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China's Militarisation and the Indian Ocean

An Assessment of China's Military Modernisation, Footprint in the Indian Ocean and the Future of the Quad

What is behind Beijing's increased assertiveness towards its regional neighbours? Many use the theory of transition of power: that China is becoming a superpower and it challenges the status quo, mostly the United States, and attempts to replace it globally.² Others tend to believe that China's real desire is to become a regional hegemon by establishing a China-centred sphere in Asia. Some believe that their only aim is to just simply overcome the "century of humiliation" from its recent past by continuing their economic boom. This paper presents a view that China is trying to reconstruct the status quo, and in order to do that the country needs to establish a China-centred Asia and most importantly a China-centred Indo-Pacific region. In its first section, this paper takes a look at the country's incredible military modernisation by examining those events and leaders that pushed this development. Then, the section also points out how China plans to reconstruct the regional status quo with the help of its economic power. The second part aims to present the Indian Ocean region's current status as a "battlefield" between China and India and why does it matter in the first place. Finally, in the third part the paper argues that the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is the best tool to deter Beijing in the future and it must be strengthened properly by, among other things, a deepened U.S.–India defence cooperation.

Keywords: People's Republic of China, Indian Ocean, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, India, United States of America, militarisation

The shift in China's "Grand Strategy" from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping

In this section the paper discusses how China's military changed since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. In order to do that the paper introduces this development through the leaders in its history, Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. Before doing so, the paper also discusses the meaning of "grand strategy" to give the reader a clear understanding of how China sees itself and how it defines decision-making regarding foreign policy. Finally, the paper presents the latest, and no doubt, the most ambitious project of China's foreign policy, the Belt and Road Initiative.

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² Kim, Woosang – Gates, Scott (2015): Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China. *International Area Studies Review*, 18(3), 219–226.

Defining “Grand Strategy”

When it comes to foreign policy one thing is for sure, it can change pretty fast. While a grand strategy is more or less solid and fixed. It is also vital to understand that grand strategy is often not written but can be understood from assessing policies and historical analysis. As Lieutenant Colonel Tony K. Cho explains:³ “Grand strategy is the direction projected in peacetime and wartime at the national-level utilizing all resources of the security community to achieve the nation’s objectives.” So, what does China want to achieve? What kind of national destiny does China want to fulfil? How does the country see itself? The answer goes by many names: “The Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation”, “Chinese Dream” and “The New China”. All these names have the same root in their core, which is the “One Hundred Years of National Humiliation”.

China has a historical quest to overcome the shame which was brought onto her by the West, during the “Century of Humiliation”, a period between 1839 and 1949 when under a series of unequal treaties China lost control over a great portion of its own territory after being defeated by militarily superior nations.⁴ Although the People’s Republic of China (PRC) states that the Century of Humiliation has ended when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) won the Chinese civil war, there are several conflicts, legacies of this period, which must be solved by 2049 and then China’s recovery will be considered complete. Most notably the return of Hong Kong and Taiwan to the mainland.⁵ Even though the aim of this grand strategy never changed, the method, which includes both conventional and unconventional warfare, evolved in the last forty years a lot.

Chinese strategic foreign policy from Mao Zedong to Hu Jintao

When Mao Zedong died in 1976, he left behind a country ravaged by his doctrine of continuous revolution from the Great Leap Forward in 1958–1962 which killed around fifty-five million people, to the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976 which killed another two to three million people while destroying the economy.⁶ With these massive waves of political killings, he also beheaded the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), by eliminating its most experienced officers thus pushing it back significantly. After Mao’s death, the arrest of his successors – the extremely Maoist Gang of Four – and the short rule of Hua Guofeng the reformist Deng Xiaoping became the head of the party in 1978. He inherited a territorial defence centric army which was meant to wage a large-scale, low-tech, protracted warfare and at the same time had secondary functions like nation building

³ Cho, Tony K.: *Mao’s War of Resistance: Framework for China’s Grand Strategy*. [online], United States Army War College, 17.03.2011. Source: apps.dtic.mil [07.12.2020].

⁴ Harper, Tom: *How the Century of Humiliation Influences China’s Ambitions Today*. [online], Imperial & Global Forum, 11.07.2019. Source: imperialglobalexeter.com [07.12.2020].

⁵ Kaufman, Alison A.: *The “Century of Humiliation” and China’s National Narratives*. [online], U.S.–China Economic and Security Review Commission, 11.03.2011. Source: uscc.gov [07.12.2020].

⁶ Phillips, Tom: *The Cultural Revolution: All You Need to Know about China’s Political Convulsion*. [online], The Guardian, 11.05.2016. Source: theguardian.com [07.12.2020].

and internal security.⁷ After all, the PLA was originally a guerrilla army. Deng shortly introduced the *Four Modernisations* in agriculture, industry, science and technology and defence, even though there were many sceptic Maoists in the PLA slowing the changes down. Thus, the Sino–Vietnamese border war in 1979 was necessary for Deng to highlight the technological deficiencies of the PLA so he can make way for further modernisation in the army. After all the PLA still relied on “human waves” of soldiers, unfortunately untrained and under-equipped, which resulted in a heavy toll in terms of both casualties and economic loss and also revealed the grave weaknesses in operational planning, tactics, command and control.⁸ Still, during this phase of reforms in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, China’s military was the least important among the “four modernisations”, because in order to have modernised weapons first a country needs a stable economy, an educated workforce and a developed industry.⁹ As Zenel Garcia highlighted, the increasingly important role of the military began as a result of two tipping points, under the rule of Jiang Zemin who succeeded Deng in 1993, both occurred in the 1990s and meant the beginning of a series of modernisations in the PLA. Firstly the Gulf War in 1991 and secondly the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996.

The Gulf War in 1991 was a clear wake-up call for both Russia and China that the U.S. has an enormous advantage in conventional warfare and also provided lessons for the PLA regarding the lethality of mobility, precision-strike capabilities, space-based surveillance and reconnaissance.¹⁰ So, Beijing altered the military doctrine of the PLA, turning its focus on limited “local wars under high-technological conditions” in 1994 which resulted in a smaller and more professionalised army, which meant new more mobile formations, training of special troops and increased emphasis on naval and air capabilities. This was also the beginning of the PLA’s historical strategic concept of “active defence”, using long-range, precision-guided munitions to keep the enemy as far from the economically developed coastal area as possible by “noncontact fighting”.¹¹

The second turning point was the *Third Taiwan Strait Crisis* in March 1996. Just as Taiwan was about to hold its first democratic election, the PRC wanted to dissuade the people from voting by intimidation. The PLA’s Second Artillery Corps (PLASAC) began firing short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM) near two important harbours, Keelung and Kaohsiung. As a result, the U.S. sent two aircraft carrier groups (CSG-5, USS *Nimitz* and CSG-7, USS *Independence*) and an amphibious ready group based on the amphibious assault ship USS *Belleau Wood* to the vicinity, defying the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and the People’s Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF) naval and missile

⁷ Until the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989 which resulted in great resentment among both PLA soldiers and officers who were called in because the People’s Armed Police (PAP) was not enough to cope with the protesters. After this, the PAP went through a series of reforms and it became the primary source of internal security.

