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# China's Grand Strategy

## *Abstract*

In 2013, President Xi Jinping articulated China's objectives of reaching technological, military, and economic capabilities second to none by 2050. The scope and scale of operations undertaken to the attainment of such objectives suggest the existence of a grand strategy. Grand strategies in international relations are the focus of this paper. The paper applies the notion of grand strategy to China's pursuit of foreign policy objectives. The interest is justified by the axiomatic elements of grand strategies. Among such elements, there is purpose. Purpose helps answer the question; to which end China seeks to achieve its objectives. Understanding the purpose of China's grand strategy, therefore, is at the same time understanding the directionality of the influence it will have, should it reach its objectives and become second to no other state. The paper, therefore, examines the question whether China has a grand strategy, if so, which one it is; what its purpose is; and what does such a purpose mean to international order or relations.

## *Key words:*

China Grand strategy, Foreign Policy, Statecraft, Dynamics of change

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Identifying and articulating national interests is inherent to the existence of states. In addition to national interests, states develop national objectives to reflect their aspirations. The most ambitious national interests and objectives require the mobilization of instruments of statecraft. They necessitate a grand strategy. What grand strategies are about, is the subject of this paper. The paper aims at elaborating on the nature of grand strategies. It aims at

describing under which context specific states conceive and develop grand strategies. The specific state we focus on is China. The reason is simply that, under the current context of global economic liberalism, China is the state that recently, since 2013, has articulated ambitious national objectives. Their pursuit and execution through various foreign policy activity and operations suggest an underlying grand strategy. Therefore, the paper also aims at clarifying, first whether China, actually has a grand strategy; and second, if indeed it does, which one is it? And finally, because grand strategies entail intent and purpose, the final question of interest here is what China's intent and purpose mean for the structure of international system, relations, and order. This last question is of significance because of the size and the potential of China. Should it become successful in its grand strategy, it stands to amass a preponderance of capabilities, making the interest in the intent and purpose of its grand strategy relevant to international relations.

## 2. GRAND STRATEGY

Both international historians and political scientists use the concept of grand strategy. They both took it from military historians and strategists. Evolving from its primordially military use, because it implies making sure that all is done to win military champagnes; it eventually spread to include areas outside the military. Among those who helped produce the evolution that understood matters of wars as being not solely about the violence of the battlefield is, the Prussian von Clausewitz (1832). In his book *On War* he made a step of conceptualizing war beyond the battlefield, and into the larger field of policy and national objectives. He argued that wars were more than about the crushing of enemy forces. Although a decisive officer who did argue that "direct annihilation of the enemy forces must always be the dominant consideration (1832: 228), von Clausewitz was a thinker. As such, he recognized the fact that matters of wars did not start nor did they end on the battlefield. They started and ended with national objectives. National objectives, however, are a primary concern of statecraft, not of the generals alone. Hence, military campaigns and wars designed to meet national objectives, were instruments of statecraft. Military strategy was just a part of a larger strategy that a state may employ for attainment of its national objectives. And when such a strategy enlists the support, utilization, mobilization, and contribution of other instruments of statecraft, it is grand.

From its Greek etymological origin, strategy suggests command from a general, but most importantly, it is the assumption and expectation that any such command is, well thought out. Hart (1967: 334) has defined it as a: “practical adaptation of the means placed at the general disposal to the attainment of the object in view”. Strategizing implies thinking. After all the consequences of an inadequate or insufficiently thought out command by a general, in matters of wars are naturally costly, in the fullest sense of the word. Strategies, therefore, connote a product of reflection, the result of a ripen reasoning. They entail calculation that take into account all known factors, and be wary about the unknown. They anticipate resistance and surprises. They must make the most of any opportunity and means. They consider the use of resources and personnel most effectively. They make use of time and space, and naturally plan for proper execution; hoping for the desired outcome. The use of the term, anywhere, implies such a process. It is than assorted with the adjective “grand” to bring into consideration all other factors that directly or indirectly contribute to securing the desired outcome. Hart’s notion of “indirect approach” suggests using instruments of statecraft against any foe, anyhow possible in order to tilt the balance in one’s favor. Today, the notion of “indirect approach” can be extended into areas and theaters that Hart has not anticipated, given the possibilities that today’s technology offers. But, winning on the battlefield is not enough. Grand strategy ought to guarantee the enduring effect of victories. It ought to seek achieving peace. Applied this perspective to the case of the United States, it had a grand strategy in winning World War II, but also made sure it won the peace through the liberal order of post war liberal institutionalism. Here is where adopting a grand strategy approach goes beyond the immediate business of conduct of war. It ensuring that the achievement of national objectives is not ephemeral.

