

FOREIGN ANALYSIS

WINTER 2024

The World According to Xi Jinping

The World in the
Dream of China

AVERY PREWITT

Could China
Shape the World?

LEON LI

Xi Jinping's
Way of Thinking

RICCARDO NACHTIGAL

Xi Jinping's CCP

KRISTIN HYNES

Putin: A Weak
Superpower

DIANA TALANTBEKOVA


Strategic Pragmatism
and Hindutva

ANSHU MEGHE

GARAGE

123 Anywhere
St. Any City.
ST 12345

01

 1234567890



AUTO SERVICES

www.reallygreatsite.com

ORIGINAL
SPAREPART

CAR REPAIR

- ENGINE TUNE-UP
- OIL CHANGES
- BRAKE REPAIR
- TIRE SERVICES
- BALACING
- BODY REPAIR
- PAINT PROTECTION
- CAR WASH



BOOK
NOW **40%**
OFF

We fix all car problems. services are now starting at \$24.99



PIXEL TECH

Empowering Innovation

Company Profile

www.reallygreatsite.com



©2030

PORT- FOLIO

Lorem ipsum
dolor sit amet,
consectetur
adipiscing elit,
sed do eiusmod
tempor
incididunt ut
labore et dolore
magna aliqua.
Ut enim ad
minim veniam,
quis nostrud
exercitation
ullamco laboris.



SACHA DUBOIS



FOREIGN ANALYSIS

WINTER 2024 • VOLUME 01, NUMBER 02

AAKIL VISRAM - EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
BATUHAN GUNES - ISSUE CONTENT EDITOR
BERK TUTTUP - ISSUE CONTENT EDITOR
SEUNGHWAN SHANE KIM - ISSUE CONTENT EDITOR
AHMET AKSU - GENERAL SECRETARY

ERIC SONG - USA BRIEF WRITER
BATUHAN GUNES - EUROPE BRIEF WRITER
GAMZE SERTKAYALI - AFRICA BRIEF WRITER
ABBAY L'BERT - AFRICA BRIEF WRITER
SHAGNIK BARMAN - ASIA & THE PACIFIC BRIEF WRITER
DILRUBA YILDIZ - MIDDLE EAST BRIEF WRITER
KRISTIN HYNES - CHINA BRIEF WRITER

Earth Hour Day

Turn off your light

— 26 MARCH, 2023 —



 Thynk Unlimited

F U R N I T U R E

CATALOG

MODERN

FURNITURE

DESIGN



www.reallygreatsite.com



FOREIGN ANALYSIS

ISSUE: 02

The World According to Xi Jinping

The World in the Dream of China 11

How is Xi Jinping's China Dream transforming global power and order?

AVERY PREWITT

Could China Shape the World? 31

Or will internal and external challenges halt its ambitions?

LEON LI

Xi Jinping's Way of Thinking 40

Xi Jinping guides China's rise using traditional values and modern strategies.

RICCARDO NACHTIGAL

Xi Jinping's Chinese Communist Party	51
<i>Xi Jinping reshapes the CCP with historical legacy, forging a nationalist vision to redefine its global standing.</i>	
KRISTIN HYNES	

What Is Going On In The World?

Putin: A Weak Superpower	67
<i>The Reality Behind Russia's Global Ambitions</i>	
DIANA TALANTBEKOVA	
Strategic Pragmatism and Hindutva	74
<i>Decoding a decade of Modi's foreign policy</i>	
ANSHU MEGHE	
How Could America Recover Its Reputation?	90
<i>American foreign policy cycles between predictability and unpredictability, challenging global trust and alliances.</i>	
KEITH SONIA	
The EU's Role in America's Greater China Strategy	100
<i>EU balances U.S.-China rivalry, seeking autonomy amidst shifting global dynamics.</i>	
RACHEL HILE	
Who is the Boss of the Middle East?	109
<i>To be a boss in the Middle East means constantly being tested through alliances and power games.</i>	
JAZMINE ALZOUBI	

Dynamic Perspectives

Is American Global Leadership in Danger? 125

U.S. leadership must preserve its ideals, reshaping through collaboration and adaptability in a multipolar world.

WILLIAM CANO

Why and How Do Leaders Manipulate Truth? 135

Post-truth politics distorts truth, erodes trust, and poses a threat to democracy.

KATYAYNI CHAMPAWAT

Global Power Shift 142

The Newcomers or the Incumbent?

BRANDON JOHNSON

Foreign Analysis, has a broad tolerance for differences of opinion. The articles published in our magazine do not represent a particular belief or consensus. What is important to us is that the articles are competent and knowledgeable, and that sincere views are taken seriously and expressed convincingly. Our magazine has a signed or unsigned, is not responsible for the views expressed in the articles on its pages, but accepts responsibility for including these views.

Ahmet Aksu, Founding Editor

Volume 1, Issue 1 • September 2024

Fradel and Spies Industries

EARTH HOUR



**MARCH
25TH**

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.

www.reallygreatsite.com

The World in the Dream of China

How is Xi Jinping's China Dream
transforming global power and order?

AVERY PREWITT

Over the past few decades, China has emerged as a dominant global power, reshaping the economic and geopolitical landscape. Once primarily viewed as a manufacturing hub, China now plays a pivotal role in international diplomacy, technological innovation, and global governance. Its meteoric rise, marked by becoming the world's second-largest economy and a leader in global trade, has challenged traditional power structures and introduced a new model of development and influence. At the heart of this transformation lies the vision of President Xi Jinping, a leader who has charted an ambitious course for China's future.

Xi Jinping's leadership represents a defining era for modern China. Through his centralization of power and strategic policymaking, Xi has sought to position China as a leader not just in Asia but on the world stage. Central to his vision is the concept of the "China Dream" (中国梦), a guiding philosophy that encapsulates national rejuvenation, economic prosperity, and global prominence. This vision speaks to the aspirations of a modern, assertive China

AVERY PREWITT, is pursuing a Master's degree at Tsinghua University, focusing on Chinese Politics, Foreign Policy, and International Relations with a specialization in Sino-Japanese relations within her Master thesis.



while evoking pride in its rich historical legacy. The China Dream promises a future where the country achieves greatness through innovation, unity, and strategic global engagement.

XI JINPING'S VISION

Xi Jinping's rise to power marked a pivotal moment in modern Chinese history, reshaping the nation's political landscape and setting the stage for its ambitious global aspirations. Born in 1953 into a revolutionary family, Xi experienced privilege and hardship. His father, Xi Zhongxun, was a high-ranking Communist official, but during the Cultural Revolution, the elder Xi was purged, and the young Xi Jinping faced public humiliation and exile to the countryside. These formative years gave Xi a unique perspective on the resilience of the Communist Party and the importance of discipline, loyalty, and ideological commitment.

Xi Jinping's ascent to power in 2012 was a watershed moment in modern Chinese history, heralding a new era of transformative leadership. His multiple roles as General Secretary of the Communist Party, Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and later President positioned him as a leader with the power to steer China towards a future of national rejuvenation. His rise mirrored a growing confidence within China that it could reclaim its historical position as a global leader, marking a significant shift in the nation's trajectory.

At the heart of Xi's leadership is the concept of the "China Dream" (中国梦), a vision he introduced early in his tenure.

At the heart of Xi's leadership is the concept of the "China Dream" (中国梦), a vision he introduced early in his tenure. The China Dream encapsulates the collective aspirations of the Chinese people to achieve prosperity, national strength, and cultural renewal. It is both a domestic and

international vision, calling for restoring China's historical greatness while elevating its role on the global stage. This dream aligns with Xi's long-term goals of modernizing China's economy, building a world-class military, and positioning the country as a leader in global governance.

One of Xi's most ambitious strategies for achieving his vision is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a colossal project launched in 2013. As of 2023, the BRI has united 150 countries across Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America, making it one of history's most expansive global infrastructure and investment programs. Central to the BRI is the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, a key component of Xi's plan to revive and modernize the ancient Maritime Silk Road. This initiative enhances maritime connectivity by developing port infrastructure and shipping lanes. Notable investments in ports, such as Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Piraeus in Greece, and Mombasa in Kenya, illustrate China's strategy of securing critical nodes in global trade networks while fostering economic ties with participating nations.

Xi's leadership style is characterized by centralization and an emphasis on ideological loyalty. Through an extensive anti-corruption campaign, Xi has consolidated power, eliminating rivals and ensuring that the Communist Party remains the unchallenged authority in China. His approach reflects a blend of pragmatism and authoritarianism, reinforcing the party's control while advancing ambitious reforms. The 2018 constitutional amendment that removed term limits for the presidency symbolized Xi's determination to maintain a steady hand in implementing his vision, potentially extending his leadership indefinitely.

Key policies and speeches have further illustrated Xi's roadmap for China's future. In his 2017 address at the 19th Party Congress, Xi outlined a vision for China's development through 2050, emphasizing the importance of socialism with Chinese characteristics, technological innovation, and environmental sustainability. This long-term perspective underscores the depth of Xi's strategic planning and his commitment to shaping China's future. As part of the BRI, the Maritime Silk Road has become emblematic of Xi's broader strategy to project China's influence across continents, blending economic cooperation with geopolitical ambition.

Central to Xi's vision is the role of the Communist Party as the core

vehicle for achieving national rejuvenation. Xi has worked to integrate party ideology into every aspect of Chinese society, from education to business to media. Through a combination of traditional propaganda and cutting-edge technology, the party under Xi has tightened its grip on public life, ensuring that his vision is not only disseminated but also deeply ingrained. This ideological dominance is bolstered by advancements in surveillance technology, allowing the party to monitor and influence public sentiment in unprecedented ways.

THE CHINA MODEL

Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China's political trajectory has not only continued but also undergone a significant transformation. His blend of historical narrative with a vision for global leadership has not only reshaped the Communist Party's role in society but also positioned China as a nation with the ambition and means to redefine the international order. At the heart of this ambition is the 'China Model'—a development framework that merges state-led economic growth with political centralization. This model, supported by initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China's growing influence in international organizations, has become a cornerstone of Beijing's strategy to export its governance and economic ideals abroad.

The Belt and Road Initiative is a clear manifestation of the China Model's global reach. With 150 participating countries as of 2023, the BRI represents an unprecedented effort to build infrastructure and foster connectivity across continents. Its flagship component, the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, is particularly significant in reviving and modernizing ancient trade routes. China has positioned itself as a critical hub in global maritime trade by investing in ports such as Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Piraeus in Greece, and Mombasa in Kenya. These projects not only strengthen trade networks but also deepen China's economic and political ties with partner nations, embedding its influence in regions of strategic importance.

Beyond infrastructure, the China Model extends into diplomacy and global governance. Beijing has sought to amplify its voice within international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization, advocating for policies aligned with its interests. This approach often blends traditional diplomacy with economic leverage, offering investments and development aid as tools to build coalitions and sway decision-making processes. For example, China's leadership in establishing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) demonstrates its intent to create parallel institutions that reflect its priorities while complementing existing global frameworks.

Case studies further illustrate the China Model's impact. In Africa, Chinese investment in infrastructure projects like railways and telecommunications has spurred economic growth while creating long-term dependencies on Chinese loans and expertise. In Southeast Asia, partnerships with countries like Malaysia and Indonesia have advanced regional connectivity but have also raised concerns over environmental and social impacts. In Europe, China's acquisition of critical assets, such as the port of Piraeus, showcases its strategic approach to expanding influence within established economies. After acquiring a majority stake in the Greek port in 2016, China transformed it into one of Europe's busiest ports, strengthening maritime trade routes between Asia and Europe. While Greece benefited from revitalized infrastructure, this move sparked unease among European Union officials, who feared Beijing's growing economic leverage in strategic assets.

The United States has reacted to the BRI and the Maritime Silk Road with outright skepticism, framing them as tools of geopolitical expansion. American officials frequently describe the initiative as a "debt trap," pointing to cases like Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port, leased to China after debt repayment challenges. In response, Washington has launched initiatives like the "Blue Dot Network" and the "Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment" to promote transparent, sustainable alternatives to China's infrastructure-led diplomacy.

Xi Jinping's China Model seeks to present an alternative to Western-led development paradigms. By prioritizing state control, long-term planning, and infrastructure-led growth, this model offers an appealing narrative for countries seeking rapid modernization without adopting liberal democratic frameworks. However, the China Model is not without controversy. Concerns about debt sustainability, sovereignty, and environmental impacts have prompted resistance in some regions, highlighting the tensions between China's ambitions and global apprehension.

THE DESIRED WORLD ORDER

China's vision under Xi Jinping extends beyond domestic development and regional influence; it seeks to reshape the global order. Central to this vision is a multipolar world, where power is distributed among various states rather than dominated by a single hegemon. Xi has often framed this as rejecting what Beijing perceives as a Western-centric global order, advocating instead for a system rooted in mutual respect, shared prosperity, and the principle of non-interference.

At the heart of this vision is the belief that the current global governance system, heavily influenced by the United States and its allies, no longer adequately reflects the realities of a multipolar world. For example, China's leadership roles in United Nations bodies, such as heading four of the 15 specialized UN agencies, including the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), allow Beijing to significantly influence global standards and policies. This influence is particularly pronounced in areas such as technology and agriculture, where China's unique approach and priorities can shape global practices and regulations.

China has provided an alternative to Western-led development models through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). For instance, in Pakistan, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship BRI project, includes infrastructure, energy, and transportation initiatives designed to enhance connectivity. While

these projects have undoubtedly benefited local economies and improved infrastructure, they have also increased China's strategic presence in South Asia, particularly in regions contested by India. However, they have also raised concerns about debt dependency and potential loss of sovereignty for the partner countries.

THE "COMMUNITY OF COMMON DESTINY FOR MANKIND"

Xi's concept of a "Community of Common Destiny for Mankind" (人类命运共同体) encapsulates Beijing's aspirations for a harmonious global order. This idea has been prominently showcased in forums like the Belt and Road Forum and international gatherings like the UN General Assembly. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, China used this framework to promote its vaccine diplomacy, supplying doses to countries across Africa and Southeast Asia under initiatives like COVAX. This approach positioned China as a global leader in addressing shared health challenges while advancing its geopolitical influence.

However, critics argue that the concept also serves as a soft-power strategy. Soft power, a term coined by political scientist Joseph Nye, refers to a country's ability to influence others through non-coercive means such as culture, political values, and foreign policies. For instance, China's promotion of digital connectivity under the BRI, such as building 5G networks in Africa and Southeast Asia, has raised concerns about data security and digital sovereignty. While the rhetoric emphasizes mutual benefits, these projects often enhance Beijing's technological and economic leverage in partner countries, thereby increasing its soft power and influence.

STRATEGIC MULTIPOLARITY

China's push for a multipolar world often positions itself as a counterbalance to U.S. hegemony. For instance, Beijing's growing

China's push for a multipolar world often positions itself as a counterbalance to U.S. hegemony.

partnership with Russia reflects a shared goal of challenging Western dominance. The two nations have conducted joint military exercises, such as naval drills in the Pacific, and coordinated efforts in forums like the United Nations Security Council to block Western-led resolutions on issues like Syria.

In the Global South, China has used platforms like the BRICS grouping (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) to advocate for reforms to global governance. For example, the BRICS New Development Bank offers an alternative to Western financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), providing loans to member countries with fewer political conditions attached. This aligns with Beijing's broader narrative of fostering a fairer global financial system.

REIMAGINING GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Beijing's desired world order also includes reforms to global governance structures. For example, China has advocated for increased voting rights for developing nations in the IMF and the World Bank, arguing that these institutions disproportionately favor Western countries. At the same time, Beijing has used its influence to block measures it opposes, such as Western-backed human rights investigations within the UN Human Rights Council.

China's Belt and Road projects further reflect its efforts to reimagine global governance. For instance, in Kenya, China funded the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) construction, linking the port city of Mombasa to the interior. While the project boosted trade and connectivity, critics argue it exemplifies how BRI projects create debt dependencies, as Kenya faced challenges in servicing its Chinese loans.

CRITIQUES AND LIMITATIONS

While the vision of a multipolar world and a shared destiny has gained traction in some quarters, it faces significant criticism. Western countries often view these efforts as attempts to weaken democratic norms and entrench authoritarian governance. For example, in Europe, concerns about China's influence were amplified after Greece blocked an EU statement condemning Chinese human rights abuses at the UN Human Rights Council in 2017, following significant Chinese investments in the port of Piraeus.

In Southeast Asia, countries like Vietnam and the Philippines have expressed unease about Beijing's actions in the South China Sea, where China's construction of artificial islands and military bases has been framed as undermining regional stability. This highlights the tension between China's narrative of peaceful cooperation and its assertive actions to secure strategic interests. The global reactions to China's desired world order underscore Xi's challenges in balancing ambitions for influence with growing skepticism. These tensions feed into China's broader aspirations for a multipolar world and its vision of a reimagined global order, which will face increasing scrutiny in the future.

CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS

Despite its ambitious vision and growing influence, China under Xi Jinping is grappling with significant challenges and criticisms, both domestically and internationally. These issues, ranging from concerns about authoritarianism and human rights abuses to geopolitical tensions and economic dependencies, are not to be underestimated. They pose formidable obstacles to Beijing's efforts to achieve the "China Dream" and reshape the global order.

China's rapid expansion of influence through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has drawn mixed reactions. In Europe, China's acquisition of strategic infrastructure, such as the port of Piraeus in Greece, has sparked debates over national

security and economic sovereignty. While Greece initially embraced Chinese investments following its financial crisis, there has been growing skepticism over Beijing's influence. European Union officials worry that such investments create economic dependencies and grant China undue leverage over critical assets.

This skepticism has expanded to include concerns about Chinese technology, particularly 5G networks. The U.S. and some EU countries have restricted or banned Huawei, citing national security risks and claiming the technology could be used for espionage or cyberattacks on critical infrastructure. These concerns underscore broader apprehensions about the potential strategic consequences of deepening ties with Beijing. The United States has also taken a strong stance against what it perceives as “debt-trap diplomacy” in BRI projects.

Controversies like Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port, leased to China after the country failed to repay its loans, have fueled accusations that Beijing uses infrastructure investments to gain control over strategic assets. This narrative has fueled skepticism among recipient countries, some of which, like Malaysia under former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, have renegotiated or canceled BRI projects to avoid excessive dependence on Beijing. In response, the U.S. and its allies have launched competing initiatives, such as the “Blue Dot Network,” to promote transparent and sustainable development investments.

China's human rights record remains one of the most controversial aspects of Xi Jinping's leadership. In Xinjiang, the Chinese government has been accused of detaining over a million Uyghur Muslims in “re-education camps,” conducting forced sterilizations, and implementing widespread surveillance. These actions have been labeled as crimes against humanity by some countries and organizations, including the United States. Beijing has consistently denied these allegations, describing the camps as “vocational training centers” aimed at combating extremism. However, satellite imagery, survivor testimonies, and leaked government documents have painted a starkly different picture, intensifying international condemnation.

In Hong Kong, the imposition of the National Security Law in 2020 marked the end of the city's semi-autonomy under the "one country, two systems" framework. The law, which criminalizes secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces, has been criticized for its broad and vague provisions that could be used to suppress dissent. Pro-democracy protests were met with harsh crackdowns, leading to mass arrests of activists and the suppression of dissent. This has strained relations with the West, resulting in sanctions and travel bans on Chinese officials responsible for the crackdown.

China's expanding surveillance state has also drawn significant criticism. Through technologies like facial recognition, artificial intelligence, and the Social Credit System, Beijing has created an unprecedented model of authoritarian control. In Tibet and Xinjiang, these tools are used to monitor and suppress ethnic minorities. International human rights organizations warn that China is exporting this surveillance technology to authoritarian regimes, further entrenching global repression.

China's rise has created intense friction with other global powers, especially the United States. Under the Trump administration, relations between the two nations reached new lows. The trade war initiated by President Trump imposed tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars worth of Chinese goods, escalating economic tensions. At the same time, Trump's confrontational rhetoric on issues like intellectual property theft and currency manipulation highlighted a growing rivalry. While Xi Jinping's relationship with Trump was sometimes framed as cooperative—evidenced by high-profile summits—the overall trajectory of U.S.-China relations during Trump's presidency was defined by mistrust.

With the recent U.S. election results, questions arise about how China will navigate its relationship with the new administration. The potential for the current administration to pursue a more unified global front with allies to counterbalance Beijing could significantly alter the dynamics of U.S.-China relations. This uncertainty, especially as Taiwan remains a contentious issue, adds a layer of complexity to China's strategic planning.

China's assertive actions in the South China Sea have further alienated neighboring countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Beijing's construction of artificial islands and military installations in contested waters has provoked criticism from countries like Vietnam and the Philippines. This has also drawn the attention of alliances like the Quad (comprising the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia), which seeks to counterbalance China's growing influence in the region.

Domestically, China faces mounting economic challenges that threaten its global ambitions. The country's real estate crisis, exemplified by the collapse of significant developers like Evergrande, has exposed systemic vulnerabilities in its economic model. Evergrande's failure to meet debt obligations has sent shockwaves through China's financial system, raising concerns about a broader economic slowdown. This crisis is part of a larger pattern of slowing growth, rising unemployment, and demographic decline.

The government's response, which includes strict regulatory crackdowns on industries like real estate and technology, has further complicated the recovery process. For example, Beijing's heavy-handed intervention in the tech sector, targeting companies like Alibaba and Didi, has deterred foreign investors and stoked fears of overregulation. China's demographic challenges compound these economic issues. The aging population and declining birthrate, legacies of the one-child policy, threaten to reduce the country's workforce and strain social welfare systems. These domestic pressures may limit Beijing's ability to sustain ambitious initiatives like the BRI, potentially weakening its global influence.

The combination of international skepticism, human rights controversies, geopolitical rivalries, and economic instability poses significant obstacles to achieving the "China Dream." However, Xi Jinping's vision of a rejuvenated China capable of reshaping the global order remains resilient in the face of these challenges. While the path to the "China Dream" may be complex and resistant, the vision for national rejuvenation and global leadership remains a

powerful one. To achieve this ambitious goal, Xi Jinping must navigate an increasingly contentious international environment, address domestic vulnerabilities, and adapt to a multipolar world that is resistant to unilateral dominance. The next decade will test the resilience of China's vision, requiring strategic recalibrations and perhaps a redefinition of what the "China Dream" can realistically achieve in a divided and competitive global landscape.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

As China continues its rise under Xi Jinping's leadership, the future of its global role remains a subject of intense debate and speculation. While Beijing has demonstrated remarkable success in expanding its influence and asserting its vision for a multipolar world, the road ahead is fraught with opportunities and challenges that will shape China's trajectory and the broader international system.

