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E. Anderson, H. Banks, M. Brown, J. Camilo Bonilla, I. Chitwood, D. Catagena Flores, J. Facer, M. Greig, W. Hagaman, B. Hedding Martinez, J. Johnson, M. Khan, L. Lafreniere, A. McNeill, E. Morin, C. Ramsey, S. Sherwood, V. Sobot, D. Valentine, I. Velez, W. Young, L. Zee



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<sup>1</sup>E. Anderson, <sup>2</sup>H. Banks, <sup>3</sup>M. Brown, <sup>4</sup>J. Camilo Bonilla, <sup>5</sup>I. Chitwood, <sup>6</sup>D. Catagena Flores, <sup>7</sup>J. Facer, <sup>8</sup>M. Greig, <sup>9</sup>W. Hagaman, <sup>10</sup>B. Hedding Martinez, <sup>11</sup>J. Johnson, <sup>12</sup>M. Khan, <sup>13</sup>L. Lafreniere, <sup>14</sup>A. McNeill, <sup>15</sup>E. Morin, <sup>16</sup>C. Ramsey, <sup>17</sup>S. Sherwood, <sup>18</sup>V. Sobot, <sup>19</sup>D. Valentine, <sup>20</sup>I. Velez, <sup>21</sup>W. Young, <sup>22</sup>L. Zee  
<sup>1-21</sup>The Members of the International Relations Organization at Virginia Tech

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** With its growing domestic and international interest, China has solidified itself as a significant player in international relations, shaking up traditional geopolitics through its military and economic expansion and shifting focus in diplomatic relations. Consequently, it is crucial to understand China's importance and effect on the United States' own development in order to react to it correctly and efficiently.

**Methodology:** This paper will detail the military, diplomatic, and economic aspects of the modern rise of China, respectively, including our recommendations for how the United States should respond to these three key areas in its relations with China. To do so, the International Relations Organization at Virginia Tech split into three initiatives, focusing on the three aspects of the modern rise of China as listed above. The Organization then spent several weeks conducting research using open-source intelligence and information from experts on the subject to understand the methods and strategies employed by China to expand its influence and power in other nations. After conducting research, the Organization began discussing the implications that the findings would have on U.S. national security and started synthesizing the research into our paper and recommendations.

**Findings:** From our research, it is clear that China is seeking to build a strong military presence in Africa to expand their influence and reach in areas outside of Asia. Additionally, their maintenance of diplomacy with Russian and alliance with President Vladimir Putin makes it evident that they are desiring to position themselves as a contrasting force to the United States in terms of global military dominance. China's goal of reunification with Taiwan furthers this notion, as in doing so they intend to increase its presence in the South Pacific arena. In terms of China's diplomacy, we find their creation of the BRICS trade agreement to significantly increase their ties with the countries involved. We find China to be progressively focusing on their diplomatic relations with the BRICS countries, which in turn threatens the U.S. diplomatic relations with these countries and undermines their power and strength as a global superpower among the Eastern sphere. Lastly, China's influence on the BRICS countries has lasting economic repercussions on the U.S. through the creation of BRICS itself, which we find to clearly be done to oppose the U.S.' G7 trade agreement. We conclude that this, along with their Belt and Road Initiative and new presence in South American trade, is done as a method for China to compete with the trade dominance of the United States and widen the gap between these countries and the U.S. economically.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** To combat China's military involvement in Africa, we recommend for the United States to lean on its international allies to formulate an arms deal with other countries in order to formulate a better long-term arms deal, dismissing possible transactions with China. In terms of dealing with military expansion in the South Pacific, we recommend the U.S. to undertake policies to put an end to China's maritime power in the Pacific and increase funding for the Air Force and Navy to invest in new technologies to deal with such power. We also recommend for the United States to promote diplomatic cooperation with Brazil, Russia, India, and South America to combat China's increasing influence with these countries in BRICS. The United States must also focus on better positioning their diplomatic stance to be allied with nations continuing to push for bilateral issues and human rights conferences in Brazil and India, as well as support India in their push for UN Security Council membership. On the economic side, the United States must respond to China's infrastructure plan for their economy by investing in other forms of development, such as agriculture, medicine, and digital infrastructure. This paper contributed to the theory of International Affairs and U.S.-China relations through analyzing various diplomatic, economic, and militaristic outlooks with the aims of providing a cohesive study on the level of threat towards American security. The theory of International Relations was augmented via the research and delineation of applicable studies and global conflicts. Thorough examination of included sources contributed to this theory and the practice of IR.

