

# per Concordiam

*Journal of European Security and Defense Issues*

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The CCP's approach in Europe

■ **RETHINKING CHINA RELATIONS**

Enabling of Russia's war sours Europe

■ **TENSIONS OVER TAIWAN**

Potential conflict threatens global security

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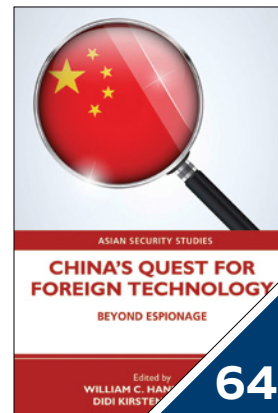
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## Book Review



### China's Quest for Foreign Technology: Beyond Espionage

Edited by: **William C. Hannas** and **Didi Kirsten Tatlow**

Reviewed by: **Joseph Vann**, per Concordiam contributor

The 2021 collection of essays on China is more relevant than ever for the West and its policymakers, security professionals and business leaders.

## On the Cover



China's efforts to wield influence in Europe and around the world are now meeting greater vigilance.

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*per Concordiam*, a U.S. European Command publication in coordination with the George C. Marshall European Center for European Studies

*Welcome* to the 49th edition of *per Concordiam*. This edition takes another look at China's economic and political influence in Europe and around the world. Two years ago, this journal published a well-received edition examining China's European strategy. This issue updates readers on China's evolving goals, explores how recent global developments have affected its strategies and what can be expected from Beijing.

U.S. European Command Deputy Director of Plans and Operations, Brig. Gen. James Cleet, leads off with a look at how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) views strategic competition and how, in partnership with Russia and other authoritarian governments, it hopes to overturn the liberal, rules-based world order and replace it with one more favorable to its global ambitions. We also see how the Large Scale Global Exercise 2024, a cumulation of 30 different exercises conducted worldwide, aimed to defend that rules-based order.

In more detailed analyses, Theresa Fallon lays out how the CCP uses its United Front system to influence European policy and thought leaders. Dr. Valbona Zeneli digs deeply into Europe-China relations and considers how Europe can "de-risk" its economic ties with China without jeopardizing the benefits of trade. Narantsatsral Enkhbat looks at China's emerging strategic partnership with Russia and how China aims to use that relationship to project power and advance its interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Kerry Gershaneck looks at how the CCP employs political warfare to pursue its geopolitical and hegemonic ambitions.

Also, Sardar Ali Haidar examines how a potential conflict in the Taiwan Strait would affect the security and economy of the entire world, and why Europe should use all levers available to prevent armed conflict from breaking out in the region. Mark Stiefbold and Dr. Rod Stiefbold examine how China is uniquely positioned to affect stability in Egypt through trade, which indirectly impacts European security. William Hagestad takes a deep dive into DIME (diplomacy, information, military and economics) analysis of Chinese economic and political policy goals in Europe and internationally, and into potential Western policy responses. Finally, an article previously published in *Indo-Pacific Defense Forum* magazine looks at how the CCP has used clandestine "overseas police stations" to track and harass Chinese dissidents living abroad.

As Brig. Gen. Cleet points out in the opening article, "Once-optimistic outlooks on Europe's business relations with China have become guarded, and for good reason." Close economic ties do not guarantee conflict-free geopolitical relations, as many had hoped. Recent geopolitical events, especially Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, have opened eyes to the dangers of strategic impassivity regarding potential geopolitical rivals. China's increasingly aggressive tone toward Taiwan and actions on its periphery, along with China and Russia's proclaimed "friendship without limits," should leave no doubts among Western allies and partners of what's at stake for the liberal, rules-based international order. Lost optimism aside, a clear vision of China's motives and ambitions will help promote a peaceful and prosperous world.

This issue provides key insights on China's evolving role in Europe and the world, and how the Western allies and international partners can prepare and respond to China's actions.

Sincerely,

**Barre R. Seguin**  
Director



## Barre R. Seguin

**Director**

**George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies**

**Barre R. Seguin** retired from the U.S. Air Force as a major general in October 2020 after more than 31 years of active service. His last assignment was as the Deputy Chief of Staff, Strategic Employment, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, Belgium. He entered active duty in 1989 as a distinguished graduate of the Reserve Officer Training Corps after graduating from the State University of New York at Potsdam. His flying assignments included serving as a flight examiner, instructor pilot, wing chief of safety and operations officer, with commands at the squadron, group, wing, and Air and Space Expeditionary Task Force levels. His command and staff positions included Commander, 9th Air and Space Expeditionary Task Force-Afghanistan and the NATO Air Command-Afghanistan, Kabul, Afghanistan; Director, Strategy, Engagement, and Programs, U.S. Africa Command, Stuttgart, Germany; Commander, 31st Fighter Wing, Aviano Air Base, Italy; and Inspector General, Headquarters Air Combat Command.

## *Marshall Center*

The George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies is a German-American partnership founded in 1993. The center promotes dialogue and understanding between European, Eurasian, North American and other nations. The theme of its resident courses and outreach events: Most 21st century security challenges require international, interagency and interdisciplinary response and cooperation.





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**China's European Strategy**

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# CHINA PLAYS THE LONG GAME IN EUROPE

## Countering Beijing's strategic efforts

By **Brig. Gen. James D. Cleet**, deputy director, U.S. European Command Plans and Operations Directorate

**F**ormer U.S. Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense and U.S. Army Chief of Staff Gen. George C. Marshall once said, “We have walked blindly, ignoring the lessons of the past, with ... the tragic consequences of two world wars and the Korean struggle as a result.” Marshall was addressing the dangers of failing to recognize strategic imperatives in the mid-20th century, a lesson equally relevant today given the malign actions of China and Russia.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping announced a “no-limits friendship” between their countries in 2022 that Xi stated is driving changes not seen for 100 years. Beijing has partnered with Moscow, not only offering diplomatic and economic support for Putin’s unjust war against Ukraine, but also joining with Russia and other autocratic powers seeking to undermine the world’s rules-based order in favor of a system more amenable to their authoritarianism.

Russia’s repeated violations of national sovereignty and its unprovoked war in Ukraine pose the most significant threat to Europe and NATO since the Cold War. This should be a wake-up call. Moscow’s upending of the European security framework undermines European unity and international institutions, emboldens authoritarians, terrorists and their backers and apologists, and threatens global freedom and security.

However, Russia is not Europe’s only security concern. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) continues to

increase its malign influence and expand its access in Europe, creating regional instability and exacerbating the Russian threat. Beijing’s diplomatic and materiel support of Russia’s war is detrimental to European peace and security. China has been critical to propping up Russia’s economy through aid and energy imports.

Beijing and Moscow have deepened defense cooperation and interoperability, including joint maritime and air patrols. Beijing is also supporting Moscow’s military buildup in Ukraine with technical assistance. At the same time, the PRC engages in actions to undermine trust in Europe’s democratic institutions and amplifies Russian disinformation, especially on Ukraine, often parroting Russian talking points.

Russia is deepening ties not only with the PRC, but also with Iran and North Korea. The increasing alignment of authoritarian powers, which persistently aim to undermine Allied cohesion and Western values, is a chronic and growing

threat to European and global security. This threat underlines the importance of building a sustainable global partnership of free nations to include not just NATO and Asian allies, but also democracies in Africa and Latin America.

### China and strategic competition

Over the past 30 years, China has steadily evolved into a top-tier strategic competitor both economically and militarily, and its integration into world markets has been truly remarkable. The CCP is committed to engaging in strategic



Brig. Gen. James D. Cleet, U.S. Air Force  
U.S. AIR FORCE





competition in Europe, where it attempts to threaten enduring NATO and partner interests through foreign direct investment (FDI), government-backed business ventures and infrastructure deals, and tries to influence academic and cultural institutions. During what seemed in the West to be an interlude from strategic competition — while we were focused on fighting terrorism — the CCP was strategizing, and China became richer and stronger.

In recent years, once-optimistic outlooks on Europe's business relations with China have become guarded, and for good reason. Russia's invasion of Ukraine clearly demonstrates the danger of underestimating a strategic competitor with European ambitions. The CCP views strategic competition as a multipronged effort. China's engagement in Europe is layered across the spectrum, from investments in university research to the wholesale purchase of small- and medium-sized enterprises. The CCP would as soon acquire technology — either by buying it or outright stealing it — than invest in its development. These acquisitions aim to secure the intellectual property the CCP needs to support its long-term strategic goals and advance the PRC's defense industries and technology base.

The PRC is working to increase its economic, political and cultural influence in Europe. China implemented an aggressive diplomatic approach to intimidate rivals and undermine their institutions and credibility. Beijing has also invested heavily in efforts to influence academic, cultural and political elites, especially in countries with weaker institutions and more fragile civil societies.

Rather than deal with the European Union as a whole, Beijing prefers to pursue bilateral engagement through

The Chinese tanker Sun Arrows loads a cargo of liquefied natural gas in the port of Prigorodnoye, Russia. Chinese economic and political support has helped Russia prosecute its war against Ukraine. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PRC-led forums, such as the Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, or 14+1 Cooperation Framework, and the related, global One Belt, One Road program (now renamed the Belt and Road Initiative). These activities have created dependencies on Beijing, giving it leverage among U.S. Allies and partners.

Of particular concern are PRC investments in European ports, transportation hubs, communications networks and other critical infrastructure, which can provide dual-use functions. For example, Chinese state-owned companies have majority stakes in the Port of Piraeus in Greece and the Port of Zeebrugge in Belgium, and significant shares in at least a dozen other ports and container shipping terminals throughout Europe. Many of these ports are located close to NATO naval bases or are used by NATO's logistics networks. Chinese companies are heavily invested in European grid infrastructure and energy development, and are partnered with European companies in mining, oil exploration and more. China is also building a new railroad from Budapest, Hungary, to Belgrade, Serbia. Chinese control of such critical European infrastructure could negatively affect NATO mobilization efforts, hinder communication and threaten energy supplies in a crisis.

China uses both legal and illegal means to gain advantage in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, advanced robotics, quantum research, directed energy and



**CHINA IS NOT A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY, NOR ONE THAT ADHERES TO THE RULES OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER. THE CCP CONTROLS THE INTERNET, BUSINESSES AND THE MEDIA; SUPPRESSES FREEDOM OF SPEECH; RIDES ROUGHSHOD OVER ITS OWN PEOPLE; AND THREATENS ITS NEIGHBORS.**

hypersonic systems. To increase wide adoption of Chinese-developed technology, Beijing is pushing for international acceptance of its national technology standards. Huawei's 5G network, which China has pushed to be adopted throughout Europe, is an example of one such government-backed enterprise. It enables the PRC to exploit intellectual property, sensitive information, technology and private personal information, which poses significant security risks for NATO members and partners.

lifting millions out of poverty. However, the CCP never adopted nor adhered to the rules of the system from which China so greatly benefited. Instead, it touted the economic gains and improved standard of living as proof of its own hybrid authoritarian/market system and used this success to further legitimize its grip on power.

China is not a democratic country, nor one that adheres to the rules of the liberal international order. The CCP controls the internet, businesses and the media; suppresses freedom of speech; rides roughshod over its own people; and threatens its neighbors. Having honed the suppression of dissent and freedom at home, the CCP does not hesitate to employ the same methods abroad, whenever and wherever it can. The PRC has a proven history of intellectual property theft using pressured economic leverage, and through cyberattacks and industrial espionage. Repression of dissent in China also creates an echo-chamber effect, limiting opposing viewpoints and hampering CCP Chairman Xi Jinping's and other party leaders' abilities to understand Western actions. This is what China expert Susan Shirk called the "dictator trap" in an October 2022 op-ed for *The New York Times*. Fealty becomes "more important than competence," she wrote, "and subordinates compete to prove their loyalty by carrying out ... policies to the extreme rather than raising harsh truths about negative consequences."



A truck hauling a container leaves Pier VII at the new port in Trieste, Italy, in 2019. Chinese infrastructure investment in Europe and elsewhere increases Beijing's political and economic influence. GETTY IMAGES

### Rules-based world order

While China's rapid economic advancement is notable, it was made possible by a supportive, rules-based international system. Western governments and institutions supported China's inclusion into the World Trade Organization (WTO), hoping the rewards of free and open trade would inspire Beijing to adopt the principles of the system and become a contributing member. Unfortunately, the CCP was not convinced. WTO membership facilitated the PRC's rise, boosting its greater-than-tenfold economic growth and

### The watchword is vigilance

China's conduct — in Europe and toward its neighbors in Asia — deserves as much concern and attention as is currently being given to Russia's. Through its tacit support for Russia, before and after the invasion of Ukraine, Beijing has made it clear it values its strategic relationship with Moscow more than its relationships within Europe. Europe must therefore reassess those relationships as well.

The EU and China remain important trade partners. China's economy is export-driven, and the EU is an





invaluable, mature market for Chinese goods. The EU is taking important measures to reduce risk and counter malign Chinese influence. In 2023, Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton called on EU member states and telecoms operators to exclude equipment from Huawei and fellow Chinese telecom company ZTE from their mobile networks, calling it “too critical a vulnerability and too serious a risk to our common security.”

More extensively, the European Commission disclosed its new Economic Security Package in January, giving it increased oversight of Chinese FDI in the EU and export controls over potential dual-use technologies, especially in highly sensitive technology sectors. The new measures also encourage enhanced research security. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen refers to it as a much-needed “de-risking” of economic relations with the PRC. The measures aim to prevent Europe from becoming overly reliant on Chinese green-energy technology and critical raw materials in the same way it has been on Russian energy.

The democratic, rules-based international order is under threat from China, Russia and others. We must assess and address these threats pragmatically and with a long-term focus. Western democratic values have guided the global economy and the liberal market system, and have lifted more people out of poverty over the course of a few generations than any other system, and at any other time, in recorded history.

When it comes to China and its relationship with Europe, we must avoid the trap of projecting our cognitive biases onto an adversary. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is a glaring recent example of how such bias can result in a failure to fully understand an adversary’s motivations.

Pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong formed human chains across the city on New Year’s Eve 2019. Hopes that economic growth in China, fostered by trade and openness, would lead to democratic political reform in the country went unrealized. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The lessons learned from Russia’s aggression and disregard for international norms are valuable only if they are truly learned and applied to other global challenges — especially in the context of understanding Beijing’s strategic interests.

When it comes to Europe’s relationship with China, we must be careful to not let optimism or pessimism warp our analyses. China remains an important economic partner and will continue to play a major role in the world. Strategic competition, by its nature, is complicated. Disruptive activities take time to manifest, and clarity is not easily achieved. Most importantly, we need to appreciate that military power is just one facet of strategic competition.

Beijing must understand it needs Europe and the West at least as much as Europe and the West need China. China cannot be allowed to support Russian aggression, violate international law in the South China Sea, infringe upon the human rights of its citizens and threaten the territorial sovereignty of its neighbors, and still expect to enjoy the full benefits of an international order that is based on rules by which Beijing refuses to be bound. It cannot have it both ways.

Russia surprised many in the West with its unprovoked invasions of Ukraine, first in 2014 and again in 2022, clearly demonstrating its blatant disregard for international norms, a disregard shared by China. It is a strategic imperative to view China through clear eyes. □



# SMOKELESS WAR AND MIRRORS



PER CONCORDIAM ILLUSTRATION



# China seeks to undermine democracy, acquire new technology and quash dissent

By **Theresa Fallon**, director, Centre for Russia Europe Asia Studies

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**S**hi Pei Pu was a Beijing opera singer and spy whose perplexing liaison with French diplomat Bernard Boursicot was one of the odder cases of espionage and inspired a Broadway play. Their trysts were always in the dark, which Boursicot attributed to Chinese modesty. Shi, who was a man posing as a woman, even presented a child, whom he claimed was their offspring. This ruse was designed to coax Boursicot to continue to pass French embassy documents to officials of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Boursicot's 20-year affair with Shi started in 1964. When he learned in 1983 that Shi was a man, Boursicot sliced his throat with a razor blade while in prison in a failed attempt to take his life. The record does not indicate if this was the first time a French official should have been less naive about the Peoples Republic of China (PRC), but the tradition continues.

Although almost all nation-states spy and seek influence, the scope and intensity of the PRC's activities are overwhelming both in the United States and in Europe. FBI Director Christopher Wray testified before a U.S. Senate panel in 2021 that his agency opened a new China-related counterintelligence investigation in the U.S. every 12 hours on average, and that it had more than 2,000 such cases. Smaller intelligence services in Europe are confronted with a rising tide of influence cases and lack the language and regional expertise needed to effectively respond.

In the post-Cold War period, the PRC was not perceived as a threat because of the "end of history" mindset that asserted free-market economics would inevitably lead to democratization. In Germany, *Wandel durch Handel* — "change through trade" — was first used to describe the country's trade approach toward Russia and then was repurposed for the PRC. What it did not anticipate was that increased trade with authoritarian regimes would introduce dangerous dependence and import corruption as well. Business interests and financiers lobbied on behalf of Beijing and eventually the PRC entered the World Trade Organization, which turbocharged its economy.

Belgium, which is home to NATO headquarters and most EU institutions, is a prime PRC influence target. Even though the Belgian State Security Service (VSSE) has increased the



Bernard Boursicot shares the defendant's box with Shi Pei Pu at the opening of their 1986 espionage trial in Paris. In 1982, Boursicot, a French diplomat, was arrested for passing intelligence information from France's embassy in Beijing to Shi. Their long relationship inspired the play "M. Butterfly." AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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number of its staff to about 1,000, it continues to be challenged in monitoring ever-expanding foreign interference operations, especially from China and Russia. Compare this number with the PRC's Ministry of State Security (MSS) department in Zhejiang, their center for European operations, with an estimated 5,000 intelligence officers.

At the time of this writing, the latest case concerned a Chinese aide to Maximilian Krah, a member of the European Parliament from the far-right Alternative for Germany party. The aide, Guo Jian, was arrested by German police on charges that he had been passing information about the European Parliament's deliberations to China for years. He was also thought to be monitoring the Chinese diaspora community in Dresden. Such activities are often the work of the CCP United Front Work Department (UFWD).

## UNITED FRONT WORK

United Front is a particular mix of engagement, intelligence operations and influence activities. The CCP uses these levers in its attempts to influence other countries' policies toward the PRC, drive wedges into Europe and gain access to advanced foreign technology. United Front is often combined with intelligence and other foreign interference.

The concept of “united front” was launched by the Third Communist International in Europe in 1921 and later exported to China, where it took on a life of its own. In 1939, Mao Zedong called it one of the three “magic weapons” for defeating the rival Kuomintang (the other two weapons being the party itself and the People’s Liberation Army). United front essentially means enlisting as many social actors as possible to pursue the interests of the CCP, both at home and abroad. The actors enlisted to work in the interest of the party are mainly Chinese citizens or people of Chinese origin.

The Party Central Committee established the UFWD in 1942. The Cultural Revolution shut it down and Deng Xiaoping reopened it in 1979. Xi Jinping strengthened the department through an internal reorganization of the party

apparatus from 2015 to 2018. Xi also established a Central United Front Work Leading Small Group of senior party figures to coordinate the work of agencies active in this area.

Of the department’s 12 bureaus, most have a domestic focus, but one concerns Hong Kong and Taiwan, and two concern overseas Chinese. People of Chinese origin who live abroad usually maintain links with their home country and draw their information from PRC media that reflect the vision of the CCP. In some cases, the PRC bought Chinese-language media outlets in Europe. This makes it easier for the UFWD to recruit overseas Chinese as agents.

The UFWD works for the long term, even though its future returns may be uneven and unpredictable. The party’s agents of influence seek incremental changes over time that shift the strategic landscape without others even noticing. The goal is that investment in influence activities will reap dividends over time. Some of the tools used by the department to co-opt individuals and spread the CCP’s influence abroad are associations of the Chinese diaspora in Europe, chambers of commerce and other business associations. Authorities in Europe have awakened to the threats posed by United Front to social cohesion and democratic politics, and to the risk that it facilitates espionage.



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United Kingdom national security service MI5 named Christine Ching Kui Lee as a suspected Chinese agent. A 2022 security alert to members of Parliament warned that Lee had been “active in the British Parliament,” had acted covertly with the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party and was involved in political interference. REUTERS







For instance, in January 2022, the United Kingdom’s domestic counterintelligence agency MI5 issued an “interference alert” on Chinese-born U.K. subject Christine Ching Kui Lee, who “knowingly engaged in political-interference activities on behalf of the United Front Work Department (UFWD) of the Chinese Communist party.” It warned that the UFWD was “seeking to covertly interfere in U.K. politics through establishing links with established and aspiring parliamentarians across the political spectrum.” It accused Lee of having “facilitated financial donations to serving and aspiring parliamentarians on behalf of foreign nationals based in Hong Kong and China” through the Chinese in Britain’s All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG). It was the first time that MI5 issued this type of alert involving China. It had issued previous alerts regarding Russia.

