

## THE IMPACT OF CHINESE ASSERTIVENESS ON GLOBAL ORDER

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### Abstract

Chinese assertiveness has increased considerably in the international arena, with enhanced Chinese influence in all spheres. China has become a political, economic, and military power, flexing its muscles in the international politics. China's rise has affected the existing liberal global order and caused the advent of a new cold war. China, being a staunch communist regime is presenting a challenge to the liberal international order. Thus, the present paper attempts to explore how Chinese assertiveness has affected the global order.

### Keywords

China's Rise; Liberal International Order; Chinese Assertiveness; New Cold War; Wolf Warrior Diplomacy

### Resumo

A assertividade chinesa aumentou consideravelmente na arena internacional, com uma maior influência chinesa em todas as esferas. A China tornou-se uma potência política, económica, e militar, flexionando os seus músculos na política internacional. A ascensão da China afetou a ordem global liberal existente e provocou o advento de uma nova guerra fria. A China, sendo um regime comunista convicto, apresenta um desafio à ordem internacional liberal. Assim, o presente documento tenta explorar como a assertividade chinesa tem afetado a ordem global.

### Palavras-chave

Ascensão da China; Ordem Internacional Liberal; Assertividade Chinesa; Nova Guerra Fria; Diplomacia Wolf Warrior

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### Introduction

The paper attempts to shed light on the impact of China's rise in the international arena. China has made remarkable progress since the Communist Revolution, which took place in the year 1949. Internal reform programmes such as the Great Leap Forward, the Second Revolution, the Four Modernizations, and the China Dream all resulted in China's development in all spheres of statecraft. Belt and Road Initiative has augmented Chinese outreach across the globe and transformed it into a global player. China's transition to a market-oriented economy while remaining an ardent Communist regime politically is a distinctive feature of blended government. Fruits of economic liberalisation were reaped in the form of China's moving fast on the path of becoming a superpower of the 21st century. Simultaneously, China's military advancement with modernised weapons and a well-developed military system and progress in other fields has taken it far ahead of other countries. Chinese confidence is evident in its dealings in the international arena, where it strives to take things in its stride, thus posing a challenge to the existing international order. The paper endeavours to apply the analytical approach and the theory of liberalisation to make the study rigorous.

The rise of China in the 21st century is a great phenomenon which has changed geo-strategic equations and the course of global order. The increasing power of China has enhanced its assertiveness in the global arena, which seems to be a threat to the existing liberal international order. The paper focuses on recent developments that are taking place, especially during the pandemic era, which pose a challenge to the existing international order. China boasts of becoming a superpower with substantial economic growth, military modernization, a strong political system, and farsighted leadership in the international arena. The irresponsible, impetuous, and rash behaviour of China during the COVID-19 global pandemic has again raised questions about the future of liberal world order. A New World Order with China as its major player is definitely not safe and secure. Since Xi Jinping became President, China has been moving fast to become a superpower for a host of reasons. Xi's vision of China Dream, the Belt and Road Initiative, his tough stance on various international issues, his hegemonic attitude toward neighbours, and the overall progress of the Chinese nation. The Belt and Road Initiative has unfolded Chinese global ambitions and pushed its outreach tremendously. Now China discards the existing Liberal International Order dominated by western powers and ups the ante to become a major player in the international arena.



## China Dream

China Dream is a concept proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping that reflects his vision for his country and its people, which is to make it enormously strong by regaining the Chinese nation's lost glory. Xi's early days of hardship shaped him as a more confident and powerful leader and helped him to develop his own vision of his country and its people, which was manifested in his decisions and actions after he became President. President XI promulgated his vision of the Chinese Dream, which means a "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation". He aspires to modernise China with more economic development, military advancement, and political reforms. The vision seeks a judicious combination of power and prosperity to enable 1.4 billion Chinese to become rich, to become powerful and to be respected. (Allison, 2017).

