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**Balancing China Without Great Power War**

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**Balancing China Without Great Power War**

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.**

**This paper is entirely my own work except as documented in footnotes (or appropriate statement per the Academic Integrity Policy).**

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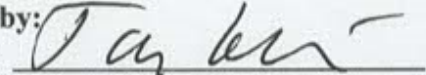
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## Abstract

After 70 years of mixed policies of containment and engagement with China, the US faces an economically strong adversary that seeks to remake the international order with China at its center. Many have opined that the rise of China will lead to an inevitable war with the US. In line with this concern, the 2017 US National Security Strategy reframes its China strategy in the form of great power competition. However, the reframing reveals policy guidance focused almost exclusively on the use of military power to compete with adversaries. In competition with China, the US needs to utilize balance of power methods outside of the usual military scope, which aim at competition, while staying below the threshold of conflict and war. The US should build a strategy based on balance of power methods successfully utilized in the 19th and 20th centuries – one which focuses on multilateral alliances, shared national interests and values, and utilization of economic principles that are predominant in international interactions today. This thesis used a historical analysis methodology to consider the various balance of power methods used throughout the last two centuries. The analysis revealed numerous balance of power methods of high, moderate, and low-risk levels towards causing conflict and war. After comparing these methods to modern-day China and its perceived grand strategy, a proposed US strategy that effectively balances China while limiting the possibility of war was devised. The five-point strategy focuses on balancing power through a focused information campaign, defending international norms, strengthening multilateral alliances, utilizing geoeconomics, and containing China economically with allies. This strategy will only be effective if the US can quell internal domestic divisions, refocus on shared national interests and values, and join efforts with its allies in a long-term effort to balance China with all pillars of national power.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my family. Mami and Papi, thanks for being there to support me all these years and to be my sounding board. Kids, thanks for putting up with my absence at work and often when I am home and still working. Lyd, thank you for keeping it all together. This family does not work without you, and I can only do what I do through your support.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes.* — Mark Twain

Great power competition is not a new concept and has occurred throughout history. Whether as the wars between Sparta and Athens on the Peloponnese, conflicts between European empires throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, or the nuclear stand-off between the United States (US) and the Soviet Union (USSR), great power competition repeatedly presents itself as countries struggle to exist or dominate. Today, the US finds itself facing great power competition with China. China is arguably the greatest peer rival to the US in our history and is on a trajectory to become a global hegemon. The 2017 US National Security Strategy (NSS) references competitions with states across political, economic, and military dimensions.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the 2018 US National Defense Strategy (NDS) calls inter-state strategic competition the primary concern in US national security and cites China first.<sup>2</sup> China also acknowledges the US as a strategic competitor; however, on a very different timeline.<sup>3</sup> The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has considered the US a competitor and prepared its grand strategy against it since at least 1949.<sup>4</sup> The US has only recently begun preparing to counter the threat of a rising China.

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<sup>1</sup> US President, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>. 2.

<sup>2</sup> US Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>. 2.

<sup>3</sup> State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in the New Era*, 2019. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Scobell et al., *China's Grand Strategy: Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Competition* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2798>. 7.

After decades of mixed policies, deliberate disengagement after World War II and the Korean War, followed by engagement to bring China into the worldwide market after Mao Zedong's death, the US has had limited effect making China a global partner. The opposite has occurred. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has emerged with aggressive aspirations of global dominance, a record of human rights atrocities, and a manipulative economic plan supported by the People's Liberation Army (PLA)—an increasingly modern and robust military force. The policies are all part of a grand strategy to install itself as the dominant global dynasty. Steven Mosher argues that China seeks, as stated by the first Chinese Emperor Qin Shiguangdi of the Qin Dynasty, “grand unification of all under heaven.”<sup>5</sup> A grand strategy that is patient and gradual is being waged across the full spectrum of China's national power assets.

The contest for hegemony with China is one of the most pressing issues facing the US in the coming decades. When discussing rising power threats, Graham Allison states that “in 12 of 16 cases over the past 500 years, the result was war”.<sup>6</sup> The US must carefully consider how to address competition with a rising China. The 2018 NDS places the utmost importance on a strategy of competition. In any case, most analyses focus on the lessons learned from the Cold War when the US competed with the Soviet Union, creating a tendency to myopically focus on military aspects such as weapons races and proxy conflicts. The military-focused strategies assume military competition but ignore the United States' broader interests and values that influence strategic development. Any

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<sup>5</sup> Steven W. Mosher, *Bully of Asia: Why China's Dream Is the New Threat to World Order* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, a division of Salem Media Group, 2017), xiii.

<sup>6</sup> Graham Allison, “Destined for War: Can China and the United States Escape Thucydides's Trap?,” *The Atlantic*, September 24, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>.

US strategy that does not consider ways to contain or manage China beyond the military dimension will quickly become irrelevant because of China's multidimensional approach to gaining global dominance through all of its instruments of national power. The US would become reactive and forced to adjust its policies based on China's actions. The singular focus on the military dimension ignores the historical examples of the 19th century that shaped George Kennan's education and led to the Soviet Containment Strategy formulation. The Soviet containment policy architect, diplomat George Kennan, studied the many conflicts of rising powers, growing nationalism, and brewing conflict that occurred throughout the 19th century.

THESIS: The United States should build a strategy based on lessons learned during the 19th century great power competitions together with George Kennan's containment strategy in order to secure American national interests and values. A combination of 19th century-style multilateral alliances built on shared national interests and values, using aspects of 20th century containment and engagement, will most effectively counter Chinese aggression and economic manipulation while avoiding great power war with China.

A Pacific Concert of Nations, similar to 19th century European alliances, that collectively counters manipulative economic policies and fulfills the vital need for a robust economy to support its sizeable industrial requirements, could constitute a multilateral alliance that would induce China to comply with international norms. Furthermore, as this competition has global ramifications, alliances should be strengthened with our European, Americas, and African partners. China's alternative would be economic isolation from the Pacific Concert, which would erode China's

economy over the long term. This alliance and Concert is only useful via multilateral diplomatic and economic support agreements that fulfill the allied countries' interests, values, and needs.

Analysis of specific examples of actions meant to balance the power of politics from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries highlights successes and failures. It shows how the various policies impacted the countries involved. Applying the understanding of the historical policies intended to balance power during great power competition between the US and China informs the variety of effective and likely ineffective options the US can employ to establish a balance of power. Further evaluation of China's perceived grand strategy and the implications of the employed balance of power methods highlights likely areas of imbalance. Comparing the historical policies to the current day problem of great power competition reveals a framework and the criteria for a multilateral approach with allies that balances against China's continuing aggression and disregard for international norms without crossing the threshold to war. The preliminary step in this analysis is identifying and defining methods used in balance of power politics.

## **Chapter 2: Balance of Power Methods**

When considering any policy regarding China, one often starts with a historical review of great power interactions. The historical study gives a glimpse into past successes and failures of various policies. The goal of the research is to determine the best mix of policies available. Understanding how all the historical approaches blended the political decisions and how those decisions impacted other countries' behavior while accomplishing one's objectives is crucial to understanding both first- and second-order effects. A historical review of the balance of power politics from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the blend of containment and engagement strategies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century highlights a collection of methods with high, medium, and low levels of risk regarding potential war and conflict.

Balance of power politics can be seen throughout history, executed with varying levels of effectiveness. Some methods are highly effective, while others have shown limited effectiveness under constraints, goals, and actors in history. These methods certainly overlap throughout history and types. Although taxonomized in this section, the focus is on defining the method and explaining its historical usage. Several balance of power methods are discussed and dismissed relative to their pertinence, value, and the likelihood of leading to war.

### **Methods that Lead to War or Conflict**

Foremost in balance of power politics is the use of military force because it has been the predominant tool. Whether utilized as a deterrent or used as the primary tool for accomplishing political goals in proper Clausewitzian form, a strong military will continue to be a primary fixture in modern politics. Some early examples of the military

balance of power are found during the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC), when Spartans and Athenians used their militaries' power and prestige to draw in allies and enforce policies. The Melian dialogue is a prime example of Athenian military usage to enforce or punish nations for not joining their alliance. The example shows a realist perspective of using military might when considering the “question between equals in power,” concluding that “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”<sup>1</sup> As history shows, the Athenians went on to attack and destroy the Melians.

Manipulation by military strength of this kind is not a US diplomatic or military policy and would not serve its interests in building alliances against China. US military strength will continue to be a focus as a deterrent, as depicted in the NSS and NDS documents today.<sup>2</sup> Without a credible and robust military, nations may not have the political strength to influence international relations and policy between countries. The importance of military readiness, deterrence, and, when necessary, the will to use military force is indisputable. Still, a military balance of power capability will serve a supporting background role in forming a valid policy against China.

In acknowledging military action as a deterrent, nations must also consider the risks of escalating a military conflict. A primary escalating factor is the tensions leading to war, such as arms races between competing countries. During the increasing uncertainty of European politics before World War 1 (WW1), Germany initiated a naval

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<sup>1</sup> Thucydides (Robert Strassler, Ed.), *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War; with Maps, Annotations, Appendices, and Encyclopedic Index*, A newly revised edition of the Richard Crawley translation (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998). 352.

<sup>2</sup> US President, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC:, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>. 25; Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>. 4.

arms race with Great Britain that escalated tensions. “The British became convinced that Germany was bent on challenging their supremacy at sea and on establishing her domination of Europe as well; the Germans became equally convinced that Great Britain was planning to ‘encircle’ them and would ultimately join France and Russia in a war against them.”<sup>3</sup> Out of fear, both countries continued to escalate their naval buildup and capacity. In forcing escalation, Germany solidified Great Britain as an adversary in the war rather than as a neutral arbitrating party, which was the typical role of Great Britain for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A 20<sup>th</sup> century example that continues today is the seeking of advantage via a 3<sup>rd</sup> offset. An offset is a decisive weapon or technology which provides an advantage over adversarial nation capabilities. The US has sought advantage via weapons races with the Soviet Union via the nuclear(first offset) and conventional precision munitions(second offset) offsets. Former Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work referenced the ongoing US research and development effort to find the 3<sup>rd</sup> offset, and this technological development continues today in the resurgence of great power competition debates.<sup>4</sup> Escalation in the buildup of military capabilities, technology, or weaponry as a deterrent serves to deter but also causes an escalation in tension between adversaries. As countries have sought stability and safety from military attacks, they have tended to seek technological advantages to keep an equilibrium against adversary offensive or defensive capability. However, this “balance of technology has tended to support balance of power,

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<sup>3</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, ed., *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848 - 1918*, 1. publ., 6. impression (Oxford New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986). 461.