### **AUTHORITARIAN CO-OPTION IN EUROPE**

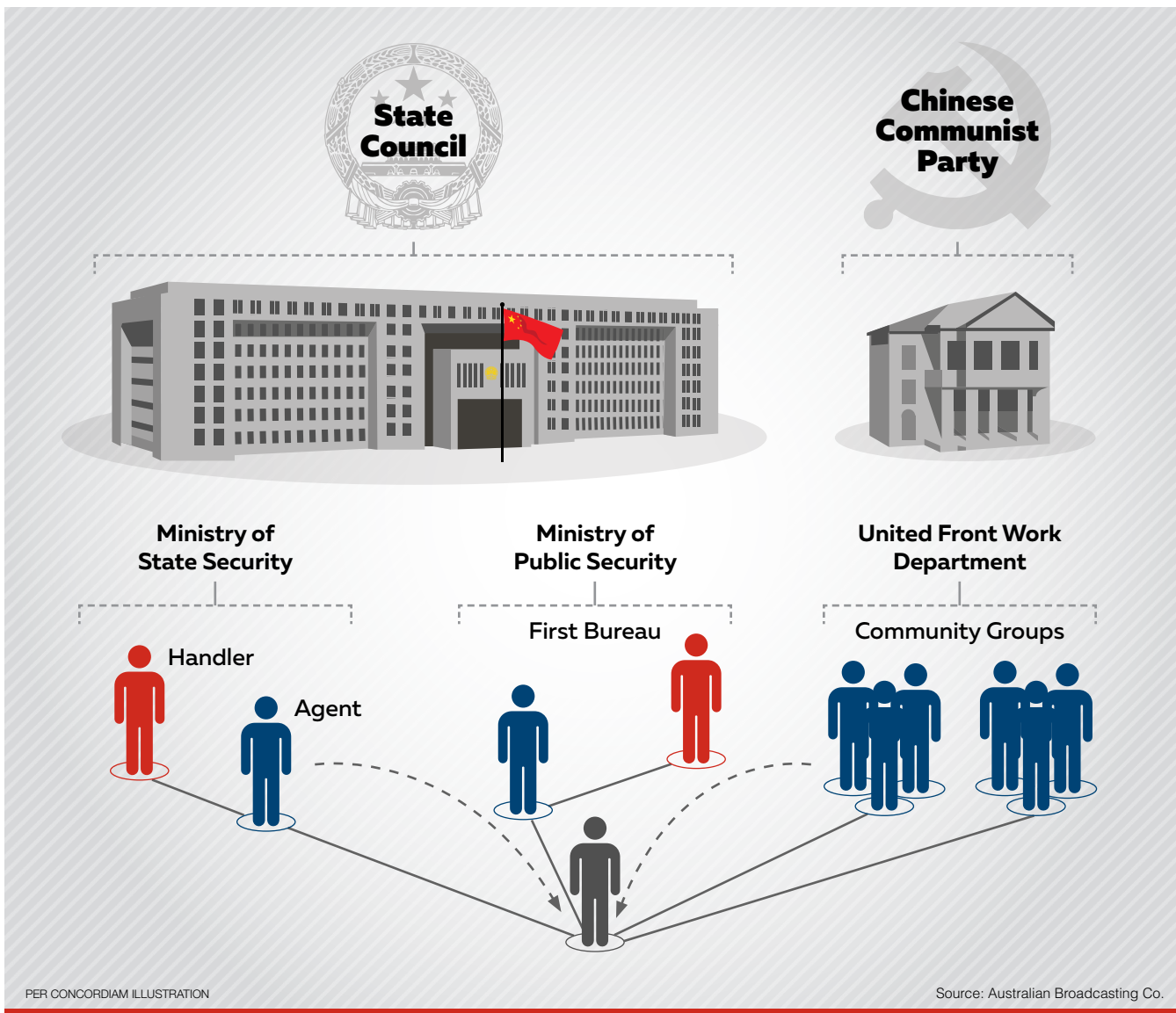
One of the main goals of Chinese influence operations in Europe is authoritarian co-option — persuading European public figures to have a positive regard for the CCP and speak favorably about its domestic policies on Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet, and on external policies such as the South China Sea. These like-minded surrogates are then invited to speak as proxies to promote the CCP’s positions. These proxies also are used to buttress the CCP’s narrative domestically to demonstrate the party’s international standing, influence and support. This

Pro-China supporters gather during Chinese President Xi Jinping’s trip to Budapest, Hungary, on May 9, 2024. The Associated Press reported that Xi’s Hungarian visit was to “one of the few places in the European Union where his country is considered an indispensable ally rather than a rival.” REUTERS

CCP-created echo chamber carefully curates a positive and uniform storyline for both domestic and international audiences.

China’s authoritarian co-option works best in permissive political environments such as in Europe. The key areas the party seeks to influence are at the nexus of society and politics because these areas lack oversight, are open to foreign participation and are largely unregulated. The CCP uses the openness of European societies, and their rights of free speech, to promote authoritarian messages that are antithetical to Europe’s own values and interests. Captured elites can openly lobby political bodies, businesses and decision-making institutions on behalf of the party. This reinforces the CCP’s chosen narratives for both domestic and international audiences.

The CCP’s efforts are calculated to co-opt specific groups or individuals such as politicians, retired military, academics, chambers of commerce, and distinct social and ethnic groups to tell China’s story. These narratives range from glossing over China’s history, deliberate distortions of China’s human rights record, and reinterpreting international law to suit Beijing’s territorial claims.



Nationalist Belgian politician Frank Creyelman is a case in point. In December 2022, three of Europe’s leading newspapers — Financial Times, Der Spiegel and Le Monde — unmasked Creyelman as a Chinese agent in a joint investigation. It was reported that Creyelman also operated in Poland and Romania. Creyelman’s handler, “Daniel Woo,” worked for the Zhejiang branch of China’s MSS spy agency.

The MSS directed Creyelman to influence discussions in Europe on issues that included Beijing’s push to isolate Taiwan, their heavy-handed approach to Hong Kong and Uyghur “reeducation” camps in Xinjiang. Phone messages from Creyelman’s MSS handler provided a blueprint of how Beijing conducts influence operations to manipulate people and to attempt to shape political outcomes. Such operations are often opaque, but these messages offered tantalizing insights into Beijing’s attempts to influence perceptions of the PRC using their intelligence assets, and to shape debate.

The CCP’s main goal, as texted by the MSS spymaster, was to “divide the U.S.-European relationship.” The investigation revealed that before German Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s

trip to Beijing in 2022, the MSS officer pushed Creyelman to persuade two right-wing members of the European Parliament to announce that the U.K. and the U.S. were weakening European energy security.

Creyelman, a former Belgian senator, was a CCP intelligence asset for more than three years. Some Belgian officials said they had known about Creyelman’s activities since 2018 but there were no laws under which they could prosecute him. Because espionage and foreign interference are not considered criminal offenses under Belgium’s penal code, which dates from 1867, they may try him on corruption charges.

In contrast to Belgium’s lack of espionage laws, the U.K.’s National Security Act 2023 updated and introduced new offenses related to espionage, sabotage, foreign interference and influence. In addition, it granted police expanded powers of arrest and detention. The new legal approach appears to be working. In May 2024, Christopher Cash, a former parliamentary researcher, and Christopher Berry, an academic, were charged under the National Security Act of passing secrets to China. Cash had worked for a China policy group



linked with then-U.K. Security Minister Tom Tugendhat. Both had previously lived and worked in the PRC. At the time of this writing, the trial is ongoing.

### **CONTROLLING AND UTILIZING THE DIASPORA**

*Huaqiao* and *huaren* are the terms used to describe Chinese who live outside the PRC; *huaqiao* refers to Chinese citizens living abroad, and *huaren* refers to ethnic Chinese with foreign nationalities. Xi sees both groups as “members of the great Chinese family” who would “never forget their homeland China” and “never deny the blood of the Chinese nation in their bodies.” In other words, the CCP sees affiliation to the PRC not in terms of legal citizenship but rather in ethnic and racial terms. Ethnic Chinese outside of the PRC are seen as possible tools to help mobilize support and advance Beijing’s interests. Clearly, not all members of the Chinese diaspora agree with Beijing’s approach.

In May 2024, a compelling Australian investigative TV program called “Four Corners” conducted the first interview ever of a former (self-described) member of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) First Bureau, the notorious Chinese secret police. Previously, he belonged to the unit called the Political Security Protection Bureau. The unit is one of the CCP’s key tools of repression. It operates around the globe to surveil, silence and summon critics of the party and then return them to China.

Basically, anyone in the Chinese population at home or abroad who threatened the CCP’s control would be investigated, opposed and disrupted as necessary. As noted earlier, the CCP’s main foreign influence organization is the UFWD. The MPS First Bureau works with Beijing’s state security apparatus when necessary. As one former CIA analyst summed up the relationship: “United Front work creates tall grass to hide the snakes. The MPS are some of those snakes.”

### **OPERATION FOX HUNT**

Operation Fox Hunt, established by Xi in 2014, is a well-funded, secretive global operation to hunt down Chinese officials suspected of corruption who have fled to other countries. One report published in May 2024 stated that 12,000 people were found in so-called “fugitive recovery operations” in 120 countries since it was established.

Not only are rich and powerful Chinese accused of corruption “persuaded” to return to China, but sometimes also those who demonstrate even the slightest form of dissent. In May 2024, before Xi Jinping’s visit to Paris, French state television broadcast a documentary on what happened to a 23-year-old Chinese national named Ling Huazhan, who lived in Paris and posted a video online criticizing Xi. Although the video had only 80 views, the PRC embassy in Paris demonstrated zero tolerance, calling Ling on the same day and telling him that he must return to China. Ling contacted a reporter, who followed him to the Paris airport. As he was escorted by several PRC diplomats to the plane, Ling fearfully stated that he did not want to go back to China and refused to board. The diplomats realized the incident was being filmed by journalists and

decided to end their efforts but refused to give back Ling’s passport. Since they were diplomats, French police could not search them. Chinese officials later used threats and torture of his family in China to coerce his return. Ling received a message on his phone stating that his brother’s leg was broken and threatening to break the other along with burning his brother’s genitals if he did not return. PRC officials prefer to conduct these extraterritorial repatriations quietly, but this incident was documented by French state media and it gives a glimpse into the lengths the CCP will go to punish even minor dissent.

### **OVERSEAS CHINESE POLICE STATIONS**

One of the key goals of UFWD is to control people of Chinese descent inside as well as outside of the PRC. To do this, the CCP has created a global network of clandestine “police stations” in more than 50 countries, many of them in Europe as well as the U.S. PRC officials protested that these were created to help Chinese nationals with mundane tasks such as renewing their licenses and other bureaucratic procedures. This claim doesn’t stand up as embassies and consulates are tasked with such functions. Rather, these clandestine stations were used to monitor the behavior of the diaspora and prevent activity seen as disruptive to the CCP. The secret police stations are a violation of established diplomatic norms and, once discovered, many countries have tried to shut them down. Chinese diplomatic missions abroad usually host MSS agents who are tasked with collecting intelligence. The work of these agents is not declared to the host countries. Agents also operate from the offices of Chinese news agencies and commercial companies.

### **‘IT IS FUTILE TO RESIST’**

In May 2024, three men were charged in London with gathering intelligence for Hong Kong authorities and with a forced entry into a residence. (A trial is set for February 2025). Their arrest highlighted the CCP’s ability to harass, surveil and even physically attack activists. One of the accused, a former British Marine named Matthew Trickett, was discovered dead in a park. His death was categorized as “unexplained” by the police (a term often used to describe a suicide).

Britain’s Foreign Office stated that the accusations of intelligence gathering appeared to be part of a “pattern of behavior directed by China against the U.K.” This increased activity included the posting of bounties of up to \$128,000 for information on dissidents, many of them originally from Hong Kong. The CCP’s message appears to be that wherever a member of the Chinese diaspora is in the world, they will be monitored and punished if they step outside CCP redlines.

### **SPIES, LIES AND TECHNOLOGY**

As the U.S. tightens exports on advanced technologies, Beijing has increased its efforts in Europe to collect knowledge and information on such capabilities. The PRC seeks to obtain advanced technology in multiple ways: legally, through investments, and by funding research. And illegally, by using a combination of company insiders, cyber espionage,

circumvention of export restrictions, acquisitions and reverse engineering of technology.

According to the Dutch military intelligence agency MIVD, in its annual report published in April 2024, CCP espionage targeted aerospace, maritime industries and semiconductor manufacturing.

ASML, the leading Dutch manufacturer of chipmaking equipment, in 2023 agreed to work with the U.S. on national security grounds to prevent advanced chipmaking technology being exported to the PRC. In April 2024, the U.S. government tried to persuade ASML not to service some of the advanced machines in the PRC. ASML repair technicians, on a previous trip to China, suspected that their advanced equipment was “broken” because it had been taken apart, likely to reverse-engineer it, and the Chinese technicians were unable to put it back together.

Germany’s domestic intelligence agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, in its most recent annual report, labeled the PRC as Germany’s “biggest economic and scientific-espionage threat.” Beijing’s key areas of interest in Germany include aerospace technology, information technology, robotics, energy-saving technology and biomedicine.

German prosecutors reported in April 2024 that three German nationals were arrested on suspicion of the unauthorized transfer of technology with military applications — including a high-powered laser — and scientific information that could be used to build advanced engines for military vessels. This case demonstrated that existing regulations were inadequate to prevent this type of prohibited export.

### **CONTROLLING THE INFORMATION SPACE**

By law, Chinese digital technology companies that own any application are obliged to share users’ data with the Chinese authorities, which opens the door to spying. The TikTok social media app has received much attention lately, as the U.S. asked its Chinese parent company, ByteDance, to divest from the app or face a ban. Several countries around the world, including some in Europe, have banned the app from the phones of government employees, or, as in the case of India, from all phones. However, this phenomenon does not concern only individual apps but is a more general problem.

The data harvested by China from any cellphone, not just from those of government officials, helps the CCP better target its messaging according to user-data analytics, thus improving its ability to control global narratives. Popular apps, social media platforms and online games are instrumental for this purpose. A recent study by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute highlighted the links between the CCP’s state-controlled propaganda entities and data-collection activities. The CCP also has legal access to any information available to a Chinese company that operates abroad.

China is now investing heavily in emerging technologies such as generative artificial intelligence (AI) and the metaverse. These will be powerful tools to advance China’s messages globally, including in Europe, testing EU regulations on the ethical use of AI. The CCP is already experimenting

with metaverse-based gaming domestically, to facilitate its ideological indoctrination of the population. At the same time, China is shielding its population from outside influence through its Great Firewall, which bars access to foreign apps such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), and through a ban of foreign games and virtual private networks.

### **SINO-RUSSIAN INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES OVERLAP**

“Right now, there are changes — the likes of which we haven’t seen for 100 years — and we are the ones driving these changes together,” Xi confidently told Russian President Vladimir Putin as he stood at the door of the Kremlin to bid him goodbye at the conclusion of a state visit in March 2023. Some of these incredible changes are the overlaps in influence activities that target both people and organizations. Recent espionage incidents in Europe have made it a bit easier to connect the dots. If a politician is willing to spy or take a bribe from Russia, the reasoning goes, it is likely they will do the same for the PRC. Sino-Russian convergence of interests displays an unrelenting drive to challenge the West and to disrupt and corrode European democracy. The unfolding Creyelman and Krah cases provide some evidence in this regard. It seems that parliamentary assistants are a particularly good source of information, and that ex-legislators are a soft target for both Chinese and Russian intelligence and influence operations.

Enhanced Sino-Russian cooperation on influence activities should not come as a surprise. At a Senate hearing on May 2, 2024, U.S. Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines testified that cooperation between China and Russia was increasing in every area. The Sino-Russian “no-limits partnership” announced in February 2022 was followed by the outbreak of war in Ukraine that same month. China must have assessed that the war is in its interest because it depletes U.S. military stockpiles and deflects attention from the Indo-Pacific. Since 2022, China increased its exports of dual-use goods to Russia dramatically while still trying to avoid U.S. sanctions on Chinese exporters.

### **CHINESE ORGANIZED CRIME IN EUROPE**

There is evidence that Chinese organized crime groups in Europe cooperate with China’s undeclared police officers posted to Chinese diplomatic missions to monitor and intimidate overseas immigrants and dissidents. These groups are well-rooted in the host countries and can offer intelligence and support to Chinese police. In exchange, Chinese authorities do not prosecute the gangsters who operate abroad, and never cooperate with their European counterparts when the suspects of a crime seek refuge in China. Chinese organized crime bosses are often involved in Chinese cultural associations in Europe, which in turn are affiliated to the UFWD. In Italy and Spain, local Chinese mobsters have been involved in setting up covert police stations. Similar patterns of activity have also emerged in the U.S. and elsewhere. The symbiotic relationship in foreign countries between Chinese organized crime and police and intelligence agents is a good illustration of the United Front concept.





## RECOMMENDATIONS/CONCLUSION

We can no longer continue down the path tread by Bernard Boursicot. Instead, to extend the metaphor, we must flip on the light switch, recognize the stubble on the Chinese opera singer's face, and end our naivety about the PRC. This smokeless war requires not only a trans-Atlantic strategy designed for the long term but also needs to include NATO's partners in the Indo-Pacific Four (Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea) and learn from their best practices. Australia has been at the forefront of understanding the effects of Beijing's influence, interference and espionage efforts. Here are some recommendations:

- Europe should investigate Chinese influence operations to understand how they work, as well as to raise awareness about them so that they can be better countered and defused. United Front is often intertwined with espionage and other influence activities. This may require developing a new conceptual framework to tackle the phenomenon.
- European countries that do not yet have anti-espionage laws, notably Austria, or have outdated ones should take legislative action. This would facilitate the prosecution of Chinese intelligence agents. (Belgium's current low-risk, high-reward espionage landscape climate is governed by laws that have not been updated since 1867.)
- European countries and the EU should support independent Chinese-language media to counter the influence of Beijing-sponsored media on the overseas Chinese population, thus reducing their willingness to carry out United Front work.
- Europe should build on its experience countering Soviet

French President Emmanuel Macron and Chinese President Xi Jinping met at a restaurant on May 7, 2024, in the Pyrenees mountains, where the two leaders held private meetings. Xi visited France, Hungary and Serbia on his European trip – his first in five years. The visits came as many countries in Europe seek to “de-risk” their economies over China's trade practices and its use of legal and illegal means to acquire advanced technologies. REUTERS

intelligence operations during the Cold War to strengthen counterintelligence capabilities and isolate Chinese assets like Belgium's Creyelman.

- EU institutions and member states should step up their work to counter foreign information manipulation and interference.
- EU institutions and member states need to push for the “disinfectant of sunlight” and advocate for a foreign influence transparency registry.
- EU institutions should invest in Chinese language and culture education to increase knowledge among policy-makers about how the UFWD operates and prepare the next generation of specialists.

Policymakers and intelligence services must innovate, educate and adapt to the changing threat landscape. A key challenge will be to ensure that the strategic response on both sides of the Atlantic will honor the ideals of freedom, openness and lawfulness. A calibrated response to Beijing's smokeless war, coupled with constant vigilance to avoid being “Boursicoted,” will help protect democratic institutions and build resilience to the growing threat from the Chinese Communist Party-state. □



# PUTTING THE **BRAKES** ON BEIJING



PER CONCORDIAM ILLUSTRATION



# EUROPE RECONSIDERS CHINESE ENGAGEMENT IN THE WAKE OF RUSSIA'S WAR ON UKRAINE

By **Dr. Valbona Zeneli**, senior fellow, Atlantic Council

**R**ussia's brutal invasion of Ukraine has shaken the foundations of the European security architecture, challenging its reliance on defense guarantees from the United States, cheap energy from Russia and cheap products from China. German chancellor Olaf Scholz described the European awakening as a *Zeitenwende* — historic turning point — for European foreign and security policies, consisting of efforts to bolster collective defense and military spending, and recognizing the challenge of energy dependence on Russia. China's role as a strategic partner of Russia and its failure to openly condemn the attack on Ukraine has led to further distrust of Beijing.

Before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Chinese enjoyed nearly unfettered access to Europe's economic, research and academic domains. Chinese Communist Party Chairman Xi Jinping's friendship pact with Russian President Vladimir Putin resulted in negative reverberations throughout European capitals and raised concerns about China's strategic ambitions and their impact on Europe. The war in Ukraine has compelled an evolution in Europe's assessment of Chinese ambitions, which is likely to impact future engagement between China and Europe.

Before February 2022, European countries had differing security perspectives, resulting in regionalized threat assessments. Many Eastern European countries were concerned with the threats posed by Russia, while others were concerned with issues such as migration. Russia's full-scale aggression sparked a remarkable unification of the West in implementing harsh sanctions against Russia and supporting Ukraine. The European Union has been united in sanctioning Russia, publishing its 13th package of sanctions in February 2024, which focused on further limiting Moscow's access to military technologies and listed additional companies and individuals involved in the war effort, and a 14th in June, which is "designed to target high-value sectors of the Russian economy, like energy, finance and trade" and make evading sanctions more difficult. At the same time, the EU provided military assistance to a non-EU country for the first time, opened its



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called Beijing's response to Russia's war in Ukraine a defining issue for the EU in its relationship with China.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

doors to Ukrainian refugees and granted the opening of EU accession negotiations to Ukraine and Moldova. Finland and Sweden joined NATO.

## CONFLICT BOOSTS DEFENSE SPENDING

The citizens of NATO countries — almost 75% — see the Alliance as the essential organization for the defense and security of the trans-Atlantic community, according to a 2023 NATO poll. The U.S. has been the single largest contributor to the Alliance, but the return of war to Europe brought a realization of the need to increase defense spending. The most disproportionate balance of burden sharing in NATO history was registered in 1952, when the U.S. funded 77% of the Alliance's total spending. The closest to parity was registered in 1999, during the Balkans conflicts, when the U.S. paid only 55%. Although most European governments ignored the 2014 Wales Summit commitment to



spend 2% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defense, they became real about efforts to bolster collective defense in 2022, driven by Germany's pledge to reach the 2% target and allocate an additional 100 billion euros to a special defense fund. As a result, in 2023, defense spending across European NATO members and Canada resulted in a total increase of 11%, adding more than \$600 billion for defense. Expectations are that 18 NATO Allies will spend 2% of their GDP on defense in 2024, compared with 2014 when only three met the target.

From a strategic perspective, European countries found a new appreciation of the U.S. as the main provider for the Alliance's security, as well as a realization that "strategic autonomy" was just a dream because of the lack of European military capabilities and need for the U.S. nuclear umbrella to deter Russia's nuclear blackmailing.

## EUROPEAN ENERGY DIVERSIFICATION

The war in Ukraine challenged the model of Europe's dependence on cheap energy from Russia. In 2021, Russia was the largest supplier of its petroleum products and provided 45% of Europe's gas needs. After the war broke out, the European Commission implemented a successful energy diversification, with the objective of making the EU independent from Russian fossil fuels before 2030 while expanding European renewable energy sources. This led to serious consequences for Russia as it lost an important natural gas and oil market. While the EU made unprecedented strides to pivot from Russian energy, the Kremlin's decision to impose additional

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Chinese Communist Party Chairman Xi Jinping in Beijing. The leaders have declared that "friendship between the two states has no limits." REUTERS

payments on European customers through its "gas-for-ruble decree" and the temporary suspension of gas transportation via the Nord Stream 1 pipeline pushed Europe toward quicker independence.

Energy diversification in real time will cost the EU at least \$220 billion per year, but in the long run it is in line with what the EU is spending to achieve its Green Deal objective, which envisions \$80 billion in annual funding to members for the clean energy transition from 2025 to 2032, according to the EU.

## STRONG POLITICAL MESSAGES FROM THE EU

Before the war, there were concerns in the trans-Atlantic community about vulnerabilities that would be created by the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. To keep Russia as a partner, these concerns were dismissed using economic justifications and the trade interdependence argument. The current security situation in Europe will certainly recalibrate Western assumptions about global economic interdependence, international law and institutionalism, and as a result, its future relations with Russia and China.

China's refusal to condemn Russia's war in Ukraine and its enabling economic stance toward Russia have galvanized concerns in Europe. Beijing and Moscow have strengthened



their diplomatic and economic relations in the past two years. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen took a strong stance during the summit in Beijing in December 2023, stating that the defining issue for the EU in its bilateral relationship with China would be the Chinese response to the “Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.” European leaders have pressed their Chinese counterparts to help prevent Moscow’s attempts to circumvent sanctions, even threatening that the EU could impose sanctions on Chinese entities thought to be sending dual-use items to Russia.

Beijing, failing to condemn the Russian invasion, released on February 24, 2023, a 12-point position paper on “China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis.” The missing condemnation was anticipated from the title of the paper and did not offer anything new in terms of Beijing’s supposed neutrality, confirming its alliance with Russia in the ideological confrontation with the West. The paper offered some insights about China’s positioning on global power dynamics, and with anti-U.S. rhetoric, in its supposed rejection of double standards. During a meeting with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in February 2024, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that China “does not take any advantage of the situation and does not sell lethal weapons to conflict areas or parties to the conflict” in an attempt to present Beijing as a neutral actor.