Xi's war against corruption during the initial years of his presidency consolidated his grip on power. His massive communist party restructuring programme and attempt to connect it with the masses won him applause and further consolidated his position. As a mark of Mr. Xi's influence, the Chinese Communist Party voted in favour of writing his philosophy, called "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era," into its constitution. Prior to Xi, Mao, who led the communist revolution in 1949, and Deng Xiaoping, who implemented economic reforms in the 1980s, had established it as a significant fundamental law of the land. (BBC, 2021: May 12th) As Maoism was the post-revolutionary ideology of communist China, nationalism is now a core ideology in China. Xi's consolidation of power and his nationalistic rhetoric established him as a paramount leader. His crackdown on corruption, suppression of freedom of the press and dissidents, and his hold on power made him the most authoritarian leader since Chairman Mao. Xi was also instrumental in amending the Chinese constitution to end the compulsion of a maximum of two terms for the president, which was supposed to be a chance for President Xi to remain in power for an indefinite term (Susan Shirk, 2018). All these developments contributed to securing his position as paramount leader. Moreover, his hardline attitude towards Taiwan, Hong Kong, in the South China Sea, with Southeast Asian neighbours, with India, Japan, and the USA, indicates Chinese assertiveness in the international arena.

## The Belt and Road Initiative

The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative is the signature project of Xi Jinping aimed at establishing China as a superpower of the 21st century. The project intends to augment trade and cooperation by connecting different continents of the globe. The project is an attempt to resuscitate the legacy of the ancient Silk Road stretching from Asia to Europe, which got its name from the silk that was carried along it. The project is taking shape with various connectivity and logistic projects being built at various places across the globe. The BRI has myriad objectives, such as infusing strong impetus to enhance political mutual trust; deepening economic cooperation; promoting people-to-people contact; and increasing cultural exchanges among relevant countries. These objectives are to be achieved through joint cooperation, common development, and regional integration. All countries along the Maritime Silk Road have appreciated the plan and aim to develop and benefit together from the project.



The widespread network of trade routes developed as part of the initiative will link China to many established and developing markets, creating considerable opportunities for Chinese industries. The PRC believes that opening up trade to new markets in this way will sustain the country's economic growth long into the future while also raising living standards for a large portion of the Chinese people. The project aims to divert Chinese manufacturing overcapacity to other markets in the world. The project is also an attempt to rectify economic inequality among the different regions of China itself.

The 19th Party Congress of the Communist Party of China, which was held in 2017, has also approved the project (PWC, 2017), which has multiple aims to enhance China's international stature and also to boost domestic industries. The project seems important also in the manner of re-establishing the credibility and legitimacy of the Communist party by creating a situation of economic affluence in the country. The project involves the global ambitions of China as it would augment its influence considerably and contribute to making it a new superpower of the 21st century. The project connects 4.4 billion people, or roughly 66 percent of the global population of more than 65 countries, with a GDP of \$29 trillion. The gargantuan project would significantly enhance Chinese outreach across the globe while giving it ample opportunities to meddle in global affairs. The Chinese presence in every nook and corner is a giant step for China, which is very much in consonance with its grand strategy to become a superpower.

### **Wolf Warrior Diplomacy**

China has always been an aggressive country, but its "wolf warrior" diplomacy became prominent during the pandemic period. It denotes the aggressive posture and non-leaning down attitude of Chinese diplomats. Chinese envoys are getting loudmouthed in their speeches and tweets, and adopting an aggressive posture by which Chinese authorities have to protect their national interests. It also suggests the chauvinistic attitude of China and a sense of contentment where there is no need to maintain friendly ties with other countries. The nomenclature has been taken from the Chinese movie *Wolf Warrior II*, released in 2017, having the patriotic slogan "Whoever offends the Chinese will be wiped out, no matter how far away". The term has been described by different scholars characterising Chinese foreign policy, such as "the new mixture of confidence and increasing insecurity combined" (Peter Martin, 2020), "assertive, proactive, and high-profile" (Zhiqun, 2021), "confrontational and combative" (Jiang and Westcott, 2021), "Major Country Diplomacy" (Smith, 2021), "Cyber-Nationalism" (Sullivan and Weixiang, 2022) etc.

