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Containing China: An Assessment of NATO's Ability to Play a Role in Chinese Containment

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**CONTAINING CHINA: AN ASSESSMENT OF NATO'S ABILITY TO
PLAY A ROLE IN CHINESE CONTAINMENT**

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ABSTRACT

China's rise over the last 30-40 years has been unprecedented. Its rapid economic growth has enabled it to become the world's largest manufacturing and trading state with significant global influence. China's economic growth has also provide it the means to modernize its military forces in manner that enables it to challenge United States (U.S.). military supremacy in Asia-Pacific. China is now in a position to challenge U.S. hegemony and is seen by U.S. policymakers as a threat to American interests and influence. In response to perceived challenges to its global position, the U.S. is pursuing a policy of containment in an attempt to limit China's political and economic influence. As part of that containment strategy, the U.S. is advocating for NATO to play a role in order to maximize its advantages.

This paper is an assessment of NATO's capability to assume such a role as part of a U.S. containment strategy against China. In order to answer this question, an analysis of both the capacities NATO can leverage to respond to the U.S. desire for the transatlantic alliance to play a role containing China as well as the obstacles which will impeded this was conducted. This analysis led to the conclusion that NATO will not at present, be capable of playing a meaningful role as part of the Washington's containment strategy towards China.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago the idea that NATO could potentially be involved in addressing the perceived security challenges posed by a rising China would have been viewed as a very unlikely proposition. NATO was thoroughly enmeshed fighting in Afghanistan and in the U.S., under President Barack Obama's administration, recognition of these challenges was still tempered with the hope that China's growing power could be shaped by U.S. influence.¹ This has proved not to be the case. Economically, China has supplanted the U.S. and currently sits as the world's largest trading state.² Militarily, the U.S. has now recognized that China possesses armed forces capable of challenging its supremacy within the Asia-Pacific region.³ These developments have put increased pressure on U.S. policymakers to respond and has resulted in a reframing of the relationship between the U.S. and China from one of cooperation to one of competition. The U.S. now views its relationship with China as one of great-power competition where the interests of America and by implication likeminded Western nations are threatened by China's rise.⁴

Starting in 2019, the U.S. began to pressure NATO to start looking at the perceived challenges posed by a rising China in an effort to mobilize NATO as part of its containment strategy concerning China. The inclusion of China onto the agenda as a topic for discussion during the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Leaders meeting in London represented a significant victory for the United States (U.S.) who under the

¹ The White House – President Barak Obama, “Fact Sheet – Advancing the Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific,” last modified 16 November 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/16/fact-sheet-advancing-rebalance-asia-and-pacific>.

² ChinaPower, “Is China the World Top Trader?,” accessed 25 January 2021, <https://chinapower.csis.org/trade-partner/>.

³ U.S. Department of State, *The Elements of the China Challenge* (Washington: Policy and Planning Staff, Office of the Secretary of State, 2020), 14.

⁴ Ibid, 4.

Trump administration had been putting increased pressure on the alliance to begin considering the security concerns posed by China. These security concerns were initially focused on future 5G networks and the threat posed by allowing Chinese telecommunications provider Huawei involvement in these networks. Following this meeting, NATO released a communique that for the first time, made reference to China. Specifically, it stated that “[NATO] recognizes that China’s growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance.”⁵

While these tentative first steps towards addressing the perceived security challenges posed by China were lukewarm, subsequent developments since 2019 have demonstrated a rapidly maturing view of China by NATO. “NATO 2030: United for a New Era”, an analysis report requested and prepared for the NATO secretary-general as a guidance document for discussions on updating NATO’s Strategic Concept refers to China as a “full spectrum, systemic rival.”⁶ This represents a significant hardening of language and views within NATO. Most recently, during a February 2021 meeting of defence ministers, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg described “Beijing’s rising power as a defining issue [for the alliance], and stated that “the rise of China is a defining issue for the [alliance] with potential consequences for our security, our prosperity, and our way of life.”⁷

⁵ NATO, “London Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London, 3–4 December 2019,” last modified 4 December 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm.

⁶ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era* (NATO Press & Media: 2020), 27.

⁷ Reuters, “China’s rise to define transatlantic ties, NATO chief says,” last modified 19 February 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-security-nato-idUSKBN2AJ24G>.

Although the immediate concern of the alliance remains focused on the direct and immediate Russian threat, NATO's long term strategic planning is rapidly evolving to take into account the security challenges presented by a rising China. It acknowledges that while China is not a military threat to the alliance, China's growing power is granting it the ability to pursue its global agenda beyond the boundaries of the Asia-Pacific region, primarily through the use of economic coercion and diplomatic intimidation to protect and safeguard its interests.⁸ Additionally, there is now an explicit recognition by NATO strategic planners that China is well positioned to exploit differences between member states to further its interests, undermining alliance cohesion and posing a threat to NATO's collective interests.⁹ This recognition represents a considerable evolution in NATO's strategic thinking concerning China, placing it in closer alignment with the current U.S. administration who has been actively making the case that there is a role for the alliance to play in containing China.¹⁰ While this most recent conceptual framing of China by NATO is certain to please U.S. policymakers who are keen to see NATO expand its focus and mandate to include China, a proverbial expansion of NATO's strategic focus in this direction is not necessarily a position supported by many of NATO's member states.

While differences in perception towards China and how they undermine the ability of the alliance to respond to a rising China will be examined in chapter 4, the question of whether NATO "should" play any role concerning China has been the subject

⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era* (NATO Press & Media: 2020), 17

⁹ Ibid, 9.

¹⁰ Department of Defense, "Austin Says Afghanistan, Iraq, China Among Topics at NATO Meeting," last modified 19 February 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2508740/austin-says-afghanistan-iraq-china-among-topics-at-nato-meeting/>

of much discussion. Within European circles, the position that the alliance must adopt a role concerning China is articulated by influential academics like Francois Heisbourg, Janka Oertel, and Jonathan Holslag who maintain that there is a role for NATO to play concerning China, although for different reasons.¹¹ These reasons include the following; concerns related to NATO's continued legitimacy, support to Western liberal values and institutions, as a means to keep the Americans engaged in NATO, and a growing recognition of the security challenges posed by China. Within the U.S., the question of whether NATO "should" or "should not" play a role concerning China is tends to be framed within the larger discussion of its relationship with China. The dominant thinkers on this issue like Aaron Friedberg and Graham Allison frame the U.S.-China relationship as one of great power competition where China is viewed as an adversary seeking to reinvent the international order to its own ends. This is a position that has clearly formed the basis for how the U.S. currently frames its relationship with China and is reflected in the public statements of key U.S. leaders in the last two administrations as well as important policy documents like the National Security Strategy (NSS). It is this adversarial view of the U.S.-China relationship that drives the U.S. to seek to influence its alliances like NATO in an attempt to contain the growing power of China.

Finally, there is a smaller body of work by Chinese academics who have made the argument that NATO does not have a role to play concerning China. It is a position much less prevalent in the literature. The volume of work is small and demonstrates a obvious bias towards the U.S.. Arguments against a NATO role concerning China are framed

¹¹ François Heisbourg, "NATO 4.0: The Atlantic Alliance and the Rise of China," *Survival* 62, no. 2 (March 3, 2020); Janka Oertel, "V. NATO's China Challenge," *Whitehall Papers: Future NATO: Adapting to New Realities* 95, no. 1 (Jan 2, 2019); Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019).

around the perception that the U.S. is utilizing its influence within NATO to create an anti-China alliance with a view to maintaining its hegemonic position in the global order.¹²

It is notable is that most of the work to date has largely revolved around the question of whether or not NATO should concern itself with China and to a lesser extent, what form that might take in policy or otherwise. Considerably less work has been done to address what is arguably the more important question; Is NATO even be capable of playing a role concerning China? It is a question complicated by the nature of the challenges being posed by a rising China and how they manifest within NATO and its member states. Issues like economic dependence between China and member states, cyber espionage, forced technology transfer, and economic influence are not issues that NATO as a military alliance is capable of addressing in the same way it might address the hard power military threat posed by Russia. The question of capability therefore becomes the most important one that needs to be answered as it underpins the entire endeavor. If the unique security challenges posed by China restrict the ability of the alliance to “pivot” towards China, the question of whether it “should” becomes irrelevant.

To that end, this paper contends that despite a desire by the U.S. for NATO to play a role in the containment of China, differences in how China is perceived by among NATO members, worsened by China’s high level of economic integration and influence, and a continued preoccupation with Russia will make it unlikely that NATO will be

¹² Wang Yiwei and Wu Xinze, "The Likelihood of Cooperation between China and NATO," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (2020): 70.

capable of playing a meaningful role as part of the U.S. containment strategy to limit Chinese political and economic influence.

In order to answer this question, this paper will first examine the nature of China's rise over the last 30-40 years and how this has positioned it as a competitor to the U.S.. Having established how China now sits as a competitor to the U.S. within the global order, this paper will next address the question of why the U.S. would seek to influence the transatlantic alliance to help contain China and how this is likely to be perceived by the Chinese. Subsequent chapters will examine the arguments why NATO might be capable of adopting a role concerning China and finally, those considerations that will ultimately undermine any attempts by the alliance to play a meaningful role in Washington's containment strategy.

To use the analogy of a train with respect to this topic, the track is very much still being laid. This paper is an attempt to make a determination about which direction that track is ultimately going. In seeking to answer the fundamental question posed within this paper, it has been necessary to draw from a variety of sources. In addition to the previously mentioned academic arguments, analysis of available policy documents, the statements of key public figures, analysis of trade statistics, and given the relatively contemporary nature of the question being addressed, news reporting have all played important roles in framing the arguments contained within this paper.

CHAPTER 2 – CHINA’S RISE

In order to address the question concerning NATO’s ability to respond to the security challenges posed by a rising China, it is necessary to have an understanding of nature of China’s rapid rise in global power. To that end, this chapter will examine the rise of China in both the economic and military domains over the last 30-40 years with a view to understanding how this rise has reshaped the global power balance, particularly with respect to the U.S.. As noted by political scientist John Ikenberry “China is emerging as both a military and an economic rival [to the US] - heralding a profound shift in the distribution of global power.”¹³ This chapter will demonstrate how China’s rapid growth, marked by its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), has transformed it into a global power, well-positioned to both challenge U.S. dominance of the global economic system and its military power in Asia-Pacific. This rapid rise in power has led to the overwhelming perception within the U.S. that China is a serious challenger to its hegemonic status that must be contained. Additionally, an examination of China’s long-term ambitions with a view to better understanding how Chinese policy in both the economic and military realms will shape their actions going forward is necessary. The way in which China’s long-term ambitions are perceived will differ between members of the alliance as a consequence of their relative power status. As the sole global superpower, the U.S. sees the future ambitions of China’s leadership as a threat to its position. For the other alliance members, there are only a few like Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom that could be characterised as regional powers.

¹³ G. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West; can the Liberal System Survive?" *Foreign Affairs*, 2008, 23.

Thus for many European member states China's ambitions will not be seen a threat to a global status they do not possess and consequently will see them view China's growing power differently. These differences will have implications for NATO's capability to respond to a rising China.

Economic Rise

China's current position as a global economic powerhouse, second only to the U.S. with a 2019 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$14.342 trillion (US) has followed an impressive 40 years of unprecedented economic growth.¹⁴ The economic reforms introduced by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1979 fundamentally changed the nature of the Chinese economy which until that point had been a centrally planned economy in the Soviet style.¹⁵ The adoption of free-market principles, opening up to foreign investment and moves away from collectivized agriculture and Soviet-style centralized planning for industry created the conditions for the start of China's economic rise.¹⁶ Between 1979 and 2001 exports represented approximately 20% of China's GDP, a significant increase from the pre-1978 levels of 4%.¹⁷ China's growth during this period was also marked the beginning of increasing international and U.S. dependency on Chinese manufacturing and trade.¹⁸

¹⁴ Trading Economics, "China GDP," accessed 8 November 2020, <https://tradingeconomics.com/china/gdp>.

¹⁵ Wayne M Morrison, *China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges and Implications for the United States* (Hauppauge: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2019). 2.

¹⁶ Ibid, 2.

¹⁷ Alexander Vuving, "The Future of China's Rise: How China's Economic Growth will shift the Sino-U.S. Balance of Power 2010-2040," *Asian Politics & Policy* 4, no. 3 (2012): 409.

¹⁸ Forbes, "Why is the U.S. so ridiculously dependent on China?" last accessed 23 April 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2020/04/30/why-is-the-us-is-so-ridiculously-dependent-on-china/?sh=430ddee56b5c>.

China's 2001 entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) marked a second significant milestone for China's growing economic power, giving its economy a substantial boost that would see exports rise again to around 40% of GDP.¹⁹ Within the West, and the United States in particular, China's entry into the WTO was viewed as an important step towards its integration into the U.S. led world order.²⁰ Indeed, one of the central arguments being put forward by the Clinton Administration in the late 1990's was that China's entry into the WTO would benefit the U.S.²¹ Like the U.S., the European Union (E.U.) also viewed the opening up of Chinese markets as something that would provide opportunities for its investors and exporters.²² Instead of achieving an outcome highly beneficial to the West, to the shock of both Europe and the U.S., China's rapid economic growth within the global economic system facilitated China's development into a global power whose increasingly assertive presence on the world's stage challenges U.S. supremacy within the global economic system.²³ The term "China Shock" has been used to describe this largely unexpected by not entirely unanticipated trajectory and its subsequent effect on the U.S. and its allies.²⁴ Broadly speaking, the term refers to the decline in manufacturing in the U.S. and Europe in favour of China following its ascension to the WTO. In the case of the U.S., an estimated 10% of its manufacturing

¹⁹ Alexander Vuving, "The Future of China's Rise: How China's Economic Growth will shift the Sino-U.S. Balance of Power 2010-2040," *Asian Politics & Policy* 4, no. 3 (2012): 409.

²⁰ Aaron L. Friedberg, "Competing with China," *Survival (London)* 60, no. 3 (2018): 12.

²¹ Paul Blustein, "Schism: China, America, and the Fracturing of the Global Trading System," (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 61.

²² Vinod K. Aggarwal and Sara A. Newland, *Responding to China's Rise: US and EU Strategies*, Vol. 15 (Cham: Springer, 2015), 131.

²³ Aaron Friedberg, "Competing with China," *Survival (London)* 60, no. 3 (2018a): 12.

