

## **Strategic Thinking on the Path of National Security with Chinese Characteristics**

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**Abstract:** General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee Xi Jinping has creatively put forward a holistic approach to national security and the path of national security with Chinese characteristics, which are synergistic and inseparable. Compared with other major global powers, China is embarking on a path of national security that incorporates distinctive Chinese characteristics. Unlike the United States, which seeks international expansion and hegemony while pursuing national security, China is dedicated to maintaining global security and building a community with a shared future for humanity. Unlike Russia, which prioritizes national security over everything else, China places greater emphasis on balancing development and security. Unlike Europe and Japan, which entrust their national security to other countries, China has always adhered to the principle of independence and self-reliance. An essential feature of the path of national security with Chinese characteristics is that it upholds the unity of the people's security, political security, and the supremacy of national interests. Moreover, China will remain committed to peaceful development while defending its interests. China will continue to balance development and security imperatives, maintaining an independent foreign policy while building a community with a shared future for humanity. To make solid strides on the path of national security with Chinese characteristics, the fundamental task will be pursuing a holistic approach to national security and implementing the Ten Upholds.

**Keywords:** holistic approach to national security, path of national security with Chinese characteristics, national security strategy

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On December 11, 2020, while presiding over the 26th group study session of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward ten requirements for strengthening national security work, that is, the Ten Upholds. Among the Ten Upholds, “upholding the path of national security with Chinese characteristics” ranked second only to “upholding the Party’s absolute leadership over national security work.” This fully articulates the special importance of such a path in the theoretical and ideological system of a holistic approach to national security. What exactly does “the path of national security with Chinese characteristics” mean? What are the fundamental differences between it and the national security paths of other major global powers? What is its relationship with a holistic approach to national security? How should we forge ahead on the path of national security with Chinese characteristics at the current stage? This paper offers some preliminary strategic thinking on the abovementioned questions.

### **Path of National Security with Chinese Characteristics and Its Development**

The path of national security with Chinese characteristics, as an important component of the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, is integral to the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. It was officially introduced at the first meeting of the National Security Commission (NSC) of the CPC Central Committee on April 15, 2014, when General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed in his speech:

At present, 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. Therefore, we must pursue a holistic approach to national security, take the people’s security as our ultimate goal, achieve political security as our fundamental task, regard economic security as our foundation, with military, cultural and social security as means of guarantee, and promote international security so as to pioneer a path

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of national security with Chinese characteristics.<sup>1</sup>

Here, two concepts arose: a holistic approach to national security and the path of national security with Chinese characteristics. These two concepts are synergistic and inseparable. In a certain sense, they are interchangeable: a holistic approach to national security is the path of national security with Chinese characteristics, and vice versa. More precisely, a holistic approach to national security provides ideological and theoretical guidance for the path of national security with Chinese characteristics, while the path of national security with Chinese characteristics exemplifies the practice of a holistic approach to national security.

Such an ideological and theoretical system (or path) contains Five Key Elements, namely, the people's security as our ultimate goal, political security as our fundamental task, economic security as our foundation, military, cultural, and social security as means of guarantee, and international security we promote. In addition, pursuing a holistic approach to national security and following the path of national security with Chinese characteristics demand handling Five Relationships appropriately, i.e., the relationships between internal and external security, between homeland security and the security of citizens, between traditional and non-traditional security issues, between development and security imperatives, and between China's security and the common security of the world. The Five Key Elements and the Five Relationships discussed above embody the "holism" of a holistic approach to national security and the "characteristics" of the path of national security with Chinese characteristics. In sum, the Five Key Elements and the Five Relationships jointly constitute the core of a holistic approach to national security.

Thereafter, a holistic approach to national security has become the ideological and theoretical guide for China's national security work in the new era, constantly enriched and improved over time.<sup>2</sup> The theoretical system

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<sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping, "Pursue a Holistic Approach to National Security and Adhere to the Path of National Security with Chinese Characteristics," *People's Daily*, April 16, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Chen Wenqing, "Firmly Cement the Guiding Role of a Holistic Approach to National Security in National Security Work in the New Era," *Qiushi*, 2019, No. 8, 18–25.

of a holistic approach to national security is increasingly mature, such that the 19th CPC National Congress confirmed in 2017 that “pursuing a holistic approach to national security” is a basic policy that underpins the Party’s endeavors to uphold and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. Furthermore, the Congress approved the incorporation of a holistic approach to national security into the Party Constitution, making it the will of the Party and the country. Moreover, the first meeting of the NSC of the 19th CPC Central Committee stressed the need to uphold the unity of the people’s security, political security, and the supremacy of national interests, significantly advancing the theory of a holistic approach to national security. Later, the fourth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee kept up with the times by adding “scientific and technological security” to the “means of guarantee,” that is, we will now take “military, scientific, technological, cultural, and social security as means of guarantee.” Such an expansion foregrounds the importance of scientific and technological security for the safeguarding of national security. Most recently, the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee historically gave equal emphasis to development and security. Hence, balancing development and security becomes the guiding principle for socioeconomic development in the 14th Five-Year Plan period. China vows to pursue both security and development in every dimension and throughout the entire process of its development. This decision marks a landmark in China’s national security work and the history of its development. During this period, the security issues that a holistic approach to national security covers expanded from originally 11 to presently 17.

