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THE RISING DRAGON? CAN CHINA OVERCOME ITS MANY OBSTACLES AND ACHIEVE THE STATUS OF GREAT POWER?

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Exercise Solo Flight

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Throughout history, the world has witnessed the rise and fall of many great powers, states, and civilizations such as the Babylonians, Romans and Ottomans. In more recent history the world has witnessed the dissolution of colonial masters including the United Kingdom and France. However, since decolonization world power dynamics have resulted in a transition or shifting of power between states. The end of World War II set the conditions for one such power transition and resulted in the establishment of a bi-polar world of power divided between the United States and its western allies and Russia and the Warsaw Pact which revolved around ideological concepts of democracy and communism.

The next major shift in the balance of global power occurred in 1989 at the fall of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Berlin Wall. From this point on the United States dominated as the sole global super power. It appears that the world is on the cusp of another great development in world power dynamics.

The rise of China is the biggest development in international relations since the end of the Cold War. Coupled with its staggering economic advancement, increased involvement in international organizations, modernization of its military and increasing force projection beyond its historic sphere of influence is cause for alarm for many. Furthermore, as an increasingly important player upon the world stage with ideological and political structure that is very

different than that of the democratic west, China is viewed as challenging the liberal values which underpin the current international order.¹

Conversely, others, such as Chinese scholars and policy makers, and some Western scholars argue that the rise of China represents an opportunity and not a threat to world order and stability. They advocate that China represents a new model of a rising power which challenges the argument that ascending powers will inevitably come into conflict with existing power states.² So the question remains, will China be capable of achieving superpower status and re-establish a bi-polar globe, and will it be able to achieve this without coming into conflict with the existing world powers? This essay will argue that China has the potential to ascertain great power status that will rival or surpass the United States but can only do so over extended time and by overcoming several challenges domestically, regionally and globally.

With such a complex subject this essay will be divided up into China's three spheres of ambitions and influence: domestic, regional and international/global. Each section will address key elements that will impede China's ambitions of achieving global power status.

To better comprehend the state of China and the mindset that drives their current actions domestically, regionally and globally we must have a basic understanding of their past. Unlike much younger countries such as Canada and the United States, China must be viewed not only as a state, but also as a civilization. As China is the only ancient civilization that has endured unbroken to present day,³ this legacy has a bearing on the way in which they view themselves, the world and their place in it. Recent archeological discoveries indicate that the Chinese

¹ Aggarwal, Vinod K, Sara A Newland (editors). *Responding to China's Rise: US and EU Strategies*. Springer International Publishing, Switzerland: 2015. 3-4.

² Aggarwal. v

³ Hsiung, James C. *China into Its Second Rise: Myths, Puzzles, Paradoxes, and Challenge to Theory*. World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd. Singapore. 2012. XV.

civilization dates back almost 7000 years, older than any other known ancient civilizations such as the Nile, Tigris-Euphrates and Indus river civilizations.⁴

Although a true dive into the complex and rich culture and history of China would take far too long, a brief explanation of their history will help to provide context for the decisions that they make and highlights the long term strategic forethought that they employ in their decision making.

When we look at China and the way in which they conduct themselves from domestically to internationally we must view them from a non-western perspective. Cultural and political ideologies are different than those of the west and the concept of the greater good is one that is more prevalent in China than it is in Western democratic societies. Of particular importance is that China sees its current rise as returning them to a position of global power that is rightfully theirs.

