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Centennial Evolution of the CPC's National Security Thought

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Abstract: Born at a time of domestic turmoil and foreign aggression, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has an ingrained understanding of and has always attached great importance to national security. Undergoing different stages of national development from “standing up” to “growing rich” and to “becoming strong,” the CPC has been constantly adjusting its visions and strategies on national security in light of changes in the international situation. Such visions and strategies will surely continue to be enriched and improved in the great endeavors of building socialism with Chinese characteristics. With the proposal of the “ten upholds,” the theoretical system of national security with Chinese characteristics for the new era has taken shape, which will be underpinned by a holistic approach to national security. Thus, a historic leap in the century-old construction of the CPC's national security theory system has been achieved. This paper aims to explore the ideological context of the formation and development of a holistic approach to national security from the centennial evolution of the CPC's national security thought, comprehend the theoretical guiding role of the CPC's national security thought from China's historic achievements over the past century, and grasp the historic significance and values of upholding and developing a holistic approach to national security from the new historic juncture in China's development and its historical responsibilities in the context of great changes unseen in a century.

Keywords: holistic approach to national security, national security thought, changes unseen in a century

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The year 2021 witnesses the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CPC. Over the past century, the CPC has always adhered to its original aspiration and mission to seek “happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation.” It set sail at a time of domestic turmoil and foreign aggression and has led the nation through different development stages from “standing up” to “growing rich” and to “becoming strong.” Presently, China is getting closer to achieving national rejuvenation and being at the center of the world stage. China’s development achievements cannot be made without the leadership of the CPC and the escort of national security work. Over the past century, the CPC has always attached great importance to national security, taken firmly the work of safeguarding China’s security, and made effective strategic decisions on coordinating security and development in different development stages from “standing up” to “growing rich” and to “becoming strong.” Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the Party Central Committee, with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, has enhanced its centralized and unified leadership over national security work; made a series of major decisions and plans for national security from an overall and strategic perspective; strengthened the top-level design of national security work; perfected national security policies in all major areas; improved national security laws and regulations; effectively dealt with major risks and challenges; and maintained overall stability of China’s national security.¹ On December 11, 2020, when the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee conducted its 26th collective study session on “effectively carrying out national security work,” General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward “ten upholds” on implementing a holistic approach to national security. The “ten upholds” mark not only a new development of Xi Jinping’s thought on national security, but also the formal formation of the theoretical system of national security with Chinese characteristics for the new era. At the starting point of the “second centenary,” a systematic understanding of the theoretical and strategic values of a holistic approach to national security is of great significance to the implementation of new requirements in the new era to “coordinate security and development” and to “emphasize national security in the whole process and all

¹ Chen Wenqing, “Coordinate Development and Security to Fortify National Security Defense,” *People’s Daily*, December 31, 2020.

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aspects of the work of the Party and the country.”

Standing up: Safeguarding Sovereign Security

The stage of “standing up” spanned the founding of the CPC in 1921, the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, and the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee held in 1978. During this stage, the CPC’s national security thought was mainly embodied in Mao Zedong Thought, whose core involved striving for national survival through struggle, seeking national independence, and persisting in safeguarding national security in political, territorial, and military terms.

The world a hundred years ago was in an age of war and revolution. The Industrial Revolution that began in the latter half of the 18th century and the Technological Revolution (also known as the Second Industrial Revolution) that started in the late 19th century greatly boosted productivity, thus changing the mode of production, way of life, and the form of war, and accelerating the rise and fall of world powers. Western powers were competing for resources, wealth, power, and spheres of influence with increasing intensity; wars were becoming larger in scale, with group rivalries more pronounced, which led to the two world wars. In such a context, China, as Karl Marx pointed out, “a great empire with one third of the world’s population, ignored the current events, remained complacent about the status quo, and artificially isolated itself from the world, deceiving itself with an illusion of heavenly perfection. Such an empire is doomed to be defeated in a duel to the death in the end.”¹ Having missed the aforementioned two Industrial Revolutions, the Chinese nation fell far behind the West in terms of productivity. Consequently, the poor and weak China lost the leading edge that it had previously enjoyed in the agricultural age. The Opium Wars, the first Sino-Japanese War, and the invasion by the Eight-Power Allied Forces forced China to cede territories and pay reparations. China suffered from a loss of sovereignty, splitting apart of its territory, and encroachment by foreign powers. The Chinese people, living in an abyss of misery, were labelled the “Sick Man of East Asia.” The feudal dynasty and

¹ *Selected Works of Marx and Engels (Vol. I)* (People’s Publishing House, 1995), 716.

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tributary system that had lasted for more than a thousand years collapsed and disintegrated under the impact of this change, whereas China's modernization process and the building of a modern sovereign state had not yet begun.

The CPC was born in this grand context of domestic turmoil and foreign aggression. Hence, it has possessed an ingrained understanding of the importance of national security and was born to shoulder the responsibilities of the times to “salvage China from subjugation” and turn it into a sovereign, independent, and modern country. When the outmoded peasant wars led to nowhere, the Self-Strengthening Movement and reformism that had failed to touch the foundation of feudalism suffered repeated setbacks, and the revolution led by the bourgeois revolutionaries and other schemes of Western capitalism were aborted successively, the cannon of the October Revolution brought Marxism-Leninism to China, which pointed out the direction for the Chinese people who had been struggling to find a way out to achieve national salvation. Marxism has provided the CPC with a powerful ideological weapon to seek “happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation.” The founding of the CPC was an epoch-making event in Chinese history, and the Chinese revolution took on a completely new look thereafter. Although Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels did not specifically address the issue of national security in their works, the materialist conception of history and methodology embodied in their works alongside their classical ideas, such as “popular sovereignty,” “dictatorship of the proletariat,” “productive forces determine relations of production,” “base determines superstructure,” “economic crises are unavoidable under capitalism,” “science and technology are part of the productive forces,” and the “class nature of ideology” have become the basic guidance for the CPC to understand political, economic, scientific, technological, and cultural security. Meanwhile, the experience of Soviet Russia guided by Leninism, which had strived for survival in the crevice of imperialism, also provided the CPC with reference to building a socialist country and safeguarding its national security. Examples include the following: to build a powerful proletarian army, to remain keenly alert to potential wars, to organize and mobilize the people to safeguard the security of the regime, to make full use of contradictions among the imperialist countries, to use economic interests to constrain the war acts of capitalist countries against