**Keywords:** *International Relations, National Security, International Institutional Arrangements, National Security and War, International Trade*

**JEL Codes:** F5, F52, F55, H56, P45

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## INTRODUCTION

Since its rise to economic power in the late 1970s, China has established itself as a dominant force in both the global political economy and as a major diplomatic agent due to its increasing military presence. With this increasing dominance, it is important for the United States to understand both the gravity of this situation as well as how to respond to this posed threat to U.S. political hegemony in the international sphere.

China's strategy of building a strong military presence in Africa exhibits a somewhat imperialist policy, standing as an example of their expansionist goals. Similarly, their continued maintenance of diplomatic ties to Russia and allyship with President Vladimir Putin - even among current anti-Western views towards the Russian president - furthers this notion of expansion; it is clear that they are positioning themselves as a "Western antithesis" to the military dominance of the United States. They are able to do so through an administered presence in Africa and Russia and particularly within its arms sales to these nations, both of which are regions the U.S. has not been able to fully grasp in diplomatic and military aspects. China is also aiming to repeat this in the South Pacific especially among its recent goals of reunification with Taiwan, which increases its presence as a global military superpower to be reckoned with to combat the United States and Russia as bilateral superpowers.

Consequently, China continues to promote this stance of expansion through the creation of the BRICS trade agreement, leading to a significant increase in diplomatic ties with these countries - particularly among the original five members of Brazil, Russia, India, (China) and South Africa. This strategy stands as a threat to U.S. diplomatic relations with these nations, as the exclusion of the United States exists as a clear signal of China's opposition to Western dominance. While the United States has been and continues to remain the dominant power in Western diplomacy, it is evident that China is using its influence with the other BRICS nations to undermine U.S. power among the Eastern spheres. Inevitably, it is vital for the United States to not only comprehend what this means for U.S. diplomacy in the East, but also to take the proper actions to ensure continued stability between these nations.

China's diplomatic relations with the BRICS countries also has economic repercussions on the United States. The creation of BRICS as an opposition to the United States' G7 trade agreement prioritizes these countries over trade interests of the U.S., further distancing itself from the West. While China remains an integral member of the U.S. economy, it is evident that by its new Belt and Road Initiative and increasing presence in South American trade that China is currently attempting to expand its economic empire to not only compete with the United States in terms of trade dominance, but also to distance these nations from the U.S. and turn to China instead. Therefore, the United States must respond quickly to these new economic developments in order to maintain its current position in the global political economy.

We, the International Relations Organization at Virginia Tech, propose an imperative resolution to China's increasing military, diplomatic, and economic dominance through an increase of strict oversight on Chinese military expansion and their economic activities in order to prevent China's influence on less-developed countries that can fall under the increasing pressure of the Chinese Communist Party. In doing so, the United States will ensure the continued stability and success of

its own power within these three key aspects of foreign policy, exhibiting a strong and dominant stance of security against China's increasing international presence.