China has consistently abstained from United Nations resolutions focused on condemning Russia. But after intense pressure from the West, and after von der Leyen visited China in April 2023 and called on Beijing to “use its influence in a friendship that is built on decades with Russia,” Xi slightly changed his stance. He held a call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky that marked the most concrete step by Beijing to take the role of mediator. Following up, China (together with India) voted in favor of a U.N. resolution that explicitly acknowledges the “aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine,” although it was a broader resolution that called for closer cooperation between the U.N. and the Council of Europe. Beijing’s slight change of language toward Russia was really a diplomatic change and, although symbolic, it underscored adjustments in Beijing’s course aimed at maintaining favorable relations with EU institutions and leaders as a counterbalance to the U.S.

## REALPOLITIK DRIVES CHINA AND RUSSIA TOGETHER

There is better understanding in the international community that realpolitik considerations drive China and Russia together. They are natural allies in their predilection to stand in opposition to the Western alliance led by the U.S. Both are subject to U.S. sanctions because of their assertive regional activities that violate international norms: Russia in Eastern Europe and China in the Western Pacific. Together, China and Russia complement each other — Russia with its nuclear weapons and hydrocarbon riches, and China as the economic superpower. Michael O’Hanlon and Adam Twardowski explain in their 2019 paper for the Brookings Institution, “Unpacking the China-Russia ‘Alliance’,” that there are four ways to look

at this relationship, from transactional cooperation, economic and arms sales to military collaboration and training. China and Russia are strategic partners, and this status was elevated on February 4, 2022, on the eve of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, when Putin and Xi met in Beijing and signed the “Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development,” declaring that “friendship between the two states has no limits.”



The BYD Explorer No. 1, with 3,000 new cars on board, is docked in Bremerhaven, Germany, on February 26, 2024. It is the first vessel in a planned global fleet for the Chinese automaker, which is expanding into Southeast Asia and Europe with its electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles. REUTERS

Economic and trade relations between China and Russia have been dominated by oil and gas, and they have intensified after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent EU sanctions. In a videoconference with Xi in December 2022, Putin proudly announced that “Russia has become one of the leaders in oil exports to China,” adding that Russia was China’s second-largest supplier of pipeline gas and fourth-largest of liquefied natural gas. According to Russian statistics, energy exports to China increased by 64% in 2022 compared with 2021.

In 2023, China became the largest buyer of Russian oil and gas, purchasing 47% of Russia’s crude oil exports, followed by India (32%), the EU (7%) and Turkey (3%). In total, half of Russia’s oil and petroleum exports in 2023 were shipped to China. Similarly for coal, China was the largest buyer, purchasing 45% of Russia’s exports in 2023.

However, it is important to look at the bigger picture. For China, Russia is not among its main trading partners, compared with the EU, Japan, South Korea and the U.S. When it comes to the economic weight of the two countries, the difference is vast, with Russia’s economy (\$1.9 trillion) being only 10% of China’s (\$17.7 trillion) in terms of GDP, 10% of the EU’s (\$18.3 trillion), and only 7% of the U.S. economy (\$27 trillion), according to International Monetary Fund data.

Chinese exports to the Russian market make up only 2.2% of its total exports (ranking as the 15th-largest market) and 4.6% of its imports, being the sixth-largest market in 2022, according to Trading Economics statistics. In 2022, 75% of total Russian exports to China (\$85 billion out of \$114 billion) were mineral fuels, oils and distillation products.

war machine. Beijing is also Putin’s most important diplomatic partner, giving him publicity through state visits and summits. On the other side, China is increasing its geoeconomic leverage over Russia by securing lower prices on its hydrocarbon needs and conquering the Russian consumer market. Another advantage for China is that more than 95% of trade between the two

countries in 2023 was done in yuan and rubles to de-dollarize their trade, since Western sanctions limit Russia’s access to the dollar and euro.

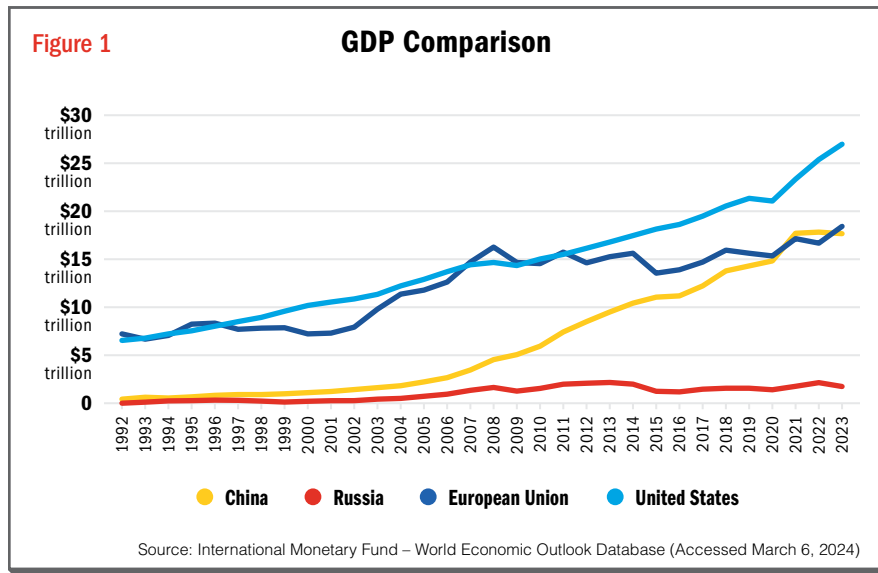
While Western sanctions were meant to send a strong political message to Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, Moscow is undermining the sanctions by diverting its trade to Asia, excluding Australia, Japan and South Korea, which have joined the sanctions.

### INDO-PACIFIC SECURITY

The war in Ukraine has brought some degree of realization that armed conflict over Taiwan is not unimaginable and has opened new discussions surrounding the risk of escalation in the Taiwan Strait and the potential economic and security consequences for Europe. One of the main takeaways from the Russian aggression against Ukraine is the autocratic leaders’ disregard for international law, and the inaccurate assumption of the Western community that economic interdependence was a sufficient rationale for good diplomatic relations.

Several European leaders have been clear on this issue. Germany’s minister of foreign affairs, Annalena Baerbock, has stated that a “military escalation in the Taiwan Strait, through which 50% of world trade flows every day, would be a horror scenario for the entire world.”

Baerbock warned that a “unilateral and violent change in the status quo would not be acceptable.” Similarly, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, in criticizing the Chinese military exercises in the Taiwan Strait, stated that the “EU is an important market for China which risks to be closed if Beijing decides to attack Taiwan.” Von der Leyen has also warned China “not to use force against Taiwan” and that the union is “standing strongly against any unilateral change of the status quo, in particular by the use of force.” These comments also highlight the difference with French President Emmanuel Macron and his remarks during his visit in April 2023 to Beijing implying that “Taiwan is not Europe’s problem.”



In 2023, trade between China and Russia grew by 26% compared with the year before, hitting a record high of \$240 billion. Chinese exports to Russia grew by 47% in one year and imports from Russia grew by 13%. Trade between China and Russia has increased 2.7 times since 2014, from \$87 billion to \$240 billion. In fact, the Kremlin launched its pivot to China in 2014, following its annexation of Crimea, first to diversify from Europe and, after 2022, because of unprecedented Western sanctions.

Two years into the war in Ukraine, Russia is increasingly dependent on China as a market for its commodities and as a source of imports for critical goods and supplies that fuel its





## DE-RISKING FROM CHINA

China has been among the EU's largest trade partners, with a 2022 trade volume of 856 billion euros (\$926 billion), the largest partner for its imports, and the second-largest partner for EU exports. Export volume is heavily tilted in favor of China by about 396 billion euros (\$429 billion), with a total value of imports of goods from China to the EU of 626 billion euros (\$678 billion) and 230 billion euros (\$249 billion) of EU exports into the Chinese market, according to EU statistics.

The value of Chinese exports to the EU increased almost nine-fold from 2002 to 2022. Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) in the EU increased in the past two decades, especially after the Eurozone crisis, with an increase of almost 50 times in eight years, from less than \$840 million in 2008 to a record 48 billion euros (\$52 billion) in 2016, according to data from the Mercator Institute for China Studies. The increase in Chinese FDI in the global economy happened after Beijing loosened restrictions on outward FDI in 2014, and large merger and acquisition transactions drove Chinese FDI in the European market.

Chinese FDI in the EU reached a peak in 2016, followed by a multiyear decline to 7.9 billion euros (\$8.5 billion) in 2022, a drop that takes Chinese FDI back to 2013 levels. The main reason is the decline of Chinese merger and acquisition activities in the EU, resulting from tightened investment-screening procedures of Chinese FDI that have affected the acquisition of strategic assets in Europe by Chinese state-owned enterprises and critical infrastructure investment.

A member of China's Peoples Armed Police stands guard in front of the Delegation of the European Union to the People's Republic of China before a news conference by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on April 6, 2023, in Beijing. GETTY IMAGES

However, this is in line with the decrease of Chinese outbound investment in general (\$117 billion), which dropped by 23% in 2022 compared with 2021 because of the global crises triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Resulting uncertainty and shifts in global financial conditions have increased caution and suppressed global FDI. A tightening of capital controls and crackdown on highly leveraged private investors by Beijing led to a sharp drop in China's global outward FDI.

Chinese investment in Europe is primarily concentrated in four countries: the United Kingdom, followed by France, Germany and Hungary. The total stock of Chinese FDI in Europe (EU plus the U.K.) has reached \$245 billion since 2000. The stable legal, regulatory and political environment in Europe offers unique business opportunities for Chinese investors, who value its open markets, intellectual property rights and strategic location. It remains to be seen whether the EU will follow the lead of the U.S. in the establishment of an outbound investment-screening mechanism, as it did for the inward FDI-screening mechanism. In 2022, we witnessed a sudden increase of European FDI in Chinese markets, despite slowing overall FDI in China, as EU investment grew by 92%.



**Whether by strategic design or happenchance, Russia and China have become increasingly aligned across the economic and geopolitical spectrum since 2014. All indicators on the horizon suggest this trend will continue with consequences that are difficult to plot with any reasonable certainty.**

In March 2019, the European Commission published its Joint Communication “EU-China — A Strategic Outlook” in which China was shifted from “strategic partner” to “negotiating partner” and the EU sought to find a balance of interests with Beijing as an “economic competitor” in the pursuit of technological leadership and as a “systemic rival” promoting alternative models of governance. This was followed by the EU’s first investment-screening framework, established to make economies better equipped to identify and mitigate the risks of foreign investment to security and public order. This was a direct response to China’s increased influence in the European market using unfair practices and state subsidies. Beijing’s interests in Europe are economic and geopolitical, focused on strategic investment in the core EU countries and infrastructure development projects on their periphery. These interests are related to the needs of Chinese companies — new technologies, know-how, broader access to the European market — and their goal of becoming key players in integrated regional and global value chains.

China and the EU approved the new Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) in December 2020 after seven years of negotiations and 35 rounds of talks; it is considered the most ambitious agreement that Beijing has ever concluded with a trading partner. The CAI appeared as a pragmatic step forward in regulating trade and investment with China in terms of liberalization of investment, rules against the forced transfer of technology, a more even economic playing field and commitments to sustainable development. But the CAI was also controversial: China skeptics, as well as human rights advocates, had urged Brussels to prioritize those issues with Beijing. Meanwhile, the Chinese economy has become more state-driven, and Chinese leaders have more explicitly disavowed Western liberal values.

Rightly, the EU parliament suspended the CAI’s ratification in April 2021 and passed a motion to freeze trade after Beijing sanctioned some EU Members of Parliament for their criticism of China’s treatment of its Uyghur population in Xinjiang province. Later, in March 2023, von der Leyen put the future of the shelved CAI firmly in doubt.

In June 2023, the European Commission issued its first ever European Economic Security Strategy, outlining a pragmatic view of the EU’s required responses to current economic and geopolitical challenges. This ambitious new course was further emphasized a few months later during von der Leyen’s State of the Union speech, where she focused on the need for ensuring resilience across supply chains to achieve a greater diversity of sources to meet critical needs and promote technological supremacy, while seeking to maintain open markets. The EU’s China de-risking strategy regarding supply chains — especially focusing on cleantech, the solar industry and electric vehicles — aligns with the economic doctrine of U.S. President Joe Biden’s administration, as the EU proposes to establish export controls on specific technologies based on the U.S. model.

In response, China’s minister of foreign affairs, Wang Yi, stated during the Munich Security Conference in February 2023 that trying to cut his country out of trade in the name of avoiding dependency would be a historic mistake. Beijing



also criticized Germany's efforts to avoid overreliance on trade with China and to diversify its supply chains, calling them "protectionism."

## FROM 16+1 TO 13+1

Twelve years after the announcement of the 16+1 Initiative, a precursor of the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) expansion into Europe, Beijing's economic engagement with the 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) lags far behind the initial enthusiasm. In 2012, the 16+1 Initiative (17+1 when Greece joined in 2019) was established between China and 16 CEE countries with the aim to further economic cooperation.

In May 2021, Lithuania pulled out of the China-led bloc (again, then, 16+1) and urged other EU countries to quit as well. The decision was based on Lithuania's foreign policy that emphasizes the importance of NATO and anti-authoritarianism, and happened after Lithuania and Taiwan opened diplomatic offices in their respective capitals. This event angered China and led to an economic coercion campaign against Vilnius, negatively affecting Lithuanian exports to China. Lithuanian products were removed from the Chinese customs system as a country of origin, thus banning not only Lithuanian goods but also European products with Lithuanian components.

The EU strongly supported Lithuania, even lodging a complaint against China at the World Trade Organization. In a response to Beijing's economic attack, the EU published a regulation in September 2023 to protect members from economic coercion, introducing a new tool to protect trade and fight unfair trade practices.

Following Lithuania's example, Latvia and Estonia quit China's economic cooperation platform in August 2022, declaring that they will continue to pursue "constructive and pragmatic relations" with Beijing within the framework of the EU and in accordance with the rules-based international order and values such as human rights. The announcement came just after China intensified its military activities around Taiwan after the visit of the then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

The decisions of the Baltic countries to leave the bloc are not related only to failed economic results and promises but also to the diplomatic and economic costs of dealing with China in an era of strategic competition and tense relations between Beijing and Washington, as all three Baltic countries see the U.S. as the main security guarantor in the region.

This angered Beijing to the point that China's ambassador to France, Lu Shaye, denied the Baltic states' sovereignty, stating that former Soviet republics do not have "effective status in international law." This caused diplomatic outcry across the Baltics and the EU. EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell called the comments unacceptable and said the union "can only suppose these declarations do not represent China's official policy." Indeed, Beijing denied the declarations were official policy and affirmed that it "respects the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries and upholds the purposes and principles of the U.N. Charter." Still, the ambassador's comments illustrated China's aggressive "wolf warrior diplomacy."

Most importantly, Italy, whose membership in OBOR had been viewed as one of China's most symbolic wins in Europe,

decided to leave the initiative right before the EU-China Summit in Beijing in December 2023. Italy's decision to leave OBOR, making it 13+1, is not just a reflection of frustration over failed projects and unmet promises but is based on a real commitment to defending democratic values and human rights.

## BEIJING AIMS TO BILATERALIZE RELATIONS

A major concern arising from increased Chinese influence in Europe is Beijing's attempts to bilateralize relations with EU members, which has the potential to affect the internal cohesion of the union. Chinese investments in strategic sectors of European countries have created economic interdependence for political ends, interfering in EU decision-making processes regarding China matters. This is mainly related to issues of human rights, such as the blocking of an EU statement after the International Arbitration Court ruling on the South China Sea, and criticism of OBOR.

The EU lacks effective mechanisms to manage serious conflicts inside its institutions. China is leveraging the EU unanimity rule to block statements or actions that Beijing considers disadvantageous. Similarly, when it comes to the Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) used in almost 80% of EU legislation, a group of 13 member states is enough to defeat any measure. With 13 EU member states now members of OBOR, it would be possible for Beijing to influence the union's decision-making. To mitigate this issue, a Franco-German expert group published the report "Sailing on High Seas — Reforming and Enlarging the EU for the 21st Century" where it is proposed to expand the QMV in foreign policy, which can be done without amending EU treaties.

Beijing has encouraged the concept of European strategic autonomy in attempts to divide the trans-Atlantic community and amplify tensions within Europe. Beijing also aims to create division in the trans-Atlantic Alliance, hoping that the EU can act as a counterbalance to perceived U.S. hostility toward China. To achieve this, Beijing tweaks its diplomatic relationship with the EU and its member states using trade and market openness as its main levers.

## STRATEGIC GAMESMANSHIP

Whether by strategic design or happenstance, China and Russia have become increasingly aligned across the economic and geopolitical spectrum since 2014. All indicators on the horizon suggest this trend will continue with consequences that are difficult to plot with any reasonable certainty. This requires reflection from the perspective of the EU and the U.S., especially concerning a coordinated response. It is obvious that the EU and the U.S. must work more closely together in developing a coordinated trans-Atlantic strategy that addresses China and Russia as an anti-Western bloc. Europe also needs to think through current policy shortfalls that allow individual countries a wide degree of geopolitical and economic maneuver room, which creates conditions that ultimately favor China. The extent and value of Europe's economic dependencies and public attitudes toward China should be subjected to continual national security scrutiny to ensure Europe's vital interests are not eroded one deal at a time. □



INDO-PACIFIC DEFENSE FORUM ILLUSTRATION



# THE CCP'S POLITICAL WARFARE

## An existential fight for allies, partners and like-minded nations

By **Professor Kerry K. Gershaneck**, fellow, NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe

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The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is waging existential warfare against the rest of the world. It is a war for global control, and the CCP aspires to win it without fighting — or at least without having to engage in major kinetic combat.

The key to the CCP's strategy is to ensure that target countries cannot — or will not — fight back.

To this end, the CCP engages in political warfare globally to shape narratives, perceptions and policies to protect the party's power and to achieve its geopolitical and hegemonic ambitions. It employs political warfare against every nation in the Indo-Pacific as well as across Europe, Africa and the Americas. It fights this war overtly and covertly and in highly deceptive ways that are difficult to detect.

Central to achieving its goals, the CCP undermines the sovereignty and political integrity of other countries. It seeks to fulfill the aspirations of thought and behavior control dreamed by China's earliest despots and the 20th century's most repressive dictators. Violence and intimidation are key to this political war, as reflected in the brutal repression of peaceful protests across China over the CCP's "zero-COVID" policy and of Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests, as well as in the combative confrontations by the CCP's maritime militia and other armed forces with various nations to assert control of international waters and airspace.

At the CCP's 20th National Congress in October 2022, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping fully consolidated his power. In his closing speech, Xi made clear that the CCP intends to accelerate this already intense war to attain his expansionist "China dream" to rejuvenate the nation under his autocratic terms.

The danger posed by the CCP is unprecedented. Targeted nations, especially the United States and its allies and partners, must understand the nature and scope of the CCP's political warfare to detect, deter, counter and defeat it. Failure to do so will be catastrophic, resulting in loss of sovereignty, resources and freedoms.

### **Political warfare as internal repression**

Brutal internal repression is one form of the CCP's political warfare, including religious persecution and genocide. In the Xinjiang region in northwestern China, the CCP is trying to destroy Uyghur culture, in part by imprisoning as many as 3 million Muslim-minority Uyghurs in so-called reeducation camps.

The CCP also imprisons tens of thousands of religious practitioners in its pursuit of Sinicization of society. Many are tortured and many have died from maltreatment, organ harvesting or other cruelties. Millions more not imprisoned still face relentless persecution such as torture by electric shock and beatings in their homes, loss of assets and forced indoctrination as punishment for their faith. "The gravest threat to the future of religious freedom is the Chinese Communist Party's war against people of all faiths: Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and Falun Gong practitioners alike," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during an October 2021 speech in Indonesia.

The release of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) secret "China Cables" in 2019 and of the "Xinjiang Police Files" in 2020 proved the atrocities against Uyghurs, including rape, forced sterilization and abortions, physical and



Protesters hold blank sheets of paper, which represent government censorship, during a demonstration in Beijing in November 2022.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

psychological torture, and execution. The leaked documents describing the internal workings of detention camps also highlighted the role Xi and other top CCP officials had in crafting the genocidal policies.

None of this is new. The CCP has brutally repressed the Chinese people for a century. It is responsible for large-scale reigns of terror beginning with the CCP conquest of China in 1949, through the Great Leap Famine (1958-62), the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and other atrocities such as the 1989 Tiananmen Square tragedy when the CCP's People's Liberation Army (PLA) massacred civilians after students called for freedom. Historians estimate that up to 100 million Chinese people have died as a result of CCP actions.

The CCP has also conducted assimilation efforts in Tibet for more than a century. Under Xi, the CCP has renewed its campaign by implementing laws, rules and regulations intended to gradually assimilate the Tibetan population into the dominant Chinese Han culture, and undermine Tibetan culture and history. The CCP's recent activities to undercut Mongolian traditional education, culture and language in Inner Mongolia represent another example of the CCP's attempts at forced assimilation.

Within China, however, it is nearly impossible to learn of the CCP's history of terror. References are heavily censored, and people risk imprisonment for even discussing the topic.

Outside China, meanwhile, the CCP's global propaganda operation claims that accusations of genocide and persecution are the "biggest lies of the century," and a reflection of the West's "deep-rooted egotism and prejudice towards China."

The CCP's internet censorship, massive propaganda apparatus and relentless indoctrination create an insidious echo chamber for the Chinese people, many of whom embrace patriotic education programs that instill hatred and xenophobia. One outcome is that the CCP weaponizes large numbers of hypernationalized students by sending them to foreign universities, where many propagate CCP narratives and attempt to stifle criticism of the PRC.

### **Lawfare as a weapon**

Legal warfare, or lawfare, is another key weapon in the CCP's arsenal. In 2015, the CCP arrested and imprisoned lawyers, legal assistants and human rights defenders who were taking Chinese statutes at face value and trying to use the legal system to protect nominally guaranteed rights. The charges included nebulous offenses such as "provoking quarrels." Many remain imprisoned.

Beginning in 2020, the CCP used a new national security law to crush Hong Kong's freedoms and any potential opposition to the party. Journalists, former lawmakers and pro-democracy activists were among those arrested and imprisoned. The CCP also attempted to use lawfare to undermine Hong Kong's election systems. The CCP touted its repression-by-lawfare internally and globally, with a resultant powerful psychological impact on people in the PRC, the Chinese diaspora and the people of Taiwan, among others.



The CCP has also established more than 100 so-called police stations in other countries, despite not having authorization from the host nations. Under the direction of China's public security ministry, CCP officials at the stations monitor, harass and, in some cases, forcibly repatriate Chinese dissidents and other exiles. Such actions include Operation Fox Hunt and Operation Skynet, in which Chinese security agents penetrated foreign countries to apprehend Chinese officials accused of corruption. However, those operations were less about battling corruption and more about the CCP clamping down on rivals and dissidents. Notably, some Fox Hunt targets living in Canada had close connections with the CCP's politburo, the party's chief decision-making body, and knew secrets the party wanted to shield.

The CCP claims the stations, which also spread party propaganda, are administrative centers to help Chinese citizens with tasks such as renewing a driver's license. Further, the CCP dismissed concerns about its extraterritorial police forces operating on sovereign soil, and a PRC spokesman demanded that the "U.S. side should stop the groundless hyping of this issue."