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socialist countries, and to support the national liberation movements of other oppressed nations and establish an anti-imperialist united front.¹ Combining the basic tenets of Marxism with China's realities, the CPC has established a people's army under the leadership of the Party, adhered to the mass line, applied thoughts on a united front, fully mobilized all progressive forces, and led the Chinese people in defeating the Japanese imperialists, overthrowing the Kuomintang reactionary rule, completing the New Democratic Revolution, and founding the PRC, thus putting a thorough end to the history of a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, abolishing all the unequal treaties imposed upon China by foreign powers and all the imperialist privileges, and making China a truly independent sovereign country.

In the stage of "standing up," the CPC considered sovereign security as the fundamental starting point for safeguarding national security. Objectively, this was determined by the development stage and the composite national strength of New China at the time, as well as by the historical backdrop of the Cold War and the complex and grim security situations at home and abroad. Subjectively, it was driven by a strong sense of national security derived from the "century of humiliation" and by the strategic consciousness of the CPC to defend the Red Regime. During this stage, the CPC's national security thought was prominently embodied in the following three aspects.

The first aspect was upholding independence and self-reliance and firmly safeguarding political and sovereign security. Politically, the CPC regarded defending the newly born people's democratic dictatorship as the core task of national security. New China was firmly committed to its own development path, as manifested in Mao Zedong's teaching: "China's affairs must be decided by the Chinese people themselves, proceeding from the national interests in all matters and resolutely opposing foreign interference."² Economically, the CPC emphasized economic and technological autonomy, resolutely opposed

¹ *Collected Works of Lenin (Vol. 33)* (People's Publishing House, 1985), 423–424; *Collected Works of Lenin (Vol. 34)* (People's Publishing House, 1985), 87–89, 152–153; *Collected Works of Lenin (Vol. 36)* (People's Publishing House, 1985), 97–98; *Collected Works of Lenin (Vol. 40)* (People's Publishing House, 1986), 2–3, 97–98; *Collected Works of Lenin (Vol. 41)* (People's Publishing House, 1986), 167.

² *Selected Works of Mao Zedong (Vol. 4)* (People's Publishing House, 1991), 1461.

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the “theory of international division of labor” proposed by the Soviet Union, steadily promoted the development of its own industrial system, and firmly took the economic lifeline that concerned national security. Meanwhile, the CPC stressed that China should be self-reliant and independent of foreign aid and must develop cutting-edge science and technology independently, instead of trailing behind other nations’ progress. Diplomatically, the CPC decided upon such basic principles as “starting all over again” and “cleaning up the house before inviting guests in,” which fundamentally ended the humiliating diplomatic history of the semi-colonial Old China. In dealing with its relations with the two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—New China adhered to its own principles and bottom line, unswervingly safeguarded its security interests, and never yielded to any hegemonic pressure. From the 1950s to the 1970s, China’s diplomacy underwent an adjustment from Leaning to One Side to Fighting with Two Fists and to One Line. Although the form and content of China’s diplomatic strategies shifted, the core ideology of independently safeguarding national security never changed.

The second aspect was putting military security at the forefront of national security and daring to fight. Growing out of a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, New China had to face not only very complex border and frontier issues left over from modern times, but also great pressure on defending its vast land and sea territories because of its insufficient naval and air forces. During this stage, New China faced such tasks as eliminating bandits, Kuomintang special agents, and remnants of the old forces, and liberating the entire country. Also encountered were hostility, subversion, blockade, and siege by Western forces led by the United States, besides frequent provocations by some neighboring countries on China’s territorial sovereignty, which made China’s security situation very grim. The poor and weak New China had very limited means of safeguarding its national security. To deal with the aforementioned challenges, Mao Zedong prioritized military security, adhered to an active defense strategy, and resolutely safeguarded China’s security by military means. During this stage, New China successively fought and won a series of wars and battles, such as the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea, Bombardment of Jinmen, the counterattack in self-defense on the China-India border, the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Vietnam, Battle of Zhenbao Island, and Battle of

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the Xisha Islands. Particularly, the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea smashed aggressors' plot to nip New China in the bud and fully demonstrated the ironclad will of the Chinese people to defy hegemony.¹ The victory of the war fully demonstrated the combat effectiveness of the People's Liberation Army, greatly deterred the external aggressors, and effectively defended the homeland security of New China. Through wars, China learned how to fight, while comprehensively strengthening the building of various armed forces and actively advancing the modernization of its national defense and armed forces. Furthermore, China implemented the concept of people's war, promoted the Third-line Construction with security as the priority, established an independent and complete national defense industrial system, and vigorously developed cutting-edge science and technology. The success of China's Two Bombs, One Satellite program completely crushed the schemes of nuclear blackmail and nuclear monopoly by nuclear powers, not only making a major breakthrough in China's military security, but also changing the international strategic landscape. Mao Zedong's thoughts on "no first use of nuclear weapons," "opposing a nuclear war," "nuclear non-proliferation," and "the aim of developing nuclear weapons is to eliminate them ultimately" have laid the theoretical foundation for China's nuclear security.

The third aspect pertained to flexibly applying the thought on the united front to safeguard national security by mobilizing international forces. In its formative period, New China decisively adopted a Leaning to One Side foreign policy, establishing diplomatic ties with countries of the Socialist Camp led by the Soviet Union to defend its newly born socialist regime. In the 1950s, China proposed the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, which laid down the diplomatic "boundaries" for better safeguarding China's national security. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, when China's relations with the Soviet Union were deteriorating in the north, and the United States and Chiang Kai-shek were waiting for an opportunity to invade mainland China in the south, Mao Zedong keenly noticed the trend of synchronous discretization of the two camps headed by the United States and the Soviet Union through a profound analysis of the

¹ Xi Jinping, "Speech at a Meeting Marking the 70th Anniversary of the Chinese People's Volunteers Entering the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to Fight in the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea," *People's Daily*, October 24, 2020.

