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COMMITTEE ON THE CIVIL DIMENSION OF SECURITY (CDS)

CHINA AND THE GLOBAL LIBERAL ORDER

Special Report

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I. INTRODUCTION: THE CREATION OF THE GLOBAL LIBERAL ORDER AND ITS INTRINSIC LINK WITH NATO'S VALUES

1. The present-day international order was established by the United States and its Allies in the aftermath of World War II. The goal of creating a new system of security alliances and global financial instruments to assist with development aid and the regulation of trade was to reduce the risk of future conflicts erupting by preventively addressing their root causes. These efforts led to the establishment of new norms for international peace and security. The system was, and still is, based primarily on security cooperation, multilateral institutions, economic openness, fundamental rights, good governance, democracy as well as goodwill.

2. In that context, NATO was founded in April 1949 to protect the common values of individual liberty, democracy, human rights and rule of law in the Euro-Atlantic area. Article 2 of NATO's founding treaty articulates the Allies' common vision: "The Parties will contribute towards the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being." By standing together for these common values, the Alliance was effective at facing down the challenge from the Soviet Union during the Cold War and evolved rapidly in its aftermath to adapt to new threats to the Euro-Atlantic area. These values remain at the very heart of NATO's *raison d'être* today.

3. Adherence to the global liberal order established in the wake of World War II and to the values at its core remains at the centre of Allies' focus and interests. Allies share an understanding that the tenets undergirding the international system and its norms today are mutually beneficial to all who adhere to them. Challenges to the values that underpin the global liberal order, however, are growing. They are being driven by three principal phenomena and actors: Russia, China, and violent extremism, some of it connected with fundamental Islam. The rise of violent radical groups, some of whom promote fundamental Islam, such as Daesh and Boko Haram, has posed a threat in recent years to the security of Allies and the values they defend. Since 2014, NATO has also been adapting its defence and deterrence posture to meet the challenges it faces from an increasingly aggressive Russia. As for China, in December 2019 at the NATO Leader's Meeting in London, the Alliance recognised the growing impact that Beijing will have on the Euro-Atlantic area; as the meeting's official declaration notes: "We recognise that China's growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance."

4. Implicit in this statement is that China, like Russia, is trying to disrupt and reshape existing global norms and institutions and therefore poses a growing challenge to the values shared by Allies. Although the Chinese narrative on the global liberal order fluctuates, and Beijing has largely benefited from global economic rules and institutions in the past decades, it rejects some of its fundamental premises that it considers as damaging its national interests and contravening its regional and global ambitions, and wishes to alter them. By undermining their work from the inside and by creating competing organisations based on values and goals better aligned with its views and ambitions, Beijing attempts to erode the liberal foundations of the institutions of the global order.

5. With its growing military capabilities, economic power and political influence, China is increasingly able to have a disruptive impact on the liberal order supported by NATO Allies. Beyond its efforts to create a sphere of influence in Asia, China is expanding its global footprint and progressively reinforcing and projecting its influence at every level of national power – diplomatic, informational, military, and economic. China's recent actions in Hong Kong and the South China Sea send a clear message to the rest of the world: Beijing does not intend to

abide by the rules of the global order established before its geopolitical rise. If not addressed collectively, China's growing influence over the definition and scope of the global order could therefore weaken the unity of the Alliance, undermine its collective security guarantee and question the supremacy of the liberal values that form the backbone of our democracies and NATO. The future of the post-WWII global liberal order depends on whether the United Nations (UN), NATO, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, among others, will be able to cooperate successfully to respond to Beijing's challenge, but also engage constructively with China where possible without compromising our common liberal values.

6. In this report, the Rapporteur has done his outmost to assemble an overview of the differing opinions expressed by experts, journalists and others on the topic. It should therefore be read as an attempt at providing a comprehensive picture of the relationship between China and the global liberal order.

II. THE GLOBAL LIBERAL ORDER AND THE RISE OF CHINA

A. CHINA'S GRADUAL INSERTION INTO THE POST-WWII INTERNATIONAL CONSTRUCT AND INSTITUTIONS

7. Part of Beijing's current uneasiness with some aspects of the global liberal order stems from the exclusion of the People's Republic of China (PRC) from its conception in the late 1940s. At the time, the Republic of China – whose authorities retreated to the island of Taiwan in 1949 at the end of the Chinese Civil War – was recognised by much of the world as the official representative of the country, until the 1970s when the PRC acquired widespread diplomatic recognition. The Chinese government then proactively engaged with the post-WWII multilateral institutions (Rapp-Hooper, et al., 2019).

8. China gradually inserted itself into the global liberal order and adhered to some of its principles. In 1971, the UN General Assembly admitted the PRC as one of its members and offered it a permanent seat at the UN Security Council (which had until then been held by the Republic of China). Beijing subsequently joined the Bretton Woods international financial institutions – the World Bank and the IMF – in 1980. More recently, in 2001, China became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and agreed to open and liberalise its economy and undertake a series of reforms, although many of them are yet to be fully implemented.

9. China has joined most multilateral organisations for which it is eligible. It is also contributing to their activities, both through financial and personnel support. For example, in 2019, China was the second largest contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations, behind the United States. The international human rights regime and the institutions that underpin it are the only evident exception. Although China has joined them as a member, it regularly tries to undermine their work and reach, especially when they attempt to discuss Beijing's violations.

10. Beijing greatly benefited from its inclusion into the global international system over the past four decades. China progressively underwent a remarkable transformation from a developing country to the world's largest trading nation by value in 2013. Prior to the launch of economic reforms by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, the Chinese economy was centrally planned, dominated by state ownership, and relatively isolated from the global economy. In December 1978, China launched a series of economic reforms aimed at attracting foreign investment, boosting exports, and decentralising its economy. These reforms were based on

the introduction of the profit motive and elements of capitalism in China's domestic economic policies and international economic engagement. These market-oriented reforms had a profound impact on the Chinese economic system, leading to the adoption by the population of a more entrepreneurial approach, generating an increase in production and wealth and acting as a fundamental catalyst in China's rapid economic rise. China has even become a key producer and exporter in many strategic and high-tech sectors, such as nuclear energy, aerospace, wind and solar energy, medical equipment, artificial intelligence, and robotics. By moving away from the extremes of communism, the country turned into one of the world's fastest-growing economies, with real annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth averaging 9.5% between 1979 and 2018 (CRS, 2019).

11. China still faces major challenges in its development, with a per capita income at about a quarter of that of high-income countries (USD 16,760 PPP in 2017, compared with USD 60,200 in the United States, according to the World Bank, 2020), growing socioeconomic inequalities (about 373 million Chinese – approximately 27 per cent of the population – are still living below the World Bank's upper-middle-income poverty line of USD 5.50 a day) and a gradually slowing economic growth (6.1% in 2019, the lowest rate since 1990, and possibly only 2% in 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the World Bank's estimations). Notwithstanding these challenges, its gradual insertion into the post-WWII global order and its institutions, and the adoption of some of their principles, have enabled China to thrive and become a global economic power.

12. Analysts have stated that China today aims to utilise its newly acquired wealth and power to reshape the post-WWII global liberal order to reflect what it sees as a changed balance of power, accommodate its regional and international ambitions and advance its national interests (Rapp-Hooper, et al., 2019). To fulfil these objectives, Beijing continues to engage and participate in the current multilateral system while simultaneously establishing and developing parallel regional and international structures in an attempt to create alternatives to the existing global liberal order, which it believes disproportionately serves Western interests and which we shall now discuss.