⁸ Quang, Nguyen Minh: *The Bitter Legacy of the 1979 China–Vietnam War*. [online], The Diplomat, 23.02.2017. Source: thediplomat.com [07.12.2020].

⁹ Garcia, Zenel (2019): China’s Military Modernization. In *China’s Military Modernization, Japan’s Normalization and the South China Sea Territorial Disputes*. Cham: Palgrave Pivot. 45–59.

¹⁰ Ward, Jonathan D. T. (2019): *China’s Vision of Victory*. Atlas Publishing and Media Company. 18.

¹¹ Defense Intelligence Agency: *China Military Power*. [online], Defense Intelligence Agency, 03.01.2019. Source: dia.mil [07.12.2020].

threats. This humiliation from a “foreign intervention” convinced Beijing of the need for further modernisation which was the beginning of heavy investments, foreign weapon acquisitions from Russia and Ukraine, a complete overhaul and modernisation of its indigenous military industry, and last but not least the embrace of an anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) strategy as core principle which means to deter, delay or deny any enemy from entering the theatre of operations in Asia, but most notably in Taiwan's case.¹²

Both Deng Xiaoping's and his successor Jiang Zemin's period (from 1978 to 2002) can be described with “hide your brightness, bide your time”, which meant to combine tight political control with increased market-based economic freedom, while at the same time accepting the U.S.-led world order so the country can profit from its economic success. In the field of the armed forces it meant a slow but steady evolution of the PLA, and especially after the Belgrade embassy bombing in 1999 and the 2001 Hanoi incident. As David Kilcullen also notes, the peacetime evolution ended and started a wartime one where the PLAN began to copy and evolve towards its adversary, the U.S. Navy with increased belief in the “zero-sum game” in regard of the U.S.–China competition.¹³

By the time Hu Jintao came to power in 2002 China had become much stronger in both economic and military terms. His job was to take care of the period known as “the period of strategic opportunity”, the first twenty years of the new millennium, while at the same time continue Deng's non-confrontational approach in foreign policy to ensure further development for the country. So how China started to fight without weapons? Hu's era aimed to prepare and alter the battlefield for China's advantage by giving a new kick to political warfare by broadening the concept of war. Most notably by the introduction of “Three Warfares” in 2003 – public opinion warfare, psychological warfare and legal warfare. This meant to shape public opinion both domestically and internationally – “peaceful rise of China”, Confucius Institutes, influence foreign decision-makers regarding China and build the legal justification for Beijing's actions.¹⁴ In 2004 Hu Jintao outlined for the PLA the “Historic Missions of the Armed Forces in the New Period of the New Century”, as a manifestation of his “scientific development” concept in military and a much broader revision on strategy, to develop the PLA's role as a military and diplomatic instrument and as a warden of China's global interest.¹⁵ This direction also meant to build an informatised military by focusing on C4ISR (Command, Control, Communication, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) technology – “win local wars under informationised conditions” – and at the same time complete infrastructure for defence operations, to construct operational capabilities better than those of Taiwan and to be capable of defending the first island chain. In a nutshell, the PLA's strategic foundation has continued to be the principles of People's War, Active Defence and its subset naval component Offshore Defence, but they have been modified to fit in the 21st

¹² Cole, J. Michael: *The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis: The Forgotten Showdown Between China and America*. [online], The National Interest, 10.03.2017. Source: nationalinterest.org [07.12.2020].

¹³ Kilcullen, David (2020): *The Dragons and the Snakes. How the Rest Learned to Fight the West*. London: Hurst. 194.

¹⁴ Mattis, Peter: *China's 'Three Warfares' in Perspective*. [online], War on the Rocks, 30.01.2018. Source: warontherocks.com [07.12.2020].

¹⁵ Mulvenon, James: *Chairman Hu and the PLA's 'New Historic Missions'*. [online], China Leadership Monitor, 2008. Source: fnvaworld.org [07.12.2020].

century.¹⁶ The 2013 Defence of Japan gives a clear picture of how much effort Beijing took to modernise its military under Hu Jintao. China's announced national defence budget was approximately 720.2 billion yuan compared to the one in 2003, about 150 billion yuan, which means that it has quadrupled in size over the ten years and has grown more than 33-fold over the past 25 years as of 2013.¹⁷ Another interesting fact is the amount of money they spent on foreign weapon acquisitions from Russia. According to a paper from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, China has spent almost 25 billion US\$ on Russian arms export between 2000 and 2012.¹⁸

Xi Jinping the Eternal

When Vice President Joe Biden met Xi Jinping in 2011, the American visitors were surprised by the way Xi talked about his father and Mao Zedong, and overall by his openness about his personal life. At the same time, writes McGregor, Biden and his staff left China with the impression that dealing with Xi will be nothing like dealing with Hu or previous leaders as he was more ambitious regarding his country and more assertive about prosecuting its interest.¹⁹ Looking back from 2020, they were certainly right, and what is more, they have underestimated him as well. Under his eight years, so far, Xi has strictly suppressed internal party dissent, started an enormous anti-corruption campaign which helped him to get rid of any political opponents or potential rivals, adopted a very much expensive and dangerous foreign policy that has directly challenged the U.S., and on the top of all this he managed to remove term limits so he can remain president for life while at the same time being the head of the party, military and state.²⁰

Back in 2012, Xi specified the deadlines of his “Two Centennial Goals”. First, China must have a “moderately prosperous society” by doubling its 2010 per capita GDP to \$10,000 by 2021, when it celebrates the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party. Second, it shall become a “fully developed, rich and powerful” nation by the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic in 2049.²¹ Even back then when he was elected he described this era as the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation”, although the “period of strategic opportunity” was still on, which could have been a hint that he had already planned for more years than he legally had. So how Xi Jinping has helped to pave China's path back to the “Middle Kingdom” from a strategic perspective? Because of limited space this paper only discusses the most important structural military reforms, and the most

¹⁶ Kamphausen, Roy et al. (eds.): *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era*. [online], Homeland Security Digital Library, 04.2014, III, 83–86. Source: hsdll.org [07.12.2020].

¹⁷ *Defense of Japan 2013*. [online], Japan Ministry of Defense, 2013. Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 3, 33. Source: mod.go.jp [07.12.2020].