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international situation. He hence proposed the Two Intermediate Zones theory for building a united international front against hegemonism to jointly contain the hegemonic acts of the United States and the Soviet Union by relying on the Asian, African, and Latin American countries in the First Intermediate Zone and actively winning over the European, North American, and Oceanian countries in the Second Intermediate Zone. In the 1970s, China resumed its lawful seat in the United Nations. Faced with new geopolitical circumstances, with the Soviet Union being offensive and the United States defensive, Mao Zedong put forth the Three Worlds theory, asserting that China was a third-world country and cooperation should be strengthened with other developing countries in all aspects. Afterward, through the strategy of One Line and a Large Number of Intermediary Countries, China further expanded the room for its diplomacy, not only normalizing relations with the United States, but also forming a triangular relationship with the United States and the Soviet Union amid rivalry between the latter two, which significantly elevated China's strategic influence and created a favorable international security environment for China to make strategic adjustments in the stage of "growing rich."

Growing Rich: Safeguarding Development Security

In the stage of "growing rich" (1978–2012), the CPC's national security thought was mainly embodied in Deng Xiaoping Theory, New Security Concept, and the Scientific Outlook on Development, which centered on boosting economic construction and seeking security through development and cooperation. The CPC attached great importance to ensuring economic, social, cultural, and other non-traditional security at home and promoting common security abroad based on expanding shared interests.

In the stage of "standing up," the severe national security situation, successive wars or preparation for war, the economic construction with national defense as its core, and the relatively closed external environment had brought serious constraints to China's development. Consequently, China missed a prime opportunity to participate in the Scientific-technical Revolution (1940–1970), which led to widening gap between China and Western countries in terms of economic and technological strengths. China started to lag behind

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in strategic position among Asian countries, thus giving rise to a risk of being expelled from the international community. The following two idioms are relevant: “Lagging behind leaves one vulnerable to attacks and only by development can one achieve self-improvement”; “Openness brings progress and seclusion leads to backwardness.” Again, the CPC’s strong sense of urgency drove the innovation of its cognition of national security.

After the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee was convened and China established diplomatic ties with the United States, Deng Xiaoping, keenly aware of the new geopolitical changes, made such strategic judgments as “a world war is avoidable” and “peace and development are the theme of our times.”¹ Based on the above judgments, Deng Xiaoping made the historic decision to shift the focus of the Party and the country to economic construction and carry out the reform and opening-up, which constituted a “critical move” that determined the fate of contemporary China.² Since then, China has embarked on the path of development with Chinese characteristics and entered a new period in the history of socialist modernization. During this stage, China firmly adhered to the Four Cardinal Principles and resolutely rejected the Western attempts to effect a peaceful evolution to westernize and divide China. Meanwhile, China continued to consider economic development as the central task and constantly improved and developed its productive forces. In the course of drastic changes occurring in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the CPC and China withstood the test of this major external risk. In the struggle against hegemonism and power politics, China has blazed a path of peaceful development with Chinese characteristics and realized a peaceful rise. With over 30 years of strenuous efforts, China created two miracles: rapid economic development and long-term social stability. Hence, it achieved a historic leap from “standing up” to “growing rich,” laying solid political and economic foundations for “becoming strong.” In this stage, the CPC’s national security thought was further enriched and developed in four key ways.

First, China took development as the foundation of security and focused

¹ *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 3)* (People’s Publishing House, 1993), 105.

² Xi Jinping, “Speech at the Conference Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of China’s Reform and Opening-Up,” *People’s Daily*, December 19, 2018.

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on consolidating the material foundation of national security by increasing composite national strength. Domestically, a consensus was reached that only a wealthy country could build a strong army and a strong army could protect the country; a weak economy not only seriously restricted China's ability to safeguard its national security, but also became the crux of the complex and difficult problem of maintaining social stability. Deng Xiaoping pointed out, "Pauperism is not socialism," "Development is the hard truth," and "Unless we modernize our country, raise our scientific and technological level, develop our productive forces and thus strengthen our country and improve the material and cultural life of our people—unless we do all this, our socialist political and economic system cannot be fully consolidated, and there can be no sure guarantee for the country's security."¹ Globally, the competition of composite national strength, mainly based on economic and technological prowess, became the core of international competition, and rapid improvement of composite national strength became the key to demonstrating the advantages of the socialist system. Accordingly, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin asserted, "If China wants to withstand the pressure of hegemonism and power politics and to uphold the socialist system, it is crucial for us to achieve rapid economic growth and carry out our development strategy;"² "Science and technology constitute a primary productive force;"³ and "Without advanced science and technology, there would be no military and political security."⁴

Second, China considered security as the condition for development and created favorable conditions for development by resolutely and flexibly safeguarding its national security. In one regard, China firmly upheld the bottom line of its sovereignty and political security. For instance, when dealing with the issue of Hong Kong's return to China, Deng Xiaoping asserted, "Sovereignty is non-negotiable;"⁵ "It must be required that patriots form the main body of administrators, that is, of the future government of the Hong Kong special region;" and "A patriot is one who respects the Chinese nation, sincerely

¹ *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 2)* (People's Publishing House, 1994), 239.

² *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 3)* (People's Publishing House, 1993), 365.

³ *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 3)* (People's Publishing House, 1993), 279.

⁴ Jiang Zemin, *On Science and Technology* (Central Party Literature Press, 2001), 151–152.

⁵ *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 3)* (People's Publishing House, 1993), 359.