B. CHINA'S PARALLEL STRUCTURES OF GOVERNANCE

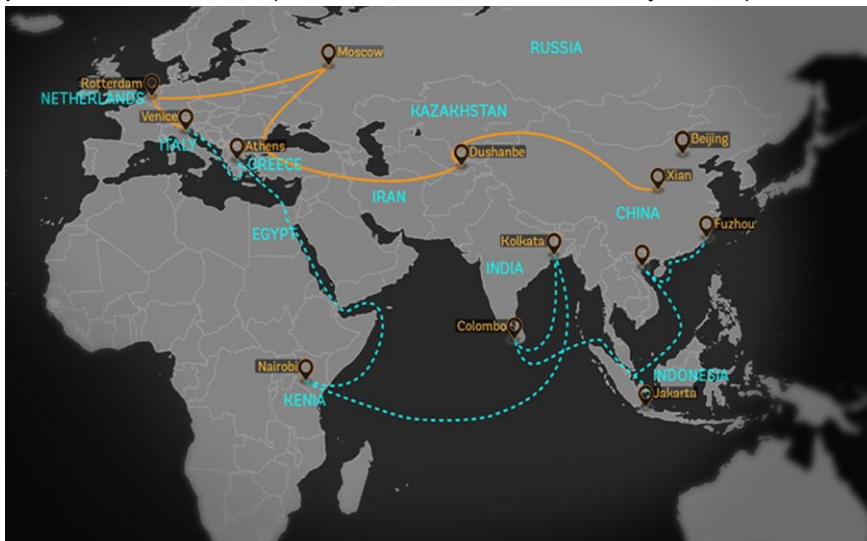
13. In the past decade, China has established and promoted additional mechanisms and structures that challenge the institutions of the global liberal order and their rules. Beijing presents these structures as alternatives to existing organisations and systems that it perceives as dominated primarily by Western countries, chiefly the United States, and serving their interests. For instance, Beijing has long complained that its share of voting rights at the World Bank and the IMF (respectively 4.72% and 6.08%) does not properly reflect the central role it plays in today's global economy (19.71% of the world's GDP on purchasing power parity according to the IMF), while the United States *de facto* holds veto power over key policy decisions (with 15.78% and 16.51% of the voting rights in each organisation) (De Gregorio et al., 2018).¹ Faced with the reluctance of some member states to increase China's voting rights in these organisations, Beijing sought to create alternative organisations and mechanisms. They are designed to reflect China's vision of the world and support its objective of expanding its sphere of influence in Asia and beyond.

14. These parallel structures touch upon a variety of areas but mainly focus on security, diplomacy, and trade. First, in the security realm, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

¹ At both the World Bank and the IMF, decisions on substantive issues require an 85% share of voting rights to be adopted. This gives the United States (and the European Union as whole) a *de facto* veto over the organisation's decisions.

(SCO), created in 2001, has expanded over the past two decades to become the world's largest regional organisation both in terms of population and geographic coverage. Although it still focuses on its original objectives of addressing three perceived non-state threats: terrorism, separatism, and extremism, it has evolved in parallel into a political and economic forum excluding direct Western participation (IISS, 2018). Second, since 2009, the BRICS grouping – including China along with Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa – has institutionalised its interactions and organises a summit each year. Although economic and political divisions have appeared among its members in recent years, all BRICS countries share a common rejection of the liberal development model and what they view as the Western-dominated IMF and World Bank that support it (Wulf, 2015). As such, the partnership Beijing has established with the other BRICS countries remains one of the main political platforms through which the Chinese authorities can put forward their views on global governance. Third, in 2019, China signed an economic and trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union, an organisation whose creation has been sponsored by Russia as a response to the European Union (Jiang, 2020).²

15. China's efforts to play a growing role in the post-WWII order – and in some cases rewrite its rules – do not stop at the creation of parallel institutions, but also include a policy of lessening its financial reliance and dependence on the US dollar, which has been the financial and economic backbone of the Bretton Woods framework. Although the yuan remains only the eighth most traded currency and accounts for about 2% of global foreign exchanges, the Chinese authorities have been advocating and supporting the expansion of their currency's global footprint (Aredy, 2019). Following the 2007-2009 financial crisis, Beijing successfully called on the IMF to include the yuan in the list of reserve currencies used to back the Fund's "Special Drawing Rights" basket which determines currencies that countries can receive as part of IMF loans (The Economist, 18 January 2020). China has also encouraged its



Source: World Bank

companies and international partners to use the yuan in their commercial exchanges. As a result, the country currently settles about a quarter of its own exports in yuan. Finally, it has created its own domestic payment and settlement infrastructure – CIPS – that is incompatible with the Belgian-based global financial messaging network Swift, which it sees as a tool

of Western domination over the global financial system allowing the United States and its allies to enforce sanctions on countries that do not respect liberal norms. Beijing has subsequently been exploring the possibility of linking its own system to a similar mechanism established by Russia, and potentially expanding this alternative network to countries such as India (The Economist, 18 January 2020).

² The Eurasian Economic Union is an international economic union created in 2015. Its aim is to increase economic cooperation and competitiveness, and facilitate the free movement of goods, services, labour, and capital among its member states. Its members are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and the Russian Federation.

16. The most striking initiative undertaken by China as part of its attempt to reshape the international order to date is without doubt the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013, it is a foreign policy initiative aiming to build trading routes between China and the rest of the world. As part of this project, China launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2014, which has been joined by many Allied countries, including Canada, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. It also participated with the other BRICS countries in the creation of the New Development Bank (NDB) (formerly referred to as the BRICS Development Bank) in 2015. Both institutions fund infrastructure projects and challenge the reach and methods of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank. China's BRI covers over 70 countries, accounting for about 60% of the world's population and around a third of the world's trade and GDP (World Bank, 2019), and constitutes an evident indicator of the scale of the country's ambitions.

C. TODAY'S CHINA: A THREAT FOR THE GLOBAL LIBERAL ORDER

17. There exists a significant risk that China will use these new parallel mechanisms and institutions to undermine the liberal values that underpin the global order. This risk is compounded by the fact that some of these institutions include members, such as Russia and Central Asian states, that do not adhere to liberal values in their domestic affairs (Feigenbaum, 2018). Another risk lies in the fact that as part of the loans it provides in the framework of the BRI-centred institutions it established or supported, China reinforces its economic and financial dominance over smaller debt-ridden states with growing and unmet investment and infrastructure needs. These countries have consequently become less likely to support any international attempt to denounce Beijing's domestic human rights abuses and foreign policy practices (Fontaine and Kliman, 2018).

18. This appeared particularly obvious, for instance, after China announced in July 2016 its refusal to abide by the decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in its dispute with the Philippines over the South China Sea, when none of the statements issued by ASEAN member states specifically mentioned the ruling but called instead more generally for respect for international law (Kuok, 2019). The influence of China and its growing financial power, particularly since the 2007-2009 financial crisis and the ensuing 2010 public debt crisis in Europe, is also a source of divisions among Allies. For instance, some European Allies, having benefited from large Chinese investments in recent years, have occasionally blocked the adoption of EU statements denouncing China's failure to uphold fundamental freedoms and human rights (Le Corre, 2019).³

19. China's BRI is often criticised as a vehicle for 'debt diplomacy'. Obscure, and sometimes predatory, lending terms can leave developing countries struggling to repay loans granted as part of the BRI, and therefore at risk of seeing both their economic and political sovereignty challenged by China in the long run (Green, 2019). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of Chinese loans for infrastructure investment under the BRI is gaining attention. China has announced a suspension of debt repayments in line with a G20 debt relief initiative and has struck agreements with many low-income countries which have asked for debt restructuring as their finances are impacted by the pandemic (Hodgson, 2020). This marks the first time that China has participated in a coordinated multilateral debt relief initiative and should be acknowledged as a positive step taken by the Chinese authorities. However, at the same time, some countries that have been unable to fulfil their rising debt repayments have

³ For instance, Hungary refused to sign an EU joint letter denouncing the reported torture of detained lawyers in China in March 2017, and Greece blocked an EU statement criticising China's human rights record at the United Nations in June 2017.

had to cede control of critical infrastructure to Chinese companies. In September, for example, Laos had to transfer majority control of its power grid to a Chinese company as it was unable to serve its ballooning debt obligations (Strangio, 2020). Such transfers of control over critical infrastructure were already occurring in developing countries heavily indebted to China before the COVID-19 crisis, in Sri Lanka and Djibouti for instance. The pandemic and its dire economic consequences could make them more frequent and thus lead to growing Chinese influence in the countries concerned.

AIIB founding members

China has approved 57 countries to become founding members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).



