

Çin'in Yükselişi ve COVID-19 Pandemisi Sonrası Uluslararası Sisteme Etkisi

China's Rise and its Impact on the International System After COVID-19 Pandemic

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ÖZET

Makalemizde, Çin dış politikasını, Çin gücünün göstergelerini ve COVID-19: Çin'in Şansı mı?, üç bölüm üzerinden tartıştık. Makalenin temel amacı, Çin dış politikasının ve sütunlarının en önemli amaçlarını ve belirleyicilerini açıklığa kavuşturmaktır. Uluslararası siyasette daha etkin ve etkili bir rol oynamak ve uluslararası sistem içindeki konumunu güçlendirmek için, özellikle ekonomik ve askeri olmak üzere sahip olduğu güç unsurlarını, yapısında bir değişiklik meydana getirmek amacıyla nasıl kullandığı. Çin'in sürekli yükselen bir güç olduğunu göz önünde bulundurarak ve Çin'in dış politikasında benimsediği beş ilkeye dayanarak uluslararası sistemin çok kutupluluğa geçmesi gerektiğine inanmaktadır. Makalemizde ayrıca Çin'in ekonomik ve askeri gücünün göstergelerini vurgulamayı amaçladı ve Makalemizde ayrıca Çin'in COVID-19 pandemisinde nasıl yararlandığını da inceledi. Makalemizde varılan sonuç şudur: Makaleden varılan sonuç şudur: Çin tek başına uluslararası sisteme liderlik etmemektedir, ama uluslararası sistemde adil bir güç dağılımını sağlamaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kavramlar: *Çin, Dış Politika, Güç Göstergeleri, Uluslararası Sistem, COVID-19*

ABSTRACT

In the article, we discussed, through three sections, Chinese foreign policy, Chinese power indicators, and the COVID-19: Its China's Chance?. Where the main objective of the article was to clarify the most important goals and determinants of Chinese foreign policy and its pillars, and how it employed the elements of power that it possesses, especially the economic and military, to play a more effective and influential role in international politics, and to strengthen its position within the international system, with the aim of bringing about a change in its structure, given that China a power that is constantly rising and believes that it is necessary for the international system to shift to multipolarity, based on the Five Principles that China adopts in its foreign policy. And explaining how China has benefited from the COVID-19 pandemic; Where China activated its foreign policy through "Diplomacy Health". The article also aimed to highlight indicators of Chinese economic and military power, and the article also examined how China benefited from the COVID-19 pandemic. The conclusion reached by the article is: China does not seek to lead the international system alone, but to achieving a fair distribution of power in the international system.

Keywords: *China, Foreign Policy, Power Indicators, International System, COVID-19*

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INTRODUCTION

A large body of opinion in the West holds that international politics underwent a fundamental transformation with the end of the Cold War. Cooperation, not security competition and conflict, is now the defining feature of relations among the great powers (Mearsheimer, 2001a: 360). But this belief is wrong, as all major powers still care greatly about the balance of power, which leads to competition among them.

During the 21st century, China emerged as one of the major rival powers on the international stage. China's foreign policy aims to play an increasing role in international politics, establish a network of cooperative relations and partnerships with anti-U.S. countries, taking advantage of its economic, military and political strengths, to regain its place in the international system and break U.S. exclusivity in international politics.

It is not a big surprise that the Chinese realize that their country's rise can be viewed as a kind of threat to the United States, although they do not agree with this view and constantly claim that China's rise is and will continue to be peaceful (Kai, 2017: 4). On the other hand, China's economy grew faster than any other economy at nearly 10 percent from 1978 to 2011. And it has remained an energy-consuming powerhouse, even after slowing down to a lower level of growth in recent years. There are heard repeated predictions that China's economy will surpass that of the U.S. by 2020 or 2025 and that the Chinese will develop the leverage to challenge America seriously and alter the rules that govern international relations (Yetiv and Oksarsson, 2018: 71).

On the other hand, In contemporary international relations theory, John Mearsheimer's offensive realism stands out for its pessimism that the rise of China will lead to an intense security competition in Asia. For years, Mearsheimer predicts consistently that as the People's Republic of China (PRC) becomes more powerful, it will declare a Chinese version of the "Monroe Doctrine", try to reduce the U.S. military presence in the Asia-Pacific, and settle territorial disputes with neighboring countries in its own favor. Furthermore, he predicts that Beijing's ambitions will frighten most of its neighbors and compel them to join a U.S.-led balancing coalition, leaving Asia ripe for conflict and even war (Li, 2015: 2).

On the other hand, the Soft power has played a crucial role in the decision making of the U.S. foreign policy and it has also been adopted by some other countries, including China. In Southeast Asia, China has appeared to be more powerful regarding its hard power tactics toward economy, military and technology. This rise in power encouraged Chinese leaders to think about other, more nuanced aspects of power. In the Chinese view, soft power is a helpful concept to build regional and geopolitical alliances (Arif, 2017: 94).

