



The Political-Military Foundations of China's Global Ascendancy

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Abstract

In recent years China has positioned itself as a global economic leader, working through its “Belt and Road” initiative (BRI) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), to not only expand its global economic reach, but to organize and lead global economic relations. China’s rise is largely understood in economic terms, but the history of global power dynamics suggests that such leadership is built on both economic and political-military foundations. This paper explores the structural relationship between China’s economic and political-military relationships with other states over the period 1993 to 2015. Drawing on a wide variety of data sources, we present a multi-dimensional analysis that measures the changing size of China’s economic and political-military networks, their shifting regional distribution, and the degree of coupling, or decoupling of economic ties from political-military ties. In describing these patterns, we conduct a similar analysis for the United States. This allows us to situate Chinese trends in the context of the structures of U.S. global power. Our analysis points to ways in which China’s global rise has been shaped through navigating U.S. global power. Our analysis also shows that China’s growing leadership in the global economy builds upon a set of existing political-military relationships that, while their scope and form are quite different from those that the United States built to support its hegemonic ascendancy, are nevertheless critical for understanding the mechanisms by which Chinese power and influence has grown in the global political economy.

Keywords: China, Hegemonic Transition, Political-Military



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Militarism and imperialism have returned to the fore in the scholarly debate over China's rise as a global power. In the second edition of *The Long Twentieth Century*, Giovanni Arrighi (2010) hypothesized that the next era of hegemony would be of a different form, marked by the decoupling of the economic and military foundations of hegemonic power itself. China would become the center of world economic strength while the United States remained the dominant political-military power.

Arrighi is certainly not alone in drawing attention to China's rising economic power over the last decade, and China's pursuit of the so-called "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) lends support to the view that China is moving into a leadership position in the global political economy. Through heavy investments in infrastructure, the BRI seeks to closely connect the two ends of Eurasia, Africa and Oceania via an overland and maritime trade and investment route. So far, 65 countries have signed on to the BRI with planned expenditures ranging from \$1 trillion to \$8 trillion (Hillman 2018). The BRI has not only played an important economic role in upgrading Chinese industry and encouraging the acceptance of Chinese technological standards but is also part of a larger policy designed to expand China's geopolitical influence (Cai 2017; Eder 2018). To further support these aims, China has launched a multilateral development bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), aimed to finance growing infrastructural needs in Asia. What is notable about the AIIB is that its creation was partly driven by China's frustration with the existing international financial institutions. By July 2018, the AIIB has 87 approved members around the world and has approved over \$5 billion of loans with 28 projects in 13 Asian countries, much of which go to the energy and transportation sectors (Dollar 2015; Wade 2016).

The rapid success, massive scope, and multilateral "buy-in" of the BRI and AIIB have reinforced a narrative of China's global ascendancy that focuses on trade and investment. What these economic-centered accounts miss is China's increasing military capacity and the relationship between the Chinese state's global political-military activities and this economic expansion. In 1990, Chinese military expenditures were the 11th highest in the world. Since 2012, China's military expenditures have been second only to those of the United States. In 2015 China's State Council issued its first defense blueprint, which highlighted the possibility of direct military conflict with the United States, and called for modernization of China's defense forces.¹ Since then, analysts have focused on China's rapid military-build up, much of which is focused on projecting power regionally and defending interests in the South China Sea.² Globally, China has

¹ "China's Military Strategy (2015)", State Council Information Office, People's Republic of China, May 2015, 27

² For recent analyses see: Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Three things to know about China's military strategy," *AEIdeas*, 12/14/2017, <http://www.aei.org/publication/three-things-to-know-about-chinas-military-strategy/>; Jonathan Marcus,

become among the world's top arms exporters³ and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has become more proactive in deploying its military forces abroad in the service of UN peacekeeping missions.⁴

China's rise as a global military power has drawn some attention, but it remains limited, focusing too heavily on the recent build-up of hard military capabilities and regional conflicts. Our goal in this paper is to bring China's global political-military engagement to bear on a historical and structural analysis of China's global economic expansion over the last twenty-five years. We bring together data on trade flows, foreign direct investment (FDI), oil imports, economic aid, arms exports, military diplomacy, and military deployments from 1993 to 2015 in order to map the regional configuration of these relationships and the connections between economic and political-military ties. Through this analysis, we aim to contribute to the current discussion of China's changing role in the global political economy in two respects. First, by systematically mapping the multiple dimensions of China's global political-military expansion, we provide a more comprehensive, and nuanced, picture of this global expansion. Second, we contextualize recent and region-specific military expansion within longer-term, global trends that highlight the importance of 'softer' forms of political-military engagement that have been crucial for supporting China's ascendancy. We conduct a similar analysis for the United States, both as a means for providing a point of reference for our China-specific data and because China's role in the global economy can not be fully understood without a clear understanding of the shifting structures of U.S. global hegemony.

