

# The Authoritarian Rise of China and Its Geopolitical Dilemma

Çin'in Otoriter Yükselişi ve Jeopolitik İkilemi

Mehmetali KASIM\* 

Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Studies, Niğde, Türkiye

## Abstract

China's rise as a global superpower is one of the defining challenges of the 21st century. This transformation impacts the security and prosperity of its neighboring countries and the future of the international, rules-based world order and global security. Beijing's rapid economic growth has fueled its defense industry and accelerated its military expansion, encouraging its leadership to pursue assertive foreign policies and "wolf-warrior" diplomacy. China has extended its global influence through establishing Confucius Institutes and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Its funding of infrastructure projects, particularly in economically vulnerable countries, has fostered dependency on Chinese supply chains and markets. Additionally, China's "debt-trap diplomacy" and efforts to forge alliances with authoritarian regimes have positioned it as an alternative to the United States, gaining the attention of authoritarian leaders worldwide. Despite these achievements, China faces significant geopolitical vulnerabilities, including hostile relationships with neighboring great powers, a declining demographic profile, a lack of political reform in its authoritarian system, dependence on global markets, and challenges in securing energy and food supplies. These weaknesses constrain China's ability to project power and outcompete its rivals on the world stage.

**Keywords:** China, Authoritarian Rise, Global Rivalry, Geopolitical Weaknesses, Future Dilemmas.

## Öz

Çin'in küresel süper bir güç olarak yükselişi, 21. yüzyılın en önemli olaylarından biridir. Bu durum sadece komşu ülkelerin güvenliği ve refahını değil, aynı zamanda tüm insanlığın geleceği ve hukuka dayalı mevcut uluslararası dünya düzeninin kaderini de etkileyecektir. Pekin'in hızla ekonomik açıdan büyümesi, onun savunma sanayisini finanse edebilmesine olanak sağlamış ve askeri açıdan yükselişini hızlandırmıştır. Bu husus Çin liderlerinin yayımladığı dış politika ve "kurt savaşçı diplomasisi" düşüncesini izlemesi konusunda cesaretlendirmiştir. Çin ayrıca Konfüçyüs okulları açarak ve Kuşak Yol Girişimini (BRI) hayata geçirerek nüfuzunu dünya çapında genişletti. Pekin'in özellikle yoksul ülkelerdeki altyapı projelerini finanse etmesi, tedarik zincirlerine ve pazarlarına olan etkisi bu ülkelerin Pekin'e bağımlı hale gelmesine fırsat oluşturmaya devam etmiştir. Ayrıca dünya çapındaki borç tuzağı diplomasisi ve ortakları satın alma girişimleri, Çin'i ABD'ye alternatif olarak görmeye başlayan otoriter liderlerin dikkatini çekmiştir. Son çeyrek asırdaki göz alıcı başarılarla rağmen Çin'in, büyük rakip güçler tarafından kuşatılmış olması, demografik bozulma, dünya pazarına bağımlılığı, otoriter siyasi sistemde reform eksikliği, enerji ve gıda güvenliğinin korunmasındaki zorluk gibi jeopolitik zayıflıkları bulunmaktadır. Bu, Çin'in rakipleriyle olan rekabetteki etkinliğinin güçlenmesi ve manevra kabiliyetini sınırlayıcı etkenlerdir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çin, Otoriter Yükseliş, Dünya Hakimiyeti Rekabeti, Jeopolitik Zayıflık, Gelecek İkilemi.

\* Corresponding Author / Sorumlu Yazar: [mkasim@ohu.edu.tr](mailto:mkasim@ohu.edu.tr)

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## **The Authoritarian Rise of China and Its Geopolitical Dilemma**

China emerged as a successful state in World War II and secured its seats in the United Nations Security Council. During the civil war, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took control of China with the help of the Soviet Union and built the world's largest communist state. Until 1950<sup>th</sup> China achieved the world's largest land grab since World War II (Navarro, 2011) by invading Manchuria, South Mongolia, East Turkistan, and Tibet. These territories, rich in natural resources and strategically valuable, bolstered China's rapid development and strengthened its geopolitical position. Additionally, China extended its claims to maritime territories. In 1946, the Chinese navy included 41 older Chinese ships plus 82 transferred from the US and 9 from the UK. For the first time in recorded history, a Chinese official set foot on one of the Spratly Islands (Hayton, 2015). These were the roots of the current territorial disputes between China and other surrounding countries. Today, China's ambition for expansion is getting even bigger in parallel with its increasing national power.

The transformation of China began in earnest in 1971, when it ended decades of isolation by allowing integration into the global community, aided by the United States. Moreover, in 1978, it successfully implemented economic reform and opening door policies, and in 2001, it joined the World Trade Organization. During this period, Western nations, along with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Israel, provided China with substantial support, including economic, technological, and political assistance. In 2010, China, the world's second-largest economy and had more than 2.5 trillion foreign exchange reserves, still received about 2.5 billion dollars in foreign aid, with about 1.2 billion dollars coming only from Japan (Keating, 2010). More interestingly, Japan, which is the world's third-largest economy, together with Germany, Britain, and other developed economies continue feeding up the world's second-largest economy. In addition, they invested billions of dollars in China, opened the markets to Chinese goods, helped China build its economy, and accelerated industrialization through knowledge sharing and technology transfer. Furthermore, they kept a blind eye to Chinese manipulations of foreign trade, stealing technology, and violating international norms and values.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States, and its alliance miscalculations about China gave Beijing an invaluable opportunity to develop its economy, strengthen its military, and build up its industry in a short period. Western idealistic policy and wishful thinking of "change China through trade" failed. China very prudently exploited Western weakness to its benefit. When the world powers awakened, China had already become more prosperous and stronger than ever. Contrary to Western thinking, Chinese leaders have become more authoritarian, more ambitious, and more emboldened with the steadily increasing overall national strength. Today, China is the world's largest industrial power and the world's largest economy by purchasing power parity, and it holds the world's largest standing army equipped with cutting-edge technology. Its influence already extended beyond its region and became one of the global superpowers and the only systematic rival of the United States. In addition, the gap between China and its adversaries narrowed rapidly toward Beijing's interests. If this trend continues without interruption, China has great potential to develop and surpass its rivals in a medium or long period. In 2017, at the beginning of his second term, Chinese President Xi declared that "China has stood up, grown rich, become strong and is moving toward the center stage" (Wingfield-Hayes, 2022).

China seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near term and the displacement of the United States to achieve global pre-eminence in the future (U.S. National Defense Strategy, 2018). China's growing ambitions and expansionist policies have caused great alarm around the world. China's massive military build-up, 750% growth in defense spending over the last

10 years, and unilateral territorial claims have irritated its neighbors and become the main cause of the accelerating arms race in the Hindu-Pacific region. In response to China's authoritarian rise, America declared that "China Poses the Largest Long-Term Threat to the U.S." (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019). The European Union also stated that China is a "systematic rival" to its interests (Small, 2020). Countries in the Hindu-Pacific region responded by accelerating military build-up and strengthening defense ties with America. Some countries joined the American-led security constructions QUAD in the region.

As China grows, its problems do follow suit. China's steady rise increasingly faces external pressure and is forced to struggle with rising internal problems. The CCP's outdated authoritarian policies failed to cope with its economic developments. CCP leaders' oppressive mindset became a barrier to growing free enterprises and the development of innovative thinking. The deteriorating demographic structure was mainly caused by the CCP's unethical policies adversely affecting its overall future developments. Geopolitical problems both at home and abroad dependence on the world market, and deepening reliance on foreign food products and energy resources to meet increasing domestic needs adversely affect Beijing's competition with its rivals.

Confronting such a reality, some questions arise, such as what is the CCP's real nature and intention? Is it trying to dominate the world and build the China-centric world order "Tian Xia" through its "BRI"? What CCP advocated for a shared future for humanity? What does it mean to the world? Can China be strong enough to replace the United States? What would be the response of the United States and other countries in different parts of the world to expansionist China? How will it affect the world and the future of humanity? This study employs qualitative analyses to answer these questions by evaluating China's advantages and disadvantages and potential and hidden weaknesses from both domestic perspectives and international developments.

### **Research Methodology**

The study of China's authoritarian rise and its geopolitical implications necessitates a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach. This research begins with an extensive review of existing literature to examine the historical roots and evolution of China's authoritarian regime, identifying the factors that have driven its rise. It explores how China's political system has struggled to adapt to the demands of economic reform and globalization, ultimately becoming a barrier to sustained growth and integration into the liberal international order.

Primary sources such as academic articles, books, policy papers, and reports from reputable institutions form the foundation of the analysis. These sources provide insights into China's domestic and international strategies, enabling a nuanced understanding of its political and economic trajectory. The study employs qualitative methods, including case studies, comparative analysis, and expert opinions, to identify key trends and patterns

The collected data is synthesized into a coherent narrative that evaluates both the strengths and vulnerabilities of China's rise. Particular attention is given to how Beijing's authoritarian practices impact its global ambitions, its interactions with rival powers, and its long-term economic and political stability. The research also examines the implications of China's policies for global security, international relations, and the future prosperity of the nation itself. By combining theoretical analysis with empirical evidence, the study aims to illuminate the challenges and dilemmas facing China as it navigates its ascent to global prominence.

## **Literature Review**

The rise of China as a global superpower has been a subject of significant scholarly interest, with researchers analyzing its implications for international security, economic stability, and the global balance of power. The literature broadly addresses three key themes: China's authoritarian political system, its strategic economic initiatives, and the geopolitical challenges it faces. Scholars argue that China's political system, rooted in authoritarian control, has played a dual role in its rise. On one hand, centralized governance under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) enabled rapid decision-making and state-driven development, contributing to economic growth and technological advancement (Pei, 2006). On the other hand, this system stifles innovation, restricts individual freedoms, and generates internal dissent, posing long-term challenges to sustainable development (Nathan, 2003). The CCP's hierarchical structure and lack of political reform are identified as critical barriers to fostering a more inclusive and adaptive society (Shambaugh, 2016).

China's economic growth has been underpinned by its strategic initiatives, such as the BRI and its integration into the World Trade Organization (WTO). These strategies are seen as efforts to expand China's influence, particularly in developing regions, by providing infrastructure investments and establishing economic dependencies (Jones & Zeng, 2019). However, critics highlight the risks associated with "debt-trap diplomacy," where recipient countries become economically beholden to Beijing, raising concerns about sovereignty and exploitation (Brautigam, 2020).

China's geopolitical landscape presents significant challenges to its aspirations of global dominance. The country's territorial disputes in the South China Sea, strained relations with neighboring powers like India and Japan, and growing tensions with the United States exemplify the obstacles to its rise (Goldstein, 2005). Scholars also emphasize demographic decline, energy dependency, and the vulnerability of China's coastal industrial hubs as key weaknesses that could undermine its long-term ambitions (Friedberg, 2011). These challenges are compounded by international resistance to China's authoritarian practices, as countries increasingly align to counter Beijing's influence (Allison, 2017).

The literature reveals a complex interplay of strengths and vulnerabilities in China's rise. While its centralized governance and economic strategies have accelerated its growth, internal inefficiencies and external pressures limit its capacity to achieve unchallenged global hegemony.

### **Authoritarian Political System as a Stalemate**

China's most significant challenge does not stem from external threats posed by powers such as the United States, Russia, or India, nor from internal dissidents or ethnic minorities such as Uyghurs and Tibetans. Instead, it lies within its authoritarian political system. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), despite overseeing decades of rapid economic development, has failed to modernize its governance structure to align with global democratic norms and the needs of its society (Kasim, 2029). Current rents and privileges also deter the elite from implementing serious political reforms, leading to a trap that prevents the completion of the transition process and continues to harm economic efficiency (Székely-Doby, 2018). Without successful political reform it's difficult to sustain economic growth and lack of political reform is considered an obstacle to the future success of economic reforms (Jinglian, et al. 2016)).

For over two thousand years, China was ruled by authoritarian rulers in which the King, Emperor, or President had supreme authority. In this hierarchical political system, the relationship is between the ruler and the ruled. Contrary to the modern democratic world, people in China never enjoyed freedom or equal treatment with their rulers. In Chinese

tradition, it is deeply rooted that people are considered subjects and have the mission to obey and serve their masters. In Confucius's tradition, the social relationship is unequal "Fathers were above sons, husbands above wives, older siblings above younger ones, and rulers above their subjects" (M. Elshaikh, 2020). CCP rulers have been accepting and advocating the same mentality and hierarchical tradition for their benefit to create obedient citizens as ancient Chinese Kingdoms did. The CCP believed itself to be superior and people who were considered inferior subjects had the responsibility to obey and respect them.

Despite its enormous economic achievements, technological progress, and increasing military power, the CCP did not want or failed to achieve social progress in terms of liberty, life, and rule of law. The CCP implemented economic reforms but failed to initiate political reforms. China's authoritarian regime has become increasingly repressive in recent years. The ruling CCP maintains tight control over all aspects of life and governance, including the state bureaucracy, the media, online speech, religious practice, universities, businesses, and civil society, and China is considered not free country in overall scores (Freedom House, 2024). China remains a virgin in terms of understanding and applying modern terms of human rights, the rule of law, and democracy. While there is private ownership in China, this does not mean that private ownership is inviolable, as in a democratic world. According to China's Constitution:

"Article 6 "The basis of the socialist economic system of the People's Republic of China is socialist public ownership of the means of production, namely, ownership by the whole people and collective ownership by the working people", and Article 13 states that "The State may, in the public interest and accordance with the law, expropriate or requisition private property for its use and shall make compensation for the private property expropriated or requisitioned" (The Constitution of the People's Republic of China, 2023).