¹⁸ Cordesman, Anthony H. et al.: *Chinese Military Modernization and Force Development*. [online], Wikileaks, 09.2013, 119. Source: cryptome.wikileaks.org [07.12.2020].

¹⁹ McGregor, Richard: *Party Man Xi Jinping's Quest to Dominate China*. [online], Foreign Affairs, 08.2019. Source: foreignaffairs.com [07.12.2020].

²⁰ Dreyer, June Teufel: *Xi Jinping's Second Coronation – And What It (May) Mean for China and the Rest of Us*. [online], Foreign Policy Research Institute, 20.03.2018. Source: fpri.org [07.12.2020].

²¹ Graham, Allison: *What Xi Jinping Wants*. [online], The Atlantic, 31.05.2017. Source: theatlantic.com [07.12.2020].

significant developments in the PLARF and the PLAN as of 2020 which is the core of China's regional military power projection.

In 2015, Xi introduced the first wave of the most substantial PLA reforms in the last 30 years to build a “world-class force” with increased naval capabilities, that can dominate the Asia-Pacific and “fight and win informatised local wars” by 2035 and global wars by 2049.²² The *structural changes* meant to strengthen CCP authority over the armed forces and reorganise it as well, so it becomes more effective in conducting joint operations – the creation of Joint Theatre Commands means to ensure this. Some of the most important of these changes are the dismantle of the four General Departments by subsuming their work within fifteen new functional bodies under the direct control of the Central Military Commission (CMC), and the dismantle of seven Military Regions with five Joint Theatre Commands (Eastern Theatre Command, headquartered in Nanjing, Western Theatre Command, headquartered in Chengdu, Southern Theatre Command, headquartered in Guangzhou, Northern Theatre Command, headquartered in Shenyang, Central Theatre Command, headquartered in Beijing). The reforms also elevated the Second Artillery Force to a full-service branch and renamed PLA Rocket Force (PLARF), and established a new service branch, the PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF) which is in control of electronic warfare (EW), cyber warfare, aerospace satellite, ISR, media warfare, physiological warfare and legal warfare.²³ China's national defence budget for FY2020 was approximately 1,268 billion yuan which means a staggering 2.4-fold budget growth in 10 years from FY2010.²⁴

In 2019 October, China unveiled its new military capabilities at the parade marking the 70th anniversary of the PRC. The lessons were clear: the PLA Rocket Force's continuing expansion is enormous and more lethal than ever before. The *DF-41* (CH-SS-20) road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), can carry either multiple warheads or single warhead and multiple jammers, penetration aids and decoy. Although, the new *DF-17* medium-range ballistic missile and hypersonic glide vehicle, which have both nuclear and conventional payload variants, and the *CJ-100* cruise missile clearly shows the PLARF's approach to the future, which is additional capacity and higher speed for nuclear and conventional systems.²⁵ In general, China has approximately 2,200 regional missiles by the highest estimates – 1,500 SRBM (up to 1,000 km), 450 MRBM (up to 3,000 km) and 160 IRBM (up to 5,500 km) – and has several Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) most notably the *DF-41* (up to 15,000 km) and the *DF-5* (up to 13,000 km), and made significant advances in ISR and manoeuvring re-entry vehicles which is capable of attacking moving naval vessels.²⁶ Another drastic development in the

²² Tiezzi, Shannon: [China's Plan for a New, Improved Military](#). [online], The Diplomat, 01.12.2015. Source: thediplomat.com [07.12.2020].

²³ Gill, Bates – Adam, Ni (2019): China's Sweeping Military Reforms: Implications for Australia. *Security Challenges*, 15(1), 33–46.

²⁴ [Defense of Japan 2020](#). [online], Japan Ministry of Defense, 2020. Part 1, Chapter 2, Section 2, 60. Source: mod.go.jp [07.12.2020].

²⁵ The Military Balance (2018): Chapter Six: Asia. *The Military Balance*, 118(1), 219–314.

²⁶ Missile Defense Project: [Missiles of China](#). [online], Missile Threat, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 14.06.2018. Source: missilethreat.csis.org [07.12.2020].

PLA's missile capabilities is the successful test of the Long March-11, it has similar solid propellant technology as the DF-21 or the DF-26, which was launched off a merchant vessel. This raises the prospect that China's merchant fleet could be used to fire ballistic missiles during wartime.²⁷

The PLA Navy, which went through a rapid modernisation and now is more numerous than the U.S. Navy, consists of three fleets: North Sea Fleet, East Sea Fleet and South Sea Fleet. During the Xi Jinping era, the PLA Navy promoted the mass production of its indigenous *Yuan*-class submarines, with enhanced stealth, air defence and anti-ship attack capabilities, and now China has approximately 70 submarines. In January they commissioned the first *Renhai*-class destroyer, which is said to have a vertical launch system (VLS) capable of firing long-range land-attack cruise missiles and YJ-18 anti-ship cruise missiles with supersonic terminal attack capabilities, and has 112 launch cells – twice the number of what the new *Luyang* III-class destroyer has. The country has two aircraft carriers – the *Liaoning* (2012) and the indigenous *Shandong* (2017), 750 major surface combatants and 88 destroyers and frigates.²⁸ China has also built more naval vessels domestically than the U.S. in the 2013–2018 period.²⁹ The numbers are great, but these vessels are definitely lighter because Beijing wants to secure its sphere of influence in close territories like the South China Sea and East China Sea, so China does not need a heavy blue-water navy just yet even though the transition is well underway.

After all, the CCP's most important strategic objective is to secure the waters within the *first island chain* – contains islands, reefs, rocks disputed by six nations (China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia and the Philippines) – and it has everything to do that, submarines, missiles of both land- and sea-based, and last but not least nuclear submarines.³⁰ Since 2014, China has expanded its ability to monitor and project power throughout the South China Sea by constructing “unsinkable aircraft carriers” – islands with dual civil–military bases in the Spratly and Paracel Islands – equipped with airstrip and hangars for aircrafts (J-11 fighters and H-6 bombers), new radar and communication arrays and capable missile systems.³¹ In 2018, the PLAN deployed Jin-class (Type 094) SSBNs armed with JL-2 submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) which constitutes China's first credible sea-based nuclear deterrent.³² As David Kilcullen notes, China has a hard time hiding its submarines from surveillance flights, and the expanding A2/AD bubbles with missiles, patrolling ships and aircrafts, radars and sensors aim to deter any keen eyes thus offering a chance for a second-strike capability in case of a nuclear war.³³

²⁷ Davis, Malcolm – Lyons Jones, Charlie: [China's Military Watch](#). [online], ASPI The Strategist, 02.10.2020. Source: [aspistrategist.org](#) [07.12.2020].

²⁸ Defense of Japan 2020: 64–66.

²⁹ The Military Balance 2018: 235.