²⁴ Paul Blustein, "Schism: China, America, and the Fracturing of the Global Trading System," (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 20.

jobs were lost during the 2001-2011 period due to competition from Chinese imports.²⁵ Having overtaken the U.S. in 2010, 2018 figures show that China accounted for almost 30% of global manufacturing output, almost double that of the U.S. at 16%.²⁶

While there is disagreement among economists as to whether there was an overall net benefit to the U.S. economy over the same period resulting from growth in different sectors, within the context of this paper, it is the political implications which arise from the concept of “China Shock” that are the most relevant. As China’s economic power grows, it reinforces the view among U.S. policymakers that China represents a threat to U.S. dominance of the global economy that must be checked in order to preserve U.S. economic hegemony. U.S. trade actions against China over the last number of years support this assertion.²⁷

Interestingly, while criticism of Chinese economic policy post-entry into the WTO has centered on the fixing of currency exchange rates in order to achieve competitive advantage, the conditions of China’s entry into the WTO did not require China to float its currency or maintain it at a certain level against the U.S. dollar.²⁸ Nor is there a WTO rule against China devaluing its currency for competitive advantage. Given the heavy U.S. involvement in setting the conditions for China’s entry into the WTO, subsequent complaints of China’s success while “playing the game” largely in

²⁵ Alexander Murray, *The Effect of Import Competition on Employment in Canada: Evidence from the ‘China Shock* (Centre for the Study of Living Standards, 2017), 5.

²⁶ Statista, “China is the World’s Manufacturing Superpower,” last updated 18 February 2020, <https://www.statista.com/chart/20858/top-10-countries-by-share-of-global-manufacturing-output/>.

²⁷ China Briefing, “The US-China Trade War: A Timeline,” last updated 25 August 2020, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/the-us-china-trade-war-a-timeline/>.

²⁸ Paul Blustein, *Schism: China, America and the Fracturing of the Global Trading System* (Waterloo, Ont: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2019), 109.

accordance with the rules set by U.S. is somewhat disingenuous.²⁹ One of the criticisms of the U.S. view in this regard is that U.S. policymakers simply underestimated Chinese capacity to undertake the hard work, investment into modern equipment and infrastructure building required to facilitate the rapid expansion of the Chinese economy post-WTO entry.³⁰

The World Bank has noted that the Chinese economy represents “the fastest sustained expansion by a major economy in history,” with an average annual GDP growth of 9.5% until 2018.³¹ This explosive economic growth has positioned China as the world’s largest economy with significant economic clout. A 2019 report by the U.S. Congressional Research Service concluded that China now ranks first in purchasing power parity, value-added manufacturing, merchandise trade, and as a holder of foreign exchange reserves.³² As a trading nation, China has supplanted the U.S. and is currently the world’s largest trading state.³³ It remains the top exporter and second largest importer after the U.S.. China’s dominance of global trade has allowed it to overtake the U.S. as a trading partner in 128 of 190 countries.³⁴ This list includes the E.U., U.S., Canada, Japan, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries.³⁵ Whether China’s economic rise is acting as a

²⁹ Ibid, 109.

³⁰ Paul Blustein, *Schism: China, America and the Fracturing of the Global Trading System* (Waterloo, Ont: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2019), 104.

³¹ Wayne M Morrison, *China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges and Implications for the United States* (Hauppauge: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2019), 1.

³² Ibid, 1.

³³ ChinaPower, “Is China the World Top Trader?,” accessed 25 January 2021, <https://chinapower.csis.org/trade-partner/>.

³⁴ Iman Ghosh, “How China overtook the U.S. as the Worlds Major Trading Partner,” accessed 22 January 2021, <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/china-u-s-worlds-trading-partner/>.

³⁵ Guoli Liu, *China Rising: Chinese Foreign Policy in a Changing World* (London; New York, NY: Palgrave, 2017), 81.

destabilizing force within the global economic system is a largely subjective assessment. U.S. views concerning China in this arena are driven by the threat to U.S. economic dominance and U.S. policymakers therefore consider China influence to be destabilizing. China's economic rise might be considered destabilizing if it sought to undermine liberal western institutions like the WTO. This is not the case and China has benefited greatly from joining organizations like the WTO as was earlier demonstrated by its post-WTO economic growth. As John Ikenberry notes, "China does not want to overturn the liberal order, but wants more authority and power in it."³⁶ Other nations however, including many NATO members are actively seeking closer economic ties with China for their own purposes.

Military Rise

One of the effects of China's explosive economic growth has been the degree to which it has allowed China to undertake the modernization of its military. Assessment of Chinese military capability in late 1990s to early 2000s determined that China possessed a large but outdated military force that was poorly suited to achieving its new aims.³⁷ It was a military organized to fight large-scale wars along its borders. China's air, naval and ground forces during this period were for the most part assessed as obsolete. Its military organizations and structures were not capable of the effective employment of joint forces and strategic enablers within the space, information, and cyber realms – in short, what

³⁶ Yanan Song, *The US Commitment to NATO in the Post-Cold War Period* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 45.

³⁷ United States Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020: Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2020), 5.

Professor Roger Cliff of the U.S. Army War College refers to as a “junk-yard army.”³⁸ China’s military forces during this time were equipped with outdated Soviet equipment and its manpower was primarily based around poorly educated conscripts, making for a large but ineffective fighting force.³⁹ In response to these shortcomings, and driven by China’s concern over closer relations between the U.S. and Taiwan in 1996, the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) undertook a significant modernization program aimed at closing the gap between Chinese and U.S. military power in Asia-Pacific.⁴⁰ This modernization would be greatly aided by the rapid economic development following China’s entry into the WTO that enabled more resources to be directed towards national defence.⁴¹ Key to this modernization program has been the development of an indigenous industrial defence capability, acquisition of dual-use technology, foreign technology acquisition, and increased domestic defence spending.⁴² While this process remains ongoing, it is assessed by Western academics that China has reached a level of development comparable to the bulk of U.S. systems, with a domestic defence industry capable of producing modern, high technology weapons systems such as the Type-98A tank, the J-20 stealth aircraft, and the Dongfeng-17 ballistic missile.⁴³ According the U.S. Department of Defence, China has made significant progress in its modernization program across all services within the PLA, including the following:

³⁸ Roger Cliff, *China's Military Power: Assessing Current and Future Capabilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.

³⁹ Roger Cliff, *China's Military Power: Assessing Current and Future Capabilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 11.

⁴¹ Guoli Liu, *China Rising: Chinese Foreign Policy in a Changing World* (London; New York, NY: Palgrave, 2017), 56.

⁴² *Ibid*, 57.

⁴³ Roger Cliff, *China's Military Power: Assessing Current and Future Capabilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 13.

- a. The People Liberation Army Army (PLAA). The PLAA continues to transition into a modern force with improving capability to manage complex, joint operations.⁴⁴
- b. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). The PLAN is currently the world's largest navy with approximately 350 vessels, including 130 major surface vessels, many of which represent modern multi-role vessels. China commissioned its first aircraft carrier in 2012 and a second in under construction.⁴⁵
- c. The People's Liberation Army Air force (PLAAF). The PLAAF possess around 2,000 combat aircraft and are rapidly closing the gap between western air forces.⁴⁶
- d. The People's Liberation Army Rocket Forces (PLARF). The PLARF represents China's strategic nuclear and land based missile capability. The PLARF is growing its capabilities related to land and sea based precision strike and is expected to grow the number of ICBM capable of hitting the U.S to approximately 200 by 2025.⁴⁷
- e. The Peoples Liberation Army Strategic Support Force (SSF). Created in 2015, the SSF contains China's electronic, cyber, psychological warfare and space capabilities. Particular emphasis has been placed on growing China's space capability as it is identified by the PRC as "the critical domain in international

⁴⁴ United States Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020: Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2020), 11.

⁴⁵ United States Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020: Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2020), 11.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 12.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 12.

strategic competition.” Additionally, cyberspace is also a focus for development as China views its capabilities behind that of the U.S.⁴⁸

While China continues to reduce the capabilities gap between the U.S. and itself, the most significant reforms were the 2015-2016 reforms carried out under President Xi Jinping that saw the reorganization of China’s seven military area commands into five theatre commands (TC).⁴⁹ The establishment of TC’s has transformed the PLA organization into something resembling the U.S. Combatant Command Structure, with each TC acting as a joint headquarters, enabled by the necessary army, navy, air, rocket, and support forces to carry out its assigned mission. While China has not yet achieved military parity with the U.S., its military growth over the last 30 years has put it in a position to challenge U.S. military dominance in South East Asia and the Pacific. This has been recognized by officials at the U.S. Department of Defence who have stated that the “U.S. can no longer take for granted military superiority in East Asia.”⁵⁰ President Xi Jinping has been clear about his vision for the PLA, stating in his 2017 speech to the 19th National Congress of the CCP that “by the mid-21st century, our people’s armed forces [will] have been fully transformed into world-class forces.”⁵¹ While he does not define

⁴⁸ Ibid, 12.

⁴⁹ Guoli Liu, *China Rising: Chinese Foreign Policy in a Changing World* (London; New York, NY: Palgrave, 2017). 59

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of State, *The Elements of the China Challenge* (Washington: Policy and Planning Staff, Office of the Secretary of State, 2020), 15.

⁵¹ Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in all Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," *Beijing Review*, 2017.

world-class military, the assumption which prevails in Western thinking, and certainly in U.S. military thinking is that this refers to a force equal to that of the U.S.⁵²

In order to achieve this, China has maintained a high level of defence spending, announcing in 2019 that its annual military budget would rise by 6.2 percent.⁵³ China's 2019 defence spending was \$266.4 billion (US).⁵⁴ By comparison, U.S. defence spending in 2019 was pegged at \$732 billion (US).⁵⁵ It is important to note that while there currently exists a significant gap between Chinese and U.S. defence spending, China is in a much better position than the U.S. to close this gap over the long term. For the time being, China's military focus remains relatively contained to its perceived regional security challenges: enforcing its claims in the South China Sea and the Taiwan issue. As political scientist Jonathan Holslag notes, "growing financial limitations are creating ever-increasing difficulties for the U.S. to respond to China's rise."⁵⁶ For example, the financial effects of the COVID-19 epidemic cost the U.S. government \$2.14 Trillion (US) in the first two months of 2020 alone and requirements for increased domestic spending will almost certainly limit the ability of the U.S. to maintain high levels of military spending and will force the continued prioritization of its military focus.⁵⁷

⁵² United States Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020: Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2020), 1.

⁵³ Ibid, 138.

⁵⁴ ChinaPower, "What Does China Really Spend on its Military?" last accessed 21 April 2021, <https://chinapower.csis.org/military-spending/>.

⁵⁵ Peter G. Peterson Foundation, "U.S. Defence Spending compared to other countries," accessed 2 February 2021, https://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053_defense-comparison.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Holslag, *Trapped Giant: China's Military Rise* (Taylor and Francis, 2017), 140.

⁵⁷ Mercatus Centre: George Mason University, "The Cost of COVID-19: A Rough Estimate of the 2020 US GDP Impact," accessed 2 February 2021, <https://www.mercatus.org/publications/covid-19-policy-brief-series/cost-covid-19-rough-estimate-2020-us-gdp-impact>.

Supported by its rapid economic development, China has the potential to increase its defence spending as a rate that the U.S. may not be able to match.

Military Policy and Strategic Interests

China's military strategic interests can be divided into two areas. The first and most important for the time being relates to China's regional security interests: Taiwan and the South China Sea (SCS). China's interests in the SCS are closely linked to resources as the area has significant deposits of oil and natural gas in addition to fishing.⁵⁸ Additionally, the SCS contains significant sea lines of communication of importance to China such as the Straits of Malacca that form part of the maritime portion of China's Belt and Road initiative (BRI). China is increasingly using its military power to dominate the region in an attempt to enforce its territorial claims represented by its "Nine dash line", the construction of artificial islands within the SCS, and regular attempts to challenge the ability of nations to transit freely within the SCS.⁵⁹ Taiwan also remains a strategic preoccupation for Chinese leadership.⁶⁰ While it is unlikely that China will use force to take Taiwan in the near future, its aggressive military posture towards the island serves the important strategic purpose of dissuading countries from moving away from the "One China policy" and formally recognizing Taiwan as an independent state, as doing so implies some form of military action on the part of China.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Klaus Heinrich Raditio, *Understanding China's Behaviour in the South China Sea: A Defensive Realist Perspective* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 71.

⁵⁹ Klaus Heinrich Raditio, *Understanding China's Behaviour in the South China Sea: A Defensive Realist Perspective* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 80-81.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 81.

⁶¹ Isabela Nogueira, Ben Lian Deng, and Caroline Rocha Travassos Colbert, "One China Policy: Origins and Implications for the Current US Taiwan Policy/One China Policy," *Mural Internacional* 9, no. 1 (January 2018): 9.

Beyond the Asia-Pacific region, China has demonstrated an increasing capacity to project its military power. In 2016 China established its first overseas military base in Djibouti, linked to its strategic interests in Africa.⁶² There has been an increasing recognition within China that its growing overseas interests need to be backed up by its military power. Additionally, there is a growing awareness that foreign policy goals can also be advanced through the use of its military. The commitment of approximately 2,500 Chinese troops to United Nations missions in Mali, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Lebanon are excellent example of China using its military to advance foreign policy goals.⁶³ China has expended significant effort building closer relations with many African countries.⁶⁴ Given China's need for vast quantities of natural resources to power its economy, securing and controlling access to Africa's abundant natural resources, which include significant reserves of key metals and minerals like cobalt, platinum, manganese, chrome, oil, and gold is an important objective for the Chinese government.⁶⁵ China's commitment of its forces in support of African peace and security is a logical linking of military power with foreign policy objectives, namely to bring Africa into China's orbit and dovetails well with its investments into Africa which were pegged at \$2.7 billion (US) in 2019.⁶⁶

⁶² Reuters, "China formally opens first overseas military base in Djibouti," last updated 1 August 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-djibouti-idUSKBN1AH3E3>

⁶³ Brookings, "China's pragmatic approach to UN peacekeeping," accessed 4 February 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-pragmatic-approach-to-un-peacekeeping/>.

⁶⁴ Guoli Liu, *China Rising: Chinese Foreign Policy in a Changing World* (London; New York, NY: Palgrave, 2017), 156.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 157.

⁶⁶ China-Africa Research Initiative, "Chinese Investment in Africa," accessed 27 January 2021, <http://www.sais-cari.org/chinese-investment-in-africa>.