Source: The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

20. In addition, the loans provided through the AIIB and the NDB – or directly by China – are not linked to any conditions with regard to respect for fundamental values. Both institutions reject the use of loans as leverage to promote social

and political change in borrowing countries. Data is lacking on the amount that China has lent to other countries either through these institutions or directly. However, recent research shows that China's outstanding claims now account for more than 5% of global GDP. More than 150 countries around the globe have borrowed in total about USD 1.5 trillion in Chinese direct loans and trade credits, mostly from the government and state-controlled entities. Developing countries, particularly in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, have accumulated large amounts of debt from the Chinese state and its subsidiaries. The debt to China of a dozen of these countries represents at least 20% of their nominal GDP (Horn, Reinhart, and Trebesch, 2020).⁴ This figure is likely to increase significantly over the next few years due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis. The vast influx of Chinese funds into states with limited governance weakens international norms of human rights, accountability, and transparency, and legitimises China's governance model beyond its borders (Faiz, 2019). There exists a significant risk that China will use its investments and loans to impose its will on increasingly financially dependent countries.

21. Finally, China plays a major political, economic, and financial role in all these parallel institutions. For instance, it holds 26.65% of AIIB voting rights and thus has veto powers within the organisation.⁵ Similarly, although the NDB has an egalitarian governance structure (with each member state holding 20% of the voting rights), China exerts tremendous influence over its decision making processes due to its economic dominance and can therefore sway the allocation of funds towards projects of its choice. The same applies to parallel organisations focusing on diplomatic and security issues. China is the dominant economic and military player

⁴ These countries are Djibouti, Tonga, Maldives, the Republic of the Congo, Kyrgyzstan, Cambodia, Niger, Laos, Zambia, Samoa, Vanuatu, and Mongolia.

⁵ At the AIIB, votes on substantive issues require a majority of 75% of voting rights to pass, thus giving China a *de facto* veto in the organisation.

in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and accounts for about two thirds of the total GDP (in current US dollars) of the BRICS based on World Bank data. China's oversized role in these institutions puts it in a position to use them to advance its foreign policy objectives and export its own governance model (Wang, 2016).

22. Through the creation of and its support for parallel institutions and mechanisms, China is emerging as a disruptive force on the international stage. However, Beijing simultaneously attempts to enhance its position in the post-WWII institutions. In the past two decades, China has continued to pursue larger stakes in the World Bank and the IMF, has joined multiple regional multilateral development banks in Latin America and Africa and has strengthened its role in UN peacekeeping operations (Gåsemyr, 2018). Similarly, although it sponsored the creation of the AIIB, Beijing remains the number-three shareholder in the Asian Development Bank (6.4% of total shares), an institution in which the United States and Japan are by far the two main stakeholders (each with 15.6% of total shares).

23. With this dual-track approach, China is trying to undermine the liberal foundations of the institutions of the global order both from the inside and from the outside. Beijing has become increasingly influential in these institutions. Chinese civil servants now head four of the UN's 15 specialised agencies -the International Telecommunication Union, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the UN Industrial Development Organization, and the International Civil Aviation Organization- and hold the position of Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Beijing uses their presence at the heart of the UN system *inter alia* to set the agenda for multilateral engagement, promote its BRI projects, push for greater state control over the Internet and exclude Taiwan from participating in the work of these organisations as an independent player (Fung and Lam, 2020). Because of these efforts, Taiwan has been effectively barred from becoming a member of the World Health Organization. As a result, Taiwan was excluded from emergency meetings and global expert briefings related to the coronavirus pandemic, possibly adversely impacting its response to the pandemic (BBC, 30 March 2020). In addition, China recently partnered with Russia to cut funding for staff appointments related to human rights and the prevention of sexual abuse in UN peacekeeping missions and scale down associated programmes (Lynch, 2018). At the same time, as explained above, Beijing is challenging the legitimacy of existing institutions by creating competing organisations whose values and aims are better aligned with its world views and ambitions.

24. In that sense, China can be defined as a revisionist power. Beijing undermines international norms and standards and often refuses to abide by them. Beijing bluntly refuses to follow international law when the country's core security interests are at stake, as in the abovementioned case of the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling on the South China Sea dispute. China has also repeatedly expressed its opposition to some concepts that have been recognised by Allies – and in some cases by multilateral organisations themselves – as essential norms to ensure the pre-eminence of liberal values. For instance, Beijing is deeply uncomfortable with the third pillar of the notion of responsibility to protect, despite having provided what it described as “cautious support” to the endorsement of the notion by the UN in 2005. Beijing views it as legitimising foreign meddling in domestic affairs and undermining national sovereignty.⁶ Since 2005, China has put forward various alternatives to the notion, such as the idea of “responsible protection” which lessens the possibility of foreign interventions to stop grave human rights abuses, in an attempt to reframe and tighten the international community's interpretation of responsibility to protect (Garwood-Gowers, 2016).

⁶ Pillar III identifies the international community's responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian, peaceful or coercive means to protect civilian populations where a state manifestly fails to uphold its obligations.

However, in other cases, China does not seek to replace existing principles and standards within international organisations but instead feigns acceptance while promoting alternative definitions for them. For example, China's interpretation of *human rights* focuses on the fulfilment of economic and social rights and stresses that their scope should vary from country to country depending on the needs of the population. It rejects their universality and their civil and political components (Ekman, 2020).

25. Based on this evidence, this report argues that China is using its increasingly prominent role in global affairs as a means and a justification to undermine the liberal values that form the basis of the current global order. These values define our democracies and underpin our Alliance. NATO member countries must therefore speak as one to defend them and respond collectively to Beijing's revisionist challenge.

III. CHINA'S POLITICAL SYSTEM AND FOREIGN POLICY

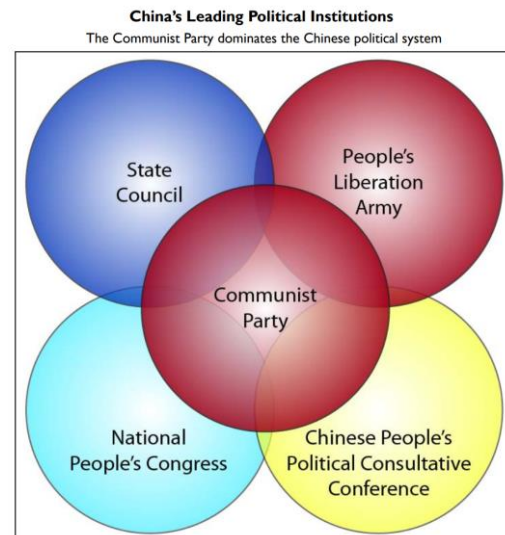
A. CHINA'S CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL SYSTEM

26. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is one of the longest-running one-party regimes in modern history. China's communist regime still survives, long after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. For more than 70 years, since Mao Zedong declared the establishment of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949, China's communist leaders have retained firm political and ideological control over the country's affairs by using a mix of fear and nationalism. The CCP and its leadership maintain a permanent monopoly of power and control over the state and Chinese society (Qin and Hernandez, 2018).

27. The General-Secretary of the CCP's Central Committee, Xi Jinping, rose to power in 2012 and quickly established himself as the country's most powerful and enduring leader since Mao Zedong. Since then, he has rapidly consolidated his power, built a cult of personality and asserted party control over the state system. In 2018, the CCP removed the constitution's presidential two-consecutive-term limit, allowing Xi Jinping to remain in office after the end of his second term in 2023 and stay in power indefinitely (Buckley and Bradsher, 2018). Since 2012, as part of an anti-corruption campaign, Xi Jinping has been purging the CCP of officials that he deemed disloyal to him. In July 2020, the CCP announced that it would expand the scope of the campaign to cover not only the political and judicial systems, but also law enforcement bodies. This marks a further step in the consolidation of Xi Jinping's power (Shepherd, 2020).

