THE NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

Elective Course: China

SYLLABUS

AY 2021

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Course Description: China has changed dramatically from the backward, closed society where Richard Nixon disembarked in late February 1972, hoping to develop a bilateral relationship which would threaten the Soviet Union. Today China is vibrant, an economic draw for many companies, and a modernizing nation in every sense. U.S. strategists ignore its influence in Asia and across the world at their peril. This course will discuss China’s role in the world along with its own internal challenges, offering the strategist an opportunity to weigh unknowns in charting a strategy for the future yet one with potential hazard for the international system.

Course Learning Outcomes: Course has four learning objectives:

A. Evaluate the strategic environment to evaluate potential or actual national security challenges which China affects.

B. Evaluate the domestic challenges that Beijing confronts as it plows through the twenty-first century.

C. Analyze how to weigh China’s modernization presents national security challenges for the United States.

D. Develop policy options which advance U.S. interests in addressing China’s role in the contemporary era.

Topic Schedule:

Course will meet 11 times beginning Monday, 14 September and ending Monday, 7 December 2020. We will meet on Mondays for the first 11 topics from 1330-1530. When we reconvene after Winter break, we will meet on Thursdays. Topics are listed below by date:

September 14, 2020 Topic 1: Introduction and China’s evolution before 1949
September 21, 2020 Topic 2: China’s evolution, 1949 through today
October 5, 2020 Topic 4: China’s governance challenges I
October 19, 2020 Topic 5: China’s governance challenges II
October 26, 2020 Topic 6: Disputes: SCS, ECS, Taiwan, and Hong Kong
November 2, 2020 Topic 7: China’s new instruments I
November 9, 2020 Topic 8: China’s new instruments II-PLA modernization
November 16, 2020 Topic 9: China and the global system
November 30, 2020 Topic 10: China and the United States
December 7, 2020 Topic 11: paper critique presentations

Reading Materials: Two assigned books will be distributed to students in this course. A series of articles, research papers and book chapters are posted in Blackboard as links to other readings and materials. The books are:


The newspapers with strong international journalist commitments are an essential manner for understanding the evolving Chinese environment.

Deliverables due dates:

Governance challenge presentation: 5 or 19 October (25%)
Policy paper to senior official: 30 November (25%)
Critique of policy paper—written: 3 December (15%)
Critique of policy paper—verbal: 7 December (10%)

Additional course deliverable: Participation (25%)

Each student will write a two page policy paper to either a senior Department of State or Combatant Commander on the Belt & Road Initiative. The paper should have three pages of back up material to support the arguments but the two pages are the heart of the assignment. The paper is due on 30 November at the close of business. More details will follow in class. The paper will be worth 25% of the overall course grade.

Each student will critique a peer’s Belt & Road Initiative paper. A written critique of the peer’s policy analysis is due at COB on 3 December for 15% of the course grade. An oral critique of no more than 5 minutes of the same paper is due in class on 7 December for 10% of the grade

Consult the Student Catalogue for guidance and policies on the following topics:

- Essay and Research Paper Format
• Assessment Policy
• NDU Grading Scale
• Original Work
• Absence Policy
COURSE China

Topic 1: 6600 National Security Strategy Research and Practicum Course Introduction
September 14, 2020

Overview

China proudly notes its civilization dates back five thousand years, with Zhongguo known as the Middle Kingdom. For most of that period, China had the most developed economy and a strong political system putting it at the fore of Asia, if not the globe. Most of that period China’s emperors resisted outside pressures by using the vast size of China, whether in land mass or population, to pressure other states to bend to China’s will. China’s leaders tried various methods to maintain its economic control over outside interlocutors over almost all of its final two millenia, including insisting on the “tributary system” whereby sustained relations with other nations under diplomatic and economic norms highlighted by offering “tribute” to the emperor.