Outside of Africa and the SCS, China has also become increasingly active in regions traditionally recognized as NATO's area of operations (AO). China has conducted several exercises in the North Atlantic, the Black Sea, the Baltic, and the Mediterranean.⁶⁷ In 2017, the PLAN conducted a live-fire exercise in the Mediterranean with Russia.⁶⁸ While these deployments are small, particularly when compared to larger NATO exercises, they demonstrate a clear attempt by China to improve interoperability with its allies and as well as develop its expeditionary capabilities. China's significant economic relationship with Europe will result in an increasing presence of Chinese military deployed into areas traditionally recognized as NATO's AO in a military diplomacy posture to reinforce its strategic interests. Chinese President Xi Jinping has been clear that he views these type of activities as key to ensuring China's interests are protected.⁶⁹

China's Ambitions

While China has clearly risen to become a global economic power and a regional military one, understanding China's motivations and ambitions is key to projecting its trajectory within the global power structure. Are China's leaders seeking to supplant the U.S. as a superpower or does it merely seek to achieve parity and the return of a bipolar world akin to the Cold War? Aaron Friedburg offers that the current U.S./China relationship "has graduated from superpower/major power to world's Number 1/Number

⁶⁷ Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 139.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 139.

⁶⁹ ChinaPower, "How is China Bolstering its Military Diplomatic Relations?" accessed 23 April 2021, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-military-diplomacy/>.

2.”⁷⁰ By implication, this view distills the relationship between these countries to one defined by who sits on top and implies that China will eventually need to surpass the U.S. in its military and economic power to achieve top status and that this is China’s goal. The idea that conflict with China over trade deals, the South China Sea, etc. is inevitable is a view that resonates with policymakers in the U.S.⁷¹ The actions of the U.S. government over the last number of years, targeting Chinese trade lend credence to this view.⁷² Interestingly, this view frames China’s rise as a threat to the U.S. while conveniently ignoring the long history of the U.S. in using its economic and military might to shape the global environment to its own ends. Arguably, statements from President Xi about “placing China on a path to restoring what it believes is its rightful position as the world’s dominant global power by 2050” have fed this narrative.⁷³

A more nuanced view is that China’s ambitions are more asymmetrical. China desires to become the top economic player while maintaining a regional military parity with the U.S. While this has never been explicated stated, there are some key pieces of Chinese policy which lend support to this argument. Within the economic domain, the “Made in China 2025” plan that launched in 2015 provides insight into China’s economic ambitions. The plan was developed in response to China’s assessment that it was overly dependent on external sources of technology and advanced equipment along with a

⁷⁰ Aaron Friedberg, "Competing with China," *Survival (London)* 60, no. 3 (2018): 24.

⁷¹ Aggarwal and Newland, *Responding to China's Rise: US and EU Strategies*, Vol. 15 (Cham: Springer, 2015), 90.

⁷² BBC, “A quick guide to the US-China trade war,” last accessed 18 January 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-45899310>

⁷³ Derek Adam Levine, "Made in China 2025: China’s Strategy for Becoming a Global High-Tech Superpower and its Implications for the U.S. Economy, National Security, and Free Trade," *Journal of Strategic Security* 13, no. 3 (2020): 5.

comparatively low domestic capacity for innovation.⁷⁴ Additionally, China does not have significant numbers of world famous Chinese brands like Huawei that are key to the perception of a high-technology economy.⁷⁵ Key aspects of the plan include improving manufacturing innovation, the closer integration of information technology into industry, and building the capacity of China's economic base.⁷⁶ There is a further emphasis on establishing domestic production capabilities, particularly for information technology in order to ensure secure supply lines, which given the U.S. restrictions on the export of computer chips required for the manufacture of smartphones is logical.⁷⁷ "Made in China 2025" is viewed by President Xi as a means for China to take the lead as the foremost producer of high technology that will allow it to define global technological standards the way the U.S. is currently able.⁷⁸ The successful implementation of this plan is seen as a means to allow China to overtake the U.S. and become the global technological leader of the twenty-first century.⁷⁹ There is convincing evidence that within the economic domain, China is seeking to supplant the U.S. to become the top global economic power driven by its belief that the existing system is fundamentally beneficial to the U.S. at the expense of other nations.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Alberto Gabriele, "The made in China 2025 Plan," in *Enterprises, Industry and Innovation in the People's Republic of China* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2020): 171.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 171.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 172.

⁷⁷ CNET, "Huawei ban timeline as Trump administration ends and Joe Biden takes office," last accessed 18 January 2021, <https://www.cnet.com/news/huawei-ban-full-timeline-us-sanctions-china-trump-administration-joe-biden-5g/>

⁷⁸ Derek Adam Levine, "Made in China 2025: China's Strategy for Becoming a Global High-Tech Superpower and its Implications for the U.S. Economy, National Security, and Free Trade," *Journal of Strategic Security* 13, no. 3 (2020): 5.

⁷⁹ Alberto Gabriele, "The made in China 2025 Plan," in *Enterprises, Industry and Innovation in the People's Republic of China* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2020): 172.

⁸⁰ Aaron Friedberg, "Competing with China," *Survival (London)* 60, no. 3 (2018): 24.

Unlike the economic domain where there is convincing evidence of a desire to supplant the U.S., China's military ambitions are harder to discern. Despite statements from President Xi outlining his ambition to see a China's military transformed into a world-class force by 2049, equal to that of the U.S., it remains unclear whether this will be regionally contained to Asia-Pacific or if there is a wider desire within the CCP to see China supplant the U.S. as a global military power.⁸¹ As described earlier in this chapter, China is undergoing a significant modernization of its military force and is recognized as a competitor to American military power in Asia-Pacific. China's projection of its military power beyond Asia-Pacific has been comparatively limited, particularly when compared against the U.S. global military footprint. China's military power projection is best understood through the lens of defence diplomacy related to strategic economic interests rather than a direct challenge to the military supremacy of the U.S. and its allies.⁸² Furthermore, while China has the flexibility to grow its defence spending, there is no evidence to suggest that it is willing to do so in the manner that would be necessary to achieve global military parity with the U.S. and alliances like NATO. The costs would likely be seen as prohibitive and unnecessary, with objectives better achieved through economic rather than military superiority. It is probably not lost on the Chinese government that the military spending required by the U.S. to maintain its global military position (\$732 billion in 2019) limits the funds available for domestic spending and socioeconomic development, which is an important area of development for the CCP and

⁸¹ Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in all Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," *Beijing Review*, 2017.

⁸² ChinaPower, "How is China Bolstering its Military Diplomatic Relations?" accessed 23 April 2021, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-military-diplomacy/>.

are unlikely to be compromised by rampant military spending.⁸³ Thus, in the military domain, a prudent assessment of China's ambitions is limited to a regional view in which it achieves military parity and eventually supplants the U.S. as the dominant military power in Asia-Pacific. Friedberg describes this as a vision of the region in which "China [is] at the centre with the United States pushed to the periphery, if not out of the region altogether."⁸⁴

As with all assessments concerning the ambitions of President Xi and the central committee, it is extremely difficult to determine definitively their objectives with certainty. At best, we can assess the ramifications of the known policies to attempt to divine what might be China's goal. The evidence suggests that China is seeking to establish an asymmetrical global power structure in which it establishes itself as the preeminent global economic power while eventually supplanting the U.S. as the top regional military power in Asia-Pacific.

Summary

Over the last 30-40 years, China has undergone a period of significant growth, rising rapidly to achieve a dominant position in terms of manufacturing and trade. Economic reforms and its entry into the WTO in 2001 created an environment in which the Chinese economy was able to achieve rapid growth fueled by trade, foreign investment and transfers of technology, enabling it to transform itself into the world's largest economy. The significant trade relationships China has developed around the

⁸³ Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in all Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," *Beijing Review*, 2017.

⁸⁴ Aaron Friedberg, "Competing with China," *Survival (London)* 60, no. 3 (2018): 24.

world have given it substantial influence within those countries for whom China is now a top trade partner, challenging previous U.S. economic dominance and influence.⁸⁵

Furthermore, this rapid economic growth has facilitated the modernization of the Chinese military, which is now capable of challenging U.S. dominance in Asia-Pacific trending towards parity and potentially, regional superiority. China's rise has set the conditions for conflict with the U.S., particularly as the speed of China's ascent to the top tier of global powers does not appear to have been seriously considered as a possible outcome of its joining the WTO. Regardless, China is now positioned to replace the U.S. hegemony within the global order, prevalent since the collapse of the Soviet Union, with something closer to bipolarity in which China becomes the dominate global economic player and a regionally dominant military one. Additionally, the implications of China's rise are viewed differently between the U.S. and its NATO allies. The U.S. sees China as a competitor to its global hegemonic status both militarily and economically, and it is therefore adopts positions that are aimed at preserving its status as such. Many European members of the alliance do not see China's rise as a threat to a global power status they do not have and therefore will view their relationship with China as primarily an economic challenge. As Holslag points out, from a European point of view, "China has mostly posed an economic challenge, though it sometimes raises challenges to global governance and security and (very rarely) military concerns."⁸⁶

CHAPTER 3 – WHY DOES THE U.S. WANT NATO INVOLVED WITH CHINA

⁸⁵ Aaron L. Friedberg, "Globalisation and Chinese Grand Strategy," *Survival (London)* 60, no. 1 (2018): 26.

⁸⁶ Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 139.

In addressing the question of whether NATO will be capable of playing a role in a U.S. containment strategy towards China, it is necessary to examine why the U.S. would seek a role for the alliance concerning China. This chapter will examine the reasons why the U.S. sees a role for NATO, arguing that great power competition and the U.S. desire to maintain its hegemonic global position compel it to attempt to influence its allies to obtain an advantage in its efforts to contain China and thus maintain its position in the global commons. Additionally, this chapter will examine how the U.S. has securitized global economics in an attempt to make its case that NATO has a role to play within this domain. Finally, this chapter will examine how U.S. attempts to utilize the alliance will be perceived by China and consequently, how this could lead to China taking action to destabilize a NATO it perceives as working against its strategic interests.

Why NATO?

Created in 1949 in the aftermath of World War II with the U.S. as a founding member, the alliance established a system of collective defence to address the perceived threat from the USSR.⁸⁷ During this period, NATO faced an identifiable and quantifiable adversary in the Warsaw Pact. From a threat perspective it was fundamentally a military one. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 forced a fundamental rethink in the purpose of the alliance no longer facing a peer adversary. Demonstrating agility for an organization which had until then been singly focused on one adversary, NATO introduced a new strategic concept in 1991 which articulated a revised focus towards possible threats to the security of the alliance which may require action beyond its

⁸⁷ NATO, "What is NATO – Key Events," accessed 5 February 2021, <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>.

borders, including crisis management and conflict prevention.⁸⁸ It is notable that while the 1991 Strategic Concept gave the alliance a much broader view security this was still generally limited to Europe and the alliances primary means of maintaining security rested with the use of military power. NATO operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo, which saw the deployment of significant numbers of soldiers exemplify this.⁸⁹ In 1999, NATO again revised its Strategic Concept, adopting a global view of alliance security in which it might be compelled to act beyond the traditional Europe-Atlantic region.⁹⁰ NATO planners used the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept to further develop this concept. The 2010 Strategic Concept outlined collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security as alliance core tasks, each of which had both a global and expeditionary implication to it.⁹¹ Ongoing NATO operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are examples of this global view concerning security.⁹²

The 2010 Strategic Concept remains extant although efforts are ongoing to revise this once again. One could argue that these most recent examples are not reflective of NATO's member states' willingness to play a role as a global security provider but might better understood in the context of a NATO being dragged into Washington's foreign and military policy decisions as both the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan were initiated by the U.S.. In the aftermath of Russia 2014 annexation of the Crimea, more that anytime in

⁸⁸ NATO, "The Alliances New Strategic Concept agreed by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council," last modified 8 November 1991, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm.

⁸⁹ NATO, "Operations and missions: past and present," last updated 22 April 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52060.htm.

⁹⁰ NATO, "The Alliance's Strategic Concept dated 1999," accessed 10 February 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm.

⁹¹ "Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization." *Charter of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* Yale University Press, 2018), 1-40. P.7

⁹² NATO, "Operations and Missions: Past and Present," accessed 15 February 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52060.htm.

since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO has returned to a preoccupation with the Russian military operations and regional European security.⁹³

While NATO has demonstrated an ability to adapt its purpose and focus, it has done so towards more or less clearly definable threats against which NATO's military power can be applied. One need only look at the numbers of soldiers deployed to NATO missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, the intervention in Libya, etc. as evidence of this. The challenge in understanding why the U.S. would advocate for a NATO role concerning China rests with the nature of the perceived threats posed by China. Issues such as trade interdependence and economic influence are not areas that NATO is well positioned to address as it lacks a security strategy in this domain.⁹⁴ NATO is not conducting an operation in Asia-Pacific, nor with the exception of the U.S. and Canada, does it have any Asia-Pacific members in a true geographic sense. Furthermore, Asia-Pacific is not a region in which most members of the alliance with the exception of the U.S., are both disposed and capable of acting in in a sustained manner.⁹⁵ China has not at present been designated a military threat to the alliance and while it has conducted some joint exercises with Russia within what would be considered NATO's area of operations (AO), these hardly present significant military threat to the alliance.⁹⁶ Concerns related to China rest primarily within the economic domain and areas like cyber espionage, forced

⁹³ Janka Oertel, "V. NATO's China Challenge," *Whitehall Papers: Future NATO: Adapting to New Realities* 95, no. 1 (Jan 2, 2019): 68.

⁹⁴ Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 145.

⁹⁵ Countries like France, the U.K. and Canada conduct intermittent operations in the Pacific region.

⁹⁶ Alexander Gabuev, "Unwanted but Inevitable, Russia's Deepening Partnership with China Post-Ukraine," in *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 62.

technology transfer, and the acquisition of foreign technology through illicit means.⁹⁷

While these issues are certainly of concern for members states, whether they which fall within the purview of NATO is an altogether different question which begs the question of what exactly the U.S. is seeking NATO to do in relation to China.

While this U.S. has not articulated specifically what is envisions NATO doing within the context of China, what is clear is that the U.S. sees a role for NATO concerning China. This position has been one of the few points of agreement between both the Trump and Biden administrations. Former Vice-President Mike Pence was clear that the U.S. sees espionage concerns related to Huawei network access and ongoing trade disputes between China and the U.S. as security threats during the 2019 Munich Security Conference.⁹⁸ During the 2019 NATO leaders meeting, President Donald Trump further pressed the NATO secretary general to expand NATO's conception of the global security environment to include China.⁹⁹ During his first call Chinese President Xi Jinping, President Biden made a point of calling out China for its perceived "coercive and unfair trade practices" and indicated that the U.S. will "continue to advance the interests of the American people and those of its allies."¹⁰⁰ During the 2021 NATO ministerial Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin reiterated the U.S. position that China is among the

⁹⁷ Derek Adam Levine, "Made in China 2025: China's Strategy for Becoming a Global High-Tech Superpower and its Implications for the U.S. Economy, National Security, and Free Trade," *Journal of Strategic Security* 13, no. 3 (2020): 6.