28. Since he took office, Xi Jinping's top priorities have included rejuvenating the Communist Party, legitimising and consolidating its power and tightening state control over the media and the Internet, fighting endemic corruption in the CCP, and restructuring and modernising the People's Liberation Army (PLA) (Fan, Zhang, et al., 2016). As such, Xi Jinping's vision has been structured around what he describes as the "China Dream", i.e. the economic, military, and social revival of the Chinese nation (Economy, 2018). His political doctrine, called "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in a New Era", was endorsed by the CCP party congress in 2017 and has been enshrined in both the state and party constitutions (Buckley, 2017). The doctrine centres around three components: the nation – realising the Chinese dream and being recognised as a world power–, the supremacy of the CCP, and Xi Jinping himself as a leader (Buckley, 26 February 2018). The doctrine has also been introduced into the mandatory curricula of universities and schools and on research agendas across the country (Phillips, 2017).

29. The CCP remains the ultimate authority across all political institutions and the military. China has three main political institutions: the State Council, the National People's Congress (NPC), and the PLA. The State Council is the chief administrative authority and responsible for the day-to-day administration of the country. The CCP and the State Council are closely linked. State Council members usually hold senior CCP positions, thus ensuring party control over the State. The NPC is the country's main legislative body and assumes the role of China's parliament. Although it is theoretically independent from the CCP, the party's leaders maintain their control, in practice, over the NPC by determining delegate selection and legislative initiatives. China's military, the PLA, is the world's largest military force with about 2 million active military personnel and the CCP exercises "absolute leadership" over the armed forces (IISS, 2020). The formal political system also encompasses two other categories of institutions. The People's Political Consultative Conferences (PPCCs) and its National Committee are officially consulted by the CCP and the State on policy issues but hold little substantive power in practice. Finally, the existence of eight minor political parties, all loyal to the CCP and its leadership, allows the CCP to claim officially that the country's political system is a multi-party cooperation, in denial of the fact that the CCP has total control over all institutions. At the local level, there exist 34 official administrative divisions, including 23 provinces – among which China lists Taiwan over which it claims sovereignty –, five autonomous regions with large ethnic minority populations (Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, and Xinjiang), four municipalities that report directly to the central government (Beijing, Chongqing, Shanghai, and Tianjin), and the two special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau. Each of these 34 entities has political structures that mirror those of the central government, with similar CCP and government organisations and people's conferences (CRS, 2013).



Source: CRS research.

B. THE LINGERING INFLUENCE OF CHINA'S PAST IN ITS CURRENT FOREIGN POLICY

30. China's imperial past still shapes its current foreign policy. For most of its history, particularly during the imperial period (221 BC - 1911 AD), China was the centre of East Asia and dominated the region. China's regional hegemony came to an end with the adoption of a series of treaties in which it was forced to concede many of its territorial and sovereignty rights to foreign powers, especially Great Britain, France, Germany, the United States, Russia, and Japan during the 19th and early 20th centuries. These imposed agreements created deep-rooted historical grievances that still play an underlying role in China's foreign policy (French, et al., 2017).

31. The lasting memory of that period survived the creation of the PRC in 1949 and became a political myth central to China's founding mythology (Zhang, 2013). The country's leaders used it to define China as a victim of Western imperialism and promote a doctrine of return to Chinese exceptionalism characterised by the desire to re-establish China's central role in world affairs and reshape the global order to better align it with the country's values and interests (Economy, 2017). Chinese leaders, including Xi Jinping since his accession to power in 2012, have promised to restore what they view as China's rightful role as a regional

hegemon and global power.

C. CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY PRINCIPLES

32. In 1954, China's then premier, Zhou Enlai, formulated what Beijing refers to as the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence": respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in other states' internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. These principles officially form the basis of the country's foreign policy.

33. However, China's actions in its relations with its neighbours and in the global arena often contradict these principles in practice. In 1950-1951, for instance, China illegally invaded and annexed Tibet and has since then made constant efforts to crush any dissent in the region and ostracise the Dalai Lama. China's claim of territorial and maritime sovereignty over the South China Sea represents another illustrative example of Beijing's inconsistency in the implementation of its guiding principles. In recent years, China has significantly increased its military activity and illegally built artificial islands in these disputed waters. Additionally, as noted above, Beijing rejected the 2016 decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in favour of the Philippines regarding some of these claims. In the past few months, while the attention of the world was directed towards responding to the COVID-19 crisis, the Chinese military has taken a series of aggressive actions in the South China Sea, including sinking a Vietnamese fishing boat and harassing a Malaysian oil exploration vessel (Beech, 2020). Similarly, the Chinese authorities represent a constant threat for Taiwan and its independence. Beijing continues to claim sovereignty over the island of 23 million people that it does not directly control. In May 2020, the Chinese authorities denounced the inauguration of Taiwan's newly elected president, and pointedly dropped the word "peaceful" in their call for reunification with the island state in their yearly work report. These actions contradict both China's own official principles and the agreed rules of the global liberal order and are, in many respects, not dissimilar to the illegal and aggressive actions undertaken by the Russian authorities in 2008 in Georgia and since 2014 in Ukraine. As such, they must be condemned in the strongest terms by all Allies, both at the national and multilateral levels.

34. The Chinese authorities present these official principles, by which they do not abide themselves, as an alternative to the current global liberal order based on international regimes and institutions and on fundamental values such as individual liberty, democracy, human rights, and rule of law. This alternative prioritises the protection of national sovereignty and territorial integrity and refrains from dissociating between political regime types and human rights records in the conduct of foreign relations.

35. China's claim of non-interference in others' domestic affairs is often used by Beijing to block international criticism of its own human rights record.

IV. CHINA'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD: STATE POWER AND ITS VICTIMS

36. On the one hand, in the past decades, China has made significant progress in the advancement of its population's economic rights. The living standards of hundreds of millions of its citizens have improved and 850 million people were lifted out of poverty (World Bank, 2020). On the other hand, China remains one of the least free countries in the world. In the past decades, the Chinese regime has maintained – and in some cases reinforced – its repressive policies restricting cultural, civil, and political rights, including freedom of expression, religion and belief, assembly, and association. Civil society organisations are not free to operate and fundamental human rights are severely limited in the country. This situation

has only worsened since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012 (Freedom House, 2020). In addition, the Chinese authorities display a general lack of transparency in their handling of domestic affairs, which has become even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A. THE CHINESE SURVEILLANCE STATE: BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU

37. In recent years, Beijing has built a high-tech surveillance state and an extensive Internet censorship system to monitor behaviour, suppress individual liberties and mute criticism of the CCP domestically and overseas. China's mass surveillance system enables the authorities to collect and analyse massive amounts of personal information about citizens' behaviours, beliefs, and activities (Human Rights Watch World Report, 2020).

38. The Chinese authorities have assembled a network of technological tools – including phone scanners, facial recognition cameras, face and fingerprint databases – that allow them to spy and track virtually all citizens and their everyday moves. Cities in China are under the heaviest camera surveillance in the world, with 8 of the top 10 most monitored cities in the world. The number of public CCTV cameras used by government entities such as law enforcement is estimated to range between 200 and 626 million (Bischoff, 2019). With the help of such tools, the police have regularly identified and targeted critics of the regime, civil rights defenders, supporters of the protest movement in Hong Kong and minority ethnic groups (Mozur and Krolik, 2019).

39. Pushing the boundaries of mass surveillance further, in 2014, China's State Council announced its decision to establish an intrusive and extensive "social credit" system. Various cities across the country have, so far, implemented pilot versions of the system, which should become fully operational by the end of 2020. This Orwellian ranking system gives each citizen a grade based on offenses they may have committed and an assessment of the myriad of actions they complete as part of their daily lives. It thus gives the authorities a chance to monitor most aspects of a person's life and behaviour, and assess their ideological loyalty (Mistreanu, 2018).

40. There is also growing concern about the fact that, in recent years, China has been supplying advanced surveillance tools to countries around the globe, including some with dubious human rights records which are more prone to use it for the purpose of mass surveillance (Feldstein, 2019). Similarly, attempts by the Chinese technology company Huawei to position itself as a potential global supplier of 5G technology have sparked a lively debate in the international community, including among Allies, about the possible implications of the cyber security risk posed to critical national infrastructure by the spread of technological tools controlled by China. Huawei has already signed contracts for the construction of 5G infrastructure in around 30 countries, including members of the Alliance (CRS, 2020). However, in July 2020, the British government decided to strip Huawei out of the United Kingdom's 5G phone networks by 2027.

