

b. The CCP's Great-Periphery Strategy Aims to Exclude the US From the Asia-Pacific Region

What is the CCP's so-called Great Periphery Diplomacy? Party think tanks define it like this: "China neighbors fourteen countries along a lengthy land border, and looks across the sea at six other neighboring countries. Beyond that, to the east is the Asia-Pacific region, and to the west is Eurasia. That is, the radial extent of China's extended neighborhood covers two-thirds of international politics, economy, and security. Thus, the framework of periphery diplomacy is more than mere regional strategy. ... It is a true grand strategy." [8]

Australia Is the Weak Link of the Western World

In June 2017, Fairfax Media Limited and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation released the results of their five-month investigation, the documentary *Power and Influence: The Hard Edge of China's Soft Power*. The documentary raised concerns around the world by describing the CCP's widespread infiltration and control over Australian society. [9] Six months later, Sam Dastyari, a member of the Australian Labor Party, announced his resignation from the Senate. Dastyari's resignation followed accusations that he had accepted money from CCP-linked Chinese merchants for making statements in support of Beijing regarding South China Sea territorial disputes. His statements on this critical issue clashed with the views of his own party. [10]

In September 2016, Australia's SBS News published a news report revealing political donations by a Chinese businessman intended to

influence Australia-China trade policies. [11] Furthermore, in recent years, Chinese state-run media outlets have signed contracts with Australian media, allowing them to broadcast content provided by Chinese media to Australian audiences. [12]

In fact, as early as 2015, Australia allowed a Chinese company with close ties to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to secure a ninety-nine-year lease over the Port of Darwin. The seaport occupies an important military location for guarding against attack from the north. Richard Armitage, a former U.S. deputy secretary of state, said he was stunned by the deal, and that the United States was concerned about the development. [13]

In 2017, a book called *Silent Invasion: China's Influence in Australia*, by author Clive Hamilton was rejected three times by Australian publishers due to fear of Chinese repercussions. Finally, following much consideration, the third publisher agreed to publish it. The censorship elicited widespread concern among Australians about China's influence in their country. [14]

Many more wonder why China has directed so much effort to Australia. What is the military strategic value of the CCP infiltrating Australia and exerting control there?

In December 2017, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) stated in its report *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence* that the Chinese Communist Party is influencing and changing Australian politics and academia by means of bribery and infiltration for the main purpose of weakening the U.S.-Australia alliance. [15]

In its 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, the Australian government said: “The United States has been the dominant power in our region throughout Australia’s post-Second World War history. Today, China is challenging America’s position.” [16] Dr. Malcolm Davis, senior analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, said Beijing was trying to gain a strategic advantage in the Australian region to achieve its final goal of ending Australia’s alliance with the United States. [17]

Australia is the CCP regime’s testing ground for soft-power operations in its strategy of periphery diplomacy. [18] The CCP’s infiltration of Australia dates back to 2005, when Zhou Wenzhong, then deputy head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, arrived in Canberra and informed senior officials at the Chinese Embassy of the CCP’s new diplomatic approach. He said that the first goal of including Australia in China’s greater periphery is to ensure that Australia will serve as a trustworthy and stable supply base for China’s economic growth in the next twenty years. The long-term goal is to pry apart the U.S.-Australia alliance. The mission of those present at the meeting was to understand how the CCP could broadly exert influence over Australia in the spheres of economics, politics, and culture. [19]

The CCP regime uses its economic strength to force Australia to make concessions on a series of military issues and human rights affairs. The standard approach adopted by the CCP to coerce others into cooperation is to cultivate personal relationships via economic interests and simultaneously create the implicit threat of blackmail. [20]

After years of investigation, Clive Hamilton found that “Australia’s major institutions — from our schools, colleges and professional associations to our media; from professions of mining, farming and tourism to military assets of ports and electrical networks; from our local parliaments and state governments to our Canberra parties — are being infiltrated and transformed by a complicated control system under the supervision of CCP.” [21]