Chinese journalists work at a media center during the CCP's tightly controlled 20th National Congress in Beijing in October 2022. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## Political warfare for global hegemony

As the CCP wages global political warfare, it employs a wide range of weapons to seduce, subjugate, infiltrate and coerce. The CCP cloaks its insidious nature behind innocuous names. The CCP rebranded its One Belt, One Road (OBOR) infrastructure scheme, for example, as the Belt and Road Initiative. OBOR spin-offs that sound enticing but promote coercive policies include the Digital Silk Road and the Polar Silk Road.

Other CCP political weapons include attempting to bribe officials in Pacific island countries, Africa and the Indo-Pacific; trying to silence critics in Australia, Canada

and New Zealand; and seeking to interfere in elections in the Maldives, South Korea and Taiwan.

The CCP has attempted to demoralize and destabilize many Pacific island countries through efforts to corrupt officials and socially divide populaces. Palau and Samoa have repelled such CCP neocolonial advances in the South Pacific. Through its United Front Work Department (UFWD) and intelligence operatives, the CCP uses bribes and other financial inducements against these countries — and many others — to target elected officials in hopes of undermining their democracy and national sovereignty. Some of those ensnared have signed security pacts and other agreements that open the door to CCP exploitation of their nations' fisheries and other natural resources, as well as to PLA access to port and aviation facilities.

In Canada, according to the nation's Security Intelligence Service, the CCP's political warfare includes payments through intermediaries to party-affiliated candidates, potentially placing agents in positions to influence national policy, as well as seeking to co-opt and corrupt former Canadian officials, and mounting aggressive campaigns to punish Canadian politicians viewed as threats to the CCP. The party has employed similar tactics in Australia, India, New Zealand, the Philippines and South Korea, as well as in countries participating in OBOR.

In Japan, as in Canada and many other nations, the UFWD is responsible for most elite capture operations. The UFWD runs organizations such as the Japanese branch of its China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification to conduct influence operations. One such organization, the Chinese Association of International Friendly Contact (CAIFC), targets Self-Defense Force officials in Japan as it does in other countries. However, in Japan CAIFC also engages with many sectors in society, including Buddhist organizations, architects, calligraphy associations and even Japanese players of the board game

Go. Further, UFWD runs at least 15 Confucius Institutes, or supposed Chinese "cultural centers," as well as friendship associations in Japan to influence Japanese elites and elections. Fortunately, Japan is increasingly taking steps to better defend its security and sovereignty.

According to Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Christopher Wray, other forms of CCP political warfare in the U.S. include blackmail, threats of violence, stalking and kidnappings of those of Chinese ancestry. In England, PRC embassy officials have been videoed beating peaceful protesters on public streets, and in Taiwan CCP-aligned gangs have publicly beaten students protesting pro-PRC

Weaponized activities include religious practices; tourism in targeted countries; flows of students; the establishment of friendship societies and sister city organizations; and the purchase of strategically important land, infrastructure and companies.

legislation. To advance its political warfare, the CCP supports proxy wars. For example, Indian officials have accused the CCP of backing terrorist separatists in the nations' disputed border region. The CCP's support and training of warlord armies to coerce Myanmar's government is also well-documented.

physical attacks. In October 2022, for example, Chinese diplomats were accused of grabbing and beating a protester outside their consulate in Manchester, England, according to news stories. In 2018, during the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Papua New Guinea (PNG), PRC diplomats forced their way into the PNG foreign minister's office to demand the rewording of the APEC final communique, and in 2020 PRC diplomats beat a Taiwan trade office librarian in Fiji, leaving the victim hospitalized, according to media reports.

The CCP has also succeeded in weaponizing many benign activities for political warfare. Weaponized activities include religious practices; tourism in targeted countries; flows of students; the establishment of friendship societies and sister city organizations; and the purchase of strategically important land, infrastructure and companies.

One example of weaponized religion is the CCP's effort to exploit Buddhism as a channel for special influence. Co-opting and managing religion is a core function of the UFWD. Under its direction, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) and the Buddhist Association

of China (BAC) seek to work with Buddhists globally to support the CCP's goals. Operatives from SARA, BAC and the PLA conduct a wide range of operations to influence Buddhists. For example, in Mongolia they attempt to cultivate Buddhist leaders to influence that country's political elite to comply with the CCP and to undermine the CCP's perceived enemies. In Japan, these operatives seek to influence Buddhist groups to shape Tokyo's foreign policy and defense planning in the CCP's favor. In Australia, CCP operatives have sought to partner with a Buddhist council to influence political leaders, while in Thailand they attempt to influence Buddhist leaders to support OBOR projects and other CCP objectives in the kingdom. In Taiwan, the CCP funnels political interference funds via Taiwan-based Buddhist organizations.

The CCP's external lawfare campaigns often entail conjuring laws to support illegitimate claims to territory and resources. They also employ bogus maps, most notably with the contrived nine-dash line that encompasses about



Then-staff members of the Apple Daily pose at the pro-democracy newspaper's headquarters in Hong Kong on June 23, 2021, the day before the paper's last edition was printed. Six former executives of the defunct newspaper pleaded guilty to collusion charges under the CCP's National Security Law that silenced and jailed opposition voices in the territory. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### Leveraging multiple pressure points

Indonesia is among the CCP's media warfare targets, and its experience is indicative of that of other countries such as the Philippines and Thailand. The CCP has dramatically expanded its media influence in Indonesia through content sharing, media partnerships and journalist training. Further, CCP state-run media such as the Xinhua News Agency and the China International Television Corp.'s Hi Indo! channel for young people have established branch offices in recent years, recruiting Indonesian journalists and other staff. The CCP's return on investment is an amplification of its propaganda and the ability to censor critics and content. In one case, the Chinese tech firm ByteDance manipulated the popular Indonesian news aggregator app Baca Berita to censor articles critical of the CCP regime and all references to Indonesia-China tensions over the South China Sea.

So-called wolf warrior diplomacy is another coercive political warfare strategy of the CCP. Relentlessly belligerent, it entails CCP diplomats engaging in verbal and, on occasion,





Protesters in Istanbul, Turkey, hold posters and pictures of victims of the CCP's brutal crackdown on Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

2.5 million square kilometers of the South China Sea, to which the PRC lays claim.

The CCP fundamentally rejects the 2016 international tribunal ruling invalidating much of its claim. It also distorts the law to extend Beijing's administrative writ into the South China Sea, including by designating Sansha, a village in the disputed Paracel Islands, as a Chinese prefecture.

Lawfare is almost always employed with media warfare. For example, Beijing either finds or contrives so-called historical documents to establish a legal basis for its territorial claims, such as in the case of the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. The CCP then publicly promotes the documents via its state-run media as purported proof of its claim.

### Countering the CCP's 'China Dream'

The CCP is aggressively waging political warfare globally to achieve its expansionist and totalitarian goals. Accordingly, allies and partners must build a common capacity to detect, deter, counter and defeat the threat. In the Indo-Pacific, an important step would be establishing a center of excellence to provide an intellectual foundation for combatting the CCP's political warfare. Such a center would help like-minded nations develop an understanding of the threat and devise effective responses.

Key steps nations can take individually to build that capacity include:

- Rapidly generate national strategies to assess and combat the CCP's political warfare, including establishing policies and operations to defeat it.
- Establish education programs on political warfare for government officials, business leaders, law enforcement personnel, academics and journalists.
- Enhance capabilities for the legal community, law enforcement and counterintelligence officials to investigate, disrupt and prosecute CCP political warfare activities. Review laws and policies to ensure adequate and effective mission statements, requirements, resources, training and assessments.
- Routinely expose CCP political warfare operations. Mandate an annual public report that includes practical advice for leaders and citizens regarding those threats.
- Raise the costs to the CCP of its political warfare. While many countries are increasingly focused on CCP espionage, the party's political warfare operatives face few, if any, consequences. To counter CCP interference and intimidation, for example, Chinese diplomats who threaten media organizations should have their diplomatic status revoked and be expelled from the host nation. □

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# JOINT IMPLICATIONS

PER CONCORRIAM ILLUSTRATION



# What China-Russia Military Exercises Portend for Taiwan and Beyond

By Narantsatsral Enkhbat, Marshall Center alumna

China and Russia are expanding their defense cooperation through joint military exercises, visits of high-level defense officials, and arms trade and cooperation on military technology. These joint military exercises have become a key feature of China-Russia defense cooperation, demonstrating the deepening strategic partnership between the two countries. In November 2021, then-Defense Minister Wei Fenghe of China and his Russian counterpart at that time, Sergei Shoigu, signed the “Roadmap for Military Cooperation for 2021-2025” to guide their bilateral defense collaboration. As reported by defense intelligence company Janes, the road map focused on increasing bilateral collaboration on strategic military exercises and joint patrols. The increased frequency of joint China-Russia exercises and strategic patrols in the West Pacific, amid rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait, carries significant implications for Taiwan and raises the important question of what political-strategic objectives Beijing aims to accomplish through these drills.

## A Reassuring Partnership

Military exercises can serve political and strategic purposes, according to historian and political scientist Beatrice Heuser, such as reassuring friendships with allies or partners and deterring adversaries. In China’s military strategy, international joint exercises are considered an integral component of overseas use of military power, part of what strategists call “non-war military operations.” In this regard, bilateral exercises are commonly referred to as the soft use of hard power. China has participated in a number of Russia’s annual military exercises, including Vostok-2018, Tsentr-2019, Kavkaz-2020, Zapad-2021 and Vostok-2022, and uses these exercises as a way to reassure Russia of its friendship. China hosted Zapad-2021 in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, marking the first time that Russia’s annual military exercise was held on Chinese territory. The state-run Chinese media source Global Times emphasized the importance of the joint exercise to both countries, saying it was to “consolidate the comprehensive strategic partnership in a new era between China and Russia, and deepen the pragmatic cooperation and traditional friendship between the two militaries.”

Moreover, the two nations have been co-organizing the “Joint Sea” naval drills since 2012, and there has been a significant increase in the frequency and scale of these exercises. Joint Sea-2023, conducted in the Sea of Japan, featured more than 30 naval aviation assets, including anti-submarine aircraft, helicopters and fighter-interceptors from both navies. Joint Sea-2022 took place in the East China Sea in December 2022. According to the official website of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), a senior Chinese naval officer underscored the significance of these joint exercises, stating that they have evolved into a stable cooperation platform and vital communications channel for the two militaries. Through these exercises, the two sides demonstrate mutual support as close strategic partners.

In March 2023, Moscow pledged to support China on the “Taiwan issue” in a joint statement released after a meeting between Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The statement affirmed Moscow’s recognition of Taiwan as an inseparable part of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), its opposition to any form of Taiwanese independence and its firm backing of China’s actions regarding the democratically governed island.



Russian President Vladimir Putin, left, then-Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe, center, and then-Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu watch ceremonies at the Vostok-2018 military exercise at Tsugol training ground in Siberia. SPUTNIK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Chinese J-15 fighter jets are readied aboard the aircraft carrier Liaoning during a drill. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

In recent years, tensions in the Taiwan Strait have subtly increased, driven by the heightened strategic competition between China and the United States. In 2022, when then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taipei, the Chinese responded assertively with a series of live-fire military drills, including firing a hypersonic missile into the waters around Taiwan. The following year, after former Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with the next U.S. House speaker, Kevin McCarthy, the PLA conducted a live-fire drill, simulating strikes against Taiwan involving the deployment of an aircraft carrier, long-range rockets, vessels, fighter jets and conventional missiles. Tensions were exacerbated by a February 2024 incident near Kinmen Island, where two Chinese fishermen drowned after their boat was chased by Taiwan's Coast Guard. With tensions continuing to escalate in the Taiwan Strait, Beijing will likely seek to further tighten its military ties with Moscow, and joint exercises serve as an important platform to facilitate collaboration between the two militaries, given that the two nations do not have an official military alliance.

### Signaling Deterrence

According to China's military strategy, exercises are considered a crucial means of implementing strategic deterrence. "The Science of Military Strategy," a key Chinese book on military strategy and doctrines, published in 2020, emphasizes

the role of exercises in creating confusion and uncertainty. It asserts that exercises achieve a deterrent effect by showcasing the PLA's combat capabilities to potential adversaries, instilling doubt regarding China's intentions and inducing psychological panic. China sometimes uses military drills to warn adversaries that Beijing views something they have done as a provocation. By showcasing its close military ties with Russia, China aims to discourage actions that could undermine its interests or pose a threat to its territorial claims, particularly concerning Taiwan.

In 2019, China and Russia began to conduct strategic sea and air patrols in the Sea of Japan, East China Sea and western Pacific Ocean. Initially, from 2019 to 2021, joint patrols occurred once a year, but in 2022 two joint air patrols were conducted over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. In May 2022, the two nations sent strategic bombers near Japan when the leaders of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Australia, India, Japan and the U.S.), or Quad, met in Tokyo. Then, in November, Chinese H-6K and Russian Tu-95MS strategic bombers, escorted by Russian Su-30 SM and Su-35S fighters, flew close to Japan and South Korea. The Chinese and Russian aircraft entered South Korea's air defense identification zone with the intention of intimidating one of the U.S.'s most important allies in the region.

A significant shift occurred in 2023, when the frequency of joint patrols increased to three with even more over the



Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. The CCP mouthpiece Global Times emphasized the “firm” China-Russia military cooperation demonstrated by the patrols. In August 2023, a China-Russia flotilla conducted a naval patrol near Alaska not long after Japan expressed intent to host a NATO liaison office beginning in 2024.

From China’s perspective, these drills have a deterrence function by demonstrating Russian support. If China intends to invade Taiwan in the near future, it would be crucial to dissuade key U.S. allies, such as Japan and South Korea, from involvement in the conflict. This creates the impression that Russia is backing China even if it is not. Although China and Russia are drawing closer, it is highly unlikely that Russia would directly engage in any conflict related to Taiwan. However, through joint military exercises, Beijing hopes to sow confusion among U.S. allies in the region and convey the impression that Beijing and Moscow stand united.

### Projecting Power in the Indian Ocean

Since 2019, China and Russia have engaged in joint naval drills with additional partners, extending beyond their traditional geopolitical spheres. A China-Russia-South Africa trilateral maritime exercise, codenamed Mosi (meaning “smoke” in the South African Tswana language), took place near Cape Town in November 2019. According to the official PLA website, the primary objective of the exercise was to improve “maritime economic security, interoperability and maintaining the good relations between the participating navies.” The three countries held a second joint naval drill in the Indian Ocean off South Africa in February 2023. These drills not only signify the broadening of the Sino-Russian partnership to include third parties but also serve to enhance their naval power projection capabilities in the Indian Ocean.

Furthermore, China and Russia conducted a first-ever trilateral naval exercise with Iran in the Gulf of Oman in December 2019. China’s state-run Xinhua news agency reported that the exercise aimed to deepen cooperation among the three nations’ navies and enhance capabilities to safeguard maritime security. A second exercise was held in the Gulf of Oman in January 2022, to which China sent two ships, shipborne helicopters and a contingent of PLA Marines.

These activities suggest China and Russia seek to strengthen their positions in the Indian Ocean, which is one of six regional priority areas in Russia’s maritime domain. According to its 2022 Maritime Doctrine, a major goal of Russian policy in the region is “maintaining and supporting the naval presence of the Russian Federation in the Persian Gulf using logistics support centers in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean and using infrastructure of the states in the region to support the naval activities of the Russian Federation.” To this end, for several years, Russia has engaged in negotiations with Sudan’s government to open a base in Port Sudan, strategically positioning itself in the Red Sea. A permanent Russian military base in Sudan would greatly enhance its strategic posture in Africa and the Indian Ocean.

China views power projection in the Indian Ocean as crucial to safeguarding its national interests, such as securing

its oil shipping routes. China’s enhanced maritime position carries substantial strategic implications for Taiwan. Beijing is particularly concerned with the U.S. security arrangement with Australia, India and Japan. In August 2023, the Quad conducted the Malabar military exercise off the coast of Australia. The exercise, involving 2,000 personnel, incorporated advanced anti-submarine, air defense and gunnery drills, and aviation and communications operations. Beijing worries that in a Taiwan Strait conflict, Quad members might help the U.S. disrupt China’s energy supply. Through international military exercises with Russia and other partners, and various nonwar maneuvers, China seeks to improve its power projection capabilities to effectively respond to and mitigate risks in the Indian Ocean region.



South African civil society activists demonstrate in Durban in February 2023 against their country’s joint military exercises with Russia and China and Russia’s war in Ukraine. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

### Conclusion

Careful observation and analysis of China’s military exercises are crucial to gaining insights into its actions and a better understanding of its behaviors and strategic intentions. To avoid unnecessary incidents or clashes with China, it is important for the U.S. and its allies in the region to accurately interpret the messages behind Chinese military activities, especially its large-scale exercises. Although Beijing and Moscow do not have an official military alliance, China uses their bilateral exercises to reassure its most important strategic partner while simultaneously intimidating regional adversaries amid rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

By establishing interoperability and enhancing capacity for joint operations, Russia signals its ability to engage in closer military collaboration with China. Regardless of the strategic interpretation, the two militaries are improving interoperability through joint drills and strategic patrols, and increasing military cooperation and joint arms development. At the same time, China benefits from its closer military partnership with Russia, which Beijing hopes acts as an effective deterrence to the U.S. and its allies. It remains to be seen whether this China-Russia cooperation remains limited to the Indo-Pacific region or if it will one day extend into the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean. □



# STRATEGIC SHOCKWAVES

## China-Taiwan Tensions Challenge European Defense and Security

By **Sarder Ali Haider**, Marshall Center alumnus

**G**rowing tensions between China and Taiwan are complicating countries' interactions and global relations. These tensions force countries around the world, especially in Europe, to adjust to a rapidly changing security environment. The situation highlights the close links among global security, economic advancement, and people's rights to govern themselves and make independent decisions.

In the complex world of global politics, these tensions stand out as a major challenge to worldwide peace and security. The dispute has grown into a major problem that could affect the balance of power across the world. The hostility originates from China's claim that Taiwan is part of its territory. However, Taiwan insists on maintaining its own identity and democratic principles. This dispute causes tensions not just between China and Taiwan but also affects international relationships and has a significant impact on global peace and stability.

This clash is a real test for the international rules-based order and the world's ability to maintain peace and security. China's aggressive actions and Taiwan's desire for global recognition have turned their dispute into an issue of world-wide significance. This situation raises important questions

about national sovereignty, democracy and international law. As tensions rise, so does the risk of a conflict that could involve major powers and shake the delicate balance of international peace.

The uncertainty places Europe at a critical point where it needs to rethink its defense and security strategies. Europe's relations with both China and Taiwan are complicated, involving trade, diplomatic ties and security interests. This places Europe in a special place to affect the outcome. It also means Europe faces many geopolitical risks, such as trade disruptions and the challenges of a world where power is more diffused and new security dangers are emerging.

The complex China-Taiwan relationship requires that Europe looks closely at how a conflict between these parties might impact its interests. It also calls for smart thinking about what choices European leaders have and how to respond in ways that are ethical and practical.

As Europe considers its options, a few important factors stand out. First, there are its economic ties to, and reliance on, the Asia-Pacific region, which could be at risk if the conflict worsens. Second, there are questions of military and strategic preparedness, especially in terms of how Europe can help keep peace in a region that's not especially under its influence. Third, and maybe most importantly, Europe should strive to follow international law and support democracy without worsening the situation or pushing away important allies.

### The China-Taiwan Relationship

Central to the relationship between China and Taiwan is the latter's position as an independent democracy, which contrasts



Taiwan Navy missile boats maneuver during drills in January 2024 in Kaohsiung. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has linked Taiwan's defense measures to European security and Ukraine's resistance against Russia's invasion. GETTY IMAGES

sharply with China's belief that Taiwan is a part of its territory. The resulting political tensions have long influenced their relations with each other and the rest of the world.

The conflict began after the Chinese Civil War ended in 1949. The victorious communists formed the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland, while the defeated Republic of China government retreated to Taiwan. This began the long-standing disagreement over the island's status as an independent country. Taiwan has since developed into a lively democracy with its own government, economy and way of life, which are different from mainland China. However, Beijing still claims that Taiwan is part of China and should submit to its control, even if it means using force.

Over the past few years, developments such as renewed Taiwan-United States defense agreements and continuing military sales have worsened tensions. Beijing sees these actions as threats to its territorial claims and has reacted more aggressively in its language and in military actions around Taiwan.

### Beijing's Approach to Unification

Beijing is applying a complex strategy to achieve its goals, including diplomacy, economic pressure and efforts to influence public opinion in Taiwan. China works hard to isolate Taiwan from the international community, persuading countries to recognize Beijing instead of Taipei, and some countries have recently switched their diplomatic recognition to the PRC. At the same time, China has been demonstrating its military strength through regular exercises and patrols close to Taiwan, aiming to discourage Taipei from moving toward full independence.

However, China also tries to win over the people of Taiwan by offering economic benefits and promoting cultural connections, seeing these as ways to encourage the peaceful incorporation of the island into China. Beijing prefers to avoid the use of military force for now, understanding that war could have devastating effects on both China and Taiwan, as well as on the rest of the world.

These ongoing tensions impact the stability of the region and affect how countries around the world interact with each other. The situation highlights how difficult it is to manage the relationship between China and Taiwan through international diplomacy. It also shows the delicate balance involved for Taiwan — maintaining its status as a sovereign democracy while maintaining peace in the Asia-Pacific region. As Beijing continues to push its claims on Taiwan, the rest of the world watches closely, aware of the possibility of conflict and what that could mean for global peace.

The relationship between China and Taiwan reminds us of the ongoing challenges related to national identity, sovereignty and the struggle to live peacefully in a world that is more connected but also divided politically. The international



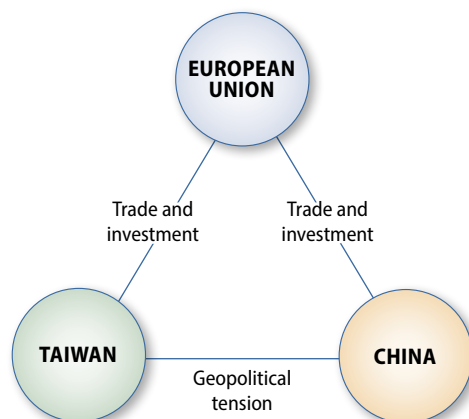
community, including major players such as the U.S. and the European Union, will play key roles in guiding how the China-Taiwan dispute evolves. They will advocate for stability, ongoing talks and a peaceful solution to one of the longest-standing political conflicts of our era.

### Europe's Interests

Europe's engagement with China and Taiwan is driven by a mix of economic benefits and strategic planning. The EU, as a major player in the global economy, has built strong trade connections with both countries. This shows how economically intertwined Europe is with the region and how important it is for Europe's wealth. These relationships go beyond trade; they are crucial to Europe's wider goals in foreign policy and its position in world affairs.

China is one of the EU's biggest trade partners, and Taiwan is key for technology and manufacturing. A conflict

Figure 1: Economic and political relationships among the European Union, China and Taiwan



Source: Sardar Ali Haidar

in the Taiwan Strait would create serious economic problems for Europe, disrupting trade and supply chains and affecting everything from technology to everyday products.

