Continued decline | Undermined – an isolated and isolationist America attempting to combat China | Undermined – the decline of the US continues or is further accelerated | Undermined – domestic instability enables and empowers the enemies of open society. Domestic illiberalism torpedoes liberalism internationally |

thereby shaping the international system. Offensive realism thus fails thrice; morally, by ignoring important human rights issues, theoretically, as it treats democracies and dictatorships with comparable consternation, and practically, due to the many international implications emanating from domestic politics.

Mearsheimer argues that twenty-five years of liberal hegemony ‘left a legacy of futile wars, failed diplomacy, and diminished prestige,’ and yet failed diplomacy abounded under an offensive realist president, America’s lost prestige is immeasurable, and international hostility was transferred to the domestic.⁴⁸⁰ Mearsheimer asserts the greatest failure of liberal hegemony is ‘the damage it does to the American political and social fabric.’⁴⁸¹ Yet the US is more divided and disreputable than at any point since Vietnam, and responsible is not decades of liberal internationalism but a more unequal and illiberal domestic sphere than Mearsheimer perceives, and which his proposed theory exacerbates. Offensive realism ensures a domestic sphere defined by competition and combat, undermining American soft power, one arena of clear US domination. While China’s military and economy may grow, America’s soft power is affected only by its own failings, of which offensive realism is an accelerant, if not a direct cause.

The need for liberal internationalism in a post-unipolar world is increasingly evident and requires that the liberal world rehabilitates America. Yet the US must first liberalise itself from within, or forever be susceptible from the illiberal and fascist elements ever present in American society. At the outset of the Cold War, George Kennan wrote:

Much depends on the health and vigour of our own society...This is point at which domestic and foreign policies meet. Every courageous and incisive measure to solve internal problems of our own society, to improve self-confidence, discipline, morale and community spirit of our own people, is a diplomatic victory...worth a thousand diplomatic notes and joint communiqués.⁴⁸²

Mearsheimer, debating China’s rise with Mahbubani, declared Kennan his theoretical ally, and yet offensive realism makes states behave alike, illiberalizing the US while claiming the values of liberal society.⁴⁸³ The final sentence from Kennan echoes this thesis while repudiating

⁴⁸⁰ Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*, 153

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² George Kennan, “The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State”, *NSAarchive*, accessed on May 25, 2021, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>.

⁴⁸³ Mearsheimer & Mahbubani, “Has China Won?”

offensive realism. ‘After all, the greatest danger that can befall us...is that we shall allow ourselves to become like those with whom we are coping.’⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁴ Kennan, “The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State”.

Conclusion

“We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature”
– Abraham Lincoln, 1861.

‘Does China challenge the US militarily, economically and by way of its domestic system?’ This thesis set out to disprove offensive realism – prominent in both Beijing and Washington – as archaic, chaotic, and positively dangerous in an age of nuclear weaponry, advanced technology, and transnational threats. Its own focus on hard power informs Chapters 2 and 3 on China’s military and economic challenge while China’s domestic system – overlooked by Mearsheimerian analysis – is analysed in Chapter 4 to reveal how China behaves when strong. These can be read as three separate academic articles which work together as a thesis to answer my research question. Brooks, Wohlforth and Ikenberry’s framework of ‘security, prosperity, and domestic liberty’ is borrowed to show how offensive realism accelerates US decline, making them militarily isolated, less economically interconnected, and vulnerable to domestic turmoil and tyranny.⁴⁸⁵

Chapter 2 reveals how China – contrary to scholarly consensus – abides more by offensive realism than its Waltzian counterpart, national narratives of humiliation and rejuvenation fuelling its military expansionism. The theoretical challenge outweighs the material one. While moral realism exists in Chinese academia, this is unheeded by Beijing’s elites who – as Mearsheimer boasts – share his worldview.⁴⁸⁶ Offensive realism prescribes conflict, and as China adopts this view, they will increasingly behave within the confines of the offensive realist diplomatic straitjacket, rendering competition inevitable, and de-escalation a

⁴⁸⁵ Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth, “Don’t Come Home, America”, 11.