⁹⁸ National Archives, "Remarks by Vice-President Pence at the 2019 Munich Security Conference," last accessed 2 March 2021, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-2019-munich-security-conference-munich-germany/>.

⁹⁹ National Archives, "Remarks by President Trump and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg after 1:1 Meeting," last accessed 2 March 2021, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-nato-secretary-general-jens-stoltenberg-bilateral-meeting/>.

¹⁰⁰ The White House, "Readout of President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. Call with President Xi Jinping of China 10 February 2021," accessed 15 February 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/10/readout-of-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-call-with-president-xi-jinping-of-china/>.

security challenges faced by the alliance and that the U.S. sees a role for NATO in addressing an increasingly aggressive China.¹⁰¹ The question therefore becomes, given that U.S. policymakers almost certainly understand that the nature of China's non-military security challenge will pose problems in any attempt by NATO to assume a role concerning China, why then does it continue to advocate for one. While the U.S. has not explicitly indicated this policy towards China, it is clear that the U.S. is attempting to contain China by among other things, building an alliance against its economic and military power.¹⁰²

In attempting to understand U.S. motivations concerning the China-NATO issue, political scientist Graham Allison offers an interesting perspective that provides a useful lens through which to contextualize U.S.-Chinese strategic conflict and thereby providing a potential explanation as to why the U.S. is seeking to involve NATO in some role concerning China. In his book, "Destined for War", Graham likens the current tensions between China and the U.S. to something similar to that which existed between Athens and Sparta. Graham has termed this the Thucydides Trap.¹⁰³ This concept comes from Thucydides "History of the Peloponnesian War" that outlines the power dynamics leading inevitably to war between the city-states of Athens and Sparta resulting from their competition. Allison applies this framework to the current China-U.S. dynamic in which a rising China is challenging the hegemonic power of the U.S, leading to conflict

¹⁰¹ Department of Defense, "Austin Says Afghanistan, Iraq, China Among Topics at NATO Meeting," last modified 19 February 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2508740/austin-says-afghanistan-iraq-china-among-topics-at-nato-meeting/>.

¹⁰² Victor Teixeira, "The United States' China Containment Strategy and the South China Sea Dispute," *Central European Journal of International & Security Studies* 13, no. 3 (2019): 170.

¹⁰³ Graham T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 52.

for resources, markets, and allies although not necessarily open war.¹⁰⁴ Criticism of Allison's application of Thucydides Trap to the current U.S.-China dynamic revolves around the usefulness of applying historical rivalries to the complicated geopolitical dynamics of the current relationship as well as the fact that military confrontation between China and the U.S. is by no means certain.¹⁰⁵ Regardless of this criticism, the usefulness of this theory within the context of this paper is that it provides a blood and guts explanation of the nature of U.S.-China relations – essentially one marked by strategic competition. Importantly, this same view is reflected in the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy.¹⁰⁶ The rapid and seemingly unexpected rise of China in both the economic and military domains threatens the U.S. with a competitive force it cannot easily control. Consequently, this places immense pressure on the U.S. to maintain its hegemonic position. Allison notes that despite U.S. attempts to downplay China's growing power over the last 30 years, in reality it has been caught off guard by China's rapid rise.¹⁰⁷ The writers at the Council of Foreign Relations highlight a lack of a coordinated strategy in dealing with a rising China. One such example is the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). The TPP would have reduced the economic dependence between Asian countries and China, increased American influence in the region, and strengthened the ability of the U.S. to contain China.¹⁰⁸ As America

¹⁰⁴ Graham T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017). 210.

¹⁰⁵ James Lee, "Did Thucydides Believe in Thucydides' Trap? the History of the Peloponnesian War and its Relevance to U.S.-China Relations," *Chinese Journal of Political Science* 24, no. 1 (Mar 15, 2019): 82-83.

¹⁰⁶ Executive Office of the President, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Officer, 2017), 46.

¹⁰⁷ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 24-26.

¹⁰⁸ Council on Foreign Relations, "What's Next for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)," accessed 21 February 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-trans-pacific-partnership-tpp>.

attempts to regain lost ground, in the face of China's challenge to its global position, it is logical that U.S. would take steps to secure every advantage to maintain its position. This includes leveraging its security alliances like NATO in an attempt to contain the growing power of China.

While Allison's Thucydides Trap provides a framework to understand U.S.-China strategic competition and why therefore the U.S. would seek to utilize the power of its alliances to contain China, it does not address how the U.S. might convince NATO that China poses a security challenge in the absence of a defined Chinese military threat to the alliance. To that end, economic securitization provides an answer to this question. Securitization in the context of international relations can be broadly understood as the process through which the state redefines a particular issue as being one of "security" and something that therefore becomes an existential threat to the state requiring government intervention.¹⁰⁹ While securitization is not a new concept, political scientist Richard Higgott, argues that the American policymakers, starting with the Bush administration, began to link America's economic and security policy and therefore securitized economic globalization.¹¹⁰ Higgott uses the example of how New Zealand's negative views on the Iraq war and consequently, U.S. security policy, were detrimental to its ability to secure a free trade agreement with the U.S. in 2003.¹¹¹ Given China's economic power and close economic relations with many countries, the U.S., through the securitization of global economics has characterized China's economic growth as an existential threat to itself.

¹⁰⁹ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Pub, 1998), 23.

¹¹⁰ Richard Higgott, "US Foreign Policy and the 'Securitization' of Economic Globalization," *International Politics (Hague, Netherlands)* 41, no. 2 (2004): 147.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 164.

President Biden's remarks to President Xi Jinping articulating China's economic policy as something that runs counter to America interests highlights the U.S. position that Chinese economic strength is considered a U.S. national security problem.¹¹² Consequently, this position allows the U.S. to define the issue as a threat to NATO. Interestingly, this was not an issue during the Cold War period as the USSR existed as only a military threat to the U.S. and the alliance, with economic issues firmly separated into East and West spheres of influence.¹¹³ Increased economic globalization has created an environment in which the major economies of the world have become intertwined and are therefore increasingly impacted by the economic policies and actions of each other.

Within the larger NATO context, economic securitization offers a means through which the US can more convincingly make the argument that the alliance has a role to play concerning China in way that would not be possible based purely on a Chinese military threat that is currently relevant only to the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific region. Given the E.U. as a bloc represents one of China's biggest trade partners and seven NATO countries (Germany, France, UK, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal) sit within the top ten concerning Chinese trade and investment, leveraging NATO as a means to contain China, particularly within the economic domain, is a logical move for the U.S..¹¹⁴ The linking of security policy to economics is already starting to become more apparent within NATO, if not its individual member states. "NATO 2030: United for a New Era"

¹¹² The White House, "Readout of President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. Call with President Xi Jinping of China 10 February 2021," accessed 15 February 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/10/readout-of-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-call-with-president-xi-jinping-of-china/>.

¹¹³ Richard Higgott, "US Foreign Policy and the 'Securitization' of Economic Globalization," *International Politics (Hague, Netherlands)* 41, no. 2 (2004): 151.

¹¹⁴ Reality Check Team, "How much of Europe does China Own?," *BBC News*, 20 April 2019.

frames China as a “full spectrum systemic rival, rather than purely economic player or an Asia-focused regional security actor.”¹¹⁵

As China’s growing power challenges U.S. hegemony, perceived strategic competition is driving the U.S. to maximize its advantages in achieving its policy goals concerning China. While China is not at present a military threat to NATO in the conventional sense, by securitizing other facets of Chinese power and influence, namely its economic power, the U.S. is hoping to be able to persuade the alliance towards a more active role concerning China. While not an explicitly stated U.S. policy, it is clear that U.S., is attempting to maximize its ability to contain an increasingly powerful China by both attempting to limit China to a regional power while simultaneously ensuring the U.S. maintains its freedom of action.¹¹⁶ The use of existing alliances or the building of new ones appears to be part of this containment strategy. The TPP, prior to U.S. withdrawal was widely accepted as an example of the U.S. building a “trade alliance” to contain China’s influence in Asia-Pacific.¹¹⁷ The U.S. desire for a NATO role concerning China is therefore a continuation of this approach and success in creating a role in containing China for NATO would serve to reinforce America’s interests, demonstrating that the U.S. is able to influence and utilize its alliances in pursuit of its objectives.

Chinese Perspectives – Why China would see NATO as a Threat

¹¹⁵ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era* (NATO Press & Media: 2020), 27.

¹¹⁶ Victor Teixeira, "The United States' China Containment Strategy and the South China Sea Dispute," *Central European Journal of International & Security Studies* 13, no. 3 (2019): 174.

¹¹⁷ Jiangyu Wang, "Between Power Politics and International Economic Law: Asian Regionalism, the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the U.s.-China Trade Relations," *Pace International Law Review* 30, no. 2 (2018): 408.

As we examine the larger question of whether NATO is capable of responding to a rising China, we must examine why China might seek to challenge NATO. For a number of reasons, the answer to this questions in not obvious. NATO for example, does not operate in Asia-Pacific and while it does have Pacific partners such as Australia and New Zealand, they are not members of the alliance and its common defence and security framework.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, NATO's borders do not physically touch those of China as they do in the case of Russia. Thus, from a purely operational and geographic perspective, NATO does not pose an immediate military risk to China. Despite this, there are a number of reasons why China might view the alliance with a skeptical eye and seek to disrupt it where possible.

For historical reasons, China's perception of the alliance has not generally been a positive one. One of the most significant incidents concerning China's relations with NATO over the last 30 years was the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade by the U.S. on 7 May 1999. The bombing occurred during the conduct of NATO operations against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and saw the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy by a U.S. bomber, resulting in the deaths of three Chinese nationals.¹¹⁹ While the U.S. and NATO assumed responsibility, this incident resulted in a freezing of relations between China and NATO that did not begin to thaw until the post 9/11/WTO period.¹²⁰ This period of thawing was almost certainly due to NATO's role in the war on terror, which given the objectives of Chinese foreign and domestic policy related to the

¹¹⁸ Yiwei and Xinze, "The Likelihood of Cooperation between China and NATO," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (2020): 69.

¹¹⁹ BBC, "The Night the US bombed a Chinese embassy," last updated 7 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48134881>.

¹²⁰ Wang Yiwei and Wu Xinze, "The Likelihood of Cooperation between China and NATO," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (2020): 68.

maintenance of stability and security, no doubt struck a sympathetic cord.¹²¹ Ultimately, it was not until around 2006 that NATO-Chinese relations returned to previous levels.¹²²

Arguably, we are again in a period of declining NATO-Chinese relations as exemplified by NATO's framing of China as a "full spectrum systemic rival."¹²³ While this is certain to be an assessment that will capture the attention of the Chinese government, equally, it is likely to be one framed through the lens of China's perception of U.S. influence within the alliance. Chinese academic writing concerning NATO goes to great lengths to emphasize the fact that the U.S. plays an outsized role in NATO. This also includes the opinion that NATO in the post-cold war era is fundamentally a tool for the U.S. to maintain American interests and influence over Europe.¹²⁴ The influence the U.S. exerts within the alliance is quite evident. It was largely due to the advocacy of former Vice-President Mike Pence that concerns relating to 5G security and potential Chinese threats related to the provision of 5G equipment into these networks was added to the agenda of the 2019 NATO leaders meeting.¹²⁵ Security concerns related to Huawei have revolved around its close relationship with the Chinese government and concern that

¹²¹ Guoli Liu, *China Rising: Chinese Foreign Policy in a Changing World* (London; New York, NY: Palgrave, 2017), 10.

¹²² "NATO-China Relations Fully Recovered: NATO Spokesman." *Xinhua News Agency News Bulletin* 2006.

¹²³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era* (NATO Press & Media: 2020), 27.

¹²⁴ Yiwei and Xinze, "The Likelihood of Cooperation between China and NATO," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (2020): 70-71.

¹²⁵ Janka Oertel, "V. NATO's China Challenge," *Whitehall Papers: Future NATO: Adapting to New Realities* 95, no. 1 (Jan 2, 2019): 77.

its equipment could be used to conduct espionage on behalf of the Chinese government.¹²⁶

The U.S. has subsequently made great efforts to convince members of the alliance to ban Huawei from their 5G networks with varying degrees of success.¹²⁷ Given that Huawei represents one of China's flagship technology brands, such overt attempts by the U.S. to pressure its allies into banning it reinforces China's belief that NATO is being used by the U.S. as a vector to attack Chinese economic interests. China's response to NATO's announcement concerning 5G which following the 2019 meeting makes clear reference to its perception that the U.S. dominates its NATO partners.¹²⁸ Furthermore, as the U.S. continues with an approach of "economic securitization" as previously described, this will manifest within the alliance in the form of increased pressure on member states to reduce their trade dependency with China and where applicable, reject Chinese economic/influence building projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Activities such as these can only serve to reinforce the perception that NATO, under the influence of the U.S. represents a threat to China's economy prosperity.

The relationship between China and Russia is also an important factor which influences China's views concerning NATO. The close relations between Russia and China, who conduct coordination through many multinational mechanisms like the United Nations (UN), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the G20, and BRICS,

¹²⁶ CNET, "Huawei ban timeline: Company tries to blame US sanctions for global chip shortage," last updated 15 April 2021, <https://www.cnet.com/news/huawei-ban-full-timeline-us-sanctions-global-chip-shortage-china/>.

¹²⁷ The New York Times, "In 5G Race with China, U.S. Pushes Allies to Fight Huawei," last modified 26 January 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/26/us/politics/huawei-china-us-5g-technology.html>.