Consequently, grand strategy is an encompassing approach. Van Hooft (2017)<sup>1</sup> simply defines grand strategy as one that ... “establishes how states, or other political units, prioritize and mobilize which military, diplomatic, political, economic, and other sources of power to ensure what they perceive as their interests”. It utilizes instruments of power such as diplomacy, formal and public, foreign policy, economic and financial incentives, countries resources, political will, national mobilization, a narrative, etc. This effort requires coordination. And if such coordination requires the mobilization of various state’s resources for the attainment of a national objective, then the process justifies the descriptive of grand strategy (Corbett 1988). It

<sup>1</sup> Van Hooft: Grand Strategy. Oxford Bibliography, 2017 <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0218.xml>

is then grand, as in “major” objective to be distinguished from a “minor” objective, which is what foreign policy is about.

The concept is certainly understood in a variety of ways by those using it. This naturally opens it up to different nuances, and emphases. While some authors emphasize the idea of grand strategy to be just about grand plans, grand principles and grand behavior with identified patterns in the implementation (Silove 2018), others such as Luttwak (2009) using the case of the Byzantine Empire argues that a grand strategy needs not to be written down. In fact, state always have grand strategies, he argues, whether they know it or not. Awareness of grand strategy is not inherent to its existence or to the coherence of its execution. However, a lack of awareness can become a flaw if it interferes with the ability of the state to formulate a narrative to accompany the execution of its grand strategy. A diplomat can coherently seek to achieve a material foreign policy objective without articulating a deeper reason. But knowing the purpose that the policy objective serves, certainly contributes to the level of commitment to that objective. For instance, during the Cold War, if you were a US diplomat, executing a policy objective against the Soviet Union, acquired another dimension knowing that it was designed against communism, not just the Soviet Union. From the US perspective, fight against communism, for the free world, was the narrative. That is what justifies the narrative of grand strategies. However, maybe even such a narrative is not important. In fact, Drezner (2011) argues just that, namely that the concept itself was overrated. Luttwak insisted that what counted was a structured and constant manner in which the strategy is conducted. He pointed to the fact that the Byzantine Empire used instruments of such as diplomacy, financial inducements, clients, intelligence and force to stay in power much longer than its counterpart in the West. Gray (2010) sees grand strategy as a bridge connecting means and end. John Lewis Gaddis (2009)<sup>2</sup> who has many complementary definitions, among them, the more poetic says that grand strategy was “about seeing the forest, but not the trees”. More recently, however, like Gray, Gaddis (2018) defined grand strategy as the ability of matching potentially unlimited aspirations and necessarily limited capabilities. And when such unlimited aspirations do not reckon with practical material limitations, the imbalance is what Paul Kennedy (1990) draws attention to. Paul Kennedy sees the use of grand strategy in action by rising powers, reaching their ambitious objectives but only losing sight of the limitation of their economic capabilities to sustain the effort.

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<sup>2</sup> Keynote address at the International Security in a New Crisis. UC Channel, June 2009.

He sees the pattern as recurrent, and therefore, hubris, as the cause of their demise. Needless to state that Kennedy's analysis found echoes in the debate ensuing in the United States, after the realization that its economy could no longer sustain the ambitious objectives of the Neo-conservative ideologues in W. Bush's Administration. Strachan (2005) on the other hand, regrets that the concept is simply used by many to denote nearly any policy objective, making it difficult to delineate and even diluting it much of its real meaning. The regret is justified simply because grand strategies are bigger than foreign policy. Grand strategies are not just slogans or bullet points. They are not just instruments of material objectives. They ought to be bold. They ought to be visionary. They are projections. They ought to articulate ideals, and purpose; otherwise, they are just foreign policy objectives, but not grand strategies.

In any case, if grand strategies are about ambitious national objectives, such objectives, must not necessarily involve, nor be achieved through military confrontation. Grand strategy takes the notion of strategy fully outside the realm of the military, simply because the object in view here is not a battlefield victory. States' national interests or objectives are thought, neither primarily, nor solely in military terms. The battlefields of today have multiple theaters, both physical and non-physical. In non-physical theaters, the cyber space for instance, must not involve military commanders. It involves policy makers and other kinds of actors. Placing grand strategy into the hands of statecraft is predicated on the ability of policy-makers and political leaders to do more than military commanders can. It subsumes any military campaigns. The beneficence is to avoid battlefields victories that do not produce enduring peace; or produce meaningless victories, as demonstrated in the case of Napoleon in Russia. Despite separating the realm of politics from that of the military, one cannot escape the analogy between battlefield and statecraft, or between military commanders and political leaders. Both battlefields and statecraft are fields of actions; and both military commanders and political leaders must make the most of the available resources to achieve the desired outcome; using their abilities. They must demonstrate the abilities of being both tactical and strategic; which leads us to Archilochus' (7<sup>th</sup> century BC) metaphor of hedgehogs and foxes as reported by Isaiah Berlin (1953) and recently, in this context, by Gaddis (2018). Grand strategy requires both, tactical and strategic skills.