⁴⁸⁶ Callahan, “Mearsheimer vs. Nye on the Rise of China.”

liberal reverie. Donald Trump assisted in this realist painting of America, whose administration released several government documents parroting *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Yet one of his reign's many tragedies was that the zero-sum rivalry – reserved for great-power competitors by Mearsheimer – was democratised, repelling allies and neutral parties, strengthening China's military challenge via US incompetence, not Chinese ingenuity. Attempting to reclaim global leadership and the liberal internationalist vision, Joe Biden has – to China's consternation – managed to amass a greater anti-China coalition, aided by international anger at China's own offensive realist behaviour, thereby weakening their military challenge.

Chapter 3 claims the Sino-American trade war is overtly offensive realist, its practical failure evident, while a larger insidious theoretical risk lurks in the historical link between economic decoupling and war, also visible in the accelerating technological rivalry, which economic binding and interdependence can ameliorate.⁴⁸⁷ The trade war represents a miniaturised case study of the larger theoretical failure of offensive realism. In attempting to retain supremacy and obstruct rivals, offensive realism encourages looking backwards through an obfuscated lens for simplified answers to a more complex present; to try an impossible reclamation of an imagined past and attempt the isolationist gambit in an irreversibly interconnected world, sabotaging yourself and risking war in the process. Chinese economic practice reflects legalism – a premodern Chinese offensive realism – and yet America's decision to not accommodate China in the global financial order simultaneously incentivised China while teaching them the unilateralism now weaponised against the US. Most notably the BRI presents a multivariate challenge – economic, military, ideational and geopolitical – while containing the military risk entailed by economic decoupling.

Chapter 4 shows how *Tianxia* underpins the worst elements of China's domestic system – repressive surveillance and merciless Sinicization – and argues this indicates China's ruthlessness, before highlighting the international implications from befriending autocrats and equipping them with repressive technologies, to utilising this nefarious fraternity in global institutions, thereby attempting to change international norms. Yet domestic problems plague the US, and the envisioned cornucopia of freedoms ensuing from the application of offensive realism was not apparent, exacerbating domestic divisions and undermining US soft power, an arena in which China can only hope to compete if America – fearful of a rising China and emasculated by visions of its own decline – allows itself to illiberalize, grasping for an imagined

⁴⁸⁷ Russett, "Liberalism", 75-76.

and vanishing past rather than embracing the reality of the present. In all three spheres, China mounts a challenge but only America holds the keys of its own defeat. The quickest suicide would be to illiberalize further, removing any important distinction between themselves and China – the most important being democracy, its absence no longer unimaginable in America, and an undemocratic US unconcerned with human rights – internationally or at home – would erase the need for rivalry. With a fascist and introverted America:

...the effect would be much the same if the ~~three~~ two superstates, instead of fighting one another, should agree to live in perpetual peace, each inviolate within its own boundaries. For in that case each would still be a self-contained universe, freed forever from the sobering influence of external danger.⁴⁸⁸

This thesis remains relevant despite Trump's welcome departure. Illiberal tendencies persist and the Sino-American rivalry rages on, now in expanded form with isolationism eschewed and new countries party to the contest. The G7 recently shared their 'Build Back Better' model, an infrastructure project rivalling the BRI, while a renewed US-Philippines alliance is under discussion and – as a former European Commissioner declared – 'We all have to become China-experts.'⁴⁸⁹ This thesis is intended to inform policy and debate, and thereby counteract three threats. The first – from China – is practical and real, though more limited than is presented by the cacophony in Washington, the second theoretical; offensive realism retarding US policy under Trump while continuing to define and corrode China's international relations, and the third subterranean, fermenting in the illiberal bowels of America, simultaneously misidentified, overlooked and exacerbated by offensive realism, which in its brief regency nearly broke the withering heart of the American Dream.

This thesis is inserted into discussion regarding the nature of the Sino-American rivalry, positioning itself within ongoing debate in *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, and critiquing one Western and three Chinese IR theories, all to the degree they endorse

⁴⁸⁸ George Orwell, *1984* (London: Harvill Secker, 2008), 189.