## **Section I - Military**

### **Military Involvement in Africa**

In 2017, the East-African country of Djibouti became the first country to host a Chinese military base overseas. Interestingly, Djibouti also hosts the only United States military base in Africa, as well as many other militaries of other countries. The main reason for these bases to be placed within Djibouti is clear: Djibouti holds the key to the important shipping strait of Bab al-Mandab, which holds an estimated nine percent of the world's seaborne petroleum trade (Barden, 2019), and serves to connect the Mediterranean Sea to the Arabian Sea. Therefore, the Chinese military may be trying to balance out the perceived 'Western control' over this strategic strait, and in doing so, is attempting to undermine the military power of the United States. However, the Chinese expansion into Djibouti may not be as aggressive as some claim, but future Chinese bases in the region should be curbed as much as possible through diplomatic means to build stronger relationships with African countries and potential sanctions, should China continue to expand its bases into Africa. The United States allowing China to expand past Djibouti sets a dangerous precedent, as any additional bases built by China after this point can be easily considered offensive.

China is progressively challenging Russia as the world's leading non-western producer of military arms. In a similar fashion to the Soviet Union, Chinese arms are often cheaper than their Western alternatives and are produced in greater numbers like their typical exports. As a result, these factors have driven other countries to bypass arms sales from the West and seek a more economically accessible way to supply their militaries with weapons. Explicitly, Africa and South America are the two regions strengthening their arms procurement with China. Specifically, countries in Africa bought "19.1 percent (32. Billion TIV) of China's overall arms exports" and northern countries in Africa, like Algeria, were the "primary destination of Chinese weapons, constituting 49 percent of Chinese exports" distributed across the continent (Schrag, 2021). While the majority of Chinese arms are still produced and sold either domestically or in other Asian countries, China has attempted to break into foreign arms markets, disrupting the industry status quo around the world. This raises the question of will China continue their efforts to try to dominate Russia in arms sales in Africa and what are the effects of this economic rivalry superficially. If China continues to decrease their quality in weapons in order to compensate for the price and those countries who are seeking less expensive or affordable weapons, it may possibly seem that China's weapons will be rampant and accessible to every country regardless of economic status. Consequently, Russia may continue to produce high quality weapons and countries looking to make an arms deal are faced to choose between Russia or China to do business with. To combat this issue, the United States needs to lean on international allies to formulate an arms deal with countries, like those in Africa, to formulate a better long-term arms deal to dismiss any possible transactions with China or Russia.

### **Military Capacity**

In terms of military expansion, China is pushing to expand its navy and increase military coercion. China's navy is marked as the largest in East Asia with a force of over 370 ships and submarines (Garamone, 2023), and recently surpassed the U.S. Navy with the number of battleships in their

fleet. Their motivation for modernizing its fleets is to gain control over the seas surrounding the country. Furthermore, they continue to do this to develop capabilities for assessing Taiwan's military situation. More specifically, some of the capabilities China is working on with its navy include communications, reconnaissance, intelligence, and anti-ship ballistic missiles. Despite the fact that even though China is reportedly building its navy, they are currently known to face limitations in accomplishing this, particularly among encompassing joint operations within its military, developing anti-submarine warfare, and long-range targeting missile systems.

### **South Pacific**

China uses plausible deniability to mask its military movements around the Solomon Islands. As China provides economic incentives to these islands, it is able to rapidly expand the capacity of its regional South China Sea strike abilities. This pact between the islands and China, allows for the covert construction of a Chinese base without its political consequences.

China has an increasing amount of naval clashes with the U.S. and other South Pacific countries over shipping lanes in and around the Pacific, Taiwan, and the Solomon Islands in order to establish its naval superiority. Consequently, China's aggressive naval moves only put it in more conflict with the United States, causing clashes between the two superpowers to become more frequent (Harding & Pohle, 2022). This results in rising tension between China and the U.S., with both responding by increasing the number of naval vessels sent to disputed areas like the strait of Taiwan, the South China Sea, the Philippine Sea, and the East China Sea. To combat and deter future acts of Chinese aggression, the U.S. responded by deploying more Naval ships and personnel to the Philippines, Taiwan, and Japan, resulting in more provocative clashes with U.S. and other Western-allied countries' naval vessels (Elleman, 2018). However, China increased naval military spending for the next decade to compete with the growing U.S. naval power. In response, the U.S. military is building and restoring military coordination and cooperation with old and new allies to help confront China. In terms of response from other countries, the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Taiwan have all established military drills, shared military intelligence, and upgraded new military weapons for naval use.