<sup>4</sup> Bob Work, “Remarks by Deputy Secretary Work on Third Offset Strategy,” US DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, accessed December 20, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Speeches/Speech/Article/753482/remarks-by-deputy-secretary-work-on-third-offset-strategy/>.

but the balance has not tended toward increasing stability.”<sup>5</sup> The analysis suggests weapons races, specifically those that will cause a paradigm change or significant shift in advantage like nuclear escalation, can bring about the war they seek to avoid. The US must tread carefully in its weaponry developments, ensuring deterrence while not provoking war escalation.

Another type of balancing of power that developed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was arms control and nuclear disarmament agreements. The US and Russia have been signatories of various nuclear arms control agreements. Arms control agreements were created and used to limit the Cold War’s nuclear arms race’s continued buildup. The agreements continue to be renewed and adjusted but are no longer a primary focus as the treaties have solidified a form of status quo between adversaries. Some agreements, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), have been abandoned as modern technology has allowed violations and lack of adherence to dissolve the US and Russia’s original intent.<sup>6</sup> As many great power nations have secured their strategic nuclear deterrent, they now look to the next strategic advantage. Countries like China, which are not at the same nuclear deterrent level, have felt pressure to escalate their capability with the cessation of armament treaties like the INF since they are at a nuclear deficit to the US and Russia. As a result, new disarmament agreements are not likely to be a significant discussion point in any policy with China as they are more likely to want to be on equal nuclear footing before seeking agreements.

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<sup>5</sup> Quincy Wright and Louise Leonard Wright, *A Study of War*, 2nd ed, Midway Reprint (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). 63.

<sup>6</sup> C. Todd Lopez, “U.S. Withdraws From Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty,” U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1924779/us-withdraws-from-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-treaty/>.

A final type of balance of power politics is when great power countries decide to intervene with military force on behalf of allies. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, alliance members' intervention was predominantly accomplished to prevent a shift in the power balance of Europe. Treaties and alliances often necessitate a nation's action to intervene against the adversary of an ally. The action happens in two types, proxy conflicts and entangling alliances

The Concert of Europe was put in place following the Napoleonic Wars in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and shaped 100 years of balance of power politics until WW1. "Through their peace treaties ending the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, the statesmen of 1814 had not solved the major problems with which they had been confronted—political problems are never permanently solved—but they had provided intelligent and practical means for dealing with them."<sup>7</sup> A primary tenet of these treaties was an agreement to intervene on behalf of or against other nations threatening to disturb the established balance of power. 19<sup>th</sup> century intervention took place repeatedly to aid in quelling internal state revolutions and interventions against other nations that were perceived to be disturbing the balance by acquiring power or territory.

The revolutions began on the idea of liberal nationalism among peoples who were unhappy with the balance of power system created by the Kings, Emperors, and Tsars.<sup>8</sup> Revolutionaries sought the aid of surrounding nations to their cause, which spurred international allied states to deter intervention actions. Intervening countries raised the suspicions of other states, believing they intended to expand territory or declare war.

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<sup>7</sup> Norman Rich, *Great Power Diplomacy, 1814-1914* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992), 26-27.

<sup>8</sup> F. R. Bridge and Roger Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States System 1814-1914*, 2nd ed (Harlow, England ; New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 86.

Regardless of the reasons, military intervention became viewed as an attempt to expand one's empire by acquiring territory. One example that caused the Russo-Turkish War's breakout was Russia's intervention in the Ottoman empire's Greek revolutions. Massacres of both Orthodox Greeks and Muslim Turks occurred due to religious quarrels and revolution in the 1820s.<sup>9</sup> Russia, as the head of the Orthodox Church and Holy Alliance, felt compelled to respond. When allied navies that included the French, British, and Russians, sunk Ottoman fleets at Navarino, Turkey and Russia formally declared war. The Russian empire significantly weakened the Ottoman Empire throughout the campaign.<sup>10</sup> While Russia's actions were justified for the conflict, European nations quickly became more concerned and fearful of Russia's rise in status and power for having weakened the Ottoman Empire. The concern built into the Crimean War of the 1850s, which began "under the heading of fear of Russia, which was seen as the primary threat to the interest of the European powers in the area at that time."<sup>11</sup> As Concert of Europe members became increasingly wary of conflict, the desire to intervene on behalf of alliances started to deteriorate at the turn of the century. To avoid conflict and methods that lead to war, countries have also utilized moderate risk methods to attempt balance of power.

#### Moderate Methods of Balance

Just as there are types of balance of power politics that directly lead to or involve war and conflict, there are types that serve to halt or create a temporary status quo against conflict. The moderate methods of balance neither solve the issue between two countries

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<sup>9</sup> Rich, *Great Power Diplomacy, 1814-1914*. 49.

<sup>10</sup> Rich, *Great Power Diplomacy, 1814-1914*. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Rich, *Great Power Diplomacy, 1814-1914*. 103.

nor ensure escalation to conflict. These methods also have a moderate level of risk in escalation to conflict or war. Nations secure temporary solutions to prevent or cause a cessation of hostilities until further negotiations and peace can be attained. Moderate methods were utilized between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and some continue to be prevalent today. While the methods can prevent war and conflict, they are typically not long-term solutions, and countries use them as a temporary measure with hopes of achieving a better resolution or peace later. Unfortunately, a few of the methods can often straddle and occasionally cross a line into balance of power methods, which cause increased tension with the potential to lead to conflict and war.

The first of the moderate methods is the utilization of buffer states. Specifically, a buffer system includes geography, capability, and foreign policy orientations.<sup>12</sup> A buffer state is simply a geographic region or country that serves as a physical barrier between countries in conflict. Furthermore, “A buffer state is a relatively weak state lying between two or more antagonistic powers of comparable potential.”<sup>13</sup> The geographical region or country does not always choose to be a buffer and is often a victim of circumstance. Also, the politics and intent of surrounding countries cause the state to be considered a buffer state. A nation is not considered a buffer state merely because it shares geographical borders. Buffer states played a significant role throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries by serving as pseudo-demilitarized zones or neutral states between larger states or empires in conflict. States often did not prevent conflict from occurring but fell victim to aggressive acts of war. Buffer states themselves experience higher levels of risk than their

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Greenfield Partem, “The Buffer System in International Relations,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 27, no. 1 (1983). 4.

<sup>13</sup> “Buffer States,” accessed December 21, 2020, <https://geography.name/buffer-states/>.

surrounding neighbors. Still, the challenging nations are typically left at a moderate level of risk as long as the buffer remains.

Belgium is an example of a buffer state, spanning both the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Belgium served as a geographical region to provide space between two countries but could not prevent war. Belgium first served as a buffer between the French and Prussian/German empires before the outbreak of WW1 via the Schlieffen plan. Later it served as a buffer at the onset of World War 2 (WW2) via Germany's Blitzkrieg. In both cases, Belgium remained a victim of France and Germany's tension and was helpless to stop Germany's military advance. While the use of a geographic buffer provides a physical distance between adversaries, the distance can be overcome in time and ultimately does not serve as a permanent deterrent against conflict.

During the Cold War, Cambodia played a buffer state in a system between Communist North Vietnam and the US in South Vietnam. Although geographically to the west of both parties, Cambodia served as a strategic geographic location that kept South Vietnam from becoming encircled. Encirclement was a concern of President Nixon when he stated, "If North Vietnam also occupied this whole band in Cambodia, or the entire country, it would mean that South Vietnam was completely outflanked and the forces of Americans in this area, as well as the South Vietnamese, would be in an untenable military position."<sup>14</sup> The Cambodian example of a buffer was explicitly used to maintain a strategic advantage during the conflict.

Korea has served as a buffer in balance of power conflict. After the Korean War, the stalemate at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel serves as a demarcation between North and South Korea.

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<sup>14</sup> Partem, "The Buffer System in International Relations." 10-11.

As allies of the US, South Korea allows many US service members to be stationed throughout the country and maintain a presence. The armistice between North and South Korea maintains a buffer between the US and China, although they are not the primary players in this conflict. This buffer began in the Cold War and remains today.

North and South Korea also serve as an example of the divide and rule balance of power type. The division of Germany and Korea was a 20<sup>th</sup> century example of Divide and Rule, also defined as a method that “keeps the competitors weak by dividing them or keeping them divided, thereby maintaining a balance of power.”<sup>15</sup> At the end of WW2, the allied victors began to annex territories taken by the Axis powers and return control of conquered countries to the rightful citizens. Countries like Japan, Germany, and Korea remained under the control of the allied nations to which they had surrendered. Since Germany and Korea had surrendered to various countries, the countries were split according to the surrender agreements. Germany split four-ways, and Korea split two-ways. While the allies used this method to limit the power of Germany and Japan-occupied Korea, the Cold War would see the US and USSR try to divide each other’s alliances and influence. Germany and Korea’s divisions became symbols of the Cold War and became symbolic of the struggle between Democracy and Communism.

Containment served as arguably the most effective moderate type in balance of power politics seen throughout the Cold War. The containment policy was a “strategic foreign policy pursued by the United States beginning in the late 1940s to check the expansionist policy of the Soviet Union.”<sup>16</sup> The diplomat George Kennan

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<sup>15</sup> “Balance of Power -,” *University of Political Science* (blog), April 25, 2018, <https://www.politicalscienceview.com/balance-of-power/>.

<sup>16</sup> “Containment | Definition & Facts,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed February 12, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/containment-foreign-policy>.

penned *The Long Telegram* and his unclassified article *The Sources of Soviet Conduct* as Mr. X. Both documents were the formative baseline for the initial US strategy against the USSR. Kennan surmised that because of the USSR's expansionist and harmful grand strategy, the US and democracy around the planet were threatened and needed to focus on containment. "In these circumstances, it is clear that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies."<sup>17</sup> The US policy of containment specifically addressed limiting the USSR via defensive measures focused on preventing the expansion of Communist ideology and preventing the USSR's physical growth.