However, during this period, the CPC Central Committee and Chinese government departments focused on a holistic approach to national security, devoting far less discussion to the path of national security with Chinese characteristics. Consequently, pursuing a holistic approach to national security has gained traction, whereas adhering to the path of national security with Chinese characteristics has not received enough attention. Relevant theoretical discussion and practical exploration fall short of progressing with the times, as in the case of a holistic approach to national security. The Chinese academic community has achieved many research outcomes on the path of national security with Chinese characteristics, which, however, mainly concentrate on

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a holistic approach to national security. The studies on the path of national security with Chinese characteristics *per se* remain preliminary or rather superficial, failing to go further.

A main reason is that, as mentioned above, the path of national security with Chinese characteristics and a holistic approach to national security are indivisible—they are inter-replaceable and interchangeable. Theoretically, the enrichment and improvement of a holistic approach to national security imply the maturation of the path of national security with Chinese characteristics. Many discussions to date have lacked a thorough understanding of the distinctions between the two. The second reason is that the path of national security with Chinese characteristics is more practice based. The success of the path depends on the perfection of the theory. Therefore, a time lag exists between the theoretical development of a holistic approach to national security and the summarization of the path of national security with Chinese characteristics, which is the objective reality.

On December 11, 2020, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee held the 26th group study session to strengthen national security work, which is unprecedented in the history of the Party. While presiding over the session, General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward the Ten Upholds, which comprehensively review the theoretical development of a holistic approach to national security since the Party's 18th National Congress and mark the formal establishment of the ideological and theoretical system of a holistic approach to national security.<sup>1</sup> Among the Ten Upholds, “upholding the path of national security with Chinese characteristics” was ranked second. Furthermore, on November 11, 2021, the sixth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee adopted the Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century. The Resolution highlighted “safeguarding national security” as one of the

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<sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping, “Adhere to Systematic Thinking in Building a Holistic National Security Architecture to Provide a Strong Guarantee for Building a Modern Socialist China,” *People's Daily*, December 13, 2020.

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13 major achievements of the Party since the 18th National Congress.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, the Five Relationships summarized in 2014 were elevated into Five Balances, i.e., balancing development and security, balancing opening up and security, balancing traditional and non-traditional security issues, balancing China's security and the common security of the world, and balancing safeguarding national security and creating conditions conducive to it. Such an evolvement—from the Five Key Elements and Five Relationships in 2014 to the Ten Upholds in 2020 and then to the Five Balances in 2021—proves that a holistic approach to national security is a constantly enriched, substantiated, and ameliorated ideological and theoretical system. It covers a broad range of issues, characterized by deep thinking and strict logic. Particularly, the Ten Upholds specifically stressed that the path of national security with Chinese characteristics must be upheld, which indicates that after years of theoretical and practical explorations, this path is maturing at the same pace as a holistic approach to national security. The formation of a national security theory with Chinese characteristics (i.e., a holistic approach to national security) and the maturation of the path of national security with Chinese characteristics symbolize that the “National Security Chapter” of the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era has been written. Thus, Xi Jinping's thought on national security is now formally in place.<sup>2</sup>

### **Distinctive Features of the Path of National Security with Chinese Characteristics**

Safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity, maintaining social stability, and sustaining economic development are common tasks facing all countries in terms of national security. However, given the vast differences in national conditions and goals, various national security paths

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<sup>1</sup> “Resolution of the CPC Central Committee on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century,” *People's Daily*, November 16, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Yuan Peng, “Strategic Thinking on the Theoretical System of a Holistic Approach to National Security,” *Contemporary International Relations*, No. 7 (2021): 2.

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exist worldwide, each with its own distinct characteristics. The path of national security with Chinese characteristics is based upon the historical, cultural traditions and sociopolitical systems of China, resulting from the persistent exploration and innovation in practice while inheriting New China's national security theories, learning from other major countries' best practices in terms of safeguarding national security, and fully harnessing China's comparative advantages. Therefore, to fully understand what exactly the path of national security with Chinese characteristics is, we should first clarify what it is not.

First, the path of national security with Chinese characteristics differs from the national security path of the United States, which is typified by distinct comprehensiveness, aggressiveness, and selfishness. The comprehensiveness of the United States national security path manifests in its ability to safeguard national security in an all-time, all-space, and all-weather manner. The United States can conduct operations against rivals or enemies in almost every part of the globe. The aggressiveness of the United States is even more visible, as evidenced by its proclivity to pursue absolute security at the expense of other countries' security. The United States strives to ensure homeland security by "engaging the enemy outside its border." Thus, it either transforms its opponents through such diplomatic means as exporting democracy, suppresses its opponents through such economic means as long-arm jurisdiction, disturbs its opponents through such intelligence means as the Five Eyes alliance, subverts its opponents through such political means as color revolutions, or eliminates its opponents through such military means as preemptive moves. Fundamentally, the United States will go to extreme lengths to safeguard its national security. Last, the selfishness of the United States is illustrated in its repeated practice of pursuing self-interests at the expense of the interests of other countries and turning a blind eye to the existing international order when necessary. George W. Bush declaring war on Iraq on the grounds of a tiny vial of "washing powder," Donald Trump pulling out of international organizations and agreements at will, and Joe Biden making a hasty military withdrawal from Afghanistan are all examples that highlight the selfishness of the United States in safeguarding national security. As a result, the United States sows the seeds of trouble for which the rest of the world must pay a price. Fundamentally, the triad of the abovementioned features that characterize the national security

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path of the United States stems from its goal in pursuing national security—to maintain American hegemony globally—and is driven by the nature of a hegemonic country. Importantly, the United States budget for national defense exceeds US\$700 billion per annum, its intelligence spending exceeds US\$80 billion, and it has over 800 military bases overseas. The unmatched strength of the United States has afforded it strategic means that no other countries possess to safeguard national security or to create conditions conducive to it. Furthermore, numerous think tanks in the United States are dedicated to serving the country's national security; the United States has established relatively mature and fully fledged legal and policy-making systems for safeguarding national security. All these have enriched the strategic toolkit at the disposal of the United States.