Outside of trade issues, the possibility of conflict between China and Taiwan puts Europe's security and its strategic role in the Asia-Pacific at risk. The EU would like to keep the world stable and open. This means European leaders need to find a careful balance in supporting international rules while dealing with both China and Taiwan.

Europe's plan involves careful diplomacy and encouraging talks to avoid worsening the situation, while also being ready for potential economic or security problems if tensions increase. This approach means working closely with Asia-Pacific countries and the U.S. to have unified responses to any issues.

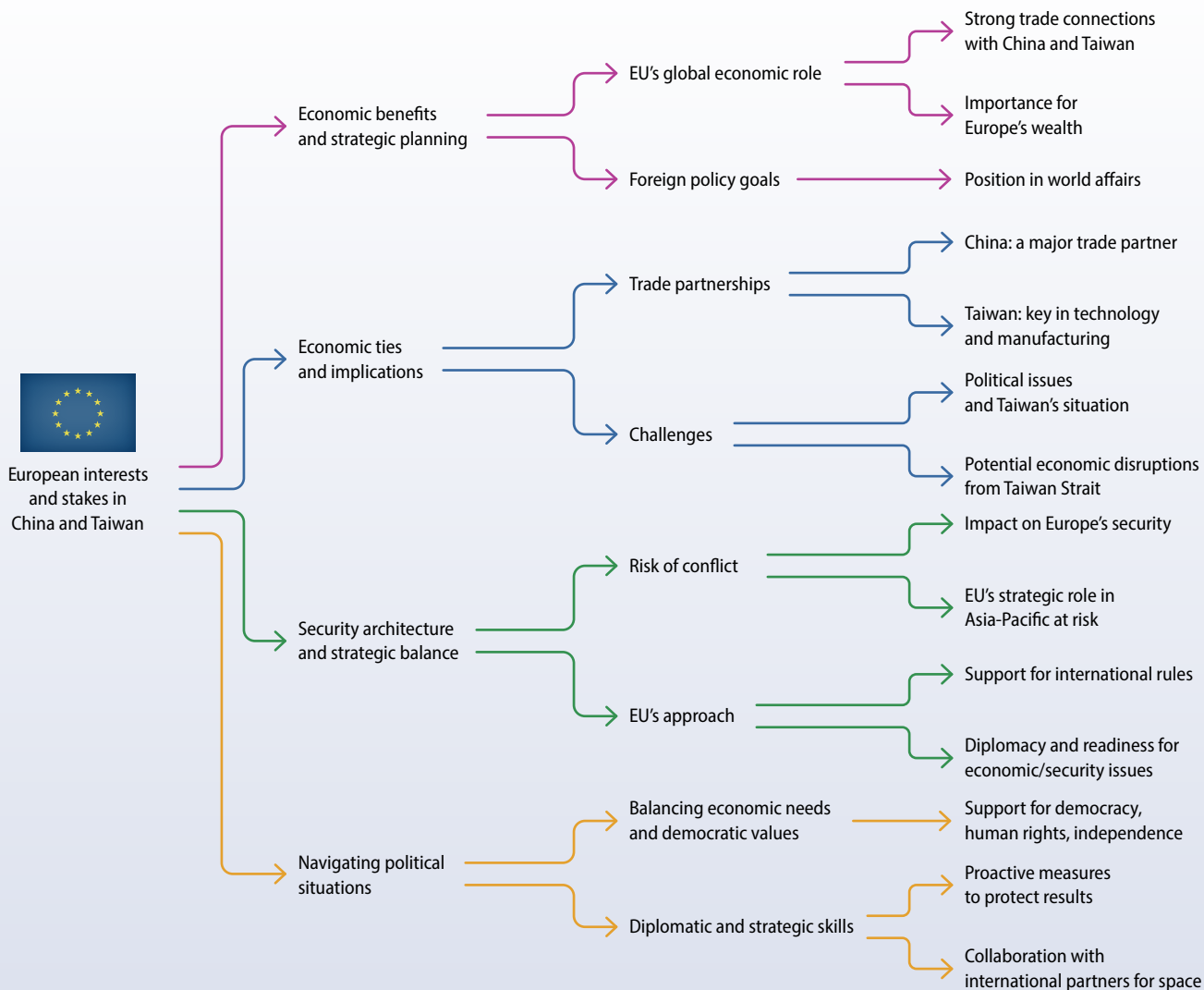
Europe has a large stake in the China-Taiwan conflict as it seeks to protect its economic interests and maintain a

stable, rule-based world order. This puts the EU in a tough spot, needing to navigate a tricky political situation while balancing its economic interests with its support for democracy, human rights and national sovereignty. The possibility of conflict between China and Taiwan is a test of Europe's diplomatic and strategic skills. Europe must be proactive and careful to protect its interests and help keep peace in the region and the world.

### Impact on European Defense and Security

The possibility of a military confrontation between China and Taiwan entails a serious threat to world peace, and it affects Europe's defense and security in many ways. Europe depends on global markets for a steady supply of important parts and materials used in technology and manufacturing. A conflict in the Taiwan Strait could disrupt supply chains for crucial technologies. It could also affect defense systems, weakening

Figure 2: European interests and stakes in China and Taiwan



Source: Sardar Ali Haidar



Europe's technological advantage and readiness for action.

The growing risk of conflict may require European countries to spend a lot more on defense to improve military readiness by updating equipment, improving safeguards against cyberattacks, and making defense material supply chains stronger and more reliable. Europe needs to look closely at its defense strategies, especially focusing on new and emerging threats. It should improve its air and missile defense systems, strengthen its naval forces, and invest in high-tech intelligence and reconnaissance technologies. These steps would help protect European interests and support efforts to maintain peace.

The evolving threat situation means Europe needs to update its security strategy, aiming to be more united and flexible. European countries, along with EU institutions and NATO, should seek new ways to work together to better handle crises and new security problems. This could include strengthening ties with important allies and initiating talks with both China and Taiwan to push for a peaceful solution and stability in the region.

The risk of disrupted supply chains, together with Europe's need to spend more on defense and rethink military and security strategies, shows the potentially complex and widespread effects of such a conflict between China and Taiwan. Collaborating on defense strategies and international diplomacy are key to reduce risks and protect Europe in an uncertain world.

### NATO's Role and European Diplomacy

NATO's handling of China-Taiwan tensions demonstrates the balance needed to match defense strategies with changing global politics. This careful, thoughtful approach highlights the significant challenges Europe would face were there to be conflict in the Taiwan Strait and the importance of diplomatic flexibility and strategic planning. The EU and NATO are leading these efforts.

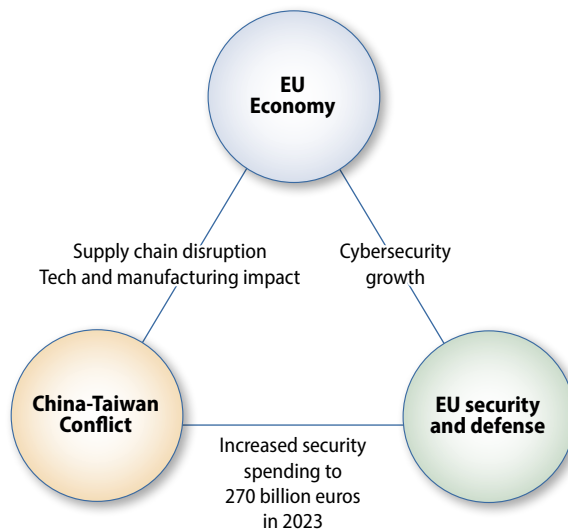
NATO, which has traditionally focused on security in the Euro-Atlantic region, now must deal with the implications of China's growing military power and strategic boldness. The Alliance recognizes how security issues around the world are interconnected and how events in the Taiwan Strait could affect security in Europe. Although NATO doesn't play a direct role in the Asia-Pacific region, its interest in preserving international norms and preventing conflicts from worsening reflects its wider goals of maintaining peace and stability.

NATO's Strategic Concept and other communications express the increasing challenges that come with China's growing power, including the impact on security across regions and the overall balance of power worldwide. NATO stresses the importance of following international rules and the need for talks and diplomacy, a posture that matches European values and strategic goals.

### European Diplomatic Initiatives

The EU, which strongly supports cooperation and adherence to international law, is seeking a careful balance by respecting

Figure 3: Impact on European Union defense and security



Source: Sardar Ali Haidar



Members of the European Commission and the Chinese delegation exchange documents at the fifth China-EU High Level Economic and Trade dialogue in Beijing in 2015. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

each country's rights while working to prevent conflict. Its approach is to push for peaceful solutions through talks, using its economic and political power to encourage positive discussions between the parties. In the Indo-Pacific region, the EU seeks stability. It aims to protect and facilitate trade and freedom of movement for commercial shipping. Europe is using diplomacy and working with countries in the region to help calm tensions.

### The EU and NATO — Shaping Europe's Response

Teamwork between the EU and NATO is key in shaping how Europe responds to potential conflict between China and Taiwan. This partnership helps Europe take an approach that includes diplomatic, economic and military strategies.

# The possibility of conflict between China and Taiwan highlights critical issues for European defense and security strategies, stressing the need to develop a stronger, more self-reliant and unified approach.

The EU's diplomatic efforts, along with NATO's strategic thinking, constitute a blueprint for Europe's constructive involvement in the Indo-Pacific region. This cooperative strategy demonstrates the importance of a unified European position in support of global peace and stability.

NATO's careful stance on the China-Taiwan situation and Europe's strategic and diplomatic actions underline the vital role of diplomacy in dealing with global tensions. As Europe confronts the challenges of the region, cooperation between the EU and NATO is key to promote peace and the international rule of law, and to protect European interests in a changing world.

A major lesson for Europe, given increasing global tensions, is the vital need to become technologically self-sufficient. The risk of supply chain disruptions, particularly in high-tech areas and essential infrastructure, shows the dangers of relying too much on non-European countries. Europe needs to greatly increase its investment in research and development to foster environments where innovation can thrive. This could lead to Europe developing its own advanced technologies in areas like cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and quantum computing. Moving toward technological independence would not only strengthen Europe's defense but it also would improve its competitive edge and its standing in the technological realm.

The risk of a conflict between China and Taiwan highlights the fragility of global supply chains and shows the importance of diversifying sources for essential materials and components. Europe should aim to create stronger trade and investment relationships with a wider range of partners to lessen risks from geopolitical disruptions. By developing closer economic relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific, Africa and Latin America, Europe could secure a more reliable supply of crucial items, including semiconductors and rare earth minerals. This strategy would increase its strategic independence and strengthen its economic stability.

The complex China-Taiwan situation — and the overarching strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific — calls for a new approach to Europe's diplomacy in the region. By building stronger relationships with important countries in the Indo-Pacific, Europe can not only meet its own strategic needs but also help make the region more stable and secure. This means Europe should encourage open dialogue by engaging in one-on-one talks as well as multilateral discussions, and support efforts to reduce tensions.

The changing global security landscape, highlighted by the tensions between China and Taiwan, gives Europe a chance to redefine its role in world leadership. Europe's dedication to multilateral cooperation, upholding human rights and following the rule of law makes it a key player in shaping the world. By pushing for ways to solve conflicts peacefully, supporting international organizations and contributing to global security, Europe can take on a leadership role that matches its values and goals.

The risk of conflict between China and Taiwan is a wake-up call for Europe to reexamine its strategic approach. It must work to achieve technological independence, diversify its supply chains, increase its diplomatic efforts in the Indo-Pacific and take an active role in shaping global rules. This will not only help protect Europe's interests but also help make the world more stable, peaceful and prosperous.



Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. produces about 90% of the world's advanced chips. Chip production makes Taiwan a critical piece of the global technology supply chain. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## Long-Term Strategic Implications

The possibility of conflict between China and Taiwan highlights critical issues for European defense and security strategies, stressing the need to develop a stronger, more self-reliant and unified approach. This case not only reveals Europe's current strategic weaknesses, such as its reliance on non-European partners in key areas, but also encourages it to rethink how it interacts with the rest of the world, innovates technologically and manages its supply chains. The long-term effects of such a conflict could significantly impact how Europe plans its defense, shapes its economic policies and approaches diplomacy, especially concerning the Indo-Pacific. Europe now has the opportunity to reshape its strategy to ensure its interests and security in a rapidly changing global landscape.



## Strategic Recommendations

As Europe deals with the complications created by the tensions between China and Taiwan, it must adjust its strategy to protect its interests and help keep the world stable. Here are suggestions for Europe to improve its defense, expand its economic ties and strengthen its diplomatic stance:

- **Strengthen cybersecurity**

Europe must make its cybersecurity stronger to defend against spying, attacks and false information. This means allocating sufficient resources to the latest cyber defense technology, teaching people more about cyber safety, and working in cooperation with private companies to protect important services and systems. Cooperative cybersecurity initiatives within the EU, such as creating joint cyber teams, can help better defend against cyberthreats.

- **Reassess alliances and partnerships**

In a world of strategic competition, Europe needs to reevaluate its friendships and alliances. It should build stronger ties with countries in the Indo-Pacific to mutually improve security and economic benefits. Strengthening NATO's role in the region, including working more closely with Asia-Pacific partners, can help address security issues. This effort should focus on shared values and respect among partner nations that support a fair international system.

- **Diversify supply chains**

Recent events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have shown the risk of relying too heavily on too few sources for important technologies and goods. Europe should try to depend less on China and Taiwan by finding other sources for critical items. This means finding alternative suppliers, expanding its own production where possible and working with trusted partners to ensure supply chains can survive disruptions.

- **Strengthen diplomatic efforts**

Europe should use its influence to help reduce tensions and encourage talks between Beijing and Taipei. By supporting democratic values in Taiwan and elsewhere, while still recognizing the "One China" policy, Europe shows its dedication to democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Through active involvement in institutions such as the United Nations, Europe can help push for peace and stability.

- **Review defense spending**

With security threats changing, Europe must look closely not only at how much it spends on defense but also on what the funds are spent. This means not just spending more money but also investing in updated military equipment and weaponry, and adding new technology. Focusing on things that make Europe

more independent, such as satellite communications, drones and advanced surveillance, can provide military advantages.

- **Address economic security**

Economic security and national security are closely connected. Europe should prepare for trade problems that could result from political tensions by using economic diplomacy to protect its interests, making trade deals that consider security, developing plans for emergencies and making its market stronger. Keeping the financial system safe and defending against economic pressures are also important.

By following these recommendations, Europe will be better able to handle challenges arising from China-Taiwan tensions, improving its security and economic stability, and increasing its influence. Taking steps to address these complex issues can help Europe protect its interests and support a stable, fair international system.

## Conclusion

The potential for conflict between China and Taiwan makes this a critical moment for Europe, one that requires a rethinking of its strategic posture. While the situation is challenging, it gives Europe an opportunity to demonstrate its importance to global diplomacy and security. The complex relationship between China and Taiwan, along with wider global developments, calls for a smart and flexible European response.

Europe's new strategy should stick closely to its core values, such as support for democracy, the rule of law and human rights. In the face of current complex challenges, it should be practical and adaptable in its approaches to defense and diplomacy. Making its cyber defenses stronger, finding additional sources for essential supplies, rethinking alliances and boosting diplomatic efforts are key to Europe adjusting to a world of changing power dynamics.

China-Taiwan tensions highlight the need for a more self-reliant Europe. This means improving its defenses, making its economy more robust, and taking a more active and confident role in world diplomacy. Europe's actions in the Indo-Pacific, its approach to the China-Taiwan situation, and its push for peaceful solutions can help stabilize global affairs.

Looking forward, Europe faces many uncertainties and challenges. However, with its strong diplomatic tradition, economic power and dedication to international rules, Europe is well placed to make a positive difference. The conflict between China and Taiwan compels Europe to redefine its role in the world, enhancing its security while living up to its values.

Europe should seek not only to protect its own interests in dealing with the China-Taiwan issue and other global challenges but it also should work to create lasting peace. In doing so, Europe can be a principled leader in a changing world, committed to promoting stability, security and prosperity everywhere. □



# CRISIS INTERVENTION

## Europe must engage China to help ensure stability in Egypt

By Col. (Ret.) Mark Stiefbold, U.S. Army, and Dr. Rod Stiefbold | Photos by Reuters

**T**he government of China is uniquely positioned to influence Egyptian stability. A destabilized Egypt would increase the flow of migrants to Europe, resulting in reduced European political and military policy cohesion. Such a result would benefit China's efforts to establish unilateral agreements with individual European countries and advocate for European acceptance of a China-Russia narrative for ending the Ukraine war. Awareness of these risks does not imply the capability, capacity or policy unity of the European Union to effectively manage them.

Nation-states have a finite capacity to assess and effectively manage complex problems. European leaders and the populaces they represent must concurrently confront a war of attrition on their bloc's border, refugee-driven irregular migration, stagnant economies and disillusionment with the aspirational goals of a united Europe. Adapting a business term, complex problems inherently are made up of too many interrelated factors for a person to absorb and process. European institutions, made up of competing and factional interests, struggle — much as people do — to combine interrelated factors into aligned and effective policy. How close is Europe to a tipping point? It could be one problem away from irreparably damaging what historian Ian Morris called the “most extraordinary experiment in the history of political institutions.” While that quote dates from 2016 and Britain's

pending referendum on its EU membership, current conditions show that the threat to the ideal of Europe remains. For Europe to succeed, it must mitigate impacts from existing crises while proactively managing future risks. Significant among those risks is the destabilization of Egypt's government.

Europe is confronting two concurrent refugee crises; one was created by the war in Ukraine and another was caused by instability in several African countries. Excluding those from Ukraine, which is a separate issue, there were 875,000 asylum applications in 2022, up 52% from 2021. In 2023, there were 44% more irregular entries into the EU than in 2022. Egyptians represented only 4% of these entries, though there is potential for their share to become much higher. For example, in 2022, Egyptians were 12.2% of irregular refugees from the eastern, central and western Mediterranean routes. This reflected the collapse of the Egyptian pound after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The devaluation stemmed from the risk — both real and perceived — of an interruption in Ukrainian grain exports to Egypt, spurring an exodus of economic migrants to Europe. Yet, the 2022 stressors on Egypt's economy pale by comparison with those of 2024.

Egypt remains a destination — if not of choice, then of necessity — for Palestinians, Sudanese, Syrians, and others fleeing conflicts and economic malaise. The approximately 500,000 refugees in Egypt are an added economic burden



for Cairo's government, led by President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi. The newcomers also pose a potential security risk: As extremism expands into the rest of Egypt from the Sinai Peninsula, it provides an alternative for the disillusioned and disenfranchised — Egyptians and refugees alike. Security and economic stability are essential for moderating the flow of refugees. The collapse of the Egyptian government would generate a refugee crisis that could overwhelm Europe, snapping tenuous links of bloc unity.

The seeds of an Egyptian government collapse are sown in the government's subsidized bread program. A nutrition dependency with early 20th century origins, 67% of Egypt's 113.8 million residents participate in the program, consuming 9 million tons of wheat per year. With public debt at 89% of gross domestic product (GDP), declining remittances from a global diaspora, 34% inflation and a devalued currency, the Egyptian government cannot feasibly sustain the bread program. Perhaps recognizing this, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), through January 2024, has bailed out Egypt four times in almost eight years, a largess frequency unlikely to abate, so long as global institutions assess it as a state too big to fail. When the IMF said that it and "Egyptian authorities also agreed on the critical importance of strengthening social spending to protect vulnerable groups," perhaps it was not low- and middle-income households they referred to, but the Egyptian government. For Egypt to end its economic malaise, it must find a deep-pocketed partner with flexibility, if not hostility, to Western mores on economic transparency and personal, civic, political and social rights.

To the EU's detriment, one such partner is China. Egypt has an enduring relationship with Beijing. They have extensive economic ties, with China being Egypt's fourth-largest creditor and a facilitator of multiple industrial and trade zones, such as the Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone. The zone, according to Chinese media, generates taxes to Egypt of more than \$200 million with nearly 6,000 direct jobs and 50,000 dependent jobs — a modest bright spot in an otherwise struggling economy. Revenue from the Suez Canal hit a record high in Egypt's fiscal year 2023 at \$9.4 billion, with 25,887 ships transiting, an 8.7% increase in traffic from the previous year. As regional tensions increase and act as a catalyst for attacks on civilian shipping, Suez Canal transits have declined, plummeting 45% in the two months after the first attack on Red Sea shipping in November 2023, following the outbreak of hostilities in Gaza. While transits and revenue collected in transit fees will fluctuate with risks, and Egypt will continue efforts to prop up collections through rate increases, the unpredictability of war makes future revenue collections uncertain. During a time of economic stress and uncertainty, Egypt views its friendship with China as essential. Chinese efforts to publicize trade, political engagements and support for statements backing a Palestinian state likely buoy the Egyptian government's confidence in China. Likewise, the EU can find solace in a separate effect of China's support of the Egyptian government: stability, and hence no increase in refugees. (Government support and economic and societal stability are not mutually inclusive.)

The EU needs a stable Egypt, and hence the European Commission must recognize and act based on how China would similarly benefit, both economically and in national prestige. For example, China would ensure security for \$2 billion in existing China Development Bank Loans and other Chinese foreign-direct investments (FDI) in Egypt. The FDI, in turn, influences regional markets to consume Chinese goods and services, furthering the intent of China's strategic One Belt, One Road policy (renamed the Belt and Road Initiative). Egyptian national stability also reduces the risk of the government trying to distract or unify its citizens in a fevered pitch of nationalism, which could endanger other regionally significant China-supported projects, such as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Enabling regional stability would demonstrate diplomatic prowess and potentially enable China to displace the United States as the primary diplomatic partner for Middle East-Israel relations.

An alternative course of action for China is to enable, either directly or through nonbenign neglect, a destabilized Egypt. Their assumed calculus would be that the harm done to the EU, and by extension NATO and the U.S., by an unstable Egypt would benefit China. Destabilization would increase economic refugees into the EU, exacerbating the rift between those countries on whose shores they land, and those nations ensconced behind multiple borders — be they political or geographic. Refugees provide EU populists with potent rallying points regarding perceived wrongs enacted by the European Commission. European policymakers, distracted by a refugee crisis, are less likely to unite on policies

The Iconic Tower skyscraper was built by China State Construction Engineering in the New Administrative Capital east of Cairo.





in conflict with China's interests. Each of those interests, such as limitless low-duty access to EU markets, tacit support of Russian aggression in Ukraine and toward the Baltic states to distract the U.S. and NATO, and endorsing citizen repression in exchange for government stability, present a crack in the human rights-based governance, economic viability and regional security of the EU.

China's support for Egypt could further prepare it for a takeover of Taiwan. Though the EU does not recognize Taiwan diplomatically, it does support the island's inclusion in multilateral forums, such as the World Trade Organization. Policy friction between the EU and China over Taiwan would intensify if the Chinese used an Egyptian government collapse to build military competencies applicable to a takeover. During a pending or actual Egyptian collapse, China could justify increasing its regional forces to protect its funded or owned assets. Such forces could be United Nations-mandated to prevent a humanitarian crisis or descent into violent factionalism. Such a mandate, fulfilled by China, would serve as a force-projection rehearsal, building competencies and scale relevant to a Taiwan invasion. With Egypt's military assessed as the 15th-most capable globally and having a history of either sustaining or changing the government, such external offers of support might be unwelcome. Egypt, too, gets a voice on how its stability is sustained, a voice that the EU can seek to influence.