41. 5G infrastructure is not the only area in which Chinese interference poses a risk. Such interference is already having tangible and adverse effects in the cyber domain. China is increasingly using cyberattacks to unlawfully acquire information beneficial to its national companies and to cripple rival foreign companies. For instance, in September, the US Department of Justice indicted five Chinese nationals associated with China's intelligence service. They were accused of having infiltrated more than 100 companies and organisations worldwide, including in Allied countries, to steal information, hijack their networks and extort them (Benner and Perlroth, 2020).

B. MEDIA CENSORSHIP AND INTERNET CONTROL

42. State control of traditional media outlets has been strengthened both over the content and the editorial line since Xi Jinping came to power. China ranked 177th out of 180 countries in the 2019 Reporters without Borders' World Press Freedom Index, with its media environment considered one of the most restrictive in the world. The CCP's Central Propaganda Department regulates all main sources of information – radio, television, news agencies, and the Internet – and imposes stringent ideological control over China's state- and privately-owned media through censorship. Foreign reporters in China regularly face obstacles in their work as well. For example, in September 2020, China announced that it would stop renewing the credentials of US journalists (Wong, 2020). Of even greater concern, it is alleged that China has been among the world's top jailers of journalists for almost two decades, with more than 120 journalists and bloggers currently detained (Reporters without Borders, 2020).

43. China's Internet environment equally remains one of the most restrictive in the world. Freedom House ranked the country as the "world's worst abuser of Internet freedom" in 2019 for the fourth consecutive year. As China counts the largest number of internet users in the world, estimated at over 800 million, the Internet and social media constitute a powerful social control tool for the Chinese government. As part of the Great Firewall of China, Beijing's Internet control and censorship of online content takes different forms. From blocking websites and keyword filters to the strict regulation and monitoring of Internet service providers and the arrests and detention of "cyber dissidents" and bloggers (CRS, 2018). Internet users are blocked from using foreign search engines or visiting news websites such as the New York Times and social media platforms like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. These restrictions, in turn, limit the ability of the Chinese public to access independent sources of information. In the past months, censorship and surveillance reached unprecedented levels as the Chinese authorities heightened their online efforts to control the narrative about the recent anti-government protests in Hong Kong, prevent any mention of the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre and thwart any attempt to criticise their handling of the coronavirus crisis (Freedom House, 2020).

C. CHINA'S PERSECUTION OF RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

44. The total number of members of the seven largest religious groups in the country is estimated at over 350 million. Only five religions are officially recognised in China: Buddhism (with 185-250 million practitioners), Islam (21-23 million), Catholicism (12 million), Protestantism (60-80 million) and Taoism (12 million). However, a number of religious and ethnic groups remain unregistered and face surveillance, intimidation, and persecution. Tibetan Buddhists (6-8 million), Falun Gong practitioners (7-20 million) and Uyghur Muslims (approximately 10 million in China) face the highest levels of religious repression at the hands of the Chinese authorities (Freedom House, 2018).

45. Since Xi Jinping assumed power, the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities by the authorities has worsened. Through the adoption of restrictive regulations and policies over the past years, the CCP has further increased its control over religious beliefs and groups in the country. Most recently, new "Administrative Measures for Religious Groups" – which came into effect in February 2020 – have made it mandatory for religious groups to obtain government permission for almost all activities or projects, and to accept and teach the principles of the CCP as part of their activities. This marks a significant escalation in the Chinese government's crackdown on religious freedom (US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2020).

46. The more than 6 million Tibetans living in China, many of them in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), face heavy restrictions on freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, as well as freedom of expression and belief. Since the illegal annexation of Tibet by China in 1950-1951, the region has faced repression, including the destruction of part of its cultural and religious heritage. Following anti-government protests in 2008, the Chinese authorities imposed extensive controls on Tibetan religious life, culture, and Buddhist religious practice, particularly devotion to the exiled Dalai Lama. These include intense police surveillance at monasteries, limitations on domestic and cross-border travel, arbitrary detention and imprisonment, heavy censorship in media and online communications in Tibet and greater restrictions on the use of the Tibetan language in schools (CRS, 2019). The CCP has also led campaigns to force believers and monks to denounce the Dalai Lama. This persecution has pushed Tibetans to protest, with at least 140 self-immolations recorded since 2009 as well as other less visible forms of resistance. The CCP has extended its repression of the Tibetan minority abroad. It is regularly using the threat of withholding investments and other forms of economic collaboration in retaliation when it considers that other countries are expressing sympathy for the exiled Dalai Lama or Tibetans' rights (Benner, Gaspers, et al, 2018).

47. The Falun Gong spiritual group was banned in 1999 by the CCP and its members have been persecuted since then, some of them arbitrarily detained and receiving long prison sentences (Freedom House, 2020).

48. Catholicism is one of the five religions officially recognised by the CCP. However, since 1951, China does not have diplomatic relations with the Vatican. Until 2018, it did not recognise the authority of the Pope and, in 1957, it set up an autonomous, state-endorsed Catholic body, called the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA). The authority of this body was, in turn, not recognised by the Vatican. This has forced Chinese Catholic worshippers who reject the legitimacy of the state-endorsed body into underground churches. Their clergy have been prosecuted. In 2018, China and the Vatican struck a deal related to the appointment of bishops. Whilst the details of the agreement have not been made public, it reportedly includes a recognition by the Vatican of the role of the CPCA in the appointment of bishops in exchange for a veto over the body's choices. In addition, the Vatican welcomed seven excommunicated CPCA-appointed bishops back and China recognised three underground bishops ordained by the Vatican. However, several clergy members loyal to the Vatican remain detained. In October 2020, China and the Vatican renewed the agreement, which was due to expire that month, for an additional two years (Horowitz, 22 October 2020). The Pope has been accused of being "naïve" for engaging with a regime that does not respect human rights and continues to harass Catholics (Kington, 2020)

49. Of particular concern also is the Chinese government's treatment of the predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwest China, where they make up more than half of the population. Discontent among the Uyghur population turned into riots in 2009 and prompted a state crackdown which only worsened when terrorist attacks hit the region in 2014. In the name of fighting terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism, the Chinese government has put in place repressive measures in the region targeting the Uyghur population. The measures include extensive police presence through the installation of thousands of police kiosks, a digital surveillance system using facial recognition cameras, mobile phone scans, and the collection of biometric data for identification purposes (European Parliament, 2018). Recent research indicates that the Chinese authorities use sterilisations, forced abortions and mandatory birth control to limit Uyghur birth rates in Xinjiang (Zenz, 2020). In the past two years, the region has also experienced a record increase in the number of arrests, trials, and prison sentences. Over that period, a total of 230,000 people were sentenced by courts to prison or other punishments (up from approximately 14,000 in 2013). Similarly, despite having less than 2% of the country's

population, in 2017 Xinjiang accounted for 21% of arrests (compared to 2% in 2007) (Buckley, 2019).

50. China has established an extensive network of camps in the Xinjiang region where, according to a 2018 UN panel, possibly over one million are subjected to extrajudicial detention, most of them ethnic Uyghurs, as well as Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Hui, and other groups (CERD, 2018). After initially denying their existence, in 2018 Beijing started describing the camps as “vocational education and training centres” where “trainees” allegedly study Chinese law and learn professional skills. Numerous reports present evidence of mass arbitrary detention, indoctrination, forced labour, and religious repression in these camps (Zenz, 2018). There are also reports of torture, restrictions on religious practice and culture, as well as mistreatment (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Although the Chinese authorities claimed in 2019 that all camps have either been closed or downsized and that detainees are progressively being freed, it has offered no evidence of their release (Kuo, 2019). Instead, a recent study indicates that there are 380 suspected such facilities in the Xinjiang region, about 40% more than previously estimated (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2020). In September 2020, an independent tribunal in the UK started investigating whether the Chinese government’s practices in Xinjiang amount to genocide. A verdict is expected by the end of 2021. Whilst this verdict will not be binding, the tribunal can serve to provide further information on and scrutiny of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Chinese authorities in the region (Hui, 2020). Already in July 2020, a group of exiled Uyghur activists filed a complaint before the International Criminal Court (ICC) against senior Chinese officials for genocide and crimes against humanity. The case is related to the forced repatriation of Uyghurs from Cambodia and Tajikistan back to Xinjiang where they were then subjected to human rights abuses. However, China does not recognise the authority of the ICC (Kuo, 7 July 2020). It is worth noting that some producers, including Western brands, have been accused by human rights groups of being complicit in the use of forced labour in Xinjiang (Kelly, 2020). In response to such concerns, the United States announced in September 2020 that it would block some exports from the province (BBC, 16 September 2020).