¹²⁸ "China's response to NATO statement and 5G," CGTN video, 1:17, Posted on CGTN, 5 December 2019. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-12-05/China-s-response-to-NATO-statement-and-5G-MbrDp7r7tC/index.html>.

is a complicating factor in NATO/China relations.¹²⁹ This is particularly true after the 2014 seizure of the Crimea by Russia. In response to Russia's actions, the U.S. applied a number of sanctions targeting Russia including its defence, energy, and financial sectors.¹³⁰ The European Union (of whom 21 also belong to NATO) slapped a number of sanctions on Russia that were extended until 31 January 2021, also targeting Russia's defence, energy, and financial sectors.¹³¹ While these sanctions directly contributed to Russia's 2014-2017 financial crisis, access to Chinese credit enabled Russia to withstand its worst effects.¹³²

China's support to Russia can be understood in two ways. First, by helping Russia withstand the effects of sanctions it is demonstrating its strength as a global power and reinforcing its influence with a key ally. Secondly, the specifics of the Russia/Crimea dispute have some interesting parallels to China's Taiwan dispute. While generally it would be expected that China would support its ally, there are also compelling similarities between the Russia/Crimea dispute and the China/Taiwan dispute which are likely not lost on the Chinese and who therefore have an interest in a successful outcome for Russia.¹³³ In the case of the Crimea, while there are clear geographic and military strategic advantages which Russia has obtained through its seizure, justified by important

¹²⁹ Jo Inge Bekkevold and Bobo Lo, *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018), 3.

¹³⁰ Dianne Rennack and Welt Cory, *U.S. Sanctions on Russia: An Overview* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2020), 1.

¹³¹ European Council, "Timeline - EU restrictive measures in response to the crisis in Ukraine," last accessed 22 February 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/ukraine-crisis/history-ukraine-crisis/>.

¹³² Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 141.

¹³³ The National Bureau of Asian Research, "Taiwan is No Crimea, But..," last updated 22 April 2014, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/taiwan-is-no-crimea-but/>.

historical and ethnic links.¹³⁴ Taiwan too is both geographically important and is considered by China to be part of China, with common language and ethnicity.¹³⁵ The similarities between these two disputes means that China has an interest in supporting a successful outcome for Russia as it serves as a test case for China. NATO interference in this arena would be viewed by China as working against its interests.

Whether China considers threats to Russia to be threats to itself is difficult to discern as the close relations between these countries has not evolved into a security alliance similar to NATO.¹³⁶ Instead, it is likely that China views actions taken against Russia by NATO members as a threat to its influence within its sphere of influence. The perceived threat to China from NATO in this context relates to the potential the alliance has to undermine China's ability to demonstrate its capability as a strong partner and ally to Russia either through the continued use of sanctions or the ability to counter China's support to Russia.

Summary

Having looked at both why the U.S. would seek a role for NATO in addressing the challenges related to a rising China and why China might view NATO as a threat, it is clear that these questions are intrinsically linked together. It is precisely because the U.S.

¹³⁴ Brookings, "Crimea: Six years after illegal annexation," accessed 15 February 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/03/17/crimea-six-years-after-illegal-annexation/>.

¹³⁵ The National Bureau of Asian Research, "Taiwan is No Crimea, But..," last updated 22 April 2014, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/taiwan-is-no-crimea-but/>.

¹³⁶ Paul J. Bolt and Sharyl N. Cross, *China, Russia, and Twenty-First Century Global Geopolitics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2018), 131.

is attempting to push NATO towards a role in containing China that China will view NATO as a threat to its global interests, both economically and within its perceived spheres of influence. If China feels that its interests are being threatened, it is logical to assume that China will seek to find ways to disrupt the alliance, reducing U.S. influence where possible and interfering with its ability to develop coherent policy concerning China.

CHAPTER 4 – NATO’S CAPABILITIES TO PIVOT TOWARDS CHINA

Having examined in the previous chapter why the U.S. sees a NATO role in containing a rising China, this chapter will examine the particular the capabilities and strengths the alliance can draw upon in attempting to respond to the U.S. desire for NATO to play a meaningful role in containing China. The biggest obstacle to an alliance pivot towards China resides in nature of the perceived threat. While China is not at present a military threat to NATO, “NATO 2030: Unit for a New Era” outlines how NATO strategic planners view the nature of the challenges being posed by China: cyberattacks and espionage, technology theft, disinformation, China’s economic influence, and threats to the alliances political cohesion.¹³⁷ The fundamental challenge for the NATO is that while it is well disposed to respond to military threats, the alliance is less capable in addressing the non-military nature of China’s challenge. Perceived threats, such as those tied to economic issues fall outside NATO’s security mandate and it lacks clear policy in this domain.¹³⁸ The question that must therefore be asked is what capacities or advantages are available to a political-military alliance of 30 developed (and

¹³⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era* (NATO Press & Media: 2020), 27.

¹³⁸ Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 145.

some slightly underdeveloped) nations, each with their own perspectives on and entanglements with China, that would allow it to play a meaningful role in responding to the threat posed by a rising China.

To that end, there are a number of things that NATO can leverage which would allow it assume a meaningful role in address these perceived security challenges presented by China. These include its decision making framework and governance structures, its proven ability to move beyond purely military concerns as exemplified its adoption of energy security into the NATO mandate, and finally, by leveraging the overwhelming influence of U.S. policy concerning China to provide momentum to this issue within the alliance.

NATO Decision Making Framework

With respect to China, the NATO policymaking environment is a complicated one. While the outsized influence of the United States on NATO policy is ever-present, there are a number of member countries such as Germany, France and Italy for whom their close economic relations with China colour their support for NATO involvement.¹³⁹ While the consequences of economic friction between NATO members and China will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, an important implication is that member states with a dependency on Chinese trade will be less willing to go on the record supporting policies aimed at reducing China's influence for fear of negative consequences to their relationships with China. To that end, NATO's consensus based decision-making framework provides an important means of policy development as it

¹³⁹ Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 145.

allows alliance members to support the development of NATO policy which may be targeted specifically against China without requiring members to be on record with their support.

NATO as an institution is composed of two separate structures: the civilian component, responsible for making decisions and setting policy and the military component that is responsible for the planning and execution of operations. The character and functioning of NATO's civilian structure is of particular interest as any NATO policies concerns China will emanate from this body. The North Atlantic Council (NAC), established under Article 9 of 1949 the Washington Treaty, serves as the highest decision making body within the alliance.¹⁴⁰ As NATO's governing body, the NAC, chaired by the secretary general, is composed of representatives from each member country and is responsible for the "political and military process relating to security issues affecting the whole alliance."¹⁴¹ Notably, Article 9 does not prescribe a specific decision-making process that the NAC must utilize. David Nauta, a NATO legal advisor, notes that in the absence of a specified process contained in the Washington Treaty, the NAC adopted a consensus driven method as its standard.¹⁴² In practical terms, this means that decisions regarding NATO policy, developed through consultation and discussion, are taken without a formal voting procedure provided there is no formal objection by a member nation.¹⁴³ In addition to its consensus-based decision making process, the NAC also

¹⁴⁰ NATO "The North Atlantic Treaty," accessed 10 December 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm

¹⁴¹ NATO, "North Atlantic Council," accessed 14 January 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49763.htm.

¹⁴² David Nauta, "Current Institutional Framework of NATO and NATO's Decision Making Process," in *The International Responsibility of NATO and its Personnel during Military Operations*, Vol. 58 (Brill, 2017), 67.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 72.

utilizes a tactic called “silence procedure.” The use of “silence procedure” within the NATO framework means that decisions are adopted unless a formal objection is sent to the secretary general. The combination of consensus based decision-making and silence procedure are useful tools in the NATO construct, as they allow the alliance to move forward with important policy decisions which may be politically sensitive or domestically unpopular. Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR, NATO’s military intervention in Libya is an example where Germany was able to utilize silence procedure to avoid taking a public position on a domestically unpopular operation.¹⁴⁴

In the context of China, the NATO decision-making framework offers significant advantages to developing policy around issues where common agreement may be difficult to achieve such as to whether there is even a limited role for NATO to play regarding China. Germany again provides a useful example of how this might come into play. The Trump administration brought considerable pressure to bear on member states in an attempt to get them to ban the Chinese telecommunications company Huawei from their 5G networks for perceived security reasons related to the relationship between the company and the Chinese government. Despite U.S. pressure, Germany has thus far refused to ban Huawei, almost certainly due in part to its extensive trade relationship with China and clear threats from China that such actions would result in retaliation against Germany’s automotive sector.¹⁴⁵ It is therefore understandable that the German government would not be publicly supportive of any NATO policy that could be seen as

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 73.

¹⁴⁵ Katrin Bennhold and Jack Ewing, "In Huawei Battle, China Threatens Germany ‘Where it Hurts’: Automakers," New York Times Company, 16 January 2020.

targeting China and therefore running counter to German interests and potentially placing it at economic risk.

Canada too provides another useful example. Like Germany, Canada has an extensive trade relationship with China worth 71.3 billion dollars (US) in 2019 representing around a 6% share of Canada's overall trade.¹⁴⁶ Despite pressure from the U.S. as both a NATO and bilateral security partner, as well as its other Five-Eyes partners, Canada remains the only member of the Five-eyes Intelligence community not to have banned Huawei from its 5G networks.¹⁴⁷ Having previously been on the receiving end of Chinese trade action with the Chinese halting agricultural imports in early 2019, the Canadian government is undoubtedly attempting to walk a difficult path between addressing security concerns while avoiding economic repercussions from China.¹⁴⁸ In this context, the advantage provided by NATO's consensus-based decision-making process and the use of silence procedure is that it provides an avenue for member states to tacitly support the development of NATO policy regarding China without needing to publicly support such measures, potentially to the detriment of their economic relationships with that country.

NATO's governance structure is supported by its ready access to various policy development and decision support entities that exist both as part of NATO's structure or in compliment to it that support any potential policy development. Nested within the

¹⁴⁶ Statistics Canada, "China is Canada's second largest trading partners after the United States," last accessed 18 January 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200306/dq200306b-eng.htm>.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Fife et al., "Canada is Now the Only Five Eyes Member to have Not Banned Or Restricted use of Huawei 5G Equipment: ," *The Globe and Mail (Online)* 15 July, 2020.

¹⁴⁸ Tom Alton, *Canada-China Trade: 2019 Year in Review* (University of Alberta: Springer International Publishing, 2018).

NATO structure are a number of committees that would have a role to play in the development of any policy concerning China. These include the Senior Political Committee, responsible for advising the NAC on political and political-military questions, the Atlantic Policy Advisory Group which examines long term security policy projections, and the Economic Committee which advises the NAC on economic issues. Additionally, “NATO 2030: United for a New Era”, a report prepared at the request of the secretary general, calls for the establishment of a new consultative body to address the security concerns presented by China.¹⁴⁹

NATO is also able to draw upon the support of complimentary organizations such as the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NPA), that while not a formal part of NATO’s structure, functions as a consultative organization which can advise on policy development. The Economics and Security Committee (ESC) of the NPA has for example, compiled reports providing strategic and economic assessments on China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), particularly useful given Italy’s 2019 endorsement of the project.¹⁵⁰ In the context of the ESC report on the BRI, the report provides an objective assessment of the risks associated with the project and can serve as a starting point for enabling debate as to the overall risk to the alliance that arises from Italy’s participation in the project.

The advantages of NATO’s ability to tap into both in-house and external decision support bodies is that they are perceived as neutral entities. This means that the analysis conducted by various NATO committees is more likely to be perceived by member states

¹⁴⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era* (NATO Press & Media: 2020), 12.

¹⁵⁰ "Not so Silky." *The Economist* (London), Mar 23, 2019, 30.

as objective NATO assessments rather than politically or nationally oriented products that are more easily dismissed or ignored by national policymakers driven by unique national concerns. Assessments of China's security threats to NATO presented by the U.S. for example, are not going to be seen as an objective assessment but rather as a product framed by the particularities of the relationship between those two countries. NATO's ability to use in-house committees and decision support bodies ensures that discussion around any role for NATO concerning China is framed objectively, taking specific national considerations and relationships out of assessments.

NATO and Energy Security – A Model to follow

As stated previously, the premise of this paper revolves around the primarily non-military, economically focused security challenges posed by a rising China and NATO's capability to address them. Although NATO is a fundamentally security alliance and therefore has a propensity to view its security challenges through a military lens, it has demonstrated its ability to adapt its mandate to address security challenges that are important to the alliance in a more comprehensive fashion. The movement of NATO into the energy security environment provides both an example of this ability as well as a potential template for how the alliance might look to expand its mandate into those areas such as economic security. Such areas while relevant to more comprehensive considerations of security are by nature, politically sensitive, even if they exist as concerns within the alliance.

Energy security within the context of NATO is defined as "a stable and reliable energy supply, the diversification of routes, suppliers and energy resources, and the interconnectivity of energy networks of critical importance and increasing [our] resilience

against political and economic pressure.”¹⁵¹ In writing on NATO and energy security, Atlantic Council Senior Fellow Phillip Cornell points out that defining a role for NATO in this realm was challenging for both political and practical reasons. NATO’s potential roles in this arena were extensive, for many member countries energy security was viewed as a domestic issue, and for some European members of the alliance, membership in the European Union and its role concerning energy policy was another complicating factor.¹⁵² Yet in spite of these obstacles, NATO was eventually successful in getting member states to accept energy security as part of NATO’s mandate in 2010.¹⁵³ Paralleling the current discussion concerning NATO and China, the idea of NATO playing a role in energy security was also initiated by the U.S. which demonstrated an interest for an official NATO energy security role as early as the 1960s, although the concept only began to gain traction in the early 2000s.¹⁵⁴ While the alliance would eventually include energy security in its 2010 Strategic Concept, the idea was not initially met with widespread support. Members were skeptical for a variety of reasons: energy was viewed as a national issue, there was skepticism as to how effective NATO could actually be in this space, and NATO would not be the only provider of energy security for NATO-EU countries.¹⁵⁵ Interestingly, France and Germany, who remain resistant to a NATO role regarding China were also the most resistant to accepting a NATO role in

¹⁵¹ NATO Review, “Energy security in the era of hybrid warfare,” last modified 13 January 2021, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2021/01/13/energy-security-in-the-era-of-hybrid-warfare/index.html>.

¹⁵² Phillip Cornell, “NATO and Energy Security: Defining a Role,” in *Understanding NATO in the 21st Century: Alliance Strategies, Security and Global Governance*, eds. Graeme P. Herd and John Kriendler (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 191.

¹⁵³ Alexandra-Maria Bocse, “NATO, Energy Security and Institutional Change,” *European Security* (London, England) 29, no. 4 (2020): 441.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 437.