In order for China to ascend to great power status there are a number of key issues that they must overcome such as its internal border and independence disputes, income inequalities, corruption, political repression, human rights abuses and their restriction on the flow of information and their population's access to it.⁵

The physical geography often underpins and shapes the national, regional and international policies of state.⁶ China is no exception to this concept and has been struggling with the complexities of its geography for centuries. Throughout its history, China has worked to expand its borders from the core Central Plain, centered upon the Yellow River. By

⁴ Ibid. 2

⁵ Weitz, Richard. *Global Security Watch: China*. Praeger Santa Barba. (2013): 4

⁶ Marshall, Tim. *Prisoners of Geography, Ten Maps that Explain Everything About the World*. Scribner. New York. (2010): 8

approximately 1500 BCE the first Chinese state emerged from the multitudes of small city states. This is where the people know as the Hans began, forming the Shang Dynasty and working to protect the heartland by expanding outward and creating a buffer zone. Today, the Han make up 90 percent of the Chinese population, dominating politics, business and united by ethnicity and politically, all centered around the common goal of protecting the heartland.⁷

As China grew in power and influence the Han would employ attack as defence, expanding out towards natural barriers that if they were able to secure them would provide the buffer zone that they desperately wanted and deeded to protect them. By 200 BCE China had been largely successful and was beginning to take the shape of what we now consider modern day Chinese geographical boundaries. But their endeavours were not without challenges and defeats. In 1279 Kublai Khan became the first foreigner to rule over China and his Mongol dynasty would last 90 years when the Han took back control and formed the Ming dynasty. However, it would not be until 1959 and the annexation of Tibet that China would reach its goal as envisioned by the early Han people over 3 millennia before.⁸

The protracted struggle of the Chinese to secure its heartland, the agricultural and industrial center of gravity of its existence demonstrates how deeply this concept is engrained into the Chinese civilization and its people. It is easy to understand how this impacts the Chinese domestic, regional and international political policies and clearly demonstrates the astounding persistence the Chinese people have in the achievement of long term goals.

Although the Chinese people have a unifying sense of purpose in the security and long-term prosperity of their civilization they also have basic needs and desires and internal turmoil is

⁷ *Ibid.*, 48

⁸ *Ibid.* 49

one of the greatest threats to Chinese stability. Without a stable domestic front, China will not be able to attain superpower status as the additional resources required to control the population will be unavailable for other activities that will further Chinese international goals.

The Communist Party of China was formed in 1921 and was under Mao Zedong's control by 1927. Under Mao, the Communist Party of China led a revolution and took control of the country in 1947 after which the country was ruled under one man. However, in 1982, after the death of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping took control and instituted many political and economic reforms, including a shift away from one-man rule limiting the length of presidential terms.⁹ Deng has been accredited for setting the foundation and championing China's economic boom.

The current regime, however, seems to be on a path to changing some of these reforms including scope of power at the top of the political party. Since China's current president, Xi Jinping, came into power in 2012 he has been working to eliminate corruption and freedom of action of his subordinates. However, one of the most concerning changes occurred in February 2018 when the two-term limit and age restrictions that was once in place for the Chinese president were eliminated. Now, President Xi can retain power indefinitely. There is risk associated with this development as the people of China will only take so much in terms of outright control.

Furthermore, China is suffering from an image problem regionally and globally and the end of Presidential term limits risks calling into question the legitimacy of the Chinese government as until this point presidential term limits had placed China apart from other

⁹ Osnos, Evan. "Xi Jinping May Be President for Life. What Will Happen to China?" The New Yorker <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/xi-jinping-may-be-president-for-life-what-will-happen-to-china>

authoritarian regimes.¹⁰ In order to be successful on the world stage China must maintain a level of legitimacy. Transition back to more authoritarian control may increase other countries wariness in dealing with China diplomatically and economically.

Further eroding its legitimacy on the world stage, is China's human rights record. Beijing has a history of repression of activists, dissidents, media and anyone who may upset the balance of power and incite social unrest. Chinese authorities have been accused of abusing protestors, torture, discrimination against ethnic minorities and religious persecution.¹¹ However, China claims that these are merely unfounded allegations and that all its actions fall within international standards and abide by domestic law. Often the case of Tibet and the repressive activities China engages in are cited when it comes to Chinese human right. In 2008 Tibet witnessed its greatest unrest for 20 years. Beijing claimed that rioters killed at least 19 people, mainly Han Chinese. Conversely, Tibetan exiles accused Chinese security forces of killing dozens of protestors. Immediately following the protests Tibet was closed to foreigners and tens of thousands of Chinese soldiers were sent to the region.¹² Such actions bring into question the actions and reputation of China and the validity of their statements.