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supports the motherland's resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong and wishes not to impair Hong Kong's prosperity and stability."¹ Simultaneously, China struck a balance between development and stability, emphasizing the creation of favorable conditions for its development and adoption of more flexible means to protect its rights. During this stage, China broke the tradition of adhering to an "ideological line" in its diplomacy, pursued a non-alignment policy, and promoted pragmatic cooperation with all countries based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. Moreover, China adhered to the principles of "keeping a low profile" and "never taking the lead," focused on self-development, and avoided becoming the focus of international conflicts. When addressing disputes and conflicts, China prioritized peaceful and reciprocal approaches to achieve win-win results and even innovated approaches when necessary and shelved contradictions and differences on the basis of adhering to principles. For example, when addressing the South China Sea issue, Deng Xiaoping presented the important thought of "shelving differences and seeking joint exploitation on the basis of acknowledging China's sovereignty." On the issue of national reunification, he creatively proposed the concept of One Country, Two Systems, providing favorable conditions for the smooth return of Hong Kong and Macao to the motherland, and the reunification of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait based on peaceful development.

Third, China followed the path of peaceful development and advocated a new security concept featuring "mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and consultation" in a bid to achieve common security. Faced with a new wave of economic globalization in the wake of the Cold War, China elected to "build socialism with Chinese characteristics independently in the process of interconnecting with, rather than decoupling from economic globalization, and achieving mutual benefit and win-win results with the rest of the international community,"² blazing on an unprecedented path of peaceful development by expanding shared interests through common development and promoting the realization of common security. China has called for "mutual trust, mutual

¹ *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 3)* (People's Publishing House, 1993), 61.

² Zheng Bijian, "China's New Road of Peaceful Rise and Chinese-U.S. Relations," *China Report*, No. 9, 2005, 17.

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benefit, equality, and consultation on security matters”¹ among all nations and advocated that “only by achieving coordinated, balanced, and universal development can we achieve lasting peace and stability in the world.”² Thus, China went beyond the zero-sum thinking that “one’s security is the other’s insecurity,” advocating “security must be universal.”³ China transcended the unilateral approach of “only safeguarding one’s own security and ignoring the security concerns of others,” advocating “achieving national security for all countries on the basis of common security.” Its approach has risen above global governance challenges such as the “tragedy of the commons,” advocating “global challenges must be met with concerted efforts of all nations.”

Fourth, China kept abreast with new national security issues arising from development and attached great importance to non-traditional security challenges. With the end of the Cold War and the further development of economic globalization, political multi-polarity, IT application, and cultural diversification, the content of national security has also expanded. In such a context, the CPC Central Committee has paid close attention to new security issues arising from development and tried to address these issues with the concept of scientific development and fill security loopholes in a timely manner. For instance, China’s social informatization and cultural diversification have accelerated, but relevant security measures have not kept pace, thus giving rise to new security risks. Under such circumstances, the CPC Central Committee aptly proposed that “cyber technology bears on national security,” vigorously promoted the development of internet culture to seize this “newly emerging ideological and cultural ground as well as ideological and political battlefield,” and strictly guarded against the use of the internet and other novel means by hostile forces from the West to westernize and divide China. As international security situation evolves, the CPC’s understanding of national security is also deepening and has laid greater store by the “dangers of terrorism,” the “risk of conflicts triggered by ethnic and religious contradictions,” and “information security, financial security, as well as the security of food, oil, and other

¹ *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin (Vol. 3)* (People’s Publishing House, 2006), 567.

² *Selected Important Documents since the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Vol. 1)* (Central Party Literature Press, 2005), 311.

³ *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin (Vol. 2)* (People’s Publishing House, 2006), 313.

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strategic materials” against the backdrop of international anti-terrorism and the global financial crisis.¹ Given the continuous progress in China’s development and its science and technology strength and the expansion of “new spaces and frontiers,” the boundaries of China’s national interests and national security are extending, and the CPC’s awareness of safeguarding security in emerging fields is also growing. As China continues to expand globally, its cultural soft power security, economic and trade security, and security of overseas interests have been gradually included in the key categories of national security that must be defended. Increasingly, the CPC has attached equal importance to non-traditional security threats as to traditional ones.

Becoming Strong: Shaping a Holistic Security

Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, with socialism with Chinese characteristics ushering in a new era, the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has entered the stage of “becoming strong.” In this stage, the principal contradiction facing Chinese society has evolved from the one between the ever-growing material and cultural needs of the people and the low level of production to that between the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life and unbalanced and inadequate development. While pursuing a sense of gain and happiness, the people also seek a greater sense of security. Hence, the new needs of the people are becoming an important driving force for the reform of national security work in the new era. In the stage of “becoming strong,” the connotation of China’s period of strategic opportunities in the new era has undergone dramatic changes, as China evolves from a dependant in the world economy to a significant contributor, from a weak player in global geopolitics to a strong one, and from a passive adaptor of the international system to a major promoter of global governance. In such a context, we need to safeguard our strategic opportunities, effectively turning crises and challenges into strategic opportunities.² Furthermore, we need to balance the overall domestic and international situations and coordinate security and development to

¹ *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin (Vol. 3)* (People’s Publishing House, 2006), 370.

² Yuan Peng, “China’s Grand Strategy Seen from the Report to the CPC 18th National Congress,” *Contemporary International Relations*, No. 5 (2013): 1–9.

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maintain and extend the important period of strategic opportunities for China's development and provide a strong guarantee for the nation's rejuvenation.