¹⁵⁵ Alexandra-Maria Bocse, “NATO, Energy Security and Institutional Change,” *European Security* (London, England) 29, no. 4 (2020): 441-442

energy security.¹⁵⁶ France was initially not supportive due to concerns that NATO was expanding beyond its purely military mandate and Germany felt that energy should remain the purview of national governments and considered Russia a reliable energy provider.¹⁵⁷ Eventually, though, both countries were brought around to including the issue in NATO's mandate. As a result, in 2012 the NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence (ENSEC COE) was established. The ENSEC COE supports NATO by enhancing strategic awareness on energy developments and their security implications, supporting the protection of critical energy infrastructure, and enhancing energy efficiency in the military.¹⁵⁸ The ENSEC COE also serves as a hub that member states consult on energy security issues to share best practices.¹⁵⁹

As a case study on how NATO might look to address perceived security challenges posed by China, the success of the NATO's move beyond core military security issues into energy security provides a useful template that the alliance could once again follow. The primarily economic nature of China's perceived threat to NATO shares many parallels with the issue of energy security. In both cases, they are considered fundamentally national concerns, both issues touch E.U. policies for those members who are members of both the E.U. and NATO, and both were and are being driven primarily by how the U.S. views NATO roles as a security alliance.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 444.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 444.

¹⁵⁸ NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence, "NATO ENSEC COE," last accessed 4 February 2021, <https://enseccoe.org/en/about/6>.

¹⁵⁹ Gintaras Bagdonas and Patricia Orglerova, "NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence," *National Security and the Future* 17, no 1. (2016): 36.

It should be noted that while the NATO move to create a role for itself concerning energy security demonstrates its ability to adapt its mandate to address more comprehensively the security challenges of today, in practical terms this has not been entirely successful. Despite U.S. entreaties for its European NATO partners to reduce their energy dependence on Russia, Western Europe remains the biggest consumer of gas from the Russian gas company Gazprom. Germany, France, Italy and Turkey, all NATO members, were among the top consumers of Gazprom supplied gas, importing just over 108 billion cubic meters (BCM) of gas in 2019.¹⁶⁰ This relationship means that the potential security challenges inherent in relying on one of NATO's primary adversaries for energy imports have not been enough to overcome the economic advantage of cheap energy.

U.S. momentum towards action

As NATO has both the decision-making structure and governance supports to enable the development of policy regarding China as well as a potential roadmap to follow should the alliance find consensus to move into this space, the question that remains is whether momentum can be built within the alliance to address the U.S. desire for a NATO role in containing the ambitions of a rising China. While there remain serious impediments to NATO's ability to respond to China's perceived security challenges that are detailed in the following chapter, hawkish U.S. policies towards China and a growing global perception of China in negative light have the potential to galvanize NATO towards adopting a role regarding China in line with U.S. desires.

¹⁶⁰ Gazprom Export, "Gas supplies to Europe," accessed 16 March 2021, <http://www.gazpromexport.ru/en/statistics/>.

While NATO is an alliance of 30 seemingly co-equal partners, the reality of alliance since its inception to the present is that the U.S. remains the alliances most influential member. In addition to being a superpower, the U.S. is NATO's most powerful military and financial contributor. Consequently, it is logical to assume that U.S. policy demands concerning China, driven by the increasingly hawkish stance of U.S. policymakers, will have a significant influence on NATO policy development.

America's China policy in the early 2000s was built around the expectation that China could be successfully integrated into the U.S.-led international order.¹⁶¹ The inclusion of China into the WTO in 2001 was seen to be a significant milestone along this path to integration, particularly when combined with a US engagement policy aimed at extolling the virtues of key western liberal values such the importance of the rule of law, growth of the middle class, and respect for the established western rules-based liberal order.¹⁶² Instead of achieving the desired results, Aaron Friedburg argues that China's rapid economic growth resulting from its integration into the global economic system has permitted China to develop into a global power whose increasingly assertive presence on the world's stage is competing with U.S. supremacy, militarily in the Pacific and economically globally.¹⁶³

In response to the perceived failure of U.S. policy towards China, Friedburg proposes a new confrontational China strategy based around containment. This strategy would see the U.S. and its allies take steps to prevent China's direct or indirect physical or economic domination, challenge attempts by China to deny the free use of the global

¹⁶¹ Aaron L. Friedberg, "Competing with China," *Survival (London)* 60, no. 3 (2018): 11.

¹⁶² Ibid, 12.

¹⁶³ Aaron L. Friedberg, "Competing with China," *Survival (London)* 60, no. 3 (2018): 12.

commons, and assist allies and friendly countries in achieving these objectives.¹⁶⁴ A criticism of the strategy proposed by Friedburg is that it is based on a fundamental lack of understanding of China's ambitions and frames U.S. policy towards China in a provocative zero-sum game context.¹⁶⁵ Perhaps most importantly within the NATO context, political scientist Michael Swaine offers that as America's allies and by extension NATO look to it for leadership, the all or nothing approach offered by Friedburg will impede the development of workable policy within the alliance, as many member states have significant economic relationships with China.¹⁶⁶

A series of sanctions undertaken by the Trump Administration in 2018 underline the hawkish, zero-sum position of American policymakers as advocated by Friedburg.¹⁶⁷ Since 2018 the U.S. has imposed \$360 billion in tariffs against China.¹⁶⁸ Additionally, the U.S. has made a point of going after Huawei, one of China's flagship technology companies, actively pressuring allies to ban Huawei from their 5G networks while taking steps to impede the ability of the company to manufacture critical components such as computer chips, framing the company as a national security threat.¹⁶⁹ There is every indication that the Biden administration will continue with similarly aggressive and

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 25-26.

¹⁶⁵ Michael Swaine, "The Overreach of China Hawks – Aggression if the wrong response to Beijing," *Foreign Affairs* (October 2020): <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-10-23/overreach-china-hawks>.

¹⁶⁶ Michael Swaine et al, "The Overreach of China Hawks – Aggression if the wrong response to Beijing," *Foreign Affairs* (October 2020): <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-10-23/overreach-china-hawks>.

¹⁶⁷ BBC, "A quick guide to the US-China trade war," last accessed 18 January 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-45899310>

¹⁶⁸ BBC, "A quick guide to the US-China trade war," last accessed 18 January 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-45899310>

¹⁶⁹ CNET, "Huawei ban timeline as Trump administration ends and Joe Biden takes office," last accessed 18 January 2021, <https://www.cnet.com/news/huawei-ban-full-timeline-us-sanctions-china-trump-administration-joe-biden-5g/>

reactive policies towards China. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has stated his belief “that economic liberalization in China did not lead to the expected political liberalization” and that he was supportive of the Trump administration’s tough approach to China.¹⁷⁰ With every expectation that the U.S. will continue to pursue a hawkish approach to China under the Biden administration, it is therefore logical to expect that the U.S. will continue to advocate for NATO to take up a role within this space. As Friedburg notes, “the United States will need to cooperate even more closely with its allies and mobilize a coalition of likeminded countries to check China’s predatory economic practices.”¹⁷¹

Given the outsized role the U.S. plays within NATO, it will be difficult for the alliance not to act to address the concerns of its largest member and biggest contributor. U.S. policy objectives will also be aided by the fact that outside the U.S., the manner in which China is perceived by other members of the alliance has also become increasingly unfavorable. A negative perception of China has been increasing among the populations of several key members of NATO. This is notable in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Italy, suggesting the possibility that U.S. policies concerning China will be better received in NATO circles as member countries come under mounting domestic pressure to take a harder line against an increasingly unpopular China.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ The Wall Street Journal, “Blinken Back Tough Approach to China, Says Will Work With GOP,” last accessed 18 January 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/blinken-to-address-u-s-rivalry-with-china-russia-in-senate-hearing-11611069439>

¹⁷¹ Aaron L. Friedberg, “Competing with China,” *Survival (London)* 60, no. 3 (2018): 9.

¹⁷² Pew Research Centre, “Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries,” last modified 20 October 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/>.

Summary

Determining whether NATO will be capable of effectively assuming a role in containing a rising China remains a difficult proposition. The unique nature of the security challenges posed by China is one that, for the near future remains fundamentally about economics and influence. This is not an area that NATO would normally be well disposed to act in given the political-military nature of the alliance. Yet as this chapter has demonstrated, NATO possesses some important capabilities and motivators that can be used to respond to the U.S. desire for NATO to play a role in containing a rising China.

It possesses a decision-making structure that enables it to develop and implement policy in a manner which doesn't require 100% agreement, only the absence of disagreement among its members. As the development of any NATO policy concerning China will almost certainly manifest within uncomfortable areas of national or E.U. economic space, this is a significant advantage. NATO also possess a useful road map to follow in this endeavor as the inclusion of energy security into the NATO mandate in 2010 has demonstrated that the alliance is capable of moving beyond a traditional hard power military focus to adopt a more comprehensive view of security. Finally, as indications remain strong that the U.S. policymakers will continue to maintain a hawkish approach to China, NATO can expect continued U.S. pressure to begin looking at what role it might play in containing China's growing power. It is important to note that the arguments presented in this chapter are not self-supporting. That is to say, that NATO's decision-making process or U.S. policy towards China are not on their own sufficient to make a determination that the alliance will be capable of effectively addressing China's

perceived security challenges. The arguments presented here must instead be viewed as mutually supporting elements that demonstrate what tools and motivations a European-oriented security alliance could draw upon. Regardless, the factors addressed here will not enable NATO to respond effectively to the U.S. desire for a NATO role containing China, as the subsequent chapter will demonstrate.

CHAPTER 5 – OBSTACLES TO A NATO PIVOT TOWARDS CHINA

While the previous chapter laid out the capabilities and advantages that NATO can utilize in responding to the non-military security challenges posed by a rising China, this chapter will examine the very serious impediments that will prevent NATO from being able to take meaningful action towards containing China in line with U.S. desires. These impediments include fundamental differences in threat perception within the alliance concerning China, issues of trade interdependence and economic influence between key NATO states and China, and a strong Russia-China alliance which has maintained Russia as a real and credible threat to the alliance at the expense of other security priorities. Ultimately, these impediments will adversely affect the ability of the alliance to agree on and develop coherent policy towards China, undermining its ability to play a viable role in containing a rising China in line with U.S. desires.

Diverging Perceptions of Threat

One of the greatest impediments to the development of a coherent policy within the alliance concerning China are the differences in how the Chinese “threat” is perceived among the various member states and consequently, the degree to which a role for NATO is supported. These views are driven largely by how China is perceived and varies greatly between different members of the alliance. Political scientist Øystein Tunsjø points to the

differences in hard and soft power capabilities and differing strategic interests as the reason for divergent European and U.S. views concerning China.¹⁷³ While the U.S. views China as a strategic competitor, the European members to include Canada tend to see China as an economic challenge.¹⁷⁴ NATO as led by the secretary-general seems to have positioned itself between the two as it attempts to rationalize diverging points of view. Consequently, where the U.S. sees a NATO role concerning China, the European members and Canada remain less convinced, and NATO itself appears to be hedging towards a solution in line with U.S. desires. As specific policy can be difficult to discern, assessment of available public documents, policy statements, and public statements by leaders have been used to make determinations as to where the various components of the alliance fall. These perspectives are examined in detail below.

U.S. Perspectives

As has been described throughout this paper, U.S. views concerning China are quite clear. The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) reflects the hawkish position towards China held by many American policymakers. As a policy document guiding American security policy, it articulates a specific worldview in which China is viewed as a strategic competitor to U.S. interests, stating “China challenges American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity”.¹⁷⁵ The

¹⁷³ Øystein Tunsjø, "China's Rise: Towards a Division of Labor in Transatlantic Relations," in *Responding to China's Rise* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2014), 157.

¹⁷⁴ Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 139.

¹⁷⁵ Executive Office of the President, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Officer, 2017), 2.

implication of such a position is that China's power must be contained in order to preserve America's.

Starting with the Trump Administration, the U.S. has brought increasing pressure to bear on the alliance to begin to consider what role NATO might play in containing China. This campaign was initiated during the 2019 Munich Security Conference under then Vice-President Mike Pence who made remarks during this event outlining the U.S. position that ongoing trade disputes and security concerns related to Huawei were demonstrated the security threat posed by China.¹⁷⁶ In a one-on-one meeting with Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg during the 2019 London leaders conference, former President Trump made it clear that he saw a need for the alliance to begin to address China's military and economic power.¹⁷⁷ The new Biden administration appears poised to continue to rally support for an alliance role in containing China. During the 17 February 2021 NATO Defence Ministerial, U.S. Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin reiterated the U.S. position that China is among the security challenges faced by the alliance and that the U.S. sees a role for NATO in addressing an increasingly aggressive China.¹⁷⁸

As the U.S. advocates its position concerning China within the alliance, it is reasonable to assume that the U.S. would expect its views concerning the NATO security environment to be given preferential consideration as the U.S. representative to NATO is

¹⁷⁶ National Archives, "Remarks by Vice-President Pence at the 2019 Munich Security Conference," last accessed 2 March 2021, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-2019-munich-security-conference-munich-germany/>.

¹⁷⁷ National Archives, "Remarks by President Trump and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg after 1:1 Meeting," last accessed 2 March 2021, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-nato-secretary-general-jens-stoltenberg-bilateral-meeting/>.

¹⁷⁸ Department of Defense, "Austin Says Afghanistan, Iraq, China Among Topics at NATO Meeting," last modified 19 February 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2508740/austin-says-afghanistan-iraq-china-among-topics-at-nato-meeting/>.

voice of the opinions of the President. NATO, and consequently European security has been undeniably underwritten by U.S. military and financial power. In 2019 U.S. defence spending at \$685 billion (US) was double the amount spent by the other 29 members of the alliance at \$302 billion (US).¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, the U.S. also has significant numbers of forces deployed throughout European NATO countries (primarily in Germany, UK, Spain, Italy and Turkey), numbering approximately 61,000, and accounting for around 32% of all U.S. forces deployed internationally.¹⁸⁰

Under the Trump administration, the U.S. unilaterally announced a drawdown of U.S. forces within Europe out of frustration related to President Trump's perception that members of the alliance were not meeting agreed upon spending goals and were engaged in unequal burden sharing.¹⁸¹ As a consequence, under the Tump Administration the manner in which the U.S. viewed its relationship with NATO changed, driven by the perception that many NATO members had been taking advantage of U.S. security protection. Referring to NATO allies as a drain on U.S. resources, America's relationship with the alliance was seen by President Trump as something that need to be more transactional in nature rather than a mutually beneficial alliance based on likeminded nations.¹⁸² Under the current Biden administration, the U.S. has recommitted to a more productive working relationship with NATO, moving away from the transactional

¹⁷⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries 2013-2019* (NATO Press & Media, 2019).

¹⁸⁰ Pew Research Centre, "U.S. active-duty military presence overseas is at its smallest in decades," last modified 22 August 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/22/u-s-active-duty-military-presence-overseas-is-at-its-smallest-in-decades/>

¹⁸¹ BBC, "Trump approves plan to withdraw 9,500 US troops from Germany," last modified 1 July 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53248177>.