In comparison, China lacks the overall strength of the United States. China's economic aggregate is fast approaching that of the United States, and its military and technological strength has increased significantly. However, a significant gap remains between China and the United States in terms of the capability to safeguard national security. More significantly, the fundamental goal of China in pursuing national security is to rejuvenate the Chinese nation and build a community with a shared future for humanity, rather than to seek global expansion and world hegemony. By realizing national rejuvenation, China aims to deliver a better life for its people and make the country prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful; it does not have the purpose of overtaking other countries, the United States included. Implementing the national rejuvenation strategy within the wider context of once-in-a-century global changes, China has developed an accurate understanding of history, always kept in mind the larger interests, and been fully aware of its role. It promotes global security that is common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable, advocates extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits in global governance, and encourages efforts to foster a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation. China pursues its own security while maintaining global security, emphasizes win-win cooperation, and promotes the building of a community with a shared future for humanity. This is what fundamentally distinguishes the path of national security with Chinese

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characteristics from the national security path of the United States.

Second, the path of national security with Chinese characteristics differs from the national security path of Russia. One of the key features of Russia's approach to national security has been the precedence of national security over everything else. President Putin has constantly insisted the supremacy of Russia's national security, emphasizing that the interests of development should be subordinate to those of national security and that maintaining national security should be the top strategic priority. Such a stance originates from the subjective sense of insecurity brought about by the unique geographical environment of Russia, a large but sparsely populated country that lacks strategic barriers. It is also the result of the objective threats from the United States, which, boasting of having won the Cold War without engaging in actual combat operations, has continuously pressed Russia's strategic space through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the eastern enlargement of the European Union (EU), and a series of color revolutions. Furthermore, it reflects the painful historical memories of and the special historical lessons learned from the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as well as a sense of crisis created by emergent challenges confronting Russia's national security ranging from climate change and energy transition to scientific and technological revolution. In consequence, Russia is more sensitive to national security issues and outperforms many other countries in terms of the resolve and will—manifested in the amount and intensity of the efforts it is willing to invest—to defend national security, which is sometimes incomprehensible to the rest of the world. Conceptually, Russia emphasizes “grand” and “absolute” security, showing great resolve in defending its geopolitical “buffer zones” and drawing red lines in negotiations with the United States, the EU, and the NATO. Legislatively, Russia stresses the use of legal weapons to prevent and punish extremism, separatism, and terrorism and guard against foreign interference. One excellent example in this respect is its national security strategy, which, as “the mother of all strategies,” is a “basic strategic planning document” that defines Russia's priority policies in various areas. In terms of mechanisms, the Security Council of the Russian Federation is directly chaired and led by the president; it has special roles and strong influences; its permanent members convene weekly. In terms of capabilities, Russia has long maintained a million active military

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personnel; its militarization rate is actually quite rare in the world; Russia today spends roughly 4.3% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on the military, a rate higher than those of all NATO countries and second only to that of Israel (a country facing an extremely adverse environment in terms of geopolitical security); the past decade witnessed an increase of as much as 26% in Russia's military budget despite the constant decrease in the real income of Russian citizens and a sluggish GDP growth of less than 2%. In terms of means, Russia has no scruples about flexing its military muscles or going to war; military operations have never been the last option in its strategic decision making. Russia has successively sent troops to Georgia, eastern Ukraine, and Syria in recent years. For example, Russian troops arrived in Kazakhstan in early 2022 as part of the wider Collective Security Treaty Organization effort to stop the unrest there. Another example is the country's unexpected decision to launch a military operation against Ukraine. Meanwhile, Russia has been persistently advancing the modernization of its military forces and actively researching, developing, and applying cutting-edge weaponries to increase its asymmetrical combat advantages.

China is equally firm with respect to the resolve and will to safeguard national security. However, due to differences in history, culture, and tradition and the basic dimension of the Chinese context that it is the world's largest developing country, China does not pursue absolute national security. Instead, it lays stress on balancing development and security and elevating its composite national strength to see that its people will have a greater sense of gains, happiness, and security. China takes into full consideration its interests related to development while defending those related to national security. The path of national security with Chinese characteristics takes the people's security as its ultimate goal to provide security safeguard for delivering a better life to its people. Regarding its national unity, China will uphold the principle of "peaceful reunification," but will not abandon the use of force as a final resort.