At this stage, unbalanced and inadequate development is particularly prominent in the field of national security. Although China has become the world's second-largest economy and the biggest manufacturer and has had the largest foreign exchange reserves, it is not yet strong enough. China's export-oriented development model is vulnerable to the impact of financial crises. The security risks caused by "lone forays" of Chinese personnel and assets overseas are soaring. The control by foreign capital of domestic enterprises presents new security risks. More importantly, key equipment and parts are highly dependent on the outside world, and core technologies and patents are controlled by foreign countries. Barriers continue to persist in civil-military integration, and the transformation of economic strength into composite national strength has much progress yet to be made. Meanwhile, huge gaps exist in strategic materials, such as grain seeds, soybeans, petroleum, and minerals. The deterioration of China's ecological environment remains a serious issue. Moreover, the "mind of peace" derived from long-term stability has made many Party officials slack in spirits and weak in recognition of risks, who lack awareness of the threats of "color revolution" and ideological infiltration by the West and have paid insufficient attention to emerging issues such as cyber security. Against the backdrop of increasingly rampant international terrorism, the "three forces" have turned extremely active in China, seriously endangering social and public security. Furthermore, issues that used to be shelved relating to the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and Taiwan, besides border disputes with India, have become prominent and interwoven, once again posing systematic challenges to China's homeland security. At this stage, China is on its way to becoming a strong socialist country. As a major country, its security concerns have become increasingly diversified and specific, extending from land to ocean, outer space, and cyberspace; objectives have become more precise, covering a wider range of areas which span industry, agriculture, science and technology, finance, manufacturing, transportation, sports, health, and ecology. China's international strategic layout is increasingly characterized by focusing on a larger neighborhood and greater diplomacy, whereas its needs for corresponding national security guarantees are becoming

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more urgent. Presently, China is more assertive in protecting its national security, as illustrated in Xi Jinping's statements: "While pursuing peaceful development, we will never sacrifice our legitimate rights and interests or China's core interests. No foreign country should expect China to trade off its core interests or swallow the bitter fruit that undermine China's sovereignty, security or development interests;"¹ "When China was poor and weak, it had the courage to defend its national interests and oppose world powers, and had never bowed to foreign pressures or yielded to them. Now that China is getting strong through development, it will never give in to any foreign pressures, and will resolutely safeguard its core and major national interests."² General Secretary Xi Jinping's strategic boldness and determination to protect China's rights and fight for justice have provided new impetus for the development and innovation of the CPC's national security thought.

At this stage, the national security issues facing China encompass far more subjects, extend over a greater range, and cover a longer time scale than at any time in the country's history. Internally and externally, the factors at play are more complex than ever before. Thus, difficulty exists in adapting the past national security thoughts and practices to meet the needs and developments of national security in the era of "becoming strong." The new situation requires that we take the people's security as our ultimate goal, achieve political security as our fundamental task, and regard economic security as our foundation, with military, cultural, public, scientific, and technological security as means of guarantee. It also requires that we promote international security to establish a national security system with Chinese characteristics. We should ensure both internal and external security, homeland and public security, traditional and non-traditional security, development issues and security issues, and China's own security and the common security of the world. A holistic approach to national security is an objective requirement in response to new changes in the national security environment. It is a continuation and development of China's

¹ Xi Jinping, "Strengthen the Foundation for Pursuing Peaceful Development," *Xi Jinping, The Governance of China (Vol. 1)* (Foreign Languages Press, 2014), 249.

² Xi Jinping, "Build a New Type of International Relations — International Relations and China's Diplomatic Strategy," *People's Daily*, July 15, 2014.

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strategic cultural thinking on national security, an inevitable result of the enhanced coordination of national security work by the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core since the 18th CPC National Congress, and a reference to the common practice of major countries in the world.¹ It signifies that the CPC's understanding of the basic laws underlying national security work has reached new heights. The proposal and continuous development of a holistic approach to national security have become the most distinctive theoretical symbol of China in the stage of "becoming strong."

A holistic approach to national security provides a systematic way of thinking about safeguarding national security. This approach makes full use of the Marxist epistemology and methodology to follow the historical trend and identify its underlying dynamics in an objective, developing, comprehensive, systematic, and universal manner and adheres to the integration of the two-point theory and the key-point theory. A holistic approach to national security requires that we consider China's national security in the context of international security and China's national rejuvenation, regard various elements and aspects of national security as an organic whole, and learn to "play the piano with ten fingers" to address national security issues in a scientific and planned way. A holistic approach to national security also demands that we consider things from a development perspective and pursue sustainable national security while emphasizing our persistent response and long-term attention to the people's security needs. Hence, based on a clarified connotation, a holistic approach to national security leaves space for important areas concerning national security and makes dynamic adjustments with the changes in security environment, which will continuously include emerging security issues such as bio-security and artificial intelligence (AI). However, at specific times, the focus of national security should be definite, thus avoiding the proliferation of national security concepts. A holistic approach emphasizes the interconnection and interaction among various national security elements and sees the snowball effect, the domino effect, and the butterfly effect of security risks rather than working only on symptoms. It requires great attention not only toward the "Black Swans," but also to the "Gray Rhinos," to "prevent small risks from evolving into big ones,

¹ Zhong Guoan, "The Path for Safeguarding and Shaping a Major-Country's Security," *Guangming Daily* (Theoretical Page), April 3, 2019.

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individual ones into complex ones, partial ones into regional or systemic ones, economic ones into social and political ones, and global ones into domestic ones.”¹ A relevant idiom is: “How much water a bucket can hold depends on the shortest piece of board.” Hence, a holistic approach to national security calls for comprehensively improving security in all key areas, strengthening areas of weakness, and enhancing overall security through improving all factors. A holistic approach to national security also demands that we inspect a problem from both sides and address it from the perspective of mutual transformation of contradictions, not only seeing the risks, but also the opportunities, while seeking a solution to the crisis. This process involves not only preparing for the worst, but also striving for the best, while seeking ways to turn the negative into positive; not only daring to fight, but also being effective at fighting; not only possessing the foresight to prevent risks, but also having clever measures to deal with and defuse risks; and not only fighting a well-prepared war to guard against and resist risks, but also a strategic and active war to turn crises into opportunities.

Moreover, a holistic approach to national security lays down an overall institutional framework for safeguarding national security. As China grows from a big country into a strong one, the complexity of its national security situation and the diversity of threats it faces have far exceeded the capacity of any single department. All kinds of emergent risk situations require rapid decision-making, and various urgent, difficult, and dangerous security tasks require cooperation among multiple departments. Thus, it is highly necessary to break through the horizontal and vertical division of labor and make joint efforts to deal with them. The establishment of the National Security Commission (NSC) of the CPC Central Committee is a pioneering endeavor since the PRC was founded. Given that national security issues are highly political, sensitive, and strategic in nature, they should be planned, commanded, and deployed by the CPC Central Committee in a unified way. The mechanism of the NSC gives full play to the role of the CPC Central Committee in overseeing the overall situation, and to the advantages of Party organizations at all levels in concentrating

¹ “The Decisive Stage in Achieving the First Centenary Goal—Part of Xi Jinping’s Speech at the Second Full Assembly of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee,” *Qiushi*, No. 1, 2016.