China's increasing economic and political clout suggests it will remain a key player in shaping the 21st-century world order. Initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a global infrastructure development strategy adopted by the Chinese government in 2013, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a multilateral development bank that aims to support the building of infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region, will likely persist as cornerstones of Beijing's strategy to deepen economic ties with developing nations. In areas like Africa and Southeast Asia, China's investments in infrastructure and technology will continue to drive growth, reinforcing its role as an indispensable partner for many countries.

However, Beijing's ability to maintain this momentum will depend on how effectively it addresses its criticisms and challenges. If China can mitigate concerns about debt dependencies, human rights abuses, and regional dominance, it could solidify its reputation as a reliable leader in global governance. Conversely, failure to resolve these issues could alienate potential allies and entrench opposition from the West and its partners.

POTENTIAL SCENARIOS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The future of the international system under China's influence will likely hinge on how global powers balance cooperation and competition. Several scenarios are possible:

Scenario 1: Coexistence and Cooperation

In this scenario, China and other major powers find common ground on climate change, global health, and economic recovery. The evolution of multilateral institutions to accommodate Beijing's aspirations creates a more inclusive framework that reflects the realities of a multipolar world, fostering a sense of optimism about the potential for global cooperation.

Scenario 2: Intensified Rivalry

Geopolitical tensions could escalate, with the U.S., EU, and regional powers intensifying efforts to counterbalance China's influence. This could lead to economic decoupling, military confrontations in contested areas like the South China Sea, and a fragmented global order dominated by competing blocs.

Scenario 3: Chinese-led Global Order

Should Beijing successfully overcome its domestic and international challenges, it may emerge as the preeminent global power. In this scenario, the "China Model," a term used to describe China's unique approach to governance and development, gains widespread acceptance, and institutions like the BRI and AIIB become dominant forces in global governance, shaping norms and policies around Chinese priorities.

BALANCING COOPERATION AND COMPETITION

The relationship between China and other global powers, particularly the United States, will remain central to the international system's evolution. While competition in areas like technology, trade, and military strategy is likely to persist, there are also opportunities for collaboration on shared challenges. Climate

change, for instance, presents a critical area where cooperation between Beijing and Washington could yield significant global benefits. Similarly, worldwide health and economic recovery provide potential pathways for engagement, particularly in multilateral settings like the G20 and the United Nations.

China's growing relationship with the European Union (EU) adds another layer of complexity to the balance between cooperation and competition. While the EU has expressed concerns over Beijing's human rights record, economic practices, and security issues related to Chinese technology, China has deepened ties with individual member states, often leveraging these relationships to its advantage. For example, Hungary has emerged as one of Beijing's strongest allies in Europe. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has frequently blocked EU resolutions critical of China, such as statements condemning human rights abuses in Xinjiang or the crackdown in Hong Kong.

This support strengthens China's position within Europe and underscores Beijing's role in encouraging the rise of populist movements that challenge EU cohesion. Through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has invested heavily in Central and Eastern European countries, creating what is known as the "17+1" cooperation framework. While some nations, such as Hungary and Serbia, have embraced Chinese investment, others, including Poland and the Czech Republic, have grown increasingly skeptical. The divergence in attitudes reflects broader tensions within the EU regarding how to engage with Beijing.

By cultivating close relationships with populist governments, China has managed to divide opinion within the bloc, undermining collective EU efforts to counterbalance Beijing's influence. This strategy has significant implications for the balance of power in Europe. Populist movements often align with China's emphasis on national sovereignty and economic development over liberal democratic values. The support of these governments provides Beijing with critical allies in its effort to shape a more fragmented and multipolar global order. However, it also exposes China to the risk of backlash if broader European sentiment turns

decisively against it, as seen with the EU's Global Gateway initiative, which directly challenges the BRI by offering an alternative development model.

CHINA'S DOMESTIC REALITIES AND THEIR GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

Domestically, China faces significant economic and demographic challenges that will critically shape its future trajectory. The ongoing real estate crisis, exemplified by the collapse of Evergrande and financial instability among other significant developers, has revealed deep vulnerabilities within China's economic system. Real estate, which contributes nearly 30% of China's GDP, has long been a cornerstone of the country's rapid growth. However, years of over-leveraging, speculative investments, and lax regulations have created a bubble that is now bursting. The consequences are far-reaching, with ripple effects threatening local governments reliant on land sales, businesses connected to the property market, and millions of middle-class households whose wealth is tied to real estate.

Broader economic headwinds further compound this crisis. Slowing growth, rising unemployment—particularly among urban youth—and weakened consumer confidence highlight underlying structural problems in China's economy. Beijing's regulatory crackdowns on industries such as technology, education, and private finance have created uncertainty among investors, both domestic and international. These policies, while aligning businesses with Communist Party priorities, risk stifling innovation and deterring the foreign investments necessary for long-term growth.

China's demographic challenges exacerbate these economic difficulties. Decades of the one-child policy have resulted in a rapidly aging population and a shrinking workforce. By 2035, it is projected that over 400 million Chinese citizens will be over the age of 60, placing immense strain on the country's social welfare systems. Efforts to reverse these trends, such as introducing a

three-child policy and incentivizing families to have more children, have thus far failed to boost birth rates significantly. The declining labor force threatens productivity and economic dynamism, raising questions about China's ability to maintain its status as the world's factory while transitioning to an innovation-driven economy.

The combined weight of these domestic challenges could have profound implications for China's global ambitions. If Beijing successfully addresses its economic and demographic issues, it could stabilize its domestic economy and reinforce its international standing. This would enable the country to sustain initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), expand its technological leadership, and continue its push for a redefined global order. Success in managing these challenges would also bolster Xi Jinping's narrative of the "China Dream," strengthening domestic and international confidence in his leadership.

Conversely, failure to address these crises could constrain China's ability to project power abroad. A prolonged economic downturn or financial crisis could force Beijing to scale back its investments in critical regions, undermining its influence in developing nations and weakening the BRI's appeal. Domestically, economic instability and growing discontent among the middle class could erode public trust in the Communist Party, leading to a more cautious and inward-focused China. Additionally, an aging population and shrinking workforce may leave the country less competitive globally, particularly as other nations innovate and quickly adapt to emerging challenges.

These realities highlight the delicate balance Beijing must navigate. Its domestic challenges are not isolated from its global ambitions but are deeply interconnected. The next decade will test the resilience of China's economic model, the adaptability of its governance, and the durability of its vision for both domestic prosperity and global leadership. Whether Beijing emerges stronger or weaker will depend mainly on its ability to confront these pressing issues while maintaining the momentum of its international aspirations.

China's ascent under Xi Jinping is characterized by a grand vision for national rejuvenation and a redefined global order. The "China Dream" embodies aspirations for domestic prosperity, military prowess, and global leadership, bolstered by initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and active participation in international institutions. However, the journey toward realizing this vision is riddled with obstacles. International skepticism, human rights controversies, geopolitical rivalries, and domestic economic challenges pose significant barriers to achieving the transformative goals outlined by Xi.

China's growing influence has inspired both admiration and apprehension on the global stage. Initiatives such as the Maritime Silk Road have bolstered Beijing's connections with developing nations but have also drawn criticism for fostering debt dependencies and strategic leverage. Relationships with critical powers like the United States and the European Union remain fraught as competition over trade, technology, and governance models intensifies. At the same time, Beijing's deepening ties with nations like Hungary reveal its ability to exploit divisions within Western alliances, highlighting its strategic acumen and the fragility of global unity in countering its ambitions.

Domestically, China's economic vulnerabilities and demographic challenges threaten to undermine its long-term stability and ability to sustain ambitious projects like the BRI. The collapse of real estate giants like Evergrande has exposed systemic risks, while an aging population and shrinking workforce could limit the nation's future economic dynamism. How China navigates these crises will determine whether it can maintain its trajectory as a rising global power or retreat into a more inward-focused posture.

Looking ahead, China's future global role hinges on its ability to balance cooperation and competition with other powers. The opportunities for collaboration on shared challenges, such as climate change and international health, could pave the way for a more cooperative global order. However, the escalation of rivalries, particularly with the United States, could lead to a more polarized and fragmented international system. The delicate balance

between these two scenarios is crucial for China's future.

Ultimately, Xi Jinping's vision for China's rejuvenation represents a continuation of its historical aspirations and a transformative shift in its global ambitions. Whether China emerges as a dominant global power, a key player in a multipolar world, or a nation constrained by internal and external pressures will shape the 21st century. The stakes are high for China and the entire international community as it grapples with the implications of Beijing's rise, and the potential outcomes are numerous and significant.

Could China Shape the World?

Or will internal and
external challenges halt
its ambitions?

LEON LI

China appears to be on an inevitable path to reshaping the world and hopes to do so in its favor. Xi Jinping has repeatedly called for a world where China exercises complete sovereignty over how it governs—a world detached from Western political liberalism and the U.S.-led order. In pursuit of this goal, China has leveraged the sheer scale and mass of its industrial base to expand its economic, military, and political influence globally. This has resulted in intensified competition in economic and military power with the West, as well as the establishment of new norms and institutions within the international system.

LEON LI, a Chinese Foreign Policy analyst, co-founder of Vanguard Think Tank, and recent graduate of Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies



Ultimately, whether China can reshape the global order in its favor depends on how it reshapes itself.

Undoubtedly, the world has moved away from a status quo without China. However, China's ability to transform the world order to its preferences remains seriously challenged by the structure of its political system, the growing difficulties in its economy, and an increasingly vigilant international community that monitors its every move. Ultimately, whether China can reshape the global order in its favor depends on how it reshapes itself.

A NEW WORLD MADE IN CHINA

Following three decades of a command economy and near-complete autarky, China began a series of economic reforms in the 1980s. Another 30 years later, China has emerged as the world's dominant manufacturing power. In 2011, it surpassed the European Union as the economy with the highest manufacturing output in the world and—after meeting its own large domestic demand—secured the largest share of the world's manufacturing exports. China's largest imports—minerals and semi-processed goods—further highlight its role as the world's largest processing hub.

Policies like “Made in China 2025” have further enhanced China's manufacturing capabilities, and its dominance in critical mineral supply grants the nation significant influence over other countries' strategic sectors, such as semiconductors, renewable technologies, and defense. The industrial prowess China has demonstrated serves as the foundation for its increasingly active engagement with other countries, multilateral platforms, and international organizations.

Notably, BRICS represents an important attempt by China to organize divided yet economically linked developing countries and create an alternative economic bloc in the world. This multilateral platform provides China with opportunities to experiment with alternative financial institutions and maximize its gains from exports to Global South countries. Nations closely aligned with China, such as Russia and increasingly Brazil, have played a role in advancing China's strategy to establish an alternative economic order that operates outside the Western liberal framework.

China's growing industrial power also gave rise to the Belt and Road

Initiative (BRI) in 2013. Beijing's strategic aim of fostering a more interconnected and secure Central Asia, combined with its commercial goals to safeguard critical energy imports, materialized into a grand economic initiative that also allows China to accumulate political influence wherever the BRI extends. The initiative has attracted numerous countries, with participants spanning East Asia, Europe, and Latin America. This enables China to expand its soft power in developing nations, building bilateral relationships through aid and loans.

Another important intended outcome of the BRI is to realign various global trade corridors in the Greater Asian and Indo-Pacific regions to align with China's economic interests. The BRI infrastructure projects have aimed to achieve this goal with mixed outcomes, but the surge of Chinese activities in countries with BRI projects has provided China with more investment and trade opportunities. In the Middle East, for example, China has been increasing its investments in healthcare infrastructure and other non-transportation projects. Chinese products and standards, which are embedded in the projects China finances, also proliferate throughout the BRI regions, fostering long-term technological dependence on Chinese goods.

The expanding trade network between China and a growing number of developing economies also creates opportunities for China to reshape the global financial order. A notable example is China's effort to internationalize its currency, the yuan (RMB). Recent initiatives, such as promoting the use of RMB in cross-border settlements and securing its inclusion in the IMF's elite reserve currency basket, have enhanced China's financial influence over other countries. Although the RMB faces structural challenges to further internationalization—particularly due to China's strict capital controls—the growing role of RMB in international trade complements China's industrial power in reshaping the global economic order.

SELLING THE CHINESE STATE

China's industrial and technological power extends its influence beyond the economic realm. Intensive state and private investments in technological innovation have positioned China as a global leader in information and communication technologies (ICT), electric vehicles, batteries, solar panels, and robotics. Over the past two

decades, China has transitioned from being a major recipient of technological transfers to becoming a leading provider of them.

Most recently, European companies have begun purchasing Chinese innovation firms and entering into technology transfer agreements with large Chinese corporations in the automobile sector. The implications of China's technological advancements are two-fold. Firstly, China has developed significant surplus capability in high-tech manufacturing and infrastructure development. Through the Digital Silk Road initiative, an integral part of the BRI, and competitive pricing of its high-tech goods, China has been able to export large volumes of its hardware and software, thereby expanding its economic influence on a global scale.

Secondly, countries receiving Chinese technologies often begin to adopt the underlying concepts and designs of these technologies, which are frequently tailored to China's own political and social management system. Most notably, the Chinese surveillance state is being exported through millions of Chinese-made cameras and, more critically, Chinese-made surveillance software. China exports surveillance technologies to both democracies and autocracies, and Chinese companies that operate China's surveillance system also provide training to countries seeking to build "smart cities," an urban design concept that integrates surveillance and communication technologies to maximize convenience for their populations.

In China, smart cities have largely become a reality, with one camera for every three people nationwide and seamless integration of convenience and surveillance through the widespread use of biometrics and cameras for payments and other public activities. As more countries begin to replicate the design of Chinese cities using Chinese technologies and models, global norms around privacy and state jurisdiction are likely to be further eroded. Additionally, China's advancements in technological innovation are driving systematic changes in international governance.

The Chinese state has actively participated in international standard-setting organizations, which determine industry standards for the production, processing, assembly, or operation of specific products. The number of Chinese standards has grown significantly in recent years, enabling Chinese firms to mandate the implementation of these standards by their foreign partners, particularly in BRI countries. This subtle and highly technical form of

influence has long-term implications for the technological use and development in countries that adopt Chinese technologies.

AWAKENED LION VS.
DESCENDING EAGLE

China's economic growth and technological advancement have also enabled it to make significant strides in catching up with the United States—a national goal long held by Chinese leaders. One of the most critical aspects of this catch-up effort is the modernization of China's military. To date, China has built the largest army and navy in the world, with a third aircraft carrier soon to become operational. The Chinese military has advanced its armaments to rival top-tier militaries, and its missile, nuclear, and space capabilities are rapidly scaling up.

Additionally, China has aggressively improved its cyberwarfare capabilities, with cyberattacks attributed to China becoming increasingly sophisticated, damaging, and destructive. This expanding military power has made China increasingly assertive in its neighboring regions. It has ramped up shows of force in the South China Sea, around Taiwan, and toward Japan and the United States. More Chinese military patrols and exercises have been observed in East Asia, sometimes conducted jointly with Russia and other countries.

Paramilitary forces have also played an increasingly important role in China's strategy. The recent Joint-Sword 2024B exercise around Taiwan featured significant involvement from the China Coast Guard, highlighting China's growing ability to engage in forceful coercion through gray-zone tactics and paramilitary assets. Collectively, these developments signal China's intent to break away from the U.S.-led status quo in the Indo-Pacific and reshape the regional order in Asia to its advantage through economic and military power.

Beyond military advancements, China aspires to achieve great power status that rivals the United States. To this end, China has pursued leadership in global security, development, and governance. In global security, China has demonstrated activism by organizing regional security dialogues, such as the Xiangshan Forum and Shangri-La Dialogue, and establishing regional security organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The nation has positioned itself as a peacekeeper, becoming increasingly involved in peace talks in Myanmar, Ukraine, and the Middle East.

China's growing willingness to take the lead in regional security and provide security to others reflects its ambitions on the global stage. In terms of development, China's foreign aid and loans, combined with its emphasis on the "development rights" of Global South countries, have garnered support and goodwill from many developing nations. Perhaps China's most significant impact lies in international governance, where it consistently re-emphasizes "respect for a country's sovereignty." Embedded in this principle is China's promotion of an alternative international system that refrains from interfering in a country's governance model.

Essentially, China advocates for a world where security cooperation and economic development are not directed by the West or guided by political liberalism. China has achieved notable success in influencing the norms of the international system. In the United Nations, an increasing number of countries have aligned with China in voting patterns on human rights issues. Many nations have also acknowledged China's redefinition of "human rights," shifting the focus from individual liberty and protection to development and prosperity—transforming the concept from individual rights to state rights.

SCALING THE HEIGHTS, TRIPPING OVER ROOTS

China's economic and technological power has fueled its activism and assertiveness in foreign economic and security policies. The country has positioned itself as an alternative source of security and leadership in the international system. However, China's success in translating its material power into achieving its global vision should not be overstated. Significant obstacles remain, the most critical of which may be rooted in China's political system itself.

The Chinese state governs an expansive country with numerous interests and foreign counterparts, while significant decision-making power resides at the ministerial and local levels. This reality has led to a lack of coordination, compliance, and quality assurance in many foreign policy initiatives, particularly when local interests and incentives diverge from the goals of central policymakers. Xi

Jinping's success in centralizing China's political system has allowed for greater oversight and supervision over the quality of its foreign policy initiatives. This new structure also makes it easier for China to implement a more cohesive and unified foreign policy strategy.

However, the centralizing institutional revisions and the imposition of party monitoring within government bureaucracies have led to erratic official behavior, oscillating between overcompliance and paralysis. Central directives on foreign economic and security policies may be passively implemented by delegated officials seeking to avoid punishment or, conversely, implemented excessively by those eager to demonstrate initiative and loyalty. This dynamic renders the foreign policy apparatus increasingly inefficient and personalistic, as officials defer difficult decisions up the hierarchical chain and prioritize "easy wins" that align with Xi's central directives.

These developments complicate efforts by Chinese foreign policy officials to sustain China's influence abroad as a reliable and responsive partner. Simultaneously, overcompliance with national security priorities by China's military and security apparatus has resulted in sporadic and seemingly uncontrolled actions that create tensions with targeted countries. Notably, cyber-espionage and cyberattack operations conducted in Southeast Asia have undermined China's credibility and harmed its interests in the region.

China's demands on Chinese and foreign companies operating within its borders, justified by national security concerns, have also damaged investor confidence in Chinese businesses and the broader business environment. These challenges have weakened China's economic appeal and heightened awareness in other countries about the nature of China's influence on the international order. Beyond the issues within China's political system, its pursuit of a world aligned with its interests is further constrained by challenges to its economic power. International resistance to a dominant China has prompted many nations, most notably the United States, to reduce and control their economic dependence on China.

At the same time, China faces significant economic headwinds, including a slowdown in growth, stagnant domestic consumption, a shrinking workforce, and an aging society. Confronting an increasingly resistant global environment and mounting domestic economic difficulties, China's prospects of reshaping the world in its

favor appear increasingly uncertain. Nonetheless, China has undeniably reshaped the global landscape through its economic strength and political ambition. The world has shifted away from a U.S.-led liberal order toward a multipolar and contested one.

However, China's domestic political and economic developments have complicated its pursuit of a world aligned with its interests. The Chinese leadership faces rising and critical challenges in economic performance, societal changes, and the political system. The future of China's global role and its ability to realize a vision for a new global order will depend on the kind of nation China transforms into. Close attention will need to be paid to the choices Xi Jinping and his party make in addressing these challenges and in how China engages with key countries, particularly the United States, Russia, and India. The contested future of China—and of the world—will not be determined by Xi's dream but by Xi's choices.

*The future of China's
global role and its
ability to realize a
vision for a new
global order will
depend on the kind of
nation China
transforms into.*

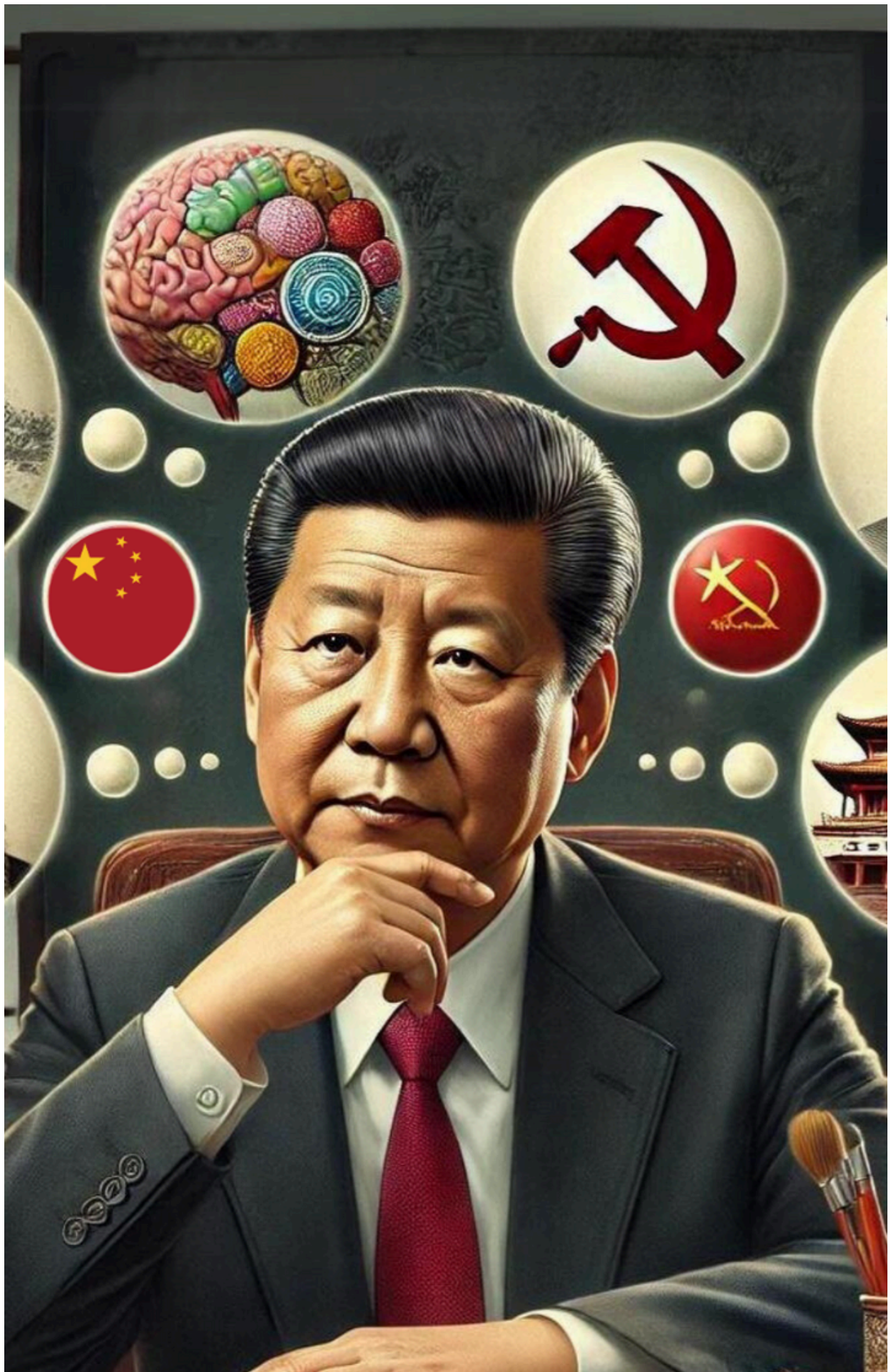
Xi Jinping's Way of Thinking

Xi Jinping guides China's rise
using traditional values
and modern strategies.

