

SECTION 2: U.S.-CHINA SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Abstract

Throughout 2023, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) recalibrated its foreign policy to counteract increasingly negative international perceptions of China over its support for Russia's unprovoked war in Ukraine and Beijing's aggression toward neighbors in the Indo-Pacific region. Emerging from Zero-COVID lockdowns in 2022, Chinese diplomats engaged in a flurry of activity in an attempt to assuage key global partners and cast China as a contributor to the global good. These engagements have demonstrated a change in tone but not substance, aimed primarily at preserving Beijing's access to foreign markets, technology, and foreign direct investment, as well as its global influence. Beijing has sought to cultivate support from governments across Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe in order to facilitate these objectives. In practice, Beijing continues efforts to shield Russia diplomatically and provide material support for its war in Ukraine. The CCP has sought to undermine the transatlantic unity that has emerged vis-à-vis China as a response to Beijing's foreign policy choices. The CCP has also continued to engage selectively with the United States while preparing Chinese society for protracted strategic competition, up to and including the possibility of war.

Key Findings

- In 2023, top CCP leaders portrayed their country as facing “extreme scenarios” and called on Chinese society to steel itself against the alleged efforts of the United States and its allies to blackmail, contain, and pressure China. General Secretary of the CCP Xi Jinping has called repeatedly on the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to prepare for war. This rhetoric has been coupled with a number of war-readiness measures, including new legislation focused on reenlistment and the revision of China's conscription law, a 7.2 percent increase to the official defense budget, and the establishment of new “National Defense Mobilization” offices around the country.
- China continued to support Russia amid its ongoing war in Ukraine, apparently judging that Russia's value as a partner in opposition to the United States outweighed the mounting reputational costs of taking sides with the aggressor. Beijing's diplomatic, technological, and economic assistance provided vital lifelines that kept the Russian government afloat as its military foundered on the battlefield. Farther afield, China and Russia continued to conduct military exercises and scientific missions in the Pacific and polar regions, respectively.

- China’s leadership has selectively responded to U.S. efforts to reduce tensions for the purposes of preserving Chinese access to U.S. markets, technology, and foreign direct investment. At the same time, China continued to blame the United States for the worsening bilateral relationship and refused to cooperate on key issues, such as reestablishing crisis communications channels and stemming the flow of fentanyl into the United States. China has also selectively engaged with U.S. allies and partners to try to drive a wedge between them and the United States.
- China promoted its new trifecta of foreign policy initiatives known as the Global Security, Development, and Civilization Initiatives to reshape the international system in its favor. At the same time, Beijing sought to burnish its image as a force for world peace by offering to mediate high-profile conflicts and continuing vigorous diplomatic outreach to countries in Africa as well as Latin America and the Caribbean, all of whom it views as important potential allies in its attempts to transform the world order. These activities are part of Beijing’s ongoing work to court countries in the Global South.
- In the Indo-Pacific region, China continued to adopt a heavy-handed and at times confrontational approach to its neighbors. In the South China Sea, China acted aggressively toward claimant states and transiting military forces alike. In East Asia, China sought to drive a wedge between the United States, Japan, and South Korea. Meanwhile, tensions continued to simmer on the border with India, and suspicions toward China’s efforts to gain strategic influence in the Pacific Islands grew.
- The PLA honed its expeditionary capabilities through new base construction in Cambodia and a much-publicized mission to evacuate Chinese and foreign nationals from the ongoing conflict in Sudan. At the same time, Beijing continued attempts to enhance its military presence in Cuba through a reported joint military facility that is under negotiation, and it conducted a host of aggressive cyberespionage campaigns against the United States and foreign governments as well as numerous private organizations.

Introduction

China began 2023 determined to recalibrate its relations with the world following a period of intense inward focus on the leadership transitions of the 20th Party Congress and the abrupt dismantlement of its draconian Zero-COVID regime in the last quarter of 2022.¹ Taking stock of recent measures by the United States and other countries to bolster security partnerships and restrict the export of advanced technologies, China’s leaders decried these measures as instances of geopolitical “containment” and redoubled their efforts to prepare their government, economy, and society for future hardships in anticipation of prolonged strategic competition with the United States.² In the foreign policy realm, Chinese leaders continued to stand by Russia amid its faltering war in Ukraine, even as they sought to limit harm to their international image by emphasizing China’s contributions to global governance, conflict me-

diation efforts, and engagement with developing countries. China's aggressive rhetoric and behaviors toward Indo-Pacific countries undermined its efforts to improve ties closer to home, while its global military activities and intelligence collection continued apace.

This section assesses key developments in China's politics, foreign relations, and military power projection in 2023. It begins by examining Chinese leaders' view of their position in the international system before surveying China's global diplomacy and activities toward regional neighbors. The section concludes with an examination of China's military operations and espionage activities abroad, both of which contribute to its growing comprehensive national power.* The section's findings are based on Commission hearings, discussions with outside experts, and open source research and analysis throughout the year.

20th Party Congress Consolidates Xi's Control, but Turbulence Roils Party's Upper Ranks

General Secretary Xi emerged from the CCP's 20th Party Congress as the undisputed leader of the Party, contravening multiple Party norms by attaining a third term as CCP general secretary and remaining in office beyond the prevailing age limit of 68.³ Xi also stacked the seven-man Politburo Standing Committee with individuals who have strong ties to him, and he increased the number of individuals on the now 24-man Politburo with whom he had long-term personal or professional ties from 15 to 19 members.⁴ At the same time, many prominent officials affiliated with Xi's predecessor Hu Jintao and his Communist Youth League faction were demoted.⁵ Jude Blanchette, Freeman Chair in China Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), assessed that the clean sweep of top positions indicated Xi's lack of desire to show "even a modicum of compromise" to any other stakeholder or faction.⁶ Dylan Loh, an assistant professor at Nanyang Technological University, assessed that with these loyalists in place, Xi "has a much freer rein and mandate in pursuing his domestic and foreign policies" than before.⁷

In recent months, however, several high-profile officials selected by Xi for key positions have been removed due to security concerns or are under investigation for alleged corruption.⁸ Dennis Wilder, former deputy assistant director for East Asia and the Pacific at the Central Intelligence Agency, observed that if the corruption allegations are true, "it indicates that Xi's vetting process for selecting top officials is deeply flawed and suggests corruption is commonplace within the system despite Xi's decade-long campaign against it."⁹ Top officials who appear to have been purged include:

- *Minister of Foreign Affairs Qin Gang*: In July 2023, the Standing Committee of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) voted to remove Qin from his post as Minister of Foreign

* China's concept of comprehensive national power encompasses the combination of a country's material strength to include military, economic, and technological ability as well as soft power. For more analysis on the origins of the concept, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 1, Section 1, "A Global Contest for Power and Influence: China's View of Strategic Competition with the United States," in *2020 Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 35–36.

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Affairs without additional explanation, and reappointed Director of the Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission Wang Yi as the Minister of Foreign Affairs.¹⁰ In September, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that senior Chinese officials were told “an internal Communist Party investigation found former Foreign Minister Qin Gang to have engaged in an extramarital affair that lasted through his tenure as Beijing’s top envoy to Washington,” and led to the birth of a child in the United States, indiscretions the leadership felt potentially compromised China’s national security.*¹¹

- *The Commander and Deputy Commander of the PLA Rocket Force and Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission:* In late July and early August 2023, it was reported that the PLA Rocket Force commander, General Li Yuchao, deputy commander, General Liu Guangbin, and a former deputy commander, Lieutenant General Zhang Zhenzhong† were believed to have been taken away by investigators as part of a larger anticorruption drive in the military.¹² Then commander of the PLA Rocket Force General Li Yuchao was replaced by General Wang Houbin, who had previously served as deputy commander of the PLA Navy.‡¹³
- *Minister of Defense General Li Shangfu:* In September, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that General Li was under investigation, citing U.S. officials’ assessment that he is likely to be relieved of his duties.¹⁴ The *Washington Post* reported that two people involved in China’s defense industry said that there is “broad consensus that Li’s absence is related to corruption charges relating to his previous position as head of military procurement.”¹⁵ General Li was previously head of the Central Military Commission’s (CMC) Equipment De-

*On October 24, Qin Gang was also removed from his position as State Councillor. Sylvie Zhuang, “China’s Ex-Foreign Minister Qin Gang Stripped of Last Remaining State Title,” *South China Morning Post*, October 24, 2023.

† In June 2022, Lieutenant General Zhang Zhenzhong’s new position as the deputy chief of staff of the Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission was confirmed when he attended the 19th Shangri-La Dialogue as a member of the Chinese delegation. Lin Yunshi, “Personnel Observation | Alternate Central Committee Member Zhang Zhenzhong is Appointed Deputy Chief of Staff of the Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission” (人事观察 | 候补中央军委联合参谋部副参谋长), *Caixin*, June 13, 2022, Translation; *Xinhua*, “GLOBALink | China Rebuts U.S. Defense Secretary’s Remarks on South China Sea, Taiwan,” June 12, 2022.

‡ During this time, the Political Commissar of the PLA Rocket Force, General Xu Zhongbo, reportedly stepped down and was replaced by General Xu Xisheng, who had previously served as the deputy political commissar of the Southern Theater Command, the political commissar of the PLA Air Force of the Southern Theater Command, and currently a CCP Central Committee member. It is unclear whether General Xu Zhongbo stepped down in connection to the anticorruption investigation. According to Alexander Niell, an adjunct fellow at the Pacific Forum, the appointment of navy and air force officers in the PLA Rocket Force suggests that the Chinese leadership is focused on developing the nuclear triad, which would allow nuclear missiles to be launched from the air, sea, and land under an integrated command system. Joyce Huang, “Analysts Say Shakeup at China’s Rocket Force Suggests Strategy Shift Toward ‘Nuclear Triad,’” *Voice of America*, August 2, 2023; Kathrin Hille, “China Ousts Top Generals from Nuclear Rocket Force,” *Financial Times*, July 31, 2023; Lin Yunshi, “Personnel Observation | The Chief Officer of the Rocket Force has been Adjusted and Promoted to General Wang Houbin and Xu Xisheng to Take Up New Posts Across Service and Arms” (人事观察 | 火箭军主官调整并晋上将 王厚斌, 徐西盛跨军兵种履新), *Caixin*, July 31, 2023. Translation.

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velopment Department from 2017 to 2022, during which time he was sanctioned by the United States in 2018 for purchasing Russian weapons.¹⁶ General Li's last public appearance was on August 29 at the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum in Beijing.*¹⁷

CCP Prepares China for Escalating Tensions and Conflict

Throughout late 2022 and 2023, General Secretary Xi continued to escalate his rhetoric and emphasize the need for China to prepare for hardships stemming from what he sees as the hostile actions of the United States and allied countries. In particular, Xi has repeatedly called on Chinese officials and citizens to anticipate “worst-case” and “extreme” scenarios, terms that imply China could face heightened tensions with the United States, serious economic damage resulting from measures like sanctions and export controls, and more intense strategic rivalry, including the possibility of an open war over Taiwan.†¹⁸ Xi urged the country to harden itself against “worst-case scenarios” in his speech at the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, emphasizing that China needed to respond to strategic risks and uncertainties in the international environment by upholding the Party's control and adopting a “fighting spirit” so that “we cannot be swayed by fallacies, deterred by intimidation, or cowed by pressure.”‡¹⁹ At the 14th NPC in March 2023,§ Xi directly blamed the United States and its allies for China's recent economic and diplomatic troubles, asserting that “Western countries—led by the U.S.—have implemented all-round containment, encirclement

*On October 24, General Li was removed from his post as the Minister of National Defense, as well as State Councilor, without additional explanation. William Zheng, Jane Cai, and Jack Lau, “China Sacks Missing Defense Chief Li Shangfu with No Explanation,” *South China Morning Post*, October 24, 2023.

†For example, Jin Canrong, the associate dean of the School of International Studies at the Renmin University of China, stated that “extreme scenarios” in particular refer to “the danger of war” and, more specifically, “the Taiwan question,” arguing that the United States' actions in the region, not Beijing's own assertive behavior, are the reasons why this risk exists. Yang Sheng, “Complex Security Threats Call for Modern Thinking, Measures: Experts,” *Global Times*, June 5, 2023.

‡Additionally, for the first time since 1949, mentions of “security” eclipsed those of the “economy” in the report to the Party Congress. Xi mentioned the term “security” 91 times and “economy” 60 times during his report to the 20th Party Congress. *Bloomberg*, “Xi Mentions of ‘Security’ Eclipse ‘Economy’ in Historic Shift,” October 18, 2022.

§The proceedings of the March 2023 14th NPC further solidified Xi's position and centralized Party control over the state institutions of China's government. Xi secured an expected third term as state chairman of the People's Republic of China and Chairman of the CMC. The Xi loyalists recently elevated to the Politburo Standing Committee at the Party Congress also took up corresponding leadership roles of China's major state institutions. The NPC also approved a significant restructuring of the State Council, the rough analogue to a ministerial cabinet within China's state government. The reorganization altered the functions of a dozen agencies and created two new Party commissions on priority topics, thereby further strengthening Party control over key government functions and clarifying the role of the state under Xi as primarily an implementer of Party policies. NPC Observer, “A Guide to China's 2023 State Council Restructuring,” March 23, 2023; *AP News*, “Xi Awarded 3rd Term as China's President, Extending Rule,” March 10, 2023; *Xinhua*, “Xi Jinping Unanimously Elected to Serve as State Chairman Central Military Commission Chairman” (习近平全票当选国家主席中央军委主席), March 10, 2023. Translation; Susan V. Lawrence and Mari Y. Lee, “China's Political System in Charts: A Snapshot before the 20th Party Congress,” *Congressional Research Service*, CRS R46977, November 24, 2021, 27, 30.

and suppression against us, bringing unprecedentedly severe challenges to our country's development."²⁰

Recent statements by Xi in May and June 2023 continued to highlight foreign threats to China's security and convey an increasing sense of peril.²¹ At a meeting of the Central National Security Commission on May 30, Xi again invoked "worst-case and extreme scenarios" and called on officials to "modernize our national security system and capacity, and get prepared for actual combat and dealing with practical problems."²² During an inspection tour of an industrial park in Inner Mongolia the following week, Xi emphasized that China's dual-circulation strategy* should aim to ensure the "normal operation of the national economy under extreme circumstances," alluding to economic disruptions stemming from a potential decoupling with the U.S. economy.²³

Xi has also made several direct statements urging the PLA to prepare for war. During a visit to the CMC's Joint Operations Command Center in November 2022, for instance, Xi said that "the entire military must... focus on combat ability as the fundamental and only criterion, concentrate all energy on fighting a war, direct all work towards warfare and speed up to build the ability to win."²⁴ In July 2023, Xi reiterated that the PLA must prepare for war during an inspection tour of the Eastern Theater Command in Jiangsu Province, which is responsible for military operations in the East China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.²⁵

These exhortations to the military have been coupled with a number of legislative, budgetary, and logistical developments indicating that the Chinese leadership is taking preliminary but limited steps to enable effective war mobilization. China's NPC implemented a new Reservists Law that journalist John Pomfret and former Deputy National Security Advisor Matthew Pottinger argued will allow the PLA to "more easily activate its reserve forces and institutionalize a system for replenishing combat troops in the event of war."²⁶ China revised its conscription law to allow retired PLA soldiers to reenlist, and it also focuses on recruiting students with backgrounds in science and engineering to serve in military positions relating to space and cyber warfare.²⁷ Furthermore, China announced a 7.2 percent increase in its official defense spending during the opening session of the 14th NPC, bringing the total defense budget to an estimated \$224 billion.†²⁸ Beijing has opened new recruitment centers known as National Defense Mobilization offices‡ across the country since December 2022 while also upgrading air-raid shelters

*Under the "dual-circulation" strategy, China aims to reorient its manufacturing sector toward fulfilling domestic demand, rather than producing for export. It will continue to seek out and draw on international resources, capital, technology, and talent but avoid overreliance on global economic integration. For more on China's "dual-circulation" economic strategy priorities, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 2, Section 1, "Year in Review: Economics and Trade," in *2020 Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 207–208.

†China obscures much of its official defense budget through a fusion of military and civilian spending as well as its non-transparent reporting practices, making it an unreliable figure. For example, in June 2023, Senator Dan Sullivan (R-AK) said that the U.S. intelligence community estimated China's defense budget to be around \$700 billion, far above the stated figure of \$224 billion. Mackenzie Eaglen, "Setting the Record Straight on Beijing's Actual Military Spending," *American Enterprise Institute*, August 8, 2023; *Xinhua*, "China's 2023 Defense Budget to Rise by 7.2%, Remaining Single-Digit for 8th Year," March 6, 2023.