Militarism and Hegemony: Lessons from the United States

The role of militarism in the arc of hegemonic orders remains disputed among political economists. Gramsci's argument that hegemony rests on the political and cultural production of consent informs many of the key texts analyzing the rise and fall of global hegemonic powers (Arrighi 1994; Cox 1987; Gill 2008). From this standpoint, hegemony is poorly served by outright military aggression; militarism seeks domination by force when the creation of consent has failed. Michael Mann (2003) thus argues that the aggressive militarism pursued by the United States over the last fifteen years is a clear signal that the postwar hegemon is in decline.

"The 'globalisation' of China's military power," BBC News, 2/13/2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-43036302>

³ Data from the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database

⁴ Gill, Bates and Chin-Hao Huang, "China's Expanding Role in Peacekeeping," SIPRI Policy Paper 25, November 2009, p. 1.

Others have argued that the political and cultural practices that reproduce hegemonic power have always relied on imperial militarism. This line of argument can be traced to the classic works on imperialism, including those of Hobson, Lenin, and Luxemburg who observed that Europe's colonial and imperial projects of the 18th and 19th centuries rescued national capitalism from their crises of accumulation, reproduction, and expansion. Contemporary scholars working in this vein remind us that U.S. economic supremacy after World War II was built upon a military bulwark in Western Europe and a massive infusion of military assistance to friendly (i.e. conservative) governments that not only kept the Soviet empire in check, but also subverted left-wing trade unions by promoting U.S.-style labor-management practices. U.S. state officials hoped that these interventions into the domestic political economy would boost productivity and the competitiveness of European exports, thus aiding the return to free trade (Block 1977; Cox 1987; Gill and Law 1989; Gowan 2003; Maier 1988; Van der Pijl 1984).

Panitch and Ginden (2005) make a similar argument, focusing on the militaristic face of the "informal empire" of the United States, which revealed itself more as clandestine military operations and support to client states than outright warfare. Similarly, Julian Go (2012) has recently challenged the 'American exceptionalism' thesis downplaying the role of militarism and empire in the construction of U.S. postwar hegemony. He argues that while U.S. imperialism may not have taken the colonial form that British imperialism did, the United States' ascendancy as a hegemon in the postwar period was built upon a new set of imperialistic practices more suitable for a global order defined by independent nation-states rather than politically unrecognized territories. Rather than conquering, and then managing, colonies, the United States supported national independence movements and then used informal imperialistic techniques—financial, military, and advisory aid—to shore up friendly political regimes.

This disagreement over the role of militarism in the construction of U.S. postwar hegemony carries over into the current debate over the current state of U.S. global power. Somewhere between the Vietnam War and the early 1990s, the neat coupling of economic dominance and informal empire began to break down. Arrighi (2010), argues that the decoupling of global political power from global economic power, signaled by the collapse of Bretton Woods and failure in Vietnam, marked the beginning of the end of U.S. hegemony. Other scholars have followed suit, suggesting that the United States has tried to compensate for its declining economic hegemony with a new form of aggressive militarism. Even as the United States scaled back its Cold War defense structure in the 1990s, it became much more aggressive in deploying those forces, committing to two wars in the Middle East in the early 2000s. Some read this new militarism as a cry of desperation from American political and economic elites seeking to maintain the informal empire of the United States as its economic and cultural foundation crumbles (Mann 2003; Go 2011).

Not all agree, however, that this more aggressive militarism necessarily means hegemonic decline. Ho-fung Hung (2014, 2015) argues that China's quick rise in the world economy has, somewhat counterintuitively, slowed the erosion of U.S. global power. By purchasing U.S. Treasuries on a massive scale, China has tied its own fortunes to the U.S.-led economic system. Panitch and Ginden (2005) have suggested that this new militarism is laying the groundwork for a re-situating of U.S. hegemony on a neoliberal footing.

Two key points emerge from this brief overview of the debates around U.S. hegemonic rise and decline. First, in order to fully appreciate the importance of militarism to hegemonic orders, militarism should be understood broadly. Second, the forms that militarism takes, and the relationship between the political-military and economic bases of global power, are specific to each historical era. Both points inform our research design and analysis, explicated below.

Research Design

Our research design aims to describe recent historical dynamics in the global, structural character of China's economic and political-military relationships with other states. This approach is inspired by Peter Gowan's (2003) description of U.S. postwar hegemony as built upon a "hub and spokes" system of militaristic relationships with key allies that served as the framing for U.S. global economic expansion. We find this account useful for two reasons. First, it highlights the often overlooked, yet critical, point that a hegemon's rise as a global power is structured by a specific geography. The sun may have never set on the British Empire, but the actual geographical footprint that served as the foundation for British hegemony consisted largely of a ribbon of territories through the center of the Middle East and the African Continent, a massive colony in South Asia, and several islands in the Caribbean and the Pacific. U.S. hegemony was anchored by Western Europe and East and Southeast Asia (mostly Japan) along with repeated interventions into South America. Second, Gowan inverts the relationship between economic and military power that one typically finds in accounts of U.S. hegemony. In the typical account, the United States established economic dominance and then maintained that dominance with military intervention. Gowan instead shows that the postwar military framework was the foundation for both economic expansion and military intervention. In this way, Gowan's account brings political-military practices to the forefront of the analysis of global power.