RICCARDO NACHTIGAL

Under President Xi Jinping, the People's Republic of China is witnessing a constant strengthening of its domestic political system and economic structure, along with an increasingly significant involvement in world affairs. China has definitively become a superpower of our century, boasting the second-largest economy in the world, revitalized and modernized armed forces, and a slow but relentless development of soft power through culture and a confident, conflict-avoiding rhetoric on the international stage.

RICCARDO NACHTIGAL, is a Master Student in East Asian Studies at University of Groningen, Netherlands. His main fields of studies are Chinese Foreign Policy, Sino-Russian relations, EU-China relations and the Asia-Pacific region.



These achievements were not created overnight: Xi Jinping's model of governance and political thought reflect a long and complex series of principles rooted in Chinese culture and society, historical events and their reinterpretations, combined with the leader's personal background, the Chinese Communist Party's approach, and Xi Jinping's own political vision. This intricate and heavily heterogeneous mix of ingredients is shaping China's current foreign policy.

Understanding this complex philosophy of thought allows for a better understanding of contemporary China, not only as an actor in the international sphere but also as a culture that presents deep differences and genuine alternatives in its vision of world order compared to those in the West. Only by grasping these principles at their core is it possible to establish constructive relationships with Beijing.

In order to unravel and understand the core principles of Chinese leadership, governance, and foreign policy, this article will explore Chinese political philosophy traditions, modern Chinese history, and Xi Jinping's personal background. It will then explain the key political concepts developed by Xi's administration and their influence on both domestic and foreign policy.

CHINESE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY TRADITIONS

Xi Jinping's political philosophy takes its roots from China's multi-millennial culture, which, to a certain extent, still influences Chinese society today. Three main traditions of Chinese political philosophy emerged during the imperial age: Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. It is worth noting that these three traditions developed at different times and differ significantly in several aspects. Nevertheless, Chinese culture has absorbed and embodied these philosophies to varying degrees throughout the imperial era, and they continue to define some core principles in Chinese society, even after the establishment of Marxist doctrine in the People's Republic of China.

Daoism is both a religion and a philosophy developed in ancient China. Its central text, the Tao Te Ching, is attributed to Laozi, who is widely regarded as the founder of Daoism and is believed to have lived in the 6th century BC. According to Daoism's main principles, a good government is one that respects the natural flow of things and refrains from unnecessary interference in external matters. Contemporary principles of Chinese foreign policy, such as non-interference in other states' internal affairs, peaceful coexistence, and strategic patience, partially stem from this traditional way of thinking.

Buddhism represents another core religion and philosophy of ancient China. It originated in ancient India and later spread across East Asia, developing different currents and interpretations based on the region or country. Chinese Buddhism remains a part of contemporary Chinese society to varying extents depending on the province, but it continues to be influential. Buddhist culture in China emphasizes the concept of harmony within society and among different groups. Policies such as Hu Jintao's "harmonious society," further developed by Xi Jinping, and the concept of "和而不同" (harmony in diversity) promoted during Xi Jinping's presidency are examples of policies with Buddhist roots.

Lastly, Confucianism is arguably the most influential political philosophy of ancient China. Developed by Confucius, a philosopher from the fifth century BC, this philosophy outlines models of good governance. According to Confucius, the most important values for a good government and society are hierarchy, social harmony, and moral leadership. Confucianism advocates for a strong but benevolent leader (the "benevolent ruler"), and Xi Jinping has incorporated this principle into his governance style. He positions himself as a unifying figure who upholds traditional Chinese values such as family, respect for authority, and national loyalty.

CHINESE MODERN HISTORY

Chinese modern history has profoundly affected Chinese society and leadership since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. First and foremost, the so-called “century of humiliation” negatively shaped China's perception of itself and the world. The Opium Wars, the unequal treaties with Western powers, and the bloody, brutal wars with Japan—particularly the Second Sino-Japanese War—took a heavy toll on Chinese society, leaving a lingering sense of inadequacy, weakness, and humiliation among the Chinese people when comparing themselves to the outside world.

This feeling of humiliation was further exacerbated by memories of a great past. Until the 19th century, imperial China was regarded as an incredibly strong empire that ruled over East Asia through a system of satellite states, which paid tributes to Beijing in exchange for political favors and military protection. The invasions by the so-called “barbarians” into the Middle Kingdom led to a period of political instability within China, beginning with the transition from empire to republic, followed by the era of warlords, and culminating in the Chinese Civil War. This civil war, fought between the nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek and the communists led by Mao Zedong, paused during the conflict with Japan but resumed in 1945.

The Chinese Civil War lasted until 1949, when Chairman Mao seized power in China, forcing Chiang Kai-shek to retreat to Taiwan, where he established a new Republic of China led by the Kuomintang, his political party. These dramatic experiences shaped the priorities of all leaders of the People's Republic of China, from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping. They focused on critical issues such as territorial sovereignty and the non-interference of foreign powers in internal affairs. At the same time, they developed a strong narrative centered on rising from oppression, emphasizing that only the Chinese people can shape China's future and restore its status as a great and powerful country reminiscent of its imperial past.

XI JINPING'S PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Xi Jinping was born in 1953 into a prominent political family. His father, Xi Zhongxun, was a veteran revolutionary leader during Mao's Marxist revolution and a former Vice Premier. This family background played a critical role in shaping Xi's political trajectory. However, during the Cultural Revolution, Xi's family faced persecution, and he was sent to the rural province of Shaanxi for "re-education." This experience in the countryside is said to have had a lasting impact on Xi's understanding of China's rural population and its economic and daily challenges.

Xi Jinping studied chemical engineering at Tsinghua University and later pursued postgraduate studies in Marxist theory, deepening his interest in political ideology and governance. He worked his way through various political roles at the local and provincial levels, including serving as Party Secretary in Zhejiang and Fujian provinces. Demonstrating excellent leadership and management skills, he was promoted to Vice President of China in 2008 during Hu Jintao's presidency. In 2012, he became the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and in 2013, he was elected President of the People's Republic of China, solidifying his position as the paramount leader of China.

Together with Chinese traditional ways of thought, which form a key part of Xi Jinping's philosophical backbone, three main political visions have deeply influenced his perspective on governance throughout his career: Mao Zedong's thought, Deng Xiaoping's reforms, and modern CCP ideology. Mao Zedong's thought has shaped Xi's vision of the primacy of the Communist Party in every aspect of society. In his speeches during Party Congresses and New Year addresses, Xi often invokes principles such as class struggle, the need for strong leadership, and the idea that the Party must lead China through continuous revolution to maintain its purity.

On the other hand, Deng Xiaoping's 改革开放 (Reform and Opening Up) policy from the late 1970s and 1980s has heavily influenced Xi's economic vision, particularly its focus on

liberalizing the Chinese market by gradually reducing the role of the state in the economy. However, Xi simultaneously promotes the concept of the “party-state,” ensuring that the government retains control over key sectors of the economy to prevent capitalism from undermining the CCP’s power.

Furthermore, Xi has also been influenced by modern Chinese Communist Party ideology. Initially formulated by Deng Xiaoping and later refined by Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, the Party’s modern ideology emphasizes the importance of adapting Marxism to China’s unique national and cultural conditions. This approach has led to the development of the so-called “socialism with Chinese characteristics” for the new era, where both a market economy and state authority are integral components of Beijing’s governance.

THE NATIONAL STRATEGY

This complex mix of old and new political philosophies—combining a pursuit of harmony with a determination for China to rise again as a primary actor in international relations—represents the core of Xi Jinping’s political thought. This philosophy translates into confident yet multifaceted policies, both domestically and internationally, which are often difficult to fully grasp from an outside perspective.

In domestic politics, Xi has focused on centralizing power, reducing the influence of potential rivals within the Party, and asserting personal control over key aspects of governance. For instance, Xi serves as the head of the Central Military Commission (CMC), maintaining direct authority over the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Furthermore, with the reform of the constitution, Xi has secured the ability to serve as President of the People’s Republic of China for life.

This centralization of power is justified by Xi Jinping as necessary to simplify decision-making mechanisms, enabling faster implementation of domestic reforms and foreign policy decisions to accelerate China’s rise as a superpower. Internally, this includes

a more efficient redistribution of wealth to the people, while externally, it involves adopting a more proactive stance on international issues. One notable domestic policy initiated by Xi in 2012 has been the Anti-Corruption Campaign. By targeting both high-ranking officials (“Tigers”) and lower-level bureaucrats (“Flies”), this campaign increased Xi’s overall support among the Chinese people.

This campaign has sparked debate over whether it was primarily a tool for eliminating political rivals and consolidating power or if it was a neo-Confucian policy designed to purify leadership for the sake of good governance. Likely, both factors played a role. Other important domestic initiatives include the Chinese Dream and the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation, both aimed at improving the economic conditions of the Chinese people, redistributing wealth within society, and implementing social policies that have strengthened national unity.

These policies are aimed at creating a harmonious society, with social stability considered a fundamental condition for China’s rise. Again, this policy is multifaceted. Taking Xinjiang and Tibet as examples—regions characterized by significant ethnic minority populations—Xi has pushed to reduce separatism and social unrest by centralizing the administration of these provinces under his control. This approach includes, on one hand, applying coercive measures to prevent separatist actions, while on the other hand, supporting these peripheral regions by sending teachers and doctors to improve education and healthcare for local citizens.

These actions reflect a dual strategy: a willingness to unify Chinese society while acknowledging cultural diversity. On one hand, Xi’s approach incorporates Maoist and Confucian principles of societal uniformity. On the other, it draws from Buddhist and Daoist ideals of harmony within society, alongside Marxist principles of providing public healthcare and education for all.

XI'S GLOBAL DOCTRINE

Xi's major aim in foreign policy has been, since the beginning, to position China as a global power, albeit with a more indirect approach. On one hand, the Chinese president has embraced a more assertive foreign policy, particularly regarding Taiwan and the South China Sea. On the other hand, he has focused on expanding China's global influence through economic, diplomatic, and military means. China's growing economic clout, military modernization, and efforts to reshape international institutions have positioned Xi as a key figure in the global geopolitical landscape, contributing to the perception of China's rebirth from the humiliations of the past.

Xi's major aim in foreign policy has been, since the beginning, to position China as a global power, albeit with a more indirect approach.

Furthermore, Xi's attempts to reform global governance in institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization suggest his government's intent to build an alternative model of world governance, with China as a dominant power within it. This intent is also evident in the creation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a trade project aimed at strengthening ties with over 140 countries by financing infrastructure projects like roads, ports, and railways to enhance Chinese influence across Asia, Africa, and Europe. The BRI can be seen as a neo-Maoist project, seeking to revitalize the socialist revolution, which, according to Mao, should begin in the countryside (the Third World and peripheral areas) before spreading to the cities (Europe and America).

Yet, on the other hand, Xi's diplomatic discourse has always been conciliatory and benevolent. Economic partners in the BRI, despite some concerns about a potential debt trap, continue to benefit from the Chinese project, which, according to Xi, offers financial support

for developing countries and aims to serve as a bridge between the East and the West, much like the ancient Silk Road. Additionally, the development of the BRICS community represents a step toward China's economic independence from U.S. protectionist policies toward Beijing. However, this does not imply that Beijing seeks to dominate the world through its economic power.

To better understand Xi's foreign policy choices, it is useful to consider the concept of "harmony in diversity" rooted in Buddhism, which has been adapted into a political theory for 21st-century China by contemporary Chinese philosopher Zhao Tingyang. According to Zhao, the world does not need a single interpretation of governance. Unlike the West, which focuses on projecting its values globally, the Chinese model of governance does not aim for domination but rather seeks to harmonize international relations between diverse societies and cultures.

Thus, according to Zhao, harmony in diversity entails a commitment by all actors to establish constructive relations with others while recognizing the differing cultural backgrounds of their counterparts. This awareness leads to diverse visions of world order. In this context, institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO can be seen as reflecting Western values. In contrast, the BRICS and the BRI embody a different vision of world order. The United Nations, however, may serve as a synthesis of these various visions, functioning as the international institution where harmonious relationships can be cultivated.

As a result, Xi's political thought is highly complex, drawing from a variety of philosophical traditions, historical memories, and personal experiences. The ancient is intertwined with the modern, force is balanced with diplomacy, and the personal is connected to the collective. At times, this heterogeneous vision may appear ambivalent, while at other times, it is remarkably coherent. Certain policies may highlight elements of one tradition, while others draw from different traditions.

More specifically, most of the time, elements of one tradition combine with elements of another to create multifaceted policies.

To a Western observer, this may seem confusing. Yet, if there is one lesson that Xi and, in general, Chinese politicians have learned from their millennial and rich history, it is that the realm of politics is the realm of compromise. As Daoism suggests: Yin and Yang may initially appear as two opposite forces, yet one cannot exist without the other. Once this concept is grasped, one can begin to truly understand Chinese politics.

Xi Jinping's Chinese Communist Party

Xi Jinping reshapes the CCP with historical legacy, forging a nationalist vision to redefine its global standing.

KRISTIN HYNES

Xi Jinping was born in Beijing in 1953, four years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. At the time, the country was under the leadership of Mao Zedong, who had led the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to victory. From 1927 to 1949, a major conflict was intermittently fought between the CCP and the Kuomintang, resulting in the establishment of a communist state. In addition to the civil war, the Chinese also had to repel Japanese forces during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945).

KRISTIN HYNES, is a PhD candidate in International Relations at Florida International University who primarily focuses on East Asia and Chinese Foreign Policy.



This war eventually merged into the broader conflict of World War II, during which China was one of the Allied Powers. Both the Chinese Civil War and the Second Sino-Japanese War continue to have a lasting impact on China today, particularly on its relations with two of its closest neighbors, Japan and Taiwan. As China was recovering from years of conflict, Xi's formative years were deeply shaped by his family background. His father, Xi Zhongxun, was especially influential in his development.

Xi Zhongxun was not only an influence on his son but also on his country. He played a significant role in bringing the CCP to power. Although he was highly respected within the CCP, he was eventually expelled from the party and imprisoned. Despite this, his son Xi Jinping would go on to become a key figure in the CCP. Since 2012, Xi Jinping has served as the General Secretary of the CCP and the Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC). The following year, he also became the President of the People's Republic of China.

Widely regarded as one of modern China's most powerful leaders, Xi's leadership has had profound implications at both domestic and international levels. Within China, he has campaigned against corruption, though some critics argue that this has been a tool to eliminate political rivals. Internationally, Xi has sought to expand China's influence through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, this project has faced significant criticism, with opponents suggesting that it serves as a means for China to exert political leverage over participating countries.

Since coming to power, Xi Jinping has played a pivotal role in shaping the CCP and, by extension, the entire country. His views are deeply connected to the themes of humiliation and nationalism, both of which are central to his vision for China's future and its position in the world. Under his leadership, Xi has emphasized national rejuvenation as a pathway to restoring China's historical greatness. At a reception in September commemorating the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, Xi stressed that the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is a shared goal for all its sons and daughters.

During his speech, he explicitly included the citizens of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan as his fellow countrymen.

THE RISE OF XI JINPING

The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) was a decade-long political and social upheaval launched by Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the CCP, aimed at reinforcing communist ideology and purging capitalist elements from Chinese society. During this period, Xi Jinping, like many other educated youths, was sent to work in poor rural villages. It was also a time when Chinese citizens, especially young people, were mobilized to challenge authority and denounce those deemed counterrevolutionaries.

Even family members were not exempt from scrutiny. The Cultural Revolution was a turbulent time that tore families apart. Xi himself was forced on stage to be publicly condemned by a crowd that included his own mother. His family faced further tragedy when his sister, Xi Heping, died. While official records state that she died after being persecuted by Red Guards, it is possible she committed suicide under duress. Following this tumultuous period, Xi graduated from Tsinghua University in 1979 with a degree in chemical engineering.

After graduation, Xi Jinping joined the military as an aide in the Central Military Commission and the Defense Ministry. In 1985, he became vice mayor of Xiamen, a sub-provincial city in southeastern Fujian, a position he held for seventeen years. He continued rising through the political ranks, becoming governor of Fujian province from 2000 to 2002, before being appointed party chief of Zhejiang province. He remained in that role until March 2007, when he was named party chief of Shanghai.

Seven months later, Xi entered the national leadership as one of the nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee, the highest leadership body of the Communist Party. Xi's rise continued when

he became Vice President of China in 2008. His efforts during this time helped him secure widespread support within the party, ultimately leading to his appointment as General Secretary of the CCP in 2012 and President of the People's Republic of China in 2013. He was elected General Secretary at the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party.

Xi Jinping's rise to power was marked by the retirement of numerous senior members of the Politburo. Around that time, the European Parliament published a report titled *Quick Policy Insight: China's New Leadership* by Xavier Nuttin, which noted that little was known about Xi's true political beliefs, aside from his zero-tolerance policy for corruption. The report also mentioned that two months before the 18th National Congress, Xi disappeared from public view. However, due to the highly secretive nature of the Chinese political system, his whereabouts during that period have never been disclosed.

DOMINATION WITHIN THE PARTY

Xi Jinping's rise to power within the party has been marked by a deliberate consolidation of authority. Over the years, Xi has tightened his control in several notable ways, including the abolishment of term limits. In 1982, Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997), another key figure in modern Chinese history, introduced term limits. A significant motive for this reform was to prevent any one individual from amassing too much power.

In 2018, Chinese media outlets reported that Xi was concurrently holding three key posts, granting him control over the party, the military, and the state. Media commentators argued that having term limits apply only to the presidency did not make sense, as no such limits existed for Xi's other two major roles—party leader and military chairman. That same year, term limits were removed from China's constitution, allowing Xi to rule indefinitely. In March 2023, Xi was granted an unprecedented third term, further solidifying his grip on power. Alongside removing term limits, Xi has also established significant control over the military.

By implementing sweeping reforms within China's military, Xi Jinping has ensured that the military remains loyal to the CCP. Xi believes that strong countries require strong militaries. According to *The Pursuit of Light*, a documentary aired by state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV), Xi views a close connection between the military and government as essential, citing the collapse of the Soviet Union as a cautionary example. He believes that if China's military is not fully committed to the CCP, it could lead to similar problems.

As a result, Xi has directed China's top military leaders to reinforce the CCP's complete control over the armed forces. As Chairman of the Central Military Commission, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, and President of the People's Republic of China, Xi has established a centralized leadership structure that consolidates his personal authority and promotes "Xi Jinping Thought." His goal is to implement a form of socialism with Chinese characteristics without facing significant opposition. This consolidation of power shapes China's domestic policies and strengthens its position as a dominant force on the global stage.

ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGNS

Anti-corruption has been a central theme of Xi Jinping's administration. He has vowed to combat corruption by "killing tigers and swatting flies," meaning that corruption at all levels—whether among high-ranking government officials or lower-level bureaucrats—will be targeted. Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao, had warned in 2012, as he was bidding farewell to his role, that corruption could lead to the collapse of the CCP and the downfall of the state.

In Xi's first speech as General Secretary of the CCP, he highlighted corruption as one of the most pressing problems within the party that needed to be addressed. More than a decade later, Xi continues his anti-corruption campaign. However, there are concerns that this campaign serves as a tool to target dissenters, with some drawing comparisons between Xi and Stalin.

Nonetheless, others argue that Xi's fears are not unfounded, as corruption remains an ongoing issue in China.

An article from Foreign Affairs (How Corruption Fuels Inequality in China by Milanovic & Yang), published this past September, stated that corruption in China has been on the rise in recent decades and has significantly contributed to inequality. Corruption has been found to be particularly widespread among the wealthiest individuals in China's cities. Even those with high legal incomes can multiply their earnings by four to six times, with some earning even more. This indicates that the actual gap between the rich and poor in China is much larger than what official reports suggest.

During Xi Jinping's leadership, Zhou Yongkang, one of the most powerful figures in the CCP, was convicted of corruption and sentenced to life in prison. Other Chinese officials arrested for corruption include Sun Zhengcai, Wang Guosheng, and Fu Zhenghua. Notably, Fu Zhenghua had led several anti-corruption campaigns himself. Despite his role in high-profile investigations, Fu later pleaded guilty to accepting 117 million yuan (approximately \$16.5 million USD) in gifts and bribes.

In September 2022, Fu Zhenghua was sentenced to death by a court in Changchun, although the sentence was commuted to life in prison after two years. More recently, Li Quan, a former insurance executive, was arrested on charges of suspected embezzlement and bribery. He is one of the latest prominent individuals ensnared in an extensive anti-corruption initiative targeting China's financial sector.

PROPAGANDA AND MEDIA CONTROL

By utilizing his anti-corruption campaign as a political tool and removing term limits, Xi Jinping has leveraged his control over state media to consolidate his narrative and shape public opinion. Media outlets in China are expected to promote the CCP's ideology, with strict censorship enforced. In addition to CCTV, other major outlets such as Xinhua News Agency and China National Radio are

also state-controlled. While the Chinese constitution nominally guarantees the right to free speech, the reality is much different.

Reporters Without Borders, a non-profit organization advocating for freedom of information, has reported that journalists in China are often silenced through accusations of crimes such as espionage or "pocket crimes." The term "pocket crimes" is deliberately vague, allowing authorities to label virtually anyone as a troublemaker. Furthermore, Xi has fostered the creation and maintenance of a cult of personality. This phenomenon is reminiscent of Mao Zedong's rule, which Deng Xiaoping opposed due to the dangers it posed to governance and stability.

Deng Xiaoping was acutely aware of the dangers associated with a cult of personality, having witnessed its consequences during the Cultural Revolution under Mao Zedong. As a result, he emphasized collective leadership. In November 2017, party official Xie Chuntao claimed that the cult of personality surrounding Mao would not reoccur, asserting that the admiration for Xi Jinping was natural and not comparable to a cult of personality. However, since Xi assumed leadership, books, songs, and even dance routines have been created in his honor.

The media plays a crucial role in shaping a positive image of Xi, portraying him as a strong and capable leader. Any negative portrayal of him is swiftly censored. One notable example of this censorship is the comparison between Xi and the cartoon character Winnie the Pooh. The association began in 2013 when social media users compared Xi to the bear due to perceived similarities in their physiques. In 2018, a film featuring Winnie the Pooh was banned in China because the character had been used as a symbol to mock Xi.