In China, the state controls everything, and the CCP is the sole authority in the state. CCP members comprise less than 10% of the Chinese population. But they are controlling the government, economics, auditions, army, media, and everything that comes to mind in China. As Lord Acton said, "Same moral standards should be applied to all men, political and religious leaders included, absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Acton, 1887). This famous phrase can also apply to modern China. The CCP is undoubtedly the world's most powerful political entity and at the same time, one of the most corrupt. It is widely believed that abusive practices and terrible human rights violations are common in China, and the CCP even committed genocide against its citizens. Today, non-Han nationalities such as Uyghurs, Tibetans, Mongols, Kazakhs, etc., and different religious believers such as Falun-Gung practitioners, Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists are all subjected to oppression. A long-delayed human rights report under pressure from China finally published on August 31, 2022, by the UN says:

"The extent of arbitrary and discriminatory detention of members of Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim groups, according to law and policy, in context of restrictions and deprivation more generally of fundamental rights enjoyed individually and collectively, may constitute international crimes, in particular, crimes against humanity" (United Nations Human Rights Office, 2022).

China violated its commitments in Hong Kong by brutally suppressing its dissidents. Even the Han population has been suffering from maltreatment by the CCP, and cultural revolutions and ongoing oppressive COVID restrictions are prime examples of this. This shows that no one in China is safe from the evil hand of the authoritarian regime. China's authoritarian practice is not limited to China alone. It continuously hijacks overseas Chinese dissidents and human

rights supporters in other countries. China also successfully exported its abusive, authoritarian practices across the globe. In 2016, Amnesty International found:

“Chinese company Huayou Cobalt was using 40,000 enslaved children—some as young as seven years old—to mine for critical minerals in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.... These are just a few examples of China’s horrid practices and subversive influence” (Rubio, 2022).

China’s greatest misfortune is an authoritarian political system that is against modern democratic values. In an authoritarian system, it is difficult to calculate or know people’s thinking and their loyalty to the party or the state. Because people are forced to live under pressure and fear. They are afraid to express their thoughts and real understandings about the developments of any issues or events. Totalitarian regimes such as the CCP can fulfill their dream and mobilize people only through incursion and forces. In 2020, China spent 1.29 trillion yuan on its defense and 1.39 trillion yuan on domestic security (Nikkei, 2022). China’s domestic security spending to control its massive population far exceeds military spending to safeguard itself from external forces. This is simply because authoritarian regimes are generally forced to act with ambiguity and fear of their people; moreover, the fear sometimes exceeds the fear of a foreign enemy.

The Chinese authoritarian political system not only restrains its people from enjoying the freedom of life but has also been a barrier to personal development, exploring innovative potential, and freely using their talent and capability to achieve success and fulfill the personal dreams of over a billion citizens. The CCP in its terms also creates a hardship for its citizens in contact with the wider world, especially in the modern democratic world, by restricting freedom of movement and banning citizens from freely using various types of free social media.

The most dangerous action taken by the CCP, which concerns the most, has been making over 1.4 billion Chinese the enemy of the whole world for its selfish dream of global domination. The CCP’s advocations of expansionist ‘wolf warrior diplomacy’ without abiding by international norms and rules have created fear among its neighbors and mistrust in the wider world.

Under Xi Jinping’s “*rich nation and strong army*”- 富国与强军” slogans, China exposed its global ambitions and accelerated its military buildup. Despite the countries struggling with COVID-19 and COVID-related economic hardship, Beijing increased its military budget by about 7.1 % more than the previous year in 2022 alone (Ministry of Finance, 2022). China’s militarization of the South China Sea and increasing incursions into other countries’ territories greatly damaged its reputation and relations with most of its neighboring states. This set alarmed and became one of the biggest reasons for stirring the arms race in the Asia-Pacific region.

China has become an epicenter of the totalitarian worldview, which is against liberal democratic values. Beijing has built close relations with North Korea, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, and other authoritarian regimes in the Islamic world, Africa, and Latin America. However, the CCP has almost no real alliance that is built based on trust and long-term national interest. Relations between China depend on various reasons. In addition, hatred against the West and democratic values, Chinese money, and the pursuit of the personal interest of authoritarian rulers are common and play crucial roles in these relationships. Since such relations fail to reflect the will of the people, they are vulnerable to regime changes or political transitions. Because of the authoritarian nature of the CCP, a political priority of alliance-making is used

to care much about building bilateral relations with the ruling class and undermining people's well-being and common interests.

Russia is one of the classic examples of this. Moscow is historically believed to be one of the greatest enemies and geopolitical natural rivals of China. Even so, they have chosen to maintain close relations. Both mistrust one another and consider each other a great threat to their national security. Close cooperation is not based on long-term national interest or common values; rather, it depends on similar concerns and intentions of anti-west and anti-democratic mindset, envy against America, and determination to overthrow the existing rule-based world order.

On the contrary, the American approach and diplomatic tradition are different from those of the CCP. Washington, most of the time, pursues a comprehensive long-term global strategy that emphasizes protecting American interests worldwide and helps advance its democratic values. It involves strengthening economic, trade, and security relations as well as targeting nations' leaders to pursue winning the hearts and minds of their people via advocating democracy, human rights, freedom, and the common welfare of the people. Successful democratic transitions and prosperity in post-Second World War II Japan, Germany, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, etc. are clear success examples of the American model. With the patience and enormous help of the United States, these countries were not only able to achieve economic prosperity and democracy, but most importantly, they emerged as pioneers in advocating democracy, protecting the current liberal democratic world order, and forming strong and reliable alliances with America.

China is becoming more authoritarian and even more aggressive under Xi Jinping's rule. After winning over its rivals and successfully breaking two-term limits in the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in October 2022, Xi Jinping became a strong man in China after Mao. This was one of the turning points, and since then, China has been entering a new stage of the darkest era. Xi openly declared in his speech that China had already become strong and stood up (Xi, 2022). That means there is no need for former leader Deng Xiaoping's strategy of "hide its capacity and bide its time" anymore. He also advocated too much about building a stronger military, unification, rejuvenation, and struggle. Xi replaced its cabinet with yes-men and hawkish guys who are most loyal to him and share the same ideology.