As the European Commission seeks to ensure unity in representing the EU's overall interests, the European Parliament and the many factions within national governments must answer to their citizens. Local grievances arising from domestic and regional factionalism can triumph over enduring EU policies intended to benefit the broader union. This was apparent in the fall of 2023 when Hungary, Poland and Slovakia unilaterally continued

a ban on Ukrainian grain imports after the original EU measure expired. Likewise, early 2024 saw Polish farmers continue to protest inexpensive grain imports from Ukraine while France successfully lobbied the EU to act on French farmers' demands, ranging from limiting Ukrainian imports to relaxing environmental regulations. China indirectly benefits from these actions. Friction, in the form of increased costs and bureaucracy for Kyiv to export grain to the EU, increases grain availability for other markets. While Egypt is traditionally a welcome market for Ukrainian grain, China has the potential to be the stable, creditworthy grain procurer Ukrainian farmers seek. This occurred under the Black Sea Grain Initiative, during which China imported 400% more Ukrainian grain than Egypt. Neither depriving Ukraine of safe-currency grain sales into the EU nor letting Egypt potentially be outbid on the open grain/commodity market is good for the EU's stated intentions to support Ukraine and stem the flow of economic refugees.

China is the world's largest consumer of wheat. Egypt is the second-largest importer. As a funding partner for GERD and with Chinese President Xi Jinping's "no-limits friendship" to Russia, China is uniquely positioned to influence Egyptian stability. Specifically, China has the potential to support Cairo's claims to consistent and sufficient Nile River water flow to support its domestic wheat production. The EU perceives China to have influence with Russia over Ukrainian grain export deals — deals that could benefit Egypt. Note that China has conflicting interests: China was the top destination for agricultural products from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, and so is in competition with Egypt for wheat. Ukraine supplied 22% of Egypt's imported wheat from 2017 to 2021 and, being more price sensitive than China in their grain purchases, a reduced supply of Ukrainian grain in the global market has a larger negative economic impact on Egypt.



Egyptian women buy subsidized food at a government-run consumer association market in Cairo amid high prices for consumer goods.





The 400-meter-long container ship Ever Given, which is part of the Evergreen fleet, blocked the Suez Canal in Egypt after getting stuck in 2021. The incident disrupted global commerce.

An example of China's options to support or impede Egyptian stability is its relationship with Ethiopia and the GERD. About 90% of Egypt's water is sourced from the Nile. Located in northwest Ethiopia on the Blue Nile, GERD is designed to generate 5,250 megawatts of power, with at least 14% funded through Chinese loans. Hence, China has both investments in Ethiopia to protect and an opportunity to support Egypt's claims for more water security from GERD. Ethiopia's unilateral approach to filling GERD and its lack of collaboration with Chad and Egypt — the only two Blue Nile states with rights to its water — have increased regional tensions. By potentially offering security guarantees to Egypt in the form of a minimum water supply in the name of humanitarian assistance, China would value Egyptian over Ethiopian interests. Thus, China has multiple means of either helping or harming Egyptian stability. Europe must highlight the advantages to China of being first among equals of countries that enable Egyptian stability. These include a disparate and potentially irreconcilable group of nations, such as China, Russia and the U.S., together with the IMF and other inter-governmental and transnational organizations.

Egypt's stability is crucial if Europe is to remain a union able to incorporate competing factions without further dissolution. This will require the EU to engage with and influence China. Even where interests are not aligned, their respective goals may be. Most significantly, both China and the EU have domestic economies that are struggling to grow or sustain growth. The European Central Bank is projecting EU GDP growth of 0.6% in 2024, while the National Bureau of Statistics of China is calling for 4.6%, a significant drop from 2023 and more than 25% less than pre-COVID norms. An Egyptian stability crisis would only further depress the GDP of the EU and China by causing further inflationary

pressures. Stability also is crucial to the viability of the Suez Canal, Port Said and Suez Port, the canal's northern and southern terminuses respectively. Without Egyptian stability there is no canal or port security, resulting in higher shipping costs for China's extensive exports to the EU. As the Ever Given container ship demonstrated in 2021, a single ship can effectively block the canal, halting EU-bound trade. The resulting inflationary shock from rising logistics prices would likely crater already lackluster EU consumer confidence and meager GDP growth targets.

The EU is facing multiple complex and layered issues in need of resolution, each competing for limited resources and awareness. Among these, the potential collapse of Egyptian national stability should be an essential priority. On par with Russian aggression on the union's eastern flank, the collapse of Africa's second-largest economy would create an existential threat for the EU. It would not be an army of tanks, drones and other hardware inherent to Russia's enduring aggression in Ukraine that would be crossing EU borders, but one of economic refugees. To manage this risk, the EU must assess competing Chinese courses of action to support or hinder Egyptian stability. Will China continue to prop up Egypt by keeping the country solvent, watch it collapse through somewhat benign neglect, or actively accelerate the dissolution of Egypt's government, confident that Beijing will emerge as its savior? There are risks and opportunities for China in each option. For the EU, only Egyptian stability enables success. Hence, the European Commission benefits from engaging both with intergovernmental enablers of Egyptian stability, such as the IMF, and with China, accepting competing methods but potentially aligned interests. The EU and China both benefit from a stable Egypt. Collaboration can bridge other differences and result in mutual success. □





TRANSNATIONAL  
**REPRESSION**

CCP'S OVERSEAS POLICING  
DRAWS INTERNATIONAL  
CONDEMNATION

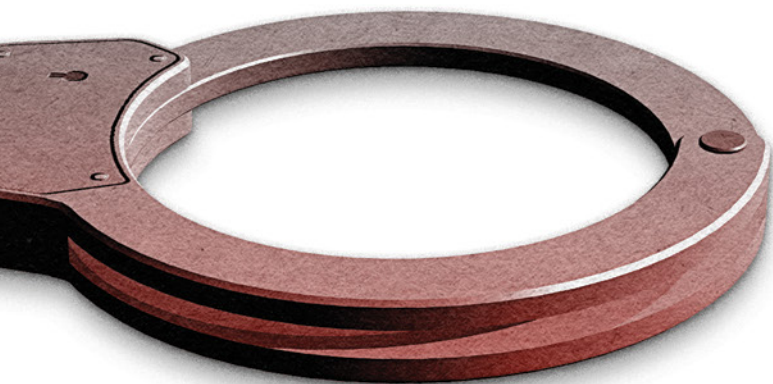


INDO-PACIFIC DEFENSE FORUM ILLUSTRATION



The People's Republic of China (PRC) continues to face international criticism for violating the sovereignty of nations across the globe with its "overseas police service stations," clandestine offices established in many cases without the approval or knowledge of the countries that become their unsuspecting hosts. Rights advocates say the stations are bases that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) uses to track and harass dissidents living abroad. Those findings have sparked investigations and criminal charges from Europe to the Indo-Pacific to North America.

Safeguard Defenders, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) based in Spain, revealed 102 of the police outposts in 53 countries. The human rights group's research highlights open-source Chinese reports touting the stations' existence on every continent except Antarctica, and the NGO says similar international facilities, often referred to as "service centers" in Chinese reporting, are also linked to police in the PRC. While the PRC appears to have policing arrangements with a handful of the countries, media reports from more than a dozen nations indicate the offices opened covertly and that law enforcement and government officials in unwitting host locations consider them illegal.



The CCP insists the offices provide Chinese citizens overseas with administrative services, such as driver's license renewal, that were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Reports from CCP authorities and state and party media, however, suggest they predate the pandemic. "Public security bureaus" in the PRC began work on the outposts as early as 2016, according to Safeguard Defenders.

Furthermore, CCP officials have said publicly that 230,000 Chinese nationals were "persuaded to return" to



Safeguard Defenders Campaign Director Laura Harth says the CCP uses entrapment and kidnapping to repatriate Chinese nationals. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

face criminal fraud charges in the PRC from April 2021 to July 2022. To understand those campaigns, the human rights group analyzed CCP tactics, which is how researchers first found evidence of the secret police stations, Laura Harth, a campaign director for Safeguard Defenders, told a Canadian House of Commons committee in March 2023. The group says most of the "returns" lauded by the PRC are "non-traditional, often illegal means of forcing someone to return to China against their will, most often to face certain imprisonment." Experts say Chinese courts have a conviction rate of more than 99%.

The CCP's overseas policing is problematic partly because it does not adhere to widely held standards such as judicial fairness. The CCP's brand of persuasion includes threatening, intimidating, and harassing overseas targets and imprisoning their relatives in the PRC, according to the Safeguard Defenders' report, "110 Overseas: Chinese Transnational Policing Gone Wild."

The same methods, the NGO says, are integral parts of the CCP's widely documented Fox Hunt and Skynet operations, global programs to apprehend purported Chinese fugitives — and known for violating the laws of sovereign countries and abusing human rights. The targets are public officials and businesspeople accused of corruption. "But some of these people didn't do what they are charged with having done," John Demers, the former head of the United States Justice Department's national security

# Countries with CCP-Linked Police Stations

■ Human rights advocates say the PRC opened police stations in these countries.

division told the ProPublica news organization in 2021. “And we also know that the Chinese government has used the anti-corruption campaign more broadly within the country with a political purpose.” Fox Hunt has overlapped with the CCP’s illicit overseas police stations, researchers wrote.

## ‘EDUCATE’ AND ‘PERSUADE’

Safeguard Defenders uncovered reports of numerous “persuasion to return” operations connected to Chinese police stations:

- One suspect returned to the PRC after being “educated” by the staff at a station in Madrid, Spain, who were working directly with police in Qingtian in China’s Zhejiang province, according to Chinese media reports.
- Officials at a station in Belgrade, Serbia, run by Qingtian police, contacted a Chinese national accused of theft and used the WeChat social media platform for “persuasion,” the Zhejiang Internet Radio and Television Station reported in 2019.
- The head of a police station in Paris founded by Zhejiang authorities told Chinese media in 2021 that he was “entrusted by the domestic public security organs to help persuade a criminal who had been absconding in France for many years to return to China through many visits.”
- Police in China’s Jiangsu province said in July 2022 that their “police and overseas linkage stations” assisted in the capture or persuasion of 80 “criminal suspects” returned to the PRC, although the report does not specify where those operations took place.

Not all of the CCP’s transnational harassment is linked to its illicit police outposts. Law enforcement agents and human rights advocates have documented other examples of coercion on foreign soil. Safeguard Defenders’ 2022 “Involuntary Returns” report detailed instances in

### CANADA

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is investigating reported criminal activity related to Chinese police stations. The RCMP created a hotline and urged Chinese Canadians to report harassment linked to overseas policing.

### UNITED STATES

A federal law enforcement investigation forced a Chinese police station in New York to close. The U.S. has also charged Chinese nationals and others accused of transnational repression and imposed visa restrictions on PRC officials. The FBI created a website for victims to report efforts by foreign governments to stalk, intimidate or assault people in the U.S.

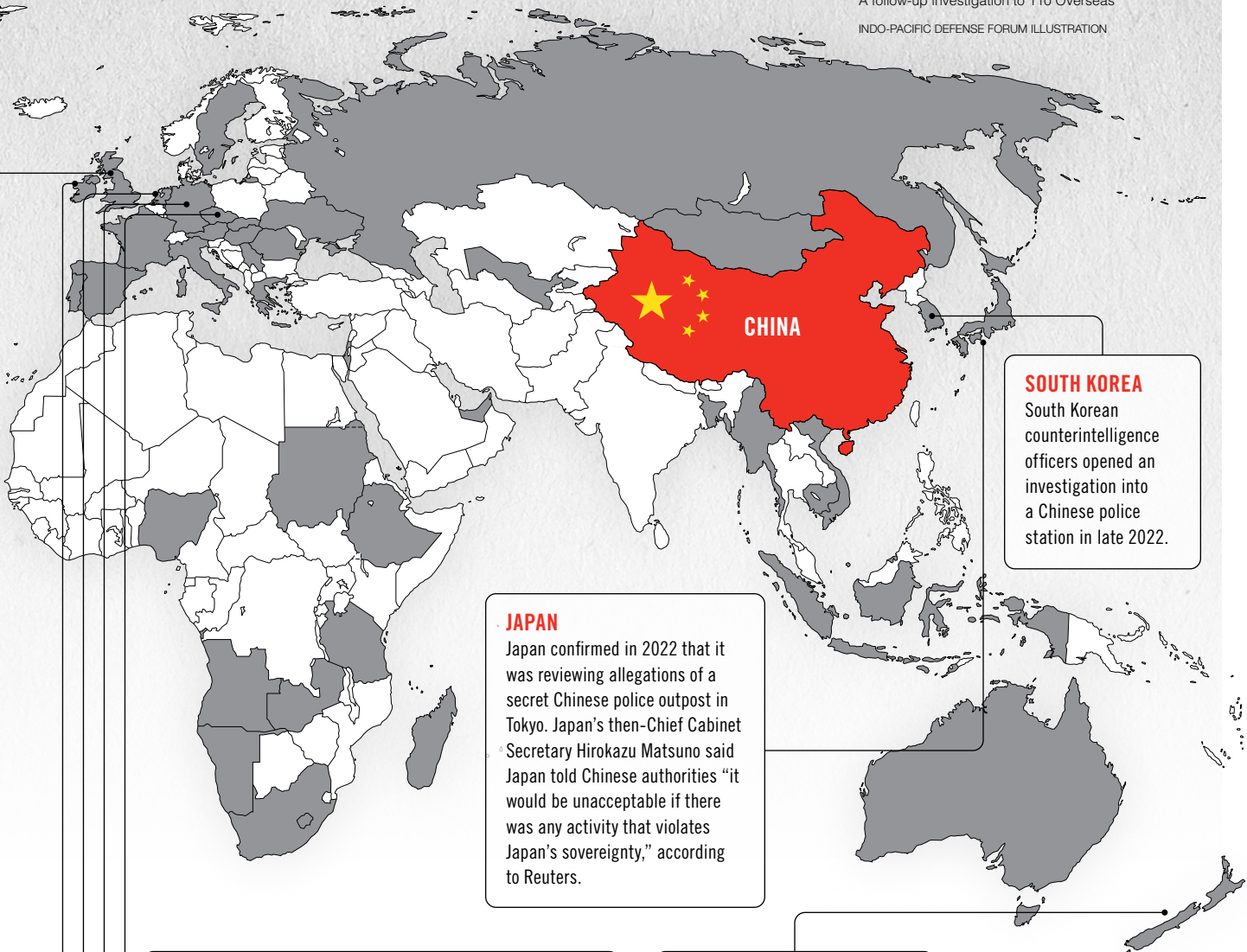
Australia, Canada, Southeast Asia, the U.S. and elsewhere. The group told the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. that it found seven cases of people living in Canada who were targeted by CCP agents. They included a former Chinese judge accused of corruption after criticizing the PRC’s criminal system. The NGO’s report said police in the PRC tried to force his return by arresting his sister and son.

Since 2020, the U.S. Justice Department has criminally charged at least 51 Chinese citizens and a dozen PRC-linked suspects after investigators found evidence of forced repatriation schemes, surveillance, harassment and attempts to coerce Chinese residents in the U.S.

### UNITED KINGDOM

After an investigation by British police and warnings from the U.K. government, the Chinese embassy said CCP-linked police stations in Britain had closed.





**SOUTH KOREA**  
South Korean counterintelligence officers opened an investigation into a Chinese police station in late 2022.

**JAPAN**  
Japan confirmed in 2022 that it was reviewing allegations of a secret Chinese police outpost in Tokyo. Japan's then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said Japan told Chinese authorities "it would be unacceptable if there was any activity that violates Japan's sovereignty," according to Reuters.

**CZECH REPUBLIC**  
A Czech official told media that relevant authorities investigated police service centers there and, in late 2022, two stations in Prague were closed.

**NEW ZEALAND**  
New Zealand authorities are investigating Chinese police stations.

**GERMANY**  
German officials requested the PRC close two stations accused of conducting espionage against members of the Chinese diaspora and spreading CCP propaganda.

**THE NETHERLANDS**  
In the Netherlands, officials said illegal PRC stations were ordered to close in 2022.

**IRELAND**  
Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs ordered the Fuzhou Police Service Overseas Station in central Dublin to close in late 2022.

The accused include 40 officers with the PRC's National Police, at least one other police officer

and a court official in the PRC. Among the victims are a naturalized U.S. citizen who helped lead the 1989 pro-democracy demonstrations in Beijing, an artist and Chinese national who criticized the CCP, and a Chinese-born U.S. resident accused of financial crimes in the PRC.

Elsewhere, the CCP has kidnapped targets. Laws relating to the PRC's supposed anti-corruption operations explicitly allow for "unconventional measures," such as abduction and entrapment. "They may use luring or entrapment of individuals," Harth told news broadcaster CNN. "So, they might try to get a person to a country where it's easier to ... bring them back to China because the judicial safeguards are less in that particular place. But they may even use kidnapping. ... Chinese authorities expressly say that kidnapping is a legitimate means to retrieve a person."



A human rights NGO says it uncovered an illicit PRC-linked police station in this London neighborhood. GETTY IMAGES

## BEIJING HAS FORMAL POLICING AGREEMENTS WITH VARIOUS NATIONS AND PARTICIPATES IN POLICE OPERATIONS OUTSIDE THE PRC. ITS CLANDESTINE OPERATIONS, HOWEVER, SEEM AIMED AT SIDESTEPPING DEMOCRATIC LAWS AND NORMS AS IT SEEKS TO EXPORT THE PRC'S "SOCIAL MANAGEMENT" REGIME.

### EXPANDING REACH

The CCP admits that it wants more power over global security norms and believes its Ministry of Public Security has a part to play in gaining influence, the Center for American Progress, a U.S.-based policy institute, said in a 2022 report on “The Expanding International Reach of China’s Police.” It cited a CCP conference at which police and legal officials were encouraged to “grasp the new characteristics of the internationalization of public security work” and a former police official who called for a “new system of public security international cooperation work” to achieve the CCP’s overseas goals.

Beijing has formal policing agreements with various nations and participates in police operations outside the PRC. Its clandestine operations, however, seem aimed at sidestepping democratic laws and norms as it seeks to export the PRC’s “social management” regime. The strategy conflicts with the PRC’s refrain about its own sovereignty. “The PRC is very big on claiming territorial sovereignty,” Harth told CNN, “claiming sovereignty when it comes to, you know, criticizing people that call out their human rights record.”

### REBUFFING THE CCP

Meanwhile, the PRC has been spurned by nations where it openly proposed expanding its law enforcement role, with one Pacific island country canceling a policing pact. Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka said in January 2023 that police would cease working with PRC security personnel. The Fiji Police Force and the CCP’s Ministry of Public Security agreed in 2011 that Fijian officers would train in China, which would send its police officers to Fiji for three- to six-month programs. The CCP also appointed a police liaison officer to be based in Fiji. “There’s no need for us to continue,” Rabuka told The Fiji Times newspaper. “Our system of democracy and justice systems are different, so we will go back to those that have similar systems with us.” Officers from countries including Australia and New Zealand will stay in Fiji, he said. The U.S. has also committed to expanding training and capacity-building programs in the Pacific island country, the Fiji Police Force said in February 2023.

Soon after signing a controversial and secretive security agreement with the Solomon Islands in 2022, Beijing





Safeguard Defenders researchers said in late 2022 that Chinese police were operating a covert station in Glasgow, Scotland. GETTY IMAGES



U.S. Justice Department officials say a building in New York City's Chinatown operated as an illegal Chinese police station until an investigation forced it to close in late 2022. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

failed to persuade a larger contingent of Pacific island countries to sign a regional deal that would have covered policing, security and other cooperation. Two of the Pacific island countries that rejected Beijing's proposal have since agreed to security arrangements with Australia. Vanuatu will cooperate with Canberra in policing, disaster relief, defense and cybersecurity, the nations announced in December 2022. An Australia-Papua New Guinea (PNG) pact will help build PNG's capacity in areas such as policing, health security and biosecurity, according to officials.

### INTERNATIONAL OUTCRY

Safeguard Defenders' Harth told the Canadian House of Commons in March 2023 that the CCP's transnational repression should be publicly denounced by nations where it is discovered. Her organization calls for governments to investigate CCP-linked overseas police activities, set up reporting and protection mechanisms for at-risk communities, and coordinate information sharing among like-minded countries. Safeguard Defenders has also called on governments to "urgently review — and possibly suspend" police cooperation agreements with the PRC.

Authorities worldwide have taken action:

- The Royal Canadian Mounted Police confirmed in March 2023 that it is investigating five Chinese-run police stations across the country, according to *Le Journal de Montreal* newspaper, and that Chinese nationals living in Canada had been victims of activities possibly linked to the centers.
- Japan's then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said in December 2022 that the nation "will take all necessary steps to clarify the situation" after allegations surfaced of a Chinese police outpost in Tokyo. Matsuno said Japan informed Chinese authorities that any activity violating its sovereignty

would be "unacceptable," according to Reuters.

- New Zealand authorities opened an investigation into allegations of an illicit Chinese police station. A Green Party spokeswoman told the *New Zealand Herald* newspaper in December 2022 that Chinese-born Kiwis have warned that Beijing is conducting surveillance at clandestine police outposts. Police and military personnel in South Korea, as well as foreign ministry officials, are investigating an alleged covert Chinese police station in Seoul, the *Yonhap News Agency* reported.
- In the U.S., Federal Bureau of Investigation agents seized material from a suspected Chinese police station in New York City and in April 2023 charged two men with conspiring to act as agents of Beijing in connection with opening and operating the illegal station. The office closed in late 2022 after its operators learned of the investigation, according to the U.S. Justice Department.

Additionally, authorities in Austria, Chile, the Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are investigating suspected Chinese police stations in their nations. Harth says those measures are a positive first step. "The first thing is really call out the Chinese authorities on what they're doing. ... Make it very clear that we think this is clandestine, this is illegal, this is a brazen violation of national sovereignty and international law," she told CNN. "The second is, building on that coalition, really share best practices, share information, share intelligence. So, we need democratic countries to actually work together, law enforcement to work together and come together on this." □

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COUNTERING  
**CHINA**  
IN  
EUROPE



PER CONCORRIMM ILLUSTRATION



# Understanding China's Influence

By Lt. Col. (Ret.) William Hagestad II, U.S. Marine Corps

China's economic and political position in Europe is extremely important to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and effort is being made to enhance that position. China engages in political alignment, intelligence gathering, information control and measured military cooperation to facilitate the expansion of its influence across the European landscape. Beijing leverages all instruments of national power to further its interests in the region.

The DIME (diplomatic, information, military and economic) philosophy is a conceptual framework used to analyze and understand the multifaceted elements of a nation's power projection and influence. Western policymakers can use the DIME model to analyze China's approach to Europe, including its strategies and methods, helping them anticipate Beijing's actions, and to counteract potentially malign efforts.