Last year, public screenings of a film featuring Winnie the Pooh were abruptly pulled from theaters in Hong Kong, prompting speculation that the decision was due to the ongoing comparison between Xi Jinping and the beloved character. This incident has heightened concerns about the increasing censorship in China, which is recognized as having one of the harshest censorship

regimes in the world. The Publicity Department of the Chinese Communist Party is a key organ in the CCP's propaganda apparatus and plays a central role in shaping public discourse within the country. Its efforts ensure that narratives align with party ideology and suppress dissenting voices.

DOMESTIC POLICY

During his leadership, Xi has focused on “common prosperity,” a key economic policy aimed at reducing inequality and promoting a more equitable distribution of wealth in China. He began introducing the term in August 2021, during the 10th meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs. While the phrase may have gained prominence recently, the underlying concepts have been part of China's development narrative for years, including under the leadership of both Mao and Deng. As for Xi, there are concerns about income inequality around the world being a significant issue. During the meeting in August 2021, Xi stated that “in some countries, the wealth gap and middle-class collapse have aggravated social divisions, political polarization, and populism, giving a profound lesson to the world.” Due to such issues, Xi believes that his country “must make resolute efforts” to combat polarization, promote prosperity, and to achieve ‘social harmony and stability.’”

There are efforts being made by Xi to advance common prosperity in phases. By the end of the 14th Five-year Plan (2021-2025), there is the hope that China will progress towards gradually reducing income equality and narrowing consumption gaps. By 2035, the goal is to make more meaningful strides toward achieving common prosperity for everyone and to effectively guarantee equitable access to essential public services. By the middle of the 21st century, the hope is to largely attain common prosperity for all. This will be achieved by narrowing the income and consumption disparities between urban and rural areas to a reasonable level. Under Xi's leadership, hard work and innovation are to be encouraged, as will the development of the public sector and the nonpublic sector. During Xi's speech in August 2021, he stated that

this goal would not be done overnight. It would take patience and would require long-term efforts.

Although Xi has taken strides to improve the economy, issues remain. While Chinese authorities have ramped up policy stimulus since September, economic growth has slowed. In October, SCMP reported that China just had its lowest quarterly economic growth since the middle of last year. The country has had ongoing economic struggles in 2024, with top companies downsizing and cutting staff-related expenses. Furthermore, in addition to sluggish growth, China struggles with other economic issues, including an aging population, environmental degradation, and high levels of debt. Despite having the world's second-largest economy, the country's debt-to-GDP ratio reached a record 288% last year. With a struggling economy and a slew of other problems, Xi faces significant challenges in realizing his vision of common prosperity. There needs to be a balanced approach that addresses both immediate economic concerns and the long-term goal of equitable growth, especially in a country where roughly 300 million people are set to leave the workforce and where the population is declining.

FOREIGN POLICY

For the past seventy years, China has emphasized mutual respect, cooperation, and harmony among nations, aiming to create a more interconnected and peaceful world. As this year marks the 70th anniversary of this foreign relations principle, Xi delivered an address at a conference to mark the occasion this past July. During his speech, Xi acknowledged that all countries have a common future and interconnected interests. As today's world is more interconnected, we all share challenges, interests, and responsibilities.

One aspect of this idea of being interconnected, has been the BRI, a global development strategy launched by China in 2013. This plan, which has sometimes been referred to as the New Silk Road, aims to enhance global trade and foster economic cooperation by

building a network of roads, railways, and other infrastructure around the world. BRI has garnered attention for allowing participating countries to upgrade infrastructure and stimulate economic growth by facilitating trade. It is not without criticism, however, as concerns have been raised about the quality of the infrastructure, the debt brought on by the costs of building, and political tensions over countries perceiving BRI as a means for China to expand its influence.

For example, in October, China invited Colombia to join BRI. With Colombia and other Latin American countries showing an interest in the initiative, regional dynamics could shift. The US, which considers the region to be in its “backyard,” tensions could escalate as it seeks to maintain its influence in Latin America. The US has long viewed the region as a key area for its geopolitical interests, and China’s BRI presents a challenge to the status quo.

A 110-year period that is often referred to as the “century of humiliation” (1839-1949) is a significant chapter in Chinese history and one that Xi is fixated on. This era began with the First Opium War in 1839, when China was forced to cede Hong Kong to Britain and open its ports to foreign trade. It was not until the victory of the CCP in 1949, under Mao, that China was able to reassert its sovereignty and independence, marking the end of this era. Throughout the 110-year period, China experienced a series of defeats, territorial concessions, and foreign interventions by Western powers and Japan.

The century of humiliation continues to resonate with the Chinese and has an immense impact on their psyche. For Xi, the period is a substantial focus of his and he aspires to bring back the greatness of China. The country is considered one of the world’s oldest civilizations and has contributed many important inventions, including gunpowder, the compass, and paper money. China is also noted for its architecture, art, medicine, and contributions that have been made to astronomy. By addressing the humiliation that China once suffered, Xi hopes to reclaim what he sees as China's rightful place in the world.

There has been a noted resurgence in Chinese nationalism under Xi. For example, an increasing number of young people are turning away from Western brands and purchasing Chinese brands instead. However, nationalists have even begun to attack these brands. An article from *The Economist* (Why are Chinese nationalists turning on Chinese brands?) that was published this past March describes how Chinese nationalists have targeted Western brands such as Nike for perceived insults of Chinese culture. The American brand Nike was once attacked for depicting a man beating a dragon in a game of basketball. Western brands are not the only brands that have been criticized though. Chinese nationalists have even taken aim at Chinese brands.

In March, Nongfu, a bottled water company, was targeted by Chinese nationalists. Their criticism came after the design on a new beverage by Nongfu resembled Yasukuni Shrine. This shrine is controversial in China, as well as in other parts of Asia, as it is the place where Japan's war dead (including people who committed war crimes) are commemorated. During World War II, the Japanese empire was responsible for numerous atrocities across East and Southeast Asia. The painful memories of these years continue to be a source of tension between Japan and other countries, especially China.

The Chinese government has increasingly targeted younger people through education and social media to instill nationalist sentiment. One crucial problem with this is that unemployment rates remain high, particularly among China's youth. In August, the youth unemployment rate rose, reaching its highest level since the new record-keeping system was implemented in December. With millions of young people struggling to find jobs, Xi's push for nationalism and unity is surely being tested.

Outside of China, tensions in the South China Sea are compromising China's emphasis on harmony as it relates to international relations. The Philippines is one country that has especially been at odds with China over this region. In 2013, the country even took legal action against China regarding disputes in the South China Sea. In October, a Filipino lawmaker urged the US

to donate one of its guided-missile cruisers. The South China Sea and tensions over this region between China and countries such as the Philippines feed into Xi's broader narrative of reclaiming national pride and sovereignty.

What remains to be seen is whether the growing sense of nationalism and support for the CCP will continue to unify the Chinese people or ultimately lead to dissent, particularly in the face of ongoing economic challenges and international pressures.

What remains to be seen is whether the growing sense of nationalism and support for the CCP will continue to unify the Chinese or if it will ultimately lead to dissent, especially in the face of ongoing economic challenges and international pressures. Ultimately, the future of nationalism in China under Xi will depend on how effectively the government can navigate these problems. If Xi and his administration can nurture a sense of pride while addressing the concerns of citizens, there may be a solidified sense of national identity that bolsters the CCP's legitimacy.

Otherwise, if economic hardships continue and external conflicts escalate, the same nationalism that the government seeks to harness may turn into a source of unrest.

To sum up, Xi's upbringing had a significant impact on his worldview. Despite his father's fall from grace with the CCP, Xi has gone on to become a key figure in the party. His rise to power has been marked by a deliberate consolidation of power. Xi has been especially concerned with corruption, but there are fears that his anti-corruption campaign may be used to eliminate political rivals and strengthen his control over the party. In addition to a focus on corruption, his time in office has been characterized by the promotion of a national rejuvenation agenda that emphasizes nationalism and aims to restore China's historical greatness. Domestically, Xi advocates for "common prosperity" to reduce inequality, while internationally, he seeks to expand China's influence through initiatives like the BRI. His effectiveness in his role as China's leader will be measured by his capacity to maintain

stability and support while addressing the aspirations and grievances of the Chinese people while also managing tensions in contentious areas like the South China Sea.



OLIVIA

DE ARMAS

FEATURING
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

GATES OPEN AT 18 : 00 | +91 78524 78569

HOTEL DIABLO, SAN FRANCISCO
USA, 784551

71 www.sundayservice.com

SUNDAY SERVICE

WORSHIP CONFERENCE

**10TH DECEMBER, 24
09 AM ONWARDS**

**WEST WOOD
CHURCH,
ALABAMA**

Putin: A Weak Superpower

The Reality Behind Russia's Global Ambitions

DIANA TALANTBEKOVA

It has been more than two years since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukrainian territory, officially marking the beginning of the war. This invasion clearly indicates that Russia meticulously prepared for the military and economic aspects of the conflict, ensuring it had the capability to invade. However, political experts and the media widely agree that Russia's actions reveal that Russia is no longer considered a superpower.

DIANA TALANTBEKOVA, is an MA graduate Bard College (US) and Central European University (Austria).



The war has significantly impacted Russia's internal economy and damaged its political reputation globally, while also alerting other nations to the fact that Russia is no longer a dominant power. Whether this decline is a recent development or whether Russia had already lost its superpower status long before remains a subject of debate. In this article, readers will explore the current state of Russia, examining key issues such as its military capabilities, economic standing, diplomatic losses, and exclusion from international alliances.

WEAK SUPERPOWER

Samuel Huntington, a prominent scholar, defines a superpower as "a state that is capable of projecting dominating power and influence anywhere in the world and sometimes in more than one region simultaneously." Examining Russia through this lens reveals that the country has lost its superpower status under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. This decline is evidenced by Russia's inability to sustain global influence across multiple regions, compounded by economic stagnation and increasing diplomatic isolation.

This dissonance between regional strength and global limitations highlights Russia's inability to assert itself as a dominant global power in the face of evolving international dynamics.

However, "a weak superpower" in political discourse refers to a state with military capabilities, nuclear deterrence, and regional influence, but lacking the comprehensive economic and political power to maintain global leadership. Consequently, despite Russia's

assertions about its military arsenal, natural resources, and leadership in regional affairs, it struggles to confront external challenges and adapt to global shifts that are happening today. This dissonance between regional strength and global limitations highlights Russia's inability to assert itself as a dominant global power in the face of evolving international dynamics.

MILITARY

In fact, it has long been recognized that Russia possesses one of the world's leading military forces, with approximately 1.5 million active-duty troops, making it the second-largest active military force globally. Under Vladimir Putin, the country has allocated a significant portion of its budget to military spending, which ranks as the third-highest in the world. Additionally, Russia holds the world's largest stockpile of nuclear weapons, solidifying its strategic military importance. However, despite these impressive assets, there has been growing discussion regarding the recent limitations of Russia's military power.

Russia's conventional military strength has been severely undermined by logistical deficiencies, particularly in supply chain management and troop mobility. The military has faced significant challenges with inadequate transportation and equipment maintenance, resulting in delays and shortages of ammunition, fuel, and spare parts. Furthermore, Russia's reliance on outdated infrastructure and poorly coordinated logistical operations has hindered the effective deployment of reinforcements and essential resources. These logistical shortcomings have exposed critical weaknesses in Russia's ability to sustain prolonged military operations beyond its immediate borders, thus limiting its capacity to project power globally.

ECONOMY

This country's economy is heavily reliant on its natural resources, particularly oil and natural gas, which are key contributors to its export earnings and overall economic output, positioning it as one of the world's leading producers. However, this dependency, coupled with entrenched corruption at the governmental level, has left Russia's domestic economy vulnerable and relatively weak. In response to Russia's actions in Ukraine, the United States and its allies imposed sweeping economic sanctions that have effectively isolated Russia from the global financial system. The U.S. began its sanctions in 2022 by freezing \$5 billion of Russian central bank

assets and blocking major Russian banks from accessing the SWIFT payment network.

In January 2024, the U.S. and G7 countries expanded these measures, targeting Russian diamonds, one of the country's largest untaxed exports at the time. These sanctions have had a profound impact on Russia's economy, leading to a significant decline in foreign investment and restricted access to crucial technology. Despite efforts to seek alternative markets and implement workarounds, the long-term effects, including the erosion of Russia's international financial connections and its technological isolation, are likely to continue weakening the economy and hindering its ability to recover fully.

ISOLATION

Talking about the international arena, Putin's war of aggression in Ukraine has increased Russia's diplomatic isolation, as highlighted in a UK statement to the OSCE. UK military advisor Nicholas Aucott states that Putin's disastrous military campaign has diplomatically diminished Russia, forcing it to turn to North Korea and Iran. Russia's increasing dependence on China, following its diplomatic isolation from the West, signals a shift in the global power dynamic with significant implications for Russian foreign policy.

While the strategic partnership with China provides Russia with economic support and a counterbalance to Western pressure, it also limits Moscow's independence in international affairs. The asymmetry of the relationship, where China benefits from Russia's resources and geopolitical positioning, could gradually shift the balance of power in favor of Beijing. This dependency risks reducing Russia to a subordinate role in its foreign policy decisions, further limiting its ability to assert influence globally. The long-term impact may be a diminished Russian geopolitical identity, increasingly shaped by China's rising dominance.

NATO

As Russia's influence weakens, NATO's role in international security has grown significantly, with the alliance expanding its presence in Eastern Europe and strengthening its deterrence capabilities. NATO's increasing effectiveness in this region has led to a noticeable decline in Russia's strategic influence, particularly as former Soviet states and Eastern European nations have increasingly aligned with the West. This shift has severely restricted Russia's freedom of action, limiting its ability to exert military or political pressure in a region it once dominated. The strategic consequences of this include diminished Russian leverage over neighboring countries, reduced military options in the face of NATO's growing strength, and a heightened sense of insecurity within Russia's sphere of influence.

While NATO's growing influence in Eastern Europe has limited Russia's strategic freedom, the country has demonstrated its ability to fight and mobilize simultaneously, challenging Western expectations. The pace of Russia's military reconstitution has exceeded initial forecasts, with rapid refurbishment of equipment and mobilization of manpower, suggesting a greater readiness for conflict than previously anticipated. However, Russia's decision-making will not be solely driven by military preparedness but by the "correlation of forces" and the perceived weakness of the NATO Alliance. Russia is likely to act based on political calculations rather than raw military readiness, choosing to engage NATO only when it deems the strategic conditions favorable.

Russia's trajectory as a global power is uncertain, with clear evidence of both strength and significant limitations. On one hand, its military capabilities, particularly its nuclear arsenal and large active-duty forces, maintain its strategic importance. However, logistical challenges and the inability to sustain effective military operations beyond its borders reveal vulnerabilities that hinder its capacity to project power globally. Economically, Russia's dependence on natural resources, corruption, and the impact of sweeping international sanctions have left it isolated and weakened. Despite efforts to find alternative markets, the long-term

term effects of these sanctions are likely to continue diminishing Russia's economic standing.

In addition, its increasing diplomatic isolation, especially from the West, and growing dependence on China, place Russia in a subordinate role in international affairs. While Russia retains significant military capabilities, including nuclear deterrence, its global influence has significantly diminished. The country's economic vulnerability, compounded by international sanctions, and its increasing diplomatic isolation, particularly from the West, have eroded its "power". Even though Russia has a strong reputation in the region, it is unlikely to reclaim superpower status without substantial changes in its internal and external dynamics, which will not happen in this decade.

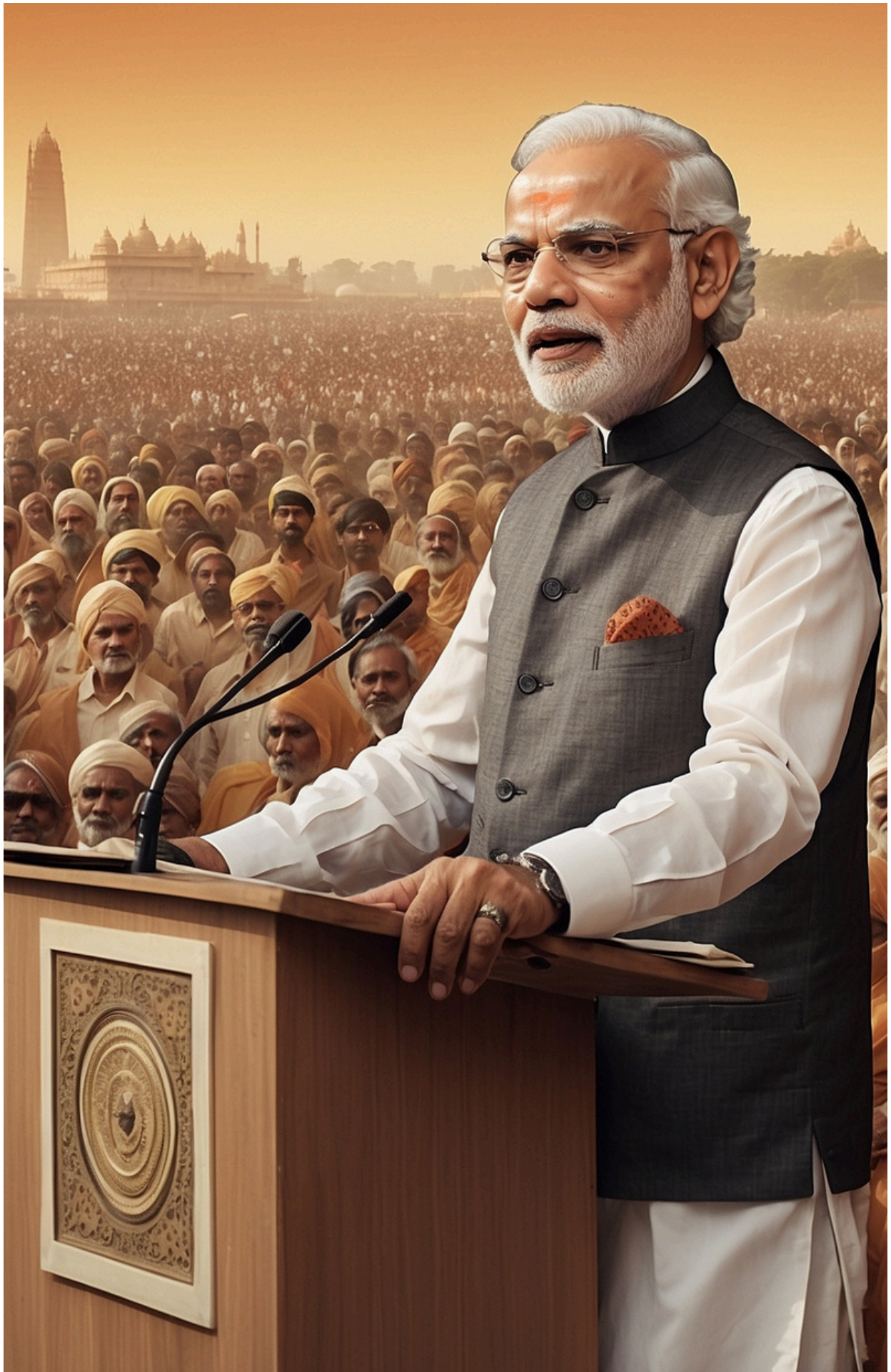
Strategic Pragmatism and Hindutva

Decoding a decade of Modi's
foreign policy

ANSHU MEGHE

In the 21st century, India has emerged as a formidable global power. Once a nation whose very survival was questioned at its inception 77 years ago, India now stands tall on the world stage. Reflecting on Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's assertion that India would become a great power not out of desire but due to its destiny, today's reality validates that prophecy. Since gaining independence from Britain in 1947, India is enjoying its most advantageous geopolitical position ever.

ANSHU MEGHE, is a young leader with the Pacific Forum and a graduate of the Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School at Tufts University. His areas of interest include grand strategy, political economy, and transnationalism.



According to historian Paul Kennedy's analysis, India possesses the critical components of a great power: a vast and growing population, a rapidly expanding economy poised to become the world's third-largest, increasing military strength, and its bid for a permanent seat on the Security Council. The 21st century has brought significant changes—spurts of economic growth, a substantial demographic dividend, and a favorable geopolitical landscape. Over the past decade, a strong domestic government has further propelled India's ascent.

Governed by the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has shifted away from its foundational socialist and libertarian principles. In 2024, Modi became the longest-serving prime minister since Indira Gandhi. His tenure is often characterized by strongman leadership rooted in the ideology of Hindutva. Modi's personality and ideological foundations have been pivotal in shaping his leadership style and are deeply reflected in his policies.

This essay analyzes the evolution of Indian foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It explores how his personality traits and ideological underpinnings have influenced foreign policy decisions and examines the impact on India's current geopolitical positioning. The discussion aims to shed light on the successes and challenges of India's rise, as well as the need for recalibrating its approach to strengthen regional relationships and rebuild trust with its neighbors.

PLACING PM MODI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, born on September 17, 1950, in Vadnagar, Gujarat, rose from modest beginnings to become one of India's most transformative yet polarizing leaders. His early life was shaped by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, and his frequent interactions with Swami Atmasthananda of the Ramakrishna Mission highlighted his interest in spirituality and disciplined living. At the age of 21, Modi joined the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological parent of the Bharatiya Janata Party

(BJP). The RSS, established in 1925, is a staunch proponent of Hindutva and Hindu nationalism—ideologies that would later define Modi's political persona.

Modi's career in active politics began in 1987 when he became the General Secretary of the BJP in Gujarat. His organizational acumen was evident early on, as he orchestrated the BJP's first victory in the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation elections and strengthened the party's performance in the 1990 Gujarat Assembly elections. By the 1995 Assembly elections, his efforts secured a decisive BJP win with 121 seats, signaling his growing influence within the party.

Modi's national prominence grew during his tenure as the BJP's National Secretary and later as General Secretary (Organisation), where he played a critical role in the party's 1998 Lok Sabha election victory. However, his appointment as Gujarat's Chief Minister in October 2001 marked a turning point. Handpicked to stabilize the state after the devastating Kutch earthquake and amid waning public confidence in the BJP's leadership, Modi was thrust into a challenging role. His early tenure was overshadowed by the 2002 Gujarat riots, which resulted in significant communal violence. While Modi faced widespread criticism and allegations of mismanagement, a Special Investigation Team appointed by the Supreme Court later cleared him of direct involvement.

In 2013, the BJP named Modi as its prime ministerial candidate for the 2014 general elections. His campaign was a masterclass in narrative-building, leveraging his modest upbringing, strongman persona, and record of development in Gujarat. Modi positioned himself as a self-made leader, sharply contrasting with the Congress party's dynastic politics. Riding an anti-incumbency wave against the Congress government, which was plagued by corruption scandals and inefficiency, Modi's BJP secured a historic victory with 282 seats, marking the first majority for a single party in three decades. His campaign also pioneered the use of social media, setting a new benchmark for election strategies in India.