Containment was used throughout the Cold War. Its policies occasionally led to wars of intervention or very nearly brought the US to the brink of war (i.e., Vietnam, US support of Afghanistan against USSR, the Cuban Missile Crisis, etc.). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the line between containment and intervention policies was repeatedly blurred. Containment risk varied from moderate to high in various sub-systemic interactions throughout the Cold War. Intervention often occurred in third-world nations, and the struggle between the US and USSR was conducted at a sub-systemic level. Containment served as the culmination point for multiple US policies that lasted until the late 1980s.

After Kennan's documents, US policies quickly followed to include the presidential implementation of the Truman Doctrine. The Truman Doctrine, a form of containment, sought to strengthen democratic principles and counter the expansion of communist advances. The doctrine specifically aimed to:

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<sup>17</sup> George Kennan, "George Kennan 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct' (1946)," accessed December 20, 2020, <http://www.historyguide.org/europe/kennan.html>.

. . . provide political, military and economic assistance to all democratic nations under threat from external or internal authoritarian forces. The Truman Doctrine effectively reoriented US foreign policy away from its usual stance of withdrawal from regional conflicts not directly involving the United States, to one of possible intervention in far away conflicts.<sup>18</sup>

The outward yet defensive posture served as a primary deterrent against communism and intended to provide vulnerable countries an option to remain democratic in the face of communist expansion. The main point was to keep governments from falling to communism and beginning a chain reaction in surrounding regions. This concept is also known as the domino theory.<sup>19</sup> The domino theory was a leading cause for intervention in South East Asia throughout the Cold War. Intervention was an acceptable level of deterrence, with moderate risk, which engaged in conflict with the intent of stopping the larger war from occurring.

Containment also took on an additional balance of power role previously discussed: military arms races. By 1950, US analysts believed Soviet expansion of nuclear and military capability would eclipse the US and its allies' capabilities if more aggressive deterrent containment methods were not developed. Under Paul H. Nitze's leadership, then-head of Policy Planning in the Department of State, NSC-68 was written and formed a military-focused containment response. Out of fear of the developing USSR military strength, NSC-68 doubled down on a nuclear and conventional weapons race "by means of a rapid and sustained buildup of the political, economic, and military strength of the free world, and by means of an affirmative program intended to wrest the initiative from the Soviet Union, confront it with convincing evidence of the determination and

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<sup>18</sup> "Milestones: 1945–1952 - Office of the Historian," accessed December 22, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/truman-doctrine>.

<sup>19</sup> "Domino Theory | Definition & Facts," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed December 22, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/domino-theory>.

ability of the free world to frustrate the Kremlin design of a world dominated by its will.”<sup>20</sup> As a policy, containment formed the basis of US global interactions throughout the Cold War. As a strategy, containment began the formation of other approaches that concluded with the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union.

### Low Risk Balance of Power Methods

Low risk, non-military based methods tend to take on notions more familiar in a liberal international order and have continued to shape international policy in the modern age. The predominant theme with these balance of power types is using the diplomatic, information, and economic pillars of national power to secure national interests and objects. The military pillar will always be present and will continue to serve as a deterrent and support the other three pillars.

The first of the methods is the recognition of territorial sovereignty and borders. Territorial demarcation and agreement are often conducted following war termination and agreed upon by the remaining great power nations, although potentially leading to future conflict. Although similar to divide and rule, this method grants sovereignty to a state and is not controlled by other powers. A redrawing of the map is standard practice and occurred after the Napoleonic Wars, WW1, and WW2, to secure amenable agreements. The Congress of Vienna established the Concert of Europe in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to create empires that could balance the rise of an aggressor nation like Napoleonic France. While previous agreements like the Treaty of Westphalia agreed on sovereignty and legitimacy, Vienna’s Congress intended to maintain the balance of power against aggressors. To that end, “legitimacy gave way to the more practical principles of security

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<sup>20</sup> “NSC-68 United States Objectives and Programs for National Security,” accessed December 22, 2020, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-68-cr.htm>.

against France, the establishment of an operational balance of power, and self-interest.”<sup>21</sup>  
The Quadruple Alliance (Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Britain) formulated a balance of power of established empires to maintain order and a status quo throughout Europe. Although challenged, the delicate balance of power lasted through most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The end of WW1 established a less successful geographical and territorial boundary that remained heavily contested and focused on the victors’ interests. The colonial system remained intact and imbalances led to a rapid buildup and the outbreak of the Second World War. Following WW2, the end of colonization, redistribution of annexed territory, and a redrawing of territorial lines had a mixture of success and difficulties. Successes that continue to this day and problems led to internal revolutions, Middle East tension, and Cold War conflicts. Agreed upon territorial boundaries must be made and adjusted with care. Historical examples show the great wars that occur when the boundaries are contested or ignored. When accomplished well, countries legitimize boundaries recognized by the international realm that leads to respected boundaries. Multilateral negotiations of this type lead to more significant interaction between nations and the formation of alliances.

With established and recognized borders, nations have sought to enhance or secure their interests by forming alliances. From their earliest conceptions, alliances served as a method of ensuring mutual security against foes and aggressor nations. In addition, alliances formed along the lines of security and lines of trade. Security alliances serve as a deterrent against aggressors with promised military action response. Trade

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<sup>21</sup> Rich, *Great Power Diplomacy, 1814-1914*. 19.

alliances connect countries' economies through low barrier tariffs and methods that encourage mutual benefit. Alliances take many forms, but the predominant in balance of power politics are bilateral. Bilateral agreements are historically prevalent since it tends to be easier to reach mutual benefit for two parties seeking a common interest.

Multilateral agreements tend to be more complicated because of the contrasting interests inherent in multiple nations but have become more predominant over the last century.

The most significant of the multilateral alliances were the Concert of Europe, the League of Nations, the United Nations, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The Concert of Europe formed following the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Its purpose was to reorganize the empires into territories that could be controlled and balanced by other nations. It focused on achieving a balance of power through force to prevent a country like France from dominating Europe again. The Concert "sought to counterbalance the interests of rival states and the passions of antagonistic nationalisms in an equilibrium of contending forces."<sup>22</sup> Order and balance of power were maintained or lost through diplomacy and the threat of force.

Accordingly, with the Concert of Europe intent, communication amongst leaders and their ability to communicate proved critical. Regular international congresses occurred to discuss problems that arose between the empires, and the empires' ability to find common ground proved crucial to finding solutions that staved off conflict. The congress meetings became a sort of arbitration between empires to find agreeable solutions without force. Third parties to a conflict often served as arbiters to help keep the balance. While mostly successful in minimizing conflict, the balance of power

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<sup>22</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014). 266-267.

maintained tension and fear between opposing empires. The beginning of the end of the Concert of Europe occurred with the Unification of German states and France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. The sentiment was captured by British statesman Disraeli in his statement that "not a single principle in the management of our foreign affairs, accepted by all statesmen for guidance up to six months ago, any longer exists. There is not a diplomatic tradition which has not been swept away. . .The balance of power has been entirely destroyed."<sup>23</sup> All of Europe began to fear the larger German empire, which led to the irrelevance of arbitration methods. Germany disrupted the balance of power, and this fissure in the Concert of Europe led to WW1. Multilateral alliances are difficult to secure and maintain. WW1 showed the flaw of competing alliances, which were based on promises of assured military action.

Following WW1, multilateral alliances were with much higher aspirations of maintaining collective security versus the previous promise of balance via power. Wilson's League of Nations was formed on the commitment "to reorder international affairs on moral and not strategic principles."<sup>24</sup> Although the League of Nations failed to prevent WW2, it served as a baseline for after the war, when the world was ready to form a multilateral system like the United Nations (UN). The UN was formed in 1945 to provide an international collective and cooperative solution to preventing future world wars and conflict. It also sought to offer global solutions to problems of "economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character."<sup>25</sup> The UN is made up of 193 different countries and plays a critical role in international relations.

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<sup>23</sup> Rich, *Great Power Diplomacy, 1814-1914*. 218.

<sup>24</sup> Kissinger, *World Order*. 267.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations Charter, "Chapter I," June 17, 2015, <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-i/index.html>.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is another example of a multilateral alliance that focuses on its members' collective security. NATO formed in 1949 to counter the Soviet Union threat to the North Atlantic region. It comprises thirty countries and "promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defense and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict."<sup>26</sup> NATO is a prime example of a regionally focused multilateral alliance while the UN is globally focused. Both organizations establish a baseline of multilateralism and fit into a larger perspective of globalization that has taken hold in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Globalization is "the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets."<sup>27</sup> Globalization had arguably existed since the 15<sup>th</sup> century when trade ships began exploring the world. The desire for countries to seek riches via trade led to colonization and further establishment of normalizing practices. Economic trade alliances are a positive balancing attribute regionally as well as globally. The creation of the liberal international order after WW2 has acted as a springboard to more significant global economic interaction and led to multilateral economic organizations such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). GATT "provided the rules for much of world trade and presided over periods that saw some of the highest growth rates in international commerce."<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, it was "the only multilateral instrument governing

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<sup>26</sup> "What Is NATO?," What is NATO?, accessed December 23, 2020, <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>.

<sup>27</sup> "Definition of GLOBALIZATION," accessed December 23, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/globalization>.

<sup>28</sup> "WTO | Understanding the WTO - The GATT Years: From Havana to Marrakesh," accessed December 23, 2020, [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/tif\\_e/fact4\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/fact4_e.htm).

international trade from 1948 until the World Trade Organization (WTO) was established in 1995.”<sup>29</sup> The establishment of the WTO at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century further established an entity that defined international trade standards of goods, services, and intellectual property. While the WTO is not an enforcement mechanism, it serves as a diplomatic forum and arbiter of the global economic realm.

As the WTO has the authority to rule on international norms and trade disputes, countries still retain the ability to enforce economic policies independently. The final balance of power politics attribute this thesis will consider is the use of geoeconomics to influence political objectives and interests. While geoeconomics can take on many definitions, for the purpose of this thesis, Blackwill’s definition describes it as “the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests, and to produce beneficial geopolitical results; and the effects of other nations’ economic actions on a country’s geopolitical goals.”<sup>30</sup> Geoeconomics is presented as economic sanctions, embargoes, economic coercion, and other economic uses to achieve a nation’s political interests.