Following methods employed by scholars working in the World Systems and World Polity perspectives, we map the structural ties between states through social network analysis. A core tenet of the World Polity research framework is that states and other organizations have become densely organized by their ties to international governmental and non-governmental organizations. These international organizations powerfully shape the policies, practices, and institutional forms of states, private firms, and other organizations, underscoring the importance of globalization for

understanding, among other things, domestic politics. Critically for our paper, it has also generated a large body of research using the tools of social network analysis to visualize, and operationalize these global mechanisms. From our perspective, a significant limitation of the world polity perspective is that it tends to envision the global political economy as a very flat, even space, a two-dimensional network of international organizations and national states, each holding equal weight in the composition of the larger structure through which different interests and practices are homogenized (Meyer et al. 1997; Robertson and Lechner 1985). Our understanding of the structure of the global system is much closer to that of Jason Beckfield (2003; 2008) who, in using the same network analytic tools as other world polity scholars, paints a picture of a global society that is fragmented with centers of concentrated power and influence. While Beckfield's work provides useful analytical strategies for using the tools of network analysis to trace global structures of power, it draws exclusively upon state membership in international organizations and thus does not capture the critical political and economic factors that make up the global order.

World-Systems theorists have long held that states are located in a global structure of dominance and subordination, but relatively few scholars working in this vein have sought to measure the shape, and impact, of this structure in a similarly systematic way. In an early paper, Snyder and Kick (1979) attempted to empirically locate a state's position in the world system through block-model analysis. Block-model analysis attempts to group individuals (the "blocks") by looking for similar patterns of interactions between individuals across multiple dimensions. Snyder and Kick's analysis was built on four networks of interaction between states in the 1960s: trade, military interventions, exchange of diplomats, and treaties. Van Rossem conducted a similar (1996) study, looking at trade, diplomatic ties, arms transfers and presence of foreign troops. Kick and Davis (2001) extended Snyder and Kick's earlier analysis by looking at change across two periods (the 1960s and the 1970s) and by increasing the number of bilateral networks in the analysis from four to eight: trade, four distinct types of treaty, arms transfers, political conflicts, and military conflicts. Within the larger body of world-systems research, these studies are notable for the fact that, among the handful of studies using the tools of social network analysis to empirically locate countries within the world system, they are the few that use non-economic (i.e., political and military) dimensions of interaction in addition to economic ones (for a review, see Lloyd, Mahutga and Leeuw 2009).

We build on this body of research by developing a multidimensional analysis of the global economic and political-military relationships of the United States and China. Our analysis improves on similar research in three ways. First, we expand the analysis of economic ties to include FDI and oil imports in addition to overall trade. As noted above, access to oil has been described as a key driver of both U.S. and Chinese foreign policy agendas (Mann 2003; Zhang 2011; Kennedy 2011). Second, our findings are much more current than those of Snyder and Kick,

who look at the period 1955-1970, Kick and Davis, who look at the period 1960-1975, and Van Rossem, who looks at the period 1980-1989. Our period of study, 1993 to 2015, both captures the era that many describe as one of U.S. hegemonic decline and Chinese hegemonic rise. Our longer time series also gives us a greater capacity to analyze change over time. Third, and finally, our analytic strategy is not confined by the World Systems analytical framework whereby states are placed into a parsimonious set of hierarchical categories (core, periphery, and semi-periphery in standard models) which are then used to explain some outcome. Rather than aggregating all of our measures of economic and military ties as World Systems scholars tend to do, our aim is to examine the relationships between these variables and, in so doing, come to a clearer understanding of when, where, and how different forms of economic and political-military ties are layered.

Data. Our theory-driven research ambitions are tempered by practical considerations, specifically the availability of robust, consistent time-series data across a range of economic and political-military dimensions. We measure economic ties as: (1) exports of all goods; (2) imports of refined and unrefined oil; and (3) FDI outflows. We measure political-military ties as: (1) deployment of troops abroad, (2) arms exports, (3) economic development aid, and (4) military diplomacy.