From China's perspective Tibet is an internal matter that does not concern any other country and it views Tibet as a part of China which holds great strategic importance. Not only is Tibet the gatekeeper between India and China but it is also the source of three of China's great rivers, the Yellow, Yangtze, and Mekong which supply the majority of the water for China. The strategic importance outweighs the impact on China's international image and it is inconceivable

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Ruz, Camila, BBC News Online. "Human rights: What is China accused of".
<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34592336>

¹² BBC News Online. "China accused of excessive force over Tibet unrest".
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-10723140>

that Beijing China will ever relinquish control no matter what international pressures are applied.¹³

Starting in 1978 under the second-generation leadership of Deng Xiaoping, his reform and opening up policy was undertaken and a substantial shift away from early Mao and Marxist ideologies of eliminating class disparity was launched. Although China remained communist and adhered in principal to those ideologies, Deng advocated that getting rich was glorious and that pursuit of such ideas was desirable, and his changes resulted in a 9% average annual growth. Along with the he policy changes and increased economic development a resurgence of societal differences and inequalities resulted. Wealth disparity grew dramatically between people, provinces and rural and urban dwellers. Coastal regions were developed first, as Special Economic Zones, developed much quicker than other parts of China as these zones allowed foreign access to ports and shipping vast quantities to overseas markets. Rural incomes dropped to less than a third of those in urban environments and although overall the poverty levels of China have decreased large income inequities, particularly between rural and urban workers remained and have placed tremendous citizen and government relations and risks undermining social stability.¹⁴

In 2016, prior to the National People's Congress Premier Li Keqiang warned that the Chines economy faces a difficult battle ahead. China is suffering from a huge overcapacity in manufacturing such as steel production, shipbuilding and coal production and many companies

¹³ Marshall. 56

¹⁴ Dellions, Rosita and R. James Gerguson. *China's Quest for Global Order*. Toronto (2013): 5.

and factories are being forced to shut down. Economic growth had dipped to 6.5%, the lowest in decades and many people are without and unable to find work.¹⁵

Another growing problem for China is the ability to feed its population. Over 40 percent of arable land is either polluted or has thinning topsoil, according to their Ministry of Agriculture. The very industrialization China is pursuing to modernize itself and raise standards of living is threatening food production and without a solution it will likely result in civil unrest. If it cannot solve this problem, there will be unrest.¹⁶

If China cannot maintain control of dissident territories such as Tibet or to maintain social order by keeping its population employed and fed then it runs significant risk to the stability of the country and the ability of the current government to maintain power. One way in which it attempts to reduce dissention is through the tight control of internet accessibility, regular censorship of online political content and by quickly deal with any anti-government actions.¹⁷ For generations the deal between the government and its people is that the government will improve their quality of life if the population follows orders. If the economy continues to grow and people feel like the government is upholding their end of the bargain, then the deal remains. However, if the economy slows or reverses then the deal will come to an end.¹⁸ With such a vast population, current levels of demonstrations and anger against corruption and inefficiency the ability to appease the populous will continue to be a growing problem that will require China to expend great resources to succeed. However, failure to put its domestic turmoil in order will result in the collapse in any bid for global power status.

¹⁵ BBC New Online. "China's slowing economy and fears of unrest. <http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-35735949/china-s-slowing-economy-and-fears-of-unrest>

¹⁶ Marshall, 60

¹⁷ Mitter, Rana (University of Oxford). *Five Ways China's Past Has Shaped its Present*. BBC News Online <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-43714279>

¹⁸ Marshall, 52

In addition to China's domestic challenges it also faces many regionally which impact its ability to ascend to great global power. As discussed earlier, over numerous generations China has worked to create a buffer zone around its heartland and for much of that time, prior to the arrival of imperial powers such as the British, in the late 19th century, the Chinese were considered the legitimate hegemon in the Asia Pacific region, a position that China desires to regain. However, China has a long road to travel to reach this objective as it borders many countries with which it has territorial and boundary disputes.¹⁹

Over the past few years China has started to flex its regional military and economical muscles and has demonstrated its willingness to push the patience of Asian states as they work towards achieving regional hegemony. Three specific policies, the "Belt and Road" initiative, the Aircraft Identification Zone and China's expansion into the South China Sea is cause for concern.