³⁰ Rahn, Wesley: [China Has the World's Largest Navy – What Now?](#) [online], DW, 21.10.2020. Source: [dw.com](#) [07.12.2020].

³¹ [Chinese Power Projection Capabilities in the South China Sea](#). [online], Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, s. a. Source: [amti.csis.org](#) [07.12.2020].

³² Ni, Adam: [The Future of China's Nuclear-Powered Ballistic Missile Submarine Force](#). [online], ASPI The Strategist, 08.05.2020. Source: [aspistrategist.org](#) [07.12.2020].

³³ Kilcullen 2020: 200.

Beijing's Horizontal Manoeuvring and the BRI

Escalation can take many different forms. There is the *vertical*, which involves an increase in the intensity of armed conflict or confrontation, such as employing types of weapons not previously used in the conflict or attacking new categories of target. The *horizontal*, which describes the expanding geographic scope of conflict, and the *political escalation* which collects everything that do not fit into the first two types.³⁴ As noted by Kilcullen:

“Beijing’s horizontal manoeuvring aims to pose a wide range of challenges by expanding the spectrum of competition beyond the rival’s capacity to cope, creating a dozen of simultaneous minor challenges that hamper the rival’s ability to respond effectively to any challenge, or to think about the whole situation as warlike at all.”³⁵

This is exactly how China wants to undermine other regional and global powers, besides increased military modernisation, with the “New Silk Road”, “Globalisation 2.0”, “One Belt One Road”, “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI), it has many names, Chinese President Xi Jinping’s way of reaching the “New China” dream.

According to Oriana Skylar Mastro, China does not want to replace the United States as the leader of the global order, it only wants to have a complete regional hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region by trying to displace the United States. He argues that a U.S. type of global position would only “constrain its own behaviour, or spread its system of government abroad”. Although China wants to be powerful enough to counter the United States whenever it is needed. He adds that for those regional aims, (Taiwan, the South China Sea, etc.), the country wants to build up its own empire, without directly challenging the United States on a battlefield, and for that it is using its economic power very innovatively.³⁶ These efforts were put in the form of the Belt and Road Initiative, to lay the groundwork for a Sinocentric Asian – and ultimately maybe a global – order.

Given the rapid expansion of China’s overseas interests and its dependence on imports of energy and raw materials through strategically vulnerable sea lines of communication (SLOC) the PLA’s military evolution is completely understandable. That is why the PLAN’s transition into a dual “near seas defence and far seas protection” is definitely an objective for the party. As former State Councillor Yang Jiechi highlighted: “A tree cannot grow tall or bear fruit in a barren land torn apart by the flames of war” – there is no development without security – which points out Beijing’s goal to create a stronger BRI security system to protect China’s overseas interests, personnel and investments.³⁷ For the protection of these businesses, the Chinese Government is using the security of the host country in the first place, but secondarily they rely on a growing number of private Chinese paramilitary security firms, which employ retired PLA personnel and have many connections to the PLA. Most notably the Hua Xin Zhong An (15,000+ employees) and the China Overseas

³⁴ Morgan, Forrest E. et al.: *Dangerous Thresholds, Managing Escalation in the 21st Century*. [online], RAND, 2008. 18. Source: rand.org [07.12.2021].

³⁵ Kilcullen 2020: 176.

³⁶ Mastro, Oriana Skylar: *The Stealth Superpower: How China Hid Its Global Ambitions*. [online], Foreign Affairs, 11.12.2019. Source: foreignaffairs.com [07.12.2020].

³⁷ Russel, Daniel R. – Berger, Blake H.: *Weaponizing the Belt and Road Initiative*. [online], Asia Society Policy Institute, 09.2020. 14. Source: asiasociety.org [07.12.2020].

Security Group (20,000+ employees).³⁸ Combating terrorism as a national priority and the growing drive for Beijing to secure BRI projects with the help of the PLA in ravaged regions can actually stabilise many of these countries. Another interesting part of the BRI is the way China wants to “set foot” and “grow roots” in foreign countries, using its “debt-trap diplomacy” so they can acquire strategically important positions. The fact is that even though they did acquire great locations from a security point of view through this method in Djibouti, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Mongolia, Montenegro, the Maldives, Pakistan and Tajikistan, it is a card Beijing seldom plays and they want to improve these lending practices especially after the effects of the coronavirus.³⁹

China and the Indian Ocean

In this section the paper points out the significance of the Indian Ocean to Beijing as the Achilles heel of its peaceful rise. Then it notes their most important ally in the region, as a tool of regional power projection, especially in the case of India. Finally, the paper illustrates the certain strategic counter steps India has made in the recent years to prevent an ever-expanding Chinese foreign policy in the IOR.

The strategic importance of the Indian Ocean

In the previous section I already discussed that China's first and foremost priority is to secure the trade routes and its many investments in the region, so it can continue the “peaceful rise” without any disruption in the economy and society. To be frank this trade route is not just important, but it is China's life line, especially when we speak about the Strait of Malacca. Between 2000 and 2016 grain and seed exports to China have increased by 563% while soybeans have increased 705% which is an enormous growth. And the passageway has become the key player, after all one-quarter of all soybean and one-fifth of all rice exports pass through the Strait of Malacca.⁴⁰ Another factor is China's increased energy consumption which fuels the country's exponential industrial expansion and this exact dependence on foreign oil created “The Malacca Dilemma” back in 2003. As highlighted by the *Oxford Institute for Energy Studies*, while China's oil import dependency was about 50% a decade ago it is currently around 70% and it arrives almost exclusively, about 80% of it, by seaborne tankers through Malacca. It is also worth to mention that even though Beijing failed to decrease this dependence on imports, with the Eastern Siberia–Pacific Ocean Pipeline (ESPO) they managed to reduce China's seaborne dependency with Russian oil imports which represented 11.3% of the country's total oil import in 2018.⁴¹ It is clear that the country's enormous economic machine is in a constant need for

³⁸ Russel–Berger 2020: 17.

³⁹ Glosserman, Brad: ‘Debt trap’ Diplomacy Is a Card China Seldom Plays in Belt and Road Initiative. [online], The Japan Times, 01.09.2020. Source: japantimes.co.jp [07.12.2020].

⁴⁰ Bjerga, Alan et al.: *Choking on Our Harvest: Threats Loom over Global Food Trade*. [online], Bloomberg, 18.05.2018. Source: bloomberg.com [07.12.2020].