The rise of the cult of personality and wolf-worrier diplomacy is a very possible sign that the world will have to deal with an even more aggressive China in the future. This might have further accelerated the struggle between China and its neighbors. Competition with America will upgrade rather than downgrade, which is the opposite of many wishful politicians and academic thinking. The fundamental issue is not only Xi's success but also the rising nationalism, expansionist tendencies, and hawkish worldview in China. This has a long-lasting impact not only on economic prosperity and security for China but also has a very strong relevance to the wider world.

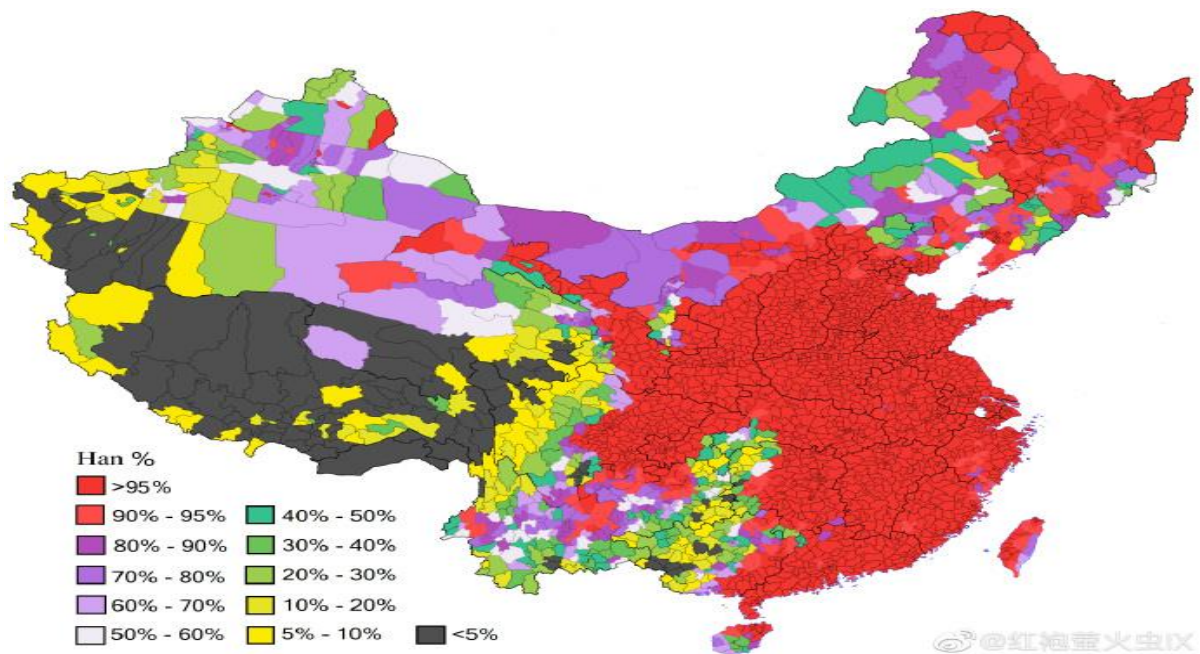
China might become a further unhappy place, and people possibly face more authoritarianism, more restriction of freedom, and curbing free enterprises at the highest level. The world might even be approaching a clash with expansionist China. Chinese expansionist policies might not make China stronger, but they accelerate the isolation of the world market and may cause economic slowdown and even stagnation. Authoritarian and aggressive China will likely be subjected to countering by coalitions. China's actions will strengthen the United States' position in the Hindu-Pacific, and more and more countries that are bordering China or feel threatened by China can easily cooperate with America and become part of anti-China coalitions. If this happens, it will be more likely to endanger the economic prosperity, sustainable development, and security of China, contrary to the CCP leaders' dream of becoming the central power of world politics.

## Unfavorable Geopolitical Environments

China is a geographically large and very diverse country. It is not as homogenous as many believe. Today, more than two-thirds of China's territory was integrated into its mainland only after World War II. They are included in the Northeast is Manchuria, in the North is South Mongolia, in the Northwest is the Uyghur region, Southwest is Tibet, and so on. These newly integrated regions are ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and historically different from the mainland Han populations. And all of them are located on the border with the outside world. These regions in which minorities live cover 64.3% of the landmass, which is approximately 90% of the Chinese border lines (Clarke, 2016; Kasim, 2021). Since the occupation, China has implemented systematic assimilation policies and supported Han migration into the borderlands. Today, the Han have become the dominant ethnic group in Manchuria and South Mongolia, but in the Uyghur region and Tibet, local populations are still dominant. Chinese forced assimilation and genocidal policies toward different ethnic groups, especially Uyghurs, have been a major concern in the modern world.

**Figure 1**

*Han Dominance in China*



**Source:** Vividmaps, 2021.

According to 2020 statistics, China's population density was 150 people per sq. km, and it seems in a better position compared to some other countries such as Bangladesh 1265 people per sq. km) and India 464 people per sq. km (World Bank, 2020). China possesses large territories and the world's largest population, but there are huge disparities and unequal distributions among them. China's large majority of the population is in the coastal regions, especially between two river basins in the East, in which the area is mostly Han dominant. Over 90% of China's population lives in about 40% of the landmass. The population density of these regions is over 400 people per sq. km, and even in some places like Macao in 2021, the population density exceeded 20800 people per sq. km (Zhongguo Xinwen Wang, 2021). But most of the territory in the North and West are sparsely populated, and these buffer zones are where most of the non-Han ethnicity used to live. The Han population, densely settled in Chinese coastal regions, has benefited enormously from Chinese economic reform, opening to the world market, and rapid economic developments in the past several decades. They get the



first advantage of investment, trade, and government support for economic development. However, the inner regions and most borderlands did not have enough government support for economic development as their peers in the east. The disparity in economic prosperity between different regions and communities has been a major social problem that the CCP faces today. In addition, ethnic discrimination and forced assimilation policies have been some of the biggest causes of mistrust and ethnic tensions in China. These ethnic issues, which are mainly caused by unequal treatment and inhumane policies, also become major political and security challenges for Chinese governments.

The CCP's inability to deal with internal problems and failure to cope with the modern world is increasingly becoming a geopolitical flaw, and it might have a consequential effect on China's foreign policy and power projection around the world. In the globalized modern world, there is no single issue considered solely internal issues of any country. The world community also keeps a close eye on China's domestic policies, including the treatment of various ethnic and religious communities. China's worst treatment of its people has set alarms in many parts of the world. This phenomenon also negatively affects China's international image. The world powers increasingly question the true nature of the CCP and its real intention. Because every development in China has directly and indirectly affected the interests of the wider world community.