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strengths, both horizontal and vertical, to accomplishing major, difficult, and urgent tasks. At the top, the CPC Central Committee, in charge of the overall situation, strategic planning, and effective decision-making, has established an inter-departmental coordination mechanism to strengthen national security legislation, formulate and implement national security strategies, and timely fill in the blanks as new situations arise, hence leaving no stones unturned. In the middle, under the “centralized, unified, efficient, and authoritative” leadership of the CPC Central Committee, all localities and departments earnestly implement the decisions of the CPC Central Committee by acting according to the law and fully undertaking their national security responsibilities. At the grassroots, full play is given to the advantages of the mass line of Party organizations, the principles of “the country being responsible for everyone’s security and vice versa” are organically combined, and the masses are fully mobilized to join the endeavors of building a national security community “everyone is responsible for and committed to.”

Under the guidance of a holistic approach to national security, the CPC has led the Chinese people in acting proactively and creating an enhanced security environment through reform and development. The CPC has solved many tough problems that were long on the agenda but never resolved and accomplished many desired things that had never been completed, thus making a series of historic achievements in the field of national security and significantly improving the Party’s ability to use legal means to safeguard China’s national security. Presently, the comparative advantages of the path of national security with Chinese characteristics have taken shape, creating more strategic opportunities for China’s development in the new era and laying a solid foundation for China to better protect its national security in the context of great changes unseen in a century. In terms of political security, in the face of rising anti-elite, anti-establishment, and anti-mainstream trends worldwide, China has taken the lead in enhancing the CPC’s cohesion and combat capacity through fighting against corruption and boosting the Party’s self-building, with the guiding position of Marxism in ideology strengthened in an all-around way. In terms of economic security, against the global backdrop of slowing economic growth, China has taken the lead in achieving high-quality development, while its economic, food, and ecological security have been strengthened across the

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board. Particularly, with infrastructural construction, such as high-speed rails, highways, bridges, ports, and airports, the time and space required to safeguard its homeland security have been dramatically reduced, and China's remote delivery capacity overseas has been significantly enhanced. In terms of military security, historic breakthroughs have been achieved in the reform of China's national defense and armed forces. Major progress has been made in preparation for military struggle, and the development of weapons and equipment has been accelerated across the board, with a host of solely-owned advanced equipment becoming instrumental in safeguarding China's national security. In terms of scientific and technological security, digital technology is advancing rapidly, while major achievements have been made successively, such as the Tiangong space station, the Jiaolong deep-sea manned submersible, the FAST, the Wukong dark matter probe satellite, the Mozi quantum communications satellite, and China's homemade large passenger aircraft, which have become an important basis for China to explore and open up "new spaces" for its national security. In terms of social and public security, this is a time when populism is rampant, people of low socio-economic status are complaining about the gap between the rich and the poor, and social unrest is on the rise globally. In contrast, China has addressed the key issues in sustainable development through its historic fight against poverty, which has significantly improved the sense of gain and security of its people and made the society more stable and united. In terms of international security, China has, through advancing major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in an all-encompassing way, actively participated in global governance and pursued a vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable global security. This vision is designed to create a favorable external security environment for China and lead the international community in jointly safeguarding international security, which effectively promotes China's transformation from a regional power to a global one. In terms of geopolitical security, the CPC Central Committee's all-directional strategic planning has ushered in a first-ever geo-security pattern that creates conditions for China to advance westward economically and eastward militarily while coping with maritime security threats more effectively. Through "creating islands by filling up the sea," China has made creative use of its economic strength to safeguard its national security and achieved historic breakthroughs

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in managing the sea and safeguarding its maritime rights. Particularly, through promoting the Belt and Road Initiative, China has opened up new corridors that connect Eurasia, the Indian, and Pacific Oceans, alleviating the so-called “Malacca dilemma”; promoted the development and stability of its Western region; and optimized its economic layout abroad, obtaining greater strategic room for its goods and capital to maneuver within.

Since the 19th National Congress of the CPC, the international security situation has changed significantly. The ongoing changes in the world unseen in a century are accelerating and the East-West contradictions are resonating with the South-North ones, leading the world into a new period of turbulence and change. On the one hand, the competition between the East and the West over their systems and paths is becoming increasingly pronounced. A new round of capitalist crisis in the West, primarily the United States, is spreading across the board politically and socially, whereas the global appeal of the theory, path, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics is growing constantly. The worldwide contest between two ideologies and two social systems has undergone a profound change in favor of Marxism and socialism, with the End of History theory ended and the China Collapse theory collapsed. Faced with a formidable enemy, the West led by the United States has been intensifying their political war against China. For instance, a bunch of Western countries have been pushing for the establishment of small circles based on “shared values.” The risk of a new Cold War is looming large. On the other hand, the South-North contest over the right for development is also intensifying. Since the First Industrial Revolution, countries of the North represented by the United States and Europe have been firmly occupying the top of international industrial and value chains and maintaining their generous living by exploiting countries of the South through the “technological dividend.” This time, however, the rise of the Southern countries coincides with a new round of scientific, technological, and industrial revolution. Big data, AI, quantum technology, life science, and other emerging technologies are reshaping the global innovation landscape, which offers a historic opportunity for the Southern countries to change their development “from quantitative to qualitative.” However, the Northern countries do not hesitate to block this process by various unconventional means to maintain their monopoly status.