This article aims to discuss the Chinese rise and its impact on the international system in light of developments in the international arena since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the last of which was the COVID-19 pandemic, where the international arena was characterized by chaos against the background of shifts in the balance of power, the transfer of power and the multiplicity of major powers in the environment of the international system. The article also aims to discuss the foundations of Chinese foreign policy, and to highlight indicators of economic and military power, as well as the soft power that China relies on in its foreign policy. The article also seeks to explain how the Chinese benefited from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The article raises the following main question: What are the factors that contributed to the rise of China and how will China's rise affect the international system after the COVID-19 pandemic?

This article is based on the descriptive analytical method, to answer the main question through the three sections following: Chinese foreign policy; Chinese power Indicators; and the COVID-19: Its China's Chance?.

1. CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

Starting from proclamation of Republic of China in 1922 to Communist takeover in 1949, China went through a phase of turmoil. Two world wars on the external front and conflict between communist and capitalist forces on the internal scenario left hardly any room for implementation of an effective foreign policy. "Mao Tse-Tung" just after taking over the charge, announced "First let us arrange the house then we will invite guests" and "let The Party to first taking care of internal affairs" (Mughal, 2009: 248). In this context, China has pursued a foreign policy consistent with its ambition to regain its position and role in the international system, taking advantage of the power's it has become, as well as playing an advanced role in the international arena by influencing international events and changes.

The new trends in Chinese foreign policy have contributed to China's rapid rise as a global power. As observed by Shi Yinhong, a leading international relations expert in China, Chinese elites and the Chinese public now see "As urgent need for a proactive and outward looking foreign policy" (Zhang, 2010: 40). Within the same context, Chinese leaders since 2005 have promoted the vision of a "Harmonious World" to guide foreign policy toward shaping a world order amenable to China's rise. This idea, which also features prominently in the Chinese Dream, carries elements of accommodation and revision. It upholds the authority of the United Nations (UN) and the basic structure of the existing economic and political order. Chinese policy also supports the development of multilateral organizations to address disagreements and disputes in a consultative and cooperative manner. However, it does envision revisions to existing institutions as well as the introduction of new ones to better serve the needs of China and other rising powers (Heath, et al., 2016: 6). In line with the trends and behavior it adopts in its foreign policy towards international policy. Not only that, it has tended to form alliances and partnerships and join regional organizations, such as the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

In addition, during the last decades, China has moved from being an isolated country separated from the international community, having become one of the world's major powers and being on its way to becoming the biggest economy in the world. Being at the epicenter of a global power shift from "the West to the East", and from "the North to the South", there has been a lot of attention given to its external affairs, including its foreign policy goals and behavior (Weissmann, 2015: 151). Where the international community assumes that China is on the rise. Stunning economic growth and rapid military modernization reflect the ascent of this huge and populous nation to world-power status (Jakobson, 2013). To understand China's foreign policy in the 21st century, we must be clarified the fundamental elements of China's foreign policy.

China defines its foreign policy objectives as follows: first, domestic political stability; second, sovereign security, territorial integrity and national unification; and third, China's sustainable economic and social development. It is noteworthy that the primary objective is

domestic stability which means ensuring that the Communist Party stays in power and the socialist system remains intact. At the same time, China's leaders acknowledge that a stable external environment is conducive to achieving these three main goals. An underlying, objective is that China seeks respect as a major power and wishes to be seen as a responsible member of the international community (Jakobson, 2013: 4), as well as it promotes political principles, such as the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", as the basis for international laws and rules (Heath, et al., 2016: 6). The "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" are: Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

Since 1949, China has consistently guided her relations on five ideological concepts with the third world countries. These are: the theory of contradiction; the concept of the United Front; the concept of the centrality of armed struggle to political victory; the principle of self-reliance and the concept of China as a model for development. Three major doctrines the doctrine of People's War, the five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the Three World Theory have evolved from the basic five ideological concepts as main role in the China's relations with the Third World. The Five principles of peaceful coexistence were officially adopted by the (PRC) at the first gathering of the third world in 1955 at Bandung conference of Asian and African countries. The Three Worlds theory was formally set forth by Peking in 1974 statement by Vice Premier Deng before the (UN) General Assembly and expanded upon in People's Daily editorial in November 1977 (Gillani, et al., 2015: 73 – 74).

After 1969, China's foreign policy brought major changes from the foreign policy positions of the 1960s. Firstly, the transfer of the title "Public enemy number one" from the U.S. to the Soviet Union. Secondly, ideology play a minor role than in 1960s as China sought to create alliance with all those who opposed the Soviet Circle. By the end of 1970s, china's foreign policy dimension had become more delay definable. A strategic re-assessment was made, in this way the encirclement theory of the Third world, China pointed out three areas. Where she perceived a major threat Indochina, the Middle East and the waterway stretching from the Persian Gulf through the Indian Ocean (Gillani, et al., 2015: 83).