The island building that takes place in China is viewed as modern-day empire building, allowing China's reach to stretch further and further into the domain of other countries. This aggressive policy of using the sea to protect vital shipping lanes - as well as secure Chinese authority over disputed oceanic areas - all follows China's long-term empiric ambitions (Harding & Pohle, 2022). It is clear that their hope is that through the construction of these low tide islands, China will be able to exert more control over the region. However, the building of these islands is expensive, and does not permit for large bases. Furthermore, these islands face increased international scrutiny, which no longer gives China the legitimacy in the region it did when its artificial islands were first constructed (Elleman, 2018).

For this subject of military expansion in the South Pacific, our recommendation of analysis is that the U.S. should undertake policies to stop China's maritime power in the Pacific and increase funding for the Air Force and Navy to invest in new technologies. We propose that one such technology should be a new 'pacific defense system' that would intercept missiles' intelligence capacity and increase military personnel and ships in national security protection of U.S. Territories of American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam. Increasing the size of the

U.S. Pacific fleet by building more ships to protect both American interest and allies, as well as incorporating military drills of the Air Force, Army, and Navy with its allies in the region would finally counter and confront China in the South Pacific, working with other countries' navies in the nine-dash line to stop Chinese aggression on shipping and trade through the South Pacific.

### **Taiwan**

The Taiwan problem has firmly established itself as the most significant geopolitical hurdle faced by the People's Republic of China (PRC) since its inception in 1949. Taiwan represents a physical and ideological threat to the very existence of the mainland Chinese State, and the continuation of the Republic of China through the exiled Taiwanese government has existed as a thorn in the side of the PRC diplomatically (Fravel, 2023). The PRC's diplomatic pleas for reunification have failed, and economic coercion seems unlikely, considering Taiwan's entrenched status as the leader in global semiconductor production and other advanced industries (Fravel, 2023). An attempt at Chinese military annexation of the island appears probable. However, any hypothetical invasion of Taiwan would likely be one of the most brutal military operations in recorded history, with the potential for millions of casualties, particularly if the PRC is forced to contend with an alliance of Asian democracies led by the United States. That being said, a number of strategies have been contemplated that would allow for a successful PRC invasion of Taiwan, especially if the mainland government feels as though reunification is worth any amount of casualties.

A potential invasion of Taiwan necessitates a robust and capable Chinese military that is able to handle not only the logistical nightmare that would be an amphibious invasion of an island roughly one hundred miles off of the mainland but also potential intervention from the U.S. and other Taiwanese allies. The reunification of Taiwan with the PRC has driven Chinese arms procurement and military restructuring for at least the past three decades as China builds up its naval capacity and seeks to nullify US air and naval superiority, especially regionally (Shambaugh, 2000). The development of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), with emphasis on carrier and amphibious assault capabilities, illustrates the potential strategies for a Chinese naval invasion (Shambaugh, 2000). The incorporation of civilian vessels into the PLAN to serve as a "maritime militia" has also proved to be a significant development in recent years. Reliance on the massive domestic Chinese maritime industry to serve as a pseudo-coastguard and amphibious assault transports highlights how China seeks to overcome traditional US naval superiority through non-conventional means (Shambaugh, 2000).

Any attempt to combat this growth of Chinese regional maritime power, especially concerning the defense of Taiwan, would require intense cooperation between U.S. Asian-Pacific allies. A focus on area denial, both from an air and naval perspective, is essential in dissuading Chinese aggression. It is clear that from a sheer numerical and technological point of view, Taiwan is unprepared for traditional combat with a Chinese force. Asymmetrical warfare designed to guarantee such tremendous Chinese losses demonstrates that reunification simply is not worth the price of an attempt should be Taiwan's main goal. Taiwanese surface-to-air and anti-ship missile capabilities, as well as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and missile technologies intended to target mainland Chinese assets, would go a long way in terms of deterrence. As illustrated in the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, the use of guided munitions and drone technology to wage semi-unconventional warfare against a militarily superior opponent is surprisingly effective (Fravel,