For overall exports and oil imports, we use the U.N. Comtrade data to measure the value of all goods exported from China to partner countries and the value of oil imported (both crude and refined⁵) by China from partner countries. Data for Chinese FDI outflows for the years 1993 to 2002 comes from the National Bureau of Statistics (1992-2003). Data for 2003 to 2015 comes from Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward FDI, published annually on the website of Ministry of Commerce of China.⁶

We use the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) data on arms transfers to measure bilateral arms exports. We measure the total value of all weapons types exported from China to foreign governments. Our measure of deployment of troops abroad combines information from two data sources. The International Institute for Strategic Studies' The Military Balance provides detailed information on the number, type, and location of forces deployed abroad on an annual basis. We note a "deployment" as any stationing of military troops or equipment in another country or participation in a U.N. or other multilateral peacekeeping operation. One limitation of the IISS data is that it does not record military conflicts as a deployment, which understates the

⁵ We sum the values for commodity codes 2709 and 2710, "Petroleum oils and oils obtained from bituminous minerals" crude and not crude.

⁶ <http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/>

use of hard military force abroad. In order to overcome this deficiency, we combine the IISS data with data from the Militarized Interstate Disputes dataset (Palmer et al. 2015). This dataset includes all cases of inter-state conflict involving the threat of, or actual use of, military force up through 2010. We include all cases of hostility that involve display of force use of force, and war where the United States or China was on the instigating side of the conflict.

Data on Chinese economic aid comes from AidData's "Global Chinese Official Finance Dataset, 2000-2014." Based out of William & Mary University, this is the most comprehensive dataset of officially-financed Chinese development projects. China does not subscribe to the development aid reporting norms laid out by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee to distinguish Official Development Assistance (ODA) from other kinds of assistance. As such, we limit our analysis to those transactions that AidData classifies as "ODA-like", which must meet three criteria: be primarily oriented towards the economic development of, or social welfare in, recipient states; be financed through an official Chinese State agency (which can include State Owned Enterprises); and, third, have a financing content that is at least 25% in the form of a grant.⁷ Finally, we explore patterns in Chinese state military diplomacy, which includes high-level military visits from PLA officials to foreign military officials, joint military exercises, and military 'ports of call' (Allen, Saunders, and Chen, 2017).

The ongoing debate over the question of U.S. hegemonic decline and Chinese hegemonic ascendancy hinges in large part on how one views the relationship between these states' economic and political-military ties with other states and regions of the world. Contributing to these discussions thus requires a method of evaluating these relationships between economic and political-military ties. To that end, we calculate the Jaccard Index for each our strong economic networks relative to each political-military network in each year.

The Jaccard Index divides the number of items shared between two sets (their intersection) by the total number of unique items across two sets (their union). In this case, the sets are the countries that make up the United States and China's economic and political-military networks. Values fall between 0 and 1, with 1 indicating that two sets are identical.⁸ Though simple, this

⁷ Alex Dreher et. al., "Apples and Dragon Fruits: The Determinants of Aid and Other Forms of State Financing from China to Africa," Working Paper #15, AidData, October (2015): 10.

⁸ For example, suppose two (hypothetical) sets of countries, set A representing the countries from which the United States imports toys, and set B representing the countries to which the United States exports cars:

A: China, Germany, India, Japan, Malaysia

B: Canada, China, France, Hungary, Kenya, India, Malaysia, Russia, Taiwan, United Kingdom

The union between these two sets is three countries: China, India, Malaysia. The intersection of these two sets is twelve countries: Canada, China, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Russia, Taiwan, United

measure allows us measure the degree of similarity between two networks and to make comparisons across different networks that are easy to interpret as they change over time. One limitation of this measure is its sensitivity to the size of the two sets being compared. If one set is significantly larger than the other, then the Jaccard Index will necessarily be closer to zero since the relatively small size of one set will limit the intersection of the two sets while the relatively large size of the other will create a larger union between the two sets. Given this, the Jaccard Index needs to be interpreted with respect to the sizes of the two sets being compared. In addition, the Jaccard Index treats all members of a set equally, obscuring the importance of key, strategic partners in hegemonic orders.

We base our analysis on what we call the ‘strong network’ of U.S. and Chinese economic and military ties. For all economic ties we consider a country as part of the strong network in each year if the value of the economic transaction is in the top half of all partner countries. For arms exports and troop deployments, we include all countries that have any relationship with the United States or China. For U.S. economic and military aid, the availability of precise monetary values for each transaction allows us to limit the ‘strong network’ to the top half of recipients. For China, the lack of consistent monetary values for economic aid prevents us from using this strategy. Absent another sorting criterion, we include all aid recipients in the strong network. Similarly, we include all countries that have participated in some form of Chinese military diplomacy in the strong network of this measure. The strong network is thus a network of unweighted, ‘dummy’ ties. Once a tie meets the threshold of being ‘strong,’ it is equal to all other ties in our analysis. We believe that these procedures achieve a good balance between analytical precision and consistency across our dimensions of economic and military ties.