⁴¹ O'Sullivan, Stephen: *China: Growing Import Volumes of LNG Highlight China's Rising Energy Import Dependency*. [online], The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, 06.2019. 3. Source: oxfordenergy.org [07.12.2020].

energy, and with the passageway located between the Indonesian island of Sumatra – it is vital to note here that Singapore is a major U.S. ally – and the Malay Peninsula, the Strait of Malacca becomes a natural strategic chokepoint.⁴² It would be a false message though, that China is the only country to whom this trade route is vital. After all the Indian Ocean borders many other countries like Australia, India, Somalia, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan – just to name some. So, Beijing had to find an answer to this geopolitical threat, and they did. Through adaptation, by the Kazakhstan–China Pipeline or the Myanmar–Yunnan Pipelines and last but definitely not least the Gwadar–Xinjiang Pipeline which enables China to bypass the Malacca Strait altogether.

An eccentric ally

For decades the ties between Beijing and Islamabad have been a stable ground for regional cooperation. For China, above everything, Pakistan serves as a barrier against India, stopping it from gaining too much power in South Asia. Furthermore, the two countries have mutual diplomatic support for certain disputed territories in question. China supports Pakistan's claim on Jammu and Kashmir – to keep the status quo against India – while Pakistan supports China's authority over Tibet and Taiwan. In fact, Pakistan was the first Muslim country to recognise the new government – the CCP – and then break diplomatic ties with the one in Taiwan. The country also serves as a link between China and other Muslim countries, which is the reason the paper uses the term “eccentric” when it defines their alliance. After all, nations – most notably Turkey, Pakistan, Syria, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia or the UAE that claim to be the “great defenders of Muslim faith” and are always more than willing to blame the West for its cartoons and laws that aim to help integration or stop terrorism – failed to protest and stayed silent over China's serious abuse of its Muslim minority, the Uighurs, in exchange for more investments and money.⁴³ So how does this cooperation between the two countries help Beijing's power projection in the region?

The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, later on just CPEC, is a part of the BRI and started as a \$46bn investment in 2015 for a line – made of highways, railway and pipelines – between the two countries connecting Gwadar and Karachi with Kashgar. Before moving to its deep-water ports, it is worth noting that this economic corridor which has been opposed by New Delhi since the beginning for being a “game-changer in the regional status quo” has failed to deliver this so far. As noted by Shams, the CPEC is slowing, because of the Pakistani elite's bad relations with their neighbours for supporting cross-border terrorists and not solving border and territorial issues. Not to mention that jihadists increasingly identify CPEC projects and other Chinese BRI investments as targets.⁴⁴

⁴² Khan, Abdullah: *The Malacca Dilemma: A Hindrance to Chinese Ambitions in the 21st Century*. [online], Berkeley Political Review, 26.08.2019. Source: bpr.berkeley.edu [07.12.2020].

⁴³ Cohen, Nick: *Why Do Muslim States Stay Silent over China's Abuse of the Uighurs?* [online], The Guardian, 04.07.2020. Source: theguardian.com [07.12.2020].

⁴⁴ Shams, Shamil: *Has China–Pakistan Economic Corridor Lived Up to the Hype?* [online], DW, 30.09.2019. Source: dw.com [07.12.2020].

The military cooperation between Islamabad and Beijing has a long history. And Pakistan's ports, three big and four smaller one – all under rapid development by the CPEC – play a major role in China's security vision. These are Gwadar Port (only 400 km from the Strait of Hormuz, a deep-sea port), Karachi Port (also a deep-sea port) and Port Qasim (deepest sea port, second port of Karachi only 28 nautical miles from it).⁴⁵ Since the beginning of the CPEC not only serious infrastructural developments have been taking place but China also wants to make sure that Islamabad is ready to defend the investments. As noted by Tim Marshall, Beijing struck a deal at the end of 2015 for a territory of 1,300 hectares for forty years to establish a “special economic zone” with an international airport and a security force of twenty-five thousand personnel.⁴⁶ Similarly they also made sure that their assets are not only safe from land-based threats but Islamabad has the necessary means to defend it on the sea. From the early 2010s, China has supplied heavy weapon systems to Pakistan, most notably JF-17 Thunder/FC-1 (88) and JF-17 Block-3 (50) FGA aircrafts, Type-041/Yuan submarines (8), anti-ship missiles, coast defence systems, air search radars, combat helicopters and many more.⁴⁷ They also struck a deal back in 2018 for four state-of-the-art Type-054A/Jiangkai-2 frigates by 2021. These multi-role frigates equipped with modern sensors and air defence systems are considered the backbone of the PLAN.⁴⁸ Finally in late December 2020 Beijing sold 50 Wing Loong II armed drones to Pakistan which might prove to be a decisive force against India in high-altitude areas.⁴⁹ The two “iron brothers” had their sixth bilateral naval exercise this year, entitled Sea Guardians–2020 and aimed to enhance the capabilities to jointly address issues such as maritime terrorism and crime. For this occasion, China deployed five major ships, including the guided-missile destroyer Yinchuan, the guided-missile frigate Yuncheng, the comprehensive supply ship Weishanhu, and the submarine rescue ship Liugongdao, whereas Pakistan sent two Zulfiqar-class F22P/F21 frigates, two fast attack craft, one fixed-wing anti-submarine patrol aircraft, two ship-borne helicopters and about 60 special operations soldiers.⁵⁰ China sees Pakistan as its own “Israel”, and just as the United States it is also helping it to grow accordingly. As former Australian defence attaché to Islamabad Brian Cloughley pointed out about China's strategic aim in the Indian Ocean:

⁴⁵ Bhatti, Baber Ali: [Ports and Their Importance for Pakistan](#). [online], Maritime Study Forum, 22.03.2020. Source: maritimestudyforum.org [07.12.2020].

⁴⁶ Marshall, Timothy (2018): *A Földrajz Fogságában. Tíz térkép, amely mindent elmond arról, amit tudni érdemes a globális politikai folyamatokról*. Budapest: Park Könyvkiadó. 224.

⁴⁷ [Transfers of Major Weapons: Deals with Deliveries or Orders Made for 2010 to 2019](#). [online], Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 07.12.2020. Source: armstrade.sipri.org [07.12.2020].

⁴⁸ [China Delivers the Biggest-Ever, Most Advanced Naval Warship to Pakistan](#). [online], The EurAsian Times, 24.08.2020. Source: eurasiatimes.com [07.12.2020].

⁴⁹ Shishir, Gupta: [China Sells 50 Armed Drones to Pakistan, Begins Psyops. It's a Reminder](#). [online], Hindustan Times, 26.12.2020. Source: hindustantimes.com [04.01.2021].

⁵⁰ Rajagopalan, Rajeswari Pillai: [China–Pakistan Naval Drills: More than just Symbolism](#). [online], The Diplomat, 10.01.2020. Source: thediplomat.com [07.12.2020].