2023). Additionally, Taiwan will benefit from allies in the region. In this situation, a unified Korean, Japanese, and U.S. front, not to mention potential allies seeking to combat Chinese claims to the South China Sea such as Indonesia and the Philippines, would go a long way in ensuring Taiwanese security. Therefore, alliance building will be just as important - if not more than - any Taiwanese force-building or arms procurement could be.

## **Section II - Diplomacy**

Global diplomacy has been a key facet of China's foreign policy within the past two decades. These efforts cover multiple elements of international cooperation, often through ways of tourism initiatives, education programs, media interventions, and aligning their interests with political rivals of their own global competitors. The ongoing Chinese attempt of resisting an ever-growing Western - notably a U.S. driven - influence on the world, has resulted in China fostering new international partnerships. Many of these diplomatic ties are situated in nations that need not only fiscal stimulation and investment in their economies, but also projects that seek geopolitical approaches to bridge the cultural and information gap between countries. In particular, such nations include Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa (formally known as BRICS with the inclusion of China) as the main focus points of China's foreign relationships. The BRICS nations reflect the diplomatic investment into each other, and are largely funded by China. This section of our paper seeks to analyze the extent of China's diplomatic efforts within these countries, as well as their responses, and finally how they reflect a push for ambassadorial endeavors on a global scale.

### **China's Focus on BRICS**

China is currently working on expanding its international diplomacy in order to maintain its foreign strategy race with the United States. As of 2023, China is the world's second-largest economy, and the aim of its Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is to return China to its "rightful place" as a global superpower. Xi Jinping has a "dream of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" in order to obtain consummation in 2049 (Meservey, 2023). As a result, China targets certain countries around the world as a means to improve their relationships and expand diplomatic partnerships through various methods. China focuses on African countries due to how they are the largest voting bloc of the UN and contain valuable natural resources that are needed to build today's technologies. In 2018, U.N. resolutions exhibited African countries' votes to be aligned more closely with Beijing, which voted on the opposite of Washington ("China Regional Snapshot," 2022). In August 2023, Chinese leader Xi attended the BRICS summit in South Africa in order to reiterate his support for partnership between developing countries, while also challenging a world dominated by American and Western influence. China is determined to expand its sphere of influence through what they call "South-South cooperation," which is a development framework focused on aid, investment, and trade across cultural and national divisions (Roy, 2023). There is a reason China has turned its attention to the BRICS nations; not only do these countries, rich in resources, make up more than 40% of the total population, but Chinese investment in them offers China a way to counter US efforts as well. The United States can continue to promote diplomatic cooperation with these states, but China, through the BRICS pact, is able to better mitigate the methods and tools used to foster relationships.

## Russia

Before the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, Chinese and Russian diplomats were hopeful on the introduction of “no-limits” partnership, but after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the partnership has proven to have its limits. The Chinese-Russian relationship is often misunderstood from a U.S. perspective, but an analysis in the language used by Chinese Premier Xi Jinping reveals the framework and reasoning for Russo-Sino relations, and a glimpse as to how successful the “strategic partnership” is.