Third, the path of national security with Chinese characteristics differs from the national security paths of Europe and Japan. One of the common characteristics of Europe and Japan has been the reliance of their national security on other countries, resulting in a lack of necessary strategic autonomy. Take Japan for example, after its defeat in World War II, the United States-led

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demilitarization policy fell short of completely eradicating the Japanese strategic culture that “seeks survival by force.” However, confined by the postwar constitution, Japan’s military and security strength is dominated and controlled by the United States in its entirety. Despite the great achievements made in such areas as economy, science, and technology, Japan remains attached to the United States in terms of national security. In the case of Europe, it also heavily relies on the United States for security. On the one hand, the United States has been clutching the reins of European security. The Commander of the United States European Command concurrently serves as NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). The SACEUR, which is responsible for the planning and execution of all NATO military operations, has always been held by a United States general. Furthermore, the number of United States troops in Europe exceeds 60,000; there exist 287 United States military bases in Europe, 119 in Germany alone; an estimated 100 United States-owned nuclear weapons are stored in five NATO member states across six bases, namely, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Turkey. The joint declaration issued by the 2018 NATO summit affirmed, “NATO’s nuclear deterrence posture also relies on United States’ nuclear weapons forward-deployed in Europe.” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said he saw no need for new structures related to European defense strategy. Instead, he believes, “What is needed is more capabilities.” Thus, the United States has a special right of veto concerning the security building of Europe. On the other hand, Europe has been accustomed to relying on the United States for security and, therefore, faltering and wavering in independently solving security challenges. In recent decades, given the security protection from the United States, Europe enjoyed the dividends of development in terms of being able to focus on development and consequently distribute welfare among citizens. Naturally, Europeans are reluctant to invest in defense. Unsurprisingly, Europe’s defense spending has been on a constant decline since the end of the Cold War, never exceeding the “2% of GDP” NATO guideline after 1993. In 2020, the defense spending of the 27 NATO countries in Europe aggregated US\$273.6 billion, only one-third that of the United States. Under intense pressure from the United States to increase its military budget, Germany declared that it would reach a NATO defense-spending target by 2031. Europe is seriously disunited in the defense

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market, which has severely weakened its competitiveness. Europe relies heavily on United States military equipment, such as high-altitude early warning and reconnaissance, aerial refueling and transportation, and drones. The United States military played a decisive role in NATO military operations, including the air strikes in former Yugoslavia and the war in Libya. A prime example is what happened to advanced fighter aircraft: after disagreements over the development of fourth-generation jet fighters, the United Kingdom (UK), France, and Germany split up, costing Europe many years of delay before having fourth-generation jet fighters. Collectively, European countries are absent from the fifth-generation stealth jet fighters. Currently, 10 out of the 18 jet fighters on HMS Queen Elizabeth, the UK Carrier, belong to the United States Marine Corps. An even more serious problem confronting Europe is its deep-rooted psychological reliance on the United States. For example, when the Trump administration declared plans in 2020 to withdraw some of the United States troops stationed in Germany, central and eastern European countries cheered with enthusiasm—Poland and Latvia successively expressed hopes that the troops pulled out will end up in their countries. When Biden postponed the withdrawal plans, the Germans were so relieved that they said the presence of United States troops in Germany was in the countries’ mutual interest. Commenting on the suggestion of a European army, then German defense minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer stated, “EU security without US is an ‘illusion’.”

Relying on the United States for security causes dual effects for Europe. On the one hand, Europe can invest more resources in development. Consequently, European countries have the most generous welfare systems worldwide, giving birth to a series of leading philosophies concerning development and governance, such as pacifism and globalism. On the other hand, Europe’s development is extremely fragile and unsustainable. If anything goes wrong with European security, its development and stability will immediately suffer. In recent years, emerging crises related to terrorism, refugees, and Ukraine have successively occurred, highlighting the challenges confronting European security. Furthermore, the Trump-style leadership and the United States policies toward Europe have pushed the sense of crisis relating to European security to post-Cold-War highs. Caught between traditional security challenges, such as

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its relations with Russia, and non-traditional ones, such as climate change and terrorism, Europe is experiencing unprecedented levels of insecurity. Such a situation has fueled anti-globalization, populism, isolationism, and xenophobia, which mutually enhance and successively surge, taking a heavy toll on Europe's development. Faced with the global changes unseen in a century, Europeans, who traditionally prioritized development over security, have realized the importance of ensuring security through their own efforts and have begun to emphasize balancing development and security. However, shifting from extravagance to frugality is difficult. Europe is facing a future of uncertainty, which is exactly the most significant challenge to its security.

By comparison, China has always adhered to the principle of independence and self-reliance, keeping its destiny firmly in its own hands. Since the founding of the People's Republic, China has prioritized safeguarding its national sovereignty as the primary task to defend national security. Internationally, it has the courage to fight, firmly upholding its homeland and military security. China has independently built a modern industrial and defense system, enabling it to master frontier technologies and strategic weapons in its resolute struggle against hegemony and power politics. Thus, China defends its legitimate rights and interests.

## **Essence of the Path of National Security with Chinese Characteristics**

As aforementioned, the path of national security with Chinese characteristics differs from the national security paths of other global powers. Thus, the major features of such a path must be explored.