President Reagan’s use of geoeconomics during the Cold War is a prominent example from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In competition with the USSR, the Reagan administration “initiated an integrated and sophisticated financial and economic strategy designed to ramp-up Soviet expenditures of precious hard currency, while limiting its sources of cash and rolling back Moscow’s access to Western public and private sector financing.”<sup>31</sup> This strategy utilized a multifaceted economic sanction approach, diplomatic coercion of allies

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<sup>29</sup> “WTO | Understanding the WTO - The GATT Years.”

<sup>30</sup> Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016). 20.

<sup>31</sup> Douglas E. Streusand, Norman A. Bailey, and Francis H. Marlo, eds., *The Grand Strategy That Won the Cold War: Architecture of Triumph* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016). 161-162.

to avoid financial deals with the USSR and advocating alternative resource sources. This strategy was encapsulated within National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 75, the Reagan administration's Grand Strategy for USSR relations.<sup>32</sup>

Advocates of geoeconomics believe it to be the predominant force of geopolitics in the modern age. Whether it will replace military force's primacy or not, geoeconomics has become more prevalent towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the generation of new war theorists like Mary Kaldor, where large conventional wars and conflicts become rare events, economics may become the instrument of choice in great power competition.<sup>33</sup> As a significant pillar of national power, economics and its use in modern-day geoeconomics will continue to be a dominant force. Countries who choose not to utilize this pillar will find difficulty advancing their interests in the age of globalization.

Balance of power methods vary in risk and utility for international interactions. This chapter reviewed the high-risk military aggression methods, military escalation via weapons races, control of nuclear weapons usage escalation through disarmament and proliferation control, and nations' decision to intervene in conflict on behalf of allies. High-risk methods inherently cause conflict or remain on a delicate edge of potential conflict. The moderate risk methods delay conflict and maintain the status quo while attempting to mitigate escalation to war. History displayed these moderate methods in the form of buffer state utilization, divide and rule state control, and containment policies. Moderate risk methods were prevalent throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in attempts to defer or delay conflict. Finally, low-risk methods of national sovereignty and borders,

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<sup>32</sup> Streusand, Bailey, and Marlo, *The Grand Strategy That Won the Cold War*. 239.

<sup>33</sup> Mary Kaldor, *New & Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Third edition (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012).

alliances of security and trade, and the use of geoeconomics were prevalent as sources of international interaction that did not escalate to war. Low risk methods served as peaceful balance methods in the prior two centuries and may continue to serve in the future.

Having discussed the methods of balance of power politics, it becomes time to compare their viability against China's perceived grand strategy.

### **Chapter 3: Balance of Power Against Chinese Grand Strategy**

Competition with China will undoubtedly use a combination of the balance of power politics methods. Employment of various and combined balance of power types runs the risk of compounding the destabilization caused by China's efforts if not carefully considered. Understanding the current state of the region and China's grand strategy shows how the US can anticipate the ramifications of employing the various and combined balance of power politics methods. Shaping the balance of power in the region without causing escalation becomes possible by applying some moderate and low-risk methods against China's Grand Strategy.

#### **China's Grand Strategy**

Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream is a long-term strategy that seeks to install a global system dominated by China at its center. It is cast as a Dream because they perceived it was their path before the century of humiliation and suppression it feels it endured following the Opium Wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the emergence of the CCP at the end of WW2. According to Michael Pillsbury,

Beijing seeks to remake the global hierarchy, with itself as leader, and to counter and undermine the power and influence of the United States. China's actions and new publications have cast serious doubts about the repeated assertions of many US scholars and policy makers that Beijing has no long-term strategy and intends merely to seek a "peaceful" rise into the pantheon of democratic, free-market nations.<sup>1</sup>

China's plan is on a timeline to achieve (or rather re-achieve) global dominance via a rejuvenated system. Xi's Chinese Dream has a disturbing perspective in that "they perceive China's history and future trajectory from a Han-nationalist point of view. . .

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2016). 236.

Success is “payback” for the two centuries of “humiliation” that China, the rightful leader of the world, and the Han people have suffered at the hands of the West.”<sup>2</sup> The return to power and grand strategy has been kept primarily internal and secret from the world until Xi Jinping’s ascendance to power. Since then, with the backing of the world’s second-largest GDP (and growing) and the support of a technologically advanced PLA, China’s ambitions are now publicly proclaimed. Furthermore, China’s ascendancy looks to claim territories it sees as part of its domain.

Just as China claimed then reasserted claims over Tibet, Hong Kong has been diplomatically reclaimed in recent history and no longer enjoys the One Country Two Systems in place since 1997. After a summer of new imposed national security laws in 2020, Hong Kong has essentially lost its system and freedom. “On paper, it targets four crimes: secession, subversion, terrorism, and colluding with foreign forces. In reality, its catch-all wording outlaws a host of political views such as advocating for independence, autonomy, or international sanctions.”<sup>3</sup> China seeks further territorial claims towards Taiwan and the South China Sea. Through Xi Jinping’s control of the Party, the PLA, and the people, China will continue to aggressively and patiently continue on the path towards regional and global hegemony, with its economic giant, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as its means. China’s BRI seeks to provide the resources and influence China needs to continue strengthening its economy while tying other countries to their international economic system. It has enriched China but has been impacted by poor

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<sup>2</sup> Azeem Ibrahim, “How Xi Jinping Is Ruining China’s Dream of a Century of Dominance,” Text, *The National Interest* (The Center for the National Interest, June 23, 2020), <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/how-xi-jinping-ruining-chinas-dream-century-dominance-163331>.

<sup>3</sup> AFP, “Hong Kong Reels after the Year That Free Speech Died,” Hong Kong Free Press HKFP, December 26, 2020, <https://hongkongfp.com/2020/12/26/hong-kong-reels-after-the-year-that-free-speech-died/>.

results and indebtedness to China throughout the globe. In Ecuador, building a dam and other infrastructure projects in exchange for exclusive oil rights has left the country with a non-functioning dam and endless debt.<sup>4</sup> “It doesn’t matter whether Ecuador can afford them. China gets paid either way. To settle the bill, China gets to keep 80 percent of Ecuador’s most valuable export — oil — because many of the contracts are repaid in petroleum, not dollars. In fact, China gets the oil at a discount, then sells it for an additional profit.”<sup>5</sup> Their strong military, China’s aggressive rhetoric, and its economic weaponization through the BRI threatens to destabilize the regional balance of power and could have lasting changes for the coming century if not addressed.

In furthering its perceived return to becoming a global hegemon, China has also sought to control the information realm. Individual rights and a free society are counter to an authoritarian government. For that reason, China aims to control the international narrative through efforts like the Chinese Dream. Influencing the narrative shapes mindsets and leads to efforts to control access to information that reinforces its vision and limits access to information that counters its vision. The policy of control has resulted in human rights violations and atrocities. As the information and technological age increases the transmissibility of content, thoughts, and data, China is forced to go to extreme lengths to control its people and counter any messaging that challenges or speaks poorly of China’s CCP rule. “Beijing was long focused on building a ‘Great Firewall’ to prevent the people of China from being exposed to any criticism of the government from abroad. Now the government is increasingly attacking the critics themselves, whether they

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Casey and Clifford Krauss, “It Doesn’t Matter If Ecuador Can Afford This Dam. China Still Gets Paid,” *The New York Times*, December 24, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/24/world/americas/ecuador-china-dam.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Casey and Krauss, “It Doesn’t Matter If Ecuador Can Afford This Dam. China Still Gets Paid.”

represent a foreign government, are part of an overseas company or university, or join real or virtual avenues of public protest.”<sup>6</sup> From the Tiananmen Square massacres to modern-day persecution of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjian, China attempts to control information and dissent through violence, oppression, surveillance, and economic manipulation against individuals, organizations, or nations who oppose or even speak against its actions.

### Application of Balance of Power Methods

Aggressive balance of power methods, such as military action and arms races, inherently cause or lead to conflict and war. These Methods will undoubtedly cause conflict with China and arguably would not gain any semblance of balance in the region. While China has used violence against its people, the goal of balance of power methods is to keep it from using violence against other states' governments and people. Preemptive military action against China, without a deliberate causal incident from China, would disrupt the current military balance of power and is not a helpful method to avoid war. Accordingly, weapons races inevitably raise tensions and do not serve the purposes of balancing power. Perhaps the most significant and likely balance of power politics situation that could lead to war is a conflict regarding Taiwan. A US military defense would inherently risk conflict. The prospect of conflict will require US leaders to consider the level of weapons advancement necessary for deterrence while limiting the chances of provoking an arms race.

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Roth, “World Report 2020: Rights Trends in China’s Global Threat to Human Rights,” Human Rights Watch, January 3, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/global>.

## Moderate Risk Methods

Moderate methods play a significant role, and the framework highlights several Pacific region problems that need addressing. First and foremost, both the buffer state system as well as the divide and rule attribute are alive and well in Korea. While the US considers North Korea a threat to the region's stability, China benefits from the buffer; North Korea also proves a disruptive and distracting power to the US. Steven Mosher points out that Xi Jinping sees North Korea as a buffer in the same manner as did Mao: “A strategic relationship between China and North Korea as being “As close as lips and teeth,” and worried that “If the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold.””<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the PLA’s 2019 *China’s National Defense in a New Era* document echoes the concern of nuclear proliferation. Still, it then fails to mention North Korea’s nuclear aspirations, for which China is responsible.<sup>8</sup> The omission is deliberate because it sustains the notion that China remains dedicated to North Korea’s support as a buffer state and benefits from the fact that North Korea serves as an unbalancing force against the US. The US’s continued focus on North Korea as a weapon of mass destruction threat in its NSS and NDS are indicative of the importance and focus it receives as a national threat.<sup>9</sup> The reality is that as long as North Korea is supported and sustained by China, it will continue to be a source of tension for the western world.

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<sup>7</sup> Steven W. Mosher, *Bully of Asia: Why China’s Dream Is the New Threat to World Order* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, a division of Salem Media Group, 2017). 280.

<sup>8</sup> China and State Council Information Office, *China’s National Defense in the New Era*, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>. 7-8; Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>. 3.