Callahan (2023) takes the critical view of looking at Russian and Chinese goals and narratives through an analysis of tradition and historiography, which can be defined as the telling of a story through history by highlighting some histories and omitting others. With regard to China, this concept is known as *tianxia*, which can be best understood through a *tianxia* map from the 19th century (Callahan, 2023). This places China in the center of the world and has a heavy influence on Chinese tradition and modern politics. Similarly, Russia has its own Russo-Centric concept through that of Eurasian ideology adopted by President Putin of Russia. Further similarities can be seen through the historiography of the narrative leaders, as both are seen through lenses of national rejuvenation, national humiliation, and loss in territory (Callahan, 2023). In Russia, this is seen through the collapse of the Soviet Union. This signifies the loss in territory according to Putin, but also highlights the necessity to maintain Kiev and Ukraine, the birthplace of the Kievan Rus (Callahan, 2023). It is for this matter that Ukraine gaining independence would fulfill the national humiliation portion of Putin’s ideology. By comparison, China begins by looking at Tiananmen demonstrations, and President Deng Xiaoping blaming the West for “brainwashing” Chinese youth (Callahan, 2023). Consequently, education programs changed from highlighting domestic issues to highlighting the foreign enemy. This is merged with the “century of national humiliation,” highlighting the history of the Opium War, and Western and Japanese imperialism in China (Callahan, 2023). National rejuvenation takes form in retaking control over lost territories such as Hong Kong and Taiwan (Callahan, 2023). Through these retellings of history and understanding of tradition, one better understands the commonalities between Russia and China.

Relating to the modern day, Russia and China both have centered views of conflict and role in domination. This said, there is still animosity between groups with regard to territories, yet the Chinese party-state adjusts their history to suit political needs. It is better to share commonalities and target the U.S. than Russia. Russia’s military operations in Ukraine and the beginning of its neo-eurasianist goals have revealed flaws. NATO committed to a quick and unified response that hindered military offensives. China has taken note of this and must now decide whether to continue carrying out its plans as a new hegemon through territorial expansion or seek other goals in the end.

## South Africa

China has turned its attention to many countries in Africa due to the continent's surplus of natural resources and investment opportunities. South Africa in particular dominates the role of advancing relations between Africa and China, as South African businesses and firms are positioning themselves within China’s own markets (Daniel & Virk, 2014). In order for South Africa to not get too caught up in the economic loan traps of China, South Africa needs to further their own diplomatic initiatives. China has a head start on this effort through building four Confucius



Institutes meant to foster a cultural understanding for both states (Daniel & Virk, 2014). These Institutes change the course of South African-China relations by drawing the attention away from a solely economic analysis. Called a “cultural diplomacy, especially the soft power version of it,” this practice closes the gap between the two countries (Daniel & Virk, 2014). In addition, the largest growing tourist influx into South Africa consists of Chinese citizens (Daniel & Virk, 2014). Of course, diplomatic efforts only began 25 years ago in January 1998, nevertheless, these relations are based on beneficial aid and investment packages from China (Daniel & Virk, 2014). In order to stay on top of a rapidly growing fiscal relationship in which China takes the lead, South Africa needs to identify new strategies for dealing with China’s growing power. While these diplomatic attempts to strengthen this relationship, South Africa can and will get cornered by the growing power of China in their country. Increasing economic, political, and diplomatic patterns are threatening to further dig a hole for South Africa which would be near impossible to climb out of. China’s influence continues to develop and fortify throughout the African continent, though South Africa in particular will soon see how this relationship is “unsustainable in the long-term.”

### **Brazil**

Brazil and China rely on a mutual understanding of shared security and a hands-off approach in regards to their diplomatic relationship. The latter has what the former lacks: the means to promote an international presence by advancing varying initiatives, such as climate and infrastructure projects. The BASIC group, dedicated to combating global warming, saw an increase in cooperation between the two in 2009 (Lewis, 2023). As Brazil is home to the world’s largest rainforest and source of timber, it is only natural that the state would seek to associate itself under the protective umbrella of China’s reliability. This partnership serves China in that their foothold is both expanded and protected in the world. In addition, China has continually increased its media presence in Brazil over the past decade. For example, the Brazilian news channel BandNews TV allowed a CCTV broadcast to be aired, causing Western critics to “warn of its implications for democratic values and freedom of expression in the region” (Morales et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the CCTV segments on a Brazilian channel have been aired like normal. Furthermore, in March 2023, Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva suggested a course of action towards order and peace in Ukraine in a visit to Beijing. This comes in the transition from Brazil remaining out of world politics to “more proactive foreign policy” (Harris, 2023). This visit to China signifies a strengthening partnership between the CCP and Brazil as the latter attempts to reestablish themselves in international relations with the help of their biggest trading partner.