China is the dominant economic force in Asia and is working to reinforce this position. Their keystone "Belt and Road" initiative, launched in 2013 which is designed to build sea (Road) and land (Belt) routes to Asian, European and African markets has been met with mixed reviews. Despite some resistance, Beijing has successfully signed up over 68 countries to their massive infrastructure development plan which includes building roads, rail lines and port facilities. President Xi's immense project has multiple goals. It is an expression to the world of China's might and resourcefulness and aims to make Eurasia an economic trading area to rival the transatlantic one. Furthermore, the Belt and Road will allow for new markets for Chinese

¹⁹ Weitz, 3

companies and to increase export capacity for China's vast overcapacity in cement, steel and other metals which is vital maintaining domestic economic viability and security.²⁰

There is scepticism as to the intentions of China and its expanding trade routes but the influx of money, employment and infrastructure along many of the routes of the Belt and Road may cause many to assess Chinese other motives as tolerable risk. One thing is for sure, President Xi is committed to the initiative as it has enormous potential to relieve much of the pressure on his countries' growing and fragile economy. The Belt and Road initiative is not just about economic prosperity, but it is also about survival. China's large production output requires a large consumer base. If they cannot sell their products, then their economy is in threat of downfall.

In addition to the land routes being established by China it is continuing to expand its port infrastructure in the South China Sea, and Indian Ocean. These activities have potential to cause increased tensions with China's largest regional rival, India.

One of the major power players and arguably the direct rival to China in Asia is India. A nuclear power with a large military and a growing economy it sees China as a direct threat to their prosperity. Although India is a growing power it does not rival the economy of China. However, with the now largest population of any state on the planet it does possess an extensive labour force which, if India properly managed, could rival China and challenge their ability to produce inexpensive products.

Geographically they have specific border disputes but despite the large-scale fighting that broke out in 1962 there has been only limited border disturbances throughout the years.

²⁰ The Economist: What is China's belt and road initiative? The many motivation behind Xi Jinping's key foreign policy. <https://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2017/05/economist-explains-11>

Nevertheless, the tension between the two most populous and nuclear capable countries in the world remains high and should be handled with care.²¹

It appears that China is attempting to isolate India militarily and economically through its Belt and Road initiative and its expanding navy. For example, China has purchased and developed ports in Sri Lanka, a mere 300km off the Coast of India and they have increased diplomatic relations with Pakistan and have also invested in and are operating a major container port in Gwadar on a 43-year lease. Although these ports are not military in nature and are for commercial purposes there are questions as to their full use. For example, the port in Sri Lanka appears to be in a state of non-profitability and will likely remain that way for the foreseeable future. If this is the case, what is the long-term intent of China's 99-year lease on this site and the with the development of an additional port on the northern coast.²²

Although Sri Lanka welcomes the investment into its economy and hopes that it will become a major port along the Indian Ocean shipping routes India is concerned with Beijing's and sees the move as provocative. Considering the shipping companies who are purchasing and operating these ports are state owned enterprises it brings into question China's intentions. Furthermore, any state-controlled organization working in a foreign country becomes an opportunity to gather intelligence and to influence the local population and government to support China. Furthermore, China's recently opened naval base in Djibouti provides great reach to the Chinese navy and increases its ability to conduct maritime patrols along the Indian Ocean trade routes. Timothy Heath from the RAND corporation on his briefing to the U.S. – China Economic and Security Review Commission dating January 2016 stated that although China has

²¹ Marshall, 54.

