

## CHINA – THE INTERNATIONAL ACTOR PREPARING TO RULE THE WORLD

Vlăduț-Constantin BERBUNSCHI

”Henri Coandă” Air Force Academy, Brasov, Romania (berbunschivladut@yahoo.com)

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**Abstract:** *China, one of the international relevant actors, intends to dominates the international relations scene through concretization of its economics and military ambitions translated into implemented strategies or in the process of being implemented. The current international context, dominated by major military operations in which the others relevant actors are direct or indirect involved, represents the proper context for China to expand its sphere of influence through concrete actions.*

**Keywords:** *China, international relevant actors, international relations scene, current international context, sphere of influence.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The weight center of the current international relation scene is represented by two major conflicts which might rearrange the world order. The first one, the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, started on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022 involves the second most influential world power directly and the first one indirectly. The second conflict that represent a really hot spot on the world map is the Israel invasion on Gaza Strip, also in this case the USA and UK are indirectly involved.

During this time, the third world power – China seems to fructify every opportunity that appears on the current international relation scene. Due to the fact that European actors sanctioned Russia for its ”*special operation*” conducted in Ukraine, Russia needed to export its goods to Asian actors at lower prices. In this case China represents one of the main beneficiaries of the situation.

On the other hand, China fills the critical void of Russian military industry with more than 90% micro electric components (semiconductors) used to produce rockets, tanks and aircraft [1]. China also provided Ukraine with 3 000 DJI Mavic (First Person View) racing drones configured to deliver anti-armor shaped charges and 1 000 DJI Mavic 3T unmanned aerial systems for approximatively 14,5 million dollars, all these representing just the beginning as Ukraine intends to buy an additional 20 000 DJI drones and UAS from China [2].

So, China is the big winner in this case. What China does while the whole world is looking at what is happening in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip will help us see and understand what the master plan of China is.

## 2. CHINA'S EVOLUTION

It may seem natural to have a concrete documentary attestation in the history of peoples, but in the case of China the first known historical sources regarding its emergence as an entity highlight the fact that Chinese society was not created but restored. China is presented as a permanent natural phenomenon and not as a conventional nation-state. The known references tell us about the myth of the Yellow Emperor who appeared at the moment when Chinese civilization was in chaos, he mobilized an army that pacified the kingdom and thus he became its leader. Furthermore, the wise Confucius, seen as the founder of Chinese culture, states that he did not invent anything, but only tried to revive the principles of harmony that had existed in the golden age of civilization, principles that had been abandoned in the period of chaos. [3]

China's approach to the world order was very different from the system of relations that existed in the Western world between the relevant actors of that period. China has never established a sustained relationship with another actor on the basis of equality, due to the fact that China had never encountered other societies possessing a culture or social system comparable to its own.

The European ideas of international relations and diplomacy were not unknown in Chinese culture, but rather they existed as a counter tradition that comes to life in the troubled times of Chinese societies which follow a continuous cyclical course characterized by periods of division ending with a reunification that also marks the beginning of a new period of stability.

What really is remarkable about the Chinese approach to international relations is the strategic acumen and the longevity of the method application that underpinned this approach.

China was not in a position to conquer all its neighbors because the majority of its population consisted of farmers tied to the land, and the Mandarin elites had earned their privileges not through martial skill but through the mastery of classical Confucian arts such as poetry and calligraphy. Taken individually, neighboring states represented real threats, if their effort had been a unified one, they could have overwhelmed China. So, there is a constant threat hanging over China, the great wall being an embodiment of the fact that the Chinese administration was aware of this aspect and acted accordingly. However, China managed to convince the neighboring peoples to respect its norms by some more subtle methods for a long time, thus projecting and cultivating the image of the properties of greatness that caused the potential invaders not to cross its path. China's goal was not to conquer the barbarians and subjugate them, but to keep them in a rather loose rein, and China exploited the frictions within potential adversaries by resorting to the method of "*using the barbarians to control the barbarians*" and when this did not work with the "*use the barbarians to attack the barbarians*" method [4].