The national mythology notes the flow of dynasties yet halts with the “Century of Humiliation” between 1842 and 1949, conveniently ending with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) under the Communists. Under the “humiliation,” foreign governments refused to pay tribute to the Qing emperors while demanding foreign traders and diplomats operate under extraterritoriality instead of under Chinese sovereignty. British, U.S., French, German, Japanese, Russian, Italian, and other non-Han Chinese governments humiliated China by ignoring Beijing’s views, a situation unknown in the Middle Kingdom. As the Qing dynasty (1664-1911) increasingly decayed, the futility of the regime in satisfying its traditional role became most obvious when Japan defeated the Qing in 1895 and took Taiwan under its sovereignty, amputating a portion of the nation. The Qing dynasty ended sixteen years later.

The “Century of Humiliation” ends as a period of dramatic instability overcomes China between 1911 and 1949. First a democracy under western-educated Sun Yat-sen from the south, followed by a decade of warlord powers, leading to Sun’s Guomingdang (“Nationals’ Party”) to ally with and ultimately persecute the Communist Party in an emerging civil war. World War II in China, beginning with the Japanese subjugation of the three northeastern provinces in 1931, delayed the civil war but it ultimately ended in 1949 with Mao Zedong’s declaration of the PRC on 1 October 1949.

Topic Learning Objectives

• Understand course structure, requirements, assignments, core syllabus content and student roles and responsibilities.
• Understand the historic experience of China through the pre-CCP era.

Issues for Consideration:

• What are the key deliverables for course?
• Why is China considered a great power competitor?
• Are China’s leaders using history to increase concern about the United States while distracting from internal issues?

**Required Reading:** (70+ pages)

**Supplemental reading:**
Topic 2: China’s Evolution, 1949 through today

Overview
The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) assumed governance over a broken nation reeling from decades of Qing collapse, then upheaval on all sides. Mao Zedong asserted himself as the first among equals after the Long March of 1934-35 and arose to public prominence in the years after the United States assisted in defeating Japan by 1945. Mao proclaimed the founding of a new China under CCP control on 1 October 1949, stating the period of violating China’s sovereignty was over. He set forth to consolidate CCP power over a twenty-five year period through a series of contradictory fits and starts for the Chinese people. The misguided programs led to tens of millions of deaths under the “Great Leap Forward” in the late 1950s and subsequent “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” six years later. By the time of Mao’s death in September 1976, China was isolated and even more backward relative to the world than it was when the Qing fell in 1911.

Second generation leader, Deng Xiaoping, led an effort to reverse the quarter of a century of isolation through adopting “the Four Modernizations”: agriculture, industry, science and technology and defense. Most relevant, Deng and the modernizers within the Party acknowledged China needed to reverse their course by opening the door to outside knowledge. To acquire that knowledge, China also welcomed foreign investment, undermining the basis of the CCP’s role in society. The resulting changes in China lifted four hundred million citizens out of poverty over the following four decades. This occurred, however, with significant disruption to Chinese society, the CCP’s ideological basis, and the post-world War II global economy. These changes lead to dramatic questions about China’s future and its interactions with other states which this course will ponder.

Topic Learning Objectives
• Analyze the changes China has undergone since the Communists seized power
• Analyze the forces at work in contemporary China

Issues for Consideration:
• Are China’s aspirations those of the Party or those of Chinese citizens? How do we answer that question?
• Does the past seventy year evolution guarantee China will proceed in the same manner in the future? What is the basis to your assessment?
• The CCP is roughly 90 million members out of a population greater than a billion. Does this have long term implications? Why do you assess it this way?
• How do these transformations affect the U.S. interests directly?

Required Reading: (83 pages)

1. Mühlhahn, 203-247
2. Nordholdt, 91-142.

**Supplemental Reading:**
Topic 3: Economic Transformation: Now Where?
September 28, 2020

Overview
The “Four Modernizations” opened the country to outside investment and a loosening of CCP centralized control over the economy because China desperately needed to put millions of agricultural workers into more productive work. The standard of living for all Chinese improved but the urbanization of a significant population substantially increased the gap in the standard of living between those living within seventy-five miles of the coast and those further inland.