In general, after completing its internal political and economic reforms, China sought to move towards confirming its presence on the international arena, and playing an important role in managing the foreign policy and shaping alliances and relations in the international arena. The changing structure of the international system has freed China's foreign political to movement from many of the constraints it has restricted, opening up a wide margin and a new opportunity to deal with international issues. (72 :2015، سرور).

After China realized the changes that affected the new international system after the end of the Cold War, it made China's foreign policy take into account the main dimensions of the changing in the international field, especially in the context of its interactions in the regional and international. In fact, the Chinese awareness of international transformations made it not rely much on the global distribution of power and influence in its assessment of international behavior and standards of influence, as much as it relied on the extent of benefit and harm that could be inflicted on it as a result of this behavior.(75 – 74 :2015، سرور)

On the other hand, China's interest in soft power has become more popular only in the late 1990s, this interest has been promoted due to some factors: Firstly, rapid development of China's economy provides confidence to its economic position in the global market. Secondly, China understood that it is important to develop its relation with neighboring countries especially Asian countries. Finally, China has realized that using hard power will not achieve its goals in some issues for example, the South China Sea issue (Arif, 2017: 98).

In a related, in recent decade, China has initiated massive efforts to enhance its soft power across the world in order to fulfill its national interests. These attempts started when former President of China "Hu Jintao" in 2004 and 2005 publically announced his intentions and aims to build "a harmonious society and a harmonious world". According to "Hu", a harmonious world would be characterized by multi relationships, mutually advantageous cooperation, the spirit of inclusiveness to build a world in which coexistence among civilizations exists and by a reformed United Nations (Arif, 2017: 97).

Beijing's attention to soft power has intensified under President Xi Jinping. And in 2014, Xi announced that developing China's soft powers can be achieved through the state's ability in global communication and its capacity of building a good communication system. He also believes that new media can play this role by increasing creativity and presenting reliability of China's publicity and the China's stories, voices and characteristics should be well explained. And under Xi, China has introduced many new initiatives to the world, such as "the Asia-Pacific dream", "the Chinese dream", "the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road", "the Silk Road Economic Belt", "a new type of major-country relations", and many others (Arif, 2017: 97). However, China has combined in its foreign policy between hard power and soft power, as one of the great powers or a powerful state in international politics.

Chinese foreign policy is one of the elements of China's soft power. In the period following the end of Mao's rule, the radical trend that characterized foreign policy in his era changed to a new approach that is less confrontational, bolder and pragmatic, and Chinese foreign policy seemed more constructive in its handling of public affairs. At the regional and international levels, making the search for a stable external environment that gives Beijing more scope to focus on internal economic and social development a major objective of China's diplomatic approach, and at the same time, seeking to send strong messages to allay the fears of its Asian neighbors about the growth of the country's power, and promote constructive relations with major powers in The world, especially with the U.S., through its adoption of the policy of "Peaceful Rise", which has become an essential element of Chinese foreign policy since 2004. It can be said that the most important features of the current Chinese foreign policy are three prominent aspects: the work to reassure international and regional powers of the peaceful nature of its economic rise, China's growing involvement in international organizations, and the strengthening of its international ties through new diplomacy. These aspects serve China's goal of presenting a positive image of the "New China" (حكيمي، 2015: 93).

Chinese foreign policy is a source of soft power; It does not call for intervention, does not violate sovereignty, respects the unity of the national territory, calls for the peaceful settlement of conflicts, calls for the application of international law and the principles of the United Nations, stands against unilateral military action, and supports respect for the cultures of other nations. China

does not oppose the existing international system, but rather calls for its reform, and works for the establishment of a multipolar system, not the hegemony of a single power. China relied on public diplomacy to spread the advantages of its foreign policy to the international public opinion. Prime Minister "Wen Jiabao" said: "We must practice public diplomacy in a more effective and effective manner" (30 :2017، نعمة) .

Recently, China has attracted more global attention by introducing different institutions and initiatives in their foreign policies (Rahman, 2019: 91). China's leaders have recognized the importance of these elements in serving China's standing at the regional and international levels. For example, one of the direct results of the opening-up policy following the end of Mao's rule was an increase in international interest in Chinese culture, an interest that successive Chinese leaders have sought to exploit through a scheme to spread the Chinese language and culture across the world in recent years (90 ب: 2015، حكيمة). Therefore, Chinese culture and language can play a major and vital role in increasing the influence of China's soft power around the world, through language institutes, media and cinema...etc.

On the other hand, there are priorities in Chinese foreign policy. Often China's foreign policy is expressed in terms of different principles and slogans, such as the: "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", "Peaceful Rise/Development, and "Harmonious World". These in turn have formed the basis of foreign policy practices. Underpinning Chinese foreign policy for the last 60 years are the so called "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. In practical terms these principles have facilitated a foreign policy focusing on "good-neighborly relations", aimed at preventing external instability to negatively affect internal frictions within China, and a strict interpretation of non-interference in internal affairs (Weissmann, 2015: 154).