What set Modi apart from his predecessors was his ability to appeal to the masses as a leader with humble origins, untainted by elite

privilege. His control over the political narrative, combined with a highly organized election machinery, made him a formidable force. A key element of his appeal was his unapologetic endorsement of Hindutva. Modi's rhetoric often included strong critiques of India's secular framework, aligning with the BJP's vision of a Hindu Rashtra. His messaging resonated with a significant section of the electorate, particularly the youth, and helped the BJP sustain its momentum through successive state and general elections.

In 2019, the BJP capitalized on the "Modi wave" to secure an even larger mandate, winning 303 seats. This period saw Hindutva politics becoming a central feature of Indian political discourse. However, the 2024 general elections marked a shift. Despite the BJP's ambitious goal of crossing 400 seats, it managed only 241, requiring coalition support to retain power. Modi's third term as Prime Minister has been weaker than his previous two, yet the legacy of Hindutva remains deeply entrenched in Indian politics, shaping electoral narratives and public discourse alike.

FROM PHILOSOPHY TO POLITICS: THE RISE OF HINDUTVA

The concept of Hindutva originates in the writings of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a prominent thinker of the early 20th century. His seminal work, *Essentials of Hindutva* (1922), later expanded into *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1928), laid the ideological foundation for Hindu nationalism. Savarkar argued that Hindus constituted a distinct nation, bound by common blood, culture, and heritage. For him, the Hindu identity transcended religion and was deeply rooted in shared history, language, and reverence for the subcontinent as both the fatherland (Pitribhoomi) and the holy land (Punyabhoomi).

Savarkar's interpretation was expansive yet exclusive. He included followers of indigenous religions—Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs—within the scope of Hindutva but excluded Muslims and Christians, viewing them as outsiders because their holy lands lay beyond India's borders. This ideological framework sought to unify

Hindus under a singular identity, fostering allegiance to a shared cultural and national genealogy. Savarkar envisioned Hindutva as a response to global movements like Pan-Islamism and Pan-Slavism, advocating for Hindus to form a cohesive bloc to strengthen their position in the "struggle for existence and power."

Inspired by Savarkar's vision, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was established in 1925. Serving as the ideological parent of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the RSS played a pivotal role in propagating Hindutva. Over time, Hindutva evolved from a socio-cultural philosophy into a political force, ultimately becoming central to contemporary Indian politics.

CRITICISM OF HINDUTVA

The ideology of Hindutva has faced significant criticism for departing from the pluralistic and inclusive ideals enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Unlike civic nationalism, which emphasizes individual freedoms and inclusivity, Hindutva prioritizes a singular cultural identity. Critics argue that it seeks to homogenize India's diverse population by promoting one faith, one language, and one cultural framework. This approach conflicts with the constitutional vision of India as a secular and multicultural democracy.

Hindutva's rise has also been marked by challenges to civil liberties and increased marginalization of minority communities, particularly Muslims. Policies such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which incorporate religious criteria for citizenship, have drawn widespread criticism for institutionalizing discrimination. Rhetoric labeling Muslims as "infiltrators" and "outsiders" has further fueled communal polarization.

The implications of Hindutva's ascendancy are deeply troubling. Incidents of mob lynching in the name of cow protection, a surge in cow vigilantism, and heightened communal tensions across districts have underscored its divisive impact. This ideological framework has fostered an environment where dissent is stifled, and minorities often feel alienated and unsafe.

HINDUTVA IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN POLITICS

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, Hindutva has transitioned from the fringes of Indian politics to its very center. The BJP has skillfully integrated the ideology into its governance and political narratives, making Hindutva a defining feature of India's contemporary political identity. Electoral campaigns frequently hinge on Hindu nationalist rhetoric, with slogans emphasizing cultural revivalism and the vision of a Hindu Rashtra.

Hindutva's influence is evident not only in domestic policies but also in the tone of political discourse, where the emphasis on majoritarian identity often overshadows pluralism. This ideological dominance has had far-reaching implications for India's

international image and foreign policy. The next section examines how Hindutva has shaped India's diplomatic trajectory under Modi, analyzing its role in the evolution of Indian foreign policy and bilateral relations over the past decade.

*Under Prime Minister
Narendra Modi's leadership,
Hindutva has transitioned
from the fringes of Indian
politics to its very center.*

HINDUTVA IN FOREIGN POLICY: MODI'S REIMAGINING OF INDIA'S GLOBAL ROLE

India's emergence as the centerpiece of contemporary global political discourse is largely driven by the structural changes reshaping the international order. The shifting balance of power and growing disillusionment with China in the West have turned the world's attention to India, now the fastest-growing major economy. India's favorable demographics, its position as an attractive alternative to China, and its central role in the strategic geography of the Indo-Pacific have collectively contributed to making this India's moment.

These broader dynamics, combined with Modi's ability to align foreign policy with domestic aspirations, have positioned India as a

rising global power. When Narendra Modi assumed office in 2014, critics questioned his preparedness for handling foreign policy, given his prior focus on domestic governance in Gujarat. Concerns were raised about whether his Hindu nationalist credentials might limit India's outreach to diverse global partners, particularly in the Islamic world. However, over the years, Modi's foreign policy has reflected a pragmatic approach, anchored in the principle of "India First."

REDEFINING FOREIGN POLICY FOR AN ASPIRATIONAL SOCIETY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has redefined the discourse around foreign policy by aligning it with the aspirations of ordinary Indians. Traditionally a specialized domain detached from public engagement, foreign policy has been transformed into a key performance metric of governance. Under Modi, diplomacy has become a populist spectacle, showcased through grand events, strategic partnerships, and social media campaigns. Mega diaspora gatherings at venues like Madison Square Garden in New York and Wembley Stadium in London exemplify this shift, turning international diplomacy into a demonstration of India's soft power and Modi's charisma.

Observers credit Modi's government with the mass popularization of foreign policy. Unlike his predecessors, who treated it as a niche field, Modi infused it with national pride and a sense of purpose. The government's narrative suggests that just as Modi's journey from modest beginnings to global prominence symbolizes India's rise, his leadership will secure prosperity and global respect for Indian voters.

IDEOLOGICAL UNDERTONES: HINDUTVA IN FOREIGN POLICY

Hindutva, while primarily a domestic political ideology, subtly influences Modi's foreign policy. The BJP promotes India as a

However, this civilizational rhetoric remains largely symbolic in foreign policy practice. At its core, India's approach retains continuity with the past. Policies once rooted in Nehruvian ideals have been rebranded—nonalignment is now "strategic autonomy," and Indian exceptionalism is reframed as Vishwa Mitra and Vishwa Guru. Nonetheless, Modi's administration has infused these principles with the BJP's emphasis on self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat), shaping economic diplomacy and promoting domestic manufacturing.

INDIAN OCEAN AMBITIONS: BECOMING A NET SECURITY PROVIDER

A significant aspect of Modi's foreign policy has been India's strategic ambitions in the Indian Ocean. Through the doctrine of "Security and Growth for All in the Region" (SAGAR), India has asserted its intent to be the net security provider in the region. This aligns with Hindutva's emphasis on protecting the nation and consolidating India's influence in its immediate and extended neighborhood. Modi's government has prioritized investments in maritime infrastructure, enhanced naval capabilities, and strengthened partnerships with countries in the Indo-Pacific, ensuring India's central role in the regional security architecture. The success of these efforts is evident in the Indian Navy's successful operations in the Red Sea against Somali pirates.

BALANCING IDEOLOGY AND PRAGMATISM

While Hindutva's ideological undertones are present, Modi's foreign policy remains largely pragmatic. For instance, despite concerns about his domestic image as a Hindu nationalist, Modi has successfully cultivated strong ties with Islamic nations, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This balancing act highlights his government's strategic priorities, which often outweigh ideological considerations on the global stage.

Domestically, Modi's consolidation of power has bolstered his

international positioning. Landmark decisions such as the abrogation of Article 370 and the reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir were framed as efforts to fully integrate the region into India. These moves, though controversial, were presented internationally as measures to combat Pakistani state-sponsored terrorism and to secure India's sovereignty.

A PERFORMANCE-ORIENTED DIPLOMACY

Modi's foreign policy is also characterized by its performative elements. His unprecedented number of international visits and high-profile engagements reflect an active pursuit of bilateral and multilateral partnerships. A significant marker of his foreign policy approach was the appointment of Dr. S. Jaishankar, a seasoned career diplomat, as the Minister of External Affairs. This choice, uncommon in Indian politics, signaled a deliberate emphasis on expertise and professionalism in international affairs and has been widely regarded as a positive departure from tradition.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, India's "vaccine diplomacy" exemplified its global leadership aspirations, with millions of vaccine doses sent to countries in the Global South. By leveraging media, orchestrating grand diplomatic gestures, and personalizing foreign relations, Modi has elevated India's global reputation. These efforts have positioned India as a key player in a multipolar world and a leader of the Global South, even as foundational elements of its foreign policy remain unchanged.

INDIA AND THE REST OF THE WORLD

India's foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has achieved notable successes in strengthening relationships with key global players. While global dynamics have favored India's rise, its diplomatic adeptness has ensured that these opportunities are effectively leveraged. These partnerships underscore India's emergence as a pivotal player in a multipolar world, adeptly navigating the challenges and opportunities of the 21st-century geopolitical landscape.

INDIA AND THE WEST:
STRENGTHENED PARTNERSHIPS
WITH STRATEGIC DEPTH

India's relations with the West have seen significant improvement over the past decade, driven by both global dynamics and strategic initiatives. Relations with the G7 countries have strengthened, with a notable expansion in India-U.S. ties. Building on the momentum of the 2008 India-U.S. Civil Nuclear Agreement and subsequent strengthening of ties, the Modi government has broadened the relationship to include technology transfers, defense collaborations, energy and climate response, education, and healthcare. These developments have remained consistent across three U.S. presidencies during Modi's tenure, underscoring the bipartisan consensus in Washington on the importance of India as a strategic partner.

The United Kingdom and France have also continued to maintain strong ties with India, particularly in defense, technology, and climate action. However, relations with Canada have become strained, especially after allegations of Indian involvement in the killing of a Canadian citizen and Khalistani activist. Despite this outlier, India's relations with other Western nations have been bolstered by extensive collaborations in technology, diaspora engagement, and energy transitions, reflecting India's growing importance as a global partner.

INDIA AND RUSSIA:
WALKING THE GEOPOLITICAL TIGHTROPE

Friendship with Russia has long been a cornerstone of India's foreign policy, particularly in defense and technology cooperation. Over the last decade, however, the nature of this relationship has evolved. India has sought to reduce its dependence on Russian defense technology imports by diversifying its sources and strengthening ties with the U.S., France, Israel, and other nations. Simultaneously, India has emphasized domestic defense production under its Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

Despite these shifts, the Ukraine conflict has added complexity to the India-Russia relationship. India has refrained from directly criticizing Russia, maintaining a neutral stance that reflects its commitment to strategic autonomy. This approach has enabled India to continue importing discounted Russian crude oil, which is refined and exported to markets such as Europe. India's engagement with Russia also persists in multilateral forums like BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the G20. Prime Minister Modi's recent meetings with President Putin underscore the continuity of this partnership, even amid geopolitical turbulence. India's ability to maintain balanced relations with both Russia and Western powers highlights its diplomatic agility.

INDIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST: EXPANDING STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT

Despite domestic challenges, including communal tensions, India's relations with the Middle East have reached unprecedented heights under Modi's leadership. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Oman have emerged as key partners, driven by mutual economic, energy, and security interests. The Middle East remains crucial for India's energy security, supplying over 80% of its oil imports. Furthermore, the region's investments in India's energy sector have solidified India's role as a global refining hub.

Economic ties have deepened, with over eight million Indians working in the Gulf accounting for nearly 30% of India's remittance inflows. Strategic engagement has also expanded to include joint military exercises, reflecting a shift toward more comprehensive security cooperation. For instance, India has conducted combined air, naval, and army exercises with the UAE and Oman, and participated in multilateral naval exercises with Qatar, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. Additionally, India has engaged in multilateral initiatives such as the I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-USA) and the IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor). However, while these forums hold promise, they have yet to achieve significant momentum as the Middle East grapples with ongoing conflicts and geopolitical uncertainties on its fringes.

India has also maintained a delicate balance in its relations with Iran, investing significantly in the Chabahar Port while reducing hydrocarbon imports in compliance with Western sanctions. Simultaneously, its deepening ties with Israel, marked by strategic and ideological alignment, reflect the influence of Hindutva in foreign policy. India's nuanced stance during the Israel-Hamas conflict in 2023—expressing solidarity with Israel while abstaining from a U.N. resolution condemning Israeli attacks on Gaza—highlights its evolving role as a pragmatic global actor willing to diverge from broader Global South positions.

INDIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD: A CHAOTIC TERRAIN

India's immediate neighborhood remains a critical and challenging aspect of its foreign policy, with recent years only deepening the complexities. Despite the 'Neighbourhood First Policy' launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, relations with neighboring countries have significantly deteriorated. While some of this can be attributed to broader regional and global dynamics, the lack of trust and cooperation with its neighbors represents a significant shortcoming of India's foreign policy under Modi's leadership.

A precarious mix of rivalry and resentment has long defined India's relations with its neighbors. Historical disputes with Pakistan over Kashmir and persistent border tensions with China underscore the region's strategic challenges. However, relations with smaller neighbors like Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives have also soured, despite New Delhi's efforts to maintain regional influence.

The difficulties India faces are not entirely of its own making. Political leaders in neighboring nations have frequently used anti-India rhetoric to consolidate power, portraying India as an overbearing regional hegemon. This narrative, fueled by fears of dominance, has become a potent electoral strategy in many parts of South Asia. Simultaneously, China's growing presence in the region has provided India's neighbors with an alternative to Indian support, reducing New Delhi's leverage. Initiatives such as the Belt

and Road Initiative (BRI) have enabled countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives to diversify their partnerships, challenging India's traditional role as the preeminent power in South Asia.

However, a significant part of the challenge also stems from India's own missteps. While the Modi government has invested heavily in global image-building campaigns, these efforts have not translated into goodwill within the neighborhood. A trust deficit has emerged, with many of India's neighbors perceiving its policies as prioritizing global aspirations over regional cooperation. The impact of these dynamics is evident in India's strained relationships across South Asia.

In the Maldives, a government with an anti-India stance recently came to power, prompting the withdrawal of a small Indian humanitarian force stationed in the country. Nepal's Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, known for his pro-China orientation, bypassed the tradition of visiting India first and opted for China instead, signaling a shift in Kathmandu's priorities. In Sri Lanka, while India supported President Ranil Wickremesinghe, the rise of Anura Dissanayake's left-wing coalition has introduced uncertainty to the relationship, given historical grievances tied to India's involvement during the civil war.

Bangladesh, once considered a cornerstone of India's regional diplomacy under Sheikh Hasina, has also seen anti-India rhetoric gain traction. Hasina's ouster has created a diplomatic quandary for New Delhi, with the new government demanding her extradition. Myanmar, meanwhile, remains mired in civil war following the 2021 military coup, with India's cautious engagement drawing criticism for failing to address the broader humanitarian crisis. Relations with Afghanistan have stalled entirely, with India maintaining no official ties with the Taliban regime since its return to power in 2021.

India's two most contentious relationships—with Pakistan and China—have seen little improvement. Diplomatic ties with Pakistan have remained frozen since 2016, marked by incidents such as the Pulwama attack in 2019 and ongoing hostility over

Kashmir. With China, tensions peaked during the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, where casualties on both sides brought relations to a historic low. While a recent agreement on border patrolling rights offers a glimmer of hope, mistrust persists, particularly as China continues to expand its influence in the region.

The deteriorating state of India's relationships with its neighbors highlights a critical gap in its foreign policy. The Neighbourhood First policy, once a symbol of regional integration and goodwill, now appears sidelined by New Delhi's focus on global ambitions. Rebuilding trust and recalibrating India's approach to its neighbors will require a renewed commitment to understanding their interests and addressing their concerns.

INDIA'S PATH AHEAD

Over the past decade, India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has undergone a profound transformation in its global standing. Positioned as a leader of the Global South and a pivotal actor in an evolving multipolar world, India has expanded its diplomatic footprint and asserted itself as a key player in international affairs. Domestically, while the rhetoric of Hindutva has become more prominent, Modi's foreign policy has been guided largely by pragmatism, with strategic interests taking precedence over ideological posturing.

However, significant challenges lie ahead. The rapidly shifting dynamics of the global order will require India to remain adaptable, seizing opportunities while effectively managing emerging crises. Despite its rising global influence, unresolved tensions in its immediate neighborhood present a serious obstacle to India's broader ambitions. Building trust and fostering meaningful cooperation with neighboring countries will be critical to ensuring regional stability and advancing India's global aspirations.

However, significant challenges lie ahead. The rapidly shifting dynamics of the global order will require India to remain adaptable, seizing opportunities while effectively managing emerging crises.

As Modi embarks on his third term, his government faces the added challenge of navigating a weaker domestic position, with the BJP no longer holding a clear parliamentary majority. This will require a careful balancing act between visionary diplomacy, pragmatic foreign policy, and managing domestic political constraints. Renewed efforts to strengthen regional ties and address neighborhood challenges will be crucial for maintaining India's credibility and leadership. For Modi, this moment represents both a challenge and an opportunity to redefine India's trajectory. How India balances domestic imperatives with global ambitions in the coming years will shape its role in international affairs and determine the legacy of Modi's leadership on the world stage.

How Could America Recover Its Reputation?

American foreign policy cycles between predictability and unpredictability, challenging global trust and alliances.

KEITH SONIA

Edwin Lefèvre, who covered Wall Street both in newspapers and as a fiction writer, scrutinized the boom-and-bust cycles of American capitalism, noting that “periods of depression invariably follow periods of overoptimism, when fear replaces hope as the controlling emotion.” The fat years of growth, coupled with the belief that the champagne will never stop flowing and that the good times will never end, often collapse under the weight of the hubris that inevitably defines these periods. Think of *The Big Short*, when a select few spotted what was around the bend, while many others felt the heavy blow of a dramatic correction.

KEITH SONIA, is a PhD in International Relations from University of London and is a former fellow to a senior Member of the U.S House Foreign Affairs Committee.



Though it might not seem entirely generous to observers of American foreign policy to declare that the election of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States serves as a proverbial walloping—for the better part of a year, the consensus was that he had something like a 50/50 shot at joining Grover Cleveland as one of the only two-term presidents to serve non-consecutively—it is nevertheless a jarring reminder of the cyclical nature of American politics. Allies, competitors, and others are now more regularly being asked to come to grips with this reality.

For decades, the party in control of the administration or Congress shifted invariably—a natural byproduct of a two-party system—and the domestic policy agenda would pivot depending on whether it was a Democratic victory or a Republican surge. Foreign policy, however, remained largely a bastion of consensus within Washington and across far-flung diplomatic outposts. Perhaps this is because the stakes deemed critical by those in the upper echelons of U.S. foreign policymaking were clearer during the Cold War than they are today. Nonetheless, the two parties regularly shared the burden even during the most contentious interludes.

Nixon inherited the war in Vietnam from LBJ; Biden took the reins of the U.S. conflict in Afghanistan from Trump, who had received the baton from Obama, who carried the torch after George W. Bush launched the “War on Terror.” Both Democrats and Republicans might whine and grumble about partners like NATO and international organizations like the United Nations, but there was broad agreement that these and similar institutions were extensions of American power. Save for modest reforms, U.S. participation and leadership in these organizations were seen as assured.

After a tumultuous four years of Trumpian foreign policy—in which the former-and-incoming president exited the Paris Climate Agreement, ended a long-sought nuclear deal with Iran, and lamented that traditional allies were exploiting the U.S. through security and trade agreements while “not paying their fair share”—Joe Biden’s election in 2020 was seen as a reversion to the mean. Biden, who had previously served as Vice President and as Chair of

the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was someone you could set your watch to. Accompanied by a Democratic-led Congress in 2021, Biden emphasized familiar themes that were thought to underpin U.S. foreign policy interests and provided a stark contrast to Beijing and Moscow: democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

It was, some argued, the return to an America you could count on. States around the world once again felt they could trust the United States to, more often than not, do the right thing. Whether or not this trust was justified—given the outbreak of conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, as well as the U.S.'s hasty and chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan—is largely immaterial. Biden was a conventional operator who signaled that he valued America's alliances.

Now, with Trump promising the introduction of new tariffs that would, in practice, amount to a trade war—including 25% tariffs on Canadian goods (Canada!)—and with his foreign policy circle confoundingly including figures like Marco Rubio and Michael Waltz on one hand, and Tulsi Gabbard and Pete Hegseth on the other, the return of an adventurous American foreign policy that pushes beyond conventional boundaries has arrived. Boom and bust, indeed.

With this stark reality setting in, how might foreign ministers, corporate executives, heads of intelligence agencies, and NGO chiefs, among others, approach the notion of “trusting” the United States? Do Trump and his cadre care about earning trust? Is a binding trust at the international level even achievable? And, finally, how might the U.S. work to re-establish trust in an era of hyper-partisanship in domestic American governance?

Historically, the U.S. has not always garnered universal acclaim for its foreign policy throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Despite initiatives like détente, historically brief engagement strategies such as “responsibility to protect,” and the promotion of concepts like “democratic peace theory” in academia during the height of American hegemony, American interventions in Vietnam and Iraq, alongside controversial activities in Latin America aimed at

curtailing the spread of communism, have drawn significant criticism from the global community over the years.

Academics have debated whether trust at the international level is achievable, given the anarchic nature of the international system. Within this system, “states might sign treaties with each other, but these do not have the same binding force as domestic contracts.” For instance, Donald Trump could theoretically lose in an American courtroom if he pursues certain policies or amendments that contradict established legislation. However, if he were to once again withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement, there would be no arbiter to hold him accountable—except, of course, Mother Nature.

Practitioners can approach this challenge in a variety of ways: by accepting that trust is inherently contradictory to the rules of anarchy, or by consistently reinventing those rules to create a more hospitable environment for a trust-based approach to international relations. Indeed, cooperation in international relations has often stemmed from compatible states working together—those with similar political, economic, and cultural identities. Knowing that the person on the other end of the phone represents a country raising its children on Disney films viewed on Sony or Samsung TVs, after picking up groceries in a Volkswagen or Renault, is emblematic of shared values and the likelihood of finding common ground on most issues.

Donald Trump has thrown a wrench into this hypothesis (how can states across the world trust an accused slumlord who proudly boasts about not paying his bills?), but adjustments can still be made to account for his unique approach to policymaking. Despite the structural barriers to building trust within the international system, one need only look back to September and Davos to see how trust remains a priority for members of the global community.