Foreign investment allowed the expansion of factories to produce products more cheaply than the costs of producing them in traditional locations, usually the home of the investors. Taiwanese, South Korean, U.S. and European investment fueled both dramatic urbanization numbers and the PRC’s skyrocketing gross domestic product growth between 1977 and 2008. This growth depended on an increasing population to sustain China’s cheap labor but that began declining after 2010. Additionally, the international marketplace slowed demand for these manufactured goods substantially after the 2008 global financial crisis. China’s environment and resource/energy base were undermined by the callous overuse of both.

China and the United States are wary trading partners at best. President Donald Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Trans Pacific Partnership in 2017, followed by a decision to impose tariffs on Chinese goods in the subsequent years threw the traditional laissez-faire approach of the post-World War II economic system into shock. The future of the bilateral economic relationship is far less predictable than at any point since Nixon’s reopening in 1972.

Topic Learning Objectives
• Understand the depth of China’s economic slowdown.
• Analyze the interplay between China’s “Four Modernizations” model and the CCP leadership in the country.
• Analyze how China’s growth over forty years allows it to play into the international trade system in 2020.

Issues for Consideration:
• Can China’s economic model ride out the reduced population challenge? Why?
• What strengths does China bring to the trade war with the United States? Weaknesses?
• Did China really create a freer market under the Modernizations or was this wishful thinking by outside investors?

Required Readings:
1. Yao Yang, in David Dollar, Yiping Huang, and Yang Yao, editors, China 2049: Economics Challenges of a Rising Global Power (Washington: the Brookings Institution, 2020): 3-29,


Supplemental Readings:


Topic 4: Governance Challenges I: environment, energy, intellectual property, corruption
October 5, 2020

Overview
No one finds China easy to govern. Energy usage far outstripped resources twenty years ago. The environment was the first and arguably biggest victim of the Four Modernizations, leaving China a terrible future. Intellectual property is a major source of friction as China’s reputation is that of thievery from foreign businesses. Corruption seems endemic.

Today’s topic will be YOU presenting reports on these topics.

Topic Learning Objectives
• Understand the range of domestic challenges which any regime in China will confront
• Analyze the relative importance of each of these challenges in topic 4 and 5

Issues for Consideration:
• Does China have institutions able to survive the global challenges of the market elasticities?
• How are China’s increasing desires for energy resources affecting their role globally?
• Is intellectual property theft worth the strain it imposes on the bilateral U.S.-PRC ties?

Required Reading:

Energy

Corruption
5. TBD

Environment
8. “Will China save the planet? A climatic conversation with NRDC’s Barbara Finamore”,

SupChina podcast, 9 April 2020, retrieved at http://supchina.com

Supplemental Readings:

2. Damien Ma, “China’s War on Coal in Seven Charts: Peak Coal is Not a Blip but a Trend,” MacroPolo, 24 June 2019, retrieved at https://macropolo.org/china-peak-coal-energy-trend/
Overview
China’s domestic issues also include people-based issues such as religion, minority rights, and demographics. Because China’s rise linked so clearly to the abundance of population in rural areas, the demographic composition matters a great deal. China prides itself on its 92% Han population but out of 1.3 billion, that means the remaining 8% constitutes multimillions citizens in the 56 minority groups of the country.

The Communist Party of Russia proved inept at addressing minority concerns as the Chinese counterpart organization is as well. Particularly worrisome for Beijing is the role of Islamic minorities. Uighur “reeducation camps,” appearing similar to concentration camps, began appearing in Xinjiang Province around 2016. Today they include a substantial number of Uighurs and other Islamic adherents.

More generally, a religious awakening was underway in China but appears yet another aspect of society which Xi Jinping finds threatening. Crackdowns on various Christian communities along with Islamic adherents made China into a country where the Party seeks to be the religion of the people.

Topic Learning Objectives
To analyze the reasons religion, demographic shifts, and minorities appear to pose a significant worry to the CCP.

Issues for Consideration:
- Why would a population with 8% minorities out of a billion and a half citizens threaten the state’s stability?
- What difference does it make if China needs more women? Is China somehow different from other societies?
- China views religion as a purely domestic issue but will this offer a perpetual challenge for those in the United States seeking to evangelize? How does that fit into the bilateral relationship?

Required Reading:
For all students
Mühlhahn, 560-614.