President "Hu" and Premier "Wen" announced that they would continue to pursue an independent and peaceful foreign policy. The basic objectives of this policy are to safeguard the independence and sovereignty of the country, strive to create a long-standing and favorable international environment for China's reform, opening to the outside world and modernization drive, safeguard world peace and promote common development. The following major points reflect continuity in Chinese foreign policy: First, Beijing leaders will decide on their approaches and policies regarding international issues independently. In international affairs, China shall decide its own stand according to its national interests and shall not yield to pressure from any big countries. Second, China is willing to establish and develop good relations with all countries on the basis of the following five principles: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. Third, China actively develops friendly relations with its surrounding countries, safeguards the peace and stability of the region, and promotes economic cooperation at the regional level. Fourth, China opens to developed countries as well as to developing countries. On the basis of equality and mutual benefit, China actively conducts extensive international cooperation to promote common development (Liu, 2003: 107).

Chinese policymakers describe their increasingly active and robust diplomacy using the expression "all-around diplomacy". All-around diplomacy is meant to contrast China's current approach with past (CCP) guiding principles – such as "leaning to one side" – which had a more ideological nature. This phrase reinforces (to foreign as well as Chinese audiences) the notion that

Chinese foreign policy will continue to focus on protecting China's national interests (sovereignty, development, and respect) and not on ideological goals, as was often the case in past years. All-around diplomacy is also meant to emphasize the comprehensive nature of Chinese foreign policy: It will include all nations, developed and developing, and will include multiple regions, such as Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and Europe as well as Asia. Chinese foreign policy will embrace all modes of international interactions (bilateral, multilateral, and regional), and such interactions will encompass economics, politics, military, science and technology, culture, education, and tourism (Medeiros, 2009: 46 – 47).

Therefore, we find that China has pursued a foreign policy based on independence, opposing absolute domination of international affairs, establishing relations, alliances and partnerships with various countries without interfering in the internal affairs of the state, and based on openness and mutual cooperation, in addition to strengthening multilateral diplomatic activity with the aim of achieving national interests and preserving global security and stability. Through this policy, China was able to attain an advanced position in international politics and strengthen its position in the international system. Now that we have made a brief review of the Chinese foreign policy, we will move to another stage/point to clarify the elements of power that China relied on in its foreign policy, to highlight the power indicators.

2. CHINESE POWER INDICATORS

As the great powers in the international system seek to strengthen their position within the system, by focusing on the development and modernization of the elements of comprehensive power. A state that possesses elements of comprehensive power will be able to influence the balance of power in the international system, and play a vital and pivotal role in international politics. Within this context, China is one of the emerging great powers in the international system. We will be clarify the power elements possessed by China, which it has become dependent on in its foreign policy and its competition with other great powers, especially U.S., for the leadership of the international system.

To measure the state's ability and power, there are many attempts, but the best equations to measure the state's ability to employ its power is the Klein scale, which combines in its equation both the material and moral factors of state power, as they are in the following equation: $CP = (C+E+M) \times (S+W)$. CP = Comprehensive Power, C = Critical Mass, E = Economic Capability, M = Military Capability, S = Strategy, W = National Will (68 – 67 :2016 القيسي). In this section we will focus briefly on the following elements of Chinese power: economic and military capacity indicators.

2.1.Economic Capability Indicators

The Chinese economy has been growing at an impressive pace since the early 1980s, and many experts expect it to continue expanding at a similar rate over the next few decades. If so, China, with its huge population, will eventually have the wherewithal to build an especially formidable military. China is almost certain to become a military powerhouse (Mearsheimer, 2013b: 88).

The economy of Chinese has achieved good results, especially in real growth rates, exports and the attraction of foreign direct investment, and this economy has begun to take steady steps towards the forefront of the global economy, occupying the places of major competing countries. These indicators made some analyzes and opinions go to say that the current century will become a "Chinese century". Under the leadership of "Mao Zedong" China established its economic infrastructure, which enabled it to achieve its economic breakthrough. Then came the policies of reform and openness with the accession of "Deng Xiaoping" when has to power in 1978, who raised the slogan "The New Option" with the aim of building an economic and scientific technology base that enables China to compete in the global market (نجيم، 2011: 39).

One of the indicators of China's economic capability is that it is characterized by the fastest economic growth in the world. If the rate of economic growth before implementing economic reform policies was about 5.3 per cent during the period from 1960 to 1978, this rate rose to reach 9.9 per cent from 1979 to 2010 (نجيم، 2011: 40). The size of China's economy has exceeded the size of its U.S. counterpart since 2014, to become the largest economy in the world, according to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) estimates of the gross domestic product of the countries of the world, according to the methodology (Purchasing Power Parity), which provides a better and more objective ability for a comparative measurement of GDP than the evaluation methodology GDP, according to nominal exchange rates (عوني، 2017).

China's gross domestic product amounted to 12 trillion dollar in 2017, with a growth rate of 9.7 per cent for 2017. This represents about 15 per cent of the total global economy, as the rate of China's contribution to economic growth reached about 30 per cent, and China's total trade surplus reached \$422 billion in 2017, and foreign exchange reserves amounted to \$3 trillion in 2017, as it is expected to regain its first place in the world (الفاضي، 2018: 143).