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Consequently, the economic and technological competition between the South and the North has become increasingly fierce, and their disputes over standards and rules have become heated. The abovementioned East-West and South-North contradictions interweave and resonate with each other, which have been increasingly gathering on China and the United States and finally manifesting themselves in the form of strategic competition between these two countries. In both Trump and Biden administrations, the United States has had no less incentive to seek containment of China, mobilizing all of its governmental and social resources to carry out an all-weather and all-field containment and repression against China. The United States has been not only staging a political war, a trade and economic war, a science and technology war, and a diplomatic war, but also playing the cards of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Xinjiang, and Tibet, in an attempt to interrupt China's development process, which has brought comprehensive challenges to China.

Thinking back, in the great changes that occurred a hundred years ago, China, without national independence or security, merely represented a trophy for foreign powers. In current times, however, the increasingly stronger China not only holds its future and destiny in its own hands, but also has become the key to shaping global changes and gained unprecedented historic opportunities. China, having missed out on the previous three technological revolutions, finally has the opportunity to fully participate in and lead a new round of revolution. However, as an old adage states, "The waves are stronger when the boat reaches midstream, and the road gets steeper when a man is halfway up the hill." The closer we get to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, the greater the risks and challenges we face. If we fail to bear the load and win in the historic contest, we will likely encounter a "halfway attack" and fall short of success. "Realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will not be easy or come easily with banging gongs and drums. To realize our great dream, we must wage great struggles." Amid the drastic changes, the CPC Central Committee has increased its emphasis on safeguarding political as well as scientific and technological security. While taking scientific and technological security as the foundation of national security and accelerating the building of China into a science and technology giant, the CPC Central Committee has made such new demands as "to uphold the Party's absolute

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leadership over national security work,” “to persistently safeguard and shape national security,” “to shape national security is to safeguard it at a higher level and with greater foresight,” “to adhere to bottom line thinking, and focus on preventing and defusing major risks,” and “to carry forward the spirit of struggle and enhance our ability to fight,” which have become not only a new theoretical weapon for us to maintain strategic focus and cope with the changes unseen in a century, but also an important development of the CPC’s national security thought in the new era. Faced with the surge of American strategic containment and suppression, all departments of China cooperate and coordinate with one another and all fronts support each other under the guidance of a holistic approach to national security in the great endeavors both at home and abroad. We have withstood round after round of US offensives and defended our bottom line and positions by daring to fight and being effective at fighting, which has fully demonstrated the advantages of our socialist system as well as the will and ability of a stronger China to shape its national security. China has firmly held the initiative in guiding and shaping contemporary global changes, as it has maintained steady economic growth, constantly enhanced its hard power, promoted security cooperation in the international arena, actively led global governance, and accelerated the improvement of its soft power.

In 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 accelerated changes unseen in a century. In the great test this pandemic has presented on national security around the world, the CPC Central Committee, adhering to the principle of “putting people’s safety and security first,” has accurately identified, scientifically handled, and proactively initiated changes, putting in national efforts to win the decisive people’s war against the pandemic. China was among the first to bring COVID-19 under control and resume work and production, which constitutes a vivid practice of a holistic approach to national security.¹ The crisis has not only further enhanced the Party’s understanding of non-traditional and common international security, but also promoted the Party’s understanding of the importance of a holistic approach to national security and its theoretical innovation. At the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC

¹ Chen Wenqing, “The Practice and Development of a Holistic Approach to National Security—Studying and Implementing General Secretary Xi Jinping’s Major Expositions on Response to Covid-19,” *Qiushi*, No. 8, 2020, 42–49.

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Central Committee held from October 26 to 29 in 2020, the Party historically included “coordinating development and security” into the guiding principles of the five-year plan for economic and social development, and made major strategic arrangements for “coordinating development and security” in a special chapter of the proposed draft. At the 26th group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, General Secretary Xi Jinping urged efforts to emphasize national security in the whole process and all aspects of the work of the Party and the country. He stressed that plans and arrangements should be made for national security in coordination with those for economic and social development, and systematic thinking should be adhered to in building a holistic national security architecture. At the group study session, General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed “ten upholds” on implementing a holistic approach to national security, which have systematically sorted out the innovations of the CPC’s national security thought in the stage of “becoming strong” and formed a complete framework for the theoretical system of national security with Chinese characteristics in the new era. The “ten upholds” present the “five major connotations” and “five pairs of relations” embedded in a holistic approach to national security in a more scientific way, thus further highlighting the political attribute of a holistic approach to national security as the CPC’s national security thought. This elevates the concept of “coordinating development and security” to a higher level of leadership. Higher requirements have been proposed for “preventing and defusing major national security risks” and “promoting common international security.” Clearer arrangements are already in place for “sticking to the path of national security with Chinese characteristics” and “promoting the modernization of national security system and capacities.” The formation of this theoretical system of national security with Chinese characteristics for the new era is a systematic integration and major innovation of the CPC’s national security thought since it was founded a hundred years ago, which marks a “national security chapter” of the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics for the new era.

A Few Enlightenment

Looking back at the past century, the CPC was born at a time of domestic

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turmoil and foreign aggression, grew up amid hardships and setbacks, and has become stronger by overcoming risks and challenges. Adhering to its original mission to seek “happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation,” the CPC has always attached great importance to national security work, leading the Chinese people on a path of development with Chinese characteristics and a path of national security that suits China’s national conditions through different development stages from “standing up” to “growing rich” and to “becoming strong.” The path of national security with Chinese characteristics has been formed in history, which is the crystallization of the wisdom of the Chinese people and the collective wisdom of generations of the CPC leaders. A holistic approach to national security is the ideological embodiment of the path of national security with Chinese characteristics, which resulted from the continuous self-summarization, revision, and perfection of the CPC’s national security thought over the past century. It directly reflects the CPC’s national security thought in the stage of “becoming strong” and is the systemic integration of the CPC’s national security thought that constitutes an indispensable and important part of the history of the Party’s thought. We should continue to improve and develop this theoretical system, using this powerful theoretical weapon to safeguard China’s national security. Also, we should enhance our awareness and actions to “coordinate security and development,” strengthening our confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics to better promote the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in the “second centenary.”