‡China has opened National Defense Mobilization offices in Beijing, Fujian, Hubei, Hunan, Inner Mongolia, Shandong, Shanghai, Sichuan, Tibet, and Wuhan. John Pomfret and Matt Pottinger, "Xi Jinping Says He Is Preparing China for War," *Foreign Affairs*, March 29, 2023.

and at least one “wartime emergency hospital” in Fujian Province, located across the strait from Taiwan.²⁹ China announced it would increase its grain production capacity by 50 million tons in March 2023, which may indicate that Beijing is seeking to improve its food security in the event a war disrupts global supply chains.³⁰

Retooling the Country for Self-Reliance in Science and Technology

In 2023, the CCP made significant personnel changes both to reinforce loyalty to Xi and advance its efforts to build a geopolitically resilient economy less dependent on the United States and other Western countries for foreign technology. These priorities are apparent in personnel appointments in the Politburo Standing Committee, Politburo, and Central Committee:

- The six members of the Politburo Standing Committee serving alongside Xi, who represent the top leadership of the CCP, have mostly had long careers in Party politics and have all proven their loyalty repeatedly to Xi over decades.³¹ Loyalty is the most important credential for promotion to the Politburo Standing Committee; having first served under Xi in 2007, Executive Vice Premier of the State Council Ding Xuexiang stands alone among its members in having credible scientific credentials.³² Ding earned a master’s degree in materials science and spent the first 17 years of his career at the Shanghai Materials Research Institute.³³ His portfolio currently includes science and technology issues.³⁴
- The new 24-man Politburo revealed at the 20th Party Congress not only has members with robust connections to Xi but also has a noticeably higher proportion of members with scientific and technocratic backgrounds than in previous terms.³⁵ Compared to the outgoing leadership team, eight of the new 24-man Politburo have science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) backgrounds, compared to just four in the 19th Politburo.*³⁶ For example, Li Ganjie, Ma Xingrui, Yuan Jiajun, and Zhang Guoqing, known as the “Military-Industrial Gang,” not only have ties to Xi by virtue of their promotion to provincial-level roles on his watch but also have extensive experience managing complex state-owned technology projects.³⁷ The remaining officials with STEM backgrounds have more distant connections to Xi, but all bring noteworthy scientific and technological expertise to the Politburo.†³⁸
- STEM backgrounds in the 205-person Central Committee increased by 35 percent to over one-third (69 members) of the total.³⁹ Of the 69 Central Committee members with STEM

*Among the eight current Politburo members with technocratic backgrounds, five hold PhD degrees and three have master’s degrees. These Politburo members have expertise in environmental engineering, materials science, nuclear engineering, systems engineering, aerospace, medical science, and defense technology. Ruihan Huang and AJ Cortese, “Nanometers over GDP: Can Technocrat Leaders Improve China’s Industrial Policy?” *MacroPolo*, May 23, 2023.

†According to the Asia Society Policy Institute, Yin Li allegedly helped Xi’s wife, Peng Liyuan, become a World Health Organization Goodwill Ambassador for Tuberculosis and HIV in 2011. Liu Guozhong worked under Li Zhanshu, a retired Xi confidant, during the 2000s in Heilongjiang. Chen Jining built favor with Xi as an administrator of Tsinghua University in Beijing. *Asia Society Policy Institute*, “Decoding Chinese Politics,” 2023.

backgrounds, 36 also lead provinces in their capacities either as provincial party secretaries or as governors, overseeing the key administrative units in China responsible for implementing Beijing's policies and agenda.⁴⁰

China also announced the reorganization of the Ministry of Science and Technology to improve the coordination of China's science and technology policy, reflecting its focus on achieving self-sufficiency and gaining superiority over the United States in critical technologies.*⁴¹ In a State Council reform plan approved by the NPC in March 2023 as part of a broader Party-state reorganization, the responsibilities of the Ministry of Science and Technology—including evaluating and managing specific research projects and research funding—were redistributed to relevant Party and state bodies that also conduct science and technology work.†⁴² The reform of the Ministry of Science and Technology is intended to streamline and strengthen its management over strategic planning of China's science and technology system.⁴³ The broader reorganization also transferred the state's overall responsibility for managing China's science and technology policy to the Party through the creation of a Central Science and Technology Commission.⁴⁴ In doing so, Party leadership will utilize the new commission to attempt to solve longstanding difficulties in coordination between the Ministry of Science and Technology and other entities under the State Council.‡⁴⁵ (For more on the role of the Central Science and Technology Commission and other institutions created or reorganized during the March 2023 NPC, see Chapter 3, Section 2, "Fiscal, Financial, and Debt Problems Weigh Down Beijing's Ambitions.")

China's Foreign Relations Law Seeks Tools to Counter Western Sanctions

In June 2023, the NPC passed the Foreign Relations Law of the People's Republic of China (PRC), a sweeping piece of legislation that codifies China's foreign policy principles and creates a legal basis for the imposition of "countermeasures" in response to foreign actions Beijing deems a threat.§⁴⁶ According to Chinese state media, the law aims to fix supposed shortcomings in China's approach to foreign affairs and address recent challenges posed by other countries' imposition of sanctions, export controls, and extraterritorial application of domestic law against China.⁴⁷ The law includes pro-

*State Council Secretary-General Xiao Jie framed the motivation for the State Council reform plan in terms of geopolitical competition. "Facing the severe circumstances of international scientific and technological competition as well as external containment and suppression, it is necessary to... accelerate the realization of high-level scientific and technological self-reliance and self-improvement," he said. *Xinhua*, "Explanation of the State Council Institutional Reform Plan" (关于国务院机构改革方案的说明), March 8, 2023. Translation.

†These include the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, the National Health Commission, and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. Huang Yanhao and Han Wei, "In Depth: The Remaking of China's Science and Technology Ministry," *Caixin Global*, March 15, 2023.

‡Prior to the reorganization, coordination of scientific and technological work was challenging because tasks were distributed across several departments within the State Council. The Ministry of Science and Technology had limited power to coordinate work with other ministries on the same bureaucratic level. Huang Yanhao and Han Wei, "In Depth: The Remaking of China's Science and Technology Ministry," *Caixin Global*, March 15, 2023.

§The law became effective on July 1, 2023. Evelyn Cheng, "China Has a New Foreign Relations Law. Here's What It Means for Business," *CNBC*, July 10, 2023.

visions that establish China’s intention to respond with sanctions and other restrictive measures to actions taken by other countries that harm its sovereignty, security, or development interests (article 33) and assert the CCP’s leadership in foreign policy and the importance of “uphold[ing] its system of socialism with Chinese characteristics” (articles 17 and 9).⁴⁸ It also enshrines Xi’s global initiatives (article 18) and states that China’s implementation of treaties must not “harm national sovereignty or security, or the societal public interest” (article 31).⁴⁹ Moritz Rudolf, a research scholar in law and fellow at Yale Law School’s Paul Tsai China Center, observes that article 31 is particularly concerning because its vague language creates uncertainty surrounding China’s adherence to its treaty commitments and “sends the signal that the necessity to prepare for ‘international struggle’ outweighs the other elements of the PRC’s foreign relations.”⁵⁰ Dr. Rudolf argues that the law underscores China’s increasing ambitions to act globally and to use the law as a tool to reshape the international legal environment in its favor.⁵¹ (For more on China’s international use of law, see Chapter 2, Section 1, “Rule by Law: China’s Increasingly Global Legal Reach.”)

Counterespionage Law Tightens State Security, Raises Risks of Arbitrary Detention

The NPC also amended China’s Counterespionage Law in April 2023, broadening the definition of espionage and granting the authorities extensive powers to investigate espionage in ways that heighten risks to foreign nationals and businesses operating in China.^{*52} According to the revised law, acts constituting espionage now include efforts to obtain information related to China’s national security, “seeking to align with an espionage organization and its agents”—an act that remains undefined—and cyberattacks against Chinese government entities and critical infrastructure.⁵³ The law also allows Chinese authorities to impose exit bans on anyone suspected of or under investigation for espionage, regardless of nationality, if they are deemed a potential national security risk after leaving China.⁵⁴ These provisions signal the Chinese government’s heightened scrutiny of data collection activities and have raised concerns among foreign observers that Chinese authorities could designate routine market research and business intelligence activities conducted by foreign companies as forms of espionage, or accuse foreign corporations of spying, if they operate in China and simultaneously conduct business with foreign governments elsewhere.⁵⁵ The new law’s administrative investigation powers establish low thresholds for Chinese authorities to raid the offices of foreign businesses, search their phones, examine their business files, or demand access to sensitive data or trade secrets.⁵⁶ Speaking to *Nikkei Asia* about the anti-espionage law in June 2023, Michael Hart, the president of the American Chamber of Commerce in China, said that “AmCham companies want to follow the laws, [but] if normal business activity gets reclassified, that’s where people are concerned.”⁵⁷ (For more on how China’s expanding definition of national security and espionage activities impacts foreign companies in China, see Chapter 1, Section 1, “U.S.-China Bilateral and China’s External Economic and Trade Relations.”)

*The law became effective on July 1, 2023. China Law Translate, “Counter-Espionage Law of the P.R.C. (2023 ed.)” April 26, 2023.

China's Global Diplomacy

Through its diplomacy in 2023, China sought to recalibrate its relations with the rest of the world while continuing to acquire greater power and influence for itself. Despite the associated economic and reputational risks, China increased its support to Russia amid the war in Ukraine, seeing the Kremlin as a source of material benefits, such as energy imports, and a useful counterbalance to the U.S.-led rules-based international order. With the United States, China has sought limited engagement, seemingly more as a safeguard against further deterioration of the relationship than out of a genuine desire to improve relations. In the Indo-Pacific, China's openly hostile, heavy-handed approach generated resistance from many of its neighbors. At the same time, China vigorously promoted its alternative vision for global governance and made further inroads with governments across Africa as well as Latin America and the Caribbean.

China Supports Russia in Its War against Ukraine

Beginning in late 2022, China's leadership intensified efforts to deepen its relationship with Russia and provide a lifeline to its war against Ukraine.⁵⁸ These efforts have continued despite the damage inflicted to China's relations with major global counterparts, including the United States and the EU.⁵⁹ "At each juncture when Xi Jinping has been faced with decisions on whether to position China in the carefully neutral way he did in 2014 after Russia's annexation of Crimea or to throw China's political weight behind [Russian President Vladimir] Putin and bolster the Sino-Russian relationship, he has chosen the latter, in full knowledge of what the fallout will be," Andrew Small, a senior transatlantic fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, observed in his testimony before the Commission.⁶⁰ At the same time, Beijing benefited from Moscow's economic and diplomatic isolation, seizing on the opportunity to import cheap energy and raw materials from its increasingly dependent neighbor.⁶¹ China has leveraged its partnership with Russia to seek influence in and greater access to the Indo-Pacific and in the Arctic.*⁶² As Mr. Small observed, "In the wider struggle that Beijing sees itself engaged in with the United States—and with the West more broadly—there is no partner more important to the PRC than Russia."⁶³

China Provides Diplomatic Cover, Weakens Sanctions on Russia

China continues high-level diplomatic and rhetorical support to protect the Kremlin from sanctions and international condemnation.⁶⁴ Throughout 2022, Chinese officials criticized sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States and other countries, sometimes dismissing them as ineffective while at other times condemning

*China has also sought to take advantage of Russia's diminishing presence in Central Asia as a result of its invasion of Ukraine. For more on China's activities in Central Asia, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 3, Section 3, "China's Activities and Influence in South and Central Asia," in *2022 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2022, 555–557, 561–563.

them as instances of illegitimate “long-arm jurisdiction.”*⁶⁵ In March 2023, Xi and President Vladimir Putin released a joint statement asserting that China and Russia oppose sanctions “unauthorized by the UN Security Council [UNSC],” denying the legitimacy of any sanctions effort beyond that approved by the UNSC, a body on which the two leaders sit as permanent members and wield a veto.⁶⁶ As of June 2023, China has abstained from at least six UN General Assembly resolutions condemning Russia’s invasion.⁶⁷ Chinese diplomats also protested unilateral U.S. sanctions against Chinese companies that allegedly helped Russia’s military evade export controls and attempted to persuade its EU counterparts to drop a proposed blacklist of eight Chinese firms that provided support to Russia’s military and industrial complex.⁶⁸ Beijing has paired these efforts to discredit and limit sanctions on Russia with the continued amplification of Kremlin propaganda narratives. For example, Chinese diplomats have invoked so-called “legitimate security concerns” in official statements to justify Russia’s unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, used the “legitimate security concerns” language to frame its claims over Taiwan, and regularly criticized NATO on social media.⁶⁹

China’s Material Support to Russia

While the U.S. and other governments have refrained from making a determination that China has delivered “lethal aid”† to Russia, as of August 2023 it has provided a number of military and dual-use exports that have aided Moscow’s war effort.⁷⁰ China’s material support to Russia includes:

- *Semiconductors*: In 2022, China doubled its exports of integrated circuits to Russia, relative to 2021’s figures, to an amount valued at \$179 million.⁷¹ Semiconductors are essential for modern weapons systems like missiles, tanks, drones, and aircraft, and are likely feeding the Russian war machine.⁷² According to an unclassified July 2023 report by the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, China has made some progress in

*Zhang Hui, a professor at Wuhan University’s Institute of International Law claims that the United States’ use of “long-arm jurisdiction” for national security purposes, particularly secondary sanctions, violates the sovereignty of other countries by limiting their ability to determine their relations with other states. Zhang Hui, “The Hegemonic Essence of U.S. ‘Long Arm’ Jurisdiction” (美国“长臂管辖”的霸权主义本质), *Guangming Daily*, February 17, 2023. Translation.

†Although the term “lethal aid” is not clearly defined in U.S. law, but is rather a term of art, Title 10 of the U.S. Code defines “nonlethal aid” as anything that “is not a weapon, ammunition, or other equipment or material designed to inflict serious bodily injury or death.” For example, communications equipment, intelligence assistance, body armor, and infrastructure could be considered nonlethal aid. U.S. officials have warned that China’s provision of lethal aid to Russia would constitute a red line justifying secondary sanctions or other punitive measures. However, Administration officials have remained vague about what kind of transfers could constitute lethal aid. In February 2023, for example, when Secretary Blinken interviewed with *CBS News*, journalist Margaret Brennan pressed him for specific answers on the types of lethal aid Beijing was considering, but Secretary Blinken only spoke in general terms. Secretary Blinken replied, “There’s a whole gamut of things that—that fit in that category, everything from ammunition to the weapons themselves.” Doina Chiacu and Sarah N. Lynch, “China Lethal Aid to Russia Would Come at Real Cost, U.S. Says,” *Reuters*, February 26, 2023; Claire Parker, “What Counts as an ‘Invasion’ or as ‘Lethal Aid’? Here’s What Some Terms from the Russia-Ukraine Crisis Really Mean,” *Washington Post*, February 23, 2022; Sophia Barkoff, “China Considering Providing ‘Lethal Support’ to Aid Russian Invasion of Ukraine, Blinken Says,” *CBS*, February 19, 2023; Joshua E. Keating, “What Exactly Is ‘Non-Lethal’ Aid?” *Foreign Policy*, August 12, 2012; “Excess Nonlethal Supplies: Availability for Humanitarian Relief, Domestic Emergency Assistance, and Homeless Veterans Assistance,” 10 U.S.C. §2557.

developing and manufacturing chips for military use, but the “failure rate”^{*} for Chinese chips bought by Russia is as high as 40 percent.⁷³

- *Fighter jet parts:* In October 2022, Chinese state-owned aircraft firm AVIC International Holding Corp. sent \$1.2 million worth of Su-35 fighter jet parts to Russian state-owned defense companies.⁷⁴ Russia is using Su-35 fighters for air-to-air combat and ground support operations in Ukraine.⁷⁵
- *Mobile radar units:* In October 2022, a procurement unit of China’s Air Force Equipment Department, China Taly Aviation Technologies Corp., shipped parts for mobile radar units to a sanctioned Russia state-owned missile manufacturer Almaz Antey.⁷⁶ Russia has used mobile radar units in Ukraine as part of its S-400 anti-aircraft missile system to detect enemy jet fighters, missiles, and drones.⁷⁷
- *Super-heavy civilian and armored trucks:* China’s shipments of super-heavy civilian trucks, which are vital for moving heavy military equipment, rose from 370 trucks in December 2021 to 4,598 in December 2022, an increase of over 1,000 percent.⁷⁸ According to the *Wall Street Journal*, in June 2023, shipments of “Tiger” armored trucks produced by Shaanxi Baoji Special Vehicles Manufacturing were also found in Chechnya, a contributor of troops and equipment to Russia’s war in Ukraine.⁷⁹
- *Drones:* Throughout 2022, nearly 70 Chinese exporters shipped \$12 million in drones and drone parts to Russia.⁸⁰ The drones may be used by Russia to carry out reconnaissance missions or drop explosives.⁸¹
- *Navigation equipment:* In August 2022, Chinese state-owned defense company Poly Technologies sent navigation equipment to Russian state-owned military export firm JSC Rosoboronexport to be used in Mi-17 military transport helicopters.⁸²
- *Communications jamming equipment:* In August 2022, Chinese electronics firm Fujian Nanan Baofeng Electronic Co. used an Uzbek state-owned defense firm intermediary to supply JSC Rosoboronexport a telescoping antenna for the RB-531BE electronic warfare vehicle.⁸³
- *Gunpowder:* Chinese state-owned Poly Technologies exported nearly \$2 million of gunpowder in 2022, enough to make 80 million rounds of ammunition.⁸⁴
- *Assault rifles:* Between June and December 2022, China North Industries Group Corporation Limited (NORINCO), one of China’s largest state-owned defense contractors, sent Russia 1,000 CQ-A rifles listed in customs data as “civilian hunting rifles.”⁸⁵ The CQ-A is NORINCO’s copy of the U.S. M-4A1 carbine—a rifle for close-quarters combat that is currently the standard-issue firearm of most U.S. military units.⁸⁶

^{*}The “failure rate” of a semiconductor is a measure of failure per unit of time and is utilized by the semiconductor industry to determine a product’s reliability. William J. Vigrass, “Calculation of Semiconductor Failure Rates,” *Renesas Electronics Corporation*.