China has made great economic achievements since its establishment, and its economic boom has been concentrated during the past three decades, as the Chinese economy has achieved growth rates of more than 10 per cent, and it was maintaining that for extended years, which pushed it to rise to the second place in the world in terms of the size of the economy after the U.S., overcoming the Japan, which fell to third place. During that stage, China was able to achieve an unprecedented industrial boom and thus obtained the title of "The World's Factory", as it became the largest exporting country in the world, which qualified it to achieve a trade surplus with most countries of the world without a competitor. In order for China to continue this expansion, it launched the "Belt and Road Initiative", which contributes to strengthening China's economic relations with the outside world (صلاح ومنصور، 2018: 2).

China has announced the "Belt and Road Initiative", as a project different from the American project, to confront the American pole and build the Chinese power (عبد الله، 2015). The initiative is based on the principles of the United Nations Charter and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The principles governing the implementation of the initiative are based on political coordination between countries and the promotion of communication, dialogue and unimpeded trade to create the necessary conditions for economic development. The scope of the initiative covers about 70 countries on the three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe (شحرور، 2017: 3).

China seeks to achieve a set of goals through the "Belt and Road Initiative", which can be summarized as follows: benefit from the growth of global trade; strengthening the position of the Chinese "Yuan"(CNY) in the world; The development of the Chinese economy, especially in the western regions of the country; strengthening the position of Chinese telecom technology companies; strengthening the Chinese presence in the Eurasia region; expanding the external role of China; Ensure the stability of the power supply (5 – 3 :2018، صلاح ومنصور).

On the other hand, China's rise is, It is considered, the single most important economic and political phenomenon in the 21st century. It has implications for global security, for international development for global governance, and for human rights, among other things. While China's status in international trade is especially noteworthy, it is also growing by other measures of international power. China's growing clout in international production and financial markets are evident in terms of its global leadership in overall manufacturing, in the offshore assembly of electronics and textiles, and its growing financial leadership through owning the world's four largest banks. China is also growing in global leadership through development of new institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the recently signed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and its Belt and Road initiative (Grosse, et al., 2021: 4).

2.2.Military Capability Indicators

China has always been conservative in military terms, but with the Chinese economy reaching a huge stage that placed it in the ranks of major countries, the Chinese military force must keep pace with the country's economic and political situation, otherwise China will lose its economic position that needs military support in order to protect its vital strategic supplies (143 :2018، الفاضلي). In this context, the annual U.S. report submitted by the Pentagon to Congress on Chinese military power in 2006 states that a Chinese official newspaper published an article in which it states: "Beijing should develop a military force commensurate with its global standing, and for as long as Chinese economic and diplomatic interests extend across the world, such strategic thinking is required"(43 - 44، 2011، نجيم) .

China has taken advantage of economic growth to support and modernize its military capabilities, enabling it to prepare a strong army that expresses its ambition as a rise major global power, and to set its feet in the international system as a superpower. In order to secure the requirements for upgrading inside. This will not come with economic progress only, it must be accompanied by elements and dimensions, foremost of which is the development of its military capabilities, army and human capabilities (2019، محمد).

China has developed its army slowly, but steadily, and the financial surpluses and economic power of the country have helped to develop the army and modernize it with high efficiency and introduce the revolution in military affairs at the core of the military doctrine, and the development of all military programs, including missile, space and nuclear programs, both defensive and offensive In addition to adopting "Asymmetric" strategy and developing Cyber War capabilities (بن مشيرح، 2018 :172).

China has sought to develop its military power to match its economic power, and although there is no fixed number indicating the size of China's military spending, there are many sources

that give different numbers. In April 2011, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) issued a report on global military spending in 2010, and the report indicated that this expenditure amounted to \$1630 billion, of which China's share was \$119 billion, ranking second in the world in terms of military spending by 7.3 per cent of total global military spending. China's military armament constituted about 2.02 per cent of the GDP (44 - 45، 2011، نجيم).

The (SIPRI) report for the year 2017 indicated that China's proportion of military spending amounted to 7.3 per cent, which is second only to the U.S., and this spending constituted 1.9 per cent of the GDP for the year 2017 (143 :2018، الفاضي). In the (SIPRI) report for the year 2018 indicated China, the world's second largest spender, allocated an estimated \$228 billion to its military in 2017, an increase of 5.6 per cent compared with 2016 – the lowest increase since 2010 but remaining in line with GDP growth plus inflation (Tian, 2018: 149). China allocated an estimated \$250 billion to its military in 2018. This represented a 5.0 per cent increase compared with 2017 and an 83 per cent increase since 2009. Chinese military spending remains roughly linked to the country's economic development: since 2013, China has allocated 1.9 per cent of its GDP to the military each year (Tian, 2019: 185).