While the world is developing very fast, technology brings people closer, communications between countries have increased even before, and the national border has become more irreverent, at least in some parts of the world. However, the reality is that geopolitics still matters today. China's rise may not be as good news for everybody to hear, especially the one that is neighboring China and has security concerns of its own. History taught that when a country rises, it naturally begins to expand its influence one or another way. This means that one's gains are at the same time means another loss. There is no such thing in the real world as "win, win" or "shared future destiny of mankind" except in theory or propaganda. China for a long time concealed its true intention and succeeded in manipulating the world by stating that China's rise only brings peace and prosperity, and this is good for all humanity. Despite the warnings of some wise intellectuals like Peter Navarro, who penned "Death by China: Confronting the Dragon - A Global Call to Action" (Navarro, 2011), and Michael Pillsbury, with his intellectual work "The Hundred-year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the global superpower" (Pillsbury, 2015), who has a deep understanding of China's politics, true nature, and evil intentions of the communist party, world leaders and greedy elites ignored these warnings. Instead of taking immediate and decisive actions, they have chosen to live in oblivion as if they were on honeymoon with communist China. Today, some of them wake up and come to the real world. Then, they began to see a different China, which is economically prosperous, militarily strong, technologically more advanced, politically aggressive, and has a global ambition that is different from what they thought before.

At the end of the Cold War, elites in the democratic world thought that the world was moving toward democratization, and this was an irreversible trend. They thought that when China became rich and prosperous, it would move toward democratization (Kasim, 2021). They invested in and helped Beijing with its overall development. The democratic world is blinded to China's atrocities, authoritarianism, and repression of its people. But when China became more assertive and aggressive in its foreign policy and more authoritarian in its domestic policy, it also transformed economic wealth into military might. Not only China's neighbors but also America began to feel threatened by its presence in the Asia-Pacific region due to China's increasing influence in this region. China's aggressive foreign policies toward neighboring countries by unilaterally claiming territorial sovereignty in East and Southeast Asia and territorial disputes with India and other neighboring countries are also the main

concern (Kasim, 2021). These developments were the opposite of Western democracies' wishful thinking that led to the rise of authoritarianism and the decline of democracy (Law, 2021).

Despite China's enormous potential and great ambition, Beijing has some geopolitical limitations to fulfill its global outreach. This is because China is surrounded by big and strong countries like Russia in the North, India in the Southwest, and Japan in the East, which are not yet ready to accept Beijing's dominance. Japan and India were strongly determined to protect their interests against Chinese aggression. They are working hard to strengthen their defenses and build broader cooperation against the worst possible scenario in the region. Both countries supported the American-led Indo-Pacific Strategy and actively joined QUAD cooperation. All these countries have a similar vital national interest to America in protecting free and open sea lines and safeguarding a rule-based international system. Besides this, they all have concerns about the rising China. Because China is the only country in the world that harbors the intention and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective, the capacity to reshape the international order in favor of one that tilts the global playing field to its benefit (The White House, 2022). Chinese dominance not only poses a security threat to this region but also poses systematic challenges, including political, ideological, technological, etc., to all of them. How does dealing with a strong and anti-democratic China directly affect the future security and prosperity of all these countries? That is why balancing against China through close cooperation and alliance-making is not a choice but a necessity for them to survive.

Japan had already begun to abandon its pacifist national strategy and started to invest more in defense via upgrading and buying cutting-edge modern defense equipment, improving the defense industry, and educating personnel. India, Taiwan, and other countries in the Indo-Pacific began to follow in the Japanese footsteps to strengthen their defensive capabilities. While some countries in these regions are economically more dependent on China, they have begun to show a willingness to cooperate with America in the security arena. Indonesia, which has historically close ties with China, signed a deal to purchase France's Rafale fighter jets while also winning U.S. approval for a potential purchase of approximately 14 billion dollars worth of F-15s, as the Southeast Asian country moves to modernize its military considering rising tensions in the South China Sea (Pene-Lassus & Tani, 2022).

If China wants to fulfill its ambitions to become a world-only superpower by overcoming harsh geopolitical weakness, it will not only face American challenges but should better prepare for a possible broader coalition of like-minded and strong countries worldwide or at least in its region. America is determined to build the strongest and broadest possible coalition of nations that seek to cooperate while competing with those powers that offer a darker vision and thwart their efforts to threaten our interests (The White House, 2022). America has geopolitical advantages over China; this is because America has no direct borders of any of these countries and any struggle occurring in these regions does not directly affect its mainland. Besides this, America has no ambition to occupy the territory of other countries that China has, which will give it better positions to ally with other countries. American strategy and advocacy of safeguarding democracy, rule-based international order, and free and open Indo-Pacific cope with the national interests of most of the countries, and it will make a clear comparison of the foreign policy of China, which is so focused on expansionism and bullying of small and weaker states.

Recently, anti-CCP sentiment has been on the rise worldwide. Especially since it is increasingly receiving bipartisan support in America. Under the leadership of newly elected House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, to tackle the emerging Chinese threat, a new committee named "House Select

Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the U.S. and the Chinese Communist Party” was created in the U.S. Congress with majority bipartisan support (Willkie, 2023). These developments will have a lasting impact on geopolitical competition, including the possible armed struggle between China and America. China has natural geographical barriers and buffer zones such as the Himalayas, Pamirs, Altay Mountains, Gobi Desert, and so on in its land borders, which help protect against external attacks. However, struggling with major sea powers may not bring good luck to China. Its eastern plain and coastal regions, in which most of the Chinese population is inhabited, major industrial bases are located, major ports, cities, and the majority of commercial and economic activities occurring are open to the attack of external air powers and strong navies like what America and its alliances have. Any military clash with the United States over Taiwan will have a destructive effect on China’s overall development and bring devastating damage to the Chinese economy. Heavy loss and failure to occupy Taiwan might destabilize the CCP’s rule (F. Cancian, Cancian, & Heginbotham, 2023). In comparison, the U.S. very possibly suffers less because of its geopolitical advantages over China.

China has some like-minded neighbors, such as North Korea, Russia, and Pakistan, which have been supporting Chinese policies in various arenas. However, most of these countries are economically poor, technologically backward, politically corrupt, and lacking modernization. These will not have the capacity to change the status quo of future developments of great power competition in modern times. Russia is the strongest among these neighbors, but Moscow has an agenda to become the regional hegemon. While Moscow has close cooperation with China to counter Western dominance, it is the natural geopolitical rival of China, especially in the Far East and Central Asia. Despite close cooperation between them, any Chinese attempt to power projection or become a hegemon in its backyard Russians will not be ready to tolerate and possibly face a strong Russian challenge.