First, the path of national security with Chinese characteristics upholds the unity of political security, the people's security, and the supremacy of national interests. China views political security, the people's security, and national interests as a three-sphere integrated whole—i.e., the interests of the Party are highly aligned with those of the country and the people. As a Marxist party, the CPC, unlike previous political forces, has no special interests of its own to pursue. The CPC has always represented the fundamental interests of all Chinese people; it has never represented any individual interest group,

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power group, or privileged stratum.<sup>1</sup> Upholding its fundamental purpose of wholeheartedly serving the people, the CPC prioritizes the interests of the people and aligns its interests with those of the people at all times. Since its founding, the CPC has made “seeking happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation” its aspiration and mission. “This country is its people; the people are the country.” The people’s security provides a basis for political security, while maintaining political security equates to defending the people’s security. China is a people’s democratic dictatorship, implementing the system of people’s congresses, which ensures the people’s position as masters of the country. Therefore, the security interests of the people are highly aligned with the interests of the country. Over the past hundred years, the CPC, setting sail at the critical moment of national survival, has led the Chinese people in resolutely defending China’s national interests and constantly expanding the space for the Chinese nation to survive and develop. Under its leadership, China has achieved the tremendous transformation from standing up and growing prosperous to becoming strong. Historically, China has moved closer to the center of the world stage and the realization of its dream of national rejuvenation. Upholding the unity of political security, the people’s security, and the supremacy of national interests is the secret of this historical achievement, unchanged in different historical stages of the great endeavors of building socialism with Chinese characteristics. The leadership of the CPC is the most essential attribute of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the greatest strength of this system. Since the founding of New China, certain Western countries have never discontinued their hostility against China due to the nature of its regime. Neither have they ceased their concern over China’s development model. Nor have they abandoned their attempt to westernize and polarize China through peaceful evolution. At the height of the China–US trade war, a few anti-China politicians in the United States intensified efforts to slander the CPC, attempting to divide the Party from the Chinese people or from the country. These acts are doomed to fail, for they ignore the unity of political security, the people’s security, and the supremacy of national interests in China.

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<sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping, “Speech at a Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China,” *Qiushi*, 2021, No. 14, 9.

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More importantly, the CPC has attached great importance to and has been firm in safeguarding China's national security. Putting national interests first, safeguarding the people's security as its ultimate goal, and maintaining political security as its fundamental task, the CPC has been ready to protect against potential dangers even in times of peace. With the deepening of the global changes unseen in a century and the intensification of the strategic competition between China and the United States, the West, headed by the United States, increasingly concentrates assault on China's ideology and systems. Therefore, upholding Comrade Xi Jinping's core position on the Party Central Committee and in the Party as a whole and upholding the Party's leadership are equivalent to safeguarding the fundamental interests of all Chinese people and defending China's national interests. In this sense, ensuring the Two Upholds and the Two Establishments in China is of greater strategic significance for safeguarding national security than at any time in the country's history.

Second, the path of national security with Chinese characteristics pursues peaceful development while standing firm for China's national interests. Among the current global powers, China is the one that most proactively and most categorically commits itself toward peaceful development. This is a strategic choice the CPC has made in keeping with the trend of the times and based on the fundamental interests of China, after years of hard explorations and efforts since the founding of the People's Republic, especially since the beginning of reform and opening up. Following a path of peaceful development, China strives to independently build socialism with Chinese characteristics while integrating with—instead of decoupling from—economic globalization. This is neither diplomatic rhetoric nor a policy of expediency. It is a conclusion drawn from the objective assessments of China's history, reality, and future. It reflects the nation's self-confidence and conscientious behavior, which derive from the legacy of the Chinese civilization, a clear understanding of China's development goals and conditions, a good grasp of global trends, and the successful explorations and practices of China since 1949. As a Chinese saying goes, "A warlike country, however big it might be, is bound to perish." With its millennia-old traditional culture that values peace and harmony, China does not subscribe to the notion that a country is bound to seek hegemony when it grows in strength. Contrarily, China is fully aware that a country that seeks

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hegemony is bound to decline. China is rising, not by engaging in aggression, expansion, or colonial plunder, but by keeping pace with the underlying trends of the world featuring peace and development and by actively participating in globalization. China's rise is achieved on the basis of its long-term economic development and social stability and through the hard work of its 1.4 billion industrious and talented people. China has made a solemn commitment to the international community that it will never seek hegemony or expansion. Looking back at history, China realizes that those who launched aggression or sought expansion by force all ended in failure. This is a law of history. Meanwhile, China understands that its pursuit of peaceful development will not be easy. Rather, whether it will succeed in this pursuit hinges on the following three conditions. First, whether we can turn opportunities elsewhere into China's opportunities and China's opportunities into those for the rest of the world. Only by realizing the interchangeability of these opportunities can China attain peaceful development. In the phase of "growing prosperous," China emphasized maintaining the strategic opportunities for its development while pursuing the path of peaceful development. Now, in the phase of "becoming strong," China should attach greater importance to proactively shaping its strategic opportunities. Second, "China pursuing the path of peaceful development" should not be deemed a pretext for any country to violate China's sovereignty and territorial integrity or undermine its national interests. "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 bitter fruit that undermines China's sovereignty, security, or development interests."<sup>1</sup> Third, "China is pursuing peaceful development, and so are other countries. This is the sure way for all the countries in the world to seek common development and peaceful coexistence."<sup>2</sup> The abovementioned three conditions have rendered China's theory of the path of peaceful development more systematic and complete, representing an important theoretical innovation by General Secretary Xi

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<sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping, "Keep in Mind Both Domestic and International Situations to Strengthen the Foundation for Pursuing Peaceful Development," *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* (Volume I) (Foreign Languages Press, 2014), 249.

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Jinping since the Party's 18th National Congress by adopting a dialectical and systematic approach to thinking and remaining mindful of the worst possible scenarios. Therefore, sticking to the path of peaceful development is not only an important component of Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy, but also integral to the path of national security with Chinese characteristics for the new era.