Another relevant aspect is represented by the canceling of the maritime expeditionary program and the destruction of documents regarding the voyages of Admiral Zheng He, the admiral who was the pioneer of worldwide naval expeditions. China's early 15<sup>th</sup> century fleet, commanded by Zheng He, possessed an insurmountable technological advantage in size, equipment, and number of vessels. Zheng He's fleet eclipsed the Spanish Armada which was still 150 years of development behind.

In the late of 18<sup>th</sup> century, under the leadership of the Qing dynasty, China reached the height of its imperial greatness. Combining the military skills of the Manchurians and Mongols with the cultural and governmental skills of the Han Chinese, the Qing Dynasty began a program of territorial expansion that extended its sphere of influence to present-day Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang [6].



**FIG. 1** Zheng He's admiral ship compared to Christopher Columbus' admiral ship [5]

Thus, China became a dominant power in Asia and its wealth and vastness attracted the attention of Western empires and trading companies, which operated beyond the conceptual framework of the Chinese perspective.

In consequence, China made contact for the first time with "*barbarians*" whose intention was not to remove the Chinese ruling dynasty, but to replace the Sinocentric system with a completely new vision of the world order.

China obviously refused to accept this new vision which led to an escalation of actions culminating in a violent clash between British naval power and Chinese port authorities. Emblematic of this clash is the Opium War, a war started by the British as a result of the refusal of Chinese administration to legalize opium trading.

Consisting of gun-toting steamships, the British fleet, vastly superior to the Chinese forces, easily dominated the Chinese islands, ports and coast in their area of interest. As a result of these events, to which the Chinese administration could not react with equal forces, China conceded to the British by establishing treaties regarding the relations between the two states.

On October 1, 1949, following the end of the civil war, the People's Republic of China was proclaimed, and the Chinese Communist Party under the leadership of Mao Zedong ruled the country. Mao Zedong ruled China for 27 years. During all this time China was subjected to several unsuccessful reforms that resulted in famine, the death of millions of Chinese and an increase in public debt that led to serious degradation of Chinese society [7].

From a military perspective, during Mao's time, China carried out the first test of the hydrogen bomb in 1967 through the Lop Nur experiment, thus becoming the third country in the world to successfully test this type of weapon [8].

Another significant period in China's modern period is that which followed the implementation of the Open Door Policy promoted by Deng Xiaoping. This represents the beginning of real economic reform that has helped transform China by facilitating, after a long time, the access of foreign enterprises and capital to Chinese territory.

The interruption of Sino-Soviet relations during the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR in 1991 represented the opportunities that the USA capitalized on in order to establish relations with mainland China, given the fact that, in the previous period, the US recognized the Republic of China of Taiwan as the legitimate government of mainland China.

So, the context and causes that led China to adopt strategies of economic and military change are represented by violent interactions with state actors who want to establish and

develop trade relations at any cost. Because of the technological gap between China and Western states, China was put in a position to sign humiliating treaties.

The end of the 20th century is characterized by a development of Sino-American relations, relations developed in the context in which the US and China had neither a common adversary nor a common vision of the world order.

Thus, the reality of the late 20th century world was this: The US and China were too big to be dominated, too special to be transformed, and too necessary to each other to allow for mutual isolation [9].

As a result, the beginning of the new millennium is characterized by a scene of international relations dominated by the USA, the established dominant actor, and China, an emerging power whose strategies represented a real success.

### **3. 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY CHINA**

At the beginning of the 21st century, China finds itself in the period of concretization of a strategy adopted to be able to manage the aforementioned events.

The economic superpower status that China has acquired is the result of the application of reform and opening policies of the last forty years, but also of the thirty years of exploration before the reform. By establishing the People's Republic in 1949, China changed its status from a colonial or semi-colonial economy and took the path of independent development. In the period before the implementation of the reform and opening policies, China had begun to rebuild its economy after the war period, and Chinese society was enjoying prosperity [10].

The more than seven-decade history of the People's Republic of China can be divided into two main periods: the first thirty years devoted to documentation and exploration, and the last forty years devoted to innovation and the application of lessons learned.

It can be concluded that the method of reform and opening has put an end to the cyclicity as a result of the traditional millennial methods, and that this is the starting point and at the same time the key to accessing the resources necessary for an upward and balanced evolution.