Consider UN chief António Guterres, who has expressed frustration with the current state of global trust: “When global norms collapse, so does trust. I am personally shocked by the systematic undermining of principles and standards we used to take for granted...so let’s be clear: rebuilding trust is not a slogan or a PR

campaign. It requires deep reforms to global governance to manage geopolitical tensions during a new era of multipolarity.”

Unfortunately for Guterres and those advocating for the idea of the U.S. as a reliable, trustworthy hegemon, one word generally encapsulates Trumpian foreign policy—and it does not inspire trust. Quite the opposite. That word? Transactional. Allies and competitors alike are likely to advance or compromise their priorities with the United States on a one-transaction-at-a-time basis, as Trump seeks foreign policy victories through a wheeling-and-dealing approach. Trump views foreign policy as akin to unloading a bad stock or renegotiating a previously settled land deal to secure better terms. What matters is what enhances the Trump brand, who offers a pathway to deals that benefit him both personally and politically, and who is willing to hold their nose and flatter him enough to make him believe he has gained a new ally.

For Europe, the quickest way to earn Trump's approval might be to allocate more resources to NATO and flatter him enough to make him believe he's coming out ahead in any negotiation.

In Europe, where states like Germany have spent the better part of eight decades since the end of the Second World War building a foreign policy rooted in cooperation and predictability, Trump's tendency to view international relationships through a transactional lens—and his need to feel like he has "won" any deal the U.S. participates in—has the potential to provoke significant changes in approach. Most notably, Trump has repeatedly questioned U.S. participation

in NATO and its commitments to Ukraine in defending against Russia. For Europe, the quickest way to earn Trump's approval might be to allocate more resources to NATO and flatter him enough to make him believe he's coming out ahead in any negotiation. Similarly, to avoid a trade conflict, Europe should anticipate that Trump will pressure them and come prepared to negotiate on his terms.

However, flattering the U.S. president and confronting existential questions—such as Emmanuel Macron's European defense

initiative—are not synonymous with fostering a trusting relationship. Macron and others have concluded that Europe’s security is “mortal” in light of a sharp shift in U.S. foreign policy circles, recognizing that predictability and guaranteed security are no longer ensured simply by hoping the U.S. will uphold its commitments. From the U.S. perspective, there is a need for a sober analysis by policymakers who value longstanding alliances and understand the importance of institutions like NATO. This analysis must also consider how that value is being communicated to the American electorate.

In the meantime, there will need to be a mutual understanding between European and American policymakers that greater investment in defense by European states is essential. This may represent the safest route to ensuring the U.S. remains engaged as a fundamental participant in NATO. Ukraine, meanwhile, will have to rely on hope—rather than trust—that Trump will not want to be perceived as being outmaneuvered by Vladimir Putin in any forthcoming peace negotiation. Putin, for his part, has played a shrewd game during the Trump era, positioning himself well to predict Trump’s next moves and adjust his expectations accordingly.

In the Middle East, the biggest winners following Trump’s victory are the Gulf states—Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE—as well as Israel. While Biden expended significant political capital through his steadfast public support for Israel (possibly contributing to Kamala Harris’s defeat in states like Michigan), Trump has shown himself to be far more in sync with Benjamin Netanyahu. His decision to appoint arch-conservative evangelical Mike Huckabee as Ambassador to Jerusalem is further evidence of this alignment. Netanyahu, as a result, is likely to receive an influx of resources and a wide berth in his operations in Gaza, with the expectation that they will conclude as swiftly as possible.

Trump wants Israel to achieve its goals—but in a way that removes the conflict from the headlines. In Gulf relations, the biggest winner is, unsurprisingly, Trump himself, as competition among Gulf states is likely to drive them to offer lucrative transactions to secure

his support. This could manifest through diplomacy—such as the Saudis potentially adopting the Abraham Accords as a gesture of appeasement to Trump, balancing their preference to avoid directly confronting Iran—or through favorable trade deals. Iran, meanwhile, is likely to face significant challenges and may adopt a more cautious approach to foreign policy ventures, as Trump has previously demonstrated his willingness to exert economic and military pressure when necessary.

That said, while Trump may posture with rhetoric about "wiping Iran off the map," others in his circle have publicly stated that avoiding war with Iran is in the best interest of the U.S. States in the region that work to limit Iran's capacity for engaging in risky activities are likely to gain favor from Trump. For Trump, the appeal lies in the fact that many of these states can partner with the U.S. to address these concerns unilaterally, without worrying about the electoral consequences that typically influence American decision-making.

In Asia, Trump-aligned Japan may continue to present a "can-do" attitude, as it did during Trump's first term, by pursuing further security and economic agreements aimed at countering Chinese influence in the region. Few understood how to navigate Trump's instincts better than the late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. However, whether Prime Minister Fumio Kishida can demonstrate the same finesse remains to be seen. The Japanese foreign policy establishment is well-versed in Trumpism and may trust in its ability to ride the wave, minimizing exposure to tariffs and other challenges posed by the White House. India also belongs to the short list of states that can feel relatively confident in their standing with Trump. Sharing a mutual concern over Beijing's influence, New Delhi has successfully positioned itself as a willing partner in defense, security, and trade during previous engagements with Trump.

In what may be the clearest example of how allies cannot rely on trustworthiness in their approach to the U.S. under Trump, the incoming president has repeatedly suggested that he might not guarantee the defense of Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion.

Despite bipartisan photo ops where Members of Congress visit Taipei to signal their commitment to Taiwan and counter China, Taiwan now finds itself as vulnerable as it has been in years. The only potential silver lining to Trump openly declaring the U.S. an "insurance agency" and voicing skepticism about Taiwan's defense is that Taipei can use this time to work overtime in developing alternative strategies to deter Chinese aggression.

Beijing can assume that Trump will continue to oscillate between imposing new tariffs and praising Xi Jinping's leadership style. This dynamic has been something of a gonzo relationship, fueled by Trump's fascination with absolute power. To bypass those Republicans around Trump who view China as a significant threat to American national security, Beijing will likely return to the playbook that once led Trump to declare that he and Xi were friends—flattery. If paired with efforts to assist in winding down conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, and an ability to negotiate a tariff deal that allows both leaders to save face, U.S.-Chinese relations may not crater as widely expected. Instead, competition could remain largely confined to areas such as the South China Sea and the Global South, where China continues its efforts to expand influence.

To sum it up: whether you are the President of South Korea, a diplomat from Honduras, a chargé d'affaires from Estonia, or a Prime Minister from New Zealand, the shortest route to predictability—and thus trust—is to prepare for unpredictability. Under Trump, the U.S. is highly unlikely to act altruistically at the federal level, meaning any agreement will require an appropriate level of flattery and strategic framing to be marketed as a win for Trump. For those who view U.S. global leadership as essential to countering democratic backsliding, protecting press freedoms, deterring aggression from key actors, and advancing human rights, this is likely to be a deeply challenging period.

This cycle—this boom and bust—will be the defining struggle for those working to solidify America's relationships abroad. At the same time, it may present an extraordinary opportunity for those seeking to exploit American weakness.

For those who believe that U.S. global leadership can still be trusted by allies and feared by adversaries, the challenge of maintaining that trust in a Trumpian era will be immense. Worst of all, it may feel positively Sisyphean—if Trumpism is defeated at the ballot box in 2028, it would be unwise to assume, as some did in 2020, that it cannot return in 2032. This cycle—this boom and bust—will be the defining struggle for those working to solidify America’s relationships abroad. At the same time, it may present an extraordinary opportunity for those seeking to exploit American weakness.

The EU's Role in America's Greater China Strategy

EU balances U.S.-China rivalry,
seeking autonomy amidst shifting
global dynamics.

RACHEL HILE

In the decades following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese government faced the dual challenges of post-revolutionary reconstruction and the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War. During this period, China's domestic and foreign policies were shaped by a pursuit of sovereignty, ideological preservation, and economic prosperity. National reforms aimed at industrialization and unification were coupled with an international strategy that balanced forming strategic partnerships with maintaining a low profile in world affairs. These efforts collectively set China on a historically unprecedented path of growth.

RACHEL HILE, is a graduate student pursuing an MA in International Relations at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and a Master of Law in Politics at Tsinghua University.



By the 1990s, China's position on the global stage had significantly matured. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis marked a pivotal shift; in its aftermath, China took the initiative to provide aid to its neighbors, emerging as a stabilizing force with the capacity to foster regional economic security. China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and its elevation to a World Bank donor role in 2007 further signaled its improved international standing. The defining turning point in China's rise came with the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, after which its status as a rising great power was solidified. Today, China has developed beyond being merely an economic powerhouse, with Beijing extending its foreign policy to encompass political influence, global responsibility, and strategic credibility.

The United States' perception of China's rise has evolved significantly over time. During the Cold War, particularly after the Sino-Soviet split, Washington regarded China as a strategic partner, recognizing the importance of maintaining amicable relations to counterbalance Soviet influence. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 1990s and early 2000s saw the United States aspiring to integrate China into the U.S.-led international order. However, this ambition faltered as the 21st century progressed. China's economic and political trajectory began to diverge from Western neoliberal ideals, leading skepticism about China's intentions to shape U.S. foreign policy.

The past decade of U.S.-China relations has been characterized by competition and instability. China has embraced its status as a rising superpower, expanding its bilateral and multilateral ties and establishing institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). In response, the United States has sought to counter China's growing global influence, employing strategies such as the Obama administration's "Pivot to Asia," the Trump administration's trade war, and ongoing efforts to decouple technologically and economically.

The future of U.S.-China relations is likely to witness a further escalation of tensions, defined by decisive efforts from Washington

towards China, significant steps were undertaken by national governments in the hope of fostering better trade relationships with Beijing. The Italian government, for example, signed up for the New Silk Road initiative alongside some Eastern European countries. However, this does not mean that Europe has become a China-dependent economy, as Europe has managed to find other markets for exports thanks to its single market, which provides it with a strong position in the world economy.

At the same time, Trump's promise to end Washington's supply of security worldwide was a false one. Instead, he pursued a Reagan-style "peace through strength" approach, which views military power as a necessity for peace. Thus, Donald Trump did not end the U.S.'s role as a global power, but his approach was not without consequences for Europe. First and foremost, the unpredictability of his decisions raised questions about the solidity of European security. Secondly, in line with Obama's "pivot to China," Trump's foreign policy was primarily directed towards China.

This move has left Europeans facing a much less secure future in the event of major aggression, as EU leaders could no longer count on the U.S. to fulfill its international obligations through NATO's Article V. However, Europeans responded firmly to this sense of insecurity by reinvigorating the seemingly "brain-dead" Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), leading to further EU integration through military mobility and a common fund for research. To sum up, Donald Trump's first administration was characterized by unilateralism in both the international economic order and the international security order. While the first macro-area directly affected European nations through tariffs, in the second macro-area, although nothing substantial happened, everything was marked by unpredictability.

Nonetheless, Europe seemed to have passed the test, as the consequences of the Trump tariffs did not lead to a crisis in Europe due to the deep level of European integration in the area. This integration prevented the EU from becoming a Chinese-dependent market. Moreover, Trump has had the unintended effect of uniting Europeans towards a long-term project of common defense, as the supply

and Beijing to secure their economic, political, and security interests. Both nations will increasingly rely on their connections with other key international players to sustain and expand their global power apparatus. Among the most critical of these players is the European Union (EU), which occupies a unique position in the U.S.-China rivalry.

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S STRATEGIC POSITION

Since its formal establishment in 1993, the European Union (EU) has emerged as a major global actor, encompassing 27 member states across Western, Central, and Eastern Europe. The EU accounts for 14% of global trade and plays a pivotal role in coordinating political, economic, and security efforts across the continent. Its influence becomes even more pronounced when examining its relations with the United States and China.

The EU has long been a core strategic partner of the United States. The Transatlantic Declaration of 1990 and the New Transatlantic Agenda of 1995 established a framework for cooperation on shared interests such as international peace, trade and economic globalization, and democracy promotion. This standardization of relations has yielded substantial economic benefits: in 2023, the United States was the EU's largest export partner and second-largest import partner, with U.S. exports to the EU totaling over \$360 billion and imports exceeding \$750 billion. The two powers also maintain regular political and security coordination, exemplified by the U.S.-EU Security and Defense Dialogue in December 2023, which reaffirmed their joint commitment to Ukraine, defense investments, and deeper security cooperation.

The stability of the U.S.-EU bond, however, has grown increasingly uncertain amid China's expanding presence in Europe. Over the past decade, China has become the EU's second-largest overall trading partner and the largest importer of EU goods, with bilateral trade surpassing \$750 billion in 2023. This trade relationship has been accompanied by a significant increase in China's foreign direct

investment (FDI) in the EU, which reached over \$4.5 billion in 2023. Furthermore, Beijing has secured the support of numerous EU member states for its multilateral initiatives, with eighteen EU countries joining the AIIB and seventeen participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

These developments in EU-China cooperation have prompted a critical question: what will the future hold for the European Union's position between the United States and China?

THE FUTURE OF EU-CHINA AND EU-U.S. RELATIONS

To understand the future of the EU's strategic position between the United States and China, it is essential to analyze recent developments in its relations with both countries. The EU's approach to China has shifted significantly since 2019, when it classified China as a "partner for cooperation, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival." In practice, the latter two designations have taken precedence. The EU has been driven by concerns over the fairness of China's trade and investment practices, particularly its substantial trade surplus with Europe. These concerns have hindered cooperation, as exemplified by the European Parliament's decision to reject ratifying the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI), despite its signing in late 2020 after seven years of negotiation.

The EU's relationship with China has been further strained by the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, which sparked criticism of Beijing's ties with Moscow and heightened concerns over the security implications of China's influence in Europe. The conflict has led to calls within the EU to remove or limit Chinese technology in European infrastructure. Tensions have also extended to humanitarian issues, with the EU imposing sanctions on China over accusations of human rights violations, prompting retaliatory sanctions from Beijing. These developments reflect the EU's efforts to distance itself from China, resulting in a closer alignment with U.S. foreign policy trends.

Despite growing apprehension in EU-China affairs, it would be premature to assume that a future of strong EU-U.S. friendship is guaranteed. Foremost, it is important to recognize that the EU is not a monolithic entity. Germany, the EU's most powerful member state, maintains the closest economic ties with China relative to any other EU member. As such, Germany has generally advocated for a cautious, non-confrontational approach to China, characterized by "relatively small policy interventions" aimed at balancing its trade and market relations. Additionally, while some EU states have moved to reduce dependency on Chinese FDI, others continue to welcome it; Hungary, for example, accounted for 44% of all Chinese FDI in Europe in 2023.

Furthermore, the EU's historical alignment with the United States has largely rested on three guarantees: economic growth, physical security, and the ontological framing of the United States as a force that preserves liberal democracy and institutions. However, the reliability of these guarantees is increasingly being questioned. The potential re-election of former President Donald Trump is expected to bring about isolationist and protectionist policies that could weaken EU-U.S. cooperation. Trump's proposed tariff plan, which includes 10 to 20 percent tariffs on all imports and a focus on reducing trade imbalances in the automobile and agriculture sectors, poses a significant threat to Europe's economic stability. This is particularly concerning for Germany, whose economy heavily relies on automobile exports.

It is also anticipated that Trump will reduce U.S. funding for Ukraine and NATO, thereby weakening the United States' role as a security guarantor for EU member states. This is likely to coincide with a broader U.S. retreat from multilateral engagements, echoing actions such as the withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord during Trump's first presidential term. The U.S. adoption of policies rooted in an "America First" vision is expected to amplify calls within the EU for greater strategic autonomy from Washington. As a result, the United States may increasingly be perceived as neither representative of nor aligned with the EU's economic, political, and security interests.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The future of EU-China and EU-U.S. relations will depend on how the EU evaluates the reliability and security of its partnerships with both countries. While the EU has historically aligned with the United States, this alignment can no longer be taken for granted, especially as the EU seeks greater autonomy and member states diverge in their foreign policy approaches. If the United States prioritizes “America First” policies, it should anticipate that the EU may adopt its own “Europe First” agenda, potentially involving deeper engagement with China. However, the United States should avoid punitive measures if the EU does not unanimously support its containment policies toward China, as such actions would only exacerbate divisions between transatlantic partners. Instead, Washington should focus on reaffirming the core principles and shared values between the EU and the United States by establishing mutually acceptable terms for economic, political, and security cooperation.

For China, it would be a mistake to assume that the EU will automatically pivot toward Beijing in response to U.S. retrenchment. The EU’s pursuit of strategic autonomy inherently includes minimizing reliance on China. Additionally, China is likely to continue being viewed as an economic competitor and a security concern. To strengthen ties with the EU, Beijing should prioritize building trust with member states and exploring opportunities for diverse, non-economic partnerships. Areas such as climate change, environmental protection, and people-to-people exchanges present the most promising avenues for collaboration. Initiatives like the EU-China Memorandum of Understanding to Enhance Cooperation on Emissions Trading exemplify the potential for advancing mutual interests. These efforts could establish a foundation of goodwill, creating a platform to address more contentious issues.

Ultimately, the European Union will continue to grapple with the escalating challenge of navigating U.S.-China competition. In this context, the EU may draw inspiration from the strategies of regional blocs like ASEAN, which has recognized both the inevitable

costs of choosing sides and the benefits of maintaining neutrality between the United States and China. The EU should resist adopting a Cold War mentality and, rather than aligning itself with rigid spheres of influence, prioritize mutually beneficial cooperation with both powers while safeguarding its autonomy. This approach calls for the EU to adopt a role of strategic balance in U.S.-China relations, striving to protect its own interests while responding flexibly to the antagonisms of a shifting international order.

Who is the Boss of the Middle East?

To be a boss in the Middle East means constantly being tested through alliances and power games.

JAZMINE ALZOUBI

The Middle East is a vital crossroads connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe, underscoring its considerable geopolitical significance and a long history of complex power dynamics. Its strategic location features essential military access points and critical global trade routes, enhancing its role in facilitating international commerce and energy distribution. The region's natural resource wealth, particularly oil, has attracted various international interests and contributed to competitive interactions among global powers.

Additionally, the diverse political systems, rich cultural identities, and different ethnic groups in the Middle East add complexity to its socio-political landscape. These intertwined factors foster ongoing challenges, encourage external engagement, and influence the global balance of power, making the Middle East a dynamic region that holds considerable importance in international relations today.

JAZMINE ALZOUBI, is a postgraduate from Queen Mary, University of London. Areas of expertise: Diplomacy, International Relations, and Middle Eastern Affairs.



THE GEOPOLITICAL IMPORTANCE AND COMPLEX STRUCTURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East, located between Asia, Africa, and Europe, has thus served as a convergence point for many countries, being the center of foreign powers, shifting alliances, and conflicts. As a result, the region is one of the most fundamental military access and global trade routes, including the Suez Canal, the Straits of Hormuz, the Straits of Gibraltar, and the Turkish Straits, and it is essential in international migration. Moreover, European powers have fought to colonize territories in the Middle East due to its natural resources, historical significance, and geostrategic location.

In particular, the discovery of oil and energy in the region has driven superpowers and rivalries to exploit the resources, leading to U.S. intervention after WWII through its alliances with Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Israel. This is because the U.S.'s military presence was seen as a means of securing its access to oil reserves and strategic interests. At the same time, the Middle East remains an unstable battleground for non-state actors such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, where they actively engage in terrorism and trigger external military interventions and security cooperations.

On the other hand, the region's complexity is rooted in its historical and political systems, diverse ethnicities, religions, and external powers, all leading to intertwined battles within or between countries, thus encouraging foreign powers to interfere and dominate the region. Religion plays a role in explaining many civil wars in the Middle East between Sunni and Shia Muslims in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon, as well as the regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which manifests through proxy wars and political conflict.

For example, sectarian identities fight over authority, identity, and rights to achieve political goals in Syria and Iraq. Israel's complicated ties with its neighboring countries over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, alongside its normalization through the Abraham Accords, have reshaped alliances with the UAE and Bahrain in opposition to Iran, further demonstrating the region's

complex dynamics. Despite its natural resources and strategic location, ongoing wars, authoritarian regimes, and political instability continue to make the Middle East highly vulnerable, thereby attracting external intervention.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF POWER STRUGGLES IN THE REGION

The Middle East is a region with a rich history of civilizations, marked by the rise and fall of empires. Due to its location as a crossroads between Asia, Africa, and Europe, it has long been a battleground for empires, conflicts, ideologies, and religions. Conflicts in the Middle East date back to the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, who competed for control of the region and left behind cultural and intellectual legacies. In the 7th century, religion played a critical role in shaping the region's conflicts. For instance, Islam spurred the rise of Islamic civilization, allowing the Arabs to establish caliphates.

However, the Sunni-Shia division led to hostility, conflicts, and competing ideologies. In more recent history, during the 19th and 20th centuries, the Ottoman Empire dominated the Middle East, implementing organizational, regulatory, and cultural structures that continue to influence the region today. Following World War I, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire marked a transitional period in which Britain and France divided Ottoman lands through the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

Based on arbitrary lines, this division disregarded religious and ethnic realities, leading to future conflicts and the rise of national movements. Similarly, during the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviet Union used the Middle East as a battleground for dominance, supporting different groups to promote their interests. This struggle resulted in proxy wars, such as the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, as they competed for geopolitical and economic dominance.

In 2011, the Arab Spring offered hope for democracy and freedom. Unfortunately, the outcome was quite the opposite, as chaos, instability, and civil wars erupted in countries like Yemen and Syria. These internal struggles attracted regional and international intervention, further destabilizing the region. Despite these challenges, the Middle East has demonstrated resilience, maintaining its cultural and historical significance while striving for stability and peace.

DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPT OF "BOSS"
AND WHAT THIS CONCEPT MEANS
FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

The word "boss" typically refers to someone with authority or leadership in a workplace setting. However, it can also describe a person who controls political, economic, or social situations. In the Middle East, the concept of a "boss" takes many forms, reflecting the region's social, political, and economic dynamics. For instance, many Middle Eastern countries are governed by authoritarian regimes, where leaders dominate political affairs and make decisions with little regard for the population.

Leaders such as Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia, Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Egypt are considered "bosses" because they exert significant control over their governments and populations. One reason for the stability of authoritarian rule in the Middle East is the use of state-controlled natural resources, known as rents. These rents, such as income from oil and gas, are often used to support oppressive governments, ensuring that opposition to the regime is suppressed.

As a result, economic bosses in the region also wield significant influence, particularly in countries like Qatar and the UAE, where leaders shape national growth policies. Nevertheless, these bosses are essential for attracting foreign investments and fostering global economic collaborations, significantly impacting the financial environment of the region. Additionally, social norms in the Middle East reflect a patriarchal structure, where men traditionally assume

roles of authority. Thus, the concept of a "boss" in the region is multifaceted, encompassing political, economic, and social dimensions.