D. CASE STUDY: BEIJING’S CRACKDOWN ON HONG KONG’S DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATIONS

51. China’s attempts to assert its governance model have been particularly evident in Hong Kong. In 1984, as part of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the question of Hong Kong, Beijing agreed to establishing a “one country, two systems” governing model for 50 years, designed to preserve the liberal order enjoyed by the territory after the 1997 sovereignty handover. This model was meant to guarantee the continuous protection of the political and civil rights of Hong Kong’s residents and the preservation of its free market economy. In addition, Beijing committed to upholding the rule of law in Hong Kong and maintaining the territory’s common law system – unlike in mainland China – and pledged that the judiciary would remain independent (Nathan, 2019). Although it has been undermined by the recent imposition by Beijing of new laws, there is, to this date, no record of the Chinese government having officially abandoned the commitments that it undertook under the Joint Declaration.

52. Whilst there has always been a pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong, it very much strengthened after 1997. From the period between 2000 and 2010, discontent grew in the territory. Pro-democracy protesters engaged in political actions that occasionally turned into violent confrontation with the authorities over the strict rules regulating – and in many cases, restricting – freedom of assembly. In 2014, Beijing’s decision to reform the procedures for the election of the Chief Executive and Legislative Council intensified popular dissatisfaction. As promised in 2007 when the reform was first sketched, all registered voters –rather than an

800-member Election Committee until then— were to be allowed to vote for the Chief Executive. However, candidates were to be selected by a committee in which Beijing's allies would be in majority. Hong Kong's residents were quick to demonstrate their disagreement in what became known as the Umbrella movement (Bush, 2019). After almost three months of mostly peaceful protests, the reform was eventually abandoned in 2015. However, these events highlighted Beijing's determination to encroach on the independence of Hong Kong's judiciary and police and limit the rights to political participation, expression, and assembly of the territory's residents (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

53. In 2019, Beijing challenged again Hong Kong's rule of law principles when the territory's Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, proposed the adoption of amendments to Hong Kong's extradition laws. If passed, they would have made it possible for the Chinese authorities to obtain the transfer of Hong Kong residents out of the territory and subject them to Chinese law. The protests that started in response to these proposed amendments rapidly spiralled into a wider 13-week-long pro-democracy movement expressing the public's frustration over fundamental rights violations and democratic deterioration. As up to two million people took to the streets, the authorities reacted with repression and violence, which in turn exacerbated tensions with protesters. Journalists were attacked while carrying out their work, and tear gas and rubber bullets were fired at close range towards protesters (Freedom House, 2019). These police actions posed a considerable risk to protesters: two of them died and hundreds were injured (BBC, 2019). It should be noted that the response to the protests was handled by the Hong Kong authorities and that, although such a move was considered, Beijing's military and police did not directly intervene at the time. Even though the amendments were formally withdrawn in October 2019, the episode clearly showed the contradiction between the Chinese governance model and Hong Kong's liberal values, and the threat faced by the latter as a result. Since they ended, Hong Kong's authorities have arrested at least 7,500 pro-democracy figures and activists for their participation in the protests (Human Rights Watch, 27 March 2020).

54. In May 2020, Beijing announced that it would directly impose a national security law on Hong Kong without consulting the territory's legislature. After an unusually rapid and secretive adoption process, the law took effect on 30 June. The law criminalises vaguely defined political acts such as separatism, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign countries, with maximum penalties of life imprisonment. It supersedes previously enacted laws, and any conflicting interpretation can be overruled by Beijing's legislature. The Hong Kong police will investigate national security cases and judges selected by Hong Kong's Chief Executive will rule on them. However, Beijing established a new security office in Hong Kong, with its own law enforcement personnel. It is headed by Zheng Yanxiong, a hard-line CCP official who oversaw the violent suppression of demonstrations by police in the southern village of Wukan, in mainland China, in 2011. This office is entitled to decide that important cases be tried in mainland China (Buckley et al., 2020). In addition, the Hong Kong authorities must allow mainland security agencies to operate in the region when the central government deems it necessary.

55. Worryingly, the territorial scope of the law is not limited to Hong Kong. Instead, it asserts jurisdiction over anyone, irrespective of their nationality or country of residence. Anyone criticising the Chinese government could potentially be charged, putting critics worldwide at risk of being arrested upon entry into China (including Hong Kong), or even extradited to China if their own governments agree to it (Human Rights Watch, 29 July 2020). For this reason, some Allies, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany, have suspended their extradition treaties with Hong Kong (Kuo, 28 July 2020; Deutsche Welle, 2020). Since the enactment of the security law, China has placed unspecified sanctions on 11 US citizens, including politicians and senior executives of major non-governmental

organisations (Kuo, 10 August 2020). The Hong Kong police has also issued arrest warrants against pro-democracy activists living in exile (Gabbatt, 2020).

56. By imposing this law on Hong Kong, Beijing tightens its grip on the territory and provides the authorities with sweeping powers to crack down on opposition and quash future protests. The law will have a restricting impact on freedom of expression in the territory. It is the most obvious demonstration to date that Beijing does not intend to respect its promise to safeguard the freedoms enjoyed by Hong Kong residents as part of the “one country, two systems” principle within the promised 50-year period. The effects of the adoption of this law already became clear the day after it was adopted: the Hong Kong police arrested more than 180 people protesting Beijing’s move (Davidson and Yu, 2020). Since its entry into force, pro-democracy groups have disbanded, schools have been instructed to prohibit political activities, and libraries have been asked to remove books deemed pro-democratic (Human Rights Watch, 29 July 2020). In July, the Hong Kong government first disqualified opposition candidates from participating in the legislative elections scheduled for September, then postponed the elections to 2021, citing concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In August, several pro-democracy lawmakers, including Ted Hui and Lam Cheuk-ting, as well as media tycoon Jimmy Lai, were arrested (Liu and Leahy, 2020). In September, hundreds of protesters took to the streets against the postponement of the elections, leading to 290 arrests (Davidson, 4 September 2020).

57. Allies, both individually and collectively, must denounce and respond to China’s efforts to restrict freedoms and impose its governance model in Hong Kong. The British government has announced a plan to give the three million holders of “British national overseas” passports in Hong Kong - i.e. Hong Kongers born in the territory before 1997 who opted to obtain such passports - the right to live and work in the United Kingdom for five years and eventually qualify for citizenship (Wintour, 2020). In the United States, lawmakers terminated Hong Kong’s special status, thus ceasing defence exports to the territory, and restricting its access to high-technology products, and approved sanctions on banks doing business with Chinese officials (Swanson, 2020). In August, the United States also placed high-ranking Hong Kong officials, including Chief Executive Carrie Lam, under sanctions over their role in restricting freedoms and undermining Hong Kong autonomy (Berger, 2020). In September, a communiqué of seven United Nations Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups warned China that its security law may break international legal standards including by infringing on fundamental rights, lacking precision, and not meeting the standards of necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination (UN, 2020).

V. CHINA’S EFFORTS TO REPLICATE ITS GOVERNANCE MODEL AND RESTRICTIVE REGIME ABROAD

58. Xi Jinping made his ambitions clear when he outlined China’s grand strategy for 2050 at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017 as he stated that “[China] offers a new option for other countries and nations that want to speed up their development while preserving their independence.” China presents itself as an alternative to the Western democratic model and promotes its governance model and restrictive regime regionally and globally.