Similarly, Taiwan serves as an unbalancing force for China because its presence thwarts their national goal of reunification under the China Dream. The western world views a democratic Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait as essential to global commerce and prefers to keep them open and unrestricted from a dominant Chinese nation. Taiwan's role as a buffer for China keeps balance in the region but remains a significant source of tension that mismanaged can spill into conflict.

During the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1995, the US “responded with the most significant American show of force directed at China since the 1971 rapprochement, sending two aircraft carrier battle groups with the carrier Nimitz through the Taiwan Strait on the pretext of avoiding ‘bad weather.’”<sup>10</sup> The US response, triggered by Chinese missile launches designed to influence free Taiwanese elections, served as a cautionary tale of the US’s resolve to maintain the region’s status quo. Since that time, the status quo remains unchanged. However, the PLA has modernized, and China has continued to seek economic and diplomatic means to reunite Taiwan. Although still serving as a buffer, the increased size and technological capabilities of the PLA mean that it remains a risk to conflict escalation and that US shows of force may not prove as effective compared to 1971.

Likewise, containing China is not easily solved. Most containment occurs along ideological, military, or economic means. Unlike the USSR, however, China is not actively attempting to spread its ideology. According to Steven Mosher, its ideology is virtually closed, as the Chinese people tend to display narcissistic Han Chauvinism. “Chinese intellectuals have always been prone to fall prey to a narcissistic nationalism: a

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<sup>10</sup> Henry Kissinger, *On China* (London: Penguin Books, 2012). 476-477.

deeply held conviction that their nation, culture, and race is superior to all others.”<sup>11</sup> China’s focus remains on achieving its grand strategy of the Chinese Dream and does not seek to bring other nations into its ideological fold. Unlike the US and western world’s efforts to create the liberal economic order which benefited democratic values of all countries who embraced the system, the Chinese ideology seeks to remake the world as one that predominately benefits itself. China only seeks to use others to fulfill its national goals.

Kennan’s USSR containment policy understood US policy along ideological and geographic terms. Kennan acknowledged later in life that he primarily sought to contain the USSR in the ideological realm. “So when I used the word ‘containment’ with respect to that country in 1946, what I had in mind was not at all the averting of the sort of military threat people talk about today. What I did think I saw—and what explained the use of that term—was what I might call an ideological-political threat.”<sup>12</sup> Although US policy would eventually expand to attempt communist containment across all spectrums, it was not the original intent. Total containment of China would not likely work because of China’s level of engagement as a global trade member. The US alone would find it difficult to economically detach from China because of the significant levels of mutual investment and trade between them. Trade of this type happens with many countries throughout the world, and it is not reasonable or realistic to expect all to detach from China on a global scale.

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<sup>11</sup> Steven W. Mosher, *Bully of Asia: Why China’s Dream Is the New Threat to World Order* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, a division of Salem Media Group, 2017). 181.

<sup>12</sup> George F. Kennan, “Containment: 40 Years Later,” March 20, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1987-03-01/containment-40-years-later>.

If not ideologically, when dealing with China, most administrations continue to focus on a mix of containment and engagement known as conengagement.<sup>13</sup> Congagement policy is hotly debated and struggles to find the proper mixture for interactions between the US and China. The engagement dimension focuses on national power's diplomatic and economic pillars, while the containment dimension focuses on China militarily. “While continuing to ‘engage’ China through trade and diplomacy, successive administrations have also taken steps to revitalize at least some of the elements of the earlier strategy of containment: bolstering US capabilities in East Asia, strengthening ties with regional friends and allies, and, to the extent feasible, slowing the growth of China’s military power.”<sup>14</sup> Despite the horrors of incidents like Tiananmen Square and ideological differences, there remained a desire and belief that engagement through global inclusion and commerce would bring China into the fold of democracy and benefit all involved. Western democracies were particularly eager to welcome China into the world economy. They avoided calling out human rights violations for “fear of provoking a full-blown crisis with Beijing, and the lobbying efforts of American businesses eager to profit from the fast-growing China trade. . . [T]he Clinton administration began to assert that it could best promote change, not by withholding the benefits of trade and investment but rather by enveloping China in a close economic embrace.”<sup>15</sup> In execution, the world was left with an unchanged Chinese authoritarian system that has benefited from its inclusion into the global liberal economic system that upset the balance of power in the Pacific region and beyond.

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<sup>13</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2011). 89.

<sup>14</sup> Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy*. 89.

<sup>15</sup> Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy*. 93.

The lack of fusion in the US engagement strategy has caused an imbalance in the current-day policy. The military focuses on deterrence and containment, while diplomatically and economically, China is encouraged to expand undeterred from international trade norms or while weaponizing its economy. The inherent contradiction allowed an economically strong China to develop a military force and capability to achieve near parity with the US. An emboldened and militarily strong China is resistant to military deterrence from the US. The Department of Defense is left responsible for militarily containing China by developing improved capabilities, providing military aid through Foreign Military Sales (FMS) to regional allies, and attempting to limit PLA strength in the area through deterrence. Meanwhile, Military containment is seemingly not coordinated on any strategic level with the economic realm of engagement, which is profitable to both countries, corporations, and the global market. The lack of fusion resulted in a military status quo and development on both sides, which presents a moderate risk of conflict because of the inherent requirement to balance military aggression.

Economic containment appears to be a realm of potential competition with China but, for the moment, remains a focus of engagement. A total containment or decoupling of economic relations also presents a problematic solution because of both economic systems' intertwined nature. Diplomatic efforts to synchronize both military and economic engagement may serve as a method of balance of power if coordinated effectively. However, if utilized disparately, engagement methods can encourage and strengthen the adversary, as has occurred with China.

## Low-Risk Methods

Low-risk balance methods, while seeming ineffective, often provided balance or a return to balance in the previous two centuries. The balance is achieved through non-violent means or deterrents that compel international action rather than enforce it. They will serve as an anchor for balance of power politics throughout the Pacific region, specifically when considering China's policies and its relationships with its neighbors and the greater global theater.

Before WW2, the western world made colonies of most of the Pacific region nations. Following the end of the war, colonial rule in the region ended and Asian countries gained sovereignty. "The end of WW2 marked the end of Western imperial rule in Asia. Where it had once depicted divisions into colonies and spheres of influence, the map of the region was now delineated into nation-states of varying sizes, populations, regime types, and degrees of cohesion. The people of Asia had shaken off their colonial overseers."<sup>16</sup> The existence of sovereign borders and territories served as a stabilizing factor throughout the Pacific region. As a region, Pacific countries predominantly maintain a sort of status quo that recognizes sovereign borders and limited interference. In many ways, the region represents Westphalian Europe before the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Westphalian peace reflected a practical accommodation to reality, not a unique moral insight. It relied on a system of independent states refraining from interference in each other's domestic affairs and checking each other's ambitions through a general equilibrium of power. No single claim to truth or universal rule had prevailed in Europe's contests. Instead, each state was assigned the attribute of sovereign power over its territory. Each would acknowledge the domestic structures and religious vocations of its fellow states and refrain from challenging their existence.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy*. 21-22.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 3.

However, as China has grown economically and militarily, it has begun to challenge the norm of sovereignty.

Much like Napoleon did by taking advantage of the lack of unity or balances of power that the Westphalian treaties provided at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, China appears eager to dominate the region. However, the difference is its method to dominate the region via economic entanglements and backed by military control of the South China Sea's international trade waters. Rather than an aggressive military conquering neighbor nations, China has sought to claim international waters to control the commerce that transits the seas and claim the resources within those waters. As Pillsbury describes China's historical approach:

China has dusted off centuries-old maps seeking to prove China's historical linkage to islands in the East and South China Seas to justify asserting expansive territorial claims. The South China Sea became a flashpoint when, at a summit meeting in May 2010 with the United States, China asserted its claim to the Spratly Islands, adding tens of thousands of square miles of ocean with rich energy and fishing resources to its exclusive economic zone and extending its territorial waters nearly to the coasts of Vietnam and the Philippines.<sup>18</sup>

China's actions disrupt the balance of power in the region as it seeks to claim economically critical areas as its own at neighboring countries' expense. Absent a mitigating body, China has continued to push claims of territorial waters and building islands and reefs to justify its claims and defend them militarily.

A growing concern among the Pacific nations is that there is no counter or balance to oppose China's aggressive disposition towards sovereignty and expansionism. When countries have grievances, China seeks to discuss them bilaterally to maintain an overwhelming imbalance of power in its favor. In recent border disputes with India, the

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<sup>18</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*. 203.

Chinese embassy reacted negatively to US discussions in peacekeeping. “The Chinese embassy in New Delhi said in a statement there is “no space for a third party to intervene” in the boundary issue between India and China.”<sup>19</sup> Yet multilateral peacekeeping has had a presence throughout history. The 19th century had the Concert of Europe, where outside 3rd parties would diplomatically arbitrate on international issues. The Pacific region now has a mix of various bilateral military agreements and a few economic trade agreements. However, none of the agencies have served to provide balance to the region. The combination of multiple alliances includes the international UN, the regional Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) alliance, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade alliance, and the regional Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad).

As the primary international arbiter, the UN has acted as a regional judge and has previously ruled on China’s claims of the 9 Dash Line area of the South China Sea. Under the UN Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Arbitral Panel found China’s historical claim to the area unfounded and does not override the UNCLOS agreement to which the PRC is an original signatory. “In 2016, a Hague-based arbitral court ruled that China’s maritime claim, which covers about 90 percent of the resource-rich South China Sea, has no legal basis.”<sup>20</sup> The ruling, however, has not reduced China’s claim to the area, nor its continued pressuring of its neighbors in the region. Other than the ruling, which serves as international law, there is no enforcing mechanism to deter

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<sup>19</sup> Sutirtho Patranobis, “Border Dispute with India Bilateral Issue: China to US,” Hindustan Times, October 29, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/border-dispute-with-india-bilateral-issue-china-to-us/story-iswsIOq647SJk0bvFnmSOO.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Alexis Romero Regalado Edith, “Duterte Raises South China Sea Ruling to UN,” Philstar.com, accessed December 29, 2020, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/09/24/2044728/duterte-raises-south-china-sea-ruling-un>.