Chinese leaders and officials staunchly believe that their belligerent attitude and aggressive posture are necessary to defend China's national pride and self-respect, and it is also supposed to be a response to baseless targeting by the western powers. China's former envoy to the UK, Liu Xiaoming, proclaimed this changed Chinese attitude as a need of the hour and said, "Where there is a 'wolf', there is a warrior." (Kewalramani, 2020). Chinese national interest diplomats seek to defend Chinese national interests in a confrontational way. It is a sort of justified defence against the west, which is determined to contain it. Wolf warrior diplomacy is manifested in Chinese actions while dealing with its neighbours and other countries. Hua Chunying and Zhao Lijian, the



Chinese Foreign Ministry spokespersons, took to Twitter to defend Chinese policies during the COVID-19 outbreak. Zhao replied in a tweet in March 2020 that "if someone claims that China's exports are toxic, then stop wearing China-made masks and protective gowns." He said in another tweet that "It might be (the) US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan." (Zhiqun Zhu, 2021).

In the early 2020s, at the time of the massive outbreak of the covid pandemic from Wuhan, the world condemned China for playing a dubious role, which resulted in spreading the crisis. The Chinese behaviour reflected a rash and berserk attitude which culminated in the severance of ties with many countries. For instance, in April 2020, a Chinese coastguard ship sank a Vietnamese fishing trawler near the Paracel Islands, and when Vietnam objected, the Chinese foreign ministry responded by saying Vietnam's claims to the area are "illegal." (Zhiqun Zhu, 2021) China has shown acute fierceness in its relations with Hong Kong, Taiwan, South China Sea, USA, Australia, India, USA, Japan, Russia, etc.

## Hong Kong

China's violation of the "one country and two systems" principle and human rights abuses are doing much harm to the people and their freedom in Hong Kong. China introduced a new security law in the year 2020 to curb the freedom of the press in Hong Kong. The National Security Law, which identifies four types of activities such as terrorism, secession, subversion, and collusion with "foreign forces" as punishable, carries a maximum sentence of life in prison. Article 35 of this law says that anybody convicted of crimes under the law will be deprived of the right to run for public office for life. (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The law discards Hong Kong's Basic Law and also disregards the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. The authorities' crackdown on Apple Daily, which resulted in its closure, suggests the brutality of the law. (HRW, 2021). At the G-7 Summit in 2021, the leaders called for the restoration of political institutions in Hong Kong and to end the unwarranted suppression of those who promote democratic values, rights, and freedoms in Hong Kong. (The Guardian, 2021: March 13th).

China has introduced myriad laws to curb freedom of speech and democracy in Hong Kong since taking over the island territory in the year 1997. In the year 2003, the Hong Kong government introduced national security legislation to prevent treason, sedition, subversion, and secession against the Chinese government. In 2012, it amended Hong Kong school curricula to promote Chinese identity. In 2014, Beijing proposed universal suffrage to vote for the chief executive of the city, but the candidate should be from the short list of China. In 2019, China proposed an Extradition Law which could have allowed extradition to the Chinese mainland for prosecution. This saw a massive protest for months by the people of Hong Kong and caught international attention as well. Finally, the Chinese government caved in to enormous pressure and withdrew this legislation. (Maizland, 2022).

Thereafter, China put forward Security Law 2020, which also had repercussions in the form of massive protests by the people of Hong Kong. It also evoked international reactions wherein the USA, Canada, Britain, and the EU have imposed numerous sanctions against China. But China, unmoved by all these developments, created the



Greater Bay Area Project, which is again an ambitious project to connect Hong Kong with the cities of Guangdong province in China. (Dezen Shira, 2019) It is going to enhance the economic viability of Hong Kong, but at the same time it jeopardises hope for democracy. After evaluating developments of the last few years, it can be concluded that the future does not augur well for Hong Kong and the democratic aspirations of the people are heading towards unnatural death.