Finally, working across a variety of data sources presented the challenge of developing a consistent set of countries across our entire period of study. Some countries became independent after our period of study began, and other countries dropped out of our data set during the period of study. We addressed these issues using the following strategies: First, we only include data for countries that were fully independent over the entire period of study. Countries that gained independence after 1993 are aggregated with their pre-independence country.⁹ Second, countries that were listed as part of a larger group of countries for one or more years by one data source were grouped for all data sources across the entire time period. We also grouped several British Overseas

Kingdom. The Jaccard Index of these two sets is 3 divided by 12 or .25. Simply read, it tells us that 25% of the countries that make up both networks are shared between the two.

⁹ This includes territories like Greenland and the Faroe Islands, both part of the Kingdom of Denmark; New Caledonia, St. Pierre and Miquellon, and Wallis and Fatuna, all French overseas territories; Tokelau and the Cook Islands, both territories of New Zealand; Gibraltar, the foreign affairs of which is handled by the U.K.

Territories in the Caribbean together (Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, and Montserrat). While politically distinct, these territories serve as offshore financial centers, the impact of which could be diluted if FDI inflows were counted separately. These procedures left us with a consistent set of 189 distinct political units for our period under study.

Our analysis is developed in two major sections. First, we describe the basic structural character of China's economic and political-military networks in the context of the global economic and political-military position of the United States. Here we focus on the changing size of each network, the degree of similarity between economic and political-military ties, and how they change over time. In the second section probe more deeply into this macro-structural picture to show how China has used policy-military relationships to expand its global influence. Specifically, we draw attention to the tight coupling of Chinese political-military and economic ties in Sub-Saharan Africa, the subtle deployment of the PLA's military force around the world, and the way in which the network of countries that make up the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank—both projects that will likely increase China's global economic influence—have been built on previously-established political-military ties.

Political-military dimensions of China's Global Expansion

The last twenty-five years have seen the dramatic expansion of China's presence in the global economy and in foreign affairs. By the early 1990s China had already established itself as a global export power. Since then, China has steadily, and substantially, expanded its global economic influence by engaging in foreign direct investment activities with more and more partner countries, and by widening the network of countries from which it imports much needed oil. While these trends have been well-documented and form the core of the narrative of China's growing global influence, China's expanding political-military activities around the world, as shown in Table 1, below, are an equally critical dimension of this process.

Since 2000, China has increasingly deployed its military forces abroad and has established more and more arms trade relationships. Between 1999 and 2010, China went from having fewer than ten arms export partners to more than twenty. In 2015, China was the third largest exporter of conventional weapons. This expansion in the 'harder' forms of militarism has been exceeded by an even more rapid expansion of 'softer' forms of political-military engagement. Chinese economic development aid expanded rapidly with the number of countries receiving some kind of development assistance nearly doubling from 47 in 2000 to 82 in 2009. This same period is also marked by the PLAs extensive engagement in military diplomacy. While systematic data on these activities is only available for the years 2003 and forward, researchers who study this see this level of activity with a large number of partner countries as marking a significant expansion the PLAs international engagement when compared to earlier decades.

Table 1: Total Size of Economic and Political-Military Networks, 1993-2015 ("key years" of significant change in network size highlighted)

United States							China						
Arms Exp.	Troop Deploy	Econ. Aid	Mil. Aid	Comm. Exp.	FDI	Oil Imp.	Arms Exp.	Troop Deploy	Econ. Aid	Mil. Dip.	Comm. Exp.	FDI	Oil Imp.
46	28	139		186	124	91	9	5			184	63	60
52	30	130	100	187	123	79	15	6			183	41	56
51	30	130	113	186	128	80	13	4			184	43	51
50	32	134	115	186	134	83	8	4			184	39	48
59	33	126	114	186	135	83	8	5			185	45	58
56	31	131	110	186	131	82	5	4			185	85	57
49	35	139	114	185	150	91	8	4			185	61	60
47	38	136	114	187	144	87	12	5	48		184	65	62
49	38	151	112	186	148	92	11	7	50		184	77	63
50	43	149	125	186	145	90	12	7	56		185	72	66
50	39	149	123	187	143	97	12	5	58	73	185	94	73
43	40	158	122	187	140	96	11	7	69	75	185	101	77
46	46	167	124	187	150	100	12	10	60	85	185	106	73
51	43	166	127	187	148	103	18	9	73	80	184	116	77
52	48	169	133	187	137	99	16	10	74	85	185	133	80
51	42	172	141	187	139	100	17	8	71	77	185	132	79
53	42	175	144	187	133	99	19	8	81	78	185	131	83
55	45	175	134	187	135	97	20	8	79	93	185	131	87
60	43	171	157	187	135	97	15	9	80	71	185	140	87
60	42	174	154	187	140	97	18	9	67	59	184	141	90
56	46	172	152	187	139	93	18	8	74	75	184	148	90
62	48	168	125	187	134	93	20	8	69	75	184	146	90
60	46	175	152	187	135	94	19	8		77	185	144	85