### 3. DOES CHINA HAVE A GRAND STRATEGY?

The elements and operations of grand strategies may be unveiled, articulated, divulged or not. And the question whether to unveil, or not, the strategy, parts of it, how much of it and when, is itself inherent to strategy. Indeed, some strategies require that operations remain undisclosed and discrete, while others are purposefully divulged. Naturally, some fields require more discretion in divulging the strategy, while others do not. On a limited scale, any party involved in military, diplomatic, political, corporate, financial, any other strategy implementation process toward a specific outcome, is mindful of the cards it holds, and how to play them. Hence, strategies are unveiled with various degrees of openness. Openness in turn depends on the objectives of the strategy utilized. Benign, benevolent or legitimate objectives must not remain undisclosed, while those, whose attainment occurs to the detriment of a third party, or any other actor, require discretion. In any case, the decision to unveil or not, must take into consideration the effects to allies and foes, to potential allies and foes. What is unveiled ought not to alienate, or antagonize allies. If anything, allies ought to be reassured. What is unveiled must not alarm and alert foes who need to be distracted and remain unaware. This explains the existence of undisclosed weapons systems. This is particularly the case about weapon systems; which can be revealed, or can remain undisclosed as part of the strategy. China, which we focus on here, may have its own undisclosed weapon systems, which Work and Grand (2019) call “black capabilities” or ‘assassin’s Mace capabilities”. This is the case, unless strategy requires the opposite. Indeed, this is what deterrence is about. One can deter potential foes only if they are aware of one’s capabilities. Strategy may also require the cultivation of ambiguity or uncertainty. This occurs when one actor deliberately decides to leave any potential foes in the dark about its capabilities, hoping to destabilize their own strategizing. This has been, arguably, the posture of the of Israel visà vis its nuclear capability. Beyond strategy and objectives lies intent. The disclosure of strategy depends ultimately on the intent behind the objective. The true intent of an objective can be hidden. Why would China, for instance, reveal to its potential “victims”, that it seeks to access a specific technology for the purpose of competing, outcompeting and dominating them in any given field? Case in point is the worry of the West about the quest by China for accessing sensitive technology in artificial intelligence, microchips, network equipment, processing innovations, cyber technology, remote vehicle, cloud computing, etc. The West worries about how China would use such technology. Indeed, in May of 2019,

the United States stopped, per executive order, US Telecommunication companies for cooperating and doing business with the Chinese Huawei, suspecting China of malicious intent. Another case in point, why would China reveal the true reason for its exploration of the dark side of the moon if it were about accessing Helium 3, a mineral with tremendous potential as an energy source, probably capable of replacing the radioactive uranium in the development of nuclear energy and even weapon. China may not have a hidden intent to explore the dark side of the moon. It may just be a benign need to achieve and accomplish a technological prowess in order to assert its rightful place among the great powers and to feel good about itself. It could as well be that indeed China seeks access to Helium 3, just as it has been aggressively pursuing all other strategic natural resources. In both cases, China would alert others to its actions and purpose and induce reactions, and counter measures. Hence, unveiling the intent by China is a strategic choice. Yes, it lies in the nature of strategies, to be calculating, to entertain surprise, secrecy and even deceit.

The quest to spot a grand strategy can be both simple and complicated. Easy when everything about it is unveiled by policy makers, white papers, and public officials; and complicated when there is deceptive behavior and maneuvers involved, for reasons discussed above. What matters is whether there are observable patterns in the foreign policy activities, vast in scale and scope, revealing of a systematic approach, and pointing into a specific direction (objectives). Grand strategies, as defined above, are spotted through their execution, even when not a priori revealed. This justifies the need for observing the behavior of actors, while scrutinizing the existence of strategy. Indeed, what we observe trumps what we hear. Facts, deeds and phenomena have precedence over words and even reason. After all, science emerges by seeking to explain what is, paraphrasing the philosopher F. Hegel<sup>3</sup>, not necessarily what is thought. This is in a way, what Gray (2010) meant when he argued that it does not even matter whether the state applying grand strategy is aware of it. It suffices if grand strategy in action can be deciphered. In other words, to know whether China has a grand strategy, it suffices to observe its foreign policy execution. In support of this perspective, one must note that indeed, a grand strategy is not necessarily produced in one piece. Grand strategy can take shape gradually and progressively, like a house under construction, brick by brick. It just has to look like a house at the end. The process of building it must show that bricks are laid systematically and the rooms are segmented to complement each other. This means, it must demonstrate coherence and

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<sup>3</sup> F.G. Hegel in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.

functionality. In the case of China, this has been certainly the case. Indeed, China's foreign policy and national objectives have changed since 1978; and they have only been systematically pursued after China had acquired the means of its ambition, namely in the 2000s, the Xi Jinping years.