## Taiwan

For China, Taiwan is a separate province, while Taiwan claims to be an independent state, and this is the reason behind the long-pending animosity between China and Taiwan. China evolved the "One China Policy" and compelled the international community to stick to this. In fact, China has established this principle to be an important part of its bilateral relations with other countries. During the reign of the Trump administration, the USA has supported Taiwan, and present President Biden has assured Taiwan that its commitment to Taiwan's security is rock solid. For a long time, the USA has adopted a strategically ambiguous policy of supporting Taiwan and preventing a war with China. But with recent Chinese intrusions into Taiwanese territory and in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war, the US has maintained a proactive approach towards safeguarding Taiwan's security against any possible Chinese aggression.

After the communist revolution in China in 1949, KMT leaders took control of Formosa (present Taiwan, Republic of China) and ran the government from there. When PRC got recognition from the world community, ROC's place was taken over by PRC in various international organisations like UNO and others. Their bilateral relations were marked by tension and instability during those days, coupled with minor conflicts between the two countries. Taiwan too remained under marshal rule from 1949-87, and after that, democracy returned to the island. China and Taiwan have reached an understanding known as the 1992 consensus regarding the conduction of bilateral relations. Both countries agreed to the principle of "One China", although both have different interpretations of that. Thus, they failed to stick to the content of this consensus, which also lacked clarity on the legal status of Taiwan. As the DPP came into power in Taiwan in 2016, it did not endorse the 1992 consensus reached between China and Taiwan. (Maizland, 2022) Tsai, the President of Taiwan, during her opening presidential address in 2016 stated that she was an elected President as per the provisions of the ROC's constitution and that would be the only source of conducting bilateral relations with China. The statement was blatantly rejected by Beijing, and it severed the official ties with Taiwan. (Maizland,2022) In the year 2019, President Xi reiterated Chinese policy for Taiwan to be incorporated into mainland China under the system of "one country, two systems", the same formula adopted for Hong Kong. Both the major parties in Taiwan, the DPP and the KMT, rejected the proposal in the wake of the crackdown on Hong Kong's freedom. (Maizland,2022)

In recent times, China has held naval exercises involving an aircraft carrier group near Taiwan. Beijing has also sent aircraft into Taiwan's air defence identification zone on numerous occasions. Taiwan spotted 38 Chinese aircraft entering its Air Defence Zone on November 28th, 2021, creating tensions in the region. (Blanchard, 2021). Taiwan has



accused China of militarily harassing it and warned of countermeasures to be taken if Chinese aircraft move close to Taiwanese territories. This type of incidences is taking place on the regular basis keeping the security of the region under much pressure.

### **The South China Sea**

China is a major player in the South China Sea and, due to its size and location, it has natural geostrategic advantages in the region. Powerful and fearless, China has been actively engaged in consolidating its position in the South China Sea for a long time. The Chinese display of hegemonic attitude creates uproar and a war-like situation in the South China Sea, which is problematic for the region's countries. China claims more than 80% of the South China Sea, and this claim is based on a U-shaped nine-dash line etched on a map. China has disputes with countries like the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, etc. in the South China Sea. A diplomatic clash between the Philippines and China continued recently as the Chinese presence near the Manila claimed area in the South China Sea. Philippine officials demanded the flotilla's withdrawal, although President of the Philippines Duterte reiterated his desire to resolve the issue peacefully. Apparent by the ICJ ruling of 2016, wherein China rejected the International Court's decision, which had given a verdict in favour of the Philippines in South China in a territorial dispute between China and Philippines. (Ankit Panda, 2016)

### **India-China Stand-off**

India and China also have a long history of animosity between their bilateral relations. A recent India-China standoff took place in Ladakh in June 2020 on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The violent brawl of June 1st, 2020, killed 20 Indian soldiers and strained bilateral relations vehemently. Such a violent incident took place after so many years. The situation is still worrisome in Ladakh where China is repeatedly intruding into Indian territory and reports of China's moving forward in Arunachal Pradesh, on the eastern border of India, where new villages have been set up near the border, are affecting bilateral relations.