²² The Economist. "The new masters and commanders: China's growing empire of ports abroad is manly about trade, not aggression".

a characteristically defensive policy the “... focus has shifted since 2010 from one of homeland defense to one that I believe is best characterized as peaceful expansion”²³

Contrary to Heath’s comments, China has used this tactic in the past as it worked to secure its homeland from potential adversaries. It appears that China is applying the same strategy on a larger scale, possibly feeling that its own state, with the annexation of Tibet and the isolation of Taiwan is effective. This may be a return to the tactic of attack as defence policy to secure the vital interests of its survival, the health of its economy, which depends upon world markets.

China also risks additional tension with India through its expanded relations with Pakistan and their joint naval exercises. India and Pakistan are historic rivals and have common border disputes. China’s and Pakistan’s improved diplomatic, economic and military relationship will further antagonize India and help China reduce India’s influence in Asia, furthering their own hegemonistic goals. However, China must be wary of applying too much pressure as India enjoys widespread soft power which could be used to diminish China’s potential regional and global rise to superpower status.

In addition to China’s activities in the Indian Ocean they continue to expand their influence in the South China Sea which they deem as their territorial waters. Although there have been rival claims to the South China Sea and the Spratly Islands between China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei for an extended period China has taken the dispute to a new level. Starting in 2015, China began to build islands on top of sub-surface reefs and subsequently built airfields and stationed military personnel and equipment on the islands while

²³ Heath, Timothy R. “Developments in China’s Military Force Projection and Expeditionary Capabilities.” *The RAND Corporation*. Testimony given Before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission. 21 January (2016): 1

increasing naval patrols in the area. One of the busiest shipping lanes in the world, the South China Sea is significant for China and many other countries and has the potential to be a flashpoint for hostilities. This coupled with the Aircraft Identification Zone which China is attempting to impose above these waters and the increased capability of their anti-ship, shore-based missile systems have dramatically increased regional and global tensions on this strategic body of water.

It is important to note that as China asserts itself and flexes its muscles in the South China Sea it greatly diminishes its soft power and any legitimacy it has as a regional leader. Its actions are that of gunboat diplomacy of old. Although their tactics are condemned by many countries in the world they continue to build their islands, with no consequences. The question remains, how long will the US and the world standby before the situation flairs into conflict? Or does China hold the upper hand as the world's manufacture and marketplace? It appears that China has effectively employed economics as a tool of war and strategic influence.

Nonetheless, if China wishes to ascend to superpower status it must resolve the issues in its own backyard first and get along with its neighbours. Minimizing the risk of confrontation with India and other regional players will allow china to continue its outward expansion and involvement in global affairs.

On the world stage China has continued to increase its involvement in international affairs. Already a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council it has been expanding its involvement in the organization. By 2015, China had pledged 8000 troops for peacekeeping missions and contributed 100 million to the African Union standby force and 1 billion to the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund. Until recently China has played an almost non-existent role in UN peacekeeping mission, resolutions and funding expressing a desire to be

viewed as a neutral player. However, as global power objectives have emerged Beijing is working to improve China's image by increasing its involvement in world affairs. This switch in policy has resulted in a dramatic increase in support to the UN and as of 2016 China was one of the largest troop contributing nations and the second largest financier of peacekeeping budgets.²⁴

While support to international organizations such as the UN have increased, China has also been working to counter against western institutions such as the World Bank. Recently China established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to help Asian countries build infrastructure and improve their economy. Although the amount of funds available to not compare to that of the world bank this the first multilateral institution under Chinese identity and represents a key soft power capability.²⁵

Both the increased involvement in the UN and the creation of institutions such as the AIIB demonstrate Beijing's awareness of the importance of soft power and the need to acquire a favourable national image as a prerequisite for emergence as a great global power.²⁶ In addition to the soft power of institutions such as the UN and AIIB, China invests in exporting its culture and the key aspects of its ancient civilization to other countries. For example, China has invested in 31 official Chinese Cultural Centers across the globe which is significantly more than other countries.