- *Body armor*: Russia received 12 tons of Chinese body armor routed via Turkey in December 2022.⁸⁷
- *Satellite imagery of Ukraine*: Changsha Tianyi Space Science and Technology Research Institute (Spacety China) and its Luxembourg-based subsidiary provided high-resolution satellite imagery of Ukraine to a Russia-based technology firm, which helped enable the combat operations of the Russian private military company Wagner Group.⁸⁸

Hong Kong has also served as a transshipment hub for advanced microelectronic components to Russia, circumventing sanctions.⁸⁹ According to the Free Russia Foundation, a DC-based prodemocracy group, Hong Kong doubled its exports of semiconductors and integrated circuits to Russia to around \$400 million in 2022, making it second only to mainland China in the value of trade with Russia in these products.⁹⁰ Brian Kot, a research assistant at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, noted that Hong Kong's participation in sanctions busting is a "direct consequence of Hong Kong's increased subservience to China," with Hong Kong's Chief Executive John Lee following Beijing's refusal to recognize U.S. sanctions placed on Russia.⁹¹ Despite U.S. technology companies halting direct sales to Russia in order to stay compliant with sanctions requirements, smaller Hong Kong traders, including one-man operations and recently established businesses, have sent shipments of U.S. chip supplies to Russia.*⁹² One example is Agu Information Technology, a new Hong Kong-based distributor established in April 2022 that sold \$18.7 million worth of Intel semiconductors to Russia.⁹³ Japanese-made chips have also been exported to Russia via Hong Kong.⁹⁴ For instance, in October 2022, 4,000 semiconductors made by Japan's Kioxia Holdings were sent to a Russian company through a Hong Kong-based trading company.⁹⁵

China's Energy Imports and Currency Provide Economic Lifeline to Russia

China has also continued to provide an economic lifeline to the Kremlin through its imports of Russian oil and gas as well as its exports of automobiles, electronics, and semiconductors to Russia.⁹⁶ As a result of this broader economic sustainment of Russia, the renminbi's (RMB) prevalence in the Russian economy has grown.⁹⁷ (For more on China's economic support to Russia, see Chapter 3, Section 2, "Fiscal, Financial, and Debt Problems Weigh Down Beijing's Ambitions.") This support has allowed the Kremlin to sidestep sanctions and export controls by the United States and its allies and partners, blunting their effectiveness.⁹⁸ China's ability to buy cheap overland fossil fuel commodities from Russia has also reduced Beijing's vulnerability to a blockade on its extensive oil imports that transverse the Strait of Malacca.⁹⁹

*In mid-June, officials from the U.S. Department of the Treasury asked Hong Kong banks and regulators for assistance in identifying U.S. high-tech items like semiconductors being transferred to Russia. Echo Wong and Pak Yiu, "U.S. Treasury Warned Hong Kong Banks on Tech Exports to Russia," *Nikkei Asia*, July 6, 2023.

The June 2023 Wagner Incident: Implications for Chinese Leadership

The Wagner Group's direct challenge to the Russian leadership in June 2023 not only underscored the fragility of President Putin's power but also reinforced long-held beliefs within the CCP about the importance of controlling the military and private security companies within China.¹⁰⁰ From June 23 to 24, chief of the Russian private military company Wagner Group Yevgeny Prigozhin* led an armored convoy toward Moscow in what some commentators called an "attempted coup" or "mutiny."¹⁰¹ Several foreign observers assessing the Wagner incident in the weeks following argued that a similar military insurrection would never have been possible in China due to the recent changes in structure and policy that strengthened CCP control over the PLA.¹⁰² Chinese analysts argued that private military companies could eventually pose a threat to CCP leadership if left unchecked, however.¹⁰³ Zhao Long, a senior research fellow at the Chinese state-backed think tank Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, argued in an analysis of the Wagner incident that China should be wary of companies like Wagner Group because "allowing such organizations to grow bigger and stronger, [as well as] ignoring their coordination with traditional military organizations, may lead to infighting and eventually [lead to] civil strife."¹⁰⁴ (For more on China's private security companies, see "Chinese State-Owned Security Companies Could Increase Presence in Africa" later in this section.)

Following the Wagner incident, China's propaganda apparatus emphasized the importance of the CCP's control over the military while simultaneously limiting online public discussion about potential uprisings at home.¹⁰⁵ During the weekend of the Wagner incident, a *Weibo* account run by the PLA made a post about Mao's revamp of the military in 1927 ensuring CCP control over the military.¹⁰⁶ In a June 2023 article posted the day after the Wagner Group halted its march toward Moscow, the *PLA Daily* also praised the political commissar system as "irreplaceable" in guaranteeing the CCP's leadership over the military.¹⁰⁷ An analysis from the U.S.-based nonprofit China Digital Times found that Chinese authorities censored search queries involving the phrase "eliminating the Emperor's cronies," a term dating to the Han Dynasty that describes coups or uprisings, on the social media site *Weibo* following the Wagner incident.¹⁰⁸ Some social media users speculated that the censorship reflected the Chinese lead-

*Prigozhin began his foray into politics in the 1990s with a career in the restaurant industry after serving nine years in prison for crimes ranging from robbery to fraud. Around this time, Prigozhin met future Russian President Vladimir Putin when the latter was a top aide to the mayor of St. Petersburg. Prigozhin obtained major state contracts by leveraging his political connections, earning him the nickname of "Putin's Chef." Prigozhin established the Wagner Group in 2014, which operates in support of Moscow's allies in Syria, Libya, and the Central African Republic. In February 2022, the Wagner Group joined Russia's war effort against Ukraine and led Russia's assault against the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut. Facing heavy losses of Wagner forces during the war, Prigozhin criticized Russia's military leadership for incompetence and treason and subsequently launched an ultimately-aborted attempt to march on Moscow in June 2023. Mark Trevelyan, "Who Is Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Wagner Mercenary Chief?" *Reuters*, August 24, 2023; *Reuters*, "Surrounded by Corpses, Wagner's Prigozhin Blasts Russian Defence Minister in Expletive-laden Video," May 5, 2023.

The June 2023 Wagner Incident: Implications for Chinese Leadership—Continued

ership’s “deep-seated fears about similar challenges to its own power base.”¹⁰⁹

Following Prigozhin’s death in a plane crash which some experts speculated was carried out at the behest of the Kremlin,* Chinese commentators contemplated the potential implications of his death for the Wagner Group’s future and Russia’s war in Ukraine.¹¹⁰ Freelance writer Chen Feng wrote in *Guancha*, a Chinese state media outlet, that Prigozhin’s death “is a relief for Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and even NATO,” adding that “the confrontation with Russia will continue, but the unpredictable and uncontrollable factors brought by Prigozhin and Wagner are greatly reduced.”¹¹¹ Mr. Chen notes, however, that Wagner’s new leadership will likely be easier for the Kremlin to control, which will benefit President Putin.¹¹² Military analyst Song Zhongping of the *Global Times*, a state-run tabloid, claimed that the United States and its allies were seeking to discredit Putin and undermine Russia’s “internal unity and stability” by assessing that he may have been responsible for Prigozhin’s death, portraying these assessments as part of a broader “cognitive and information warfare” campaign.¹¹³

Chinese-Russian Coordination in the Indo-Pacific and Beyond

China and Russia coordinate on security issues beyond the war in Ukraine. Notable examples include rhetorical alignment on China’s claims over Taiwan, joint military exercises in the Indo-Pacific, and ostensibly scientific activities in the polar regions.

Russian Support for China’s Claims on Taiwan

Russia is increasingly willing to provide rhetorical support to China on the Taiwan issue, raising the question of whether those words could eventually evolve into material and operational support for a Chinese war of aggression against the island.¹¹⁴ (For more on China’s approach to Taiwan in 2023, see Chapter 5, Section 2, “Taiwan.”) In March 2023, President Putin made an unprecedented commitment to Xi, stating that Russia “reaffirms its adherence to the One China principle, recognizes Taiwan as an inalienable part of Chinese territory, opposes any form of ‘Taiwan independence,’ and firmly supports China’s measures to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity.”¹¹⁵ Previous Russian statements only noted that the Kremlin respected the One China principle and opposed Taiwan independence but did not express full-throated support for China’s actions toward Taiwan.¹¹⁶ In April 2023, Russia further condoned Chinese aggressive behavior toward Taiwan, when Kremlin

*U.S. intelligence officials assessed in a preliminary intelligence report that an explosive device or bomb may have caused the crash, as there was no evidence of a surface-to-air weapon or missile launch directed at the plane based on satellite intelligence. The officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, stated that it was likely that Putin approved the assassination. Jennifer Jacobs and Alex Wickman, “Russia Rejects US Claims Putin Likely Approved Prigozhin Killing,” *Bloomberg*, August 24, 2023; Julian E. Barnes et al., “Blast Likely Downed Jet and Killed Prigozhin, U.S. Officials Say,” *New York Times*, August 24, 2023.

Spokesman Dmitry Peskov defended the large-scale military exercises China conducted around Taiwan after Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with then U.S. Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy in the United States.¹¹⁷ Mr. Peskov asserted that Beijing had the "sovereign right" to respond to "repeated actions that have been provocative toward the People's Republic of China."¹¹⁸ According to Alexander Gabuev, director of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center in Berlin, the leverage Beijing is currently gaining over Moscow as a result of the war in Ukraine may also lead to increased Russian sharing of designs and technology for advanced weapons systems over time.¹¹⁹ "This is material support for China's Taiwan policy that's not advertised," Mr. Gabuev observed.¹²⁰

Joint Strategic Bomber Patrols in the Indo-Pacific

China and Russia continued strategic bomber patrols with nuclear-capable aircraft in the Indo-Pacific, demonstrating their deepening military collaboration and collective might to nearby countries.*¹²¹ In November 2022, Chinese H-6K bombers, Russian Tu-95 bombers, and Russian Su-35 fighters flew an eight-hour mission over the Sea of Japan and East China Sea.¹²² During the drill, Russia and China landed their bombers at one another's bases, a first for both militaries.¹²³ The patrols prompted Japan and South Korea to quickly scramble their aircraft in response, and Japan expressed its "severe concerns" with China and Russia's joint air force activities near Japan's territory.[†]¹²⁴ In June 2023, China and Russia again sent H-6 and Tu-95 bombers to the Sea of Japan and East China Sea for two days, prompting Korea and Japan to scramble aircraft and for Japan to again lodge protests.¹²⁵

Scientific and Economic Projects with Russia Could Give China Strategic Advantages in the Polar Regions

Beijing is also leveraging scientific and economic cooperation with Russia to make further inroads in the polar regions.¹²⁶ During Xi's March 2023 state visit to Moscow, he and President Putin agreed to "continue to deepen practical cooperation in polar scientific research," an area in which Russia had previously limited in its interactions with China.¹²⁷ With China's prospects of expanding its presence in the Arctic through collaboration with the Nordic countries shrinking due to deteriorating geopolitical circumstances, Russia is becoming an increasingly important partner in accessing the region.¹²⁸ At the same time, the Kremlin's diplomatic exclusion from the Arctic Council has left Russia in a position where Beijing is its best option for serving as a collaborator.¹²⁹ For example, during

*China and Russia previously carried out joint strategic bomber patrols in 2019, 2020, and 2021. Wang Qi, "Chinese, Russian, Bombers Hold Joint Patrol, Safeguarding World Strategic Stability amid Western Provocations," *Global Times*, November 19, 2021; Justin McCurry, "Japan and South Korea Scramble Jets to Track Russian and Chinese Bomber Patrol," *Guardian*, December 22, 2020; Franz-Stefan Gady, "China, Russia Conduct First Ever Joint Strategic Bomber Patrol Flights in Indo-Pacific Region," *Diplomat*, July 23, 2019.

†In April 2023, Japan published a revised version of the "Basic Plan on Ocean Policy," citing Beijing and Moscow's joint naval exercises as a reason for Japan's national interests being "under greater threat than ever before." The following month, then Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi expressed additional concern over China and Russia "strengthening their military collaboration," including joint flights and naval exercises. David Keyton and Karl Ritter, "China and Russia are Increasing Their Military Collaboration, Japan's Foreign Minister Warns," *Associated Press*, May 13, 2023; *Kyodo News*, "Japan Wary of China, Russia Military Presence in Updated Ocean Policy," April 28, 2023.