China’s global economic and political-military activities have not only grown, they have become increasingly coupled. Key trade, foreign investment and oil import partners are also increasingly partners in one, or more, political-military relationship. Table 2a shows the Jaccard Index measuring the degree of similarity between each strong economic network and our political-military ties, highlighting values in years where there was a significant expansion in the size of a

political-military network. The general picture that emerges from that table is that over the period 1993 to 2015 the countries with whom China maintains a strong economic partnership are also increasingly those with whom there is a political-military relationship. The table also shows that, in many cases, that coupling became especially strong during those periods when China expanded its global political military activities.

The growing connection between arms exports and commercial exports is perhaps to be expected: the relationships that sustain commercial trade are often useful in supporting arms trade, and the already-broad scale of Chinese commercial trade means that any increase in the arms trade is more likely to overlap with existing trade partners. The steadily strengthening connection between China's arms trade and its FDI and oil import networks can not be so easily explained. What is important to note here is that the period 2005 to 2010 where we show a strengthening connection between these networks was one where the size of China's arms exports, FDI and oil import networks were all expanding. Given this, a strengthening of these relationships suggests that not only were new arms export partners those who were already strong investment and oil important partners, but also that many of these new investment and oil import relationships were built upon a pre-existing arms export relationship.

China has also made good use of the "soft" influences of economic development aid and military diplomacy to support its global economic activities on a wider scale. While our data for these two measures is limited to the early 2000s and forward, we can still see that as China expanded its economic development aid to more and more countries with already-established oil import relationships. Economic aid also becomes increasingly connected to foreign investment. China's extensive military diplomacy activities around shows that they appear to be driven more by the need to secure foreign investment outlets than the need to secure energy supplies. Between 2005 and 2010, a period when both networks undergo a significant expansion, the relationship between military diplomacy and FDI and military diplomacy and oil imports strengthens, but the connection to FDI is much stronger.

While these general trends are significant, they can obscure the way that military diplomacy functions as a somewhat unique tool for expanding China's global influence. Table 1 shows a sharp increase in the number of countries participating in PLA military diplomatic activities from 2009 to 2010, which also manifests as a significant increase in the Jaccard Index between the military diplomacy network and the FDI and oil import networks. This phenomenon highlights the unique way in which military diplomacy has been used as a political-military tool. This punctuated increase the Jaccard Indices is entirely to a surge in visits abroad by PLA officials, from 172 such visits in 2009, to 202 visits in 2010, and then back down to 154 visits in 2011. These additional visits were almost entirely made to economic partners in sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America where, as we already saw, China had already

been expanding its foreign investments and supplies of oil. Military diplomacy's short-term character allows it to be used flexibly to serve specific geopolitical goals at critical moments.

Table 2a: Jaccard Index, Economic and Political-Military networks (China, 1993 - 2015. "Key years of political-military network growth highlighted)

	Exports				Foreign Direct Investment				Oil Imports			
	Troop Deploy.	Arms Exports	Econ. Aid	Mil. Dip.	Troop Deploy.	Arms Exports	Econ. Aid	Mil. Dip.	Troop Deploy	Arms Exports	Econ. Aid	Mil. Dip.
1993	0.05	0.07			0.05	0.05			0.05	0.08		
1994	0.06	0.14			0.03	0.09			0.09	0.10		
1995	0.05	0.11			0.04	0.13			0.14	0.08		
1996	0.06	0.06			0.04	0.25			0.19	0.03		
1997	0.06	0.06			0.00	0.07			0.13	0.03		
1998	0.04	0.05			0.00	0.02			0.06	0.03		
1999	0.07	0.07			0.03	0.12			0.15	0.03		
2000	0.05	0.11	0.19		0.03	0.13	0.21		0.09	0.08	0.13	
2001	0.07	0.12	0.19		0.04	0.07	0.19		0.14	0.08	0.11	
2002	0.06	0.09	0.25		0.07	0.12	0.23		0.13	0.10	0.16	
2003	0.04	0.09	0.20	0.55	0.02	0.09	0.14	0.35	0.02	0.09	0.08	0.22
2004	0.05	0.09	0.23	0.53	0.09	0.07	0.28	0.31	0.04	0.09	0.14	0.18
2005	0.03	0.11	0.18	0.52	0.10	0.08	0.26	0.28	0.04	0.07	0.11	0.22
2006	0.05	0.13	0.26	0.52	0.05	0.17	0.25	0.38	0.04	0.19	0.13	0.24
2007	0.06	0.14	0.32	0.52	0.04	0.14	0.24	0.40	0.06	0.08	0.12	0.24
2008	0.05	0.12	0.27	0.50	0.03	0.19	0.28	0.36	0.04	0.10	0.13	0.27
2009	0.06	0.17	0.32	0.54	0.04	0.27	0.28	0.39	0.06	0.17	0.17	0.25
2010	0.06	0.20	0.31	0.56	0.07	0.20	0.24	0.48	0.06	0.21	0.14	0.30
2011	0.06	0.13	0.27	0.50	0.05	0.12	0.29	0.42	0.06	0.09	0.19	0.26
2012	0.05	0.16	0.26	0.40	0.03	0.17	0.26	0.34	0.06	0.13	0.16	0.24
2013	0.04	0.18	0.25	0.50	0.04	0.21	0.32	0.37	0.04	0.15	0.11	0.28
2014	0.03	0.17	0.23	0.52	0.04	0.13	0.23	0.42	0.04	0.18	0.14	0.30
2015	0.03	0.18		0.53	0.07	0.17		0.45	0.02	0.19		0.30