“Beijing thinks long term, and having Pakistan as an ally in the Indian Ocean is a big plus in its plans to secure trade routes and increase its regional influence. The [Pakistan Navy] is an important part of its overall strategy, and it can be expected that there will be further exercises, probably developing in size and scope”(cited by Ansari).⁵¹

The eye of the tiger

In the last two decades China has stretched far beyond its own borders and deep into the Indian Ocean as a result of its strategic imperative in the region, which is the protection of both sea lines of communication (SLOC) and a range of BRI maritime infrastructures from state and non-state actors. So far China has established a strategic presence at a few locations, with different levels of intensity. These are Colombo, Sri Lanka; Mahe, Seychelles; Male, Maldives; Hambantota, Sri Lanka; Gwadar, Pakistan and Doraleh, Djibouti (Gulf of Aden). Even though these ports present a threat – most notably Gwadar and Doraleh which is China's first foreign military base from 2017 – but it is still manageable.⁵² Not to mention the many Chinese submarines in the Eastern Indian Ocean and a dozen of its research and survey vessels which swarm the IOR.⁵³ As highlighted by David Brewster, the geography of the Indian Ocean region gives India major advantages and to China serious disadvantages. For instance, the need to deploy its naval forces through narrow chokepoints or the existence of limited and uncertain logistical support in the region.⁵⁴ Finally, China's SLOC is extremely long, and protecting it in a war surrounded by no real major regional allies, only a dysfunctional Pakistan, gives it little prospect or none at all. More about that in the next section.

Another key thing to remember is that though India does have a clear advantage in the region, New Delhi has invested a lot to ensure it stays that way. The country addresses her security concerns of the IOR through four tracks: The first track is that India realised its naval, coast guard and air capabilities need serious upgrading in order to project power farther from the mainland. The second part is the creation of a platform which aims to boost regional cooperation through the Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region, or IFC-IOR. The centre was launched in 2018, functions as a common operating ground and it processes radar and sensor data then redistributes it between the member states of the Indian Ocean Rim Association. The third line of effort is the expenditure of military ties with other major regional actors in the Indo-Pacific. Finally, India started its own investments in important ports and airports as a counter step against China's heavy

⁵¹ Ansari, Usman: [Pakistan and China Launch Joint Naval Drills. Should India Be Concerned?](#) [online], Defense News, 08.01.2020. Source: [defensenews.com](#) [07.12.2020].

⁵² Stanzel, Angela: [China Trends #2 – China's String of Ports in the Indian Ocean](#). [online], Institut Montaigne, 25.06.2019. Source: [institutmontaigne.org](#) [07.12.2020].

⁵³ Singh, Abhijit: [India Has a Bigger Worry than LAC. China Now Expanding Military Footprint in Indian Ocean](#). [online], The Print, 12.06.2020. Source: [theprint.in](#) [07.12.2020].

⁵⁴ Brewster, David: (2016): India and China at Sea: A Contest of Status and Legitimacy in the Indian Ocean. *Asia Policy*, (22), 4–10.

influence through the BRI.⁵⁵ In this section the paper only briefly discusses India's steps to enhance its naval capabilities.

The *Indian Maritime Doctrine 2015* highlighted the necessity for India to establish a strong presence in the Indian Ocean Region with its Navy through strengthening its coastal defence and offshore military bases. The doctrine was also pushing for the indigenisation of its naval vessels within the "Make in India" framework, relying on local ship building facilities.⁵⁶ The *Maritime Capability Perspective Plan 2027* specified it and set out a goal to have 200 warships, 500 naval aircrafts and 24 attack submarines by 2027, which is a significant step considering that as of 2020 India has around 132 warships, 220 aircrafts and 15 submarines.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19, India's defence budget had faced serious slashes for some time, as high as 40% according to some sources, which could completely undermine its original defence plans. That being said, under the light of China's adventurism in the Himalayas the Modi Government decided to remove the spending cap on defence for the third quarter.⁵⁸ Besides the fast modernisation of its outdated conventional weapon systems, India is also trying to create its own strategic bubble through establishing and developing its offshore military bases. As highlighted by the *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative* India has 10 offshore military bases. These are Navidet Bitra (2016) – surveillance and intelligence collection, Agatti Runway – aircraft, ICG District Headquarters (CGHQ-12) (2010) – activity monitoring and maritime patrols, Navdet Androth (2016) – surveillance, sea lines monitoring, communication, Navdet Minicoy (2017) – dual-use airport but no visible construction as of 2019, INS Baaz (2012) – surveillance aircrafts, further plans delayed, INS Kardip – ship maintenance and logistics, possible port for larger warships, Car Nicobar Air Force Base (2019) – supporting combat aircraft and heavy transport aircrafts, 9,000-foot runway, INS Jarawa (1) and INS Utkrosh (2) – (1) 8 ships, four coastal radars, lighthouses, (2) 10,000-foot runway, two air squadrons, reconnaissance aircraft, light utility helicopters, INS Kohassa (2001–2019) naval air station – plans for further extension.⁵⁹ With a three dimensional blue water navy under modernisation, serious radar systems and natural geopolitical advantages India poses as a real challenger to Beijing. That being said, underestimating China never ends well, that is why international and regional defence cooperation is more significant than ever before to New Delhi's approach to its own security dimension.

The Indian Ocean Region and the Quad

The final part of this paper aims to highlight the importance of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or in short QSD/Quad, in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) – the most significant

⁵⁵ [Ports and Partnerships: Delhi Invests in Indian Ocean Leadership](#). [online], Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 05.12.2019. Source: amti.csis.org [07.12.2020].

⁵⁶ [Indian Maritime Doctrine – 2015 Version](#). [online], Indian Navy, 2015. Source: indiannavy.nic.in [07.12.2020].

⁵⁷ Chand, Naresh: [Navy's Quest for Modernisation](#). [online], SP's Naval Forces, 01.2020. Source: spsnavalforces.com [07.12.2020].

⁵⁸ Nair, Remya – Sneesh, Alex Philip: [Modi Govt Removes Spending Cap on Defence for Q3 Amid Tensions with China](#). [online], The Print, 01.10.2020. Source: theprint.in [07.12.2020].

⁵⁹ Stanzel 2019.

international informal strategic forum between major regional powers India, the United States, Australia and Japan – as a tool of deterrence against Beijing. To do that, the paper assesses the India–U.S. defence relation first and the many turbulences the new administration will face. Then it takes a closer look at the Quad's cooperation regarding the IOR, and how their alliance evolved and what might come next.