After the 2008 economic crisis, in practice, Australia has proven willing to serve as the CCP’s supply base due to the common belief that the CCP rescued Australia from the recession. Hamilton says that the reason the CCP’s infiltration and influence can be so effective in Australia is that Australians “have allowed it to happen right under our noses, because we are blinded by the belief that only China can guarantee our economic prosperity, and because we dare not stand up against Beijing’s bullying.” [22]

Despite awareness of the CCP’s infiltration and influence on Western society, and particularly the CCP’s infiltration and control of overseas Chinese communities, most well-meaning Westerners naively imagined initially that the main purpose of the Party’s strategies was “negative” — that is, to silence the voices of critics and those with different political opinions. However, Hamilton says that behind the “negative” operations are the CCP’s “positive” ambitions: to use ethnic Chinese immigrants to change the frame of Australian society, and to have Westerners sympathize with the CCP so as to allow Beijing to build up influence. In this way, Australia would be transformed into the CCP’s helper in becoming an Asian, then global superpower. [23]

Similarly, the CCP is extending its infiltration and control from Australia to New Zealand. Anne-Marie Brady, an expert in Chinese politics at the University of Canterbury, released a report titled *Magic Weapons*, which takes New Zealand as an example to illustrate how the CCP extends its infiltration and political influence overseas. The report reveals that several Chinese-born members of New Zealand's Parliament have close links with the CCP, and that many politicians have been bribed by massive political donations from rich Chinese merchants and CCP united-front organizations such as Chinese trade associations in New Zealand. [24] Shortly after her report was published, Dr. Brady's college office was broken into. Before the break-in, she also received an anonymous letter threatening her with the words "You are the next one." [25]

China is actively roping in New Zealand's local politicians. For example, members of New Zealand political parties are lavished cordial treatment on trips to China. Retired politicians are offered high-paying positions in Chinese enterprises, as well as other benefits to have them follow the Party's directives. [26]

The CCP Targets Pacific Island Nations for Their Strategic Value

Despite their size, Pacific island nations have the critical strategic value of being able to serve as maritime bases. Their total land area is just 53,000 square kilometers (20,463 square miles) compared with their exclusive economic zones (EEZ) over ocean, which measure 19,000,000 square kilometers (7,335,941 square miles) — an area over six times the size of China's EEZs. Developing greater ties with Pacific island nations is a publicly acknowledged component of the CCP's military strategy.

Currently, spheres of influence in the Pacific area are divided between the United States, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, and France. To develop its maritime capabilities in the Pacific Ocean, the CCP must first build good relations with the island nations, then slowly push out the U.S. presence. [27]

John Henderson, a New Zealand professor, and Benjamin Reilly, a professor in Australia, said that the CCP's long-term goal in the South Pacific area is to take the place of America as the superpower there. [28] The CCP has invested immense amounts of money in Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia to assist these island nations in constructing infrastructure. It has promoted local tourism, and made e-business platforms available. It is outstripping American activity in the area. Ben Bohane, an Australian author, warned that America is losing influence over the Pacific Ocean to China. [29]

Following the CCP's large-scale financial assistance and investment, the arrogant behavior of its officials reflects the real mentality of the CCP when it is strong and thinks highly of its abilities. It tries to treat the people of other nations the way it treats the Chinese people under its totalitarian control. The CCP's goal is to demand obedience from countries of inferior strength. Naturally, the CCP cannot be expected to respect international regulations and protocol.

At the APEC summit held in late 2018 in Papua New Guinea, the rude and uncivilized behavior of Chinese officials shocked the locals and those in attendance. Chinese officials bluntly stopped journalists (including those of Papua New Guinea) from interviewing

attendees at a forum held between Chinese leader Xi Jinping and leaders of the Pacific island nations. Instead, they demanded that all journalists refer to the Xinhua news release.