Minority unrest

Religion

Demographics
 Topic 6: Disputes and Tensions: SCS, ECS, Taiwan, and Hong Kong  
October 19, 2020  

Overview  
The rhetoric from Beijing invariably discusses “indisputable facts” about areas surrounding China that are in dispute. Beijing rejects the traditional international legal interpretations of who controls the land features in the South China Sea (SCS) and East China Sea (ECS), opposing various neighbors’ claims which create the potential for conflict as China becomes more assertive with its modernizing People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and more nationalistic in its policies.

Hong Kong and Macau, both European colonies for well over a century, returned to Beijing’s control in 1997 and 1999, respectively. Macau today is a hotbed for Chinese gamblers but presents no governance challenges. Hong Kong, on the other hand, operates under the bilateral accord signed with the former colonizers in London. That agreement provides Hong Kong with a “special administrative status” for half a century after the turmoil but recent decisions by the Beijing-backed government in Hong Kong have engendered much popular discontent. One thing that no government in China tolerates is luan, or chaos, which creates anxiety in the mainland.

Taiwan remains a hot button issue for China, revealing the depth of the CCP’s insecurities about this remaining issue from the 1940s. Just over a dozen states on the planet recognize Taiwan’s government as sovereign yet Beijing finds this extremely disturbing, even though Washington does not have diplomatic relations with Taibei. Located just over a hundred miles off the Fujian coast, Taiwan’s status evokes strong commentary from any member of the CCP for fear its status will create doubts about CCP power. Taiwan’s odd relationship with the United States, covered under the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, makes Washington the most important reason the island has not yet reunified with the mainland.

Topic Learning Objectives  
• Analyze the dangers the current disputes pose for the government in Beijing.  
• Analyze the differences between each of these cases for China in the future.  
• Analyze the relative importance of ties with Taiwan versus those with the PRC for the United States.

Issues for Consideration:  
• Is either the South China Sea or the East China Sea as important for the United States as it is for China? Why so?  
• What role should the international community play in preserving Hong Kong as a special administrative region through 2047?  
• Taiwan will always be a hundred miles off the coast of China so what realistic hope does it have for ever establishing genuine sovereignty? Should Washington do that in
perpetuity?

Required Readings:


Supplemental Readings:

Overview
China under Xi Jinping, the 5th Generation leader of the CCP, consolidated power as an individual and as a Party with great alacrity since assuming his position in November 2012. Xi’s CCP has dramatically limited transparency into the Party decision-making (which was never open in a western sense) while using new instruments to achieve its foreign and domestic objectives. Xi appears dedicated to returning the CCP to a position as dominant in China in a ways not true during the “modernization” period when outsiders played an important role in that process.

Internal control over society, whether the ubiquitous CCTV system throughout largest cities or monitoring the internet or surveillance throughout the society on the streets, is a method of protecting against luan. The Party’s ability to protect its central role in this vast country explains the greater expenditure for domestic security than for the People’s Liberation Army in national external defense.

Additional instruments China is using today include cyber, aid, lawfare, domestic regulations, and sanctions. Less formal pressures include pushing Chinese tourists to avoid countries where China’s leaders seek to persuade another country to alter its international behavior. China actively seeks to change other states’ behavior when its interests are under threat.

Topic Learning Objective
Analyze how China uses various instruments in its new position as a global power to alter other states’ behavior.

Issues for Consideration:
- Is China’s use of instruments really different from those of traditional western powers?
- Frequently, analysts note the CCP leadership does not need worry about public opinion as it governs. Do you see this as true? If so, why or why not?
- Do China’s relatively new laws really seem destined to undermine western businesses and NGOs?

Required Reading:
Topic 8: New instruments II- PLA modernization
November 9, 2020

Overview
The fourth of the modernizations of the 1970s was the military, an institution which proved unable to defeat the Vietnamese in early 1979. Discussion in Washington or at Indo-Pacom today rarely hints that China has ever been anything other than a highly successful, modernized military able to roll back the United States and any foreign militaries anywhere in Asia.