### **Dispute with Japan over Senkaku Islands**

China and Japan have a territorial dispute over Senkaku island, and they have had so many clashes over this. Recently, China intruded into the waters off the Senkaku Islands for 157 consecutive days (Davidson, 2021). The islands in the East China Sea are presently controlled by Japan but claimed by China, and Chinese vessels intruded into Japan's "contiguous zone" almost daily in April 2021. The contiguous zone is usually used to be the area beyond the territorial sea and which extends up to 24 nautical miles from the baseline that a country claims. The presence of the Chinese vessels on the island is an act of provocation. Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi asked for US, European and world support to stop Chinese expansionism. He warned that "China is strengthening its military power both in terms of quantity and quality, and rapidly improving its operational capability." (Davidson, 2021).



## **The China-US Rivalry**

China-US differences are evident in the last few years, particularly in the aftermath of China's resurgence in the 21st century as it became a political, economic, and military power. China is posing a challenge to US supremacy in the international arena. During the regime of the Trump administration, the trade war between two countries reached its worst. The US-China trade war has taken the form of a cold war. The current Joe Biden administration is committed to maintaining and strengthening the rules-based international order. The US Secretary of State noted that China's actions in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan have endangered the peace of the region and challenged global stability. China's top diplomat, Yang Jiechi, criticised the US stand and reaffirmed Chinese faith in international order based on UN principles and international law and disregarded the dominance of the western world's rules-based international order. (Nikki Asia, 2021).

## **Chinese Concept of International Order**

The present world order was framed in the aftermath of World War II with the establishment of United Nations embedding the spirit of Atlantic Charter of 1941. It embraced the values of liberal democracy – the rule of law, individual freedom, religious liberty, free enterprise, free trade, majority rule with minority rules combining the efforts of Churchill et al. This world order has myriad synonyms such as Rules Based Democratic Order, Liberal International Order and Free World Order etc. (Dowd, 2021). The system is still prevailing but facing immense challenge with the rise of China in the 21st century.

With enormous economic power, military modernization, progress made in science and technology, and subsequent development in all walks of life, China is heading towards the path of becoming a superpower. The unique combination of communist authoritarianism and economic liberalisation increased China's global presence significantly, while making it difficult for international powers to deal with it. Its enormous power, coupled with the aggressive postures of leaders, led it to follow its own course in international relations. China is a member of the United Nations and a signatory of all the important international conventions where it is supposed to obey and respect them. But Chinese actions reflect its hegemonic attitude, which is guided by its deep-rooted national interests, entrenched with Chinese nationalist sentiments to act in the global order on its own terms. China wishes to establish new international relations based on Chinese characteristics and rejects the western world led Liberal International Order.

China's rise is the most important political and economic phenomenon of the twenty-first century. It has consequences for "global security" (Toje 2018), for "global governance" (Beeson and Li 2016; Economy 2018), for "human rights" (Gamso 2019), for "international development" (Gallagher and Porzecanski 2010, Lin 2018) etc. While China's power in international trade is par excellence, it is also growing by other measures of international power. (Grosse 2018) China's growing clout in international production and financial markets is evident in terms of its global manufacturing leadership, stewardship in the assembling of electronics and textiles, and in financial leadership through owning the world's four largest banks. China is also growing in global leadership through the development of new institutions such as the recently signed



Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the landmark Belt and Road initiative (Soong 2018).

In the history of international politics, different scholars have had different opinions regarding international order. It is construed as "international society", "a group of states obeying a set of common rules" (Hedley Bull, 1977), "a systematised group of international institutions" (Mearsheimer, 2019), that all world orders rest on a "set of generally accepted rules" (Henry Kissinger, 2015: 1), and a U.S.-led "liberal" order with an emphasis on "rules-based character". (Ikenberry, 2009). Andrew Moravcsik's liberal theory of international relations focuses on the social groups that shape government officials' orientations and incentives who decide a state's "fundamental" foreign policy preferences. (1997) Now the United States and China are competing to shape the foundation of global system—the essential ideas, habits, and expectations that govern international politics. It has given rise to a new competition, which, according to noted scholar Michael Mazarr, "It is a competition based on narratives, norms, and legitimacy." (2020).