- **Diplomatically**, China employs bilateral and multilateral forums to build consensus, overcome barriers and secure support for major initiatives such as One Belt, One Road (OBOR, renamed the Belt and Road Initiative).
- In the **information** domain, Beijing disseminates targeted messaging to shape positive perceptions and counter unfavorable narratives related to its activities in Europe.
- The **military** dimension involves selective cooperation and naval access arrangements to protect China's growing overseas investments and assets.
- **Economically**, Beijing wields its financial clout to fund major infrastructure projects, stimulate trade linkages and employ incentives or coercion when advantageous.

By orchestrating a synchronized strategy across these domains, China strives to achieve its overarching objectives in Europe — expanding its economic and political influence, accessing advanced technologies, reshaping global governance, and cementing its role as a major global power on the world stage.

China's increasing focus on Europe has necessitated a comprehensive and multifaceted approach by the United States military's European Command (EUCOM) and NATO to counter Chinese influence. Through a range of strategic initiatives, these organizations aim to safeguard European security, protect national interests and promote democratic

values while mitigating the risks posed by China's expanding presence. EUCOM and NATO can effectively counter China's influence in Europe by strengthening economic cooperation, addressing military expansion, leveraging soft power and public diplomacy, building multinational partnerships, fostering cooperation with global powers, investing in critical infrastructure, and promoting regional security cooperation.

## CHINA'S FOCUS IN EUROPE

### Key aspects

**Infrastructure development:** OBOR aims to enhance connectivity and infrastructure development between China and Europe, with a focus on improving transportation networks, such as railways, ports and roads. A comprehensive and efficient transportation network will facilitate trade, investment and people-to-people exchanges between the two regions.

**Trade and investment promotion:** China aims to deepen economic ties and promote trade and investment between China and Europe. By improving infrastructure connectivity, reducing trade barriers and enhancing market access, Beijing envisions increased bilateral-trade volumes and a boost in Chinese investment in Europe, as well as European investment in China.



Construction vehicles prepare the bed for the Budapest-Belgrade railway line near the Hungarian-Serbian border in 2022. The 350-kilometer high-speed rail project, being built by a Hungarian-Chinese consortium, is part of China's economic investment in Central and Eastern Europe. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

### **Cultural exchanges and people-to-people ties:**

Alongside economic development, OBOR emphasizes fostering cultural exchanges, understanding and people-to-people ties between China and Europe. China aims to strengthen cooperation in areas such as education, tourism and cultural-heritage preservation to promote mutual understanding and friendship.

**Regional cooperation and diplomacy:** Using OBOR as a platform for regional cooperation and diplomatic engagement, China seeks to collaborate with European countries and institutions in areas such as policy coordination, connectivity planning and project implementation. By fostering multilateral dialogue and cooperation, China intends to create an inclusive and cooperative framework for regional development.

It is important to note that OBOR is not solely focused on Europe and encompasses a broader vision, including Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Nonetheless, Europe plays a crucial role in OBOR due to its geostrategic importance, economic potential and historical ties with China.

## **DIME ANALYSIS OF OBOR**

### **China's perspective**

**Diplomatic dimension:** China strategically employs diplomacy to reinforce OBOR's objectives, engaging in bilateral and multilateral dialogue with participating countries, promoting OBOR as a cooperative endeavor that facilitates mutual economic development, regional stability and win-win outcomes. China seeks diplomatic support, cooperation and consensus-building to overcome potential barriers to implementation, such as political disagreements, regulatory issues or national security concerns.

**Information dimension:** China recognizes the importance of managing information and narratives related to OBOR. It uses various channels, including media, public relations and cultural exchanges, to disseminate positive messages about the benefits and progress of OBOR projects. China aims to shape perceptions, generate support and counter any negative narratives that may emerge.

**Military dimension:** Although the primary focus of OBOR is economic in nature, the military dimension cannot be disregarded. While China promotes a peaceful vision for OBOR, it acknowledges the need to safeguard its interests and protect its investments and infrastructure. China engages in military cooperation, primarily maritime security and anti-piracy efforts, to ensure the safety of critical sea routes and protect its overseas investments and personnel involved in OBOR-related projects.

**Economic dimension:** The economic dimension is at the heart of OBOR. China leverages its economic might and financial resources to provide funding, loans and investments in infrastructure projects along OBOR routes. Through initiatives such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and Silk Road Fund, China facilitates economic cooperation and provides financial support to partner countries.

DIME helps articulate how China employs each dimension — diplomatic, information, military and economic — to further its OBOR goals. By using a comprehensive approach

across these domains, China seeks to maximize its impact, build partnerships and address challenges that may arise during implementation. An expanded analysis and application of the DIME framework provides additional metrics to understand OBOR's reach in Europe:

**Political dimension:** The political dimension is intertwined with diplomatic efforts in promoting OBOR. China engages in political dialogue, negotiations and diplomacy to secure support for the initiative. It seeks to align the interests and aspirations of participating countries with its own OBOR objectives, forging strategic partnerships and agreements that facilitate policy coordination and mutual benefits. China also uses economic incentives and aid packages to foster political alignment and gain influence in participating nations.



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi speaks during the National People's Congress in March 2024 in Beijing. Wang is considered one of China's most aggressive "wolf warrior" diplomats. GETTY IMAGES

**Information warfare:** China recognizes the importance of information warfare as a means to shape OBOR narratives. Through the use of social media, digital platforms and state-controlled media outlets, China actively promotes positive stories and achievements associated with OBOR while countering unfavorable narratives. It also invests in soft-power initiatives, including cultural exchanges, media cooperation and academic partnerships, to shape perceptions and gain support for OBOR.

**Intelligence gathering:** Intelligence plays a crucial role in implementing large-scale infrastructure projects, evaluating risks and ensuring successful outcomes. China engages in intelligence-gathering activities to assess the political, economic and security landscape of participating countries. It analyzes potential obstacles, identifies investment opportunities, and addresses potential threats to its projects and interests along OBOR routes to inform decision-making, risk management and mitigation strategies.

**Military cooperation and presence:** While the primary focus of OBOR is economic cooperation, China recognizes the importance of military cooperation and presence to increase stability, protect its investments and address potential security challenges to OBOR projects. China engages in military exercises, joint trainings and exchanges



with partner countries to enhance security cooperation, build trust and safeguard its maritime interests. It also strategically establishes naval bases or access arrangements along critical sea routes as part of its broader security framework.

**Economic warfare:** The economic dimension goes beyond funding infrastructure projects. It uses market access and economic leverage and incentives to advance the OBOR agenda. China can use economic coercion or inducements to influence the decision-making of participating countries and create dependencies. It strategically offers trade opportunities, investments and economic cooperation to strengthen relationships, promote integration and expand Chinese influence.

By considering these additional dimensions, we can better understand how China applies a comprehensive approach to OBOR by incorporating political, information, intelligence, military and economic tools to achieve its strategic objectives. The continual assessment and adaptation across these dimensions allow China to navigate challenges, seize opportunities and exert influence throughout the implementation of OBOR. Table 1 illustrates China's multi-dimensional application of the DIME elements — including additional ones such as information warfare, intelligence and military cooperation — to further its OBOR strategic goals and objectives.

Table 1

Dimension	Key strategies and objectives
Diplomatic	Bilateral and multilateral engagement; consensus building; overcoming barriers
Information	Disseminate positive messaging; shape perceptions; counter negative narratives
Military	Maritime security cooperation; protect overseas investments and personnel
Economic	Funding and investment for infrastructure; stimulate growth and trade
Political	Secure political support; policy coordination; economic incentives
Information warfare	Control information flows; promote achievements and soft power
Intelligence	Assess risks and opportunities; inform decision-making
Military cooperation	Exercises, training and exchanges; naval base-access arrangements
Economic warfare	Employ economic leverage; create dependencies; expand influence

## COUNTERING CHINA'S INFLUENCE

### EUCOM perspective

**Diplomatic:** For EUCOM, the diplomatic dimension involves engaging with European nations through bilateral and multilateral channels to foster cooperation, building alliances and promoting shared security interests. EUCOM conducts diplomatic negotiations, strategic dialogues and military-to-military engagements to strengthen partnerships, address regional challenges and enhance collective defense. It aims to solidify alliances, facilitate interoperability and foster collaboration through diplomatic initiatives and agreements.



A Great Wall 236 submarine of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) sails in a naval parade in 2019 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of PLAN's founding. China has used its growing military strength to threaten the territorial rights of neighboring countries. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Information:** Information is critical for EUCOM to shape perceptions, counter misinformation and maintain a strategic narrative. EUCOM employs communication strategies and media platforms to disseminate accurate and timely information about its activities, exercises and missions in Europe. It engages in public diplomacy to foster understanding, build trust and counteract potential negative narratives or propaganda.

**Military:** EUCOM forces stand ready to defend U.S. and NATO interests in Europe, respond to crises and deploy forces when necessary. EUCOM maintains a robust military presence, conducts joint exercises and provides deterrence against potential threats. It collaborates closely with NATO Allies and partners to ensure collective defense and security cooperation.

**Economic:** While EUCOM is primarily a diplomatic and military command, economic considerations can play a role in strengthening alliances and partnerships within Europe. EUCOM supports economic initiatives that promote stability and prosperity, encouraging increased trade, investment and economic integration among European nations. Economic cooperation enhances regional resilience, contributes to security and fosters long-term stability.

**Intelligence:** Intelligence is crucial for situational awareness, threat assessment and decision-making. EUCOM collects, analyzes and disseminates intelligence to understand shifting security dynamics, anticipate emerging threats and develop effective strategies. Intelligence helps identify potential challenges, vulnerabilities and opportunities in the European theater, informing military planning, operational activities and policy recommendations.

**Political:** The political dimension is inherent in EUCOM's engagement in Europe. EUCOM works closely with U.S. diplomatic representatives and policymakers to align military objectives with broader political goals. Political engagement ranges from high-level strategic dialogues to local coordination with host nation governments or regional political entities, and seeks to influence decision-making, enhance cooperation and build consensus around common security objectives.



An F/A-18E Super Hornet lands on the flight deck of the USS Ronald Reagan as the USS Nimitz steams alongside in the South China Sea during a U.S. Navy operation in July 2020 to challenge China's efforts to restrict transit in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The DIME framework shows that EUCOM employs a comprehensive approach to ensure regional security, enhance partnerships and project U.S. influence in Europe. The integration of diplomatic, information, military, economic, intelligence and political elements lets EUCOM address multifaceted challenges, build coalitions and support the strategic interests of the U.S. and its European allies. Table 2 summarizes EUCOM's application of DIME across all dimensions to counter China's influence in Europe, including key elements within each dimension.

### NATO strategy

**Diplomatic:** Diplomacy is at the core of NATO's operations. It involves robust engagement and dialogue among member nations and partner countries to ensure solidarity and consensus on key issues. NATO diplomatic efforts strengthen the Alliance, build partnerships, facilitate cooperation with non-NATO partners, promote shared values, address regional challenges and forge common approaches to security.

**Information:** Managing information is essential to shape narratives, counter misinformation and maintain public support for NATO's mission. Through strategic communications, NATO disseminates accurate information about its activities, operations and collective defense efforts, fosters understanding, builds trust and counters disinformation campaigns that may undermine NATO objectives or erode public support.

**Military:** NATO's foundational mission is the collective defense of its member states. The Alliance maintains a credible military presence, conducts joint exercises and ensures interoperability among its forces. It coordinates defense planning, crisis response, and conducts peacekeeping and counterterrorism operations, which contribute to regional stability and security.

**Economic:** NATO's economic influence rests on the economic capabilities and contributions of its member nations. NATO encourages defense spending and defense industry cooperation among members to ensure the development and maintenance of effective military capabilities, including strengthening resilience against hybrid threats, such as cyber and economic vulnerabilities. Economic cooperation ensures the sustainability and effectiveness of NATO's military endeavors.

### EUCOM strategy

**Diplomatic:** EUCOM engages with European nations through strategic dialogues, military-to-military interactions and diplomatic negotiations to foster cooperation, build partnerships and synchronize interactions with European allies. EUCOM promotes mutual trust, understanding and consensus on key security matters, facilitating the alignment of military objectives with broader U.S. diplomatic goals in Europe.

**Information:** EUCOM aims to shape perceptions, counter misinformation and maintain a strategic narrative by using communication strategies, media platforms and public diplomacy to communicate accurate and timely information about its activities. It enhances transparency, builds public support and counters potential negative narratives that might undermine U.S.-European partnerships or military operations.

**Military:** As a combatant command, EUCOM focuses on the readiness and posture of U.S. military forces deployed in Europe. In collaboration with NATO Allies and partner militaries to ensure collective defense, EUCOM maintains a robust presence, conducts joint exercises and provides deterrence against potential threats. This encompasses crisis response, contingency planning and rapid-deployment capabilities.

**Economic:** Though primarily a military command, EUCOM recognizes the significance of economic factors for regional stability and supports economic initiatives that



Table 2

Dimension	EUCOM's Application	Key elements
<b>Diplomatic</b>	Engagement through bilateral and multilateral channels	Solidify alliances and partnerships; foster cooperation; facilitate interoperability
<b>Information</b>	Communication strategies and public diplomacy	Shape perceptions; counter propaganda; maintain strategic narrative
<b>Military</b>	Deployment of forces; joint exercises; deterrence	Ensure collective defense; crisis response; contingency planning
<b>Economic</b>	Support initiatives promoting stability and prosperity	Encourage trade, investment; enhance regional resilience
<b>Political</b>	Alignment with diplomatic and policy objectives	Influence decision-making; build consensus; achieve political goals
<b>Intelligence</b>	Collection, analysis and dissemination of intelligence	Inform decision-making; identify threats and vulnerabilities

promote stability, trade, investment and economic integration among European nations. By encouraging economic cooperation, EUCOM enhances regional resilience, contributes to security and fosters long-term stability.

**Intelligence:** Intelligence is instrumental for situational awareness, threat assessment and operational planning. EUCOM collects, analyzes and disseminates intelligence to understand the evolving security environment in Europe. Intelligence supports decision-making and effective risk management, and enables timely responses to emerging challenges and potential threats.

**Political:** EUCOM coordinates closely with U.S. diplomatic representatives and policymakers, participates in strategic dialogues and engages with European governments and political entities to align military objectives with broader political goals. This helps shape decision-making, enhance cooperation and build consensus on key security issues.

NATO and EUCOM utilize a comprehensive approach — incorporating diplomatic, information, military, economic, intelligence and political tools — to ensure regional security, enhance partnerships and project influence in Europe. This holistic perspective strengthens collective defense, supports efficient decision-making and fosters cooperation among member nations and partner countries.

## PROPOSED COURSES OF ACTION

### Course of Action 1: Enhance cyber defense capabilities

**Diplomatic:** Strengthen diplomatic ties and engage in information sharing on cyber threats among NATO member nations and partner countries. Foster dialogue on norms of behavior in cyberspace and establish joint initiatives to counter cyber threats collectively.

**Information:** Develop a comprehensive cybersecurity communication strategy to raise awareness in the public about cyber threats and promote responsible behavior. Disseminate accurate information about cyber incidents and counter potential misinformation campaigns by engaging with the media and using digital platforms.

**Military:** Prioritize the allocation of resources toward cyber defense capabilities, including robust training, exercises and joint operations among NATO Allies. Focus on enhancing cyber resilience and improving interoperability to allow for effective information sharing and coordinated responses in the event of a cyberattack.

**Economic:** Encourage investment in research and development of cybersecurity technologies, promote public-private

partnerships and establish cyber-protection agreements with defense industries. Foster economic cooperation to improve the collective resilience of NATO members against cyber threats.

### Course of Action 2: Counteract disinformation campaigns

**Diplomatic:** Strengthen coordination and information-sharing mechanisms with partner countries to exchange best practices in countering disinformation. Establish joint task forces, workshops and training programs to enhance media literacy and critical thinking skills.

**Information:** Develop a proactive and agile strategic communications approach to counter disinformation. Establish dedicated communication channels to promptly respond to false narratives, challenge disinformation and provide accurate information. Collaborate with social media platforms to identify and mitigate the spread of disinformation.



Attendees of the 2017 China Internet Security Conference in Beijing walk past a display showing cyberattacks in China. In 2021, the Chinese Communist Party announced a sweeping effort to tighten control over information.

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**Military:** Leverage the strengths of military strategic-communication units to counter disinformation campaigns. Use military channels to disseminate accurate news, engage with local communities and build trust. Conduct joint information operations exercises with NATO Allies to enhance coordination and effectiveness.

**Political:** Work closely with political leaders, policymakers and civil organizations to develop policies that address the impact of disinformation and strengthen media resilience. Promote information transparency and accountability among political entities, fostering public trust in democratic processes.

Table 3

Dimension	Course of Action 1: Enhance cyber defense	Course of Action 2: Counter disinformation	Course of Action 3: Defense against hybrid threats
<b>Diplomatic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen ties and info sharing on cyber threats</li> <li>Establish norms of behavior in cyberspace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordination and info-sharing mechanisms</li> <li>Joint task forces and training programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foster international partnerships</li> <li>Mechanisms for joint operations</li> </ul>
<b>Information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cybersecurity communication strategy</li> <li>Counter misinformation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic communications approach</li> <li>Collaborate with social media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public awareness strategy</li> <li>Media literacy initiatives</li> </ul>
<b>Military</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritize cyber capabilities</li> <li>Exercises and joint operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leverage military communications expertise</li> <li>Information operations training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve coordination</li> <li>Training and joint exercises</li> </ul>
<b>Economic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>R&amp;D investments</li> <li>Cyber protection agreements</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Critical infrastructure investment</li> <li>Supply chain security</li> </ul>

### Course of Action 3: Strengthen defense resilience against hybrid threats

**Diplomatic:** Foster international partnerships to enhance information sharing and cooperation in countering hybrid threats. Strengthen diplomatic ties to establish mechanisms for swift responses and joint operations when faced with hybrid challenges.

**Information:** Develop a comprehensive strategy to raise public awareness about hybrid threats, their tactics and potential consequences. Establish public-private partnerships to combat disinformation and promote media literacy initiatives to increase resilience against manipulation.

**Military:** Improve cooperation and coordination among NATO member military forces to rapidly respond to hybrid threats. Focus on training and joint exercises to enhance interoperability and develop the capability to counter hybrid tactics effectively.

**Economic:** Encourage investment in critical infrastructure protection, including measures to defend against cyber-attacks and secure supply chains. Foster economic resilience by diversifying energy sources and reducing dependencies on single suppliers to mitigate potential economic coercion.

The DIME framework can be applied to address specific challenges. By adopting a holistic approach, NATO and EUCOM can effectively respond to evolving security threats, ensure regional stability and strengthen partnerships in the European theater. Table 3 highlights key points from each course of action under the relevant DIME dimensions.

## CHINA'S CHALLENGES

### Diplomatic Challenges

**Competition for influence:** As China's economic and political power grows, balancing its influence against that of the U.S., Japan and regional rivals, such as India and Vietnam, requires careful, nuanced diplomacy and economic and strategic engagement to expand its sphere of influence without triggering backlash or conflicts.

**Disputed territorial claims:** China's territorial disputes, particularly in the East China and South China seas, pose significant diplomatic challenges. Resolving these disputes while maintaining regional stability and avoiding conflicts is crucial for its diplomatic strategies, requiring skillful negotiation, confidence-building measures and adherence to international law to mitigate tensions and foster a cooperative environment.

**Tensions with neighboring countries:** China's aggressive foreign policy, such as its border disputes with India and historical rivalries with Japan and South Korea, create challenges in maintaining stable diplomatic relations. Addressing these historical grievances and defusing tensions through dialogue while promoting cooperation are essential for fostering mutual trust and understanding, and maintaining peace and stability in the region.

### Information Challenges

**Information control:** China faces challenges in controlling and managing information flows within its borders, especially with the increasing influence of the internet and social media platforms. Maintaining strict censorship and managing narratives to maintain domestic stability while engaging with the global community can be a delicate balancing act. China should allow for greater transparency and open communication while addressing concerns related to cybersecurity and maintaining social stability.

#### Disinformation and perception management:

China faces scrutiny regarding its state-sponsored disinformation campaigns and efforts to shape global perceptions. Countering negative narratives and addressing concerns about human rights, intellectual property and technological advancements is a significant information challenge. Fostering greater transparency, engaging in constructive dialogue and sharing accurate information would help shape a more favorable global image.

**Media influence:** Countering negative perceptions is a critical information challenge for China. State-controlled media outlets, such as Xinhua and CGTN, encounter challenges in presenting a positive image abroad while facing accusations of biased reporting and lack of press freedom. Navigating the global media landscape and enhancing the international presence of Chinese media outlets, building media partnerships, promoting cultural exchange and fostering independent journalism could help improve China's global media influence.

### Military Challenges

**Regional security dynamics:** As China's military capabilities expand, it faces challenges with regard to regional perceptions and potential rivalries. Neighboring countries and global powers, such as the U.S., are cautious about China's military modernization and assertiveness, creating challenges in maintaining a stable military balance and managing regional tensions. Emphasizing transparency, confidence-building measures and



Table 4

Dimension	Challenge	Details
<b>Diplomatic</b>	Competition for influence	Balancing relationships with Japan, India, U.S., Vietnam
	Territorial disputes	Resolving East China and South China seas disputes
	Tensions with neighboring countries	Border disputes with India; historical rivalries with Japan, South Korea
<b>Information</b>	Information control	Censorship, narrative management, balancing openness and stability
	Disinformation and perception	Countering negative campaigns, managing global image
	Media influence	Promoting state media amid press freedom concerns
<b>Military</b>	Regional security dynamics	Cautiousness about China's military growth and assertiveness
	Technological advancements	Gaps in developing advanced defense tech (AI and cyber)
	Naval power projection	Building blue-water navy; logistical and tech constraints
<b>Economic</b>	Structural reforms	Shifting export model; managing risks and inequality
	Trade tensions	Navigating disputes with U.S.; supporting trade rules
	Resource and energy security	Ensuring supply while diversifying sources

dialogue can foster trust among regional stakeholders.

**Technological advancements:** China faces challenges in developing cutting-edge military technologies, such as artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities and advanced weaponry. Addressing the gap between indigenous innovation and reliance on foreign technologies is crucial for China's military modernization efforts. Encouraging research and development, fostering collaborations with global partners, and investing in education and training can help China overcome these challenges and achieve technological self-reliance.

**Naval power projection:** China's desire to expand its maritime influence presents challenges in developing a blue-water navy capable of power projection beyond its immediate maritime borders. Overcoming technological constraints, enhancing logistical capabilities and countering regional concerns are significant military challenges. Improving naval capabilities, developing overseas military bases and ensuring maritime security collaboration with other nations are crucial for China to establish itself as a regional maritime power.

### Economic Challenges

**Economic structural reforms:** China faces the challenge of transitioning from an export-led economic model to one driven by domestic consumption, innovation and a more sustainable growth trajectory. Rebalancing the economy while managing financial risks, addressing inequality, reducing overcapacity and promoting environmental sustainability requires comprehensive economic structural reforms, including liberalizing key sectors, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, and strengthening social safety nets to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth.