To prevent statements condemning the CCP regime's unfair trade behavior from being written into a joint communique, Chinese officials demanded to meet the Papua New Guinea foreign minister. Since a private meeting with Chinese officials would affect his impartial stance, he turned down the request. Third, Chinese officials resorted to yelling and shouting at the summit when they accused other countries of plotting a scheme against China. One high-ranking U.S. official described the CCP officials' behavior at APEC as "tantrum diplomacy." [30]

Debt Traps Enable the CCP to Seize Control Over Central Asia's Resources

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the CCP has taken great efforts to develop and cement its relationship with Central Asian countries, like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The goal of the CCP's strategy in Central Asia can be viewed from several angles: For one, Central Asia is an unavoidable land route in China's westward expansion. Further, when China constructs infrastructure to transport goods in and out of China, it can also expand its commercial interests in Central Asia. Secondly, China aims to seize the natural resources, including coal, oil, gas, and precious metals that are abundantly found in these countries. Thirdly, by controlling Central Asian countries that are geographically and culturally close to Xinjiang, China can tighten its control over ethnic minorities in Xinjiang.

Though the CCP has not announced its desire to dominate Central Asia, it has effectively taken up the most influential role in this region. The International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based think tank, released a report in 2013 saying that China has been rapidly growing into an economically dominant power in this region by taking advantage of social unrest in Central Asia. Beijing sees Central Asia as a supply base of raw materials and resources and as a market for its low-priced, low-quality products. Meanwhile, the CCP has also poured millions of U.S. dollars into investment and aid in Central Asia in the name of maintaining stability in Xinjiang. [31]

A huge network of highways, railways, airways, communication, and oil pipelines has closely connected China with Central Asia. The China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) and its contractors have been responsible for the construction of highways, railways, and electricity transmission lines in Central Asia. They pave roads on some of the most dangerous and complex terrain and construct new roads to transport China's goods to Europe and the Middle East, as well as to ports in Pakistan and Iran. In the two decades between 1992 and 2012, of diplomatic relations between China and the five Central Asian countries, the total volume of trade between China and Central Asia grew one-hundredfold. [32]

In Central Asia, the CCP has promoted investments in large state-run, credit-financed infrastructure projects. Some scholars have realized that such investments would form the basis of a new international order in which China would play a dominant role. Seen from this perspective, Central Asia, like Australia, is another testing ground for the CCP's conceptual revolution in diplomatic strategy.

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Beijing tends to support the corrupt authoritarian leaders of the Central Asian countries, and its opaque investment projects are considered beneficial primarily for the local social elites. The International Crisis Group's report noted that each of the Central Asian governments is weak, corrupt, and fraught with social and economic unrest. [34] The large infrastructure projects promoted by Beijing are not only linked to massive loans, but also involve official approvals and permits, which are based on vested interests. This gives rise to and worsens the corruption in these regimes.

In Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, the former first secretary of the Communist Party of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic in the USSR, served as the country's president from the time of independence in 1991 to his death in 2016. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan was under Karimov's authoritarian rule for another quarter century. In 2005, government forces clashed with protesters in the eastern city of Andijan, resulting in hundreds of deaths. The CCP placed itself as a firm supporter of Karimov, rendering firm support as usual to Uzbekistan and other countries in this region in their efforts to safeguard the status quo. [35]

The fragile economic structures of Central Asian countries, in combination with massive infrastructure loans from China, leave these countries especially prone to falling into China's debt trap. Turkmenistan is suffering from a severe economic crisis, with an annual inflation rate of over 300 percent, unemployment estimated at over 50 percent, severe food shortages, and rampant corruption. Now China is the only customer of Turkmen gas, [36] and also the

largest creditor of its foreign debt, which stands at US\$9 billion (estimated at 30 percent of GDP in 2018). [37] It's possible that Turkmenistan had no choice but to give its natural gas fields to China to pay off its debt. [38] This country has put its economic arteries in Beijing's hands.