China believes in the Westphalian conception of order with state sovereignty and non-interference as the paramount principles, while undermining the liberal notions of individual rights. This vision cannot be said as less "rules-based" than the United States', in so far as it has faith in the United Nations Charter. It also includes many current forms of international cooperation, including extensive trade, investment, and collaboration on vital transnational issues such as climate change. China is also a staunch supporter of multilateralism, although its actual behaviour sometimes violates existing multilateral norms. Nonetheless, the Chinese world order is significantly different from the order where US influence prevailed (Walt, 2021). China also sticks to core interests of "national unity," "reunification" and "independence" (Swaine 2011).

During the Political Bureau study session of the Communist Party of China on global governance, which was held on October 12th, 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared that the fundamental purpose of China's participation in global governance is to serve the accomplishment of the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Xi said, "The rise of developing countries has brought revolutionary changes to the world order. For centuries, powerful countries divided the world and competed for profit and power through war and colonization, but that has been replaced in today's world by rules and mechanisms to balance different interests," he said. (Xinhua, 2015, October 14th) He also advocated democratic and law-based rules to guide global governance so that the global governance system represents the will and interests of a majority of countries in a more balanced manner. (Xinhua, 2015: October 14th)

The Chinese scholar Zhao Suisheng has argued, China is discontent with the current international order because it is dominated by western values and norms. (2017) As a result, China only believes in UN-based international order and advocates that "there is only one system in the world, and that is the international system with the United Nations at its center. "There is only one set of rules that are the basic norms of international relations based on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. There is only one order, and that is the international order based on international law. " (Minghao, 2020).



The ambiguity in Chinese words and actions is ostensible in Chinese behavior, which many observers regard as an increasingly powerful China's approach to the post-World War II international order. What does China require to achieve its announced goal of revitalization? What does China's revitalization mean for the international order? President Xi has initiated a grand vision for the PRC—the "China Dream"—which has "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese People" at its core and in which China would achieve the desired goals of a moderately well-off society by 2021 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the formation of the CCP and the status of a fully developed nation by 2049, which is the 100th anniversary of the founding of the PRC.

But the Chinese policies highlight the difference in preaching and practice. Major features of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule include: rule by law rather than rule of law; prioritisation of the state over the individual; disrespect for people's rights and freedom; distrust of civil society and NGO's activities; and unwillingness to tolerate individual differences and identities. (Weiss and Wallace, 2021). China opposes liberal internationalism associated with the "freedom agenda," promoting democratisation and a global standard of human rights. As a result, the CCP's interests clash with the more demanding principle of Liberal International Order. As regarding liberal institutionalism and governance via principled multilateralism, China does not have a good record of working within some institutions to advance its interests, like the IMF, the World Bank, WTO, and UNSC, while flouting others, such as the rejection of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea ruling on the South China Sea. (Weiss and Wallace, 2021).

An interesting study was done among the youth of various Asian countries to elicit their opinion regarding China's rise in the world. The survey concluded that the youth of Asian countries believe that China's rise will definitely challenge the global order and that China will not maintain peaceful relations with other Asian countries. It suggests that China has not convinced the world about its peaceful rise. (Zhai, 2018).

The recent actions of China in Afghanistan and Iran suggest that it is now ready to accept the tasks of a superpower. China wishes to challenge the USA in the present global order on equal footing and behaving like a major player in the global arena.

### **China-Iran Agreement**

China and Iran signed a 25-year deal in March 2021. (Figueroa, 2022) The deal was proposed to be signed during Xi Jinping's visit to Tehran in 2016, but the situation prevailing at that time was not conducive to it. With the signing of the Iran nuclear deal in 2015, sanctions were lifted against it by the western world, preventing China from formally signing an agreement with Iran. The United States withdrew from the Iran Nuclear Deal in the year 2018 on the pretext of Iran not following the nuclear deal genuinely and imposed sanctions against Iran. That allowed Beijing to accelerate the process of the China-Iran deal.