59. Beijing has used loans, infrastructure projects, investments, and other economic measures as foreign policy tools to increase its presence in many developing countries and get them to support its worldviews and interests. This has been the case particularly as part of the BRI, notably in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region. Oftentimes, these tools then become part of Beijing’s coercive diplomacy efforts. For instance, in the past decade it has convinced Central Asian countries which benefit from substantial investments, as well as Egypt, Thailand,

and Vietnam, among others, to deport hundreds of Uyghurs back to China (The Economist, 28 March 2018). In multilateral organisations, Beijing has used its soft power and economic might to garner support among other members for initiatives delegitimising human rights defenders, weakening international norms on the protection of civil society and enhancing the principle of non-interference in sovereign affairs (Piccone, 2018).⁷

60. Its global economic weight has equally allowed Beijing to gain a foothold in Western societies and expand its influence in some Allied countries. Beijing's clout affects both the foreign policy decisions of these countries and their domestic governance model. In the past decade, Chinese groups have increasingly invested in essential services and critical infrastructure such as banks, maritime and land-based infrastructure, and energy grids of European countries. This makes the development of a common response to China's violations of human rights and international law difficult (Rühlig, et al., 2018).

61. These Chinese investments in strategic sectors can threaten our security, independence and resilience, if not properly vetted. The pandemic and the economic disruption it has caused have only heightened this risk. Many Allies have already set up screening mechanisms for foreign direct investments (FDI) to examine whether they may pose security risks. Such efforts are crucially important. There is ample room for increased cooperation amongst Allies and between NATO and other organisations, particularly the European Union, on FDI screening mechanisms. These screening mechanisms are not meant to disrupt global investment ties with China or any other states, as member nations recognise that economic cooperation is a key driver of prosperity. They are tools that allow Allies to make more informed decisions on foreign investments, level the global economic playing field, and alleviate risks posed to national and collective security.

62. Beyond investments, Beijing has also exploited the increasingly global reach of Chinese companies to serve its interests. The CCP's influence over the media extends far beyond China's borders, through censorship and propaganda. Censorship on WeChat, one of China's local social media platforms, has been reported by users even when accessing the service from abroad. A message sent by a Canadian parliamentarian to constituents about Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement was even intercepted and deleted by the company's censors in 2019 (Repucci, 2019).

63. China is exporting its sophisticated surveillance and censorship system abroad. Beijing's experience in this area has made it a supplier of choice for countries considering the development of their own surveillance systems. At least 18 countries have adopted Chinese surveillance and monitoring systems in recent years, such as Malaysia, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Angola, Ecuador, and Venezuela (Polyakova and Meserole, 2019). Beyond providing the tools, Beijing is also training interested governments on how to carry out online censorship. It has held trainings and seminars in at least 36 countries on "new media" or "information management", thus exporting not only the technology to support such censorship systems, but also the legal and institutional framework that permits state control over society (Economy, 2019).

⁷ An analysis of seven such amendments and resolutions proposed by China between 2016 and 2018 at the UN Human Rights Council shows that countries such as Bangladesh, Bolivia, Burundi, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, and Vietnam almost always supported Beijing. Other members, such as Ethiopia, El Salvador, Kenya, Iraq, Nigeria, the Philippines, Senegal, and South Africa either voted with China or abstained. For more details, see: Piccone, Ted, [China's Long Game on Human Rights at the United Nations](#), The Brookings Institution, September 2018.

64. China is also using its role in standard-setting United Nations fora to spread its norms and serve its economic interests. Chinese technology companies, such as ZTE, China Telecom, and Dahua are playing a role in the development of standards within the UN International Telecommunications Union (ITU). These standards are then often adopted by developing countries across Africa, the Middle East and Asia, which do not have the means to develop their own rules (Gross, Murgia and Yang, 2019). China's standard-setting influence in areas such as Internet governance, facial recognition, video monitoring, city and vehicle surveillance does not just constitute an ethical and human rights threat. It also gives Chinese products a technological edge in matching the specifications that these companies helped create (Gross, Murgia and Yang, 2019).

65. China has also used some more subtle and less visible tools to promote its governance model and national interests. Beijing has, for instance, made considerable, but largely unnoticed, efforts to train foreign government officials both in Chinese academies built for that purpose and at home, particularly in Asia, Africa, and the MENA region. Following the participation of officials from these countries in such trainings in 2017 and 2018, Vietnam, Uganda, and Tanzania, for instance, all adopted restrictive cybersecurity and media laws (Shahbaz, 2018). China has also been accused in the past couple of years of meddling into electoral processes in Australia and New Zealand by granting political donations, via donors with links to the CCP, in exchange for political influence (Roy, 2019).

66. China's influence over other countries' education systems is also a cause for concern. According to official figures from China's Ministry of Education, 662,100 Chinese students studied abroad in 2018 (Yishu, 2020). Allied countries are their first destination: for example, in the 2018/2019 academic year, 370,000 Chinese students studied in the United States (Institute for International Education, 2019), and over 120,000 in the United Kingdom (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2020). As such, Chinese students now represent the largest share of foreign universities students in the United Kingdom (Jeffreys, 2020). The tuition fees that they pay constitute a significant source of income for universities. The high number of Chinese students enrolled in Western universities is also a tribute to the quality and attractiveness of Allied education systems. Moreover, cultural exchanges and exposure to different viewpoints are key elements of today's education. However, the presence of Chinese students has been increasingly linked to allegations of espionage and undue influence. In 2019, the British intelligence services warned universities that reliance on Chinese students and the fees that they pay could make them vulnerable to state theft of research and intellectual property (Kerbaj and Griffiths, 2019). China is using some of these students enrolled in Western educational institutions to influence academia, research outputs, and political debates, as well as monitor other Chinese students abroad and limit discussions of topics it considers sensitive (House of Commons, 2019).

67. The role of the Confucius Institutes, the Chinese culture and language institutes, has also raised suspicions. There are currently more than 1,700 Confucius Institutes and classrooms (affiliated respectively to universities and schools) worldwide. Cultural exchanges are a valuable tool for building mutual understanding and Allies should continue to welcome and support such efforts. However, these institutes are run in partnership between a host institution, a university or school in China, and a branch of the Chinese government responsible for language (Hanban, Office of Chinese Language Council International) (Jakhar, 2019). They therefore censor sensitive political topics and take into consideration loyalty to the CCP when hiring. As such, they can be considered extensions of the Chinese government (Human Rights Watch, 2019). For these reasons, some universities across Allied countries, including in the United States, the United Kingdom and France have closed the Confucius Institutes which they previously hosted (Jakhar, 2019). In August 2020, the United States designated Confucius Institutes as "foreign missions" for their role in supporting the

dissemination of Chinese propaganda, thus imposing on their staff restrictions similar to those placed on embassies (BBC, 14 August 2020).

VI. THE COVID-19 CRISIS: A TELLING INDICATOR OF THE EVOLUTION OF CHINA'S GOVERNANCE MODEL AND BEIJING'S EFFORTS TO EXPORT IT

68. The current COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a particularly relevant example of the risks associated with China's partial rejection of the global liberal order, as well as of the way in which the Chinese authorities aim to develop their repressive governance model and export it. First, although the decisiveness and effectiveness of the drastic measures adopted by the Chinese authorities to fight the outbreak of COVID-19 should be lauded, it should be also noted that their repressive policies restricting fundamental freedoms had a negative and dramatic impact on the initial spread of the virus. The limitations imposed on freedom of speech in the country delayed the Chinese government's response to the health crisis by crucial weeks. In particular, the silencing of whistle-blowers who tried to alert the population and the authorities at the early stages of the crisis about the potential dangerousness of the virus gave it a critical month-long head start, contributing to its spread (Palmer, 2020).

69. Second, the lack of transparency displayed by the Chinese authorities throughout the first months of the crisis only compounded the problem. They changed their definition of what constitutes a COVID-19 case multiple times after the outbreak started. They also withheld crucial information on the nature of the virus and initially downplayed the threat posed by the novel coronavirus. At the local level, the reflex of officials to suppress discomforting information led to delays in the national government's response. These shortcomings made it challenging for experts around the world to determine the true scale and severity of the outbreak and impeded containment efforts (Rabin, 2020). Moreover, China's lack of transparency and fluctuating calculation methods throughout the coronavirus outbreak cast doubt on the reliability of its official figures concerning the number of cases and deaths (Palmer, 2020).