¹⁸² The Atlantic, "Trump Violates Diplomacy's Golden Rule at the NATO summit, the president publicly heaped abuse on America's closest friends," last modified 4 December 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/12/at-nato-summit-trump-abuses-americas-closest-friends/602959/>.

approach taken by previous administration. It has for example, suspended the withdrawal of soldiers from Germany and reiterated a commitment to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which had been called into question during the Trump administration.¹⁸³

There are likely to be high expectations within the alliance for a more cordial working relationship based on how the Biden administration has moved to repair relations with NATO. These moves should not be viewed however as a retreat from the U.S. position that NATO needs to play a role in containing China. It is notable that while the U.S. announced a “freeze” on the withdrawal of forces from Germany, this was done in the context of a “global force posture review” and not an outright reversal of policy.¹⁸⁴ As this review presumably could yet result in the redeployment of U.S. forces from Europe, it suggests that the U.S. intends to maintain some “stick” in its dealing with NATO in order to influence the alliance to address those security challenges its views as important, namely China. The threat of U.S. disengagement from NATO has proven an effective tool in advancing U.S. interests within the alliance. For example, President Trump was able to use the threat of U.S. disengagement to reach a new agreement concerning NATO’s operating budget.¹⁸⁵ Concerns over U.S. disengagement saw Estonia, Poland, and Romania all commit to exclude Chinese suppliers from involvement in their 5G infrastructure, a key objective of the U.S..¹⁸⁶ As Francois Heisbourg states,

¹⁸³ The White House, “Readout of President Joseph R. Biden, Jr Call with Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg of NATO,” last modified 26 January 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/01/26/readout-of-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-call-with-secretary-general-jens-stoltenberg-of-nato/>.

¹⁸⁴ The New York Times, “Biden Freezes Trump’s Withdrawal of 12,00 Troops from Germany,” accessed 2 March 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/04/us/politics/biden-germany-troops-trump.html>.

¹⁸⁵ BBC, “Trump: What does the US contribute to NATO in Europe,” last updated 20 July 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-44717074>.

¹⁸⁶ Janka Oertel, “V. NATO’s China Challenge,” *Whitehall Papers: Future NATO: Adapting to New Realities* 95, no. 1 (Jan 2, 2019): 78.

“America’s policy to its European allies will be increasingly shaped by U.S. perceptions of the role allies play in helping or hindering U.S. objectives towards China.”¹⁸⁷

European Perspectives

Among the European members of NATO and including Canada, there is no consensus on whether there is a role for the alliance to play concerning China. Unlike the U.S., whose position as a global hegemon is being challenged by the power of a rising China in both the military and economic domains, this is not the case for many of the NATO’s European members. As individual European countries and the European Union as a whole are regional powers, their views concerning the challenges posed by China are much narrower in scope than those of the U.S.. Holslag notes that from the perspective of NATO’s European members, “China has mostly posed an economic challenge, though it sometimes raises challenges to global governance, security and, very rarely, military concerns.”¹⁸⁸ Germany, France, Italy and Portugal for example, do not view China as a military threat but as an economic challenge.¹⁸⁹ As NATO is a security alliance, any view of China as solely an economic challenge places it outside the purview of NATO. The German government for example has been reluctant to endorse a NATO role concerning China and favours an approach to China based on avoidance of criticism and dialogue,

¹⁸⁷ François Heisbourg, "NATO 4.0: The Atlantic Alliance and the Rise of China," *Survival* 62, no. 2 (March 3, 2020): 90.

¹⁸⁸ Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 139.

¹⁸⁹ Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 144.

unwilling to upset its relationship with China.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, French President Emmanuel Macron has explicitly stated that he does not consider China to be NATO's enemy.¹⁹¹

As a litmus test, the Huawei/5G issue provides an important means of assessing the willingness of European alliance members to accede to U.S. demands in addressing perceived Chinese security challenges. The U.S. considers any involvement of the Chinese telecommunication provider Huawei in the building or provision of equipment to 5G infrastructure to be a security risk. This risk is primarily due to a Chinese law which mandates companies to “support, assist, and cooperate with state intelligence work” creating a risk of cyber espionage.¹⁹² Yet despite intense pressure from the U.S. for NATO members to ban Huawei outright from involvement in 5G infrastructure, many European NATO members have resisted doing so, including France, Germany Italy, Canada, Belgium, and the Czech Republic.¹⁹³ In addition to the large economic benefits 5G offers, many of these countries have significant trade relationships with China which would be adversely affected were they to ban Huawei.

The position of European alliance members and Canada can be considered hedging. Tunsjø, in writing on transatlantic relations within the context of China defines hedging as a strategy employed to allow a country to “remain reasonably well positioned regardless of future developments, preserving the number of options, preventing

¹⁹⁰ Noah Barkin, “Why post-Merkel Germany will Change its Tune on China,” *Politico*, 3 August 2020.

¹⁹¹ “*Macron Says Russia, China Not NATO Allies' Common Enemies -- Terrorism Is* (Washington: Federal Information & News Dispatch, LLC, 2019).

¹⁹² Council on Foreign Relations, “Huawei: China's Controversial Tech Giant,” accessed 2 March 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/huawei-chinas-controversial-tech-giant>.

¹⁹³ NATO Review, “NATO and the 5G challenge,” accessed 1 March 2021, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2020/09/30/nato-and-the-5g-challenge/index.html>.

opportunity costs, and attempting to preclude brinksmanship and conflict.”¹⁹⁴ Essentially this means that European alliance members and Canada, with some notable exceptions like the U.K., are unlikely to allow NATO to become decisively involved in containing China as it both increases the risk of conflict and potentially closes the door on future, largely economic, opportunities with China.¹⁹⁵

NATO Perspectives

Beyond the specific perspectives of the U.S. and European members, the evolving perspectives of the NATO institution are also an important factor which needs to be examined. While the alliance is composed of member states who provide political direction to the North Atlantic Council (NAC), as an institution, NATO, as led by the secretary-general has demonstrated an evolving view of the security challenges posed by China which position it somewhere between the U.S. and the European and Canadian members of the alliance. The NATO communique from the 2019 Leaders meeting referred to the need for NATO to “recognize that China’s growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance.”¹⁹⁶ Recent comments by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg describe “Beijing’s rising power as a defining issue [for the alliance], stating, “the rise of China is a defining issue for the [alliance] with potential consequences for our

¹⁹⁴ Øystein Tunsjø, "China's Rise: Towards a Division of Labor in Transatlantic Relations," in *Responding to China's Rise* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2014), 154.

¹⁹⁵ As the U.K. has left the EU, it has become more reliant on the U.S. Additionally, as a member of the Five-eye community it is more likely to be receptive to U.S. arguments concerning the threats posed by China.

¹⁹⁶ NATO, “London Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London, 3–4 December 2019,” last modified 4 December 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm.

security, our prosperity, and our way of life.”¹⁹⁷ Additionally, “NATO 2030: United for a New Era,” a report commissioned by the secretary-general to outline the future security challenges for the alliance in order to guide future discussions concerning a updating of the NATO’s Strategic Concept refers to China as a “full spectrum, systemic rival.”¹⁹⁸ The speed with which NATO (the institution) has moved to redefine its relationship with China, while certain to please the U.S., is equally certain to make the European members of the alliance extremely uncomfortable, as many do not consider China to be a full spectrum, systemic rival. The language is such that politically, any number of European countries will find it difficult to endorse a revised strategic concept that frames their relationship with China as one of competition and rivalry.

So What?

Having examined the U.S., European, and NATO perspectives, it is clear that there are significant differences between these groups on how China is viewed and ultimately whether there is a role for NATO concerning China. For the U.S., China represents a threat to its dominant position within the global order. For many of the alliance’s European members, China is only seen as an economic challenge and thus outside the purview of NATO. While NATO itself appears to be conceptually moving towards a position concerning China more in line with the U.S. than the rest of Europe, this is likely a result of pressure applied by the U.S. to review the alliances mandate and

¹⁹⁷ Reuters, “China’s rise to define transatlantic ties, NATO chief says,” last modified 19 February 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-security-nato-idUSKBN2AJ24G>.

¹⁹⁸North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era* (NATO Press & Media: 2020), 27.

strategic framework and is not an endorsed position from member states.¹⁹⁹ What is most important is that within the alliance there exists a lack of a common understanding concerning the perceived threat posed by China borne out by the different positions of various member states. This lack of a common agreed upon understanding will significantly impede any efforts within the alliance to formalize a role concerning China.

Trade (Inter)Dependence and economic influence

Directly connected to the issues of differing perception concerning the Chinese threat among different parts the alliance is the issue of trade interdependence. Writing on geoeconomics and foreign policy, political scientists Sören Scholvin and Mikael Wigell highlight how China as a rising power has been successful in creating dependent asymmetric trade relations that grant it political influence within other countries.²⁰⁰ Holslag uses the term “offensive economic statecraft” to describe China’s ability to create economic dependency, granting it influence that it can then use to achieve its strategic objectives.²⁰¹ Trade interdependence within the context of this paper can be understood as the degree of importance of a countries trade relationship with China and consequently the amount of power this grants China to influence policymaking within a given country based on the threat of trade action. The concept of trade interdependence is important to any assessment of NATO’s ability to play a meaningful role in containing China as those

¹⁹⁹ Janka Oertel, "V. NATO's China Challenge," *Whitehall Papers: Future NATO: Adapting to New Realities* 95, no. 1 (Jan 2, 2019): 78.

²⁰⁰ Sören Scholvin and Mikael Wigell, "Power Politics by Economic Means: Geoeconomics as an Analytical Approach and Foreign Policy Practice," *Comparative Strategy* 37, no. 1 (2018): 75.

²⁰¹ Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (Jul 3, 2019): 143.

NATO members with significant economic relationships with China will be unlikely to risk those relationships by endorsing such a role for NATO.

Within the alliance, the degree to which China has established its influence as a trade partner is significant. Seven NATO countries rest within the top ten locations for Chinese investment and trade within Europe and include the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, France, Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain.²⁰² Notably, Germany, France, Italy and Portugal remain resistant to the idea of a role for NATO concerning China.²⁰³ In his analysis of the security challenges posed by China to NATO, Major Adam Graham argues that the trade dependencies China has created with a number of key NATO countries has granted China the ability to influence domestic policy making and ultimately NATO policy. As evidence of this, Graham points to China's explicit threat to target the German automotive sector in response to any attempts to ban Huawei from its 5G networks as an example of China leveraging its trade dependency to secure its interests.²⁰⁴ As Germany has thus far elected not to ban Huawei despite legitimate security concerns linked to the company and pressure from the U.S. to do so, this suggests that Graham's conclusions are correct. A look at the 2018 trading data for the countries identified as being resistant to a role for NATO concerning China highlights the significant trade relationships that exist between these countries and China and thus why they would be unwilling to lend their support to a change in NATO policy that might

²⁰² BBC News, "How much of Europe does China Own?" last modified 20 April 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-47886902>.

²⁰³ Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 144.

²⁰⁴ Major Adam Graham, "A Rising China vs NATO" (Global Vortex paper, Canadian Forces College, 2020), 7-8.

affect their relationship with China. With overall trade percentages approaching 10%, this represents a significant dollar value within their respective economies.

Country	Exports to China	Total value of trade with China	% of overall trade
Germany	\$110.45 billion	\$237.2 billion	9.8%
France	\$24.6 billion	\$83.6 billion	8.95%
Italy	\$15.51 billion	\$52.02 billion	7.25%
Portugal	\$845.85 million	\$3.85 billion	3.14%

*all values in US dollars²⁰⁵

Germany is not the only NATO member which has chosen to protect its trade relationship with China. France also appears to be hedging its bets in order to balance its security and trade relationships. It has refused to ban Huawei, instead adopting a policy of preferring European suppliers in an effort to avoid potential repercussions to its relationship with China.²⁰⁶ Italy too has chosen to forgo an outright ban on Huawei and like France, is attempting to hedge between security and economic considerations related to China.²⁰⁷

Most recently, the E.U. and China reached an agreement in principle on the E.U. and China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI).²⁰⁸ Strongly backed by

²⁰⁵ World Integrated Trade Solution, “2018 Trading partner Data for Germany, France, Italy and Portugal,” accessed 25 April 2021, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/DEU/Year/LTST/TradeFlow/EXPIMP>

²⁰⁶ Associated Press, “France wont ban Huawei but favours European 5G systems,” last access 2 March 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/technology-business-europe-c01cd4d50b8fb29a8762120bc66bf697>.

²⁰⁷ Reuters, “Italy vetoes 5G deal between Fastweb and China's Huawei: sources,” last modified 23 October 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-huawei-italy-5g/italy-vetoes-5g-deal-between-fastweb-and-chinas-huawei-sources-idUKKBN2782A5>.

²⁰⁸ European Commission, “EU and China reach agreement in principle on investment,” last modified 30 December 2020, <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=2233>.

Germany, the CAI is intended to boost E.U. business relations with China. The manner in which it was quietly agreed upon in December 2020 during the transition between the Trump and Biden administrations has created controversy in the U.S. due to the lack of consultation. Among academics, the deal has generated a great deal of criticism. Philippe Le Corre of the Carnegie Endowment referred to the deal as “slap in the face of the transatlantic relationship” and Janka Oertel of the European Council of Foreign relations called the deal a “political victory for China.”²⁰⁹ That the E.U., led by Germany, continued to push forward with an agreement certain to create friction with the U.S. and impeded the development of coherent transatlantic economic policy towards China further demonstrates the power and allure that close economic relations with China hold in Europe, even if it comes at the expense of the long-standing transatlantic relationship.

Canada provides another example of a NATO member whose extensive trade relationship with China has influenced its policymaking. China is Canada’s second largest trading partner after the U.S., exporting around \$21.3 billion (US) in 2018, representing 12.6% of Canada’s trade.²¹⁰ Despite Canada’s close bilateral security relationship with the U.S., as well as its status as a member of the five-eye intelligence community, it remains the only five-eye member to have not outright banned Huawei. Given Canada status as a nation that is economically dependent on trade it is understandable that the Canadian government would seek to avoid upsetting its relationship with China despite increasing numbers of public statements from key

²⁰⁹ The New York Times, “Will the Sudden E.U.-China Deal Damage Relations with Biden,” last accessed 18 January 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/06/world/europe/eu-china-deal-biden.html>.