### Demographic Deteriorations

China had been believed to be the world’s most populous country but one of the poorest countries in the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since opening its economy to the world market, China has benefited enormously from the abundance of its workforce and low labor costs. Decades-long rapid economic growth mainly comes from Chinese integration into the global market, benefiting second-comer advantages via absorbing, implementing, and expanding existing technologies that were developed mostly in advanced countries without requiring Beijing to spend much more for innovation and research. In addition, the mobilization of its massive population into the workforce was one of the driving forces for the expansion of production and development of the world’s industrial base. Moreover, abundant, and cheap labor costs positively affected the competitiveness of Chinese products and were the main attractive force for foreign capital and investment. Without abundant and cheap labor, it would be too difficult to mention today’s Chinese success and tremendous economic growth.

**Table 1**

*Age Dependency Ratio, Old (% of Working-Age Population) - China, World*

Year	1980	2001	2010	2022
China	7	10	12	20
World	10	11	12	15

**Source:** data.worldbank, 2022.

Recent demographic developments in China show that maintaining this demographic advantage might not be possible in the future. In the past, China benefited from the demographic advantage, which has increasingly diminished due to increasing labor costs and, most importantly, a declining birthrate and rapidly aging populations. China is on the way to suffering an irreversible demographic disaster in the future. This was mainly because governments have made wrong policies without considering social and ethical consequences and have focused too much on short-term material gains in the past decades.

Normally, every state in its initial stage of moving toward industrialization and modernization has experienced economic development, increased welfare, and a gradual trend of demographic decline. This is because countries initially encourage citizens to focus more on pursuing more education, getting involved in the job market, and making a career. With the increasing years of education and improving quality of life, the birth rate among people naturally shows a gradual decline. Most of the developed Western countries and other modernized states in Asia experienced a steady decline in birth rates during their industrialization process. In contrast to countries in West Europe, East Asia, and other parts of the world in which the decline in birth rates was caused by natural social developmental phenomena and choices of families, China's decline in birth rates not only came from natural development but was also mainly related to unethical government family planning policies against the parents' will. CCP's implementations of harsh family planning and one-child policies brought disaster not only for healthy demographic growth but also for ethical, racial, and social consequences for the country. Decades of family planning policies have turned China into one of the most gender-imbalanced countries. The balance between male and female was destroyed because in Chinese tradition, males are considered to continue their family heritage and are preferred over females. Because very limited children were allowed, millions of children, especially females, were killed before they were borne via abortions. Today, in China, there is a larger male population than females. In 2021, the female population accounted for nearly 48.7 % of the total population (World Bank, 2022). This means that nearly 40 million more men are facing difficulty in finding a female spouse in modern China, and this is becoming one of the main social challenges that are difficult to deal with. Moreover, it hurts fertility as well as the sustainability of future healthy demographic growth.

The worst scenario in the coming years is not merely declining population growth but a steady shrinking of the Chinese population. At the same time, it will be one of the worst news for China's future growth since it must face the harsh reality of losing one of its key drivers and abundant and cheap labor force advantages. The ratio of older people (ages 65 and above) to the overall population of China increased from 4% (42.3 million) in 1978 to over 12% (175.3 million) in 2021, and the average age also increased from 20 to 39 in the same period (World Bank, 2022). This trend shows the difference between China and developed countries, and China's population is likely to become older before the country becomes rich. This phenomenon will worsen in the coming years. Because most younger generations aged below 45 were born after 1979, at which time China kicked off implementing unholy family planning and One Child policies. This means that more and more people will join the retired group at an accelerated pace. But there is less and less population coming into the working age. In 2021 alone, the number of people over 65 years old increased by more than 9.92 million, and the number of people aged between 0 and 15 decreased by more than 5.28 million (Chinese National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Therefore, with the increasing average age and ratio of older people, a lesser number of people are forced to shoulder a greater burden in society, such as paying taxes and feeding a larger population. This will not only harm demographic growth and social welfare but also the overall economic growth of the country. An increasing number

of labor-intensive companies, both domestic and foreign, will move out to advantageous countries like India, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

### **Lack of Food and Energy Securities**

Ensuring a safe, sustainable food and energy supply is one of the top priorities of any country. Food and energy security is also considered to be part of national security. This has become more relevant, especially when a country is in a crisis, has a geopolitical rivalry, and is involved in a war with other countries. In such a critical time, a country that has robust food and energy security would have gained enormous strategic advantages over its opponents, who are dependent on the foreign market and have difficulty in self-sufficiency.

There is a difference among countries in fulfilling the demand for their food and energy needs due to the dissimilar policies, geographic and geopolitical environments, and various dependency levels of global developments. As China's economy and industrial output have grown dramatically in the last several decades, the demand for freshwater, food, and energy has also increased. Nowadays, China is not only the most populous country in the world but also the world's biggest industrial power and largest energy consumer. China needs more food to feed its mass population and energy to meet the steadily increasing demand of a huge and fast-growing economy. Insufficiency in fulfilling the increasing demand for food and energy domestically without relying on foreign markets due to incapability to produce enough food and lack of energy reserves on its own is becoming one of the great strategic challenges for China today and might continue more severely in the coming future.

While in theory greater self-sufficiency in grains remains a policy priority for the government, China is becoming more dependent on foreign markets to fulfill its demand for food. China imported a record-high 164.5 million tons of grain in 2021, up 18.1 % from a year earlier, and the country's food self-sufficiency rate has fallen to 76.8 % in 2020, declining from 101.8 percent in 2000, and the ratio is expected to drop to 65 percent by 2035 (Wang, 2022). This is mainly because of the loss of arable fertile land due to massive urbanization, industrialization, desertification, and soil pollution. According to World Bank statistics, there were more than 125.5 million hectares of arable land in China in 1991, and this number decreased to 119.4 million hectares in 2020 (World Bank, 2021). During the same period, the Chinese population increased from 1.135 billion in 1991 to over 1.41 billion in 2021 (Chinese National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Feeding a massive population is always considered not only food security of China but also part of national security. As Yu said,

“No country in modern history has witnessed more unnatural deaths than the People's Republic of China. China is unique in that deaths are not only caused by outright brutality but also simply by the Chinese Communist Party's stupefying incompetence and stupidity... Mao's Great Leap Forward caused the deaths of up to 45 million people, almost the total death toll from World War II” (Yu, 2023).

In modern times, more people died by starvation compared with the Sino-Japanese War and Civil War combined<sup>ii</sup>. A populous country that has difficulty achieving self-sufficiency in food is also likely to be open to influence by shocks such as natural disasters, wars, regional or global political and economic crises, and so on. Apart from food security, China has a big problem in safeguarding its energy security. While China is considered one of the most energy-rich countries and among the largest energy producers by volume, it faces difficulty in fulfilling its increasing energy demands.