So, the beginning of the 21st century represents China's renaissance on the scene of international relations. This, being aware of the exemplary evolution, conveyed to the whole world the fact that its strategy aims at a peaceful rise, and the development of military capabilities should not be interpreted as a threat to peace, they actually represent the guarantee of maintaining national sovereignty and regional stability [11].

In 2005, Zheng Bijiang, an influential figure in Chinese politics, published an article through which he assured the world that his country had adopted a strategy aimed at overcoming the traditional ways by which the great powers rose. China seeks to establish a new international political and economic order, an order that can be achieved through gradual reforms and the democratization of international relations. At the same time, he reiterates that China's strategy is not similar to that of Germany before the First World War, nor to that adopted by both Germany and Japan before the Second World War, when these countries plundered other states and pursued hegemony by use of violent means.

Nor will China adopt the path taken by the great powers that fought for global dominance during the Cold War [12].

As a result of the message sent by China, Robert Zoellick, US Deputy Secretary of State, responded by developing the idea that China is a relevant global actor and, at the same time, urging it to be a "responsible stakeholder" (indispensable actor in creating and maintaining peaceful relations) as they develop their own capabilities.

Thus, China is recognized as a powerful actor and, at the same time, is invited to become a privileged member of the international system, with an active contribution to its configuration [13].

At the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 18, 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping presents the Chinese administration's vision of the importance and future of the Chinese armed forces. Some of the ideas promoted are:[14]

- building armed forces that can fight, win and maintain excellent behavior so that they can contribute to the achievement of objectives;
- strengthening military capabilities for the new era;
- strengthening the armed forces through reform and technology;
- emphasizing combative capabilities, encouraging innovation, building systems, increasing effectiveness and efficiency;
- military-civilian integration.

President Xi Jinping, who is also the chairman of China's Central Military Commission, calls for increased efforts to modernize the armed forces, and Zhang Youxia, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, said that it is necessary to achieve technological independence and maximum effort to accelerate modernization and build a world-class military [15].

China's military power this year ranks it 3rd in the world, after the US and Russia and from a numerical point of view, China's army ranks 1st worldwide, surpassing both Russia and the USA.

A very relevant aspect in the context of the modernization and transformation of the Chinese army is represented by the status of Taiwan and the US military presence in its area.

After the defeat suffered in the Second World War and due to pressures from the USA, Japan cedes Taiwan to the Republic of China founded in 1911 on the territory of mainland China. After 4 years, following the loss of the civil war with the communist movement led by Mao Zedong, the government of the Republic of China takes refuge in Taiwan together with 1.5 million Chinese emigrants and establishes the new administration of the republic in Taipei, but at the same time, on the territory of mainland China, the People's Republic of China led by the Chinese Communist Party becomes recognized internationally, including by Romania[16].

Relevant in the context of the dispute regarding Taiwan is also the fact that it produces 92% of semiconductors worldwide, which represent indispensable components for technologies applicable in both the civil and military fields [17].

President Xi Jinping presented the new requirements for the modernization program of their armed forces, emphasizing the need to achieve the mechanization of the forces and major advances in the field of strategic warfare by 2020. He also wishes to transform the army into a modern one by the year 2035 and into a world-class one by the middle of the century [18].

Not to be overlooked is the fact that Chinese armed forces are officially called the People's Liberation Army. It can be considered that this name was established in the context in which Taiwan is considered a territory that belongs to China but is under foreign influence, and to bring this territory back within its borders, China needs instruments that possess corresponding capabilities. The name itself refers to the noble purpose of the Chinese military and represents, at the same time, its strategic objective.

Another reform of the Chinese armed forces was represented by their reorganization. Thus, Commands were created that have well-defined areas of responsibility and strategic objectives [19].

Following developments in the area, representatives of the Indo-Pacific Command of the United States of America (INDOPACOM), highlight the impact of the modernization of the Chinese armed forces on security in its area of responsibility. It states that the People's Republic of China has a strategy aimed at reducing US access and influence in the Indo-Pacific region and the obvious transformation into a regional hegemon. In line with the established strategic goals, the administration in Beijing has made major progress so that China is no longer just an emerging power, but has become a real competitor occupying a position equal to that of the US [20].