Iran has also joined the BRI project and it has myriad objectives for the same, such as enhancing its development and IT infrastructure plan while becoming part of BRI.

First, it would improve Iran's economic prospects.

Second, it would help to minimise its isolation in the international arena.



Third, the project has the potential to give Iran an edge over its rival Saudi Arabia.

Fourthly, the deal also enhances scope for China-Iran military cooperation, and this could be a potential area for growth.

Iran has welcomed BRI since its launch in 2013; the project was seen as an opportunity to connect with the world market through an extensive and ambitious set of land and maritime trade routes. The project gives Iran a prominent place in China's global plan in the new international order. Central Asia has three access points to global markets: to the east via China, to the south via Iran, and to the west via Russia. So, China-Iran cooperation gives an impetus to the project. The first cargo rail from China reached Iran via the Kazakhstan–Turkmenistan–Iran rail link in the year 2016, and that was construed to be a milestone in the direction of accomplishing the targets of the BRI project (Reuters, 2016: February 16th).

China and Iran signed an agreement on military cooperation in the year 2014 and they also signed a deal to jointly combat terrorism in 2016. The two countries also signed an agreement to expand trade to dollar 600 billion over 10 years period which constitutes an important part of 25 years agreement. Iran's differences with USA brought it closer to China and to develop strong ties with Russia and China. Iran and China have similar views on the international order and US hegemony and both want to end US dominance in the international arena.

### **Chinese Overtures in Afghanistan**

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent control of power by the Taliban gave an opportunity to China in a changed geo-strategic scenario. China endeavoured to fill a void in Afghanistan. It became the first country to give recognition to the Taliban regime, followed by a visit of Chinese leaders to Afghanistan. The Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said, "China and the Afghan Taliban have unobstructed and effective communication and discussion." (Wang Wenbin 2021). During the US presence in Afghanistan, China was not an active player; rather, it observed qualms in the region. But with the withdrawal of US forces, China is ready to assert itself in Afghanistan. (Zhou Bo, 2021) China has also pledged to extend \$31 million in aid to Afghanistan for food and vaccines (BBC, 2021: September 9th).

### **Chinese Economic Interests in Afghanistan**

Afghanistan is also rich in several other resources, such as uranium, coal, gold, oil, zinc, gemstones, talc, iron ore, lead, sulphur, bauxite, rare earths, chromium, copper, natural gas, travertine, gypsum, and marble. It also has the largest reserve of lithium, a much-wanted natural resource by China which is used as the key ingredient of the large-capacity lithium-ion batteries that are widely used in the renewable energy industry and electric vehicles. China is also eyeing investing in infrastructure and industry projects in Afghanistan. Moreover China also wishes to enhance its BRI Project to Afghanistan, from Peshawar to Kabul, then to middle east would be very convenient for China to make its reach in West Asian and European markets.



## Chinese Concern in Afghanistan

It is not that China is not aware of the threat of the possible spread of terrorist activities in Xinjiang. To some extent, Xinjiang's security and stability are the starting point for China's Afghanistan policy (Zhao Huasheng, 2021). Terrorists are present in Afghanistan who are manoeuvring to establish an Islamic state in the Chinese province of Xinjiang, a serious threat to China. Turkistan Islamic Movements has nexus with Al Qaeda, Tawhid Wal-Jihad, and Jamaat al- Jamaat Ansarullah of Afghanistan, a very dangerous preposition for China. Khorasan group of Islamic State, known as IS-K, has also threatened to attack China.

Nevertheless, China is moving forward in Afghanistan with a renewed hope of strengthening its geo strategic position. Afghanistan is considered a graveyard for conquerors—Alexander the Great, the British Empire, the Soviet Union and now the United States. But now China enters—armed not with bombs but with construction blueprints, and a chance to prove the curse can be broken. (Zhou Bo, 2021)

## Is it the Rise of a New Cold War?

Two big powers with different ideologies, belief systems, and conflicting interests will lead to a path of cold war. The present international scenario suggests that a new cold war is emerging with the rise of China in international affairs. Both the USA and China are making new equations to keep the balance of power in their favour. The USA has come up with the signing of AUKUS, the Build Back Better World Initiative and the strengthening of QUAD, reaffirming once again the importance of multilateralism. With China's recent hypersonic missile testing, there is a fear of an increase in the arms race, a phenomenon that was missing after the end of the cold war in 1990.