With that in mind, we will embark on a deductive effort, of mapping what China does in order to find out whether it makes strategic sense. Zhang (2012) has already answered this question stating that there was no cohesive grand strategy to speak of with respect to China. But he went on noting the emergence of a combination of ideas and interests among Chinese policy makers. Zhang's remarks reflect his observation of China by 2012. China is known to making grand steps by the decades. It will soon be another decade since Zhang made his remarks, which means that China will have made, in all probabilities, greater progress since. Indeed, a year later, the Chinese Communist Party elected Xi Jinping as present of China. China's foreign policy has been transformed since, as we describe in subsequent segments. Zhang, however, noticed back then, the beginning of change in Chinese foreign policy, and suspected that although he had not seen a cohesive grand strategy then, he anticipated that could change. Hanson (2019) on the other, in his article in *National Review* argues that: "China does not have so much of a strategy to translate its economic ascendance into global hegemony as several strategies"<sup>4</sup>.

While Zhang in 2012 could not find a cohesive grand strategy, Hanson has seen many strategies in action in 2019. The question now is; can we spot elements of a grand strategy in today's execution in China's foreign policy behavior and therefore confirm that things have changed since Zhang's observation, and disagree with Hanson if we did find indeed that there was a grand strategy rather than several strategies? Can we identify objectives, interests, benchmarks pursued by China to translate its economic ascent into a global hegemonic status? Is the dimension of time and space taken into account, and even the entire environment of international politics? Is the scale and scope of the pursuit of such objective and national interest expansive enough to commend and compel the mobilization of state's instruments of power and resources? Does China have an ideational narrative in which the pursuit of its objectives are rendered meaningful beyond their materiality?

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<sup>4</sup> Victor Davis Hanson: China's Brilliant, Insidious Strategy. *National Review*, Tuesday, May 14, 2019.



#### 4. THE OBJECTIVES UNDERLYING CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY

China's objectives have dramatically morphed in the last few decades. Before 1978, as the second most important communist state, China focused its international involvement on supporting and helping the developing world to resist imperialism and capitalist forces. It dedicated its foreign policy activity to promote international socialism. Since the implementation of its economic reforms of 1978 and subsequent success, China foreign policy developed objectives reflective of its new capitalist economic needs. Such a new objective increased in scale and scope as its economy continued to grow. Timid objectives that started early in the 1980s blending the quest for raw material, economic aid and market entry, grew to become a more engaging and expansive in the 2000s. They have blossomed into a full-fledged aggressive, multi-faceted, assertive and ubiquitous commensurate with its improved status, at the turn of the 2010s, the era of Xi Jinping. In 2013, Xi signaled the end of low profile and heralded a new era of "seeking achievement". Xi aims at rendering China's military fully mechanized. Xi seeks to render China a leader in export of manufacturing products. After that, Xi aims at producing the greatness of China, by the time the nation celebrates the centennial anniversary of the ascent to power of the communist party.

#### 5. THE TIMEFRAME OF THE GRAND STRATEGY

The objectives articulated by Xi Jinping in 2013 came with specific benchmarks, and a time frame; another important element of grand strategies. Achieving a fully mechanized military should occur by 2020. Achieving a leading manufacturing export status should occur by 2025. Achieving greatness should occur by 2049. Finally having a China second to no other nation should occur by 2050.

Although time in its essence is non-material, it is a limited commodity for human beings in many ways. What we endeavor is limited in and by time. The objectives we have, therefore, are executed within a timeframe. Moreover, we are limited in what we can achieve within a specific timeframe simply because of numerous intervening factors and obstacles. Finally, one can be late with the achievement of an objective. An objective can miss the time within which its achievement would have been most impactful. As a matter of example, there are nations that have achieved the objective of

acquiring nuclear arms. Those that have not been able to achieve such an objective within a specific time, now live with the deterrent effect it induces. In the meantime, acquiring nuclear capabilities has become unacceptable to the international community. Those who have not achieving such a goal must live without its strategic benefit. In the end, because of the limitedness of the time factor, and the many possible empirical and political interferences, it is imperative that objectives set, be met, in time. That is where strategizing becomes necessary. Issues of practical nature such as financing, personnel, logistic, expertise, feasibility studies, execution, effectiveness, challenges, are met heads on through strategy. In the case of China, Xi Jinping has articulated such a timeline. Since then, China has a road map. It has a strategy. Indeed, strategy derives from objectives. While immediate objectives require tactic, long-term objectives require strategy.