China. Countries have sought arbitration but have not subsequently chosen to support any consequence, through the UN, against China following the decision. Neither the ASEAN nor the RCEP serves as an arbitrating group as these alliances primarily focus on financial, peacekeeping, and cultural relationships of their respective members. Furthermore, countries have not supported each other in an effort to counter Chinese debt-trap diplomacy collectively.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the Quad is a group of democratic nations (Australia, India, Japan, and the USA) formed primarily as a defensive military alliance for the region. Initially created in 2007, the coalition has seen a resurgence of importance as China's aggressive and coercive tactics have increased. Although its members previously vacillated about the alliance's significance, there is a return to its perceived necessity. "One of the few tangible foreign-policy philosophies of the Trump administration is movement away from multilateralism and alliances. But the White House seems to make an exception for the Quad. This may be because the Quad today is defined less by what it stands for and more by what it opposes: China."<sup>21</sup> Alliances like the Quad have the potential to recruit members and form a sort of Pacific Concert or Pacific type of NATO, which would balance China's advancements. To date, it has not matriculated and focuses solely on a military method of rebuttal to China's tactics. As Pacific leaders' awareness of China's coercive and manipulative threats grows, open communication and cooperation amongst allies will become a critical tool in balancing power.

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<sup>21</sup> Ravi Agrawal, "Why the Quad Is the One Alliance Trump Cares About," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed December 29, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/10/08/why-quad-alliance-trump-cares-about-india-australia-japan-china/>.

The final and arguably most feasible balance of power attribute is China's same method to induce imbalance in the region: geoeconomics. Geoeconomics is "the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests, and to produce beneficial geopolitical results; and the effects of other nations' economic actions on a country's geopolitical goals."<sup>22</sup> China has employed a systematic utilization of its economy to drive its strategic goals. In the words of James Carville, "It's the economy, stupid."<sup>23</sup> Just as Carville opined that US citizens would vote primarily for whoever would benefit their finances, similarly, China understands they can continue to move towards their China Dream strategy by getting countries to focus on their economic system and BRI's perceived benefits while the balance of power gradually shifts towards China's advantage. So much so that countries willingly or via coercion continue conducting business with China because of its capabilities' lucrative nature. Much like the UN, organizations like the WTO aim to ensure fair international law is formulated and maintained. The WTO acts as an economic arbiter but cannot enforce its rule of law if its members do not hold each other accountable.

While China's success and the financial opportunities it provides do cause imbalance, its manner of conducting business is the main problem. China has imbalanced the economic realm of the Pacific region by its unchecked and unchallenged use of geoeconomics. Western society has seemingly abandoned the use of geoeconomics for its perceived lack of political correctness and "reflect a widely held worldview that markets

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<sup>22</sup> Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016). 20.

<sup>23</sup> Gerald F. Seib, "Voters Tend to Trust Trump on the Economy. Yet He's Behind. Why?," *Wall Street Journal*, October 19, 2020, sec. Politics, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-campaign-2020-apparently-its-not-the-economy-stupid-11603111498>.

are somehow apolitical, to be kept free from geopolitical encroachments, and in any case not a proper arena for state power politics.”<sup>24</sup> No longer valued as an exemplary method of fair-trade economics, the world has fallen victim to China’s weaponization of its economy. China’s geoeconomics is blended in with strategic diplomacy, which supports its political objectives. The price for politically clashing or speaking against any Chinese policy is dealt with as a sudden and harsh cessation of commerce, aimed ultimately at coercing nations to kowtow to China’s political aspirations lest countries find themselves cut off from trade and political discourse.

The Philippines found itself in a difficult economic situation when China refused to purchase their bananas and left them to rot on their docks after challenging China’s South China Seas territorial water claim:

Scarborough Shoal, a cluster of coral reefs and islets, lies more than 500 miles from the Chinese mainland and 140 miles off the northern coast of the Philippines, well within a 200-nautical-mile “exclusive economic zone” provided for by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. But China — which claims most of the South China Sea, including portions also claimed by the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan — insists that the shoal has been part of its territory since at least the 13th century and points to old maps that mark it as Chinese<sup>25</sup>

China responded to political challenges and conflicts by banning products, imports, and the economics of its challengers. This method is repeatedly utilized by China and has caused a balance of power shift in China’s favor. By economically punishing its adversaries, China forced states to concede to its demands or cease opposition to its practices.

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<sup>24</sup> Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means*. 153.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Higgins, “In Philippines, Banana Growers Feel Effect of South China Sea Dispute,” *Washington Post*, June 10, 2012, sec. Asia & Pacific, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/in-philippines-banana-growers-feel-effect-of-south-china-sea-dispute/2012/06/10/gJQA47WVTV\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-philippines-banana-growers-feel-effect-of-south-china-sea-dispute/2012/06/10/gJQA47WVTV_story.html).

Similarly, the Chinese government banned the import of Norwegian salmon after Norway chose to honor Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo with the Noble Peace Prize.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, numerous international leaders from Norway, Denmark, and even the US have chosen not to meet with the Dalai Lama so as not to offend and get caught in Tibetan-Chinese politics. The change in policy stems from a fear of impacting political and economic trade arrangements with China.<sup>27</sup> The US entertainment industry has also become subservient to Chinese political sensitivities and will no longer acknowledge or discuss any topic which could appear to be critical of China. The result would be banning Hollywood productions or Sports league viewings throughout China and coming at a massive revenue loss. Countries and organizations consistently give up political and diplomatic concessions to ensure economic benefits are maintained.

A final example from the winter of 2020 is China's ceasing Australian imports across multiple industries. The policy change is due to Australian officials' calls for Coronavirus investigations against China and subsequent Twitter escalations between both sides. "China has put a stop on Australian coal while imposing hefty tariffs on a range of farm products including barley, beef, lobsters, and wine, angered by Australia's calls for a global inquiry into the origins of the coronavirus."<sup>28</sup> There are countless other examples of China's geoeconomics use to enforce its political and economic will with countries worldwide. Due to China's unchallenged use of geoeconomics, the imbalance continues and increases in voracity as countries sign on to the BRI initiative. It further

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<sup>26</sup> Higgins, "In Philippines, Banana Growers Feel Effect of South China Sea Dispute."

<sup>27</sup> Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means*. 129.

<sup>28</sup> Reuters Staff, "Australia's Goods Trade Surplus Hits 2-Year Lows on China Trade Tensions," *Reuters*, December 23, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/australia-economy-tradefigures-idUSKBN28X0HB>.

allows China to manipulate the globe for fear of impacting other countries' economic systems or profits. For the moment, the US utilizes economics as a tool separate from its political strategy, which has enabled China's rise. If the US wishes to change China's trajectory, it must consider a new combination of balance of power Methods. The US must develop a strategy that includes geoeconomic aspects.

## Chapter 4: Discussion and Recommendation

### Acknowledgment

Before continuing into the discussion and strategy recommendation, it is necessary first to acknowledge the works and analysis conducted in parallel with this thesis. Following the five initial months that comprised most of the research, analysis, and writing for this thesis, two Atlantic Council Strategy papers were released in late 2020 and early 2021, which conclude many of the same points.<sup>1</sup> While methods and analysis used to devise each strategy differed from this thesis, some of the same strategy points are suggested. Rather than see this as a conflict, the presence of similar suggestions on how to handle China strategically is a validation of these options' strength.

### Discussion

With a thorough analysis of the historical balance of power politics methods completed, it becomes time to recommend a course of action. The US is seemingly emerging from its sole focus of winning the War on Terror to a renewed focus on the return of great power competition.<sup>2</sup> Neither focus is inherently a strategy unto itself. While the thought of great power competition may reinvigorate military members, leaders, and planners to the Clausewitzian glory days of the cold war, a realistic strategy for the US must seek to achieve its interests and values while maintaining the liberal international order which has brought so much prosperity to the planet. The anonymous

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Kroenig and Jeffrey Cimmino, "Global Strategy 2021: An Allied Strategy for China," *Atlantic Council* (blog), December 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/global-strategy-2021-an-allied-strategy-for-china/>; "The Longer Telegram: Toward a New American China Strategy," *Atlantic Council*, January 28, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/atlantic-council-strategy-paper-series/the-longer-telegram/>.

<sup>2</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>. 2.

Longer Telegram article suggests that “the US’s China strategy must be anchored in both national values *and* national interests. This is what has long distinguished the nation from China in the eyes of the world. The defense of universal liberal values and the liberal international order, *as well as* the maintenance of US global power, must be the twin pillars of America’s global call to arms.”<sup>3</sup> Although easier said than done, a renewed focus on interests, supported by a combination of balance of power attributes, could enable the US to achieve its objectives while avoiding great power war with China.

Before listing the points of a balance of power strategy with China, the US must first consider a few formative goals. The US must once again address and define what kind of country it wants to be. By first refocusing on its interests, it can then look outward and formulate a strategy to achieve them. A renewed internal focus would serve two purposes. First, to redefine or refocus on the people of the United States’ values and interests. John Locke’s philosophies shaped the US’s beliefs and were formative to the Declaration of Independence in that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”<sup>4</sup> These formative values served as a baseline for the US and, in many ways, the subsequent Liberal International Order. If the US still values this system, it should seek to defend and strengthen it with its allies. At its core, the Liberal International Order is built on free and open trade. That order requires consistent work and focus.

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<sup>3</sup> “The Longer Telegram: Toward a New American China Strategy,” *Atlantic Council*, January 28, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/atlantic-council-strategy-paper-series/the-longer-telegram/>. 10.

<sup>4</sup> “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription,” National Archives, November 1, 2015, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

Second, a redefined national purpose would serve as an example and attractant to our allies. For too long, the US's domestic politics has projected the image of a divided people, unable to agree or accomplish any semblance of agreement. Every policy, comment, and tweet is dissected and used towards a domestic political advantage, further dividing the country on the simplest of measures. Without a unified posture or desire to unite, it will be impossible to invigorate our leaders towards finding a solution to collective international threats. Kennan noted the same observation when confronting the USSR. "Thus the decision will really fall in large measure in this country itself. The issue of Soviet-American relations is, in essence, a test of the overall worth of the United States as a nation among nations. To avoid destruction, the United States need only measure up to its own best traditions and prove itself worthy of preservation as a great nation.<sup>5</sup>" The US will have to decide what it wants to look like and if it will choose to unite in purpose.