Although China has increased its involvement in world affairs and works to contribute to the global commons many of its actions overshadow these good deeds. Its strong-arming and

²⁴Fung, Courtney. "China's Troop Contributions to UN Peacekeeping". *United States Institute of Peace*. 26 July 2016 <https://www.usip.org/publications/2016/07/chinas-troop-contributions-un-peacekeeping>

²⁵ LaForgia, Rebecca. "Listening to China's Multilateral Voice for the First Time: Analysing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank for Soft Power Opportunities and Risks in the Narrative of 'Lean, Clean and Green'" *Journal of Contemporary China*. 26:107, (2017): 633.

²⁶ Klimes 127

intimidation in the South China Sea, its internal repression of its citizens and human rights violations in areas such as Tibet erode any of its soft power advances at an exponential rate.

The most visible impact of China today can be seen in their economic influence on global affairs. Its successes since as Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms have been staggering.²⁷ As of February 2017 China accounted for approximately 14.84% of the world economy, the second largest in the world. The US leads at 24.32% but China's closest competitor, Japan sits behind at 5.91%.²⁸ In addition to its status as the second largest economy China has become the world's largest exporter. With its economic prowess, Chinese policymakers often apply these tools to advance their foreign policy objectives through varied activities such as lending money to the US and Europe while giving aid to North Korea.²⁹

Chinese foreign investment, in particular in infrastructure such as port facilities through the use of state owned enterprises, greatly increases China's global power reach. Even in the US' where foreign direct investing is closely monitored' China has been able to acquire small investments in ports in Houston and Miami by buying Terminal Link, a French shipping line.³⁰

With continued investment to secure its economic interests China is gaining a foothold in almost every aspect of the global economy and if China can surpass the US as the world's largest economy they will be able to influence many global matters in their favour. Ultimately, they have, and will continue to use economics as war through other means, increasing their influence and power as their economy grows. Conversely, their economic strength is also their potential

²⁷ Weitz, 2

²⁸ Gramer, Robbie. « Infographic: Here's How the Global GDP is Divvied UP. » Foreign Policy.com
<http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/24/infographic-heres-how-the-global-gdp-is-divvied-up/>

²⁹ Weitz, 2

³⁰ The Economist. Intelligence Unit. China's expanding investment in global ports.
<http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=985980482&Country=Norway&topic=Economy&subtopic=Regional+developments&subsubtopic=Investment>

weakness and downfall. However powerful it is, China's economy is driven by production and the need for new and expanding markets to purchase their products is ever present. This can account for the Chinese push for the Belt and Road initiative and their heavy investment into the African continent. Although not a rich continent, it is full of developing nations that will require investment and cheap resources. If China is unable to sell its products, or a cheaper more efficient labour market emerges as may be possible in India or Africa in the future and unemployment ensues the social unrest will have devastating effects on China and its very existence, rendering their global power goals unattainable.

China's extraordinary economic growth has allowed its government to allocate substantial resources to the development of the People's Liberation Army³¹ (which includes the air force and navy) which is a prerequisite to obtaining superpower status.

According to China's latest Military Strategy published for external consumption on their governmental web page it states that:

China will unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development, pursue an independent foreign policy of peace and a national defense policy that is defensive in nature, oppose hegemonism and power politics in all forms, and will never seek hegemony or expansion. China's armed forces will remain a staunch force in maintain world peace.³²

Although their official external policy states this the PLA's actions speak to a different approach. The aggressive action of the Chinese navy within the South China Sea continues to demonstrate China's desire to showcase its military strength. Furthermore, the construction of

³¹ Weitz, 2

³² China. China's Military Strategy.

http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm

airfields and military installations on man made islands in the international water of the South China Sea demonstrate a desire for expansion and dominance in the region.