Putin and Xi's March 2023 state visit, Russia demonstrated further willingness to accommodate China in the region by agreeing to create a joint working body focused on the development of the Northern Sea Route, which stretches across Russia's northern coastline from the Kara Strait through the Arctic Ocean to Providence Bay (in northeastern Siberia) and serves as the shortest shipping route between East Asia and Europe.¹³⁰ The China Coast Guard (CCG) and the Russian Federal Security Service also signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) regarding maritime cooperation in April 2023 during a meeting in the Russian city of Murmansk, located within the Arctic Circle.¹³¹ Although the details of the memorandum were not publicly announced, experts assess it may open the door to deeper security cooperation in the Arctic region.¹³²

Russia and China have publicly described their cooperation as civilian research expeditions and attempted to open a joint scientific research base in the Arctic, but recent cooperation between Russian and Chinese scientists on applications relevant to anti-submarine warfare has raised concerns that this purportedly scientific cooperation in fact has military applications.¹³³ According to the White House's national strategy for the Arctic published in October 2022, China's scientific engagements in the region are used for "dual-use research with intelligence or military applications."¹³⁴ Sarah Kirchner, head of Asia-Pacific Strategy and Security at the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University, noted in testimony before the Commission that intense research collaboration between Chinese research and development (R&D) institutions with military ties, such as Harbin Engineering University, and Russian counterparts on hydroacoustics communication and fiberoptic hydrophone development in Arctic waters for use under the ice.¹³⁵ These research topics have clear applications for anti-submarine warfare.¹³⁶

China has also made several investments in Russian commodities operations in the Arctic that may someday translate into strategic access for Beijing.*¹³⁷ In 2019, the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Fuzhou University conducted a study to identify the Russian ports along the Northern Sea Route that have significant potential for facilitating Chinese access to the region.¹³⁸ An April 2023 report by CSIS found that major Chinese firms have in fact been investing in Russian ports in and around the Arctic Circle for years, including the Chinese state-owned Poly Group's \$300 million investment into a coal terminal in the city of Murmansk and commitment to develop a deep-water port at Arkhangelsk in 2016.¹³⁹ Chinese firms and financiers have also made investments in liquefied natural gas and quartz deposits near the Arctic Circle.¹⁴⁰

China-Russia Collaboration in Artificial Intelligence

China may exploit new opportunities to attract talent in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) due to the exodus of technology workers from Russia amid the war in Ukraine as well as the Russian govern-

*China and Russia began dialogues on Arctic cooperation over a decade ago, but the Kremlin initially had attempted to limit Beijing's presence in the region by trying to prevent its membership in the Arctic Council and prohibiting its research vessels from transiting through the Northern Sea Route. Russia may have been apprehensive about a Chinese presence in the Arctic due to Moscow's placement of strategic assets there, ranging from ballistic missiles to advanced radar arrays. For more, see Matthew P. Funaiolo et al., "Frozen Frontiers: China's Great Power Ambitions in the Polar Regions," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, April 18, 2023.

ment's stifling of domestic AI R&D.¹⁴¹ Both Xi and Putin view AI as a critical technology for geopolitical power.¹⁴² Although it is unclear how many went to China to seek employment, around 100,000 information technology specialists left Russia in 2022, constituting at least 10 percent of the country's technology workforce.*¹⁴³ In 2021, a Russian government poll assessing the level of confidence in the Kremlin's AI efforts demonstrated that only 64 percent of domestic AI specialists were content with their working conditions.¹⁴⁴ According to the poll, Russia's personnel shortages and a weak venture capital market, among other issues, caused AI development within the country to lag.¹⁴⁵ According to Samuel Bendett, an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) and adviser at the Center for Naval Analyses, the Kremlin's plans to address these issues were paused in 2022 following its invasion of Ukraine.¹⁴⁶ The invasion led to the rapid pull-out of major information technology and high-tech companies from Russia, brain drain, and sanctions on advanced technology components that may weaken Russia's domestic AI research and development for years to come.¹⁴⁷ John Lee, the director of East West Futures Consulting, assessed that in the fields of AI and software development before the war, Chinese firms were "attracted by Russia's capable research institutions and skilled labor pool, while the prospect of access to PRC markets attracted Russian partners" and noted that despite ongoing sanctions against the Kremlin, the Chinese will likely try to leverage Russian talent "in software fields that cannot yet be adequately serviced by the PRC's domestic labor force and existing corporate expertise."¹⁴⁸ Prior to 2022, China and Russia's AI collaboration was expanding, with 14 times as many AI-related publications coauthored by Chinese and Russian researchers published in 2019 compared to 2010 and, despite fluctuations in the interim, an overall increase of China-Russia AI investments from \$182 million in 2016 to \$300 million in January 2021.¹⁴⁹

North Korea's Weapons Deal with Russia May Complement China's Material Support for the War against Ukraine

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's weapons deal with Putin may complement Beijing's effort to materially support Russia's war in Ukraine, but it is unclear whether such an agreement would have a decisive impact on the war effort.† Kim's tour of Russian military facilities in September 2023 and remarks by Putin expressing openness to military cooperation gave rise to speculation that North Korea may provide ammunition and artillery shells to Russia in ex-

*The *New York Times* noted in April 2022 that in the weeks following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, thousands of Russian tech workers fled to Armenia, Georgia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and other countries. Cade Metz and Adam Satariano, "Russian Tech Industry Faces 'Brain Drain' as Workers Flee," *New York Times*, April 13, 2022.

† Cooperation between the three countries has also appeared to increase in recent months. In July 2023, North Korea invited delegations of Chinese and Russian officials to Pyongyang to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the armistice of the Korean War. The following month, Moscow proposed that China, Russia, and North Korea participate in joint naval exercises, which would be a first for Pyongyang, and North Korea hosted Chinese and Russian delegates for a second time during the 75th anniversary of the country's founding. Kim Tong-Hyung, "Kim Jong Un hosts Chinese and Russian Guests at a Parade Celebrating North Korea's 75th Anniversary," *Associated Press*, September 9, 2023; Christian Davies, "Russia Proposes Joint Naval Drills with North Korea and China," *Financial Times*, September 4, 2023; Brad Lendon and Gawon Bae, "North Korea, China and Russia Commemorate 'Victory' 70 Years Ago, While Aligning on Ukraine," *CNN*, July 27, 2023.

change for missile and space technologies.¹⁵⁰ General Mark Milley, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, predicted after the meeting that North Korea would provide Moscow with Soviet-era 152mm artillery rounds, although it remained unclear how many rounds would be transferred or how soon the transfer would take place.¹⁵¹ General Milley told reporters he was “skeptical” North Korea’s material assistance to Russia would make a significant impact on the outcome of the war.¹⁵² In October 2023, *CBS News* reported that a U.S. official confirmed Pyongyang was sending artillery to the Kremlin, but it did not specify the quantity or type of rounds.¹⁵³ By contrast, Bruce W. Bennett, a professor at the Pardee RAND Graduate School, argued that the combination of North Korean and Chinese material support could “prolong the war” and “substantially increase the damage inflicted.”¹⁵⁴ Yun Sun, the director of the China program at the Stimson Center, observed that even though Pyongyang’s transfer of military technology to the Kremlin would destabilize the region, “China will turn the table and blame the U.S. and its allies for pushing both Russia and North Korea in a corner. This reinforces China’s opposition to the ‘Asian NATO’ it sees [the] U.S. as orchestrating.”¹⁵⁵

China Selectively Responds to U.S. Engagement while Blaming It for Tensions

China selectively responded to U.S. engagement efforts intended to reduce tensions in 2023, likely for the purpose of preserving its access to foreign technology, markets, and financing.¹⁵⁶ It did so without offering meaningful concessions and while blaming the United States for all problems in the relationship.¹⁵⁷ The U.S.-China relationship was strained at the end of 2022 due to what the United States and its allies saw as Chinese provocations in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea as well as China’s support throughout the year of Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine.¹⁵⁸ Even so, the November 2022 meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden* and General Secretary Xi on the sidelines of the G-20 Summit in Indonesia culminated in an agreement that U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken would visit China in early 2023, creating initial prospects for an improvement in the relationship.†¹⁵⁹ These diplomatic efforts at rapprochement were quickly derailed by the discovery of a Chinese surveillance balloon transiting over the United States, resulting in the postponement of Secretary Blinken’s trip and other high-level

*According to a readout released by the White House, President Biden emphasized that United States and China must manage competition responsibly and maintain open lines of communication. He also underscored areas where the United States and China could work together to address transnational challenges such as climate change and global macroeconomic stability (debt relief, health security, and global food security). President Biden also raised concerns about Taiwan, Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, human rights, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and Russia’s brutal war against Ukraine. White House, *Readout of President Joe Biden’s Meeting with President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China*, November 15, 2022.

† On November 22, 2022, a week after President Biden’s meeting with Xi, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III met with China’s then Minister of National Defense General Wei Fenghe on the margins of the ASEAN Defense Minister’s Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) in Cambodia. This was the first senior-level defense meeting with China since China canceled military-to-military talks following then Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan. U.S. Department of Defense, *Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III’s Meeting with People’s Republic of China (PRC) Minister of National Defense General Wei Fenghe*, November 22, 2022; *Reuters*, “Pentagon Chief Raises Concern about Beijing’s ‘Dangerous’ Behavior with Chinese Counterpart,” November 22, 2022.

el official exchanges for several months.*¹⁶⁰ Since then, China has hosted or participated in several meetings with U.S. officials, but it has approached these engagements in a transactional way while refusing to substantively discuss issues of concern to the U.S. side.¹⁶¹

China's Spy Balloon Program Publicly Reveals Global Reach of Surveillance Efforts

Although General Milley said publicly in September 2023 that the U.S. intelligence community ultimately concluded the Chinese spy balloon neither collected intelligence over the United States nor transmitted it back to China, the discovery of its transit over the country earlier in the year shed light on the extent of China's global balloon surveillance program.¹⁶² In February, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) stated that the Chinese surveillance balloon seen flying across the United States was a part of larger global Chinese surveillance program using high-altitude balloons.¹⁶³ According to DOD, over the past several years, Chinese balloons have been spotted operating over South America, East Asia (including Japan and Taiwan), and Europe.¹⁶⁴ China's balloons are reportedly capable of gathering signals intelligence, allowing it to collect large amounts of communications and data on targets below.¹⁶⁵ Balloons allow China to operate more stealthily because they move with wind patterns rather than the fixed—and thus more predictable—patterns of satellites.¹⁶⁶ Balloons also allow China to gather clearer images because they are able to hover above a target for extended periods of time, unlike a satellite that is in constant motion.[†]¹⁶⁷ According to a former senior U.S. intelligence officer, China's balloon program may also supplement the data collection of its satellite networks by providing information on atmospheric conditions and communications that are only accessible at lower altitudes.¹⁶⁸ This information could assist China in improving and expanding its missile, naval, and air operations.¹⁶⁹

*On January 28, 2023, a PLA surveillance balloon was detected entering U.S. airspace over Alaska after transiting the Pacific Ocean from its launch base in Hainan, China. While Chinese authorities claimed the balloon was a non-military "weather balloon," DOD determined that China's high-altitude balloon program was intended for intelligence collection. The balloon's trajectory took it over Alaska, Canada, and the continental United States, passing close to a number of sensitive U.S. military sites, including those known to host U.S. intercontinental ballistic missiles. President Biden authorized DOD to neutralize the balloon, and an U.S. Air Force F-22 Raptor subsequently shot down the balloon off the coast of South Carolina on February 4. In the hours after the downing, PLA leadership reportedly refused outreach by Defense Secretary Austin on a crisis hotline between the two militaries, reflecting a lack of interest in mitigating the crisis. The incident prompted Secretary Blinken to postpone his planned trip to China, and President Biden described the incident as an "unacceptable" violation of U.S. sovereignty. Ellen Nakashima, Shane Harris, and Jason Samenow, "U.S. Tracked China Spy Balloon from Launch on Hainan Island along Unusual Path," *Washington Post*, February 14, 2023; David Vergun, "Chinese Surveillance Balloons Global in Scope, Says Official," *U.S. Department of Defense*, February 13, 2023; Ellen Knickmeyer and *Associated Press*, "U.S. Military Called China on a Crisis Hotline During the Spy Balloon Crisis but Chinese Officials Refused to Talk: 'That's Really Dangerous,'" *Fortune*, February 10, 2023; Matthew Lee, "Chinese Balloon Soars Across US; Blinken Scraps Beijing Trip," *AP News*, February 3, 2023.

†According to Brian Weeden, director of program planning for Secure World Foundation, balloons can capture images of targets at a "much closer distance and can dwell over an area for a longer time than low Earth orbiting satellites." By contrast, a small constellation of satellites in orbit would be required to capture images of a single area consistently from space. Moreover, a balloon's ability to loiter complicates efforts an adversary might take to protect against intelligence collection, because a balloon's trajectory is less predictable than that of Earth orbiting satellites. Theresa Hitchems, "Balloons vs. Satellites: Popping Some Misconceptions about Capability and Legality," *Breaking Defense*, February 7, 2023; Courtney Albon, "Why Stratospheric Balloons Are Used In Era of Space-Based Intelligence," *CAISRNET*, February 6, 2023.

China Entertains Limited Engagement with the United States

In the aftermath of the spy balloon incident, China engaged with U.S. officials in areas where it had clear economic or strategic interests.¹⁷⁰ U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo met with her Chinese counterpart in Washington, DC at the end of May 2023, where they discussed U.S. economic and trade policies of interest to Beijing, including China's concerns over the United States' semiconductor policies, export controls, and foreign investment review.¹⁷¹ The same month, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William Burns made a secret trip to Beijing, where he met with Chinese officials to emphasize maintaining open lines of communication in intelligence channels, since Beijing had unilaterally broken off most regular calls between senior intelligence officials after the downing of the balloon.¹⁷² Secretary Blinken visited Beijing in June 2023—the first trip by a U.S. secretary of state to China in five years.¹⁷³ U.S. Department of the Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and the president's special envoy for climate John Kerry both visited China in July 2023.¹⁷⁴ Secretary Blinken's visit included discussion of issues that are strategically important to China, such as Taiwan, U.S. de-risking policies, and global macroeconomic stability; it also resulted in a commitment to work toward increasing the number of commercial flights, and produced an invitation to then Foreign Minister Qin to visit the United States, which he accepted.¹⁷⁵ The meeting with Secretary Yellen reportedly involved discussion of cooperation to stabilize the macro-economy, as well as climate finance and debt distress in low-income and emerging economies.¹⁷⁶

Secretary Raimondo traveled to Beijing in late August 2023, just weeks after the release of a U.S. executive order addressing regulating U.S. investments in certain national security technologies and products in China.¹⁷⁷ (For more on the implications of the executive order, see Chapter 1, Section 1, "U.S.-China Bilateral and China's External Economic and Trade Relations.") During Secretary Raimondo's visit, China and the United States agreed to establish a commercial issues working group to help both sides solve investment and trade issues, with the United States set to host the first meeting in 2024 and subsequent meetings taking place twice a year.¹⁷⁸ The working group will comprise public and private sector leaders from the United States and China.¹⁷⁹ The two sides also reached an agreement to create an export control enforcement information exchange, which will serve as a platform to reduce misunderstandings and ensure clarity of the United States' expectations on national security.¹⁸⁰ Both countries also agreed to allow subject matter experts to participate in discussions during administrative licensing proceedings that involve sensitive business information and trade secrets.¹⁸¹

China Refuses to Accept Responsibility for Bilateral Tensions

China continues to absolve itself of any responsibility for the problems in the bilateral relationship with the United States, placing the onus of improving ties entirely on the United States.¹⁸² While U.S. officials have consistently called for open channels of communication to ensure competition does not veer into conflict, China has used public and private engagements, as well as its propaganda

system, to promote its narrative that the United States is to blame and should acquiesce to China's demands for the sake of improving relations.¹⁸³

At the same time, China has continued to reject U.S. requests for top-level defense talks and the restoration of military communication channels to delay cooperation on curbing the flow of fentanyl precursors from China into the United States and to engage in unprofessional and dangerous military behavior in the Indo-Pacific region. Then Defense Minister General Li Shangfu, who is currently under investigation for corruption, refused to meet with U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in June 2023 due to the Chinese side's insistence that sanctions on Li be lifted before any talks.*¹⁸⁴ Also in June, China reportedly rebuffed Secretary Blinken's calls to restore military-to-military communication, which China had unilaterally severed after then Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in 2022.¹⁸⁵ China has also been unresponsive to U.S. calls to cooperate more closely on fentanyl trafficking after it unilaterally canceled talks on the issue following then Speaker Pelosi's visit, saying the United States should instead respond to the crisis by fixing its own societal problems and examining the role of pharmaceutical companies.¹⁸⁶ Although the United States invited China to participate in the first meeting of a global coalition of countries convened to crack down on synthetic drug trafficking in July, China did not respond or attend.[†]¹⁸⁷ Finally, China continued to reject U.S. complaints that the PLA has carried out "unsafe and unprofessional" intercepts of U.S. naval vessels and aircraft in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.[‡]¹⁸⁸ During the 2023 Shangri-La

*On September 20, 2018, the United States imposed sanctions on Li, then the director of the CMC Equipment Development Department, for engaging in significant transactions with persons listed under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). According to a fact sheet published by the State Department, the transactions involved "Russia's transfer to China of Su-35 combat aircraft and S-400 surface-to-air missile system-related equipment." A State Department spokesperson clarified that Secretary Austin "is able to engage in official United States government business" with Li, despite the sanctions. Nike Ching, "U.S.: Sanctions on China's New Defense Chief Not a Hurdle for Military Talks," *Voice of America*, March 20, 2023; U.S. Department of State, *CAATSA Section 231: Addition of 33 Entities and Individuals to the List of Specified Persons and Imposition of Sanctions on the Equipment Development Department*, September 20, 2018.

†The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control designated 12 entities and 13 individuals based in China for the international proliferation of illicit drugs in October 2023. The China-based network was found responsible for manufacturing and distributing "ton quantities" of fentanyl, methamphetamine, and MDMA precursors. The first charges against China-based companies and Chinese nationals occurred on June 23, 2023, when the U.S. Justice Department announced the first prosecutions to charge four China-based precursor chemical manufacturing companies and their employees with crimes related to fentanyl production, distribution, and sales resulting from precursor chemicals. U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Treasury Targets Large Chinese Network of Illicit Drug Producers*, October 3, 2023; U.S. Department of Justice, *Justice Department Announces Charges against China-Based Chemical Manufacturing Companies and Arrests of Executives in Fentanyl Manufacturing*, June 23, 2023.