When engaging in great power competition, the US must also acknowledge and understand its nature. As previously discussed, China has understood this competition for the last 70 years. Now that the US is becoming aware, it must consider the scale and type of competition it faces. A competition with China that avoids war must be understood as an enduring journey or an infinite game. As Simon Sinek describes, "infinite games have infinite time horizons. And because there is no finish line, no practical end to the game, there is no such thing as 'winning' an infinite game. In an infinite game, the primary objective is to keep playing, to perpetuate the game."<sup>6</sup> The US cannot afford to declare

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<sup>5</sup> George Kennan, "George Kennan 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct' (1946)," accessed December 20, 2020, <http://www.historyguide.org/europe/kennan.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Simon Sinek, *The Infinite Game* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2019). 4.

victory and abandon successful policies and strategies, as it did at the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, it should also not abandon policies and give up, even if it perceives a relative decline in the face of a rising China.

Finally, the US must understand why it seeks to compete with China. A successful strategy against China that avoids conflict will strive to maintain the US and its allies' interests and values. This strategy should not pursue a policy to simply remain #1 or to regain power or status previously achieved. A strategy to maintain dominance goes against what has made our country successful in the past and risks causing more problems than it seeks to solve.

The new call for competition obscures more than it reveals. At its root, competition is not a strategy. It says little about the links between particular tools of statecraft and underlying US political objectives. This is understandable, for the simple reason that 'competition' itself is not really the United States' strategic response to China's emergence as a great power. Instead, underlying and embedded in the new competition consensus is a nascent grand strategy I term 'neo-primacy.'<sup>7</sup>

A primacy policy works against the liberal international order and is the current policy that China aims to achieve. To compete, the US strategy requires a long-term focus on ensuring international norms, national interests, and national values.

Having discussed the various balance of power attributes and their potential impact on China, the following points will not come as a surprise. In fact, many of these points have either been agreed upon or discussed at some level in various books, State Department documents, and recent strategy memos. These points, however, have not

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<sup>7</sup> Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, "Neo-Primacy and the Pitfalls of US Strategy toward China," *The Washington Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (October 1, 2020): 79–104, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1849993>. 79.

been explicitly addressed as a joined strategy of balance of power. Especially not as a balance of power policy that does not focus on military force.

## Strategy Recommendation

### 1. Information Campaign

To date, the US's renewed focus on great power competition appears unfocused and appears to be a desperate attempt to force allies to favor the US over China. "At a time when calls for great power competition are front and center on the foreign policy agenda, strategists need to recognize that competition does not itself dictate a particular course or strategy. Thus far, however, the US approach has focused on re-securing US dominance for its own sake."<sup>8</sup> The US must realize that in many ways, China is its own worst enemy. As previously discussed, China's record of human rights atrocities, aggressive actions in the South China Sea, theft of intellectual property, and violation of international business practices should be quite damning on their own account. Instead, we see an expertly executed public relations policy implemented by China with the backing of financial manipulation. We also see organizations and national leaders content to ignore China's transgressions to prevent loss of economic relations with them.

An information campaign that factually points out and condemns Chinese wrongdoings should be conducted internally in the US and externally to the international community. The US must understand and be educated on China's threat and why it must focus on competition with them. The same State Department office which George Kennan worked in recently released a proposed strategy document stating a similar point:

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<sup>8</sup> Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, "Neo-Primacy and the Pitfalls of US Strategy toward China," *The Washington Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (October 1, 2020): 79–104, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1849993>, 95.

The United States must educate American citizens about the scope and implications of the China challenge. Only an informed citizenry can be expected to back the complex mix of demanding policies that will enable the United States to secure freedom. Executive-branch officials and members of Congress must address the public regularly and forthrightly about China's conduct and intentions, and about the policies the US government must implement to secure freedom at home and preserve the established international order.<sup>9</sup>

This internal information campaign would be a critical piece in uniting the country in like-purpose and mind—especially those of our political leaders. Bipartisan agreement on a course of action with China is vital.

Likewise, an information campaign that informs our allies and the world on China's policies is also necessary. In the information age we live in, a properly executed public affairs campaign is very influential and formative. The goal of the information campaign should not be to manipulate our allies into choosing the US. Instead, it must be a campaign designed simply to inform and allow the end-user to make decisions. This policy would look to strengthen the attractiveness of US soft power while weakening that of China.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, an information campaign that calls out China's manipulative economic practices must be understood. China's grand strategy seeks to ensnare others in the sticky power trap of its economy.<sup>11</sup> An informed domestic and international populace would restore the information balance and is a direct threat to China, which aims to control the narrative at great measure.

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<sup>9</sup> Policy Planning Staff, "Elements\_of\_the\_China\_Challenge-20201117 - DocumentCloud" (Office of the Secretary of State, November 2020), [https://beta.documentcloud.org/documents/20407448-elements\\_of\\_the\\_china\\_challenge-20201117](https://beta.documentcloud.org/documents/20407448-elements_of_the_china_challenge-20201117). 48.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 1st ed (New York: Public Affairs, 2004). 7.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Russell Mead, "America's Sticky Power," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed January 1, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/29/americas-sticky-power/>.

## 2. Defend and Enforce Territorial & International Norms

Sovereign territories and recognized borders continue to form the basis of general peace and balance of power among nations worldwide. Their existence led to the formation of multilateral and international organizations such as the UN and WTO, in which countries come together to maintain peace and globalized trade. These organizations helped to establish international boundaries, waters, and regulations to prevent conflict amongst competing nations.

Over time, however, it appears the enforcement of such territorial and international norms has become strained. Through patient and methodical economic, diplomatic, and military pressure, China expands its political interests globally while expanding its territorial rights geopolitically.

Today, observers not blinded by a Wilsonian worldview see nothing surprising in China's growing naval power, its actions in the South and East China Seas, and its Belt and Road Initiative. This is what empires have always done. . . In classical geopolitical terms, China is a great Eurasian-based land power that has taken to the sea. The United States should view the Belt and Road Initiative as a geopolitical development of the first order.<sup>12</sup>

China's continued attempts to control the free trade lanes and resource-rich waters of the South China Sea are a clear violation of international laws and rulings. Yet, China continues its manipulative practices and military build-up throughout the region.

It is time for international nations and organizations to recognize China's strategy and act. In conjunction with the previously mentioned information campaign, a united effort to stop China's encroachment of sovereign and international territories must be enforced. "The principal reason for the formation of international organizations,

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<sup>12</sup> Francis P. Sempa, "The Case for Containing China," *The Diplomat*, June 29, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/the-case-for-containing-china/>.

including the UN, was to uphold and promote an international system characterized by liberal principles and to play a decisive role in maintaining international security.”<sup>13</sup>

These organizations and systems will only be effective in maintaining the territorial balance of power by backing the international community’s rulings and standing laws. Only united under agreed-upon international law can the global community compel China to conform.

### **3. Form and Strengthen Multilateral Alliances**

Although tenuous at times and not without conflict, 19<sup>th</sup> century peace was made and kept by the balance of power that the Concert of Europe’s multilateral alliances provided. In the past, these alliances formed predominantly on their leaders’ diplomatic skills and the promise of military action against opposing aggressive empires. Although much has changed in contemporary society, there are still multilateral alliances such as NATO, which formed to defend against a USSR threat and continue today as an Atlantic alliance against aggression. In the Pacific, like-minded democratic states formed an alliance known as the Quad. This alliance has historically been built on the back of military weapons sales and inter-military exercises but limited beyond that scope.

The Quad is a symbolically and substantively important addition to an existing network of strategic and defense cooperation among four particularly capable democracies of the Indo-Pacific. What makes the Quad unique is that its members are powerful enough militarily and economically to resist various forms of Chinese coercion while offering the “muscle” necessary to defend the foundations of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific from potential challengers.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. “The United States and Europe: A Concrete Agenda for Transatlantic Cooperation on China.” November 2020. [SFRC Majority China-Europe Report FINAL \(P&G\).pdf \(senate.gov\)](#). 9.

<sup>14</sup> Jeff Smith, “The Return of the Indo-Pacific Quad,” Text, The National Interest (The Center for the National Interest, July 26, 2018), <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/return-indo-pacific-quad-26891>.

Expanding the presence and capability of entities like the Quad or some future Pacific Concert will be necessary to balance Chinese aggression.

Noticeably absent in the Pacific region is a third-party arbiter to balance conflicts and disagreements among neighboring nations. Individual nations or allied groups of united purpose should serve as this arbitrating presence. At times the UN and WTO fill these vital roles, but a Pacific regional entity does not further enforce or lend credibility to that purpose. “The absence of a region-wide grouping of some kinds is a historical anomaly. . .Lack of strategic coordination is a luxury that the democracies can no longer afford; if they hope to balance China’s growing power, they are going to have to find ways to resolve their differences, pool their resources, and align their policies.”<sup>15</sup> The US must seek to establish and strengthen Pacific alliances to assure the region there is an option other than China's manipulation. “The worry across Asia today is not that the United States will pursue overly combative policies toward China; rather, it is that Washington may not be up to the challenge of consistently and effectively dealing with the rise of China over the long term.”<sup>16</sup> The US needs to assure allies of their commitment to the region. A strategically aligned Pacific Concert-like alliance that can provide arbitration is a normalized diplomatic means for nations to offer discourse and opposition to China without military action.

Furthermore, China’s global aspirations require alliances that exist beyond the Pacific region. China’s BRI seeks to expand and include the greater Middle East and European areas as well.

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<sup>15</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*, 1st ed (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2011). 281-282

<sup>16</sup> Robert D Blackwill, “Implementing Grand Strategy Toward China,” *Council on Foreign Relations* Council Special Report Number 85, no. Number 85 (January 2020): 84. 15.

China has continued to advance an ecosystem of anti-competitive economic and industrial policies that use discriminatory practices and coercion to further its strategic goals. Such actions hamper legitimate private enterprise and present an unprecedented challenge to the international trading system. If the United States and Europe hope to preserve the role of free markets, then they must find areas for cooperation that strengthen the system itself and push back on specific PRC behavior.<sup>17</sup>

The US must strengthen its diplomatic and economic ties with its allies within the EU. It can no longer be perceived as having less concern for its European partners as it focuses on the Pacific pivot. Renewed relations with the EU along multilateral interests will go a long way towards restrengthening the US's soft power. Multilateral alliances that unite and balance the region need to utilize all national power attributes and expand their scope to include economics. The US must show that it does not merely seek primacy but desires to defend and strengthen the liberal international order. The utilization of multilateral economic power will serve as the most prominent tool to balance China.