### **India**

Indian and Chinese relations have soured since the 1962 border disputes in the Himalayan states, including the recent Galwan Valley conflict. These states are positioned as economic, political, and population centers in Asia, resulting in tensions rising alongside overlapping claims and interests in the region. China views India as a potential threat and made diplomatic efforts to try and contain Indian influence in the region, including most importantly an alliance with Pakistan. Through increased military and economic ties through the Belt and Road Initiative, China has created a relationship where, “India may, in the future, face a two-front war, a scenario that would have been implausible a decade ago” (Miller, 2022). This in combination with China’s “string of pearls” strategy, a series of military and commercial establishments in the Indian Ocean from the

Chinese mainland to Port Sudan which surrounds India, reveals China's attitude towards India as more of a threat than a partner (Dabas, 2017).

However, both China and India still have not shut out collaboration and relations between one another. India remains committed to its non-alignment strategy towards international relations, playing the "middleman" between the United States and Western democracies with China and the Eastern authoritarian states. Although India has pursued better relations with the United States, it has also maintained avenues with China including being a participant in the Chinese Shanghai Cooperation Organization as well as participating in the BRICS summits each year. India wants there to be a bipolar world where it can benefit from both the United States and China, seeking to gain influence as well to "sidestep geopolitical competition between China and the United States while navigating its own way to global leadership" (Markey & Scobell, 2023).

### **Why China is Ahead of the U.S. in Diplomacy**

The United States risks being left behind as China makes and strengthens strong diplomatic relations with the BRICS nations. China is now the top trading partner for South America. Currently Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil export more to China than to the US and EU together (LaFranchi, 2022). China is involved with Argentina due to the Belt and Road Initiative, and its relations with Brazil continue to cement due to media and climate initiatives between the two (LaFranchi, 2022). China continuing to build diplomatic partnerships and connections with nations that are geographically closer to the United States than their own country is a risky political approach. Regardless, China is taking the reins on corporations and diplomatic investments, increasing their connections across the globe.

The mentioned nations have responded to the diplomatic initiatives by China in various manners. While some reflect these efforts through finding similarities in their nations' histories - such as Russia - others are more hesitant to embrace a civic partnership free of geopolitical tensions, like India. Regardless, the BRICS countries are being supported by China in methods that are far from purely economic practices. The United States must continue to better position their diplomatic stance in the world by allying itself with these nations through continuing to push for bilateral issues and human rights conferences in Brazil and India, as these two states are not too far enraptured in Chinese strategy, unlike Russia and South Africa. The United States should also support India in their push for UN Security Council membership, in addition to furthering trade and environmental agreements with Brazil. American diplomacy must be continued on the highest level by both maintaining our foreign cooperation with the BRICS countries and expanding diplomatic efforts with smaller powers. In order to mitigate the rising power of China in non-violent manners, the United States must focus on uniting both the great and growing states, as well as those that are more vulnerable and less-prepared.

### **Section III - Economy**

#### **South American Influence**

Over the last decade, the reshaping of the global economy has been driven in part through rapid Chinese economic expansion in Latin America; Chinese influence in Latin America was solidified by way of trade partnerships, natural resource extraction, and new infrastructure projects throughout the continent. In fact, according to the United States Institute of Peace, within the last

20 years “trade between China and Latin America has grown a staggering 2600 percent,” and “China is now South America’s main trading partner and the second largest trading partner for Central America” (Devia-Valbuena & Mejia, 2023). The spike in trade between these nations has proven financially beneficial to both, considering China’s economy had been previously declining due to a real estate crisis and an increasing unemployment rate while Latin America gets the benefit of investment from China. The heightened amount of resources being exported to China is largely the cause of this, expanding Central America’s economy while giving China more resources to use. For instance, Peru exported around \$17.7 billion to China in 2021, including mainly copper ore, iron ore, and animal meat (“China and Peru,” 2023). South American countries have noticed the investments by China, leading to seven countries to date joining China’s BRI: Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay (“What does China”, 2023). As a result, “annual goods trade between China and Latin America rose to \$445bn in 2021, up from \$12bn in 2000” (“What does China”, 2023).