70. Third, as part of their response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Chinese authorities implemented a myriad of new security and surveillance measures, including the mass collection of personal data to track citizens. Although these measures may have been – at least in part – both legitimate and necessary to contain and fight the spread of the novel coronavirus, there is growing concern that the authorities will use this crisis as a pretext to accelerate the expansion of their already excessively repressive surveillance regime (Kuo, 9 March 2020).

71. Fourth, as Beijing claims to have successfully contained the spread of the coronavirus within its borders, its narrative on the pandemic has evolved into disinformation. The change of gear indicates a willingness to shift the blame away, undermine democratic regimes and ultimately promote its own model of governance. The Chinese authorities have officially and openly been spreading disproved conspiracy theories about the origins of the outbreak. They also insist that China's victory over the coronavirus after a long and painful battle proves the superiority of its governance system (Barnes, Rosenberg, and Wong, 2020). In addition, the authorities have expelled American journalists from the country in part to prevent objective reporting of the government's activities and the evolution of the COVID-19 crisis inside China's borders (Nossel, 2020).

72. Fifth, the Chinese authorities are attempting to turn the current health crisis to their benefit and promote their governance model by taking advantage of the need for support in countries currently battling the disease (Hernandez, 2020). They appear particularly worried

about the possible lasting damage that could be caused by the outbreak to the country's global ambitions. In an attempt to portray China as a responsible global power, the authorities have resorted to propaganda to heavily advertise deliveries of medical supplies to various countries, including NATO Allies. This Chinese propaganda has overshadowed the media coverage of support provided by NATO member states to each other and to their partners in response to the pandemic. In the battle of narratives currently at play, Allies should therefore ensure that their message of unity and cohesion reaches the general public.

73. Finally, Beijing is exploiting the global uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which most of the world's attention is focused on responding to the crisis, to opportunistically advance its interests in its neighbourhood. In March, Chinese military aircraft crossed the unofficial demarcation line between China and Taiwan, and a Chinese fishing boat collided with a Japanese destroyer in the East China Sea. As mentioned above, in April, the Chinese navy continued to act aggressively in the South China Sea. It rammed and sank a Vietnamese fishing boat and harassed a Malaysian oil exploration vessel. In the same month, China declared two archipelagos, also claimed by Vietnam, in the South China Sea as Chinese administrative districts. In June, China engaged in a deadly skirmish with India on its disputed Himalayan border. In August, the PLA conducted a live-fire drill involving medium-range missiles in the South China Sea (Myers and Bradsher, 2020). Finally, in September, China conducted large-scale joint air and naval exercises involving almost two dozen military aircraft and seven naval ships in international airspace and waters on Taiwan's side of the unofficial demarcation line between China and Taiwan (Hille, 2020). Responding to Beijing's opportunistic assertiveness and increasingly confrontational foreign policy requires a coordinated response from Allies and partners.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

74. China has been increasingly challenging the liberal values that form the basis of the contemporary global order. While they have achieved progress in the area of economic rights, since Xi Jinping took power in 2012, the Chinese authorities have simultaneously reinforced their domestic repression and tightened their control over society. In addition, China continues to use the death penalty. Although the number of executions is considered a state secret by the authorities, experts estimate that Beijing is the world's leading executioner and carries out thousands of executions each year (Amnesty International, 2019). China has also developed an extensive high-tech surveillance state and a complex media and Internet censorship system that monitor individual behaviours and suppress fundamental freedoms. China's repressive treatment of ethnic and religious minorities is a matter of grave concern. Over the last four decades, the Rapporteur has formed close friendships with various senior members of past Chinese administrations. However, he never failed to draw their attention to the unacceptable situation following the annexation of Tibet by China. In Hong Kong, Beijing's aggressive reaction to the demands of pro-democracy protesters and its decision to impose a national security law on Hong Kong show China's willingness to use all its might to impose its governance model to the territory. In the South China Sea, in Hong Kong and in other parts of the world, China has been opportunistically using the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, during which the world's attention was focused on its response to the crisis, to aggressively assert its presence and impose its views.

75. Over the last two decades, China's growing military capabilities, economic growth, commercial power, and political influence have deeply affected the global political and security environment. A more assertive Beijing is now seeking to expand its regional and global footprint. As part of these attempts, China continues to engage in the current multilateral system with the aim to enhance its position in the post-WWII institutions and undermine their

liberal foundations. Simultaneously, Beijing has established multiple parallel mechanisms and institutions in Asia and beyond whose values and aims are more aligned with its world views and ambitions.

76. Beijing has repeatedly demonstrated disdain for and rejection of liberal values. The Chinese authorities regularly trample on fundamental freedoms and rights – chiefly, individual liberty, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. This report argues that Beijing’s approach to the global liberal order can therefore only be described as revisionist. China’s attempts to undermine the liberal structures of the contemporary global order constitutes a risk for our Alliance and our democracies.

77. This is particularly true as China has been successfully using its growing influence to promote and export its governance model abroad. The COVID-19 crisis is a recent example of the potential global risks associated with China’s lack of respect for liberal values, and in this case freedom of speech in particular. Since the outbreak started, the Chinese authorities have adopted drastic measures that have allowed the country to contain the spread of the virus. However, it appears that in the initial phase of the crisis they silenced those raising the alarm about the threat it posed, subsequently refused to recognise the scale of the crisis and were unwilling to share crucial information about the disease it causes with other countries. All these shortcomings contributed to the global spread of COVID-19. At the time of writing, the Rapporteur has become aware of the wide circulation of unverified information highly critical of the Chinese authorities and their response to the crisis. At this stage of the pandemic, it would be inappropriate to comment on the veracity of such information. This crisis remains an evolving situation which we will be able to better analyse once more information and data are made available and analysed. This will allow us to understand the causes of the emergence of the virus and the ways in which it could have been prevented.

78. In the face of China’s persistent efforts to manipulate the post-WWII global order, maintaining cohesion among NATO member countries is crucial to protect and promote the values on which our Alliance is based. The NATO 2030 reflection process, launched by the NATO Secretary General in June, is an excellent opportunity for Allies to elaborate a common response to the threat posed by China to the global liberal order. NATO member countries cannot let occasional differences in their approach towards China weaken the unity of the Alliance, undermine its collective security guarantee or challenge the centrality of our common liberal values. NATO Allies and partners must address the challenges posed by China collectively without ever compromising the core values on which both the global liberal order and NATO were founded.

79. In June 2020, NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, noted that China was one of three factors –together with the pandemic and the threat of global terrorism– which should push NATO towards pursuing a more global approach (NATO, 2020). One important step that the Alliance can take to become more global and contribute to safeguarding the liberal order is to strengthen and expand its cooperation and coordination with like-minded countries and organisations. In particular, NATO should consider reinforcing existing partnerships with countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, as well as fostering new ties with countries sharing its values. This would allow NATO to demonstrate its commitment to the region, share information, build common threat perceptions, and, where necessary, ensure a unified response to any illegal or hostile actions. Likewise, in order to combat the threat of disinformation which can undermine the trust placed by citizens in the functioning of Euro-Atlantic institutions, and to enhance resilience against interference or hostile investments in strategic sectors, NATO should strengthen its existing partnership with the European Union.

80. The significant deterioration of relations between China and many NATO Allies in recent years constitutes a particularly worrying trend. The Alliance and its member states should refrain from treating China as a pariah and, instead, seek every opportunity to cement goodwill, engage in a frank but constructive dialogue and promote tolerance with this rapidly rising power. Cooperation with China on common security threats can be beneficial for both the Alliance and Beijing. The COVID-19 pandemic is, here again, a pertinent example. As a global phenomenon that does not recognise any borders, it requires a coordinated global response which will necessarily have to involve both China and the Alliance. Failing to collaborate when faced with a crisis of this magnitude would only make our populations more vulnerable and undermine the resilience of the Alliance. In their interaction with Beijing, however, the Alliance and its member states should never hesitate to draw attention to those actions undertaken by Beijing, at home and abroad, that are unacceptable and should be prepared to resist behaviours that undermine the global liberal order.

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