²¹⁰ World Integrated Trade Solution, “Canada trade balance, exports and imports by country and region 2018,” accessed 25 April 2021, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/CAN/Year/2018/TradeFlow/EXPIMP>.

security personalities like the Chief of the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) that China represents a strategic threat.²¹¹

Notably, in 2019 Italy became the first NATO member to endorse China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), despite opposition from both the E.U. and U.S..²¹² The BRI is a massive infrastructure project stretching from Asia to Europe and is intended to develop new export markets and provide investment opportunities for China.²¹³ A draft report by the Economic and Security Committee (ESC) of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly identified the BRI as a vehicle to "increase economic and strategic dependence on China."²¹⁴ The U.S. in particular views the BRI as a challenge to the existing U.S. led economic and political order that is designed to reduce U.S. global influence.²¹⁵ There is significant concern that certain NATO countries, like Italy with poor performing economies are more likely to fall into economic dependence with China through initiatives like the BRI.²¹⁶ This is particularly true of former Soviet satellite states who have since become NATO members like the Baltic States, Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia. China has been actively courting these countries through the 17+1 framework in order to promote investment and business opportunities as part of the BRI initiative.²¹⁷

²¹¹ The Global and Mail, "Canadian spy chief calls China strategic threat," accessed 10 February 2021, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-canadian-spy-chief-calls-china-strategic-threat/>.

²¹² Erhan Akdemir, "Chinese Strategy Towards Europe: The Belt and Road Initiative and 17 + 1 Strategy – what does it Mean for the EU and Central and Eastern Europe?" *Studia Europejskie (Warszawa)* 24, no. 2 (2020): 135.

²¹³ Council on Foreign Relations, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative," last accessed 19 April 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>.

²¹⁴ NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Economics and Security Committee, *China's Belt and Road Initiative: A Strategic and Economic Assessment* (NPA: 15 Oct 2020), 4.

²¹⁵ Amit Gupta, "Global Strike vs. Globalization: The US-China Rivalry and the BRI," in *The Belt and Road Initiative*, (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 58-59.

²¹⁶ NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Economics and Security Committee, *China's Belt and Road Initiative: A Strategic and Economic Assessment* (NPA: 15 Oct 2020), 4.

²¹⁷ Erhan Akdemir, "Chinese Strategy Towards Europe: The Belt and Road Initiative and 17 + 1 Strategy – what does it Mean for the EU and Central and Eastern Europe?" *Studia Europejskie (Warszawa)* 24, no. 2 (2020): 136.

That these countries might be attracted to Chinese investment and trade to boost their economies represents a significant weakness for the alliance as it opens the door to increased Chinese economic and political influence. The fundamental concern is that initiatives like the BRI will allow China, as political scientist Erhan Akdemir states in his analysis of China's BRI strategy for Europe, to "divide and rule."²¹⁸ If NATO members are brought into China's orbit through projects like the BRI this will strengthen China's political and economic influence as the expense of alliance cohesion. As political scientist Amit Gupta of the U.S. Air War College points out, "greater trade and infrastructure links with the Chinese will lead to higher levels of interdependency that will loosen the traditional Western alliance system."²¹⁹ Despite these concerns, dissuading countries, and in particular NATO members from participating in the BRI will be difficult for Washington as there is no U.S.-led alternative to the project on offer to compete with China.²²⁰

While China has cultivated close economic ties with many NATO members, it has also demonstrated its willingness to use its influence and flex its economic muscle to protect its strategic interests. In response to the arrest and ongoing extradition trail at the request of the U.S., of Huawei Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Meng Wanzhou, China imposed restrictions on imports of Canadian pork and canola in 2019.²²¹ There is no doubt that China viewed her arrest as an assault against the one of its flagship brands by a proxy of the U.S. and responded accordingly to send a clear message that it had the

²¹⁸ Ibid, 136.

²¹⁹ Amit Gupta, "Global Strike vs. Globalization: The US-China Rivalry and the BRI," in *The Belt and Road Initiative*, (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 58.

²²⁰ Ibid, 59.

²²¹ Tom Alton, *Canada-China Trade: 2019 Year in Review* (University of Alberta: Springer International Publishing, 2018).

power to damage the Canadian economy. The aforementioned example of China's explicit threat to target German automotive exports, which account for 25% of Germany's exports to China, in response to a potential Huawei ban, further underlines the willingness of China to use its influence to protect its interests.²²² China willingness to use its economic influence to target those perceived to be working against its interests is not likely to be lost on those NATO countries with significant trade relationships with China. This means that member states are not likely to support any NATO pivot to China that might be interpreted by China as an attack on its strategic interests thereby damaging important trade relationships or potentially risking a negative response from China. Given the non-military nature of China's perceived threat to NATO, any attempt by NATO to assume a role in containing China is almost certain to involve a response that touches on the economic relationships between China and NATO's member states. As China considers the protection of its overseas interests to be a key objective of its foreign policy, this is certain to be viewed with hostility by China.²²³

China-Russian Relations – A complicating factor for NATO

In addition to differences in threat perception concerning China and trade dependence issues, close China-Russia relations form another obstacle to NATO's ability to pivot to China in line with U.S. desires. With bilateral relations between these two

²²² Trading Economics, "Germany exports to China," accessed 3 March 2021, <https://tradingeconomics.com/germany/exports/china>.

²²³ Guoli Liu, *China Rising: Chinese Foreign Policy in a Changing World* (London; New York, NY: Palgrave, 2017), 10.

countries normalizing in 2008, the Sino-Russian relationship has grown rapidly in both the military and economic domains. Within the military domain, improved relations have allowed both China and Russia to redeploy military forces that had previously been positioned along their shared border.²²⁴ Starting in 2003, China and Russia have engaged in a regular series of exercises aimed at improving their interoperability.²²⁵ Additionally, improved relations led to the 2015 resumption of Russian arms sales to China valued at \$5 billion (US) dollars.²²⁶

Economically, both China and Russia are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Founded in 2001, the SCO was established to facilitate smoother trade among its member states while also fostering security cooperation.²²⁷ Beyond membership in the SCO, their bilateral trade relationship is quite significant and was worth \$110 billion (US) in 2019.²²⁸ Importantly, China also took steps to support Russia economically in the aftermath of its 2014 seizure of the Crimea, which helped reduced the overall impact of Western sanctions.²²⁹

There are a number of important implications that stem from close Sino-Russian relations that impact the ability of the alliance play a meaningful role concerning China.

²²⁴ Paul N. Schwartz, "The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations," in *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 99.

²²⁵ Paul J. Bolt and Sharyl N. Cross, *China, Russia, and Twenty-First Century Global Geopolitics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2018), 122.

²²⁶ Paul N. Schwartz, "The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations," in *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 93.

²²⁷ Alexander Cooley, "Tending the Eurasian Garden: Russia, China and the Dynamics of Regional Integration and Order," in *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 117.

²²⁸ Russia Briefing, "Russia-China Bilateral Trade Hit US\$110 Billion in 2019 – What is China Buying," last modified 14 January 2020, <https://www.russia-briefing.com/news/russia-china-bilateral-trade-hit-us-110-billion-2019-china-buying.html/>.

²²⁹ Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 141.

First, the redeployment of Russian military forces from its border with China towards the West has increased the perception of Russia's threat to NATO within the alliance.²³⁰ Furthermore, China's economic support to Russia in the face of sanctions enabled it to continue its program of military modernization and thereby continue to exert pressure on NATO.²³¹ Consequently, for many NATO members, and particularly those countries who share a border with Russia, Russia remains their foremost threat and principle focus. Russia's actions have continued to reinforce this perception. Its recent buildup of thousands of forces along the Ukraine border in April 2021 created deep concern within NATO with the secretary-general calling Russia's activities "unjustified, unexplained, and deeply concerning," while calling on Russia to "stop its provocations."²³²

There is likely to be legitimate concern among alliance members that U.S. efforts to create a role for NATO concerning China will only serve to distract focus and attention away from the more immediate and real military threat posed by Russia. Thus, any move which is perceived to detract from this focus or is perceived to dilute the alliances ability to respond to Russian aggression is certain to receive at best, a lukewarm response. As Graham notes, China's support to Russia has kept "NATO's eye firmly fixed on the Russian threat at a time when there is growing pressure for the US to address the growing power and influence of China."²³³

²³⁰ Paul N. Schwartz, "The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations," in *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 99.

²³¹ Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 141.

²³² NATO, "Joint press point by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Foreign Minister of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba," last updated 12 April 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_183016.htm.

²³³ Major Adam Graham, "A Rising China vs NATO" (Global Vortex paper, Canadian Forces College, 2020), 14.

Summary

Despite a U.S. desire for NATO to assume a role in containing China, the obstacles outlined in this chapter make it unlikely that NATO will be capable of doing so in a meaningful way. Differences in threat perception between the U.S. and European members of the alliance will create significant barriers to the development of coherent NATO policy concerning China. The U.S. sees China as a strategic competitor, both military and economically while most of the European members of NATO view China as an economic challenge. Furthermore, China's success in cultivating significant trade relationships with various alliance members has both given it a degree of influence in shaping the domestic policies of these countries making it less likely that they will seek to risk their economic relations with China by supporting a shift in NATO that could be perceived as targeting Chinese interests. Finally, close Russia-China relations have allowed Russia to maintain its status as the principle threat to NATO in the minds of many members of the alliance, making it unlikely that anything perceived as detracting from NATO's primary focus on Russia will garner the necessary support among European member states.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

China's rise over the last 30-40 years has been an unprecedented period of growth during which China has advanced rapidly to achieve its current status as a global power. China's entry into the WTO in 2001 set the conditions for Chinese economic leaders to transform China's economy, turning the country into a manufacturing powerhouse

accounting for almost 30% of global output.²³⁴ Fueled by its massive manufacturing capacity and global trade relationships, China now has the world's largest economy, having surpassed the U.S.. This rapid economic growth has in turn allowed China's government to modernize the Chinese military, which the U.S. Department of Defence now recognizes as being capable of challenging U.S. military dominance in Asia-Pacific trending towards parity and potentially, regional superiority. China's actions in the South China Sea, such as the construction of artificial islands and the use of its military to enforce its "territorial claims" with the region exemplify this challenge to U.S. power that has been made possible by China's rapidly developing military capabilities, underwritten by its economic growth.

China's rise has set the conditions for strategic competition with the U.S. as China is positioned to challenge U.S. hegemony within the global order. Consequently, U.S. policymakers view China as a strategic competitor both militarily in Asia-Pacific and globally economically. In line with the approach advocated by Aaron Friedburg, the U.S. has moved towards a policy of containment concerning China in an effort to limit the expansion of Chinese influence. As part of this containment strategy, the U.S. is seeking to mobilize NATO. U.S. advocacy for a NATO role in its containment policy should be viewed as attempts to maximize its ability to contain the expansion of Chinese power and influence.

In order to assess NATO's actual capacity to assume such a containment role, this paper has drawn from a number of sources. These sources include relevant NATO and

²³⁴ Statista, "China is the World's Manufacturing Superpower," last updated 18 February 2020, <https://www.statista.com/chart/20858/top-10-countries-by-share-of-global-manufacturing-output/>

U.S. policy documents, public statements made by key U.S., NATO, and European policymakers, analysis of trade statistics and economic relationships, and the arguments put forth by important American and European academics who have written on the subject of China and NATO.

In assessing NATO's capability to assume a role concerning China we have examined the structural capabilities and motivators that are available to NATO and can be drawn upon to enable the alliance to respond to the security challenge of a rising China. Specifically, NATO possesses a decision-making structure that it can utilize to develop and implement policy in a manner that does not require the unanimity of all members, only the absence of formalized disagreement. As there is no consensus among NATO member states concerning a pivot towards China, highlighted by the relative positions of the U.S. who see a role for NATO and key European members like France and Germany, who do not, this is a useful mechanism to advance policy development without requiring unanimity of all 30-member states. In how NATO might move to address the non-military security challenges posed by China, its foray into energy security provides a road map to follow. The inclusion of energy security into the 2010 NATO mandate demonstrated that the alliance was capable of moving beyond a traditional hard power military focus to adopt a more comprehensive view of security. This is important as responding to the non-military threat posed by China would require a NATO move into areas like economic security. Finally, as indications are that the U.S. will continue to maintain a hawkish approach to China, NATO can expect continued U.S. pressure to begin looking at what role it might play in countering China's influence,

providing a degree of momentum to this endeavor given the overall influence of the U.S. within NATO.

Despite the capabilities NATO might take advantage of, there are significant obstacles standing in the way of NATO being capable of assuming a meaningful role concerning China. Differences in threat perception between the U.S. and European members of the alliance have created significant barriers to the development of coherent NATO policy concerning China. The U.S. sees China as a strategic competitor, both military and economically while most of the European members of NATO, as Jonathan Holslag points out, view China primarily as an economic challenge.²³⁵ According to Soren Scholvin and Mikael Wigell, China has been successful in cultivating economic relationships with different countries that have granted it political influence.²³⁶ In the case of NATO, China's economic relationship with various alliance members has given it a degree of influence in shaping the international policies of these countries as demonstrated by the continued refusal of key member states to ban Huawei despite U.S. pressure to do so. This influence makes it unlikely that these alliance members will seek to disrupt their economic relations with China by supporting a shift in NATO policy that could be perceived as targeting Chinese interests. Finally, close Russia-China relations has maintained Russia as the principle threat in the minds of many of NATO's European members who remain focused on regional security. This regional security focus makes it unlikely that anything perceived as detracting from NATO's focus on Russia will garner the necessary support among member states. These are significant political obstacles that

²³⁵ Jonathan Holslag, "China, NATO, and the Pitfall of Empty Engagement," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 139.

²³⁶ Sören Scholvin and Mikael Wigell, "Power Politics by Economic Means: Geoeconomics as an Analytical Approach and Foreign Policy Practice," *Comparative Strategy* 37, no. 1 (2018): 75.

must be overcome in order for the alliance to play any meaningful role concerning China and largely negate any of the available capabilities the alliance has to act at this time.

U.S. political pressure, exemplified by the repeated statements of key U.S. government officials has not succeeded in convincing many leading figures of NATO's European member states to reduce their economic relationships with China and therefore its influence. Nor has the U.S. been successful in convincing all NATO members to ban Huawei. While NATO has begun framing China as a threat to the alliance, this is a view not universally held by the alliance's member states who tend to view China through an economic lens rather than a security one. This makes it unlikely approval will be given for a new Strategic Concept that specifically targets China, a necessary step to developing a NATO role in Washington's containment of Chinese political and economic influence. Consequently, NATO will not, for the near future, be capable of playing any meaningful role as part of a U.S. containment strategy towards China.

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