As more and more countries choose to join China’s Belt and Road Initiative, more investments are being put into the continent, leading to an increase in potential debt. Alarmingly, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, and Argentina are the top Latin American countries most indebted to China, each owing billions. For example, Venezuela’s markets have grown closer to China since 2005, accounting for 44% of China’s financing development (Castellanos, 2023). Furthermore, in April 2023 a Chinese power company purchased two power suppliers in Peru, giving China almost a monopoly over Peru’s energy supply (“What does China”, 2023). This expansion into Latin America has begun to worry American officials, leading China to ultimately limit its influence to more southern countries rather than Central America.

The United States is in a precarious position where the tides of political allegiance have shifted away from Western powers towards the East, specifically China. The over looming threat of what the Chinese government wishes to do with the infrastructure plan, whether that is trapping developing countries in debt to gain more control in the region via proxy or simply to hold more trade power through boosted relations with these countries. This still poses a threat to U.S. interests and foreign politics. It is no secret that the U.S. and the PCR do not get along as they have very different views as to how the world should be governed. This means the U.S. should act; however, this does not warrant a violent response or a direct abrasive action towards the PRC.

For US intervention in Africa, the continued support and US of the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment is essential. The reliance on a forum such as this would ease tensions among developing nations as it is solely to provide them with money to invest in hard infrastructure projects. However, this should be limited at first as investing in the same places that China is may draw out unwanted tensions between the two superpowers. Therefore, the U.S. should start by focusing on the underrepresented nations in Africa and then slowly increasing U.S. influence vis-a-vis China in the region.

Outside of the G7 infrastructure fund, the US should invest in other forms of development bases such as agriculture, medicine, and digital infrastructure. There is a very clear need for hard infrastructure in many places around the world. Therefore, the U.S. cannot afford to completely condemn the BRI, as it provides infrastructure for places that need it dearly. Consequently, what the U.S. should do instead is create alternatives that are cleaner while also providing a safer

backing. With China's BRI, there is a very high risk of a global debt crisis due to how China has lent billions to nations not able to return the costs. The United States should avoid this, and instead invest in countries that can afford to pay them back while giving grants and aid to those who cannot afford the extra debt.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the United States is posed in a unique global situation with regards to China's growing power. China is currently able to influence countries' economies, politics, and military actions just as easily as the U.S., if not easier. If the United States seeks to maintain the upper hand in these facets of international relations with China, we must initiate diplomatic endeavors with nations that we lack substantial partnerships with while also ensuring fiscal and mutually beneficial investments as well. The militaries of both China and the U.S. are in a never-slowng race to build new technology and increase their own global presence. Although China has more service members and a larger navy than the United States, the latter has a much stronger and accurate armament, though China is close behind in this aspect. In summary, we recommend for the United States to increase strict oversight on Chinese military activities abroad and their economic ventures, while advocating state cooperation when possible, in order to counter China's influence on less-developed countries that are prone to the ascendancy and political leverage of the Chinese Communist Party.

This study has concluded that American security is at risk from growing Chinese relations and expansion into the global south through political involvement, economic investments, and diplomatic efforts. The geopolitical tension between the United States and China has grown as the latter continues to make foreign connections in countries that are of political importance to the United States. The implications of this study include a clearer understanding of exact CCP actions and their direct results on American security.

### **Biography**

The International Relations Organization at Virginia Tech is a student-run think tank that meets once a week to research international issues and write analytical reports based on this research. We spend each semester focusing on a particular topic, attend seminars given by guest speakers, and participate in simulation activities to provide us with the specific context and research skills necessary to fully understand and delve into the field of international relations.

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