Until now one of the limitation of Chinese power was its lack of a blue water navy capable of adequate force projection in support of state interests. However, China has been working aggressively to increase its navy to help protect its resources, trade routes and citizens abroad.³³ With a stronger navy China continues to push the boundaries of tolerance for its actions. For example, in April of 2018 China conducted live fire naval exercises with their training aircraft carrier the Liaoning in the Taiwan Strait.³⁴

Current Chinese PLA modernization plan sees a full command and control restructure within the next five years and the ability to conduct joint operations by 2035. Further, significant resources are being put into growing technologies focused on electronic and cyber warfare, network centric command and control and precision strike capabilities, all of which the US already possesses. The threat is the potential of China to leapfrog current US and allied capabilities.³⁵

The overall shot term goal of the Chines leadership is for the PLA to have the capacity to defeat a regional adversary and to conform the US or allied forces responding in support of Chinese adversary. The longer-term goal is to have full PLA modernization by mid-century.³⁶

³³ Cooper III, A. Cortez. "PLA Military Modernization: Driver, Force Restructuring and Implications". *The RAND Corporation*. Testimony given Before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission. 15 February 2018: 5

³⁴ Petricic, Sasa. CBCNews: Warnings to Taipei and Washington: China takes real and verbal shots across Taiwan Strait. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/china-taiwan-strait-petricic-1.4626232>

³⁵ Cooper III. 3

³⁶ *Ibid.* 7.

Much like the Russians and the US during the Cold War, Beijing realizes that direct confrontation with the US would be detrimental to Chinese development goals. However, they seem willing to push the limits of US tolerance to determine the US' desire to push back. As they continue to be unchecked by the once dominant force in the Pacific the Chinese continue to assess their level of risk acceptance and will likely push the boundaries further in the future.³⁷ Overall, if the Chinese are able to create a force sufficient to deter US intervention then they will have reached successful parity and re-established a bipolar world. However, with current projections on PLA modernization this is not achievable prior to mid-century.

It is interesting to note, that as China acquires greater military strength a high level of scrutiny is placed on their military activities whereas many other countries conduct similar operations without invoking international alarm. As a country grows in power status growth in military capability normally coincides at a parallel level. Throughout history a similar correlation between power status and military capability growth has been observed in such powers as United Kingdom and the US. Correspondingly, ascending powers normally challenge institutional status-quo while the existing powers tend to resist.³⁸ It will be interesting to see how the US and its allies respond to the increasing strength and influence of China at the global level.

Much like other rising powers in history China has to make a decision whether to use its growing military and economic powers to uphold the current institutional and global framework and interests such as freedom of the seas, economic development and nuclear no-proliferation, or it may choose to try and reshape the world to better support and advance their own interests.³⁹

³⁷ *Ibid.* 12.

³⁸ Weitz, 6

³⁹ Weitz, 3

Unfortunately, recent policies and decision seem to point towards a country that will attempt to mould the world to their needs. Such actions as aggressively asserting its claims on the South China Sea point towards its desire for regional dominance. Once it has secured hegemony in the Asian Pacific China will likely look to expand its influence and obtain global power status.

However, will China be able to achieve such goals? China may possess the tools and desire to ascent to superpower status, but these will not be sufficient to achieve these goals. China will have to overcome many domestic social economic, regional and international challenges. As we have observed, China is becoming an economic powerhouse the like that will soon rival US dominance. But this economic strength is fragile and dependent upon the support of a population that is often repressed, abused and suffers enormous pay and living condition inequalities. If China cannot elicit the support of its populous at home it cannot succeed as a world power.

Further complicating matters is the regional instability China has created through its aggressive policies in the South China Sea and its rapid expansion of its Belt and Road initiative and its attempt at isolating India. Gunboat diplomacy will not work in today's world and without successful relations within Asia China will never be seen as a legitimate regional hegemon, limiting its power and influence.

Finally, on the international stage China continues to play on both sides of the coin. On one hand, providing substantial support to global organizations such as the UN while on the other hand imposing its will on international waters by attempting to take a piece of the global commons for itself. Furthermore, its actions against its own population and the perceived threat of massive foreign investment through state owned enterprises has greatly eroded its soft power

image and legitimacy on the world stage. Without reform and change China will not ascend to the status of a global power the likes of the United States.

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