⁴⁸⁹ "2021 G7 Leaders' communiqué: Our shared agenda for global action to build back better"; Patrick Wintour, "G7 backs Biden infrastructure plan to rival China's belt and road initiative", *The Guardian*, June 12, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/12/g7-global-infrastructure-plan-to-rival-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative>; Steve Holland and Guy Faulconbridge, "G7 rivals China with grand infrastructure plan", *Reuters*, June 13, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/g7-counter-chinas-belt-road-with-infrastructure-project-senior-us-official-2021-06-12/>; Jeffrey Ordaniel, Jay Batongbacal and Krista Wiegand, "Advancing a Rules-based Maritime Order in the South China Sea", *Pacific Forum*, June 23, 2021, <https://twitter.com/PacificForum/status/1403434441398272009>; Jonathan Holslag, "The Strategic Dissonance Between Europe and China", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 3, No. 3 (August 2010): 325.

unilateralism and zero-sum relations. Its structure and chosen topics allow relevant analysis on contemporary areas of geopolitical conflagration, while its analytical eclecticism and use of Chinese academics allow inspection of Chinese diplomacy and strategic thinking. I update the arguments of Popescu to show how Trump's zero-sum hyper-realism committed international and domestic fratricide, while⁴⁹⁰ Ikenberry's concept of binding is contemporised for the techno-economic Sino-American rivalry, and classical realist analysis on the domestic-international link is reversed to reveal top-down imposition of chauvinism abetted by advanced technology and an offensive realist epistemology.⁴⁹¹ Finally, I add the dystopian concern about enforced homogeneity endorsed by *Tianxia* to Kim's list of problems with Chinese IR.⁴⁹²

Yet alongside this innovation exists an insight identified by George Kennan in 1946 – that improving your own system is infinitely more advantageous than subverting your enemy's.⁴⁹³ The US temporarily forgot this lesson, Mahbubani claiming America behaves like the USSR, and China like America during the Cold War, and it is imperative that Biden's America relearns lessons forgotten by the former administration.⁴⁹⁴ Much of this thesis critiques the West's recoiling from modernity and looking backwards for answers, thereby painting a pessimistic portrait of our times. Yet the upwards curve of history should not be forgotten. Harari writes:

The last 500 years have witnessed a breath-taking series of revolutions. The earth has been united into a single ecological and historical sphere. The economy has grown exponentially, and humankind today enjoys the kind of wealth that used to be the stuff of fairy tales... Today humankind has broken the law of the jungle. This situation might of course change in the future and, with hindsight, the world of today might seem incredibly naïve. Yet from a historical perspective, our very naivety is fascinating. Never before has peace been so prevalent that people could not even imagine war.⁴⁹⁵

The threat of offensive realism in the age of Sino-American rivalry is that it may undo all this; in its inability to transcend zero-sum thinking it endorses great-power conflict, with real-life implications, illustrated by this thesis. It therefore appears to inadequately value both

⁴⁹⁰ Popescu, "American Grand Strategy", 375-405.

⁴⁹¹ John Ikenberry, "Reflections on After Victory", *British Journal Of International Politics and International Relations* Vol. 21, No. 1 (February 2019): 11-12.

⁴⁹² Kim, "Will IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics be a Powerful Alternative?", 75.

⁴⁹³ Kennan, "The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State".

⁴⁹⁴ Mahbubani, *Has China Won?* 128.

⁴⁹⁵ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 181.

civilisational benefits and risks entailed by endorsing great-power competition. It is a naïve worldview which underestimates human naivety, inspired from 20th century history without digesting its most important lessons; the folly of great-power competition and how close humanity came to annihilation. History does not know the name Stanislav Yevgrafovich Petrov, the Russian officer who in 1983 did not report the five missiles falsely identified by Soviet radar, and in disobeying military protocols may have saved between 130-290 million lives.⁴⁹⁶ Technology increasingly replaces the human component in these decisions, while “tactical” nuclear weapons render the unthinkable possible once more, and offensive realism – the theory which led to that moment – is again prominent, its prescriptions risking the entire human project of civilisation. Humanity has never been closer to flourishing, and yet this vertiginous era confers on us a special responsibility. We must love one another or die.

⁴⁹⁶ Perry, *The Button*, 64.

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