Third, the path of national security with Chinese characteristics balances development and security. "Security is a precondition of development, while development offers the guarantee for security." Development and security, which resemble two wheels of the same cart or two wings of the same bird, underpin and reinforce each other. Development is the only path to elevating national security capabilities, while security provides critical support and guarantee for sustainable development. In the absence of security, all development achievements may disappear overnight.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, development holds the key to and is the foundation for resolving China's current problems. To effectively tackle all the pressing problems and prevent all the potential risks we face in advancing our great cause in the new era, the ultimate solution will depend on development. Only by promoting steady and healthy economic development can we strengthen the material basis for the prosperity of our country, the happiness of our people, and the harmony and stability of our society. On the other hand, national security and social stability are essential prerequisites for innovative, coordinated, green, open, and shared development. Ultimately, development is impossible without security and stability. China has made glorious achievements over the past 70 years. In the phase of "standing up," we believed that "a war must be fought to deter invasion," resolutely defended China's national security, and successfully achieved breakthroughs in such key areas concerning China's strategic security as the "Two Bombs and One Satellite" project. Meanwhile, we emphasized the coordinated development of the economy and national defense, laying a solid foundation for China's industrial development. A series of achievements we obtained in this phase created conditions for the economic boom of the next phase when China grew prosperous. In the phase of "growing prosperous,"

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<sup>1</sup> Chen Wenqing, "Vividly Apply and Constantly Develop a Holistic Approach to National Security—Carefully Study and Put into Practice General Secretary Xi Jinping's Major Expositions on COVID-19 Response," *Qiushi*, 2020, No. 8, 42–49.

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we put economic development front and center by striking a balance between reform, development, and stability, which enabled us to steadily build economy- and technology-centered composite strength and constantly enhance our ability to safeguard China's national security. All these offered an excellent foundation for us to utilize our strength to create conditions conducive to national security in the "becoming strong" phase. Meanwhile, we forestalled and foiled all Western attempts to westernize and polarize China, stood the test of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the drastic changes in eastern Europe in 1989, and creatively resolved the questions of Hong Kong and Macao by adopting the "One Country, Two Systems" policy. We handled a series of international emergencies that had a bearing on China's sovereignty and security with confidence and resilience, defeated various major risks that arose in the political and economic fields or from nature, and created "dual miracles," i.e., maintaining rapid economic growth while sustaining lasting social stability. In the phase of "becoming strong," we balance development and security in a more active and more explicit manner, making it a guiding principle for China's socioeconomic development. Giving equal importance to development and security demands, on the one hand, making good use of the fruits of development to increase the strength for safeguarding national security while, on the other hand, redoubling efforts to prevent and defuse major risks to create a security environment favorable for socioeconomic development. This makes a significant theoretical contribution to New China's governance thoughts. Moreover, we balance opening up and security. Faced with strengthening external headwinds and an increasingly complex and challenging security environment, China, by seizing the initiative on every occasion, has won a series of battles—the one against absolute poverty, the one against the spread of COVID-19, the one to safeguard national security in the Hong Kong SAR, and the one to maintain stability on Chinese financial markets—and the trade war with the United States. China has solved many tough problems that were long on the agenda but never resolved and accomplished many things that were wanted but never got done, thereby winning strategic initiatives in its response to the global changes unseen in a century, further expanding its development space, and obtaining new historical opportunities for its development.

Fourth, the path of national security with Chinese characteristics gives

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equal importance to upholding an independent foreign policy and building a community with a shared future for humanity. New China was born from a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. The past sufferings have taught the Chinese people the value of national independence. Therefore, defending the people's democratic dictatorship has always been a central task to safeguard national security. China values its right to freely choose its development path and strongly opposes acts that impose one's will on others or interfere in the internal affairs of others. The Chinese people are also aware that "one cannot rely on others or beg for a better life" and "development is the hard truth." Economically, we have always adhered to the principle of self-reliance. By steadfastly building an independent industrial system and developing cutting-edge frontier technologies, we have ensured that the lifelines of the Chinese economy that are vital to national security remain firmly in our hands. Politically, we follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, adapting Marxism to the Chinese context. Diplomatically, we advocate "putting the house in order before inviting guests," develop friendly relations with all countries based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, pursue partnership without alliance, uphold China's national interests, principles, and stances in handling international affairs, and firmly oppose any form of hegemony and power politics. Whether in good times or bad, China has never exported its problems, nor has China played the blame game in the face of intractable domestic problems. China has grown in strength, not by imposing its will on others, plundering the wealth of others, or committing colonial expansion and external aggression. Instead, China has managed to blaze a path with distinctive characteristics that can effectively safeguard its national security with full awareness of its responsibilities given that "every man shall bear his own burden" and in a spirit of exploration that can be described as "crossing the river by feeling for stones." Presently, China has become the world's largest industrialized country, the only country to obtain all the industrial categories listed in the United Nations industrial classification, and the main engine driving global economic growth. China has been the vanguard of the world's science and technology revolution, moving closer to the center of the world stage and providing valuable experience for other