In January 2019, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency issued an important report entitled: China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win, which indicated that China was engaged in a strategic competition with the great powers, and that there is no possibility of doubting China's orientations aimed at imposing its hegemony and imposing its will on the international system. The report stresses that China's military goal is to build a strong and fighting force capable of winning regional conflicts, and that the basic principle of this strategy is evolving with the ongoing Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) reforms. The report asserts that China describes its strategy as "active defense", this concept that means - according to the strategy - that it is "Strategically Defensive", but it's actually "Operationally Offensive"(2019، عبد الراضي).

According to some sources, China pursues defense policies based on specific pillars, most notably: Strengthening China's global and regional position, and obtaining technologically advanced weapons; Flexibly deal with the ambiguous future military positions of the U.S., Japan and India; Retaining the ability to seriously/actually the use of force against Taiwan whose an increasingly her tendency separatist and militaristic; Strengthening China's military and diplomatic influence in the neighboring strategic areas claimed by Beijing, and enhancing access to them, including the South China Sea, and defending the right to use vital transportation lines in the seas and oceans; Enhance China's ability to deal with domestic social unrest and border instability due to ethnic reasons (113 :2011، علو) .

Therefore, with line with its foreign policy, and in line with its aspiration to strengthen its position in the international system, China's it has focused on developing its economic and military power, as one of its hard power tools on which it relies in competition with the U.S. hegemonic power on the international system. The process of reform, development and modernization undertaken by China in the economic and military aspect leads to the prediction of an advanced leadership role in international politics, by playing a more effective and influential role in various international affairs. In other words, China focused on possessing a deterrent force to influence the global balance of power, to restructure the international system towards multipolarity.

Based on that, in the final section of the study, we will focus on the global health crisis, COVID-19, and how China has benefited from this crisis as it seeks to restructure the international system.

3. COVID-19: ITS CHINA'S CHANCE?

The great American baseball player and "philosopher", Yogi Berra, famously said that if you come to a fork in the road, you should take it. Today, the international system stands at Berra's fork and is heeding his advice by taking two roads simultaneously. The first road is the well-trodden one: the international community continues to practice multilateral diplomacy and follow the post-1945 international patterns of cooperation – but with fewer productive results. The second is an as-yet uncharted path of new patterns of behavior marked by technological competition and coercion, the revitalization and modernization of industrial policies, and a radical rethink of the role of governance and diplomacy (Conley, et al., 2021: 1).

The international system has been advancing toward this fork in the road for the past 30 years, accelerated in recent years by a rapid decline in multilateralism as the United States returned to its historical state of retrenchment and as China challenges the U.S.-led global order and its presence in the Indo-Pacific. This structural shift of heightened Sino-American confrontation, very different from the bipolarity of the Cold War era, occurs at a time when trans-national challenges – climate change, technological innovation, a global pandemic, as well as ethnic, racial, and political tensions – confront all nations and spur calls for collective action (Conley, et al., 2021: 2).

The cracking of the U.S.-led international system has been aided by the emergence of challengers to the U.S. hegemonic power position, none more so than China. China's rise over the past two decades has been remarkable. Its economy is now the world's largest and its military capabilities have also grown, albeit not to the point of challenging the U.S.. Although it maintains something of a peaceful rise narrative, has sought to exert much more influence, at first regionally in Asia such as through the "Belt and Road Initiative" and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), but also increasingly on a global scale. China's rise has led it to covet a fairer international order, one which privileges the United States less and recognizes China's rise (Smith and Fallon, 2020: 238).

Also, there is currently a shift in the structure of the international system from unipolarity to multipolarity, according to most realistic analyzes. The major powers are seeking to strengthen their sources of power and their strategy for survival, in light of the transfer of power elements from the West to the East, and the impact of the tangible decline in the role and position of the U.S. in international politics, during the first and second decade of the 21st century. China is one of the major powers that is moving to restore its position and position in international politics, through the elements of power that it possesses and the ability to influence the international affairs and international environment.

Theoretically, China's rise to the top of the international system is a strategic goal for it, under Xi's leadership, based the power indicators it possesses, and the conflict of interests with the U.S.. However, China's pursuit of integration and restoration of its role in the international system

prompted it to maintain relations with the U.S. as the leader of the current international system and an important force in the international economy, in addition to developing relations and cooperation with powers and countries opposed to global American policies, with the aim of forming a "Lobby" whose goal The president confronted American policy against it.

In Xi Jinping's "New Era", the Chinese leadership's ambitions to have a greater impact on the course of international affairs have become clearer and more purposeful. In his remarks at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, Xi indicated his eagerness to build China into a "global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence". In practice, that influence is already exercised increasingly to shape – and sometimes to challenge – aspects of the existing international system, a trend that most international observers would see as natural for a rising power (Rolland, 2020: 3). Gradually, the Chinese leadership began to engage in many international affairs issues, in line with the ongoing developments and changes in international politics. As it began to link its foreign policy and its view of the international system, through issues such as: the democratic, income gaps, populism, terrorism, climate change, and (Covid-19).