SAUDI ARABIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. AND STRATEGIC ALLIANCE IN THE REGION

Saudi Arabia and the U.S. shared a long strategic alliance beginning in World War II. Since then, Saudi-U.S. relations have continued to develop in ways that serve the interests of both countries, such as military cooperation, regional stability, and energy security. Specifically, Saudi Arabia has focused on building strong regional and global partnerships. In exchange for ensuring a continuous oil flow to the U.S., Saudi Arabia receives security guarantees and weapons, with the U.S. also working to limit Iran's regional influence.

Complex issues, such as the conflict in Yemen and human rights concerns, have complicated this partnership. Despite these challenges, both countries remain united in their efforts to counter Iran and maintain regional stability. Additionally, normalizing diplomatic ties with Israel has become a significant priority for Saudi Arabia. As a result, the United States must prioritize safeguarding and advancing Saudi Arabia's interests as a cornerstone of its foreign policy.

ITS NUCLEAR PROGRAM AND RELATIONS WITH THE WEST

Iran's nuclear program has been a focal point of international concern in its interactions with the West. According to Iranian officials, the program is solely for peaceful and civilian purposes, such as medical research and energy production, and they deny any ambitions to develop nuclear weaponry. However, the U.S., Israel, and the E.U. argue that Iran is actively pursuing nuclear weapons development. In 2015, the Iran nuclear program, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), resulted in a landmark

agreement signed between Iran and major powers, including the P5+1: the U.S., UK, France, China, Germany, and Russia.

The terms of the deal required Iran to impose restrictions on its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. Nevertheless, in 2018, the U.S. withdrew from the JCPOA and reinstated sanctions, citing Iran's perceived failure to safeguard U.S. national security interests. Following the U.S. withdrawal, Iran resumed its nuclear activities, including research and development, sparking widespread international concern regarding its potential pursuit of nuclear weapons. This has notably increased tensions with Israel, which perceives Iran's nuclear ambitions as an existential threat and actively seeks measures to mitigate this risk.

Moreover, the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia further complicates the regional landscape, as both countries compete for leadership within Islam and strive for regional dominance. The advancement of Iran's nuclear capabilities, therefore, intensifies these rivalries, prompting Saudi Arabia to confront the potential for an arms race. In response, the West has employed various strategies, including negotiations, sanctions, and military deterrence, to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions. However, the deep-seated mistrust between Iran and Western countries leaves the future of their relationship ambiguous.

NATO MEMBERSHIP AND BALANCED RELATIONS WITH THE WEST

Türkiye has been a significant member of NATO since 1952, serving as a strategic bridge between the Middle East and Europe. Despite challenges in its relations with Western nations, Türkiye remains an essential ally within the alliance. For example, it hosts NATO's Allied Land Command headquarters and critical airbases like Incirlik and Konya. Moreover, Türkiye is crucial in joint defense initiatives, peacekeeping missions, and counterterrorism operations.

However, Turkish foreign policy is characterized by efforts to

strengthen ties with Russia and China, raising concerns among NATO allies. For instance, acquiring the Russian S-400 missile defense system represents a significant departure from NATO protocols. Additionally, Türkiye's military interventions in Syria and Iraq, along with stalled discussions regarding E.U. accession, have contributed to tensions with Western partners. Nevertheless, Türkiye remains a vital player in NATO. By leveraging its geopolitical position, Türkiye seeks to balance its relationships between the Middle East and the West while maintaining its autonomy in global affairs.

ITS RECENTLY DEVELOPING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB COUNTRIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Israel has made substantial progress in establishing diplomatic relations with various Arab nations, significantly altering the regional landscape. For instance, it has forged strong partnerships with Jordan, Egypt, and the UAE, working together on security policies and enhancing economic ties. The signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020 marked a transformative development, normalizing relations with the UAE, Sudan, Morocco, and Bahrain. These agreements reflect a shared commitment to technological advancement, countering Iranian influence, and promoting economic and security cooperation, leading to a notable reconfiguration of Middle Eastern geopolitics.

Trade, security cooperation, and initiatives aimed at regional stability are thriving despite longstanding political challenges. Although Saudi Arabia has yet to formalize its relations with Israel, secret meetings between officials suggest that new opportunities for collaboration are being explored. Nonetheless, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a significant hurdle for many Arab countries, which may impede future diplomatic efforts. As a result, the path toward deeper regional integration will likely face ongoing challenges.

HOW THE ARAB SPRING CHANGED THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE REGION

The Arab Spring markedly transformed the power dynamics of the Middle East, propelled by regional and international engagement. As a result of this movement, long-established regimes were overthrown, creating a notable power vacuum and initiating civil conflicts that fundamentally reshaped the region. For instance, the elimination of leaders in Yemen, Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia not only diminished the authority of existing governments but also paved the way for the emergence of new political forces, including influential Islamist movements and non-state actors such as ISIS.

In some cases, like Syria, uprisings escalated into devastating civil wars, attracting intervention from regional powers, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, the UAE, and Türkiye, each backing opposing factions to further their respective interests. Thus, the stability and security of the Middle East, along with the longevity of its regimes, became increasingly dependent on shifting alliances. For example, in Syria, the government's reliance on Russian intervention substantially altered the balance of power in its favor.

Moreover, this upheaval provided fertile ground for ISIS to expand its territory and influence, eliciting military responses from both regional and international actors. Ultimately, the Arab Spring fragmented power structures throughout the region, intensified rivalries, and shifted alliances, leaving a lasting legacy of political instability and a complex geopolitical landscape that continues to evolve.

THE U.S.'S MIDDLE EAST POLICIES AND THE CHANGES EXPERIENCED IN RECENT YEARS

In recent years, the United States has significantly reshaped its policy in the Middle East, transitioning from costly military interventions to a more strategic and diplomatic framework. In response to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. administrations have shifted their focus toward diplomacy,

counterterrorism, and reinforcing strong alliances while reducing direct military involvement. Nevertheless, the U.S. maintains its influence through arms sales and partnerships with key allies, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, ensuring continued engagement in the Persian Gulf region.

At the same time, this strategy seeks a fair resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and aims to curb Iran's nuclear capabilities. However, tensions regarding Saudi human rights practices in Yemen have complicated U.S.-Saudi relations. Additionally, the U.S. has made significant efforts to normalize relations between Israel and Arab nations through the Abraham Accords, fostering regional peace and stability. Altogether, these developments serve strategic and security interests by strengthening cooperation among the U.S. and its regional allies and establishing a more hopeful geopolitical landscape in the Middle East.

RUSSIA'S INTERVENTION IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR AND ITS INCREASING INFLUENCE IN THE REGION

In 2015, Russia undertook a significant intervention in the Syrian Civil War, effectively protecting Bashar al-Assad from a potential collapse. This action established Russia as a major player in Middle Eastern geopolitics and expanded its influence by safeguarding vital regional interests. Through military support and airstrikes, Russia played a crucial role in helping the Assad regime reclaim lost territories and restore its power. Moreover, the Syrian government's decision to grant Russia long-term access to an airbase in Latakia and a naval base in Tartous marked a pivotal development. These agreements allowed Russia to position itself as a dominant force in Syria and the eastern Mediterranean.

In addition, the intervention strengthened Russia's diplomatic relations with Iran and improved ties with regional powers such as Israel and Türkiye, despite their differing interests in the Syrian conflict. By engaging with multiple factions, Russia has positioned itself as both a military power and a mediator, enhancing its credibility in regional diplomacy and challenging the longstanding

influence of the U.S. in the Middle East. Ultimately, Russia's intervention in Syria has profoundly reshaped the power dynamics in the region and demonstrates its commitment to playing an active role in shaping the future of the Middle East.

CHINA'S BRI

China's Belt and Road Initiative, formerly known as the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, represents one of the most ambitious economic and foreign policy endeavors. This initiative aims to bolster China's economic leadership through a comprehensive infrastructure development program, enhancing its political influence across neighboring regions. The significance of this initiative lies in the strategic locations of these regions along essential trade routes connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe.

China has invested considerably in railways, ports, energy facilities, and special economic zones in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Oman. Additionally, Chinese enterprises have led renewable energy projects and developed smart cities, reinforcing relationships with regional powers and presenting a notable counter to Western influence. A critical factor in China's success is its non-interference approach to domestic politics, which has appealed to many Middle Eastern countries. By avoiding engagement in regional conflicts, China is not only emerging as a significant power but also reshaping the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East through trade initiatives, infrastructure investments, and strategic partnerships.

AN ASSESSMENT OF WHO COULDBE CONSIDERED A "BOSS" IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In the Middle East, a "boss" clearly denotes a leader or power with substantial influence over political, economic, or military affairs, thereby critically shaping regional dynamics and outcomes. Among these powers, Saudi Arabia firmly establishes itself in this role through its vast oil wealth, leadership in OPEC, and expanding

political influence, particularly with transformative initiatives like Vision 2030 and active involvement in regional conflicts. Meanwhile, Iran asserts its considerable power by backing militant groups such as Hezbollah and spreading its influence through a robust network of proxies across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

In addition, Türkiye projects its authority through military interventions in Syria and Libya while strategically balancing its position within NATO and maintaining relations with Russia. Moreover, Israel wields significant influence owing to its strong military capabilities, advanced intelligence operations, and practical normalization efforts with Arab states through the Abraham Accords. At the same time, external powers such as the U.S. and Russia act as geopolitical "bosses" through military alliances, arms sales, and active involvement in regional conflicts. Ultimately, these actors, whether state or non-state, compete and collaborate, thus fundamentally shaping the dynamic power landscape of the Middle East.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A "BOSS" IN THE MIDDLE EAST, AND IS IT SUSTAINABLE?

To be a "boss" means wielding influence in the Middle East, encompassing significant authority over the region's political, economic, and military affairs, thus fundamentally shaping its trajectory while asserting control over rivals. This role also requires the strategic management of essential resources, particularly oil wealth in Saudi Arabia, along with the effective use of military power and proxy networks, such as those deployed by Iran and Türkiye, to expand one's influence.

Additionally, being a boss requires navigating complex alliances and carefully balancing relationships with global powers, including the U.S., Russia, and China. At the same time, internal challenges, such as economic reform and political opposition, must be addressed. However, maintaining this status is complicated by the region's inherent volatility, where shifting alliances, sectarian tensions, and evolving geopolitical interests can rapidly affect long-term stability.

Furthermore, external factors, such as global energy transitions and international interventions, add complexity to the situation. Therefore, it is essential to demonstrate adaptability, possess strategic foresight, and effectively manage competing interests within this dynamic landscape to sustain such influence.

SUNDAY SERVICE

FREE EVENT

**10TH NOVEMBER, 24
09 AM ONWARDS**

**123 ANYWHERE ST.,
ANY CITY**

WWW.REALLYGREATSITE.COM

**PASTOR
ANDRE FERNANDES**



ONE STOP DESTINATION

FOR ALL YOUR
FASHION NEEDS

➤ VISIT: WWW.FASHIONSALE.COM

KODAK PORTRA 600



► 6

KODAK PORTRA 600



► 6

KODAK PORTRA 600



KODAK PORTRA 600



KODAK PORTRA 600



► 6

KODAK PORTRA 6



► 6

**BUY 2
GET 3
FREE**



grace

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith
and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8

Is American Global Leadership in Danger?

U.S. leadership must preserve its ideals, reshaping through collaboration and adaptability in a multipolar world.

WILLIAM CANO

Since the mid-20th century, the United States has been the architect of a world order grounded in the principles of democracy, open markets, and security alliances. Emerging from World War II as a superpower, the U.S. designed and sustained institutions like the United Nations and NATO, championing what became known as the liberal international order. This era of dominance fostered an environment where American values and ideals were perceived as synonymous with global stability and progress.

WILLIAM CANO, is pursuing a Master of Arts in International Affairs at American University's School of International Service, specializing in Global Governance, Politics, and Security. He served in the United States Army for six years.



Today, however, the influence of the United States is being contested by rising powers, most notably China, and strained by internal challenges such as political polarization and economic inequality. In a shifting global landscape marked by uncertainty and competition, questions about the durability of U.S. leadership have come to the forefront. Constructivist insights into these transformations emphasize that perceptions, identities, and the evolving meanings of power are critical to understanding America's position in the world.

The Cold War solidified the United States' role as a global leader, countering the Soviet Union's ideological and military threats with a robust alliance network and the promise of economic support for allied nations. During this period, American leadership became synonymous with a commitment to containing communism and promoting liberal democracy. This commitment was exemplified by initiatives like the Marshall Plan and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The U.S. constructed a narrative centered on democracy and freedom that defined its foreign policy, laying the foundation for a values-driven leadership model that persisted for decades.

From a constructivist perspective, it was not only the material power of the United States but also its global perception as a "benevolent hegemon" that sustained this order.

With the Soviet Union's collapse, the world entered a unipolar era dominated by American power, both economically and militarily. This period of unrivaled influence saw the U.S. championing globalization and technological advancement, presenting itself as the steward of a "new world order." From a constructivist perspective, it was not only the material power of the United States

but also its global perception as a "benevolent hegemon" that sustained this order. However, as the 21st century has unfolded, shifts in global norms and the rise of multipolarity have increasingly called this unipolar hegemony into question, challenging the long-standing legitimacy of U.S. leadership.

The divergent foreign policy approaches of recent U.S. presidents illustrate the ideological divides shaping America's global role. President Joe Biden's tenure has marked a return to

multilateralism, as seen in his administration's efforts to rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement and re-engage with NATO allies. Biden's approach underscores the notion that alliances and partnerships are vital to addressing global challenges such as climate change, cybersecurity threats, and authoritarianism.

Conversely, Donald Trump's "America First" policy represented an explicit shift toward isolationism, challenging traditional alliances and prioritizing national sovereignty over cooperative global governance. Trump's criticism of NATO, withdrawal from international agreements, and preference for bilateral over multilateral diplomacy reflected a shift in the identity of American power—from leader of a liberal international order to a more transactional actor. These transformations in leadership demonstrate how domestic ideologies shape and reshape foreign policy, influencing how the U.S. is perceived abroad and challenging the coherence of American leadership.

The divide between multilateralism and isolationism in American politics creates uncertainties about U.S. commitments to global institutions and alliances. This ideological tension undermines both America's credibility and the strength of international norms it once championed. Allies accustomed to U.S. commitments now question its reliability, while rivals perceive opportunities in American hesitation. Constructivist theory, which emphasizes how perceptions and identities shape international relations, provides insight into this phenomenon: the United States' self-image as a "global leader" has evolved, creating a disconnect between its past and present roles on the world stage. The development of these perceptions will ultimately determine whether the U.S. remains a trusted global power or cedes influence to rising challengers.

The U.S. economy has been a central pillar of its global leadership, shaping global markets through trade, investment, and technological innovation. With the dollar serving as the world's reserve currency, the U.S. wields considerable economic influence, allowing it to impose sanctions and incentivize cooperation through its financial systems. Historically, this economic power

has reinforced America's diplomatic and military influence, enabling it to shape international norms and standards.

Alas, U.S. economic primacy faces mounting challenges. Globalization has redistributed manufacturing and economic clout, while rising powers like China have leveraged economic interdependence to challenge American influence. As other nations diversify their trade partnerships and currencies, the U.S. risks losing its unparalleled leverage over the global financial system. China's rapid ascent as an economic powerhouse has significantly shifted the global economic balance.

Through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has extended its economic influence across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, creating an economic sphere of influence that rivals U.S.-led institutions like the IMF and World Bank. China's economic rise also enables it to export its governance model, offering a tangible alternative to the liberal-democratic framework championed by the U.S. The constructivist perspective, which emphasizes that power is both material and ideational, highlights the dual significance of China's rise: it is not only a material challenge but also a normative one, as it contests the American-led global governance model.

The U.S.-China trade war underscores the intensifying competition between the two superpowers. Trump's tariffs on Chinese imports, coupled with Biden's continuation of a "tough on China" stance, reflect a bipartisan consensus on addressing China's economic practices. These tensions have had global repercussions, disrupting supply chains, reshaping international trade norms, and impacting the economies of U.S. allies reliant on Chinese markets. The trade war highlights the competing visions of global economic governance: the U.S. advocates for free markets, while China emphasizes state-driven development—a fundamental clash that threatens the cohesion of the global economy.

The U.S. maintains the world's largest defense budget, underscoring its commitment to sustaining a robust global military presence. From NATO to the Indo-Pacific, U.S. military

power deters aggression and ensures the security of critical trade routes. However, questions about the sustainability of such spending are increasingly pressing, particularly as domestic challenges and shifting global priorities call for a reevaluation of budget allocations.

Despite these pressures, the U.S. continues to invest in advanced defense capabilities, including cybersecurity and artificial intelligence, to counter emerging threats. Constructivist insights suggest that these investments go beyond material deterrence; they reinforce the U.S.'s identity as a "global protector" and demonstrate its commitment to upholding its leadership role in security. Alliances like NATO have long been central to U.S. security strategy, providing a framework for projecting power while sharing the burdens of global security. However, shifting global dynamics, including a more assertive Russia, demand a reassessment of these alliances.

NATO's expansion, which Moscow perceives as a threat, has contributed to heightened tensions and exacerbated the U.S.-Russia rivalry, as evidenced by the ongoing war in Ukraine. Modern security threats, however, extend beyond traditional battlefields. Cyberattacks, terrorism, and asymmetric warfare require innovative strategies, presenting the U.S. with complex challenges from both state and non-state actors. The U.S.'s ability to address these evolving threats while maintaining global stability will be a critical test of its leadership capacity.

Russia's resurgence as a military power—evident in its strategies in Ukraine and Eastern Europe, as well as its alliances with Iran and North Korea—directly challenges U.S. security interests and the stability of Europe. The Kremlin's willingness to confront the United States to test its defense commitments, coupled with its perceived unpredictability, undermines the stability of existing security frameworks. Russia's actions serve as a stark reminder that, even as new security challenges emerge, traditional great-power rivalries remain a central feature of global security dynamics.

U.S. diplomacy has traditionally relied on strong alliances and partnerships, providing a foundation for addressing global challenges collectively. However, recent tensions—particularly with allies in Europe and Asia—have exposed underlying strains in these relationships. Allies have expressed concerns about the U.S.’s commitment to multilateralism, especially after the Trump administration’s emphasis on unilateral decision-making. Reaffirming alliances and reestablishing the U.S. as a “reliable partner” will be critical for sustaining its diplomatic influence on the global stage.

The U.S. role in international organizations like the UN, IMF, and WTO has been instrumental in shaping global governance. However, recent skepticism about the effectiveness of these institutions—exacerbated by the growing influence of China and Russia within them—poses a significant challenge to American leadership. As these organizations face criticism for perceived inefficacy, the U.S. must advocate for reforms that restore their relevance and reassert its leadership on the global stage.

U.S.-China relations are characterized by diplomatic tensions over Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Uyghur issue. The U.S. faces a delicate balancing act: championing human rights and democratic values while maintaining a pragmatic approach to its relationship with Beijing. This ideological and policy tension reflects a broader challenge—the difficulty of reconciling America’s values with its geopolitical interests. This dilemma lies at the heart of sustaining U.S. leadership in an increasingly multipolar world.

U.S.-Russia diplomatic relations have reached a low point, strained by Russia’s war in Ukraine, interference in Western democracies, and confrontational posturing. These tensions exacerbate ideological divides and reinforce opposing visions of world order, with Moscow’s actions challenging the liberal norms central to U.S. foreign policy. Maintaining dialogue while deterring aggression is essential to preventing further destabilization. American culture—through Hollywood, tech giants, and the “American Dream”—exerts a profound influence worldwide. This soft power has shaped global perceptions of the U.S. as a land of opportunity and

innovation, reinforcing its leadership through cultural appeal.

However, the rise of alternative cultural powerhouses, particularly in Asia, presents growing competition to American cultural dominance.

American universities remain centers of innovation and thought leadership, attracting students from around the world and reinforcing the U.S.'s reputation as a hub of knowledge and progress. Yet, increasing competition from international universities, coupled with restrictive immigration policies, risks diminishing the global influence of American educational and research institutions.

The United States has long promoted democracy, human rights, and individual freedoms as core values of its foreign policy. However, inconsistencies in applying these principles—such as supporting autocratic allies or engaging in selective humanitarian interventions—have fueled global criticism. Many countries question whether American ideals are genuine universal principles or tools for strategic gain, eroding the U.S.'s credibility as a moral leader. Constructivist insights emphasize the importance of consistent identity and norms in maintaining international influence. For the U.S. to continue shaping global values, it will be crucial to align its actions with its stated principles.

The deepening social and political polarization within the United States poses a significant challenge to its global leadership. Domestic strife undermines the cohesion and resilience of U.S. foreign policy, as shifting administrations signal unpredictable policy reversals to the international community. These internal divisions risk projecting an image of instability, making allies wary of U.S. commitments and emboldening rivals. For American leadership to remain effective, achieving national unity on fundamental foreign policy priorities—such as climate action, security commitments, and support for international institutions—will be essential in navigating the complexities of global politics.

The era of unipolar American dominance is waning, giving way to a more multipolar landscape where the U.S. must contend with

other centers of power. As China, Russia, the EU, and regional players assert themselves on the global stage, the U.S. faces a strategic choice: adapt to this new balance of power through diplomacy and coalition-building or risk becoming isolated. While the U.S. remains influential, its leadership will likely evolve into a more collaborative role, emphasizing partnerships rather than outright hegemony.

In this evolving global landscape, U.S. leadership is no longer inevitable; it must be earned.

China's economic influence, Russia's military assertiveness, and the EU's commitment to multilateralism present credible alternatives to a U.S.-led order. Each brings unique strengths and ideologies that challenge the established

norms of international relations. This multipolar world complicates the traditional binary of "U.S. leadership versus autocratic alternatives," requiring the U.S. to engage in nuanced diplomacy and influence-building with diverse actors. As constructivism suggests, the competition among these powers is as much about ideas and identities as it is about material capabilities. To navigate this new landscape, the U.S. must redefine its leadership to accommodate diverse perspectives while remaining a steadfast advocate for democratic values.

The United States stands at a pivotal moment in its leadership journey, confronted by both external challenges and internal uncertainties. While the foundation of American power—its economy, military, and cultural appeal—remains formidable, the country urgently needs to address its ideological and strategic vulnerabilities. A commitment to consistent values, collaborative alliances, and pragmatic adaptation will determine the extent to which the U.S. can continue to influence global governance and uphold the norms it helped establish.

Ultimately, the question of American leadership is not solely one of resources or strategic assets but of identity and vision. As constructivist perspectives suggest, the meanings and values associated with American power are as critical as its material foundations. In adapting to a multipolar world, the U.S. has an

opportunity to lead by example—upholding democratic principles, fostering equitable economic growth, and addressing global challenges in a spirit of cooperation. By doing so, it can retain a vital role, not through dominance, but by championing a world order that reflects both American ideals and the aspirations of a diverse global community.