‡According to a press release issued by DOD in June 2023, there has been an "alarming increase" in the number of intercepts and confrontations in the region. For instance, in December 2022, DOD reported that a Chinese Navy J-11 pilot flew 20 feet next to the nose of a U.S. Air Force RC-135, forcing the U.S. pilot to maneuver away from the PLA Air Force pilot to prevent a collision. A similar incident occurred in May 2023. In March 2023, China made threats to the United States after a U.S. Navy destroyer sailed through disputed waters near the Paracel Islands for two days in a row. In June 2023, DOD released video of a Chinese warship cutting off the U.S. destroyer *USS Chung-Hoon* in the Taiwan Strait, nearly causing a collision after coming within 150 yards of the U.S. ship. Jim Garamone, "Defense Leaders See Increase in Risky Chinese Intercepts," *DOD News*, June 8, 2023; Igor Patrick, "US Military Slams Chinese Warship's 'Unsafe and Unprofessional' Maneuvers in Taiwan Strait," *South China Morning Post*, June 6, 2023; David Rising, "China Threatens Consequences over US Warship's Actions," *Associated Press*, March 24, 2023.

Dialogue, in response to an audience question regarding unprofessional operational behavior, then Defense Minister General Li hit back at the United States, claiming that “foreign vessels and fighter jets com[ing] into areas near [China’s] territory” are “not here for innocent passage” but are “here for provocation.”¹⁸⁹

China Seeks to Shape Global Governance, Mediate Global Conflicts

China seeks to influence global governance organizations to benefit CCP interests. It does so by promoting new initiatives that aspire to rework the norms underpinning global institutions, attempting to change the way existing institutions work, and inserting itself into attempts to mediate active world conflicts.

China Promotes Xi’s Global Initiatives as Solutions to World’s Problems

Beijing continues to promote three mutually reinforcing foreign policy initiatives: the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative. Each is aimed at reshaping global governance in ways amenable to CCP interests. Now featuring prominently in China’s new Foreign Relations Law, the three initiatives establish a blueprint for constructing a new global governance system to replace the rules-based international order led by the United States and its allies.¹⁹⁰ In the proposed system, China would play a leading role in international affairs, other states and international organizations would respect and potentially even emulate China’s authoritarian Party-state system, and universal values such as human rights and democracy would no longer be upheld as a standard for international behavior.¹⁹¹ While advancing this objective, China’s leadership aims to gain recognition for contributing solutions to global problems.¹⁹² The details of China’s agenda for these three interrelated initiatives remain amorphous as China’s government institutions continue to flesh out the initiatives via leadership speeches, Chinese state media commentary, and other avenues.

The Global Development Initiative aims to promote China’s leadership in the international development sphere.¹⁹³ Xi introduced the initiative on September 21, 2021, in a speech before the UN General Assembly.¹⁹⁴ The initiative has been strategically promoted in association with the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, allowing China to project an image of itself as a positive contributor to international economic stability and sustainability.¹⁹⁵ China has also established a forum at the UN called the “Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative” to discuss the agenda and implementation of the initiative.¹⁹⁶ Implementation of projects associated with the initiative has reportedly been occurring jointly between the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA),* China’s Minister of Commerce, and various ASEAN and UN agencies.¹⁹⁷ (For more on the development of the Global Development

*As stated by Chairman of the CIDCA, Luo Zhaohui, CIDCA manages China’s foreign aid and international development cooperation and is in charge of coordinating Global Development Initiative projects. Luo Zhaohui, “GDI Contributes to UN Development Goals,” *China Daily*, April 26, 2023.

Initiative in 2023, see Chapter 1, Section 1, “U.S.-China Bilateral and China’s External Economic and Trade Relations.”)

The Global Security Initiative aims to establish China as a leader of global security affairs.* Xi introduced the Global Security Initiative in a speech at the Boao Forum for Asia† on April 21, 2022, in Hainan, China.¹⁹⁸ China presents the Global Security Initiative as a framework that is applicable worldwide and able to address a wide range of traditional and nontraditional security challenges.‡¹⁹⁹ Through the Global Security Initiative, China’s leaders hope to undermine U.S. leadership in international security affairs, establish a role for China in mediating international conflicts, and normalize its selective application of its stated principle of “non-interference.”²⁰⁰ The Global Security Initiative has been a constant theme in China’s diplomacy in 2023, with leaders invoking the initiative in remarks at high-profile events, such as the Shangri-La Dialogue and the G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting, and careful integration of the concept into China’s other major diplomatic efforts.§²⁰¹ In February 2023, China released a Global Security Initiative Concept Paper elaborating on the initiative and laying out plans for its further implementation worldwide.²⁰² The concept paper specifically identifies the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) Cooperation, the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, the Middle East Security Forum, the Beijing Xiangshan Forum, and the Global Public Security Cooperation Forum¶ as organizations that could promote Global Security Initiative principles.²⁰³

The Global Civilization Initiative focuses mainly on governance and aims to promote China’s leadership in international political affairs. Xi introduced the Global Civilization Initiative in a speech

*For more on the introduction and key objectives of the Global Security Initiative, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 3, Section 1, “Year in Review: Security and Foreign Affairs,” in *2022 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2022, 368–370. For more on the Global Security Initiative as a case study of China’s foreign policy formulation process, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 1, “CCP Decision-Making and Xi Jinping’s Centralization of Authority,” in *2022 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2022, 65–67.

†The Boao Forum for Asia is an international organization created by China with a stated mission of promoting economic integration and advancing development in Asia. The forum is headquartered in the town of Boao in Hainan Province, China. *Boao Forum for Asia*, “About BFA,” 2021–2022.

‡For example, China’s Global Security Initiative Concept Paper identified 20 areas of cooperation that China will prioritize including addressing security challenges in ASEAN, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands. According to the Concept Paper, issues pursued under the Global Security Initiative framework will reportedly include pursuing cooperation on transnational maritime issues, counterterrorism, information security, biosecurity, AI, outer space, food and energy security, law enforcement, and climate change. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper*, February 21, 2023.

§China’s position paper on the war in Ukraine leaned heavily on talking points associated with the Global Security Initiative, and Chinese state media directly invoked the concept in connection to the peace deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Michael Schuman, Jonathan Fulton, and Tuvia Gering, “How Beijing’s Newest Global Initiatives Seek to Remake the World Order,” *Atlantic Council*, June 21, 2023; Kheir Diabat, “Security Initiative Works in Middle East,” *China Daily*, March 16, 2023; China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis*, February 24, 2023.

¶The Global Public Security Cooperation Forum—commonly referred to by China as Lianyungang, after the name of the Chinese city where it is hosted—was established in 2015 by China’s Ministry of Public Security (MPS). According to Jordan Link, an independent researcher, at the Lianyungang Forum, “The MPS holds international convenings, trains foreign police officers, provides opportunities for information sharing, and promotes Chinese security technologies.” The forum has been attended by police and security sector officials from 30 to 40 countries annually and representatives from organizations such as Interpol and the SCO. Jordan Link, written testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China’s Military Diplomacy and Overseas Security Activities*, January 26, 2023, 6–7; Jordan Link, “The Expanding International Reach of China’s Police,” *Center for American Progress*, October 17, 2022.

at the CCP Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting on March 15, 2023.²⁰⁴ Through the initiative, China's leadership seeks to normalize the concept of the relativity of values, undermining the idea that certain values such as democracy and human rights are universally applicable.²⁰⁵ According to Evan Ellis, a research professor of Latin American studies at the U.S. Army War College, "By promoting the relativism of values and arguing against calling out bad behavior and seeking to stop it, the concept appeals to regimes that desire to do what they wish, from criminality and repression at home to the ruthless invasion of their neighbors under the spurious mantle of 'legitimate security concerns.'"²⁰⁶ The concept also encourages ruling political parties to play a greater role in global governance worldwide.²⁰⁷ As the newest of the three initiatives, the Global Civilization Initiative remains the least developed in its implementation, but China's ambassadors abroad are actively promoting the concept through various channels such as op-eds and webinars.²⁰⁸

China Seeks to Burnish Image as Global Peacemaker

China pushed aggressively in 2023 to involve itself in conflict mediation efforts across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, reflecting a desire for greater diplomatic prestige and aspirations to supplant the United States as the primary leader in global governance.²⁰⁹ These efforts included the following:

- *China claims credit for brokering Saudi-Iran deal:* In March 2023, China claimed to have brokered an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia to restore diplomatic relations, ending a seven-year dispute and fueling speculation that Beijing seeks to take up the U.S. mantle of peacemaker in the Middle East.*²¹⁰ Chinese officials were quick to hail China's role in the talks despite the fact they were initially facilitated by Iraq and Oman several years earlier.²¹¹ As of August 2023, Saudi Arabia and Iran had reopened their respective embassies, but other parts of the deal had not yet been implemented.²¹²
- *China offers to host talks to end Israel-Palestine conflict:* China also offered to mediate the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians in 2023.²¹³ In June, Xi put forward a three-point proposal for a two-state solution to the conflict during Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's June visit to Beijing.²¹⁴

*In 2016, Saudi Arabia cut ties with Iran following an attack on its embassy in Tehran in response to Saudi Arabia's execution of the Saudi Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a prominent Saudi Shia opposition cleric. Over the next six years, distrust between the two countries continued despite a few attempts to establish dialogue. Analysts cite several major events between 2018 and 2021 that prevented the restoration of diplomatic relations: Saudi Arabia's opposition to Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile advances, the Kingdom's accusation that Iran was behind missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabian oil facilities and tankers in 2019 (denied by Iran), and Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi movement. Under the deal, Saudi Arabia and Iran will reportedly normalize diplomatic relations, re-open their respective embassies and missions, and implement two previously signed agreements related to security, economics, trade, technology, and cultural cooperation. United States Institute of Peace, "Timeline of Iran-Saudi Relations," September 20, 2023; Adam Gallagher, Sarhang Hamasaeed, and Garrett Nada, "What You Need to Know about China's Saudi-Iran Deal," *United States Institute of Peace*, March 16, 2023; Saeed Azimi, "The Story behind China's Role in the Iran-Saudi Deal," *Stimson Center*, March 13, 2023; China's Embassy to the Kingdom of Sweden, *Joint Trilateral Statement by the People's Republic of China, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Islamic Republic of Iran*, March 10, 2023; Parisa Hafezi, Nayera Abdallah, and Aziz El Yaakoubi, "Iran and Saudi Arabia Agree to Resume Ties in Talks Brokered by China," *Reuters*, March 10, 2023.

This proposal was similar to a previous plan Beijing put forward in 2013, which had failed to gain traction among the parties.²¹⁵ Palestinians have been more receptive to the idea of China as a peace broker, with one survey finding that around 80 percent of Palestinians support China's facilitation of peace talks, but Israel is less likely to accept China playing such a role.*²¹⁶ There is no evidence China's offer was taken up by either side.²¹⁷

- *China offers to facilitate peace in Ethiopia:* China also sought to involve itself this year in efforts to implement a peace accord that was reached by the Ethiopian government and Tigray People's Liberation Front in November 2022.²¹⁸ In March 2023, China's special envoy for the Horn of Africa Xue Bing flew to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to meet with Ethiopian government officials to discuss the challenges that ongoing instability posed to the accord, slightly beating Secretary Blinken to the city for talks.²¹⁹ During his visit, Special Envoy Xue pandered to the Ethiopian government by describing the conflict as Ethiopia's internal affair and made a veiled criticism of the United States' sanctions on Ethiopia for human rights abuses by condemning "interference in other countries' sovereignty and domestic affairs in the name of humanitarianism and human rights."²²⁰ The same month, China undermined U.S. efforts to hold the Ethiopian government accountable for implementing all elements of the peace agreement by opening a new export market for Ethiopia and granting zero tariff treatment to 98 percent of tariff lines on products from Ethiopia.²²¹ The zero tariff treatment is likely to offer Ethiopia some benefits in further diversifying its exports.²²² Though given the outsized trade imbalance † between Ethiopia and China, the zero tariff treatment is a low-cost option for China to improve political relations with Ethiopia. China's announcement follows the United States' continued suspension of Ethiopia's duty-free access to the U.S. market under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trade preference program due to gross violations of internationally recognized human rights perpetrated by the government of Ethiopia.²²³
- *China postures as neutral mediator of Russia's war against Ukraine:* China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a position paper on Ukraine in February 2023 purporting to provide a neutral, 12-point political framework for settling the war while demonstrating China's capacity to be a global peacemaker.‡²²⁴

*Aspects of China's peace proposal, such as ceasing the development of settlement homes in the West Bank, are largely non-starters for Netanyahu's government, which has taken a firmer stance on land claims. Israeli ambassador to the United States Michael Herzog noted he does not believe China will successfully broker peace between Israel and Palestine, calling China's efforts a "political initiative" and suggesting that if peace talks were to begin again, he would expect the United States to be actively involved in the mediation. Jacob Magid, "Having Given Up on the US, Palestinians Look to China to Mediate Peace with Israel," *Times of Israel*, June 15, 2023; Liz Jassin, "China Won't Broker Israel-Palestine Peace: Michael Herzog," *News Nation*, April 25, 2023; Dan Williams, "Israel's Netanyahu Returns with Hard-Right Cabinet Set to Expand Settlements," *Reuters*, December 29, 2022.

†In 2021, China exported \$2.8 billion to Ethiopia, compared to the \$148 million Ethiopia exported to China. Observatory of Economic Complexity, "China and Ethiopia." <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/chn/partner/eth>.

‡China's position on the political settlement of Russia's war against Ukraine included the following 12 points: (1) respecting the sovereignty of all countries, (2) abandoning the Cold War

The document repeated established Chinese talking points about the war, including Beijing's support for the UN Charter and territorial integrity, opposition to unilateral sanctions, and condemnation of any expansion of U.S.-led military alliances.²²⁵ The paper also placed the onus on "all parties" to resolve the conflict, rather than acknowledging Russia as the aggressor, and implicitly blamed Ukraine's allies for allegedly perpetuating a "Cold War mentality" that did not take into account Russia's "legitimate security interests."²²⁶ China's position paper provoked skepticism from Europe and the United States as well as a lukewarm reaction from Russia and Ukraine, consigning it to a position of irrelevance.²²⁷

China Continues to Make Inroads in Latin America and the Caribbean

China's efforts to increase its presence and influence in the Global South* are particularly visible in Latin America and the Caribbean. China continued its aggressive courtship of Latin American and Caribbean governments through diplomacy, investments in strategically valuable infrastructure, and space cooperation. These measures could ultimately lead to an expanded Chinese footprint in the region, including for the PLA.

China's Diplomacy Wins Friends, Support for Beijing's Initiatives

China's diplomacy toward Latin American and Caribbean countries in 2023 targeted countries of strategic value to Beijing while emphasizing its contributions to regional development, its alternative vision of the global order, and the benefits of breaking diplomatic ties with Taiwan.²²⁸ Between November 2022 and June 2023, Chinese leaders met with leaders from Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Brazil, Barbados, and Honduras, reflecting a wide-ranging diplomatic approach to a region with historically deep U.S. influence.²²⁹ Notable meetings included the following:

- In November 2022, Argentinian President Alberto Fernández and General Secretary Xi met in Bali, Indonesia, on the margins of the G20 summit, where the Chinese leader expressed his desire to increase imports of Argentinian goods and promoted his global initiatives in the hope Argentina would support them.²³⁰ The meeting reflected China's strategic interests in deepening its ties with Argentina, which include diplomatic

mentality, (3) ceasing hostilities, (4) resuming peace talks, (5) resolving the humanitarian crisis, (6) protecting civilians and prisoners of war, (7) keeping nuclear power plants safe, (8) reducing strategic risks, (9) facilitating grain exports, (10) stopping unilateral sanctions, (11) keeping industrial and supply chains stable, and (12) promoting post-conflict reconstruction. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis*, February 24, 2023.