We can be said that China is the rising great power in politics and international affairs, due to its (Hard and Soft) power elements, and the gradual transfer of power elements from "West to East". It has come to see it necessary to change the status quo in the international system. In other words, China sees itself as a major partner in managing international affairs, and the unipolar international system is no longer acceptable in light of the multiplicity of international powers and the shift in the balance of power.

There are main reasons why China occupies a privileged position in the international arena, namely: the end of the Cold War, which opened broad prospects for China to emerge strongly in the international arena and play active roles in the international system. China has the largest army in the world. China is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, which supports its political position against the background of international changes. China is considered a nuclear power and ranks third after U.S. and Russia. China opposes the unipolar system that leads the world led by the U.S., and has a desire to reach a multipolar system. China is the second largest global economic power after the U.S.. China enjoys a privileged strategic location through which it can control land, sea and air navigation routes (المشابقة ومقداد، 2018 :273).

Also, China enjoys a strategic weight at the regional and international levels, and these levels have placed it in an important international position. As the human, economic, military and technological factors made China to be an active player in the international arena. What increases and supports this international position is its geopolitical position, as almost no region in South, Central and North Asia is devoid of Chinese investments (المشابقة ومقداد، 2018 :271).

Anyway, How did China benefit from the COVID-19 pandemic? The widespread spread of the Covid-19 in China, and then its spread worldwide, has sparked a great debate about the extent of the impact of this health crisis on China's global role, at a time when China is making unremitting efforts to restructure the international system. Many observers argue that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the transformation process in the global balance of power and the transfer of power elements from West to East, in addition to China becoming an active global player in the context of the diminishing role of U.S. policy in the international arena.

With the spread of the new Coronavirus, and the declaration of the World Health Organization (WHO), on March 11, 2020, that it is a global pandemic, China took the initiative to provide support and assistance to the affected countries, and to advise them, which made them appreciated by the governments and peoples of those countries. This is at a time when the role of the U.S. has withdrawn from leading international efforts in addressing the first wave of this epidemic. In light of this, the great thinkers went that the post-Corona world will not be the same as before it, especially in light of the catastrophic economic and social repercussions left by this pandemic, which increases the uncertainty about the future of the international system, and some analysts have gone to expect the brightness of the star of China is faster than expected, and that "Corona" will accelerate its rise to gain an advanced position in a "new international system" that this pandemic has begun to draw its initial features (بن صدیق، 2020: 35).

In the same context, the COVID-19 revealed to the world the ability of the Chinese regime to withstand and quickly recover against crises (Resilience), as the Chinese government was able to lead and coordinate effectively against the virus. President Xi Jinping led the anti-coronavirus activities himself, and also cooperated with other foreign countries to quickly withdraw foreign residents from Wuhan (تینج، 2020).

China considers any U.S. decline as an opportunity to enhance its global rise, and it was no secret that China presented itself during the COVID-19 pandemic as a distinctive model, whether by claiming that it had managed to contain the virus crisis and return to normal life, production and economic recovery, or through what some called "Diplomacy Masks", by providing examination devices and masks to some countries, and providing financial assistance to the (WHO) (دحمان، 2020).

Although there is much uncertainty to how the COVID-19 pandemic will develop, it is likely to cause a lasting impact that will be felt in international politics, particularly with regard to international power and order. As epochal moments in international politics are critical junctures or tipping points that disrupt the status quo, resulting in new realities once the dust settles. They are also crucial for order in international politics. While international systems and orders are hardly static and are always evolving, epochal moments make monumental changes suddenly (Smith and Fallon, 2020: 237).

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted a decisive moment in the course of international politics, as it is believed that China took advantage of the pandemic to enhance its role and position in the structure of the international system, in conjunction with China's efforts to restructure the international system in light of power shifts and changing balances of power, to move to multipolarity. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided China with a fertile environment to play a more influential role towards the countries of the world, especially in developing countries, which have been greatly affected by the pandemic, by employing "Diplomacy Health" in its foreign policies, and influencing extensively in the interactions of the international environment in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. As China was able to control the spread of the pandemic based on its health capabilities and the strict measures it has taken.

The outbreak prompted greater strategic competition and disagreements over ideology between the great powers. In China, once the epidemic was under control the government

immediately sent medical teams and materials to 90 countries, and donated funds to the (WHO) to help developing countries fight the epidemic. Beijing opened many platforms, mainly through video conferences, to share clinical experience with medical experts in many countries. These efforts were not to promote the China model, but about humanitarianism and international solidarity (Yong, 2020: 10).

China took the initiative to strengthen international cooperation to combat it. This was not just advertisements or statements, but was reflected in practical support, by providing medical assistance and expertise to more than 150 countries and international organizations around the world, according to the Chinese National Health Committee. China has reiterated its principled position on strengthening international anti-epidemic cooperation, coordinating with the (WHO), and sharing its experience with other international and regional parties (37 :2020 :بن صديق). And if the main event revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it had a great resonance at the global level, is the rise of the Chinese role on the international scene, with its success in confronting the epidemic and limiting the speed of its spread on its soil, and with its intensive efforts to find a treatment to contain its risks (2027 ، رفعت).