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countries in terms of independently safeguarding national security.<sup>1</sup> Following an independent foreign policy, China does not pursue isolationism, nor will it opt to close its door to the world. China's independent foreign policy works because it appropriately balances China's security and the common security of the world. "No country can maintain absolute security by its own efforts only. Neither can any country achieve stability by destabilizing other countries. The law of the jungle leaves the weak at the mercy of the strong; it is not the way for countries to conduct their relations. Those who adopt the self-serving approach of using force will find that they are shooting themselves in the foot."<sup>2</sup> Since 1949, China has always embraced the world with open arms and has pursued cooperation with all friendly countries. China has neither started a single war or conflict, nor occupied an inch of any other country's land. Since the beginning of reform and opening up, China has implemented the "bring in" and "go global" strategies. Learning from the outside world, China has promoted world peace and development through its own development and expanded common interests through common development, thus contributing to the common security of the world. Entering a new era and faced with an international order filled with turbulence due to once-in-a-century global changes, China encourages all to reject the zero-sum mentality, advocates "security should be universal" and all countries should pursue national security through common security, and opposes the unilateral practices of seeking one's own security regardless of others' security concerns. Fundamentally, China has followed the principles of peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit, advocated a new model of global governance in the process of jointly pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and actively participated in defusing major international and regional flashpoints. Furthermore, China has encouraged efforts to foster a new type of international relations, calling for a concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable global security and proposing building a global community of shared future, with the goal

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<sup>1</sup> State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, "China and the World in the New Era," *People's Daily*, September 28, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Xi Jinping, "A New Partnership of Mutual Benefit and a Community of Shared Future," *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* (Volume II) (Foreign Languages Press, 2017), 523.

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of creating an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity. To quote a Chinese saying, “When impoverished, they cultivated their own goodness in solitude. When successful, they devoted themselves to encouraging the goodness of everyone in the world.” China’s practices are in stark contrast to those of some Western countries that always put their own interests first, create regional chaos, and withdraw when they should have stayed. Thus, sharp differences exist between the path of national security with Chinese characteristics and the national security paths of other global powers.

### **Adhere to the Path of National Security with Chinese Characteristics**

Presently, the most important thing to do in following the path of national security with Chinese characteristics is to pursue a holistic approach to national security and implement the Ten Upholds in the safeguarding of China’s national security. Particularly, the following objectives must be obtained.

First, firmly implement the system of Chairman of the NSC assuming overall responsibility over the work of the Commission and effectively strengthen the centralized, unified leadership of the Party Central Committee, with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, over national security. We must ensure that the Party Central Committee fully exerts its role in providing overall leadership. Moreover, we should fully leverage the institutional strengths of the Party organizations that come from being able to mobilize resources—across the nation and down to grassroots level—to accomplish major undertakings, surmount challenges, and tackle emergencies. We should constantly improve the leadership system for national security, which is centralized, unified, authoritative, and highly efficient, and strengthen the coordination mechanism for national security work in key areas and projects as well as the command system for national security. At the top level, we should increase overall policy planning and coordination, strengthening the command and supervision mechanisms over policy implementation under the guidance of a holistic approach to national security. We must, based on China’s national conditions and in light of changing times and the strategic environment, constantly

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ameliorate our legislation for safeguarding national security and continuously improve the legal system of national security with Chinese characteristics that is efficiently functioning thanks to its coordinated contents, strict procedures, and perfect supporting measures. We should follow the guidance of the National Security Strategy (2021–2025) that has been reviewed and approved by the Party Central Committee in our implementation of relevant policies to further improve such systems and mechanisms as national security risk assessment and early warning mechanism, national security review and supervision system, national security crisis management and control mechanism, national emergency management mechanism, and national security comprehensive support system. Doing so will help more effectively lengthen our “short boards” and secure our “base boards.”<sup>1</sup> At the middle level, we should promote the modernization of China’s national security system and capacity with selecting and training officials as the initial step; handle all matters according to law; strengthen efforts to raise awareness of national security, awareness of services, and sense of responsibility among officials at all levels; ensure officials perform their duty of leadership in national security work, take protecting the people’s security as their mission, and live up to their responsibilities. Thus, we can constantly improve our capacities to prevent and defuse risks and handle security emergencies. At the grassroots level, we should fully leverage the strengths of the Party organizations stemming from the Party’s mass line and inspire public awareness of national security by developing the publicity and education system on national security, particularly by building the newly launched first-level discipline of national security studies. Thus, we can ensure that a holistic approach to national security takes root in people’s minds and the defense line that relies on the people to safeguard security in various areas strengthens.

Second, grasp the core and essence of “balance,” that is, better incorporate the notion of “balancing development and security” into the whole process and all aspects of the work of the Party and the country in a dynamic equilibrium. Balancing development and security is not only a major strategic thinking

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<sup>1</sup> Tian Peiyan, “Strengthen National Security System and Capacity Building,” *Dang Jian Yan Jiu*, No. 1 (2022): 5.