In this evolving global landscape, U.S. leadership is no longer inevitable; it must be earned. By prioritizing partnership over unilateralism, the U.S. can establish the foundation for a resilient, adaptable, and enduring presence on the world stage—one that aligns with the complex realities of the 21st century. Whether this vision of American leadership is realized will depend on the nation's ability to navigate shifting global dynamics with humility, consistency, and a forward-looking approach.

Why and How Do Leaders Manipulate Truth?

Post-truth politics distorts truth,
erodes trust, and poses a threat to
democracy.

KATYAYNI CHAMPAWAT

Propaganda, fake news, and post-truth have increasingly become common buzzwords in today's political discourse. However, lying and manipulation are nothing new in the world of politics, nor have they always posed such a direct threat to democracies. Political actors have long delivered "influential speeches," "offered incentives," "disrupted decision-making," and "hidden facts." Sometimes, these actions are carried out in the name of national security and interest; other times, they serve the purpose of "image-making." A politician might tarnish an opponent's image to gain power, or a party might craft narratives to secure its voter base.

KATYAYNI CHAMPAWAT, received her Master's Degree in International Relations and Diplomacy from Leiden University.



Whatever the case, these tactics are designed to purposefully alter citizens' beliefs, intentions, and behavior. And we know this; in fact, we often expect our politicians to be untruthful. So, why has there suddenly been such public concern about truth in politics? The answer may lie in the complex interplay between social media, rising populism, and the crisis of democracy. Manipulation is a form of power. Therefore, it is no surprise that it has been an integral part of political strategies aimed at gaining or consolidating power.

Manipulation enables leaders to control public narratives and perceptions, mobilize support, and enhance their public image in ways that serve their interests. A notable example is the 1988 Willie Horton ad, aired during the presidential race between George H.W. Bush and Michael Dukakis. The ad featured Willie Horton, an African American man convicted of murder and granted a furlough under a Massachusetts prison program during Dukakis's tenure as governor. While on furlough, Horton committed violent crimes. The ad exploited Horton's case to portray Dukakis as soft on crime and incapable of protecting the American public, while simultaneously playing on racial prejudices.

A more recent example can be found in India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) campaign during the elections in the State of Jharkhand. The campaign included an ad showing seemingly poor individuals wearing skull caps and hijabs "infiltrating" the house of a visibly Hindu family. Although the ad was later pulled following a complaint from the opposition party to the Election Commission, citing its divisive nature, the message had already left an impression on voters' minds. Another, more blatant example of truth manipulation occurred during Stalin's regime in Russia. In a photograph published in 1937, Joseph Stalin was depicted standing alongside several colleagues, including Nikolai Yezhov, the head of the secret police.

Just three years later, a revised version of the same photograph was published, but this time, Yezhov was conspicuously absent. By then, he had fallen out of favor with Stalin and was executed in 1941. This demonstrates how truth manipulation not only helps

leaders secure their strategic interests but also allows them to construct narratives that align with their principles and ideologies. By now, it should be evident that manipulation takes many forms. It can be executed overtly, as in Stalin's case, through propaganda and media control, or through more nuanced methods such as spreading misinformation and disinformation, as well as employing psychological manipulation.

Hitler's propaganda machine is a notorious example of manipulation through media control. Radios and public speakers were used to disseminate Nazi propaganda, while strict censorship ensured that opposing voices were silenced. Spreading misinformation and disinformation through media remains an effective method of public manipulation to this day. Advances in communication technology and the rise of social media have only made truth manipulation easier and more pervasive. Moreover, it has become increasingly difficult to recognize when one is being manipulated. A carefully placed euphemism, strategic ambiguities, and psychological manipulation are subtle but among the most effective techniques.

They exploit voters' emotions—fear, anger, and racial or religious prejudice—to shape their perceptions of candidates. For instance, in a public address earlier this year, India's Prime Minister Modi referred to “those who have more children” as a threat to the nation. Many interpreted this as a veiled reference to Muslims; however, Modi vehemently denied the accusation, stating that the day he resorts to Hindu-Muslim rhetoric, he would become “unworthy of public life.” An earlier example of psychological manipulation is the 1964 Daisy ad, aired during the presidential election between Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater. The ad featured a young girl plucking petals from a daisy, counting each one before the tranquil scene was suddenly interrupted by the countdown to a nuclear explosion. A voiceover then warned that Goldwater's policies could lead to nuclear war.

The ad was crafted to instill fear and link Goldwater with the threat of global catastrophe. In the modern era, social media manipulation by political actors has escalated into an industrial-scale issue. A

2020 media manipulation survey conducted by the Oxford Internet Institute found that disinformation has become a widespread tactic in political communication, with over 93% of the countries surveyed (76 out of 81) reporting the use of disinformation as part of their political strategies.

This is the era of ‘post-truth,’ where objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

This is the era of ‘post-truth,’ where objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. Political speech is not only indifferent to the truth but also unwilling to engage with opposing perspectives. As a society, we have collectively outsourced our ability

to discern truth and encased ourselves in self-affirming media bubbles. There is no shared reality in which we can coexist and form opinions. In this context, modern political manipulation does not seek to persuade; instead, it sows confusion, stifles discussion, and halts debate. Politicians are not striving for rational arguments based on facts but are focused on ‘hijacking’ attention.

This is a defining feature of both Donald Trump’s and Boris Johnson’s political careers. In 2016, The Washington Post fact-checker blog analyzed Trump’s statements and rated 70% of them with its highest falsehood rating—four Pinocchios. The remaining 30% weren’t entirely truthful either; they contained just enough truth to avoid the worst rating. Examples of this pattern include his exaggerated claims about his inauguration crowd size and Kellyanne Conway’s infamous false reference to the “Bowling Green massacre.” Similarly, Boris Johnson built much of his political identity on distortion, especially during his tenure as Brussels correspondent for The Telegraph in the 1990s. His infamous stories about absurd EU bureaucratic demands—such as regulations on square strawberries or smaller condoms—shaped public perception and contributed to the rise of populist Euroscepticism.

Russia offers another compelling example, where Vladimir Putin’s “political technologies” focus on fostering a climate of distrust in

all political information. The strategy aims to convince people that everyone is lying, turning the battle into one of crafting the most convincing lies and projecting the most appealing persona. In India, similar tactics can be observed. After the Supreme Court declared the Electoral Bond scheme unconstitutional—exposing massive, opaque donations to the ruling BJP—Prime Minister Modi insisted the scheme had increased transparency, even as government lawyers had argued the opposite in court. The COVID-19 pandemic further revealed this distortion, with the government maintaining an official death toll far lower than what experts believed to be accurate, thus perpetuating a narrative of control and competence.

In each case, these political figures use distortion not just as a tool of persuasion but as a method to manipulate public perception, creating confusion and eroding trust in established truths.

Drawing on Hannah Arendt, I argue that factual truth is essential to pluralistic politics. Facts serve as a shared reference point for diverse opinions, each shaped by different interests and passions. To deny facts is to dismantle the very foundation that enables democratic dialogue. This crisis of truth can be traced to broader shifts in the interconnected realms of media, economics, and politics—particularly the decline in public trust in mass media and the erosion of a shared reality based on common facts.

*To deny facts is to
dismantle the very
foundation that
enables democratic
dialogue.*

With technologies like AI-driven deepfakes, skepticism has only increased. There is also a growing trend of rejecting scientific consensus, evident in climate change denial and vaccine hesitancy. Today, it is easy for individuals to follow certain news outlets that provide narratives aligning with their beliefs. Social media algorithms further reinforce this by curating content that supports these views, creating an illusion of widespread consensus. This dynamic has led to greater fragmentation and polarization of the public sphere.

Countering such complex manipulation of truth requires a deliberate and systematic approach. Currently, there is no legal regulatory body or even a set of common principles to combat disinformation at the international level. Regulating social media platforms and enforcing objective fact-checking mechanisms are critical to rebuilding trust in the media. Organizations like the Content Authenticity Initiative, which helps verify the authenticity of digital images, play an essential role in this effort. However, the mere presence of such organizations and frameworks is not enough. We must also promote media and civic literacy from an early age to empower individuals to critically engage with the information they encounter.

Many countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, have been considering raising the minimum age for social media access and regulating smartphone use in schools to protect children from unregulated misinformation. Such measures, however, are not long-term solutions. Instead, children must be taught to build a healthy relationship with the digital world. We need to learn how to be critical users rather than passive consumers of social media. Media literacy plays a crucial role in achieving this. It empowers users by placing agency back in their hands while simultaneously promoting transparency and accountability.

The relationship between truth and politics has always been a tenuous one. Whether framed as propaganda or influence, untruths have long been a part of political strategy. In recent years, however, the scale and scope of this phenomenon have expanded exponentially, leaving societies struggling to keep up. Newer technologies are being exploited while the average citizen in a democracy remains uninformed and unprepared. Post-truth is deeply intertwined with the rise of populism and the crisis of democracy. Countering post-truth political manipulation requires creating space for rational debate and discussion grounded in a shared reality. Ultimately, the fight for truth in politics is not merely about protecting facts; it is about safeguarding the very foundation of democratic dialogue and ensuring that future generations are equipped to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world.

Global Power Shift

The Newcomers or the Incumbent?

BRANDON JOHNSON

Change is the only constant—an unchanging truth paradoxically observed by the great sages of the world’s highest cultures. From the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who noted that “everything flows” (panta rhei), to the revered father of Taoism, Lao Tzu, who viewed change as the natural flow of the universe embodied by the Dao, or “The Way.” This universal truth can be extended to every aspect of reality: from the physical world, where evolution has shaped and reshaped the Earth, to less tangible phenomena like the languages we speak or the cultures to which we belong.

BRANDON JOHNSON, holds a Master of Arts in International Affairs: Diplomacy and Foreign Policy from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University. He currently works at the Consulate General of Canada to the United States, San Francisco.



National power is no exception. The Romans once viewed the Mediterranean as *Mare Nostrum*, and the sun truly never set on the British Empire. Yet, as new discoveries, philosophies, religions, technologies, and even climatic changes arose, these mighty empires—like all those that preceded them—fell. Someday, this will indeed be the fate of the Rome of our era: the USA.

This article is not intended as an American doomsday piece, nor is it meant to stoke the flames of fear in an already politically volatile world. On the contrary, it is meant to offer comfort. National power may wane, but culture and identity can transform into something unexpectedly sanguine. Rome was great, but Renaissance Italy was even greater. The question, however, is this: how do we want to direct that change, and what can history teach us?

FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN

Let us first travel back to the Great Tang (618–907), the Golden Age of Chinese civilization. A successor state to the Sui Dynasty, the Tang built a formidable empire on the foundations of the Sui, which had unified China after centuries of fragmentation. In many ways, Tang Dynasty China resembled our interconnected world today—it was proudly cosmopolitan, globally linked via the Silk Road, and religiously pluralistic, attracting followers of the world’s great faiths—Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Islam—to its famed capital, Chang’an.

The Tang Dynasty thrived and succeeded due to several factors: a strong civil service system based on merit, secure economic alliances, openness to foreign ideas, and effective governance. Over time, however, the Tang’s strengths gradually eroded and became its downfall. According to quantitative historian Peter Turchin, one of the primary causes of societal collapse is elite overproduction. Once an empire overextends itself, competing interests lead to factionalism and increased competition for resources and power. This, in turn, leads to economic strain, heightened instability from political destabilization, and ultimately social unrest.

At the end of the Tang's decline, power shifted to the Song Dynasty. The Song learned from the Tang's failures and restructured China's political and economic systems—elite positions prioritized bureaucratic control over the military, the navy was professionalized to consolidate and centralize power, and the state implemented agrarian reforms to stabilize the economy, including technological innovations in rice cultivation. In sum, what worked for the Old World did not work for the New.

Similar dynamics can be observed in more recent historical contexts. Much like the Tang Dynasty, the British Empire of the 18th century overextended itself both economically and militarily. Centralization of power became exceptionally challenging across multiple continents, particularly as competing elites in the colonies vied for influence. Fast-forward to World War II: as the U.S. rose to become one of two global superpowers, economic strain and the inefficiencies of Britain's antiquated imperial system culminated in its power decline.

The horrors of the World Wars taught the Western world that traditional imperialism and alliances yield only short-term benefits at unjustifiable costs.

The horrors of the World Wars taught the Western world that traditional imperialism and alliances yield only short-term benefits at unjustifiable costs. As the needs of the world evolved, the center of global power shifted from European imperial powers to a U.S.-led rules-based international order (RBIO) that, at least in theory, promotes global and economic stability through free trade, democratic reforms, and respect for the rule of law.

Despite these shifts in global power and the accompanying assaults to national egos, Britain did not vanish from the world stage. It remains one of Europe's wealthiest states, preserved its stable constitutional monarchy, and even integrated into the European Union for a time. A great deal was lost in shedding its old skin, but transformation, for all of us, was an absolute necessity.

RISING POWERS:
A HISTORIC CASE STUDY

Global power dynamics, as illustrated above, are never static. Policies evolve, alliances form, and regional and global orders realign. In the current established world order, the West dominates, with the United States at its core. However, as economies modernize and the RBIO begins to show cracks in its foundation, the Global South is poised to emerge as a significant force.

Rising powers take on many forms, but in the context of international relations, they are characterized by rapid economic growth, technological modernization—often in the military sphere—a growing educated class, a young population, and mounting geopolitical ambitions. A notable rising power is South Korea. Just a few decades ago, this East Asian nation was among the poorest in the world. Today, it ranks second on the Henley Passport Index, boasts the world's 13th largest economy, leads in high-tech industries, and has become one of the globe's premier entertainment hubs, with K-pop achieving worldwide acclaim. South Korea stands as a shining example of a nation that wields dominance through soft power.

Japan, another Asian giant, has also risen, fallen, and risen again as a remarkable world power. The Japanese Empire's surrender in 1945 marked the most significant transition in the nation's history since the Meiji Restoration. Once a military superpower dominating East Asia, Japan's destiny became inextricably tied to the newly established U.S.-led liberal international order. Japan purged itself of military control, renounced its right to belligerency, and adopted a full democratic model for the first time in its history. Though military power in the region shifted to the United States, Japan—like Song Dynasty China or post-colonial Britain—successfully reinvented itself.

Following its defeat in World War II, Japan reshaped its domestic and foreign policies around three core tenets: Japan's economic recovery would be the primary objective, necessitating political and economic cooperation with the United States, Japan would limit its

use of armed forces in favor of American security guarantees, Japan would adopt a pragmatic foreign policy that emphasized economic diplomacy in global affairs.

In the decades that followed, under Prime Minister Ikeda Hayatō (1960–1964), the Japanese government pursued high-growth policies aimed at doubling the nation’s income within a decade through the “Income Doubling Plan” and raising Japan’s standard of living to match that of developed Western nations. This economic transformation was made possible by several factors. Firstly, the Japanese government limited its defense budget to less than 1% of its GDP, freeing resources for domestic economic investment. As a result, Japan achieved a staggering growth rate of over 10% in the first three years of the decade. By the end of this period, Japan had successfully reestablished itself as one of the wealthiest countries on Earth and a global economic and cultural powerhouse.

RISING POWER: CHINA

The BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) embody some, all, or a combination of the characteristics of rising powers. Among them, China has proven itself to be a formidable economic, military, and political rival to the West. Historically known as the “factory of the world,” China has since transformed into a hub of innovation. From its perspective, the West’s near-monopoly on critical technologies poses a significant national security risk, as American mobile operating systems—Google (Android) and Apple (iOS)—dominate 98% of the world’s smartphone market. In October 2024, Huawei launched its own operating system, HarmonyOS, designed to run only domestic apps, a move Chinese media has dubbed a “blue blood system.”

China is also investing heavily in research and development (R&D), an area where the United States has struggled to keep pace. In March 2024, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) pledged to “transform its economy” through a \$52 billion investment, marking a 10% increase from the previous year. Meanwhile, the United

States reduced its R&D budget by 2.7% in the same year. Simply put, winning the technological race positions a nation to win the economic one. A rising power's technological and economic growth is not inherently a bad thing—after all, competition breeds innovation. The crux of the issue lies in differing political ideologies and conflicting geopolitical interests.

A wealthy, high-tech China under communist governance poses a significant threat to its neighbors and allied liberal democracies. Technological advancements extend far beyond smartphones, with heightened military capabilities potentially emboldening China to invade its neighbor, Taiwan. Furthermore, to maintain its grip on power, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is likely to intensify its use of surveillance technology to suppress any form of opposition or criticism. Simply put, the Chinese government does not operate based on principles. Its decisions are driven purely by pragmatism, and it is poised to export both its technologies and its authoritarian politics to bad actors on the global stage.

ESTABLISHED POWER: THE UNITED STATES

Now it is time to play devil's advocate. Foreign affairs aficionados are well aware of the threats China poses to the West, but despite its negative track record, China also acts as a responsible player in other domains. The nation is the world's largest investor in clean energy, accounting for \$890 billion in investment in 2023. That year, the clean energy sector contributed an impressive 40% to its GDP growth. Additionally, China's infrastructure investments far surpass those of the United States, boasting affordable high-speed rail networks crisscrossing the country and robust metro systems in nearly every major city. While there are undeniable problems with China's system of governance, its centralized nature allows for swift and efficient execution of plans when directed appropriately.

History, as the saying goes, is written by the winners. The Western world has undeniably made great strides in philosophical contributions, technological development, and the promotion of

human rights. However, having dominated the global arena for the past five centuries, the West often glosses over its own structural inefficiencies, historical injustices, and blatant human rights abuses. Consider the RBIO: the U.S. is deeply critical of Russia's war crimes in Ukraine, yet the self-proclaimed leader of the free world dismisses the ICC's war crimes arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as "outrageous."

Beyond the major news headlines, the U.S. has provided extensive military support to Saudi Arabia, one of the world's most notorious human rights abusers, in its ongoing conflict with Yemen. Of course, the Houthi rebels, their Iranian backers, and the Saudi government have all committed egregious actions, making the ethics behind their motivations subjective. However, who or what we choose to support or condemn is ultimately a matter of national interest, and the corresponding narratives tend to align with the interests of established powers.

EMERGING POWERS: INDIA AND BRAZIL

Global power dynamics are shifting, with Brazil and India standing out as notable emerging economic giants. India has experienced remarkable economic growth, with a rate of 7.8% far exceeding the G20 average of 3.4%. Alongside its expanding military, manufacturing, IT, and agricultural sectors, India's consolidation of political power under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has positioned the nation as an effective counterweight to China in the East Asian region.

Brazil, like India, has also witnessed significant economic growth over the past few decades. Unlike India, however, Brazil does not view China as a geopolitical threat—perhaps because China is not at its doorstep. Instead, President Lula's government has embraced China's technological rise, exemplified by Lula's visit to a Huawei research facility in 2023. Brazil's emergence as an economic and political mediator holds the potential to ease Sino-U.S. geopolitical tensions in the years to come.

THE WORLD AHEAD

The world is in for a wild ride as Donald J. Trump prepares to assume office for his second term. For better or worse, the United States has positioned itself as the political and economic glue maintaining order through free-market trade and democratic principles. However, as a Jacksonian, Trump could disrupt this balance. The core philosophy of Jacksonian realism is that the U.S. should remain skeptical of international involvements unless they directly impact American interests.

This approach is far more pragmatic than values-based diplomacy, as decisions are not made based on ideology or ethics but rather on what is perceived to "work." Consequently, the Trump administration views American support in international alliances as transactional and never guaranteed. Despite his hardline stance on China and plans to implement high tariffs on Chinese imports, Trump considers American military support for Taiwan negotiable. These uncertainties surrounding American security guarantees are echoed in the West, as Trump continues to question the value of the NATO alliance.

What does this mean for the world? In East Asia, we are likely to see shifts in foreign and domestic policies among America's allies, particularly Japan. Historically, Japan has taken a more pragmatic and neutral approach to foreign affairs to prioritize economic gains. However, it must now assume a leadership role as an anchor for a rules-based diplomatic order in the region. This diplomatic pivot is already evident in Japan's reinterpretation of Article IX of its constitution, which now allows the country to engage in "collective defense"—defending its allies—rather than solely relying on American military intervention in the region.

In Europe, the war in Ukraine has prompted significant investment in military capabilities. In 2023, Finland became the newest member of the NATO alliance, Germany pledged to make its military the "backbone" of European defense, and Poland is on track to becoming one of Europe's "military superpowers."

As we mark 25 years into the new century, there is much to unpack geopolitically—rising populism in the Western world, potential disintegration of European cohesion, the spread of authoritarianism, and deepening culture wars in the U.S. Yet, there is also much to be hopeful about. We have entered a new technological era with the AI revolution, a reinvigorated multipolar world has given the Global South a platform for innovative solutions to the climate crisis, and women's and LGBTQ rights are improving globally, with Taiwan and Thailand recently becoming the first Asian countries to legalize gay marriage.

*The truth is, we
have little control
over how the world
moves forward on a
macro level.*

Every era in history has its challenges, its triumphs, and its failures, and today is no different. Is the world better than it was 20 years ago? That depends entirely on who you are, where you're from, and the specific challenges you and your country face. No writer, political pundit, politician, or religious

figure has all the answers to improve our lives. I don't either. So, what's the point? At the very least, we can start by listening to those who see the world differently from us, making educated decisions about how we expend our energy and resources, and—as cliché as it sounds—doing the right thing.

The truth is, we have little control over how the world moves forward on a macro level. But we can create a meaningful impact on our own small worlds: adopt a pet, volunteer at an elder care home, donate when possible, and prioritize family, friends, and loved ones. The world has always been messy, and it always will be. But it can be a little less messy if we start by cleaning up our own corners first.

Arun K. Jain

President,
BizzConn



Amella Patson

Marketing Head



Paul Wallen

Ecommerce Expert



John Smith

Vice President,
BizzConn



Seminar on Online Business

Discover new business opportunities and learn new ways to grow. Designed by The Digital Designer.

Starts from

**12th
October**

**Saturday
11 AM Onwards**

Discover new business opportunities and learn new ways to grow.

Venue

**9th street avenue,
Near Ojubele Hospital
Ogun state, SA**

**More information
www.bizzconn.com**

The key areas of business and personal branding in the journey of building a long lasting brand and getting recognized as the industry leader.

Are you

HOUSE HUNTING?

We know you are.

Secure your
dream home
with us!

Today

FOR AS LOW AS:

35 L

FULL
PAYEMENT

39 L

PAY IN
6 TERMS

www.phoenix.com
info@phoenix.com

Buy your dream home

Get 2BKH & 3BHK homes for
affordable price in prime locations



Call us on +91 78451 45815
for more details