Xi Jinping began his term worried about corruption across China, not the least in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Since November 2012, thousands of PLA officers faced cashiering for their massive corruption, leaving many in prison for life—and unable to oppose Xi’s actions within the CCP.

Along with trying to purge corruption, Xi initiated steps to reform the PLA to make it more joint and more effective. This modernization continues but the PLA is most definitely not your father’s military for China; instead, it is one which deploys task forces for extended periods of time and is moving towards a far more coherently powerful role in Asia.

Topic Learning Objectives
Analyze the role of the PLA as an instrument of China’s regime at present

Issues for Consideration
- Is there evidence China has been able to deter the United States and its allies over issues of major importance to them?
- Is China’s northern strategy evidence of a fundamental shift in power globally?
- China is traditionally a ground-based force. Is evidence compelling that the CCP has moved to a maritime-based power?

Required Readings:
Supplemental Reading:

Overview
China rejected engagement with Britain in 1792 because the Qing emperor could not envision someone as powerful as him. China today still rejects major portions of the global regime, such as the international arbitration tribune on the United Nations’ Commission on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). China’s desire to select its behavior is not completely isolated as the United States frequently receives similar criticism about selectivity, although Washington rejects the charge.

The CCP under Xi Jinping began expanding China’s role in foreign lending and infrastructure development, particularly under the “Belt & Road Initiative” (BRI). Initially aimed at Central and Southeast Asian states, it now includes Chinese activities as far as Latin America and Canada, making it truly the global belt project. As Beijing observers said in 2018, the BRI is Xi’s signature effort.

Many outside China doubt the massive investments of the PRC will in fact get to these countries because China traditionally has a tremendous problem with corruption. Xi claims to have a path towards remedying that problem, still a work in progress. Additionally, outsiders fear this program really amounts to attempts to capture the poorer states around the world, entrapping them in a “debt” relationship with China.

Topic Learning Objectives
- Analyze China’s behavior towards the international regimes in place today and how it appears to address its goals.
- China’s motives in moving investment overseas as its own economic model stalls
- Analyze the options available to other states in trying to obviate dependence on the PRC

Issues for Consideration:
- Is the critical or the supportive analysis on China’s behavior more persuasive? Why?
- Since the United States and Europe don’t appear interested in investing in a number of these states, what is the harm for China to invest in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and other poorer places?
- China’s involvement in Africa attracts the most attention because that investment is so pervasive. Yet a decade ago, China had been invested in Africa, only to withdraw when the global drop in natural resource prices occurred as a result of the international financial crisis. Is that probable again?

Required Reading:
1. Daisy Khalifa, “Grand Idea: China’s Ambitious Belt and Road Initiative Also Has Its Hurdles,” SeaPower, 1 November 2018, retrieved at

**Supplemental Reading:**

Relations between the United States and China suffer from dramatically different expectations on both sides. The two large countries have competing interests and impressions of their relative importance to the international system. China harkens to its historic role as the overwhelmingly dominant state in East Asia over millennia, reluctant to acknowledge that internal decay undermined its continued position as much as did foreigners during the ‘Century of Humiliation’. The United States, rarely challenged during the three quarters of a century since the end of the Second World War, harbors intentions to retain its central role as guarantor of peace in the region. At the same time, Washington confronts a China more confident, aggressive, and determined to return to its prior position as the major voice around the world in places where Washington finds competition between the two states as increasingly challenging.

Many analysts assume this invariably will lead to conflict between the United States and China. Is this absolutely true? If not, why not?

Student policy papers on the Belt & Road Initiative are due today.

Issues for Consideration:
1. Is conflict inevitable between the United States and China? If not, how do the two states find common interests to incentive no conflict?
2. Is there a hierarchy to the aspects of relations between the United States and China?
3. Are China’s priorities clear as it enters the third decade of the century and do they include ties with the United States?

Learning Objectives
1. Identify common national interests that might exist between China and the United States
2. Analyze the differences between U.S. and Chinese aspirations globally—are they automatically conflicting?

Required readings:

More material as semester develops—TBD
Topic 11: Student critiques on presentations

Each student will offer a critique on a peer’s paper on the Belt & Road Initiative.