## 6. THE SCALE AND SCOPE OF THE GRAND STRATEGY

In order to meet the objectives it has articulated, China enlisted all instruments of statecraft. China is literally in a unique position from which to design operations commensurate with its newly found ambition. The position is that of a state with a respectable size, with comparative and sometimes, absolute advantage in a number of areas. It has the economic growth, from which to draw the financing to fund its ambitious objectives. It has the ability of combining the forces of the public and private sectors, because its political system unifies political totalitarianism and economic liberalism. This combination allows China to avoid the independence and idiosyncrasies of the private sector, and the political opposition of the public sector, both of which, inherent features of liberal democracies. China, therefore, capitalizes on the flexibility of one sector and the power of the other. The result is a greater synergy between finance and politics. The synergy facilitates the design of a strategy whose scale and scope are unprecedented. China's ambitious objectives have a global scale and scope. At this junction, a listing of all China's activities and operations around the world would ensue. Such a list, however, is impressive and the details of it are elaborate enough for the limited intent of this paper to provide. Short of listing all China's activities and operations, this paper simply articulates the fields and categories they cover; and which demonstrates their scale and scope of China's grand strategy. The scope and scale of China's activities around the world allow the following picture.

First, China explores the planet (on different continents, the Arctic and the North Pole) and the outer space (the dark side of the moon) for strategic natural resources, both mineral and non-mineral. The access to these resources can then allow China to secure its premier position as a trading nation and world's largest economy.

Second, China seeks to converge world commerce toward Beijing. Already, as stated, the premier trading partners to seventy-one nations, it has efforts underway to increase that number. To that effect, the following efforts are underway: aggressive investment in both foreign direct investments, and in construction (infrastructure building). These activities go hand and hand, which explains their importance in China's grand strategy.

Third, to improve its role in world trade, China invests. With respect to foreign direct investment, it is concentrated in high-income nations, essentially North America and Europe, receiving 65.6% of Chinese investment between 2005 and 2017<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, loaded with cash the mid-2005, China has been attempting to buy assets around the world. In 2017, Chinese companies that had outbound FDI of just 4% of all FDI globally, have exceeded 10% since 2009 and reached 17% in 2016. (McCaffrey December 16, 2017). Since 2017, Chinese FDI assets holdings are second only to the US's. Total Chinese investment has risen to 1941.53 billion in 2018. This development is evidenced by the rise of Chinese companies among the most significant on Forbes's 500 global companies list. While one could find only 30 Chinese companies on the list in 2007, the number increased to 109 in 2016. Chinese FDI in Europe has increased from 1.6 billion Euros (\$2 billion) in 2010 to 35 billion Euros (\$44. Billion) in 2016 (European Think Tank Network on China). In Europe, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Italy have been the preferred targets for the obvious reason. They are the hub of some of the most advanced European technologies. China's investment includes infrastructure building in all nations signatories of the Belt and Road Initiative; it includes as well utilities, transportation, industrial machinery, and equipment, on top of natural resources it still pursues for its developing manufacturing. Naturally, this development has justified the need for a debate around the question of China's acquisition of top-notch European technology, as alluded to earlier.

Fourth, to improve its role in world trade, China invests in construction, building infrastructure. China builds roads, sea routes, ports, airports and railroads, linking Shenzhen, China to Duisburg, Germany, Venice, Italy, South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the Eastern

<sup>5</sup> From: Heritage Foundation's China Global Investment Tracker.

coast of Africa. This infrastructure building is conceptualized in the Belt and Road Initiative. In 2017, China expressed the intent to expand the Belt and Road Initiative into Latin America. China now has secured presence, access, ownership or leasing in all the six choke points of international commerce, namely: Strait of Malacca, Suez Canal, the Strait of Bab el Mandeb, Turkish strait, Strait of Hormuz and Panama Canal. Beyond these choke points, China has secured presence in what is called the string of pearls, namely Sudan, Djibouti, Pakistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Cambodia and Hong Kong. China's presence in these strategic locations can be used for more than just trade. They can be used to secure China's interests from the Middle East and the Mediterranean, to the India Ocean to the South China Sea. Focus on infrastructure building has allowed Chinese companies to occupy seven spots in the group of the ten largest construction companies in the world. China is almost building the world, given its ubiquitous presence in construction sites around the world, primarily, in the developing nations. The obvious reason here is that the developing world needs infrastructure, which no other foreign investments have financed. But China is a believer in infrastructure. It has demonstrably argued that no development was possible without it. Sub-Saharan Africa the region with concentrated Chinese investment (119.7 billion) north America (\$106.9 billion), East Asia (\$98), West Asia (\$84.9 billion), Europe (\$82.5), South America (\$77), Arab World (\$60.2), Australia (%59.2 billion). China builds bridges, roads, railways at over 200 sites around the world, 41 pipelines, 199 power plants (nuclear, natural gas, coal, and renewables. China finances 112 countries around the world (New York Times, November 18, 2018)