#### **4. The Use of Geoeconomics**

China continues to gain influence and growth almost predominantly through the attractive growth nature of its economy. So much so that other nations are, little by little, becoming further tied to its economic sticky power. Each nations' expectation of profit also enhances and encourages China's will to do whatever it wants to include the furthering of its BRI. The BRI will further seek to control the world's economy and feed the engine of growth China requires to achieve its Grand Strategy. Meanwhile, China operates with impunity in almost every other aspect of life. Whether military aggression, diplomatic alienation, information wars via social media, or economic blacklisting,

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<sup>17</sup> US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. "The United States and Europe: A Concrete Agenda for Transatlantic Cooperation on China." November 2020. [SFRC Majority China-Europe Report FINAL \(P&G\).pdf \(senate.gov\)](#). 10.

China's belligerent behavior is ignored because of the profit to be made and the economic prowess of its growing GDP. To counter China's weaponization of its economy, the US and its allies must refocus its usage of geoeconomics.

Although a popular method in the past, contemporary US and Western countries have grown to see geoeconomics as flawed and separate from typical political actions. This imbalance in views is advantageous to China, which has chosen to use geoeconomics as its primary method. Today's minimal western utilization is almost exclusively focused on sanctions and should expand to its full potential. Economic tools in usage today should include trade policy, investment policy, economic and financial sanctions, cyber, aid, financial and trade policy, energy, and commodities.<sup>18</sup> Only an approach that understands how to utilize and defend against these modern economic tools can be effective in any geoeconomic strategy against China. As the US and its allies begin to refocus their efforts to balance China, the predominant weight of effort must be balancing the geoeconomic struggle that is occurring in the Pacific. "China has heightened its use of geoeconomic incentives, both in its neighborhood and beyond, with the goal of increasing the stake other countries have in maintaining good relations with China. Little has been done—in Washington or elsewhere—to check China's geoeconomic influence."<sup>19</sup> As still the number one GDP globally, the US has excellent potential and influence with its economic national pillar, and it must return to its utilization.

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<sup>18</sup> Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016).49.

<sup>19</sup> Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means*.Robert D. 231 – 232.

A return and revitalization of geoeconomic usage must accompany an education and information campaign on its uses. The stigma of geoeconomics usage by western countries must be countered and explained. Geoeconomics utilization should be used aggressively to counter and coerce against misbehaving countries, such as China, while also encouraging good behavior and the following of international trade norms by our allies. Furthermore, re-education amongst the US leadership is essential so that policies are formed in the country's interests and not along short-sighted party lines. Critical geoeconomic decisions have fallen short "when the administration and Congress have encountered these geoeconomic possibilities. . .they have been blunted by bureaucratic disputes inside the administration, by differences within a Congress largely unfamiliar with the potential of these geoeconomic tools, and by contentious US domestic politics."<sup>20</sup> Through a thorough education and information campaign, geopolitics will be understood and embraced as a primary method for ensuring national interests in the contemporary age. This enterprise will require an all-hands, all-agency approach to rebalance China's geoeconomic practices.

## **5. Containment. . .Through the Economy**

The final application of balance of power methods is a mix of both moderate and low-risk methods. Total isolation and containment of China is as impossible a venture as it was for the US against the USSR in the Cold War. Any strategy against China must acknowledge a balance of Friedberg's engagement principle, as economic globalization is such a large part of today's society. A engagement strategy with China must seek to engage them when they adhere to international norms while economically containing or

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<sup>20</sup> Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means*. 254.

isolating them when they are not. The US, however, cannot do this alone. The country must “reboot US alliances for geoeconomic action-focused as intensely on shared geoeconomic as on political and military challenges.”<sup>21</sup> Economic engagement will only work against a belligerent China when it is applied multilaterally. Multilateral alliances that economically isolate and contain China when they do not follow international norms are a must.

While it will be difficult for an individual country to counter China’s manipulative economic principles, allied nations would make it possible through mutual support. Matthew Kroenig and an international group of strategists contend that defending against China must be done through alliances to protect the existing economic system. “Likeminded allies and partners should defend against destabilizing Chinese behavior and impose costs on Beijing’s ongoing violations of core principles of the rules-based system.”<sup>22</sup> Their article goes on to explain the geoeconomic methods to enforce against China and defend the global economy.<sup>23</sup> This alliance would provide alternative sources of commerce and support where China falls short. Ultimately a united alliance that ceases to conduct business with China would cause China to isolate itself economically, as more nations choose not to engage. This multilateral alliance of economic engagement with China would, at worst, see countries continue to seek profit over strategic interests. At best, however, the region would see economic balance return to the region, based on fair international practices and national interests.

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<sup>21</sup> Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means*. 230.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew Kroenig and Jeffrey Cimmino, “Global Strategy 2021: An Allied Strategy for China,” *Atlantic Council*, December 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/global-strategy-2021-an-allied-strategy-for-china/>. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Kroenig and Cimmino, “Global Strategy 2021.” 57-60.

This five-point competition strategy is not a guarantor of success. In the end, the US's best chance in competing with China is by focusing its strategy on a long-term, infinite competition while keeping the interests and values of the country in mind. "America's place as an Asian power rests not only on economic and strategic interests but also on enduring ties of family, faith, and personal experience. . . For America, continued openness is not only an expression of self-confidence, it is an enduring source of national strength. The surest way for the US to keep its balance in Asia and the world is to remain true to its finest traditions."<sup>24</sup> Through this focus and not one of maintaining dominance or primacy, the US will successfully continue to compete with China peacefully into the future.

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<sup>24</sup> Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy*. 284.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

While the US NSS and NDS may acknowledge a return to great power competition, we must understand that China has seen the US as its main competition since at least the end of the Chinese Revolution in 1949.<sup>12</sup> China's 100-year plan is to continue its growth throughout the Pacific and establish itself as a global hegemon.<sup>3</sup> A popular notion is that China's rise to power will result in an inevitable war because of its rapid rise and natural conflict with the US. Regardless of whether war may be inevitable, the US must refocus on great power competition methods that attempt to avoid regional or global wars with China while balancing China's nefarious intent. The strategic competition should be formulated on lessons learned from the past two centuries.

The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century great power nations provided numerous examples of balance of power methods used in their competition strategies. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century European powers specifically built their Congress on the premise of countering the growth and aggression of rival nations. In contrast, the Cold War was a bipolar balance of power that narrowly avoided great power war at the expense of costly military arms races and sub-systemic conflicts. Economic policy, Kennan-inspired containment strategies, and sub-systemic conflicts led to USSR's disintegration.

Historical analysis of high, medium, and low-risk balance of power methods revealed options for competition with China that stress the importance of alliances and multilateral agreements. The US must continue to shape the competition to focus on

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<sup>1</sup> US President, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Scobell et al., *China's Grand Strategy: Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Competition* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2798>. 7.

policies built on multilateral partnerships that emphasize collective allied interests and values that can prevent escalation to war. “Perhaps it is best to return to a compelling compass for US external behavior—American national interests as a basis for US grand strategy—and to examine briefly again how geoeconomic instruments, as informed by history. . .might promote these interests.”<sup>4</sup> The resulting five-point strategy of a focused information campaign, defending international norms, strengthening multilateral alliances, utilizing geoeconomics, and containing China economically with allies, provides a strategy for effectively competing with China. Any policy that stays below the threshold of war while economically limiting China in coordination with US allies will need to consider the same balance of power methods analyzed in this thesis. The strategy ultimately leaves China to decide if it wants to either follow international norms and participate in a global economy or force itself into isolation.

A lack of whole-of-government strategy continues to divide efforts of US national power. Disconnected diplomatic, informational, economic, and military actions have little hope of maintaining a balance of power with China or preventing war. Unification of effort will only be possible if the US can focus on the problem with its allies and limit its divisive internal debates and politics towards an enduring competition strategy. The China competition challenge will take persistent deliberate action to maintain a balance with China peacefully.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016). 254.

## **Appendix A**

### Acronyms

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

BRI – Belt and Road Initiative

CCP – Chinese Communist Party

EU – European Union

FMS – Foreign Military Sales

GATT – General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

INF – Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NDS – National Defense Strategy

NMS – National Military Strategy

NSC – National Security Council

NSDD – National Security Decision Directive

NSS – National Security Strategy

PLA – People’s Liberation Army

Quad – Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

RCEP – Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership

UN – United Nations

UNCLOS – UN Convention on Law of the Sea

US – United States

USSR – Soviet Union

WTO – World Trade Organization

WW1 – World War 1

WW2 – World War 2

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## Vita

Lieutenant Colonel Adam H. Rosado is a student at the Joint Advanced Warfighting School (JAWS) at the Joint Force Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia.

Previously as Commander of the 912th Air Refueling Squadron, March Air Reserve Base, California, he executed a \$63 million flying-hour program and \$671 thousand operations budget to ensure the readiness of 148 personnel across 33 Air Force Specialty Codes, including 35 aircrew members.

Lieutenant Colonel Rosado was commissioned in 2002 as a graduate of the US Air Force Academy. After completing undergraduate pilot training at Columbus AFB, Mississippi, he served as a KC-135 instructor pilot at Robins AFB, Georgia. He flew missions in support of Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. Next, he served as FTU Chief KC-135 Evaluator Pilot, Operations Group Standardizations and Evaluations, Altus AFB, Oklahoma. In 2009, Lieutenant Colonel Rosado attended and graduated as a Weapons Officer from the United States Weapons School, Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada. In 2011, he was selected for Phoenix Reach and cross-trained to the KC-10 as part of the 6th Air Refueling Squadron, Travis Air Force Base, California, where he served as 60 AMW Deputy Director of Staff, Chief of Mobility, Chief of Tactics, and as a KC-10 Evaluator/Instructor Aircraft Commander. In 2014, he served as a Deputy Director of Operations, 618th Air Operations Center (TACC) before transitioning to Strategy Advisor to the Director, A3/10, Air Mobility Command.

In 2017, Lieutenant Colonel Rosado served as Director of Operations for the 912th Air Refueling Squadron before taking command in 2018. He has over 3,500 hours as an Evaluator/Instructor Aircraft Commander in both the KC-135 and KC-10.