China's Rise in the Context of U.S. Global Hegemony

In order to properly understand China's expanding global, political-military presence and the deepening relationship between China's global economic and political-military ties, these trends need to be situated in a context where the United States has expanded its own political-military activities around the world and deepened the already dense relationship between its own economic and political-military ties. While China's network of economic ties now approximates the scale of that of the United States, the latter has also been expanding its political-military activities around the world on a scale that, on most comparable measures, dwarf those of China.

U.S. hegemony was built, and maintained, through a global projection of military force. This manifests both as a global network of military bases and troop deployments and as a global 'strike capacity' whereby U.S. military forces are staffed and equipped to have the ability to defend the homeland, conduct counter-terrorism operations, and simultaneously engage in multiple military operations anywhere in the world (Department of Defense 2014).

The militaristic turn in U.S. foreign policy of the last three decades is clearly seen by the rapid growth in the number of countries within which the U.S. military deploys its troops or stations military hardware, both on an on-going basis and as a result of direct military conflicts. At the same time, this more expansive use of aggressive military force has been accompanied by a significant expansion in the more subtle forms of political-military engagement. The number of countries receiving U.S. economic development aid grew steadily, and significantly, between 2000 and 2010. Between 2005 and 2010 the United States began to export arms to a growing number of countries and began to distribute military aid on a wider scale.

The general pattern that emerges from Table 2b shows that the expansion of U.S. political-military engagement, which largely took place over the course of the 2000s, was in countries where the United States also had a strong economic ties. This has had the general effect of strengthening, rather than weakening, the overall relationship between the global economic and political-military networks of the United States. The years of rapid political-military expansion in the late 1990s and early 2000s forged more political-military ties with the major export partners of the United States and, to a somewhat lesser degree, with major FDI and oil import partners. The increased deployment of U.S. troops abroad in the late 1990s and 2000s and the extension of U.S. military aid to more countries in the 2000s did correlate with U.S. oil interests, but not its major foreign investment partners. On the other hand, many of the new arms export relationships that were created in the late 2000s were major FDI partners, but were not major sources of U.S. oil imports.

Table 2b: Jaccard Index, Economic and Political-Military networks US, 1993 - 2015.**Key years of political-military network growth highlighted**

	Exports				Foreign Direct Investment				Oil Imports			
	Troop Deploy.	Arms Exports	Econ. Aid	Mil. Dip.	Troop Deploy.	Arms Exports	Econ. Aid	Mil. Dip.	Troop Deploy	Arms Exports	Econ. Aid	Mil. Dip.
1993	0.21	0.48	0.28		0.23	0.54	0.17		0.23	0.44	0.13	
1994	0.22	0.53	0.26	0.32	0.25	0.56	0.12	0.22	0.26	0.51	0.06	0.14
1995	0.23	0.52	0.23	0.36	0.27	0.51	0.17	0.29	0.25	0.42	0.08	0.08
1996	0.26	0.39	0.24	0.36	0.27	0.33	0.17	0.29	0.24	0.19	0.08	0.08
1997	0.25	0.55	0.25	0.35	0.27	0.49	0.19	0.28	0.28	0.38	0.08	0.15
1998	0.23	0.54	0.23	0.35	0.25	0.57	0.17	0.25	0.20	0.31	0.08	0.13
1999	0.27	0.46	0.29	0.43	0.27	0.46	0.25	0.33	0.27	0.36	0.13	0.17
2000	0.32	0.49	0.25	0.38	0.31	0.49	0.19	0.34	0.28	0.36	0.11	0.17
2001	0.30	0.49	0.28	0.37	0.30	0.54	0.21	0.31	0.32	0.40	0.14	0.14
2002	0.31	0.52	0.28	0.37	0.29	0.54	0.22	0.35	0.27	0.46	0.14	0.16
2003	0.30	0.46	0.27	0.36	0.23	0.49	0.20	0.30	0.21	0.41	0.15	0.17
2004	0.31	0.45	0.29	0.38	0.24	0.45	0.22	0.30	0.21	0.40	0.15	0.15
2005	0.32	0.48	0.30	0.34	0.27	0.46	0.24	0.29	0.21	0.44	0.15	0.18
2006	0.30	0.50	0.32	0.38	0.26	0.51	0.25	0.28	0.22	0.45	0.17	0.19
2007	0.33	0.51	0.33	0.39	0.26	0.50	0.24	0.25	0.24	0.40	0.21	0.18
2008	0.34	0.53	0.32	0.43	0.31	0.50	0.20	0.29	0.25	0.36	0.17	0.20
2009	0.31	0.52	0.34	0.42	0.27	0.51	0.20	0.24	0.20	0.41	0.18	0.20
2010	0.33	0.51	0.36	0.36	0.30	0.46	0.23	0.21	0.26	0.44	0.20	0.17
2011	0.31	0.56	0.32	0.43	0.29	0.54	0.19	0.27	0.26	0.40	0.22	0.22
2012	0.31	0.61	0.33	0.38	0.33	0.55	0.18	0.23	0.26	0.45	0.19	0.19
2013	0.31	0.49	0.31	0.31	0.29	0.42	0.20	0.21	0.24	0.38	0.19	0.17
2014	0.33	0.55	0.30	0.34	0.31	0.47	0.18	0.19	0.25	0.38	0.17	0.17
2015	0.30	0.54	0.31	0.35	0.28	0.50	0.17	0.23	0.26	0.40	0.16	0.12