Fifth, since its improved economic status, China has become an established purveyor of economic assistance. China, therefore, accompanies its presence in the developing world with loans and grants. It has upgraded its own development assistance agency to meet the demand and to reflect its status as purvey of economic assistance. China has created a State Development Cooperation Agency in March 2018, with the design of coordinating its growing budget for foreign aid. It is "an institution with the specific mission to control and distribute funds for its international aid programs" Legarda (2018) writes.<sup>6</sup> The most important and established great powers have their state development cooperation agencies. It is a way of stating their status as wealthy, arrived states. It is as well a way of creating venues of relations with the many dependent and recipient

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<sup>6</sup> Helena Legarda: China Upgrades Diplomacy While the US Pulls Back. *The Diplomat*, March 20, 2018.

states. It is as well a way to promote China's own industries, facilitating their implantations in these states in order to access their resources. It is, finally, a way to ensue, structurally, the rapport de force between donor and recipient. In this rapport, as the saying goes, the hand that gives is above the hand that receives. This means, in the context of realpolitik, donor states do not hesitate to use their status in this rapport de force to influence a number of outcomes in their favor, should they have to deal with the recipient state.

Sixth, China has openly disclosed its objective to compete, and eventually lead in the field of telecommunication infrastructure, and digital technology. After dominating the physical world, China aims at dominating the digital world and cyber security. In this technological field, China seeks nothing less than supremacy in the field of information technology, remote vehicle, and artificial intelligence and system destruction warfare<sup>7</sup>. To this end, China seeks to feed its own Chinese made network through gathering data from its servers, smartphones and other technological hardware. With all that, China seeks to become the gatekeeper of as much data as possible, from around the world. The consequence has been a buying spree of companies or shares of companies with high technological know-how, which have been anything from robotic, artificial intelligence, semi-conductors, bio-medicine, and autonomous vehicles to augmented reality, sensors, chips, aerospace, and informational technology. Because many such companies are located in the West, because much of China's technology can be diverted to servicing the need of the military, and because some of these companies represent a technological edge, the alarm has been raised in Europe and the US. This will make the Chinese Communist Party the maintainer and controller of such data, to which end it has created a Cyberspace Administration, funded by the government, in 2014 (Gorrie, 2019). China wants to be ready for what it sees as the battlefield of the future. It is the digital battlefield. Indeed, if steel was the raw material needed for cannon on battlefields of the past, silicon is the raw material needed for the technological ballfield of the future. This led David Goldman (2019) to say: "Silicon is to the military power of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what steel was to the military power of the 19<sup>th</sup> century"<sup>8</sup>. It is the battlefield of cyberwars, which brings all other battlefields into one. Indeed, the economic battles, the political battles and the technological battles can all be fought in and through the digital battlefield. It is a battlefield where national security is

<sup>7</sup> System destruction warfare which interferes with, or cripple the enemy's battle network's command, control communication, and intelligence system.

<sup>8</sup> David Goldman: What is China's Grand Strategy? A talk at The Heritage Foundation, May 23, 2019.

at stake. The objective here is to be able to win any battle in that battlefield. Gorries (2019) sees China as the only nation waging this war in a deliberate and strategic fashion. China has been denounced by Australia in the last couple of years of using its 5G technology for espionage. In 2018, Garnaut wrote:

“The Australian conversation has evolved from amorphous anxieties about Chinese influence and soft power into more precise concerns about covert interference by the Chinese Communist Party. Media reports are shedding light upon a hidden world of inducements, threats, and plausible deniability. They reveal a dimension of risk that sits between the poles of economic attraction and military force, which Western Sinologists, diplomats, and national security officials had not previously focused on. The more we learn, the more it seems that there is little that is soft about the way the party wields power beyond its borders”. (Foreign Policy 2018).

Seventh, such technology has repercussions in another field, namely the military. Here as well, China has a declared objective of becoming second to none by the 2050. It has embarked on an aggressive modernization and buildup of its military. China can use its space technology for both military and civilian uses. The first Chinese *taikonaut* (astronaut) was launched into space in 2003, and China has successfully conducted an anti-satellite weapon test. It has sixty to seventy intercontinental missiles with nuclear weapon delivery capability and an estimated 240 to 400 warheads (Lanteigne 2016). Since 2016, China has become the owner of aircraft carriers, the ultimate status symbol of blue water navy in the world of military capabilities. China continues to reach new milestones. The latest advancement is China’s fifth generation J-20 stealth fighter jets<sup>9</sup> with a capacity for long distance. China has developed air to air missiles, the PL-15, and the PL-XX, as well as the PL-10, which are, respectively, the best performing to date and equipped with an electronically scanned array radar, making difficult for agile jet fighters to escape. These missiles are capable of striking slow moving airborne warning and control systems. Then, the Chinese military also has fire-and-forget missiles. Together, these weapons have propelled China into the ranks of sky competition, comparable to the US. And China continues to develop and collaborate with others, like Russia, to develop or buy weapon systems, like the S-400 air-defense system. China is improving its military capability in dramatic fashion, as demonstrated through steadily increasing defense spending. With respect to the navy, an important aspect of its military, for