Tajikistan borrowed more than US\$300 million from China to build a power plant. Unable to pay its debt, the country transferred ownership of a gold mine to China in order to pay off the liabilities. [39]

The Kyrgyz economy is also in danger, as large-scale infrastructure projects carried out by the CCP there also caused it to fall into the debt trap. The country is likely to give part of its natural resources to pay debt. Kyrgyzstan also cooperated with Chinese communications companies Huawei and ZTE to build digital communication tools in order to tighten governmental control over people, while also leaving China a backdoor to extend its surveillance into these countries. [40]

Beijing took advantage of the power vacuum in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union to enter the Kazakh energy sector. The Kazakh economy depends on production of crude oil, and oil revenue in U.S. dollars is used to buy cheap Chinese products. Apart from oil drilling, this nation's industrial foundation is fragile. With the flow of cheap Chinese products into its market, the Kazakh manufacturing industry collapsed. [41]

Another motive for the CCP's expansion in Central Asia is to crack down on Uyghur dissidents living in Central Asia. The Shanghai

Cooperation Organization (SCO) Charter signed by the China-led SCO allows suspects to be extradited to member countries. A member country can even send their own officials to another member country to conduct an investigation. In this way, the CCP extends its suppression of Uyghurs abroad and arrests Uyghur dissidents who have taken refuge in other countries. [42]

The CCP Uses Pivotal States to Secure Strategic Resources

Implementation of the Communist Party's peripheral strategy involved first creating pivotal states, which are then used as a base for achieving strategic goals in the entire region. According to the Party's think tanks, pivotal states are countries that have considerable regional power that Beijing has the capability and resources to guide; they have no direct conflicts with the CCP in terms of strategic interests, and don't share close interests with the United States. [43] In addition to the aforementioned Australia, Kazakhstan, and others, examples of pivotal countries for the Chinese regime include Iran in the Middle East and Myanmar.

In the Middle East, Iran receives the greatest Chinese investment. Iran is an important oil producer in the region and has been in ideological opposition to the West since the late 1970s, making it a natural economic and military partner for the CCP. Beijing has maintained close economic and military relations with Iran since the 1980s.

In 1991, the International Atomic Energy Agency discovered that the CCP had exported uranium to Iran and that China and Iran had signed a secret nuclear agreement in 1990. [44] In 2002, when Iran's

uranium enrichment project was revealed, Western oil companies withdrew from the country, giving the CCP an opportunity to capitalize on the situation and cultivate closer relations with Iran. [45]

Bilateral trade volume between the CCP and Iran grew exponentially between 1992 and 2011, increasing by more than one hundred times in seventeen years, although there was significant slowdown due to pressure caused by international sanctions on the Iranian regime. [46] Due to the CCP's assistance, Iran was able to weather the international isolation imposed on it and develop a broad arsenal of short- to medium-range ballistic missiles, as well as anti-ship cruise missiles. The Chinese also provided it with sea mines and fast attack craft, and helped Iran establish a covert chemical weapons project. [47]

Another pivotal state favored by the CCP regime is Myanmar, its neighboring country in South Asia. Myanmar has a long coastline, which provides strategic access to the Indian Ocean. The CCP regards the opening of a China-Myanmar channel as a strategic step to minimizing reliance on the Strait of Malacca. [48] The Burmese military government's poor human rights record has caused it to be isolated by the international community. The 1988 democracy movement in Myanmar was ultimately crushed with military force. The following year, in Beijing, PLA tanks opened fire on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square.

The two authoritarian governments, both condemned by the international community, found a degree of solace in their diplomatic company and have since enjoyed close relations. In

October 1989, Myanmar's Than Shwe visited China, and the two sides signed a US\$1.4 billion arms deal. [49] In the 1990s, there were again many arms deals between the two sides. Equipment the CCP has sold to Myanmar include fighter planes, patrol ships, tanks and armored personnel carriers, anti-aircraft guns, and rockets. [50] The CCP's military, political, and economic support thus became the Burmese military junta's lifeline in its struggle for continued survival. [51]

In 2013, the Chinese invested US\$5 billion into the China-Myanmar crude oil and gas pipeline, said to be China's fourth-largest strategic oil-and-gas import conduit. Although it met with strong popular opposition, in 2017, it went into operation with the backing of the CCP. [52] Similar investments include the Myitsone Dam (currently placed on hold due to local opposition) and the Letpadaung Copper Mine. In 2017, bilateral trade between China and Myanmar totaled \$US13.54 billion. The CCP is currently planning to create a China-Myanmar economic corridor with 70 percent of the share held by the Chinese side. This includes a deep-water port for trade access to the Indian Ocean, [53] and the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone industrial park. [54]