Considering the fact that one of China's goals until the year 2050 is to assume the role of leader of International Relations, in other words to dominate the world from all points of view, the integration of Taiwan is the key to success. This would represent a major win for China from two points of view:

1. unlimited and unconditional access to components necessary for cutting-edge technologies produced by Taiwanese industry;
2. limiting and even stopping US access to the same range of products, a fact that would generate a shortage of components indispensable to US industry, this situation could produce economic problems for the US.

Therefore, Taiwan and its human and technological resources represent the indispensable resource for China to achieve its strategic goals by respecting the self-imposed deadlines, and in order to be able to control and use this resource, China has developed and implemented military strategies and tools that it can use to achieve objectives.

It can be stated that the main economic and military reforms determined by the interactions with other international actors were the determining factors that radically transformed Chinese society, a fact that contributed to China's emergence and, subsequently, to the creation of favorable conditions for launching the race to leading place on the scene of international relations.

Right in this moment China is working on its huge project: the Belt and Road Initiative, which is the most ambitious infrastructure project in modern history. It spans over 60 countries will cost over a trillion dollars and the objective is to make it easier for the world to trade with China, by funding roads, railways, pipelines, and other infrastructure projects in Asia and Africa.

China is loaning trillions of dollars to any country that's willing to participate and it's been a big hit with the less democratic countries in the region. This makes the BRI a risky plan as well. But China is pushing forward because its goals are not strictly economic, they're also geopolitical [21].

Furthermore, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Europe for the first time in the last five years. The tour highlighted European divisions over trade with Beijing and how the EU positions itself between the United States and China.

President Xi Jinping visited France, which can be considered the current EU leader, Hungary and Serbia two European countries that are pro-Russia and are big beneficiaries of Chinese investment, including financial aid for a delayed railway project that is supposed to link their capitals [23].

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said he was honored by Xi's visit and expected a free trade agreement between the two countries, signed last October, to come into effect on July 1 and the Chinese analysts say that Xi could use his stopover in Belgrade, which coincides with the 20th anniversary of NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in that country, to highlight China's anti-NATO agenda.

After these, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited China, where he met with his counterpart Xi Jinping.



**FIG. 2** China's trillion-dollar plan to dominate global trade [22]

The relations between China and Russia became closer after the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, especially since the sanctions imposed by the West on Moscow severely affected the Russian economy and China became the lifeline for Russia and has been indirectly financing the war machine of the Russian Federation.

China is interested in cooperation with Moscow, because, through Moscow's leverage, it solves its problems of global influence, as the two nuclear powers have come together, created an undeclared alliance, an alliance that has not been formalized by treaties, but it is an alliance to oppose the West and primarily the US [24].

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Thanks to its vast resources, knowledge and know-how, China has seen a rapid evolution on the stage of international relations, transforming itself from an actor forced to react to external stimuli in order to preserve its own identity to a relevant actor taking the initiative.

China is accumulating resources that it intends to use in order to exercise economic and military hegemony at the regional level, which it will extend on a global scale.

Also, China is exploiting all the situations that can bring an advantage on the international relation scene.

It remains to be seen whether the methods that China will use in order to exercise regional and global hegemony will be the classic ones that also involve the use of military intervention or whether it will apply the strategy that it has claimed to have adopted, a strategy aimed at overcoming the traditional ways by means of which the great powers had previously risen.

In conclusion, China is a state that has contributed and is contributing to the restructuring of global economic competition, and which has acquired the level of maturity to allow it to take the initiative in contemporary economic relations. Simultaneous with the economic development it also developed its armed forces, giving it the security necessary to prosper and even the possibility of expanding its sphere of influence. By also taking the initiative in the military field China would decisively influence the scene of international relations, transforming it into an economic as well as a military superpower.

However, it can be argued that the scene of international relations is passing through very peculiar times and that the 21st century may be the period in which the world will know a much-needed evolution, which may have its origin in the East and China may even be its source.



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