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and a vital strategic planning, but also an important strategic tool. It requires “careful studying” to develop an accurate grasp of the essence of balancing development and security and cement the ideological foundation for security and development and “putting into practice,” i.e., pushing forward development and security through systematic and strategic planning. The fundamental task of the path of national security with Chinese characteristics is to facilitate the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, in the final analysis, hinges on China’s own development. Balancing development and security, in essence, is intended for safer and higher-quality development; the ultimate purpose is to take timely measures to detect and defuse major risks and potential dangers arising during the development and resolve the serious security threats that hinder development to facilitate faster and better development. Balancing development and security demands adapting to the changing times and tailoring policies to local conditions, such that concrete analyses can be made of specific problems. A one-size-fits-all approach must be avoided. If we pursue biased policies, we are prone to gaining in one area and losing in another. Balancing development and security should not be understood in purely mechanical terms. Instead, we should distinguish between different times, areas, and regions and adopt an approach of “supplementing what we are short of,” with specific focus to achieve a dynamic balance in the process of dynamic adjustments. At the current stage, China’s development is creating a fast-growing demand for security, whereas its national security capacities and awareness are lagging, resulting in an even more conspicuous contradiction. We should attach greater importance to non-traditional security fields ranging from biology, ecology, the outer space, and the deep sea to the polar regions, enhancing our capabilities to prevent and defuse emergent risks. To balance development and security, a pressing task confronting China is to address its inadequacies related to security, such that its ability can effectively increase to safeguard national security and create conditions conducive to it. We should follow the guidance of a holistic approach to national security in encouraging all departments and sectors to adapt to the new developments, tasks, and requirements in the realm of national security in the new era. We must foster strategic consensus and awareness regarding fully strengthening national security. Such consensus and awareness will constitute the ideological

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foundation for our transition from the first to the second centenary goal and for our pursuit of the path of national security with Chinese characteristics in the phase of “becoming strong.”<sup>1</sup>

Third, adhere to “holistic” thinking and a “big” security concept to make our work increasingly systematic and effectively safeguard national security in key areas by building a new security architecture in line with the new development paradigm. A holistic approach to national security is the ideological embodiment of the path of national security with Chinese characteristics. The core principle of such an approach is “holistic,” which requires us to view various elements of national security as an organic whole that is “pluralistic but integrated.” We should observe and understand all types of risks that might affect China’s national security within the wider context of once-in-a-century global changes and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Moreover, we should bear in mind the new situation, where various risks and contradictions are closely intertwined, jointly resonating, and mutually interchangeable and security threats are increasingly diversified, when reflecting on and dealing with national security work in key areas. We should perceive not only the differences between various risks, but also the linkage and interchange mechanisms between them; be able not only to address various security threats and safeguard national security, but also to foresee all types of security risks and create conditions conducive to national security. Particularly, we must prevent small risks from evolving into big ones, individual ones into complex ones, partial ones into overall or systemic ones, and global ones into domestic ones. For a more systematic process, not only should we avoid a “synthesis fallacy”—the negative systemic effect caused by the overlapping of limitedly reasonable policies—and the tendency to take care of our responsibilities only, rather than share responsibilities in safeguarding national security, we should also avoid a “decomposition fallacy,” that is, to simply decompose and distribute tasks level by level. We must adapt to the new realities that require us to apply the new development philosophy and foster a new development pattern as China enters a new development stage. We must be more forward looking in national security

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<sup>1</sup> Yuan Peng, “Balance Both Development and Security in Building a Holistic National Security Architecture,” *Qizhi*, No. 2 (2021): 30.

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work, attaching greater importance to new national security frontiers originating from science and technology advancements. Moreover, we should enhance our capabilities to utilize science and technology in safeguarding national security, constantly ameliorate our ability to foster a favorable national security posture, and build a new security architecture commensurate with the new development paradigm, such that we can promote higher-quality development through a higher state of security.

Fourth, strike a better balance between following the path of peaceful development and safeguarding China's national security interests, as well as between China's security and the common security of the world, to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation while spearheading the building of a community with a shared future for humanity. The current intensifying strategic competition between China and the United States has increased the risks of a "new Cold War." Furthermore, a combination of the anti-globalization movement and the COVID-19 pandemic has brought globalization to a standstill. China now faces greater tests of its ability to pursue the path of peaceful development. Globally, we are entering a period of turbulence and change, but the trend of our times featuring peace and development has not changed. Moreover, the high-quality development of China will spearhead a fresh round of high-standard opening up. Therefore, the internal forces driving globalization remain strong. The accelerating arrival of the digital age, coupled with the diversification of global threats, has pushed countries all over the world closer together into a community with a shared future. In such circumstances, confrontations among major countries will not only undermine their own security interests, but also cause brand new risks to international security and global governance. Cooperative, collective, and common security is thus the only right choice to solve problems. We should promote global security, stay committed to the path of peaceful development, and actively build a new type of international relations and a community with a shared future for humanity. Strengthening international cooperation to broaden our "circle of friends" can help us stay at international moral heights. Therefore, we should ensure the BRI continues building momentum and producing concrete outcomes. We should strengthen practical cooperation with other countries in our region, facilitating security cooperation through development cooperation, resolving security

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challenges with development initiatives, and promoting traditional security governance with the help of non-traditional security cooperation. We must be brave and adept in carrying out our struggles and strive for common interests while standing firm for China's interests to enhance the interests and voices of the developing countries. We shall continue to promote a fairer and more open global governance system, cooperating with other developing countries to recalibrate the international political and economic order amid once-in-a-century global changes. More importantly, we shall realize the second centenary goal in the strategic stalemate with the United States.

As the poet Li Bai described, "With monkeys' sad adieus the riverbanks are loud; my skiff has left ten thousand mountains far away." China, with the CPC as its strong nucleus, as long as it remains committed to an independent foreign policy, maintains strategic focus in developing itself, balances development and security, and remains dedicated to serving while always relying on the people, will undoubtedly be able to make steady and sustained progress on the path of national security with Chinese characteristics. Ultimately, the dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will be realized.