The USA, UK, and Australia signed a pact last year known as AUKUS, which would help Australia acquire technology to deploy nuclear-powered submarines and sharing of intelligence. This is construed to be a response to increasing Chinese militarization and influence in the region, particularly in the strategically important South China Sea. The alliance has also angered France, after Australia backed out of a \$ 37 billion submarine deal with Paris in favour of AUKUS. On the other hand, China has said the AUKUS plan risks severely damaging regional peace and stability. Russia has also expressed its unhappiness over the deal as it would undermine efforts in the direction of nuclear non-proliferation. (Rozanna, 2021)

The Quad is a quadrilateral group of India, the USA, Japan, and Australia. The cardinal objective of the Quad is to prepare the ground for an open, free, prosperous, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. The Quad also has another important objective to ensure the strategic sea routes in the Indo-Pacific are free of any political or military influence. The group ostensibly aims to curtail Chinese dominance. Thus, the core objective of the Quad is to secure a rule-based global order, freedom of navigation, and a liberal trading system. The coalition also aims to offer alternative financial support for nations in the Indo-Pacific region and ensure a free supply chain for different goods.

The first virtual summit of QUAD took place in March 2021, and the first offline/physical summit took place in September 2021 in the USA, where leaders of the partners took



part in the meeting and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen their ties in the wake of the changing global scenario. They urged multilateral cooperation in all fields and criticised terrorist proxies in South Asia. A recent summit meeting of QUAD countries was held in Japan in May 2022, wherein member countries discussed issues pertaining to global order in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Chinese dominance. They expressed their commitment to augment cooperation to face the challenges of emerging trends of global order

## Conclusion

China's rise in the international arena has changed the geo-strategic equations and posed a challenge to the existing liberal international order. A typical communist regime with a flourishing market-oriented economy, China has a dismal human rights record and a dislike for political rights and freedom of the people. China is ready to take on the role of a superpower owing to its military, technological, political, and economic power and capabilities. It is striving hard to surpass the USA to become the world's largest economy in the near future. The gargantuan Belt and Road initiative is all set to enhance Chinese presence and influence across the globe and poses a challenge to US dominance. It possesses the military-technological-industrial assets to thwart the values of the Liberal International Order. The pandemic era has witnessed the peculiar aggressive features in Chinese foreign policy known as "wolf warrior diplomacy" in its interactions with neighbours and other countries. Xi's statement "We make no promise to abandon the use of force" while dealing with Taiwan and Hong Kong suggests an autocratic characteristic of Chinese leadership. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Iran Nuclear Agreement (JCPA) has given an opportunity to China to fill the void and establish its foothold in these countries. Chinese assertiveness in the global arena suggests the beginning of a new cold war with US-China rivalry dominating the present order. Both the power blocs are now manoeuvring hard to strengthen their positions. To gain an advantage over its rival, China is relying on BRI, economic power, military modernization, hypersonic missile advancement, and space research; whereas the United States is relying on QUAD, Build Back Better World, AUKUS, and NATO etc.

An increase in Chinese power has allowed it to strive to establish an international order based on UN principles, but looking at Chinese behaviour since the communist revolution in 1949, it seems these principles are meant for preaching and not for practice. Being a communist country, China's rise in international relations does not augur well for democratic values and principles as its policies undermines individual liberty and rights. The world cannot forget the gruesome suppression of democracy and individual freedom at Tiananmen Square in June 1989. China at the helm of the New International Order will imply propagating the ideologies of China Dream, National Unification, and Socialist Modernisation with Chinese Characteristics, which would promote Chinese nationalism while jeopardising the spirit of the existing Liberal International Order.

The world should stand for the rule-based international order with respect for democratic values and the rights and freedoms of the people. Only such a system can ensure global peace and security.



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