First, upholding the Party’s absolute leadership over national security is the key to pursuing a path of national security with Chinese characteristics. Over the past century, the leadership of the CPC has been critical for realizing China’s transformation from a poor and weak country deprived of sovereignty to a country of independence, self-reliance, development, and self-improvement. China today is historically closer to the center stage of the world and the shore of national rejuvenation. The leadership of the Party is both the defining feature and the greatest strength of the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese people are well aware of this. With the historic rise of China’s international influence, the trends of “the East is rising while the West is falling” and “the South is ascending while the North is descending” are gaining

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momentum, and a well-governed China sharply contrasts the chaos in Western countries, which the international community is beginning to recognize. Since the founding of the PRC, some Western countries have never given up their hostility toward the nature of the Chinese regime, nor have they given up on peaceful evolution, westernization, and division of China. The victory of the Cold War has benefited some countries and led them into a wrong strategic cognition; some of them even attempt to start another Cold War against China. During the heights of the China-US trade war, some anti-China politicians in America pointed public opinion at the CPC. To “resume world leadership,” the United States has constantly played up China’s institutional threats. With the accelerated advance of global changes, the East-West contest is intensifying. Hence, safeguarding political security is not only the fundamental guarantee for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, but also the key to safeguarding and shaping the period of strategic opportunities in Chinese history.

Second, the principle of “putting people’s safety and security first” should be upheld, since the consolidation of China’s national security is based on the strength of the people. The people are the creators of history and the fundamental force that determines the future and fate of a nation. The founding of New China is the result of the bloody struggle by its people. The victories of a series of wars, including the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea, were won by relying on the strength of the people. Additionally, China’s brilliant achievements in development since the reform and opening-up have also resulted from the wisdom and sweat of the Chinese people. Without the support of the people, national security would be like water without a source or a tree without roots. Safeguarding national security calls for our upholding of the principle of “putting people’s safety and security first” and ensuring the security interests of the broad masses effectively. Meanwhile, it also requires a firm reliance on the people to safeguard national security. Only by giving full play to the enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity of the broad masses and by viewing the people as the basic force for national security can we pool a powerful force for safeguarding national security. The systematic thinking mode found in a holistic approach to national security is an important innovation by Xi Jinping to the epistemology and methodology of the CPC’s national security thought, which has been widely infiltrated into Xi Jinping’s thoughts on

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economy, military, diplomacy, ecological civilization, the rule of law, and other fields. In the process of China's advance toward becoming a stronger country, deeply rooting a holistic approach to national security in people's minds as a world view and a methodology to guide them in analyzing and solving problems, and effectively enhancing everyone's awareness of national security and risk prevention should be our foothold and focus in upholding a holistic approach to national security. In this sense, education on national security is not only a required course, but also a basic one for all our people.

Third, "coordinating development and security" is the key point in implementing a holistic approach to national security in the stage of "becoming strong." In retrospect, during the stage of "standing up," New China sought security through struggle and prioritized the survival of the nation over anything else, attaching great importance to external security and exerting every effort to preserve its homeland security. However, New China failed to resolve internal and external security issues caused by the relatively backward economic development and people's wellbeing. During the stage of "growing rich," China attached greater importance to pursuing development through peace and opening-up and promoting stability and peace through development. This pursuit achieved rapid economic development through firm and flexible rights protection, but failed to resolve such problems as relatively backward development in other aspects and the shelved national security issues hampering economic development. "Coordinating development and security" is a profound summarization of China's experience in promoting socialist modernization over the past seventy years since the founding of the PRC, in that "development and security are just like two wheels of a cart or two wings of a bird,"¹ which must be relatively balanced without obvious weakness on either side. The key to preventing and defusing major security risks is to detect and foresee risks and nip them in the bud, which, in essence, is to "shape national security." Currently, China must focus on the mismatch between its development level and its capacities to safeguard national security. China should enhance its national security capacities through development, continue to increase investment in national security, strive to transform national strength into policy tools, promote

¹ Chen Wenqing, "Coordinate Development and Security to Fortifying National Security Defense," *People's Daily*, December 31, 2020.

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the modernization of its national security system and capacities, and enrich and improve its “toolkit of national security policies.” Simultaneously, China should seek to create a security environment conducive to economic and social development, consider security in the course of development, and work toward creating a pattern that security is safeguarded in development and development is promoted by security, to achieve more secure development.

Fourth, it is important to keep in mind the “two big pictures” and stick to the paths of peaceful development and national security with Chinese characteristics. Throughout the century-old history of the CPC, China has unswervingly followed the path of peaceful development and pursued a national defense policy of active defense, while seeking no hegemony, expansion, or sphere of influence. Once a victim of bullying by foreign powers and hegemonism, China values sovereignty, independence, fairness, and justice, always adhering to the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence in handling its relations with other countries, forging partnerships rather than alliances, and actively practicing multilateralism. Today, faced with the drastic changes unseen in a century, China remains committed to cooperation, innovation, the rule of law, and win-win results, and promotes a vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable global security, which transcends the traditional zero-sum thinking and Western traditional security theories. China opposes forming exclusive groups, rejects a new Cold War or great-power confrontations, and wishes to unite all forces possible to jointly uphold a fair and equitable international order. Presently, China is expanding shared interests with other countries through a new round of reform and opening-up and through increased participation in multilateral mechanisms. China seeks to achieve common security through joint development and governance by taking an active part in global and regional security governance and working with other countries to build a human community with a shared future that provides security for all. By adhering to a holistic approach to national security and the path of national security with Chinese characteristics, the CPC has demonstrated to the world the direction of China’s development as it becomes a stronger country. Under the leadership of the CPC, the Chinese nation, reborn from the hundred years of national humiliation, will not lose its original aspiration in the face of headwinds and undercurrents. Nor will it compromise

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or retreat under complex pressures and difficulties. China will surely break the waves and sail out for its journey ahead in the course of peaceful development. Coordinating security and development, China will win the great struggle with many new contemporary features and arrive victoriously at the destination of its national rejuvenation.