*According to Anne Garland Mahler, associate professor of Spanish at the University of Virginia, the term "Global South" is used in intergovernmental development organizations, especially those that originated from the Non-Aligned Movement, to describe economically disadvantaged nation-states and to offer a post-Cold War alternative to the "Third World." Authors Nour Dados and Raewyn Connell, faculty members at the University of Sydney, assert that the Global South encompasses the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania, all regions outside of Europe and North America with lower-income countries that are often "politically or culturally marginalized." Nour Dados and Raewyn Connell, "The Global South," *American Sociological Association* 11:1 (February 2012): 12; Anne Garland Mahler, "What/Where Is the Global South?" *University of Virginia*.

support and continued access to the PLA-run space tracking station in Neuquén Province.²³¹

- In January 2023, Xi addressed the seventh summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he promoted engagement with Latin American and Caribbean countries through his global initiatives.²³² According to Dr. Ellis, China views CELAC as a key multilateral tool for engaging with the region while excluding the United States and Canada.*²³³ Beijing and CELAC hold forums through which China engages participating countries on telecommunications, biotechnology, agriculture, infrastructure, space, and local governance, among other areas.²³⁴
- In June 2023, Honduran President Xiomara Castro made a state visit to Beijing, just three months after the island's decision to break diplomatic ties with Taiwan.²³⁵ During the meeting, President Castro expressed Honduras's support for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and other global initiatives, while Xi called for a free trade agreement and deepened people-to-people exchanges.²³⁶ China likely views Honduras as an important trade and investment partner in Central America, with Beijing seeking to earn money from participating in the country's infrastructure projects relating to dams and power generation, as well as a \$20 billion rail line linking its coasts.²³⁷

China's vigorous diplomacy has translated into some Latin American and Caribbean leaders' public support for Chinese interests and initiatives. For example, during his April 2023 state visit to China, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva called for a shift away from dollar-denominated trade, expressed support for Beijing's One China principle, and demonstrated enthusiasm for deepened economic and technology cooperation with China.²³⁸ To take another example, in May, Bolivian President Luis Arce expressed support for Xi's global initiatives and called for further cooperation on the production of zinc and lithium † during a conference organized by the Chinese Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT), an organization affiliated with China's united front system. ‡²³⁹ President Arce also expressed interest in using the RMB

*China and CELAC established a cooperation mechanism known as the China-CELAC Forum in 2014. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of Latin America and Caribbean Affairs, *Basic Information about China-CELAC Forum*, April 2016, 3–4.

†China is an important driver of lithium and zinc demand due to its manufacturing needs. Lithium is a key component of China's electric vehicle production, while zinc is used for rust-proofing metals. Aside from lithium and zinc, silver, lead, and tin are mined in Bolivia. In January, Bolivia signed an agreement with Chinese firms Contemporary Amperex Technology Co. Ltd. (CATL), CATL's recycling subsidiary BRUNP, and the mining company CMOC to partner with the Bolivian state-owned lithium mining company Yacimientos de Litio Bolivianos (YLB) to explore Bolivia's untapped lithium resources. Bolivia solicited proposals to mine its lithium in 2021 and received submissions from companies in Argentina, China, Russia, and the United States. Daniel Ramos, "Bolivia Hikes Lithium Resources Estimate to 23 Million Tons," *Reuters*, July 20, 2023; Joseph Bouchard, "In Bolivia, China Signs Deal for World's Largest Lithium Reserves," *Diplomat*, February 10, 2023; Matt Blois, "Bolivia Picks Chinese Firms for \$1 Billion Lithium Project," *Chemical and Engineering News*, January 24, 2023; Dillon Jaghory, "How China Is Transforming the Global Lithium Industry," *Global X*, September 27, 2022; *Economic Times*, "China Is the Key Driver of Zinc Demand at Present: Gavin Wendt, MineLife," November 2, 2016.

‡The CCPIT, established in 1952, is a quasi-governmental entity linked to the Ministry of Commerce and responsible for national foreign trade and investment promotion. CCPIT was recognized in a de-classified 1957 CIA report on China's united front system as a "front organization" used as an instrument by the CCP to "mobilize a number of federations and important persons in support of an important propaganda program." As a tool of the Party-state system, CCPIT

for international trade during a press conference in May and called for reducing “dependence on the U.S. dollar” at the 62nd Summit of Heads of State of MERCOSUR and Associated States in July.²⁴⁰

China Invests in Latin American and Caribbean Strategic Infrastructure

China is continuing commercial investments with potential strategic implications in the Latin America and Caribbean region. China has leveraged its relationships with Latin American and Caribbean countries in recent years to help finance and construct potential dual-use infrastructure, such as energy grids and ports, which could give China sway over important strategic assets or provide a foothold for a future military presence in the region.²⁴¹ Notable developments in 2023 include:

- In April 2023, *Caixin Global* reported that the state-owned China Southern Power Grid Co. Ltd. will pay \$2.9 billion to acquire two local power suppliers in Peru from Italy’s Enel, pending regulatory approval.²⁴² Enel’s Peruvian subsidiary—Enel Peru—agreed to sell all shares that it owns in its subsidiary power distribution and supply company Enel Distribución Perú SAA and its subsidiary energy services provider Enel X Perú SAC to China Southern Power Grid Co. Ltd.²⁴³ The Peruvian National Society of Industries, a chamber of private companies, has expressed concerns that by acquiring the two power suppliers, Beijing could achieve a monopoly over Peru’s energy sector, especially in and around the capital of Lima, where the two energy firms power electricity for over half of the population.²⁴⁴ The acquisition would complement the 2020 purchase by Chinese state-owned Three Gorges Corporation of Luz del Sur, which provides power to the other half of Lima, as well as the corporation’s 2018 deal for the Chaglla hydroelectrical plant that serves as Peru’s third-largest power generator.²⁴⁵
- An MOU signed between the Chinese state-owned Shaanxi Chemical Industry Group and the governor of Tierra del Fuego, Argentina, in August 2022 was reportedly kept secret until it was ratified by the Argentinian provincial executive later that year.²⁴⁶ Under the terms of the MOU, the Chinese state-owned company will invest approximately \$1.2 billion into a petrochemical plant and a multipurpose port.²⁴⁷ The MOU has sparked pushback in Argentina, where national legislators such as Federico Frigerio have said that the project “encourages a Chinese state-owned company to take control of our strategic infrastructure.”²⁴⁸ Some observers argue that China could utilize this port in Tierra del Fuego to control the passage of vessels in the Magellan Strait, more directly access Antarctica, and even support China’s fishing fleet in the South Atlantic, where

partners with organizations such as the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, another component of the CCP’s united front system. Lukasz Sarek, “CCPIT in Poland: Economic Cooperation in the Hands of a Party-State Actor,” *Sinopsis*, May 4, 2023, 2; Jichang Lulu, “Repurposing Democracy: The European Parliament China Friendship Cluster,” *Sinopsis*, November 26, 2019, 24–26; *China Council for the Promotion of International Trade*, “About CCPIT,” March 24, 2016; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *The United Front in Communist China*, May 1957 (approved for release August 24, 1999), 13, 59, 63.

in 2022 there were an estimated 800 Chinese vessels fishing illegally.²⁴⁹

- A subsidiary of the state-owned China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) Ltd. called COSCO Shipping Ports Ltd. is continuing construction of a commercial port and industrial zone in Chancay, a fishing and farming town located 50 miles north of Peru's capital, Lima, that is supposed to be completed in 2024.²⁵⁰ In May 2023, however, Peru's prosecution office initiated an investigation into the construction site, where a landslide damaged at least four houses near a tunnel and forced COSCO Shipping Ports Ltd. to halt construction.²⁵¹ Commentators note that the port would aid China's efforts to bolster its energy and food security and could also hypothetically serve as an intermediate staging base for PLA operations in the Eastern Pacific.²⁵²

China-Latin America Space Cooperation

Beijing is deepening space cooperation with Latin American countries to help achieve its goal of becoming a major space power.²⁵³ During President Lula da Silva's visit to China in April 2023, Chinese state media reported that Brazil and China would deepen project planning for the CBERS-05 satellite, accelerate development of the CBERS-06 satellite, and expand cooperation in lunar and deep-space exploration.*²⁵⁴ Also in April 2023, following Beijing's invitation, Venezuela expressed its interest in joining the International Lunar Research Station (ILRS), a planned lunar base run by China and Russia that was unveiled in 2021 and reportedly aims to begin construction by the 2030s.†²⁵⁵ Beijing also announced the International Lunar Research Station Cooperation Organization (ILRSCO) in April 2023, which—unlike the U.S.-led Artemis Accords (a non-binding multilateral agreement)—will be a formal organization with a bureaucratic structure and leadership potentially led by China.²⁵⁶ This organization may become a platform through which Beijing further elevates regional space cooperation with Latin American and Caribbean countries.²⁵⁷

China is also developing ground-based satellites throughout the Latin America and Caribbean region that could be used for future military and intelligence collection purposes in the Southern Hemisphere.‡²⁵⁸ According to an October 2022 report by CSIS, satellite

*The China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite (CBERS) satellites provide global optical remote-sensing data on earth resources. China and Brazil launched the first version of the CBERS satellite in 1999. *Xinhua*, "New China-Brazil Earth Resource Satellite Sent into Space," December 20, 2019.

†When the CELAC joint plan was first released in 2021, China invited regional member countries to join the ILRS. Since then, China has signed cooperation agreements or statements of intent with Argentina, Brazil, and Peru (as a member of the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization). Ling Xin, "China's Moon Ambitions Take Shape with Construction Road Map for Research Station," *South China Morning Post*, April 25, 2023.

‡The development of Chinese-operated satellite ground stations in Latin America and Caribbean countries, such as Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile, provides China with coverage of the skies over the Southern Hemisphere. These facilities are a component of China's expanding global network of ground stations to track and maintain communications with satellites in orbit. The proximity of these ground stations to the United States raises concerns that the facilities could further Chinese intelligence gathering and intercept sensitive information. In testimony to the House Armed Services Committee in 2019, then commander of the U.S. Southern Command Admiral Craig Fuller stated that China could "monitor and potentially target U.S., Allied, and partner space activities" using deep space tracking facility in Argentina. Matthew P. Funaiole et al., "Eyes on the Skies: China's Growing Space Footprint in South America," *Center for Strategic and International Studies, Hidden Reach Issue No. 1*, October 4, 2022. For more

imagery reveals that China's Espacio Lejano Station in Neuquén, Argentina, which has operated since 2017, and is likely run by personnel of the PLA's Strategic Support Force,* has only utilized a small portion of the 500 acres of land that was leased to Beijing, indicating that the ground station may expand in the future.²⁵⁹ Currently, Espacio Lejano's 35-meter antenna can send and receive data in S- and X- bands;† these bands may be used to transmit data related to airborne early warning, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and command and control in addition to civil applications in telecommunications systems and deep space operations.²⁶⁰ The facility can also receive data in the Ka-band, which could support close-range targeting radars on military aircraft in addition to civil applications like high-resolution mapping and radio astronomy.²⁶¹ The report also notes that Emposat, a Beijing-based firm tied to the Chinese Academy of Sciences, is planning to build another ground station in Río Gallegos with Argentine company Ascentio, which will house four to six antennas and provide increased coverage of Earth-orbiting satellites due to its proximity to the South Pole.²⁶²

Chinese Engagement with Africa Remains Persistent, Multifaceted

In 2023, China continued its efforts to build goodwill in the Global South and support for China's foreign policy initiatives by engaging countries on the African continent through diplomacy and medical cooperation. There were also indications that Chinese private security companies could expand their presence in Africa in the near future.

China Seeks African Countries' Support for CCP Vision of Global Order

China's diplomacy toward Africa in 2023 reflected its efforts to build support within the Global South for the CCP's proposed revisions to the international order and multilateral institutions.²⁶³ In January 2023, then Foreign Minister Qin continued the more than three-decade tradition of his predecessors by making Africa the first destination of the year, visiting five African countries, including Ethiopia, Gabon, Angola, Benin, and Egypt.²⁶⁴ According to

on China's space cooperation and influence in Latin America and the Caribbean, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 1, Section 2, "China's Influence in Latin America and the Caribbean," in *2021 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2021, 99–100. For more on China's expanding global network of ground stations, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 4, Section 3, "China's Ambitions in Space: Contesting the Final Frontier," in *2019 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2019, 371–372.

*As a result of the merger of the former China Satellite Launch and Tracking Control General (CLTC) with other space-related military organizations in 2015, the PLA's Strategic Support Force Space Systems Department plays a role in the operation of China's overseas ground stations. For instance, the Espacio Lejano ground station in Argentina is run by the China Satellite Launch and Tracking Control General, a sub-entity of the PLA Strategic Support Force. Matthew P. Funaiolo et al., "Eyes on the Skies: China's Growing Space Footprint in South America," *Center for Strategic and International Studies, Hidden Reach Issue No. 1*, October 4, 2022. For more on China's expanding global network of ground stations, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 4, Section 3, "China's Ambitions in Space: Contesting the Final Frontier," in *2019 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2019, 371–372.

†Antennas communicate via radio waves that are segmented into sections, or "bands," that are located on the radio spectrum. The use of a particular antenna can be ascertained by understanding what types of data are transmitted across these bands. Matthew P. Funaiolo et al., "Eyes on the Skies: China's Growing Space Footprint in South America," *Center for Strategic and International Studies, Hidden Reach Issue No. 1*, October 4, 2022.

Paul Nantulya, a Research Associate at the U.S. National Defense University Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Chinese diplomatic efforts are motivated by the recognition that “Africa has something China needs to increase its clout at the multilateral level, that is, its voting and representational strength.”²⁶⁵ Following then Foreign Minister Qin’s visit to Africa, Beijing hosted an “Africa Day” reception for various African foreign ministers, ambassadors, and diplomatic envoys on May 25, 2023, where Qin called for closer China-Africa cooperation.^{*266} At the reception, then Foreign Minister Qin appealed to African nations by asserting China’s status as a fellow “developing nation” that has shared “weal and woe” with African countries for 60 years.²⁶⁷ In tribute to this supposed solidarity, then Foreign Minister Qin stated that China hopes to work with African countries to implement the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative in tandem with “push[ing] forward the reform of the global governance system.”²⁶⁸ In June 2023, political cadres from the ruling parties of six African countries graduated from a leadership training workshop at the CCP-funded Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School in Kibaha, Tanzania.²⁶⁹ The school is a \$40 million joint project of the CCP and the Former Liberation Movements of Southern Africa (FLMSA), where party officials of the member countries learn about China’s model of governance.^{†270}

Medical Diplomacy Cultivates Goodwill

China has touted its medical diplomacy toward Africa, which involves building healthcare facilities and dispatching Chinese healthcare workers abroad. In January 2023, China and the African Union unveiled the Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, built and funded by China as a flagship project for China’s medical diplomacy in Africa.²⁷¹ The Africa CDC headquarters is intended to increase the African Union’s epidemic response capacity and includes facilities to improve disease prevention and monitoring capabilities.²⁷² At the Third China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo in June 2023, an official from China’s National Medical Products Administration said that Chinese pharmaceutical companies would expand investment in Africa, support the development of local African medicine, and carry out joint medical research with African partners.²⁷³ China also continues to dispatch medical personnel to Africa.²⁷⁴ In 2023, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chinese state media marked the 60th anniversary of China’s first dispatch of a Chinese medical team to Africa.^{‡275}

*According to the remarks made by then Foreign Minister Qin, the following African diplomatic personnel attended the event: Demeke Mekonnen Hassen, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia; Christophe Lutundula, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of Congo; Martin Mpana, Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps in China and Ambassador of Cameroon to China; Rahamtalla M. Osman, Permanent Representative of the African Union to China; and Ambassador Charif Maoulana of the Union of Comoros, chair of the African Union. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *When Brothers Are of One Heart and One Mind, They Have the Strength to Break Metal*, May 25, 2023.

†The six African countries include Tanzania, South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Angola. Jevans Nyabiage, “China’s Political Party School in Africa Takes First Students from 6 Countries,” *South China Morning Post*, June 21, 2022.

‡According to the National Health Commission of China, China has dispatched around 30,000 medical personnel to 76 countries and regions across five continents since the first Chinese medical team arrived in Algeria in 1963. The Chinese personnel have primarily focused on Africa,

Chinese State-Owned Security Companies Could Increase Presence in Africa

Developments in 2022 and 2023 suggest Beijing may increase the presence of its “private security companies,” which are actually state controlled, on the African continent to better protect Chinese assets in the future.²⁷⁶ During the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, Xi stressed the need to “strengthen our capacity to ensure overseas security and protect the lawful rights and interests of Chinese citizens and legal entities overseas.”²⁷⁷ These interests include multi-million-dollar programs sponsored by Chinese state-owned enterprises as part of BRI, which runs through many countries with civil conflict.²⁷⁸ The March 2023 killings of nine Chinese nationals by heavily armed gunmen at a mine in the Central African Republic highlighted this risk, prompting Xi to call for those responsible to be “severely punished” and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to issue a security alert for its citizens.²⁷⁹ Experts assert that Beijing may ramp up the use of security companies in light of the murders.²⁸⁰ At present, there are Chinese security companies operating in 14 African countries, primarily concentrated in East and Southern Africa.²⁸¹ Due to the direct control Beijing asserts over these companies, firms such as the Huaxin Zhong An Security Group or Beijing DeWe Security Service are restricted by Chinese law in their use of firearms, often relying on collaboration with host nation security companies, local militias, or local authorities.²⁸² Mr. Nantulya, asserts that these Chinese companies “work very, very differently from Russian ones like Wagner” because the Wagner Group, a private military company, is engaged in combat operations and becomes part of the state security apparatus of the country by fighting a war on the host nation’s behalf.*²⁸³

China’s Regional Approach: Heavy-Handed and Aggressive Treatment toward Neighbors

China continued to adopt a heavy-handed and at times confrontational approach to its neighbors in the Indo-Pacific region. In the South China Sea, China acted aggressively toward claimant states and transiting military forces alike. In East Asia, China sought to drive a wedge between the United States and its allies. Meanwhile, tensions simmered on the border with India, and Pacific Island nations balked at China’s efforts to gain strategic influence in their region.