Since its opening up in 1978, China has experienced a decades-long dramatic rise and economic growth. This triggered a rapid increase in energy needs, and after the mid-1990s, China turned from a net energy exporter to an energy importer. Since then, China's dependence on foreign countries for energy imports has steadily increased. China is now the world's largest energy consumer and largest emitter of carbon dioxide. This is mostly because of China's huge industrial sector, which consumes 66% of the country's energy and nearly 60% of its energy needs come from coal (CSIS, 2022).

China wanted to diversify its energy supplies by replacing other energy sources such as natural gas, oil, nuclear, and renewables. However, coal is still the dominant energy source in China, down from 70% in 2001 to 56 % in 2020. Then comes petroleum and other liquids, which comprise 19%, while there has been diversification to clean energy. Natural gas only comprises 9%, hydroelectric sources (8%), nuclear power (2%), and non-hydro renewables account for about 7% in 2021 (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2022). China's energy production has increasingly failed to meet its increasing energy consumption. China should import more from outside the world to fulfill its energy demand. Statistics from the General Administration of Customs show that "in 2021, China imported 323.216 million tons of coal, an increase of 6.6% compared with the same period in 2020, and 121.356 million tons of natural gas, an increase of 19.9% compared with the same period in 2020. In 2022, the total allowable import volume of crude oil for non-state trading will be 243 million tons, which is the same as that in 2021" (Xinhuanet,2022).

It is assumed that if the Chinese economy continuously grows at a slower pace in the future, its energy demand will also follow suit. China's limited energy resources are considered, and China's dependency on energy imports is very likely to continue to increase without an energy revolution in the future. Dependency on energy is relevant to national security. If a country is heavily dependent on foreign markets for its energy use, it is vulnerable to external shocks. In addition, these energy-dependent countries easily affect regional and global crises, especially when energy becomes a weapon to punish its opponents. The world witnessed its example with the ongoing war in Ukraine, in which energy-dependent Europe stressed safeguarding energy needs against Russian aggression.

### **Dependence on the World Market and Trading Routes**

China has experienced rapid economic growth and development in the past several decades. This is mostly because during this period Beijing received a massive inflow of Western capital, investment, and technology. China has a favorable external environment and developed countries have easy access to their market for Chinese goods. In addition, the Chinese export-derived economy benefited enormously from international favorable environments. Without these, it may not be possible to talk about the dramatic rise of China.

The American idealistic approach to China and ignoring the CCP's true intention played a crucial role in Beijing's gaining opportunities to achieve a dramatic rise. Before Washington thought that China's rapid economic development and accumulation of wealth were beneficial for U.S. interests. They assumed that economic prosperity and trade liberalization also led Beijing to democratization (Kasim, 2019). Beijing exploited the weakness of democracy and the money-hungering business class to achieve its strategic goal of providing false information to transform into a more liberal system when it became rich. Matt Pottinger likened it "We kept feeding the shark and the shark got bigger and bigger. And now we're dealing with a formidable, great white" (Pottinger, 2023). But now they increasingly believe that China, in its development, fooled the world by exploiting its weakness and masking its true intention of world domination:

“Since China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001 and falsely promised to end its mercantilist and protectionist practices, America’s apparel, textile, and wood furniture industries have shrunk to half their size—with textile jobs alone beaten down by 70%. Other critical industries such as chemicals, paper, steel, and tires are under similar siege, while employment in our high-tech computer and electronics manufacturing industries has plummeted by more than 40%. China’s newly modernized Navy and Air Force features everything from virtually undetectable nuclear submarines and the latest Russian-designed fighter jets to ballistic missiles that can precisely target America’s aircraft carriers on the high seas (Navarro, 2011; Kasim, 2019).

When China became prosperous, it transformed its economic power into military might, its foreign policy became more assertive, and its ambition of global dominance became even bolder. However, Chinese leaders must notice its strategic weakness of heavily depending on the world market. China is the world’s largest exporter, and its share in global exports is about 14.7% of America’s share of 8.1% in 2020 (United Nations, 2022). The exports of goods and services to GDP ratio was 20% for China and only 10.9 % for America in 2021 (World Bank, 2022). China exports more of its production rather than consuming domestically compared to its peer competitor, America. China’s dependence on the world market is nearly two times higher than that of the world’s largest economy, America. China’s prosperity is more related to reaching the world market, and Beijing benefited enormously from free and open trading routes and the current international trading system. And its dependence on the world market is much greater than that of America. In addition, China’s main export markets, sources of foreign direct investments, and key technology providers have been America and its key alliances such as NATO and QUAD members.

Some countries including America increasingly realized the danger of dependency on China’s market. During COVID-19, Beijing carried out stringent lockdown measures and a zero-COVID strategy, which have significantly impacted global supply chains, raising concerns among other countries about their dependency on Beijing for essential goods. The COVID-19 outbreak exposed several vulnerabilities in the supply chain of global manufacturers, who realized the extent of their dependence on China. Moreover, several countries realized that they relied on China for key medicines and medical supplies, which cost them heavily during the pandemic (Eos Intelligence, 2021). As countries experienced shortages and delays in critical supplies, there was a growing realization of how vulnerable global economies had become due to reliance on Chinese manufacturing. According to a report by the McKinsey Global Institute, "Lockdowns, shelter-in-place orders, and travel restrictions were disrupting activity in every part of the economy. As they struggled to keep their businesses running, companies were planning significant strategic changes to the configuration and operation of their supply chains" (Alicke, Barriball, and Trautwein, 2021). This shift reflects a broader geopolitical concern where nations are increasingly wary of being too dependent on China, which could leverage its position in times of crisis.

The competition between China and America is intensifying. America sees itself as a guarantor of safeguarding the rule-based current world system and China is increasingly considered as a threat. Countering China's threat, appropriate countermeasures were developed and practiced (Sadler, 2024). In this competition for world dominance, America has unmatched geopolitical advantages over China. The CCP gained its legitimacy in China mostly from economic development, and without accessing foreign investment, technology, and markets, the Chinese economy will face great difficulty in steady growth if not crumble. China’s exports to the U.S. and other high-income countries play a central role in its economy. Together, these advanced countries hold the largest share of global trade compared with China (Allison, 2022). America

has great potential to lead the democratic world and build anti-China coalitions. If Washington can act wisely, it will win the competition against China without suffering great damage.

Contrary to America, China depends on importing a significant number of its energy needs from the international market because of its insufficient energy reserves. At present, China is the world's largest importer of energy and food. Despite heavily investing in renewable energies, much of its energy needs come from the world market, and some of the sources do not come from politically stable regions. For example, over 67% of China's oil consumption comes from the foreign market, and it is estimated that by 2040<sup>th</sup> China's more than 80% of China's oil will need to be imported. More than 80% of imports must travel through narrow straits and contested waterways before reaching China (CSIS China Power Project, 2022). These critical sealines and trading routes are controlled by the United States with its regional alliance.