**Trade tensions:** China is challenged by its trade disputes with major economies, particularly the U.S. Navigating protectionist measures, supporting global trade rules, and striking a balance between economic growth and geopolitical influence pose significant economic challenges. China must emphasize fair-trade practices, increase market access and strengthen multilateral trade mechanisms to resolve disputes and maintain global economic stability.

**Resource and energy security:** China's rapidly growing economy faces challenges related to resource scarcity and

energy security. As the world's largest energy consumer, ensuring a stable supply of resources while diversifying its energy mix, reducing dependence on fossil fuels and promoting sustainable practices are essential for China's economic resilience. Investing in renewable energy infrastructure, promoting energy efficiency and international cooperation in resource management can help address these challenges effectively.

Application of the DIME framework reveals a range of challenges for China, including diplomatic competition, information control and influence, military modernization and projection, as well as economic transformation and trade tensions. By addressing these challenges across the diplomatic, information, military and economic dimensions, China can navigate its geopolitical landscape more effectively and shape its strategies accordingly, enhancing its global standing and contributing to regional stability and prosperity. Table 4 summarizes the key challenges China faces across the diplomatic, information, military and economic dimensions.

### CONCLUSION

The CCP will continue to strive to improve China's diplomatic and economic position in Europe. China's relationship with and access to Europe is crucial to achieving Beijing's long-term growth and development goals. The EU bloc's economy rivals those of the U.S. and China, and Europe remains a key hub of science, academia and high-tech research and development, not to mention the home of many of the world's major multinational institutions and corporations.

The DIME-plus framework is an excellent tool to analyze the numerous and complex diplomatic, informational, military and economic factors involved in the strategic decision-making processes of the actors involved, including China, the EU and the U.S., and affecting how each actor views its own options and those of its adversaries and friends.

China's access to Europe has decreased since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and European enthusiasm for closer economic and political relations with Beijing has waned with China's backing of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Understanding these dynamics is critical. □







# competitive EDGE

LARGE SCALE GLOBAL EXERCISE 2024  
DEMONSTRATES HOW THE U.S.  
AND ITS PARTNERS WORK TOGETHER  
TO PROJECT POWER, DETERRENCE

By *per* Concordiam Staff

When U.S. Army Gen. Christopher G. Cavoli addressed a security forum in Sweden on January 9, 2023, he shared his observations on how Russia’s “illegal, unprovoked, brutal invasion” of Ukraine overturned European security from the moment that Moscow’s first missiles struck near Kyiv before dawn on February 24, 2022.

“It has forced us to recognize the imperative of collective territorial defense and that has fundamentally changed our [NATO] Alliance posture,” said Cavoli, commander of United States European Command (EUCOM) and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe.

As for the approach needed for deterring potential aggressors — whether it be Russia or another global threat? Cavoli was unequivocal: “Hard power is a reality.”

“If the other guy shows up with the tank ... you better have a tank,” he said.

To better wield that hard power, Cavoli said the U.S., along with its Allies and partners, must modernize and focus on “larger scale [military] exercises that are centered on collective defense.”

In a 2018 NATO Defense College book, “Military Exercises: Political Messaging and Strategic Impact,” Beatrice Heuser and Diego Ruiz Palmer wrote that such events play a “deterrence-signaling role” to potential adversaries.

They wrote: “Of all the tools of statecraft used by political leaders and military brass, holding exercises is one of the most effective. Operating in unison during peacetime conveys solidarity among exercise partners; it implies that if deterrence fails, allies and partners will fight together and do so more effectively given better interoperability and command and control relationships.”

Nothing embodies that concept more than Large Scale Global Exercise 24 (LSGE 24).

LSGE 24, which took place from February to June 2024, was coordinated by EUCOM in collaboration with

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U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Justin Kennedy, 28th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, marshals a B-1B Lancer assigned to the 28th Bomb Wing, Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota, to the landing pad during Bomber Task Force 24-2 at Sweden’s Luleå-Kallax Air Base on February 23, 2024.

U.S. AIR FORCE/ STAFF SGT. JAKE JACOBSEN

its fellow U.S. combatant commands. It included nearly 30 exercises, involved 90 nations, flexed military muscle and enhanced interoperability between Allies and partners.

“Our commitment to peace and security not only here in Europe, but throughout the world, is unwavering,” EUCOM’s deputy commander, U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Steven Basham, said in a February 16 news release. “Large Scale Global Exercise 24 is another opportunity to showcase our commitment and resolve while demonstrating our readiness to respond to any security challenge.”

Now, more than a year after Cavoli’s speech in Sweden, Stockholm has joined Finland as NATO’s newest members and Russia’s ongoing war in Ukraine has refocused the military exercises of the U.S. and its Allies and partners.

## A GLOBAL UNDERTAKING

LSGE 24 was the third iteration of an integrated series of all-domain exercises. It brought together forces and commands from across the globe, displaying the interoperability and enduring partnerships between the U.S. and its Allies and partners. The nations involved in Allied Spirit alone — the first EUCOM event of LSGE 24 — included Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom and the U.S.

“Now, more than ever, this shared resolve is absolutely critical,” Brig. Gen. Steven Carpenter, who leads the U.S. 7th Army Training Command, said in a February 26 EUCOM news release. “Allied Spirit is a strong symbol of that ongoing relationship.”

“THE ALLIANCE WILL DEMONSTRATE ITS ABILITY TO REINFORCE THE EURO-ATLANTIC AREA VIA TRANS-ATLANTIC MOVEMENT OF FORCES FROM NORTH AMERICA”

~ U.S. Army Gen. Christopher G. Cavoli,  
commander of United States European Command



U.S. Army Gen. Christopher G. Cavoli, shown during a visit with Swiss Armed Forces troops in Bern in February 2023, says that large-scale military exercises with U.S. Allies and partners — such as LSGE 2024 — are vital to deterrence. SWISS FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE, CIVIL PROTECTION AND SPORT



Members from all branches of the U.S. armed forces participated in the multinational endeavor. Of LSGE's events, 11 took place in the EUCOM area of responsibility. In addition to Allied Spirit, those exercises included Trojan Footprint, Nordic Response, Arctic Shock, Saber Strike, Immediate Response, Swift Response, Astral Knight, BALTOPS, and two iterations of Bomber Task Force. In all, the global activities ranged from U.S. B-1B Lancer strategic bombers training alongside Swedish warplanes, to multinational naval activity in the Baltic Sea and exercises in South Korea involving Australian, Japanese, Korean and U.S. forces.

In addition, LSGE 24 complemented Steadfast Defender 2024 — the largest NATO exercise since the Cold War, according to a January 25 story from the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD). Steadfast Defender, which ran from January to May, included more than 90,000 troops from all 32 NATO Allies.

“The alliance will demonstrate its ability to reinforce the Euro-Atlantic area via trans-Atlantic movement of forces from North America,” Cavoli said at the time, according to DOD News. “Steadfast Defender 2024 will be a clear demonstration of our ... determination to protect each other, our values and the rules-based international order.”



Maj. Gen. Yavor Mateev, commander of the Bulgarian Joint Special Operations Command, greets Kenneth Merten, U.S. ambassador to Bulgaria, on March 7, 2024, after joint training by Bulgarian, Romanian and U.S. special operations forces during Trojan Footprint 24 near Sofia, Bulgaria.

U.S. ARMY/SGT. ALEJANDRO LUCERO

## STRATEGIC COMPETITORS

The protection of the global rules-based order has become even more critical as strategic competitors seek to expand their influence — and their territories — in regions such as the Arctic and the South China Sea.

“The most important challenge facing the United States in the 21st century is the rise of the powerful and increasingly authoritarian — if not totalitarian — states of China and Russia,” wrote James Van de Velde in a February 2024 analysis in *The SAIS Review of International Affairs*.

That challenge, of course, also applies to U.S. Allies and partners, which makes endeavors such as LSGE 24 crucial.

Something else to point out: These authoritarian adversaries also conduct exercises together. In February 2022, PRC leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a “friendship without limits” at a Beijing meeting.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) considers joint exercises integral to its foreign policy, according to a June 3, 2023, story in *The Diplomat* magazine. China has taken part in Russia's annual military exercises. The two nations have also conducted joint naval drills as well as air patrols in the Sea of Japan and East China Sea. China and Russia have also held naval drills with Iran in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, most recently in March 2024, according to Reuters.

In the NATO Defense College book, Heuser and Palmer wrote that military exercises serve both political and strategic purposes. “(They) take place in the grey area between peace and war. ... Their design and planning nearly always requires some form of strategic or foreign policy calculus.”

So, what is that calculus for the PRC and Russia?

“Russia and China are trying to convey to Japan and the U.S. that they are very unhappy with their cooperation in NATO and the [Indo-Pacific] region, and they want to prove that they can achieve the same level of cooperation in the region as [Washington and its Allies,]” Stephen Nagy, a regional security expert at Japan's International Christian University, told *Voice of America* news in a July 20, 2023, story.

## POWER IN PARTNERSHIPS

The 2022 National Defense Strategy of the U.S. asserts that effective deterrence requires the consideration of how strategic competitors perceive the combat capabilities and commitment of the U.S. and its Allies and partners.

To that end, LSGE 2024 — “where strength meets unity,” according to a EUCOM public affairs video, demonstrated multinational interoperability and the means to counter adversaries on multiple fronts and in all domains.

During a 2023 exercise in Latvia, U.S. Army Lt. Col. Eric Evans succinctly summed up how the unique capability of U.S. forces to integrate with their Allies and partners provides a strategic advantage.

“We won't have to ask the new guy questions,” Evans said in a U.S. Army news release. “We become combat-credible much more quickly because we don't go through a combat power build phase.

“We arrive ... and we're truly ready to fight.” □

# CHINA'S INSATIABLE THIRST FOR TECH

EDITED BY: William C. Hannas and Didi Kirsten Tatlow

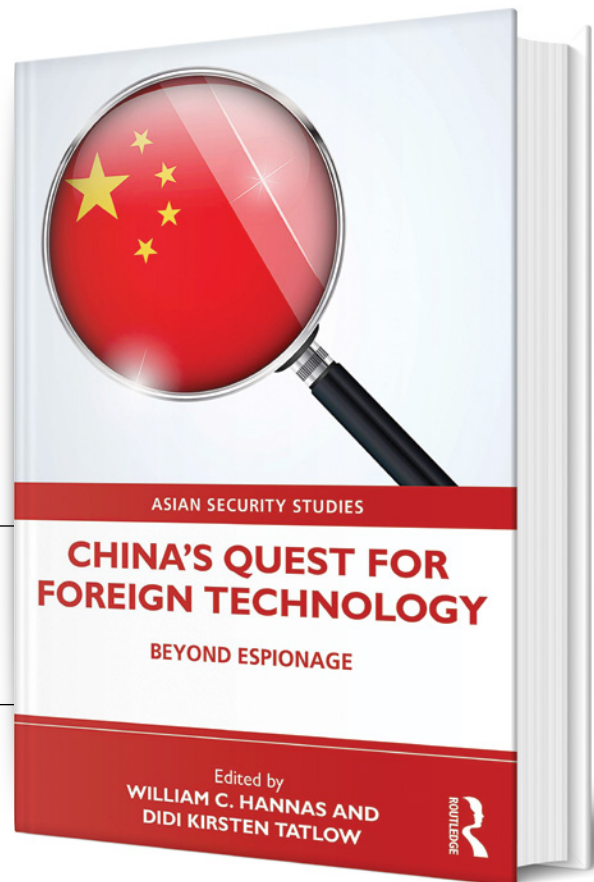
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REVIEWED BY: Joseph Vann, per Concordiam contributor

“China’s Quest for Foreign Technology: Beyond Espionage” is an essential read for policymakers, security professionals and, most importantly, business leaders. It is a superb anthology that, although first published in 2021, is more relevant than ever. The book provides one of the most comprehensive collections of essays — all from renowned China experts — on Beijing’s acquisition of foreign technology and information.

China’s insatiable appetite for technology has long presented a dilemma to Western countries. As the Cold War ended, the West became inebriated with its successes and, for the most part, cast aside concerns about protecting prized technology. After China’s harsh putdown of the 1989 riots in Tiananmen Square, any contest with Beijing seemingly belonged to the Cold War. As the United States’ entry into the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War marked the beginning of its change in war-planning focus from great-power to regional conflicts, the rout of Iraqi forces by the U.S.-led coalition was a wake-up call to China. By most accounts, Beijing learned that it was ill-prepared technologically and doctrinally for any war with the U.S. From this realization, China embarked on a global crusade — using methods both legal and illegal — to acquire technology and information. These efforts succeeded well beyond expectations and show no indication of abatement.

Huey-Meei Chang and co-editor William C. Hannas open with a scene-setter that appropriately calibrates China’s reputation for innovation by dispelling myths about its ability to innovate. The authors describe China’s “composite innovation system” that relies on both foreign and indigenous



approaches, with the former being the acquisition of innovative technology, and the latter being more practical in application. This approach has changed as China adapts, applies and improves that acquired technology. This well-researched chapter pulls together China’s determined efforts to have its citizens educated abroad for the purpose of acquiring technology and knowledge. One key takeaway: The past assessments that dismissed China’s quest for technology as purely copycat culture are mistaken because the Chinese can innovate with or without foreign models.

Chapter 2 unfolds with the bigger story. Andrew Spear’s contribution is the appropriately titled “Serve the Motherland While Working Overseas.” In it, he sets 1978, under Deng Xiaoping, as the starting line for China’s ongoing technology quest and prophetically points to Deng’s declaration: “Thousands, or even tens of thousands, should be sent abroad rather than a handful. ... We should make every effort to speed it up and increasingly widen our path.” Roughly 2.21 million Overseas Chinese Scholars remain abroad today to generate large-scale technology transfers. Spear puts “brain drain” into a Chinese context of not worrying where the talent resides but how it can be utilized for China, and details various methods used to incentivize overseas Chinese to “serve the motherland.”



Jeffrey Stoff, in Chapter 3, focuses on China's talent programs with an insight into how Beijing recruits foreign experts to work in China to facilitate technology transfer. China's ability to observe and to learn is typically underappreciated. Stoff cites the U.S.-trained Chinese physicist Qian Xuesen, who worked on the Manhattan Project and returned home to become the most prominent figure in Beijing's nuclear programs. Delving deeper, Stoff outlines how the current talent program is a newer version of the 1994 Hundred Talents Plan. The Chinese state and the Communist Party of China (CCP) have succeeded it with a flagship program called the Recruitment Program for Global Experts, commonly known as the Thousand Talents Plan. These are just a few of hundreds of China's programs — all configured to increase access to intellectual capital from around the world.

In Chapter 4, Karen M. Sutter describes how China approaches technology transfer through commerce. She points to the role of trade and investment in China's highly developed practices for obtaining foreign technology, and also illuminates a government plan that forces technology transfer as a requirement for doing business in China. As Sutter states, China seeks access to ventures that include aerospace, advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence (AI), biotechnology, data analytics, materials and semiconductors. The key takeaway: There can be no misconception about the size and efficiency of China's strategy to acquire foreign technology — and its successes.

In Chapter 5, Anna B. Puglisi wonderfully brings into perspective the difference between Western and Chinese views on technology. The concept that technology can only be developed in a democracy and that Western countries, especially the U.S., can always out-innovate others is appropriately challenged. Puglisi hits the target regarding the West's error in thinking China would embrace globalism and capitalism. She also rightfully notes that China views itself as engaged in a strategic rivalry with the U.S. and uses a "whole-of-society" approach to target the foundation of U.S. power. Its methodology successfully exploits the West's beliefs that China will come around, while at the same time using a carrot-and-stick approach for allowing Western businesses access to China's markets. Puglisi emphasizes that China only abides by the rules when called to account — and then only for as long as needed before ignoring them again.

Chapter 6 turns toward China's efforts to target defense technology. James Mulvenon and Chenny Zhang look into how such acquisitions complement Beijing's overall strategy. They make it clear that much of China's progress on military platforms and systems is related to technology theft. China's old model of "steal, reverse engineer and reproduce" has been replaced by the new model of "cooperate, learn, master and re-innovate."

Chapter 7 starts a deeper dive into Beijing's worldwide efforts with co-editors Didi Kirsten Tatlow, Hinnerk

Feldwisch-Drentrup and Ryan Fedasiuk painting a vivid picture of China's efforts in Europe. Beijing recognizes the European Union as one of the most innovative regions in the world and uses all organs of state power to acquire its technology. Of note are the Chinese Student and Scholar Associations, especially in Italy, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, and the CCP's reminders that students must repay the homeland. There is also a network of Chinese professional associations and guilds, half of which openly state that they are engaged in transferring technology.

Elsa Kania and Peter Wood cover the People's Liberation Army's acquisition of foreign technology in Chapter 13. They aptly point out that what is often missed in the seemingly innocent acquisition of commercial technology is its dual use for defense applications. More important is the transfer of design and manufacturing techniques that also have military purposes. Simply having the technology does not equate with understanding how to reproduce it. Once again, the authors point to the practice of sending students abroad to study and research developments in critical-needs areas.

In Chapter 14, "Foreign Technology and the Surveillance State," Dahlia Peterson writes about how China has used its acquisitions to build what is likely the most intrusive state monitoring of a country's citizens in modern history. The concerns are made greater by China's application of Western-acquired AI and chip technology to increase its surveillance capabilities.

Alex Joske and Stoff's contribution in Chapter 15 is worthy of a book of its own. They explain how China's United Front Work Department (UFWD) contributes to the composite strategy. Made up of party and state agencies, the UFWD conducts a dragnet for talent. Ethnic minorities, religious groups, business leaders and the wider Chinese diaspora are targeted. The essential takeaway: UFWD has a presence in most developed countries with the purpose of supporting technology acquisition.

The remaining two chapters cover a more difficult topic. In Chapter 17, another contribution from Puglisi, "Chinese Students, Scholarship, and U.S. Innovation," confronts the difficulties of welcoming students while not opening the door to creating research and technology theft opportunities. In Chapter 18, Mulvenon, Tatlow and Joske look at Western mitigation efforts. While there has been some success in tightening the flow of technology, the book makes clear there is much more to do.

This is a highly recommended anthology. Each chapter is extensively footnoted and of clear academic quality, yet is easy to read. Perhaps the real takeaway is that Western democracy, individual freedoms and relaxed state control represent a perfect system for exploitation. It raises the question: Is it time for the West to develop a "composite innovation system" designed to restrict its technology from being used against it? □

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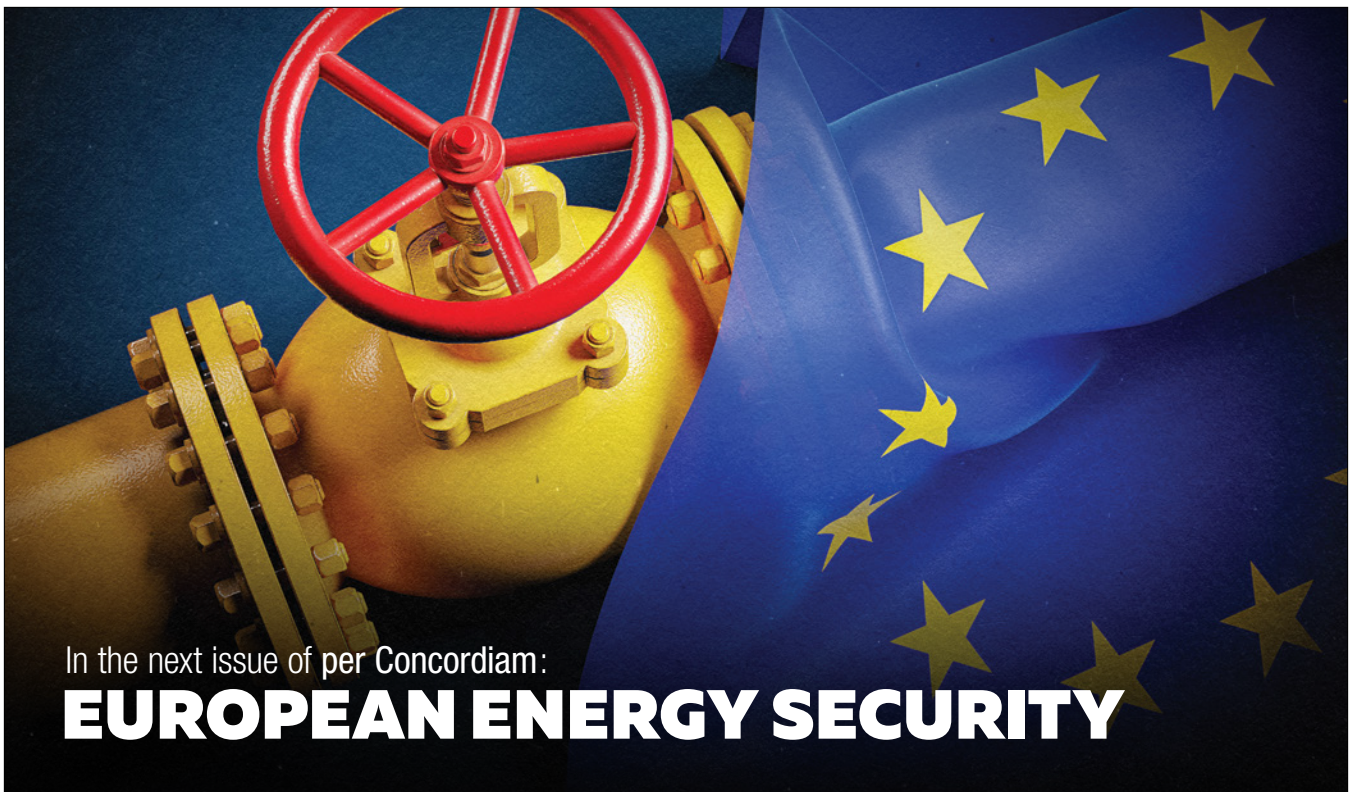
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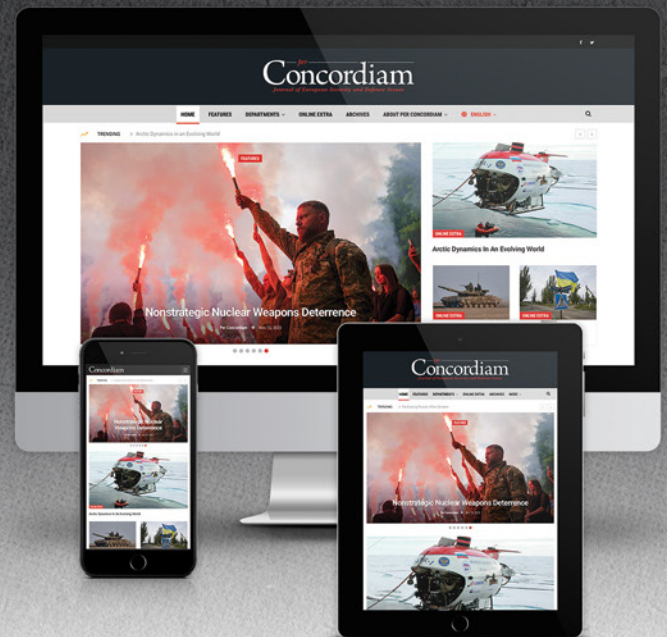
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