However, the covid-19 pandemic reveals that the balance of power has returned and is adversely affecting global health. The pandemic has generated international political and legal controversies that will not end when the its curve is flattened and bent down. COVID-19 has stirred up a host of global health issues that states and international organizations will struggle to address under the darkening shadow of the balance of power (Fidler, 2020: 238).

In January 2017, President Xi has repeatedly stressed the necessity and urgency of building a community with a shared future for humanity on many occasions at home and abroad. In January 2017, he delivered a speech under the title of "Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind" at the United Nations Office at Geneva. The idea of building a community with a shared future for mankind marks not only the theoretical foundation of China's diplomacy in the new era, but also provides the guideline under which China participates in international affairs, manages external relations and promotes the reform of the global governance system. The credibility of this important idea has been proven by the developing trends of our times. The gradual emergence of global anti-epidemic cooperation triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has once again demonstrated the essence of interconnection and interdependence in the human community. On 29 March 2020, President Xi Jinping announced at the G20 Extraordinary Leaders' Summit on COVID-19 that "major communicable diseases are the enemy of all mankind", receiving general recognition from the international community (Hongjun, 2020: 3 – 4).

The spread of the COVID-19 cannot be said to be just a health crisis, but rather has taken a geopolitical dimension. The current health crisis – COVID-19 – has resulted in the exaggeration of the dynamics of competition between international superpowers, especially between the U.S and China (Bahi: 2021: 76). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the US-China friction as they both compete for global dominance. Fareed Zakaria asserts that: "The Covid-19 crisis is occurring at a time when global cooperation has collapsed and the traditional leader of international collective efforts to respond to this crisis has abandoned its role entirely" (Bahi: 2021: 82). The Chinese model emerged as a reference to success or "victory against the virus". China tried to capitalize on this to promote its image, status and political system (Bahi: 2021: 84).

Before the spread of COVID-19, many analysts viewed China as the most likely contender to balance American power or surpass it, thus ending American hegemony. Niall Ferguson, for instance, predicted that "the 21st century will belong to China". The pandemic could accelerate the shift of the global balance of power from West to East. Scholars compare the slow-growing West and an economically dynamic East. The negative economic fallout on the economies of the U.S and Europe as a result of the pandemic might be long-lasting. For example, "the extraordinary fiscal and monetary measures that these countries are taking to support businesses and households will be hard to reverse", whereas "China and other fast-growing economies in Asia are likely to experience a faster recovery based on their underlying advantages in terms of strong investment, innovation and productivity growth". Therefore, the pandemic is likely to accelerate the shift in the center of economic gravity and the balance of power toward China and Asia (Bahi, 2021: 88).

CONCLUSION

As a result of the above, it can be said that China has greatly sought to benefit from the global health crisis (Covid-19), to fill the void formed as a result of the failure of the United States - the dominant power in the international system - to confront the outbreak of the virus. We find that after reaching the stage of controlling the outbreak of the virus, China began to provide health support and expertise to several countries, including countries from the European Union, with the aim of contributing to providing public benefit at the global level, and achieving strategic goals in the foreseeable term with regard to its geopolitical competition, according to "The Belt and Road Initiative" and its foreign policy objectives, in order to ensure that it restructures the international system. Although China alone will not be able to fill the void caused by the global health crisis, it has been able to benefit from the repercussions of the crisis globally, by rapprochement with the allies of the U.S.

The Chinese economy is recovering, and its military power is constantly growing and developing, not to mention the continuation of the "Belt and Road Initiative" in its interaction, and China's establishment of partnerships and cooperation with countries covered by the "Belt and Road" line, in addition to its permanent membership in the Security Council, and its membership in international and regional organizations. Similar to the G-20, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the BRICS countries.

In addition, China has submitted other initiatives at the international and regional levels aimed at establishing organizations or institutions of an international and regional nature, such as the initiative to launch the "Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank" (AIIB), which was opened by China in early 2016, and the Bank of BRICS, and the trade group known as the Asia-Pacific Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (PCER). All of this is in line with the objectives, principles and foundations of its foreign policy, which has become more effective in international politics.

The main conclusion of the article is that China, despite its continuous accumulation to the elements of power and the formation of "balancing" alliances, partnerships, and regional organizations, does not seek to lead the international system alone and remove the U.S. from the international system, given that China is not considered an expansionist country. All that China is seeking is for the international community, particularly the U.S., to accept China as a superpower and an active player in the international system, meaning that it aspires to gain international trust

and respect. Notwithstanding that China, like other major powers in light of the chaos in the international system, seeks to achieve regional hegemony within its geopolitical scope, in addition to achieving a fair distribution of power in the international system. In a more precise sense, China desires a balance of power and a multipolar international system.

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