Wind of change and India's strategic autonomy towards the United States

As I have already argued in the second section India has certain advantages which makes it an important player in the IOR. And the fact that New Delhi does not want to give up her traditional posture of strategic autonomy from great powers is completely understandable because of two reasons. Firstly, India was a colony for about two hundred years, suffering in the hands of a great power taught her to take dependency seriously.⁶⁰ Another factor is its unique geopolitical environment, surrounded by one of the most important oceans on the South, contained by China on the East and the North, and threatened by Pakistan on the West. Having China as a neighbour was manageable for hundreds of years, because of the Himalayas and – because of the same geographical reason – even in the 20th century due to a mostly dysfunctional People's Liberation Army. Having said that, the 21st century came with a both economically and militarily powerful China, posing a more serious danger to India than ever before, which shows in the increased number of peacetime border clashes between the two and Beijing's activity around the disputed border.⁶¹ Since their last clash in the summer of 2020 in the Ladakh and Sikkim region New Delhi has realised that the possibility of dealing with its giant neighbour without the clear support of others, and most importantly the U.S., is risky.⁶² Lately New Delhi strengthened its defence ties with Vietnam on a virtual summit where the two countries agreed to do so by regular ship visits, joint exercises and training, capacity building programmes and intensified defence industry collaboration.⁶³

The U.S. and India have inked five “foundational agreements” so far.⁶⁴ The first was in 2002 to protect shared military information, then came the logistics and security communication pacts in 2015 (COMCASA), in 2016 (LEMOA). And finally, the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) which allows for the sharing of sensitive geospatial data to enhance the accuracy of Indian drones and cruise missiles. There is

⁶⁰ Tharoor, Shashi: 'But What about the Railways ...?' *The Myth of Britain's Gifts to India*. [online], The Guardian, 08.03.2017. Source: theguardian.com [07.12.2020].

⁶¹ *A Frozen Line: The India–China Standoff at the Top of the World*. [online], Center for Strategic and International Studies, 30.09.2020. Source: youtube.com [07.12.2020].

⁶² Ayres, Alyssa: *The China–India Border Dispute: What to Know*. [online], Council on Foreign Relations, 18.06.2020. Source: cfr.org [07.12.2020].

⁶³ Sharma, Pranay: *India, Vietnam Strengthen Defence Ties Amid Shared Concerns over China's Assertiveness*. [online], South China Morning Post, 23.12.2020. Source: scmp.com [04.01.2021].

⁶⁴ Rej, Abhijnan: *India and US Likely to Sign Geospatial Intelligence Pact*. [online], The Diplomat, 24.08.2020. Source: thediplomat.com [07.12.2020].

also the U.S.–India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative from 2008, which acknowledged India as a *de facto* great power.⁶⁵

Overall, the two countries have reached an increasing level of strategic convergence, which is most apparent in the area of defence and security – as of 2020 the U.S. is the fourth largest military supplier of India – under the Modi and Trump era.⁶⁶ Still, this paper argues that the U.S. must do far better in aiding its most vital allies in the IOR, and most importantly India by convincing it to establish a formal alliance with Washington. Starting with the case of Diego Garcia where India voted in favour of Mauritius who demanded the U.K. to withdraw from the Chagos Archipelago, thus causing some headache for Washington as well.⁶⁷ One thing is clear, the most important job of the upcoming Biden Administration is to re-establish the presence of the U.S. in the region both diplomatically and militarily. To do that effectively, the new administration must heal the wounds of its divided nation first, without the clear support of the home front waging an efficient Asia-Pacific policy can get really hard. Another important question is how the future administration will address the Modi Government's crackdown on Muslims, especially in the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir.⁶⁸ Considering that the Kashmir problem is extremely sensitive and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is a Hindu nationalist one, foreign pressure might prove to be fatal to the future of a deep defence cooperation.

Towards an enhanced defence cooperation

China's crackdown on the Hong Kong protests and increased assertiveness towards both Taiwan and the South China Sea – let alone, its heightened militarisation in general – made like-minded countries who share common interest in the region to unite once again and reactivate the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue after more than a decade of slumber in 2017. In the same year the United States, Japan, Australia and India has embraced the Quad as a tool to keep the eastern maritime trade routes free and open, and also as a way to rebalance China's coercive policies in the region.⁶⁹ The core countries also met with the “Quad Plus” members – Vietnam, South Korea and New Zealand – to discuss coordinated responses to the Covid-19 which shows that their long term goal is to expand the alliance throughout the Indian Ocean even more.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ U.S.–India: *Civil Nuclear Cooperation*. [online], U.S. Department of State, 2009. Source: 2001-2009.state.gov [27.01.2021].

⁶⁶ Levesques, Antoine: *India–US Relations in the Age of Modi and Trump*. [online], IISS, 27.03.2020. Source: iiss.org [07.12.2020].

⁶⁷ *India Votes in Favour of UNGA Resolution Demanding UK Withdraw from Chagos Archipelago*. [online], The Hindu, 23.05.2019. Source: thehindu.com [07.12.2020].

⁶⁸ *India: Abuses Persist in Jammu and Kashmir*. [online], Human Rights Watch, 04.08.2020. Source: hrw.org [07.12.2020]; *Joe Biden's Agenda for Muslim American Communities*. [online], Joe Biden for President, 08.2020. Source: joe Biden.com [07.12.2020].

⁶⁹ Bennett, Yan C. – Garrick, John: *China's Actions Have Driven the Evolution of the Quad*. [online], ASPI The Strategist, 29.11.2020. Source: aspistrategist.org [07.12.2020].

⁷⁰ Teo, Sarah: *What the Quad Meeting Means for ASEAN*. [online], The Diplomat, 09.11.2020. Source: thediplomat.com [07.12.2020].

The decade between Quad 1.0 and 2.0 has allowed the ties of the four nations to mature and deepen, and as a result intra-Quad dialogues were upgraded to ministerial level, and bilateral exercises into “minilateral” arrangements. To name some of these landmarks – not including the India–U.S. agreements as the paper has already discussed them briefly in the previous part – the Japan–India civil nuclear cooperation agreement in 2017 was such, or when Japan became a permanent member of the U.S.–India naval exercise at Malabar in 2015. Furthermore, the increased AUSINDEX exercise between India and Australia, then India joined Australia’s Pitch Black air defence exercise in 2019. Finally, it is worth to mention that Japan joined the U.S.–Australia Talisman Saber exercise in 2019 after participating in the Southern Jackaroo (2017) and Kakadu (2016) multilateral exercises, hosted by Australia.⁷¹ Or the robust JIMEX 2020 bilateral exercise between Japan and India in the North Arabian Sea.⁷² Not to mention one of the most important developments that this year involved high profile combined military drills known as Malabar exercises. The event was hosted by the Indian Navy and featured ships, aircrafts and personnel from Australia, India, Japan and the United States in the Bay of Bengal, on 3 November 2020.⁷³ Before that in October the U.S, Japan and Australia conducted a trilateral naval exercise in the South China Sea with Burke-class guided-missile destroyers without India, which proves that New Delhi is not ready yet to turn its back to Beijing completely.⁷⁴

It is clear that the Quad was made for this year, not just because of the path of Xi Jinping has set for it, but also because of the record high unfavourable views of China in many countries – including Australia, the U.S. and Japan – as a result of the way Beijing handled the pandemic and its assertiveness.⁷⁵ The upcoming meetings and cooperation will define the direction of the Quad, but as long as China continues on the path of Xi Jinping, the cooperation will deepen and more countries will join.⁷⁶ Still, the Quad has resisted to openly identify China as its primary objective so far – only the U.S labelled it as “adversary” in its National Security Strategy.⁷⁷ The question is for how long can they do that? The fact is, that not many countries are keen to join a military alliance against China, thus angering it and provoking economic restriction in the middle of the pandemic. On the other hand, the Quad would have an objective in its core, which could help coordinate their efforts towards something. This would also enhance the deterrence

⁷¹ Buchan, Patric Gerard – Rimland, Benjamin: *Defining the Diamond: The Past, Present, and Future of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue*. [online], CSIS Briefs, 16.03.2020. Source: csis.org [07.12.2020].