China’s Harassment of Vessels in the South China Sea

China maneuvered aggressively against claimant states in the South China Sea, including the Philippines and Vietnam. The CCG has consistently harassed Philippine Coast Guard ships operating in the South China Sea. In February 2023, a CCG ship allegedly used a military-grade laser against the Philippine Coast Guard to prevent

providing 290 million diagnoses and treatments for local people. *Xinhua*, “Six Decades of Selfless Aid Make Chinese Doctors ‘Most Welcome Guests’ in Africa,” April 6, 2023.

*For example, Central African Republic president Faustin-Archange Touadéra has retained Wagner since 2018 to help maintain his grip on power by fighting rebels that control large areas of the country. Approximately 1,500 Wagner troops work alongside the Central African Republic’s military. Katarina Hojje, “Wagner-Backed Central African Leader Wins Right to Third Term,” *Bloomberg*, August 8, 2023.

delivery of supplies within the Second Thomas Shoal.²⁸⁴ China's aggressive behavior in the region prompted the commanding general of the Philippine Army to assert in May that his country faces threats from China "every day" in the South China Sea.²⁸⁵ In April, a CCG ship blocked a Philippine patrol vessel steaming into the Second Thomas Shoal for an underwater survey, nearly causing a collision, and in June, multiple CCG vessels followed, harassed, and obstructed Philippine Coast Guard vessels operating near the Second Thomas Shoal.²⁸⁶ In response to China's harassment, the Philippines' Foreign Ministry has filed 97 diplomatic protests against China since President Ferdinand Marcos assumed office last year, with 30 of those protests filed between January 1 and July 6 of 2023.²⁸⁷ In September 2023, the Philippine Coast Guard reported that three CCG boats and one Chinese maritime militia boat installed a floating barrier to prevent fishing boats from entering a disputed area of the South China Sea, spanning 300 meters in the Scarborough Shoal.²⁸⁸ Philippine authorities removed the barrier, and the Philippine Coast Guard subsequently issued a statement saying that "the barrier posed a hazard to navigation, a clear violation of international law."²⁸⁹ From May to June 2023, a Chinese research ship and its escort vessels also operated in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) for nearly a month, including into areas where Russia and Vietnam operate joint energy projects.²⁹⁰ The Chinese ships refused to leave in response to a request by the Vietnamese government, but they ultimately returned to Hainan, China.²⁹¹

Philippines Expands Military Cooperation with United States in Response to China's Maritime Aggression

Continued Chinese aggression in the South China Sea has prompted the Philippines to deepen its military cooperation with the United States.*²⁹² Most notably, in February 2023, the Philippines announced it would be expanding its Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the United States to include four new sites, bringing the total number of Philippine Armed Forces bases from which the United States can operate from five to nine.†²⁹³ The U.S.-Philippines base deal has clear implications for a war over Taiwan, both for the potential rescue of Filipino nationals living in Taiwan, as President Marcos has suggested, and due to the potential for U.S. forces to operate from the bases.²⁹⁴ President Marcos also said publicly that it would be difficult for the Philippines to remain neutral during a conflict over Taiwan, prompting the Chinese ambassador to the Philippines to make veiled threats against overseas Filipino workers in Taiwan, advising Manila to "unequivocally

*In April 2023, the Philippines hosted the largest ever Balikatan joint exercise between the United States, Philippines, and Australia, with 17,600 personnel in attendance. The same month, U.S. and Philippine defense and diplomatic officials met for the first "2 Plus 2" meeting in seven years. Rene Acosta and Jon Grady, "U.S., Philippines Kick Off Largest-Ever Balikatan Exercise as Defense, Foreign Affairs Leaders Meet in Washington," *USNI*, April 11, 2023; U.S. Department of State, *Joint Statement of the U.S.-Philippines 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue*, April 11, 2023.

†The U.S.-Philippines EDCA was originally signed in 2014 to supplement the existing Visiting Forces Agreement of 1998 and allows a U.S. military presence on a rotational basis for disaster and humanitarian responses and to facilitate U.S.-Philippine military exercises. United States Embassy in the Philippines, *Fact Sheet: Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement*, March 20, 2023; U.S. Department of State, *U.S. Security Cooperation with the Philippines*, October 7, 2022; Government of the Philippines, *Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Government of the United States of America Regarding the Treatment of United States Armed Forces Visiting the Philippines*, February 10, 1998.

oppose” Taiwan independence if it cared about the wellbeing of the 150,000 Filipinos working there.²⁹⁵ The Chinese Embassy in Manila reacted to the expansion of the EDCA by accusing the United States of attempting to encircle China and stating that granting the U.S. military greater access to Philippine military bases will drag the Philippines into “geopolitical strife” that will “seriously harm Philippine national interests.”²⁹⁶ China’s foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning also accused the United States of acting “out of self-interest” and of holding a “zero-sum mentality” that would “inevitably” result in increased military tension.²⁹⁷

China Condemns Japan’s Alignment with the United States

While China and Japan had several diplomatic engagements in late 2022 and early 2023, they have been undercut by Beijing’s hostile rhetoric and aggressive maritime activity around Japan. After Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and General Secretary Xi met on the margins of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in November 2022, both sides reportedly agreed to increase communications and hold a series of high-level dialogues.²⁹⁸ In February 2023, China and Japan’s Foreign Ministries held the first security dialogue in four years, and the two sides’ militaries agreed to establish the first ever defense hotline.²⁹⁹ The hotline, which connects Japan’s Defense Minister and China’s Minister of National Defense, was established in March 2023 and held its inaugural conversation in May.³⁰⁰

Despite these positive diplomatic engagements, China continued its intrusions into Japanese waters and stridently criticized Japan’s engagement with the United States and NATO.³⁰¹ In November 2022, four CCG ships—including one armed with a 76mm cannon, the largest ever seen on such a vessel—were seen in the waters near the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands.³⁰² Three similar incidents took place in March and May 2023, with one lasting for over 80 hours, which the *Kyodo News* claimed was the “longest period Chinese ships have intruded into the waters since the Japanese government put the islets under state control in 2012.”³⁰³ In April, then Foreign Minister Qin responded to Japan’s decision to restrict exports of semiconductor manufacturing equipment in alignment with the United States by stating that “Japan should not help a villain do evil.”³⁰⁴ In May, Beijing slammed Japan over reports that it was considering hosting a NATO liaison office in Tokyo, although as of July 2023 there had been no concrete movement to establish the office.³⁰⁵ In July, Director of the Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission Wang Yi, China’s top diplomat, appealed to Japanese and South Korean government and nongovernment participants of the International Forum for Trilateral Cooperation to pursue “strategic autonomy” from the United States and cooperate with Beijing

* French President Emmanuel Macron also opposed the opening of the proposed NATO office in Tokyo, arguing that Japan is located too far outside the geographic scope of the organization. President Macron has also previously opposed NATO focusing on China, such as in 2021, when he stated that “we shouldn’t confuse our goals,” asserting that, “NATO is a military organization, the issue of our relationship with China isn’t just a military issue. NATO is an organization that concerns the North Atlantic, China has little to do with the North Atlantic.” Stuart Lau and Laura Kayali, “Macron Blocks NATO Outpost in Japan amid Chinese Complaints,” *Politico*, July 7, 2023.

to “revitalize Asia.”*³⁰⁶ Later that month, following the two-day NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, Beijing reacted angrily to a NATO communiqué portraying China as a major challenge to the military alliance’s interests and criticized the presence of Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea at the summit.³⁰⁷ (For more on the NATO Summit in Vilnius and NATO’s engagement with the Indo-Pacific, see Chapter 5, Section 1, “Europe-China Relations; Convergence and Divergence in Transatlantic Cooperation.”)

China also instigated a diplomatic row with the Japanese government and launched an online disinformation campaign following the discharge of treated water from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in August.³⁰⁸ In response to the release of the treated water, on August 24 China’s General Administration of Customs announced an import ban on all aquatic products from Japan, including seafood.³⁰⁹ Despite Japan’s cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to conduct continuous safety reviews of the discharged treated water, China has consistently and vocally opposed Japan’s plan.†³¹⁰ China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs fueled doubt and concern among domestic and international audiences by criticizing Japan for being “extremely selfish and irresponsible” and accusing the Japanese government of choosing the “cheapest option” for managing the contaminated water.³¹¹ China-linked actors have conducted a coordinated online disinformation campaign about the risks of the water release.³¹² The UK-based data analysis firm Logically found that between January and August 2023, Chinese officials, state media, and pro-China influencers amplified the disinformation and narratives in line with Chinese government statements that opposed Japan’s decision to release the wastewater.³¹³ Both the Chinese government’s statements and this disinformation campaign encouraged Chinese citizens to engage in abusive behavior, such as throwing bricks, rocks, and eggs at Japanese consulates and schools in China, and make over 400,000 nuisance calls to the Japanese Embassy.³¹⁴ These moves prompted Japan’s prime minister to call on China to urge its citizens to halt acts of harassment.³¹⁵

China Critical of South Korea’s Views on Taiwan, Relations with United States

China’s approach to South Korea in 2023 mirrored its approach to Japan, featuring an attempt at high-level diplomatic engagement that was ultimately undermined by strident Chinese criticism of South Korea’s remarks on Taiwan and engagement with the United States. In November 2022, President Yoon Suk-yeol of South Korea

*During the event, Wang Yi made off-color racial remarks to Japanese and South Korean participants of the forum in an attempt to revitalize racial pan-East Asian solidarity against the West. Wang Yi stated, “No matter how blonde you dye your hair, how sharp you shape your nose, you can never become a European or American, you can never become a Westerner.” Nectar Gan, “You Can Never Become a Westerner: China’s Top Diplomat Urges Japan and South Korea to Align with Beijing and ‘Revitalize Asia,’” *CNN*, July 5, 2023.

†Following the destruction of the Fukushima nuclear plant by a tsunami in 2011, water has been used to cool down the reactor’s fuel rods, producing contaminated water that was later treated and stored in tanks. The treated water still contains high levels of radioactive substances tritium and carbon-14. Japan proposed diluting the treated water with seawater before releasing it into the ocean, a plan the IAEA determined complied with international safety standards and would have “negligible” impact on the environment. Tessa Wong, “Fukushima: China Retaliates as Japan Releases Treated Nuclear Water,” *BBC*, August 24, 2023; International Atomic Energy Agency, “IAEA Finds Japan’s Plans to Release Treated Water into the Sea at Fukushima Consistent with International Safety Standards,” July 4, 2023.

met with General Secretary Xi on the margins of the G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia.³¹⁶ During the meeting, Xi called for a bilateral trade agreement, high-tech manufacturing cooperation, and for South Korea to “oppose politicizing economic cooperation”—a veiled reference to cooperating with U.S. export controls and other economic measures—while President Yoon expressed a desire for China to respond more vigorously to North Korea’s continued threats, amounting to what one observer described as “a confirmation of each leader’s differences.”³¹⁷

Since the Yoon-Xi meeting, China’s foreign ministry has been openly critical of South Korea’s foreign policy, straining relations.³¹⁸ In April, then Foreign Minister Qin sharply rejected President Yoon’s description of Taiwan as a “global issue,” urging Seoul to act with caution on Taiwan and stating that the issue “is a matter for the Chinese, who do not need to be told what should or should not be done.”³¹⁹ In June, China’s ambassador to Seoul Xing Haiming met with South Korean opposition leader Lee Jae-myung and criticized South Korea’s engagement with the United States, warning that “those who bet on China’s loss [in rivalry with the United States] will definitely regret it.”³²⁰ Ahead of President Biden’s meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Kishida and South Korean President Yoon at Camp David in August, China’s foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin criticized South Korea’s trilateral diplomacy by condemning the alleged “cobbling together of various small circles by the countries concerned.”³²¹

India’s Tensions with China Continue

Relations between India and China in 2023 continued to be strained by clashes along the disputed border. On December 9, 2022, Indian and Chinese forces engaged in a violent altercation along the Line of Actual Control, a 2,100-mile contested border in the Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh.³²² While neither side used firearms and no fatalities were reported, both sides sustained injuries.³²³ The incident in Tawang marked the most consequential skirmish between Indian and Chinese forces since deadly fighting in Galwan Valley in 2020 that led to 20 Indian casualties and four reported Chinese casualties.³²⁴ Despite more than 17 rounds of military talks between Chinese and Indian forces since the 2020 clash to address the disengagement along the western sector of Aksai Chin,* the Tawang altercation demonstrated that tensions along the border remain between India and China and could potentially escalate.³²⁵ Both sides also continued to build up their military forces and infrastructure along the Line of Actual Control, investing in light tanks that can maneuver in high altitudes and mountainous terrain.†³²⁶ China further strained relations when it published a new 2023

*The Aksai Chin region along the Line of Actual Control has held the most clashes between Indian and Chinese forces, including Depsang Valley in 2013, Chumar in 2014, Burtse in 2015, Hot Spring in 2020, Galwan Valley in 2020, and Pangong Tso in 2020. To reference disputed areas and military incidents along the Sino-Indian Border (2013–2022) see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 3, Section 3, “China’s Activities and Influence in South and Central Asia,” in *2022 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2022, 536.

†Following the altercation, Indian and Chinese forces held an additional two rounds of military talks, as the two sides appeared to be tempering their disagreements to allow for a potential meeting between Xi and India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the 15th BRICS summit held in South Africa in August 2023. Sudha Ramachandran, “19th Round of India-China Border Talks Produces Joint Statement,” *Diplomat*, August 17, 2023.

edition of its so-called “standard map of China” on August 28 that continued to depict India’s Arunachal Pradesh and the disputed Aksai Chin plateau as part of Chinese territory.³²⁷ Despite meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in August, Xi did not attend the G-20 summit hosted by India in September, an apparent snub that set back prospects for the two leaders to resolve the border tensions.³²⁸

India’s relationship with China is also becoming increasingly complicated as a result of the latter’s deepening ties with Russia amid the war in Ukraine.³²⁹ Experts assess that Indian leaders may be concerned about Russia’s weakened position and growing reliance on China for economic and strategic support, since such a dependency could ensure continued Russian arms sales* to China or even Russian support for China in a potential Sino-Indian border conflict.³³⁰ In July 2023, India hosted a virtual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that was attended by Putin and Xi.³³¹ Some experts argued that the shift of the summit to a virtual format could be an effort by India to downplay the meeting, which took place just weeks after Modi’s state visit to Washington.³³²

India faces a more complicated security environment created by China’s engagement with Pakistan, a neighboring country India regards as hostile.³³³ China has longstanding security ties with Pakistan motivated by a common geopolitical rivalry and territorial disputes with India.³³⁴ Since 2015, these ties have been bolstered by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an initiative that promises massive infrastructure investment as part of China’s BRI but has so far fallen short of expectations in its implementation.³³⁵ China’s existing investment in Pakistani ports has raised suspicions that these ports may be intended for use as PLA Navy bases, which would enable China to project power and undermine India’s influence in the Indian Ocean.³³⁶ China also continues to sell conventional, strategic,† and offensive strike weapons to Pakistan that could be used against India,‡ accounting for 75 percent of all of Pakistan’s imported arms by value since 2015.³³⁷ In April 2023, China’s defense ministry officials announced that the two countries would expand military cooperation.³³⁸ The following month, China

* Russia provides China with advanced platforms such as Su-35 fighter jets, which may give the PLA an edge over India’s military. Krzysztof Iwanek, “Does China-Russia Cooperation Hurt India’s National Interests?” *Diplomat*, April 25, 2023; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.”