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<sup>9</sup> It is a twin-engine stealth fighter with wing stability appendages, advanced electronic, and with three internal bays for air-to-air missiles and bombs.

reasons, evoked earlier China has built in four years, a fleet to surpass that France. In four years, China has launched more warships and submarines, support ships and major amphibious vessels than the entire number of ships now serving in the United Kingdom (International Institutes for Strategic Studies, London, 2019).

## 7. IS THERE A DEMONSTRABLE COORDINATION OF THE EFFORT UNDERTAKEN?

Strategic action is part of a strategic goal. As such, it does not unfold in a vacuum but in a relational context; with other elements of the strategy. They all must be coordinated. To unveil the proof of coordination of China's various activities within the frame of a grand strategy, is a tricky as finding a white paper disclosing the grand strategy itself, for reason we have described earlier. Naturally, one would start there, looking to find a Chinese white paper on its grand strategy. If there was one, not every step of the strategy will be disclosed. However, one can scrutinize the various actions and operations of China's foreign policy activities to detect a picture they leave behind. This paper does both, and relies more on the latter. The hierarchical political power structure in China, its communist totalitarian regime, and the symbiosis between the communist ruling party and the government allow the working assumption according to which any official activity, in the name of China, including the private sector, is conducted with the approval from above. This working assumption is borne out by empirical facts, anywhere one looks in China, from the press and the media, to companies and investing, and naturally from public to formal diplomacy, etc. And because such approval is not reactive but proactive, Chinese officials owe it to themselves to coordinate its steps for coherence. Idiosyncrasies, dissonances, vague desires are not features associated with totalitarianism. China decision-making bodies consist of the Politburo standing committee (a group of seven members, chaired by Xi Jinping), a large polit burro (of 27 seven members), the central committee of 200 members, the Central leading group for comprehensive and deepening reform, the national security commission, the party congress, foreign ministry, and other ministries. They are headed either by Xi Jinping, or they report to him. Chinese pursuit of national objectives is filtered through these hierarchical organs. This filter explains the complementarity and therefore coherence in the pursuit of the goal of making China the center of gravity of world commerce; of making China's military second to none; of making China the leading nation in cyber technology and the cyber battlefield of the future;

of putting China, ultimately, on top of the world by 2050. Every element of Chinese foreign pursuit can be woven in a great web whose pattern, shape, scale and scope converge toward a trajectory leading to the attainment of its objectives.

From this hierarchical laboratory at home, the pursuit of grand strategy find its execution through ad hoc, bilateral or multilateral institutionalized frame of involvement with foreign states. The institutional frame becomes a source of tracking the coherence of China's action internationally. This source reveals China's consequential behavior and attitude suggestive of a coordinated effort. Indeed, China either integratesold, like the World Trade Organization (WTO), or initiates new international institutions, which are instrumentalized for attaining its national objective. This is more apparent in cases of institutions built than those integrated. China has built supporting multilateral institutions in the fields of Finance and Banking to fundand manage loans and grants. It has contributed to finding the BRICS Bank since 2014, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, a duplicate in many ways of the World Bank. Another is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), with 57 founding members, among which we find countries such as India, Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, Pakistan, Turkey, Australia, Brazil, France, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Germany; all of whom are traditional U.S partners and who have yet to be persuaded by the US to not join. China holds annual summits with groups of nations in which it is increasingly playing an important role. One of the most notable is the China-Africa Cooperation Forum, since 2005. Since 2016, the China-Central and East European Fund, in which \$11,150 billion has been set aside for infrastructure, high-tech manufacturing, and consumer goods and run by Financial Holdings Ltd. China-CEE (or 16 +1) brings China and Eastern, Central, and Southern European countries. There are China and CELAC summits, which bring China with Latin American and the Caribbean nations. There is a China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF), which meets every two years, since 2004. Its last summit was held in Qatar, in July, 2018. The cooperation between China and the Arab countries encompasses political, economic, and cultural issues. China's interest in cooperating with the Middle East lays in the geography of the region. Located in the middle of the land and maritime route of the Belt and Road initiative, the Middle East helps connect China with Eurasia. All these new venues of bilateral and multilateral cooperation augment the number of existing institutional and regime that China has already established in Asia. The Belt and Road initiative is becoming the binding glue that helps bring and articulate the presence of all these countries and regions into China's orbit.