Dependency on the foreign market for energy, food, and other critical products restricts political options and limits the maneuvering ability of any country. Therefore, safeguarding its energy flows is crucial to the sustainable development and prosperity of China. While China kicked off BRI and invested massively in building China-centric infrastructure development and creating alternative trade routes, there is doubt that China will overcome this geopolitical dilemma.

America was not only the leader of the post-World War II international system, a pioneer of innovations, and a main source of new thinking and knowledge. Moreover, it controls the sealines and critical trading routes that China depends on. As a current leading country in the world, Washington is controlling the world's main currency in trade, a source of critical and emerging new technologies, and the world's largest consuming market together with its democratic and strong alliance. Any country that wants to prosper needs America and its alliance more than America does. China is not an exception to that. Even so, Beijing became the biggest trading partner with most countries in the world compared to Washington. But this is not enough in a comprehensive and systematic rivalry. China has a way to go and still needs to do more to overcome its rivals. China is too big to ignore and it is not powerful enough to change the status quo on its own without America and its alliance making grave strategic mistakes in the future.

### **Conclusion**

With its landmass, population, economic potential, culture, and history, mainland China is pregnant to becoming a great power. Whoever rules China, no matter which race, religion, or ideology he or she belongs to, will possess a land with great potential that no nations are comparable to except very few countries like India bestowed on the Earth. China's becoming the first world power to surpass the United States of America in GDP size is not considered a miracle or outperforming success. On the contrary, it is a natural phenomenon in a country with over four times more population than America. Normally, being the second biggest world economy might not be considered a source of pride for a giant like China. This is not a normal response for any capable government. Because any assumption that China is catching up with America and becoming equal soon does not cover up the reality that China will not become equal to America in every criterion, but only by the overall size of its economy. In terms of quality, China still lags far behind, and Americans are richer and more productive than their Chinese peers.

The success of Chinese economic growth and developments in the past several decades is eye-catching. This is not because of miracles, or because the Chinese model is the best. But the outcome of abandoning the unrealistic economic policies of the Chinese government after the



death of Mao Ze Dong and implementing economic reform, opening its market, allowing private enterprise, inflowing foreign investment, and technology as well as increasingly engaging with outside the world. China's fast economic growth not coming from innovation-driven but using second-coming advantages via absorbing existing technology and knowledge, which were created mostly in the developed world.

Compared to Taiwan, South Korea, and other successful developed economies in Asia, China still has a long way to go. If Chinese rulers were able to give more freedom and opportunities to their people and provide them an idle platform to explore their talent and a fair environment to compete, China would possibly be in a better position on the world stage today. However, China's authoritarian political system and its characteristics of curbing individual freedom, free thinking, and free enterprises are the main obstacles to Chinese success in every field from science to humanitarian development. Xi Jinping's grasp on power and securing the third term is a sign of a dark shadow not only for the Chinese but also for the development and security of the world. The CCP's ambition to become the central state and dominant power of the world by enforcing its will and subjugating other states in every corner of the world will have a destabilizing effect on regional security.

From historical experience and a strategic viewpoint, the geopolitical environment plays a crucial role in the fate of states. Any country that wants to dominate the world should have considered both domestic developments and international environments to a great extent, and China is no exception. Capability, intention, and viable grand strategy are inseparable parts of achieving a country's ambition. Since the world is too big to be dominated by a single country, ambitious countries must have a clear understanding of their advantages and weaknesses as well as their adversaries. Any miscalculations can have severe consequences. As the world's largest populous country and one of the strongest powers, China has great potential to become a world hegemon, but this does not mean Beijing has no limitations or weaknesses.

Despite its enormous potential, China has a great geopolitical dilemma. The Chinese rise itself is a natural threat to its neighbors and the hegemony of the United States. A more ambitious, aggressive, authoritarian, militaristic, technologically sophisticated, and expansionist state is considered even more dangerous. It will increase the risk of China colliding with the outside world. China is surrounded by great and powerful countries such as Japan, India, and Russia, which do not want to accept others' will and are determined to protect their sovereignty and national interests. There is awareness and concern, especially in Japan and India, about preparing for the worst scenario by strengthening national defense and building greater coalitions to safeguard peace and security in its regions.

China's dilemma in fulfilling its national rejuvenation and global ambitions is not only to face stronger resistance from outside the world but also to face harsh internal realities such as fundamental geopolitical weaknesses, demographic deterioration, and difficulty in safeguarding energy and food security. China depends on foreign energy supply, most of which comes from seelines controlled by America and its allied forces. Any conflict in the region will damage not only the energy and food security of China but also severely affect trading with the wider world market, and without these, China will not sustain itself. Besides this, most of China's industrial and commercial hubs as well as major military components are located near the east and south coastlines, which are very vulnerable to foreign attacks. Especially in any conflict with the United States and its alliances, they can become an easy target for superior American air force or advanced alliance equipment.

China's geopolitical weakness does not mean that it cannot achieve the strategic goal of world domination. Everything is possible for a human being if he is smart enough to solve problems and capable of overcoming his rivals. China's future developments depend very much on

domestic developments and how the international community will respond to Beijing's rise in the coming future. Any other miscalculations and grave strategic mistakes made by the world community, especially leading global players, will play a fundamental role in how China will shape global politics. There are conflicts of interest among American elites and a lack of coherence in the democratic world toward China.

Winning the support of Russia, the Islamic world, and other countries in the Global South will also, to a very extent, play a determining role in the determination of who would be a dominant player in the future world order. China's wisdom and capability to create a viable strategy to exploit the weakness of its adversaries and wider world communities to its benefit will play a crucial role. Beijing has rich experience in it. By building close alliances with greedy elites and major international companies, China masterfully created the interdependence of major world economies, which makes it difficult for its rivals to form coherent strategies and policies toward Beijing. In addition, America and its alliance may face difficulty competing with China in the technological sphere. Because key technologies are widely spread throughout the developed world, they have difficulties in building coherent policies or mindsets against China. This makes it difficult for America to curb China's gaining and developing key technologies. Once China gains a technological advantage, it will be far more difficult for Washington and its alliances to succeed in the competition as well as curb China's potential to become the world's most powerful hegemon.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> This is the same slogan that was implemented during the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) to conquer neighboring states by legalist policymakers.

<sup>ii</sup> There are estimates that about 3,94 million Chinese died in the Sino– Japanese War, although statistics vary. It has been suggested that up to 4,96 million people died during the 1945–1949 phase of the Civil War, and between 1959 and 1962, 38,70 to 76,70 million people (some estimates reach about 90 million) died by starvation (<https://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/NOTE2.HTM>).