† Between the 1970s and 1990s, China assisted Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program, including bomb designs, the development of high-explosive components, and nuclear weapons delivery capabilities. One of the primary figures facilitating this transfer was AQ Khan, a Pakistani nuclear scientist who cooperated with China’s nuclear establishment to establish Islamabad’s nuclear arsenal, and who later facilitated the illegal proliferation of nuclear weapons expertise and technology around the world. More recently, China has further advanced Pakistan’s strategic capabilities by providing space access and advanced optical tracking systems for the development of multiple independent reentry vehicles (MIRVs) on missiles. According to the U.S. Institute of Peace, some analysts assess that China may assist Pakistan in developing or acquiring hypersonic weapons such as the Dongfeng DF-17 medium-range ballistic missile, or provide assistance as Pakistan pursues an anti-ship ballistic missile (P-282) modeled on China’s DF-21D. Sameer P. Lalwani, “A Threshold Alliance: The China-Pakistan Military Relationship,” *United States Institute of Peace*, March 2023, 11; Peter Huessy, “The China Connection: How AQ Khan Helped the World Proliferate,” *National Interest*, October 16, 2021.

‡ According to the U.S. Institute of Peace, Pakistan’s conventional arms appear to be increasingly tied to and dependent on China’s Beidou navigation satellite system for positioning, navigation, and timing. This is especially true of Pakistan’s advanced air-delivered strike capabilities, such as the Raad II and Babur cruise missiles, and the Ababeel ballistic missile. Sameer P. Lalwani, “A Threshold Alliance: The China-Pakistan Military Relationship,” *United States Institute of Peace*, March 2023, 12.

delivered two frigates to Pakistan's navy intended to safeguard the seas around CPEC.³³⁹

China's Growing Presence in the Pacific Islands Prompts Backlash

In 2023, China persisted in efforts to increase military access and diplomatic clout with Pacific Island nations through both persuasive and coercive means. These efforts came despite China's failure to secure a region-wide security pact with the Pacific Island nations last year and amid increased U.S. engagement with some of the key island nations.³⁴⁰ Most notably, in May 2023, the United States signed a new security pact with Papua New Guinea, and renewed its Compact of Free Association agreements with Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia,* contrasting with China's failed overture in 2022.†³⁴¹ President Biden also hosted the leaders of 18 Pacific Island countries in Washington, DC, in September 2023, underscoring the United States' commitment to investing in and engaging with the region.³⁴²

One example of China's continued efforts to win over the Pacific Islands in 2023 was its expanded engagement with the Solomon Islands.‡ In July 2023, Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare met with Xi in Beijing, where the two leaders reportedly established and discussed the outlines of a new "comprehensive strategic partnership" between the two countries and formalized a police cooperation deal that permits China to help "strengthen Solomon Islands' police law enforcement capacity" through 2025.³⁴³ China has previously provided the Solomon Islands with riot control equipment and police training.³⁴⁴

Despite Beijing's progress with the Solomon Islands, other Pacific Island nations have condemned China's efforts to expand its influence through coercion. In March 2023, outgoing Micronesian President David Panuelo accused China of seeking to intimidate him, attempting to bribe government officials, and gathering intelligence on Micronesia's resources and submarine paths through the use of research vessels in the waters around Micronesia.³⁴⁵ Then President Panuelo asserted that China's use of these tactics were

*As of October 6, the United States and the Marshall Island's Compact of Free Association agreement lapsed on September 30, and had yet to be renewed. Khushboo Razdan, "U.S. Deal with Marshall Island Lapses Without Renewal, but Cofa Talks Continue; Micronesia and Palau Reaffirm Ties," *South China Morning Post*, October 3, 2023.

†The United States also increased its diplomatic presence in the Solomon Islands by reopening the U.S. embassy there in January 2023. The embassy had been closed there for 30 years as part of a global reduction in diplomatic posts. In September 2023, the United States also announced that embassies would open in two other South Pacific nations, the Cook Islands and Niue. Angela Cullen, "Biden Set to Announce New Embassies in Cook Islands, Niue," *Bloomberg*, September 24, 2023; Nick Perry, "US Opens Embassy in Solomon Islands to Counter China," *AP News*, February 2, 2023.

‡In 2022, China and the Solomon Islands signed a secretive security pact that would allow Beijing to send law enforcement and military personnel, protect Chinese personnel and projects, and allow China to carry out logistical replenishment, according to a draft of the agreement, which alarmed international observers. PLA access to the Solomon Islands could potentially compromise the ability of the U.S. and Australian militaries to transit through the region on their way to a conflict in East Asia. Prime Minister Sogavare said in June 2023 that he requested a review of the Solomon Islands' security pact with Australia, yet he claimed he did not wish to downgrade the Solomon Islands' relations with Australia. *Agence France-Presse*, "Solomons PM Calls for 'Review' of Australia Defence Pact," June 29, 2023; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2022 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2022, 380; Patricia M. Kim, "Does the China-Solomon Islands Security Pact Portend a More Interventionist Beijing?" *Brookings Institution*, May 6, 2022.

motivated by a desire to align Micronesia with China or ensure its neutrality in the event of a Taiwan invasion.³⁴⁶ In April 2023, Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka stated that his government was investigating Panuelo's claims that he was spied on during a visit to Fiji and argued that China should not use the Pacific Islands as part of a powerplay in the region.*³⁴⁷ In June 2023, Palau President Surangel Whipps asked the United States, Japan, and other allies to help his country deter Chinese research vessels from operating without its consent in Palau's EEZ after several reported incursions there.³⁴⁸ Also in June, Fijian Prime Minister Rabuka said Fiji was reconsidering its 2011 policing agreement with Beijing allowing Chinese police officers to be stationed in the island nation, citing differences between Fiji and China's systems and values.³⁴⁹

China Expands Global Military, Espionage Capabilities

The PLA continues to acquire the overseas access and skills it needs to sustain a more permanent military presence beyond its borders. (For more on China's global military diplomacy and operations, see Chapter 4, Section 1, "China's Relations With Foreign Militaries.") China's intelligence apparatus has also intensified its intelligence collection efforts, displaying increasing sophistication against a range of targets.

Basing and Overseas Operations Expand Power Projection Capabilities

China continues to build or seek access to military facilities overseas and practice the skills needed for power projection, likely with the goals of ensuring the rapid seizure of Taiwan and denying U.S. military access to the Indo-Pacific.

Construction of Artificial Islands in South China Sea Continues

China continues to build up its artificial islands in the South China Sea to bolster its expansive territorial claims and support its military footprint there. In December 2022, *Bloomberg* reported that China is building up "several unoccupied land features" in the northern Spratly Islands.³⁵⁰ In Eldad Reef, new land formations have appeared above water, with images showing "large holes, debris piles and excavator tracks at a site that used to be only partially exposed at high tide."³⁵¹ Similar activity was also sighted at Lankiam Cay, Whitsun Reef, and Sandy Cay.³⁵² China has also continued improving the equipment it uses for artificial island building.³⁵³ In February 2023, the *South China Morning Post* reported that China had opened supermarkets to serve military personnel in three of its largest man-made islands,† enhancing its ability to sustain its military outposts in the South China Sea.³⁵⁴

* Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka later clarified his comments to *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, that he did not believe China was "intentionally using" the Pacific as a powerplay in the region. Lice Movono, Nick Sas, and Stephen Dziedzic, "Fiji Prime Minister Investigating China Spy Claims, Says 'Survival' Is Key Issue for Pacific Nations," *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, April 5, 2023.

† These artificial islands include Fiery Cross Reef, Subi Reef, and Mischief Reef in the Spratly Islands. For more, see Laura Zhou, "South China Sea: Disputed Spratly Islands Now Home to

More Construction on Cambodian Naval Base Linked to China's Military

Satellite imagery captured in 2023 revealed new construction at Cambodia's Naval Base in Ream, where the PLA reportedly has exclusive use of the military facility.³⁵⁵ In February, *Radio Free Asia* released satellite pictures from earth imaging company Planet Labs showing the construction of new structures, large-scale land clearance, and two new piers.³⁵⁶ According to analysis by Tom Shugart, adjunct senior fellow with the Defense Program at CNAS, the imagery appears to show a deep pier that could dock full-size PLA Navy combatants.³⁵⁷ In April, the Cambodian government also announced plans to develop an air defense center and expand a radar system near the Ream Naval Base.³⁵⁸ Cambodia's development of a deep water port and an air defense system will enhance the strategic value of the base as a potential site for intelligence collection, air defense operations, and naval operations and maintenance.*³⁵⁹

PLA Evacuation of Chinese Nationals from Sudan Practices Expeditionary Capabilities

China has honed skills relevant to power projection through its humanitarian rescue efforts in Sudan. In April 2023, the PLA evacuated 940 Chinese citizens and 231 foreigners from Port Sudan, a city in the country of Sudan, where a war is raging between the Sudanese military and a rival militant group.³⁶⁰ The PLA Navy guided missile destroyer *Nanning* and the Type 903 supply ship *Weishanhu* were diverted from their escort missions and antipiracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden to carry out the evacuation.³⁶¹ The supply ship carried a helicopter and 490 officers and soldiers including dozens of special forces personnel.³⁶² Notably, no PLA assets were deployed from China's military base in Djibouti, even though humanitarian operations were one of the stated reasons behind its establishment.³⁶³ The Sudan evacuation was the third time the PLA Navy had participated in an evacuation operation from a conflict zone.†³⁶⁴ Chinese state media capitalized on the evacuation, asserting that it exemplified China's ability to protect its nationals living abroad.³⁶⁵

China Spies on Foreign Adversaries and Debtor Nations

Chinese state-sponsored espionage continued apace in 2023. Notable developments included public revelations about a listening post in Cuba as well as a spate of cyberattacks against the United States and other countries.

Supermarkets for PLA Soldiers." *South China Morning Post*, February 11, 2023.

*According to *Nikkei Asia*, a Cambodian defense ministry spokesperson said there would be no Chinese funding, support, or presence at these facilities. Jack Brook and Phin Rathana, "Cambodia Reveals Air Defense Plans near China-Funded Naval Base," *Nikkei Asia*, April 1, 2023. For more on Ream Naval Base as a potential node of PLA power projection, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 3, Section 2, "China's Growing Power Projection and Expeditionary Capabilities," in *2020 Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 407–408.

†China first used its armed forces to evacuate more than 30,000 Chinese citizens from Libya in 2011. In 2015, China deployed a naval fleet to evacuate more than 600 Chinese citizens from Yemen. *China Daily*, "Sudan Evacuation Shows China Fulfills Its International Obligation," *China Military Online*, May 11, 2023; Gabe Collins and Andrew S. Erickson, "Implications of China's Military Evacuation of Citizens from Libya," *Jamestown Foundation*, March 11, 2011.

China's Surveillance and Military Facilities in Cuba Could Facilitate Spying on United States

In 2023, media revelations emerged that China has operated an intelligence facility in Cuba since 2019 and that it is negotiating to establish a new joint military training facility there.³⁶⁶

- In June 2023, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that China and Cuba had reached a secret agreement to build a signals intelligence facility on the island, potentially allowing China to eavesdrop on electronic communications at military bases throughout the southeastern United States.³⁶⁷ A Biden Administration official subsequently told the *New York Times* that China had operated an intelligence facility in Cuba since before 2019.³⁶⁸ The media reporting led members of Congress and experts to express concern about China's intelligence collection activities near the United States.³⁶⁹ According to Dr. Ellis, China's use of electronic intelligence facilities in Cuba could enable it to monitor and potentially disrupt U.S. military deployments and sustainment flows in the event of a conflict between the United States and China.³⁷⁰ Paul Kolbe, a 25-year CIA officer and now senior fellow at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center, said that China's spy post was just one element of a "vast apparatus of Chinese intelligence activities directed against the U.S."³⁷¹ He assessed that the intelligence facility in Cuba reflects China's "geopolitical goals of expansion and assiduous cultivation of governments in Latin America."³⁷²
- Another report by the *Wall Street Journal* later that month found that China and Cuba were negotiating to establish a new joint military training facility on Cuba's northern coast.³⁷³ U.S. officials have reportedly made contact with Cuban officials to discourage the deal from moving forward and raised concern of Cuba ceding sovereignty to China.³⁷⁴ Former National Security Advisor John Bolton noted that such a facility could allow the PLA to train within close proximity to the United States and to conceal a number of offensive weapons, delivery systems, and other threatening capabilities, such as hypersonic cruise missiles.³⁷⁵

Chinese Cyber Operations Target U.S. and Foreign Governments

In 2023, actors linked to China's government perpetrated multiple cyberespionage attacks against the U.S. and foreign governments, demonstrating the growing prowess and danger posed by Beijing's cyber operations.³⁷⁶ These included the following:

- A Chinese state-backed hacking group infiltrated the unclassified Microsoft email servers of the U.S. Department of Commerce and the U.S. Department of State beginning in May 2023, perpetrating the first publicly known, successful Chinese hack of a Cabinet-level official since 2008.*³⁷⁷ Although the hackers

*According to a comprehensive survey of publicly available information on instances of Chinese espionage directed against the United States since 2000 by CSIS, the last known instance of a Cabinet-level official facing a Chinese hack was then-U.S. Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez in May 2008. According to the survey, Chinese officials inserted spyware onto then Secretary

failed to access Secretary Blinken’s account, they did manage to break into the email accounts of several senior State Department officials, including U.S. Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns and the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia Daniel J. Kritenbrink as well as Commerce Secretary Raimondo’s account.³⁷⁸ The hacks took place mere weeks before Secretary Blinken’s visit to Beijing and may have provided the Chinese government insights into U.S. policy thinking ahead of the visit.³⁷⁹

- Microsoft announced in May 2023 that a Chinese state-sponsored hacking group known as Volt Typhoon had targeted critical infrastructure in Guam and elsewhere in the United States.³⁸⁰ The cyberespionage campaign reportedly targeted critical infrastructure organizations in the government, maritime, communications, transportation, manufacturing, and information technology sectors, among others.³⁸¹ U.S. Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro stated that the U.S. Navy was “impacted” by the cyberattack but declined to provide further details.³⁸² The U.S. National Security Agency released a joint advisory with Five Eyes partner agencies sharing information about the sophisticated tactics used by Volt Typhoon and best practices on how to detect and mitigate further malicious activity.³⁸³
- *Reuters* reported in May 2023 that Chinese-backed hackers had conducted a cyberespionage campaign against the Kenyan government over a three-year period, allegedly for the purpose of collecting information about Kenya’s ability to repay BRI-related debts owed to the Chinese government.³⁸⁴ Eight of Kenya’s ministries and government departments—including the presidential office, Kenya’s intelligence service, and the treasury and foreign affairs departments—were compromised in the hack.³⁸⁵ The hackers reportedly stole documents pertaining to Kenya’s foreign debt, a sixth of which is owed to China.³⁸⁶
- The cybersecurity firm Mandiant reported in June 2023 that Chinese state-backed hackers were likely behind the massive exploitation of a recently discovered flaw in Barracuda Networks’ email security system.*³⁸⁷ The hackers reportedly exfiltrated data involving email domains and users from a variety of government and private organizations.†³⁸⁸ Compromised organizations identified by Mandiant included Asian and European government officials, the ASEAN Ministry of Foreign

Gutierrez’s laptop during a trade mission. *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, “Survey of Chinese Espionage in the United States since 2000,” March 2023, 5.

*Barracuda Networks is a security, networking, and storage solutions company based in Campbell, California, that offers Software as a Service (SaaS) deployment, cloud computing, threat protection, backups, and other solutions. Barracuda has more than 200,000 global customers around the world, including government clients. Barracuda, “Company,” <https://www.barracuda.com/company>; Barracuda, “Customers,” <https://www.barracuda.com/company/customers>; Bloomberg, “Barracuda Networks Inc.” <https://www.bloomberg.com/profile/company/CUDA:US?sref=mxblZFb4>.

†Chinese hackers were able to break into the networks of hundreds of these public and private organizations around the world, with nearly a third being government agencies. Public and private organizations in at least 16 countries across the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa were impacted by the hacks. Frank Bajak, “Chinese Spies Breached Hundreds of Public, Private Networks, Security Firm Says,” *Associated Press*, September 4, 2023; Austin Larsen et al., “Barracuda ESG Zero-Day Vulnerability (CVE-2023-2868) Exploited Globally by Aggressive and Skilled Actor, Suspected Links to China,” *Mandiant*, June 15, 2023.

Affairs, and academic researchers and organizations in Taiwan and Hong Kong.³⁸⁹ The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) issued a notice to U.S. federal agencies warning of the vulnerability.³⁹⁰ Charles Carmakal, Mandiant's chief technical officer, called the exploitation the "broadest cyberespionage campaign known to be conducted by a China-nexus threat actor" since the 2021 Microsoft Exchange hack, which affected at least 30,000 U.S. organizations.³⁹¹

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