## 8. THE TELEOLOGY OF THE GRAND STRATEGY

In various public pronouncements, Chinese officials often provide explanations of the motivation behind the objectives at home and abroad. They argue that China aims at contributing to the prosperity of the Chinese people through trade. They claim that their economic cooperation with other states are win-win situations. They legitimately seek to secure their homeland through military buildup, which is thought to become second to none, and at winning in the battlefield of the future, namely the cyber space, which subsumes both the economical and the military battlefields. And generally, public discourse in China wants to renew with the glory and greatness of the past. Those are legitimate motives behind the objectives. However, they do not articulate a purpose. Recently, successive party secretaries, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping expressed the wish for “a community of shared future” for the international community that has the potential of entailing a substance for teleology, but remains uncorroborated. If China has a grand strategy, does it have a purpose? Does it have an ideational, aspirational value beyond the need to be first, economically or militarily? Maybe China just wants to be the most prosperous and the mightiest; and nothing more. One can argue that these are worthy enough objectives and motivational factors. After all, relieving itself from the trauma of the humiliations years is purpose enough. One can also argue that defending itself against the powerful foes, the likes of the United States, China will have to be at least as powerful itself; which justifies its quest for military superiority. China is still a communist state. As such, it still holds on ideals that differ from those of liberalism, which it only espouses for its economic virtue. In addition, China is traditionally Confucian. Recently, it has rehabilitated the worldview of Confucianism. This means that China, as a state harbors two identities, both of which could inspire its sense of purpose. Both these identities are not liberalist. This also means that China could develop a sense of purpose different from the one underlying the current international order. If China has started awakening resistance from Western nations due to access to advanced technology in telecommunication, it is because of such a difference in identity-grounded-value systems. A purpose is what greater cause the objective is supposed to serve. This question justifies the relevance of teleology about China's grand strategy.

China's flurry of activities to secure an advantage in the future cyber battlefield raises the question; to which purposeful end? Should the purpose be benevolent; one must not worry about China accessing Helium

3 in order to harness its tremendous potential. Should the purpose be benevolent, one must not worry about its exploration of the North Pole and presence on the Arctic. Should the purpose be benevolent, one should not worry about its quest for strategic natural resources. Should the purpose be benevolent, one must not worry about its attempt to securing predominance in the South China Sea, rich in offshore petroleum. Should the purpose be benevolent, one must not worry about its nascent interest in military bases. However, should its purpose be self-serving, all its current activities will appear to be steps taken by an expanding power; which would bring the world closer to the scenario described in the hegemonic transition theory. Not knowing China's intent and therefore purpose, such behavior becomes alarming to some. The answer to the question of China's purpose remains fuzzy. However, the fact that it is fuzzy right now, does not mean it does not exist, nor does it mean it cannot be conceptualized more clearly in the near future. Right now, China is busy conducting, and executing phases and dimensions of its grand strategy that are already defined and determined. When the time arrives, China could chart a new or a different course. It does have difference sources of competing values from which new principles could emanate and new norms for the next supply of order would derive. That source is Confucianism. It will take material capabilities for the convincing, incentivizing or even the coercing of other states, which often comes with a cost, to push Confucianism-grounded values into the international arena. It will take tremendous political will to accomplish. It looks as if China is aware of this ideational dimension, the need to see its greatness rounded in a worldview that proposes values that can be shared, or are attractive enough to be adopted by others. To that end, China has used the venues of soft power and public diplomacy; establishing Confucian institutes and Chinese broadcasting, which are vehicles to spread the values and worldview of Chinese thinking. The fact that this use of soft power and public diplomacy is occurring at this particular phase of its economic ascent is an indication that China is well aware of the need for an ideational support basis for any potential claim to hegemonic leadership.

## 9. CONCLUSION

I argued that China indeed has a grand strategy in the works. A grand strategy is in action when a number of elements actively concur towards the accomplishment of a specific outcome. It has been established that such elements are given in China's foreign policy pursuits. It has been established

that China's conduct of foreign policy demonstrate the existence of those elements of a grand strategy but one. China, indeed, is yet articulate and demonstrate the existence of a purpose. Its teleology is not defined. For whatever ambition China has for the world, to prevail, it has to stand on solid grounds. It needs a purpose. China can still deliver that purpose, or maybe not. The strength of the post Second World War order does not lie in the preponderance of capabilities of the West. It lies primarily in the attraction of its liberal purpose, that of free human beings, in essence, in rights and in the pursuit of happiness. Any China's ambition, after achieving equivalence or surpassing the material preponderance of capabilities of the West, it will have to achieve and surpass the attractiveness of the liberal order. The question remains, namely, China's grand strategy but for which purpose? One possible answer to the question is maybe, China does not have any purpose. Just maybe, its achieving its objectives is the sole justification for its grand strategy, and nothing beyond, or maybe not.

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