⁷² Rej, Abhijnan: *India and Japan Hold Bilateral Naval Exercise in North Arabian Sea*. [online], The Diplomat, 28.09.2020. Source: thediplomat.com [07.12.2020].

⁷³ *India Hosts Japan, Australia, U.S. in Naval Exercise MALABAR 2020*. [online], America’s Navy, 02.11.2020. Source: navy.mil [07.12.2020].

⁷⁴ *U.S., Japan, Australia Conduct Trilateral Naval Exercises in South China Sea*. [online], Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet, 19.10.2020. Source: c7f.navy.mil [07.12.2020].

⁷⁵ Silver, Laura et al.: *Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries*. [online], Pew Research Center, 06.10.2020. Source: pewresearch.org [07.12.2020].

⁷⁶ Shoebriidge, Michael: *The Quad Was Made for 2020*. [online], ASPI The Strategist, 08.10.2020. Source: aspistrategist.org [07.12.2020].

⁷⁷ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. [online], The White House, 12.2017. Source: whitehouse.gov [07.12.2020].

value of the group, as pointed out by Derek Grossman, then he adds that a formalised military alliance is unnecessary and signalling willingness to help each other in case of a tension or an armed conflict should be sufficient.⁷⁸

Conclusion

As the paper showed the People's Republic of China went through an incredible modernisation regarding both its economy and military in the last four decades. All that, within an international environment dominated by western powers, but most notably the U.S. itself. As of 2021, it is clear that the concept of "China's peaceful rise" was a misunderstanding by many. Thinking that economic changes and an emerging middle class will alter the way the CCP rules China. Let alone, turning the one-party system into a democracy.

In the last two decades Beijing was trying to replace the U.S. in the Indian Ocean region by foreign investments through the BRI. Unfortunately for them, the Chinese Navy still faces serious problems regarding their overseas bases. So far, they have only Djibouti as a military base, and although Beijing is trying to find other possible facilities on the east coast of Africa and the South Pacific, it seems they ran out of luck. Mostly because of the fragile structure of these ties between China and its host nations, making these facilities more of a burden and Beijing's global and regional ambitions unreachable in their current state.⁷⁹ That said, China will do anything to establish a real presence in the region, especially in the case of Gwadar. After all, Beijing must find a way to address the Malacca Dilemma, and Pakistan is their only way considering that China imports a great deal of its crude oil from countries like Saudi Arabia, Angola, Iraq, Oman and Iran – just to name some.

China's assertiveness towards its immediate neighbours, most importantly Taiwan and India, clearly indicates that Beijing's paranoia against encirclement should not be taken lightly. That is why the U.S. must strengthen its ties with the above-mentioned countries. In particular with India, which is strongly stated in the recently declassified U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific. According to this, the U.S. sees India as a key strategic partner against China, but there are other countries in the neighbourhood as well, like the Maldives, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Still, this framework has nothing new to scare the horses and only states the reality that a resurgent China will inevitably challenge the U.S. soon, and India is Washington's best bet to box it in.⁸⁰ As for a broader strategic cooperation, the Quad has its dawn it seems. After a dozen successful joint naval exercises in the last couple of years between its core members, Canada participated in the latest Sea Dragon 2021 anti-submarine warfare exercise.⁸¹ This is an interesting

⁷⁸ Grossman, Derek: [The Quad Is Poised to Become Openly Anti-China Soon](#). [online], The Rand Blog, 28.07.2020. Source: rand.org [07.12.2020].

⁷⁹ Grady, John: [Chinese Navy Faces Overseas Basing Weakness, Report Says](#). [online], USNI News, 22.01.2021. Source: news.usni.org [07.12.2021].

⁸⁰ Kartha, Tara: [In Declassified US' Secret Indo-Pacific Strategy, India Is Central, Pakistan Has Fallen Out](#). [online], The Print, 18.01.2021. Source: theprint.in [27.01.2021].

⁸¹ Bhattacharyya, Anirudh: [Canada Joins Quad Joint Naval Exercise in Pacific Ocean](#). [online], The Hindustan Times, 25.01.2021. Source: hindustantimes.com [27.01.2021].

turn of events, which indicates that a broader strategic cooperation might be under the horizon, drawing in additional nations willing to show their teeth to contain the China threat. The way the CCP handled the pandemic and the bad quality of medical equipment sent to its allies certainly had a mark on China's diplomatic stability. On the other hand, it was the first major economy to recover from Covid-19, although it still remains a mystery in the face of job losses, uneven growths and record high prices which made many sceptical about it.⁸²

The new Biden Administration has already made steps to contain China, from reaffirming Taiwan about their support to rejecting Beijing's South China Sea claims by backing Japan.⁸³ Not to mention Joe Biden's plan to unite democratic countries against China thus building blocks, which strongly resembles the Cold War, but was opposed by German Chancellor, Angela Merkel.⁸⁴ All things considered, the future of the Asia-Pacific is more important than ever before and it is highly unlikely that either Beijing or Washington will give up their regional goals.

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⁸² Kuo, Lily: [China Becomes First Major Economy to Recover from Covid-19 Pandemic](#). [online], The Guardian, 19.10.2020. Source: theguardian.com [28.01.2021].

⁸³ [US Reaffirms Taiwan Support after China Sends Warplanes](#). [online], Eyewitness News, 24.01.2021. Source: abc13.com [28.01.2021]; McCurry, Justin: [US Takes Aim at China Territorial Claims as Biden Vows to Back Japan](#). [online], The Guardian, 28.01.2021. Source: theguardian.com [28.01.2021].

⁸⁴ Mai, Jun: [Merkel Backs Xi on Need to Avoid New Cold War, but Presses China on Human Rights, Transparency](#). [online], The Guardian, 27.01.2021. Source: theguardian.com [28.01.2021].

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