Taken as a whole, these findings belie the straightforward ‘decoupling’ narrative of U.S. hegemonic decline. Specifically, it suggests that the structures of U.S. global hegemony—the joining of economic and political-military power upon which that hegemony was built in the postwar period—remains basically intact. We do not see the fracturing of U.S. global economic interests and global political-military activities that some accounts of U.S. hegemonic

decline expect us to see. These findings also help to more clearly define the global context of U.S. hegemony within which China's own economic and political-military expansion has taken place. China's expanding global economic and political-military activities, and the coupling of these two sets of relationships are still both relatively small when compared to the massive, and densely overlaid economic and political-military relationships of the United States around the world. This suggests that if we want to locate the processes by which China's global influence has increased, we need to look in the smaller cracks and weaknesses in the global, structural footprint of the United States. Below we focus on three such examples: China's growing leadership role in transnational military activities; China's growing economic and political-military presence on the African continent, and the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative with the related formation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

The Subtle Expansion of China's Military Influence. The U.S. may still wield overwhelming military force, but has been unable to use that force effectively in recent decades to bring states together under its hegemonic umbrella. This a reflection of two related developments. One the one hand, any aspects of state power have been transnationalized and located in powerful transnational, inter-governmental bodies including, as Martin Shaw (1997) argues, the state's means of military force. The Cold War military power was organized into transnational military alliances, like NATO and the U.N., which now serve as the organizational framework of what Shaw describes as a "worldwide web of authoritative relations" (2000: 193). This process has altered the terrain on which hegemonic power is built. To be successful the next hegemon's global political-military practices will likely need to cultivate and mold the global state in a way that supports its global economic power.

This points to the second key development. U.S. militarism has increasingly eschewed these transnational military bodies, opting instead for a "go it alone" approach in many instances. China, on the other hand, has increasingly embraced transnational military cooperation. A key example of this is the fact that China now often plays a leadership role within UN Peacekeeping operations, contributing more troops and police than any of the other five Security Council members to UN peacekeeping missions, and now serving as the second largest financial contributor to UN peacekeeping operations. This points to China's willingness and desire to be a visible, global, political-military leader (Allen, Saunders and Chen 2017).

Thus, while U.S. militarism remains deeply bound up with its massive web of military bases around the world and a strategic posture that demands a military capacity to intervene anywhere around the world unilaterally, China's military deployments have been much more limited. On the one hand, China flexes its military muscle in and around the South China Sea, but it is military deployments to the Middle East and the African continent that predominate the distribution of

China's 'hard' military engagements. This is consistent with the general distribution of Chinese military deployments after 2000.

The PLA's expansive participation in military diplomatic activities around the world is another mechanism by which the PLA has taken a role in forging transnational military relationships. While the aggregate total of the various activities that fall into the category of military diplomacy has not changed all that much (or at least not in a clear direction) over the last 15 years, there have been some significant shifts in the types of military diplomatic activities that the PLA engages in. Since 2010 there have been notably fewer visits abroad by PLA officials, but also a marked increase in the PLAs participation in joint military exercises, especially those which involve several nations working in a multilateral fashion. The researchers who study these trends suggest that they point to the PLA's growing confidence in its military sophistication (by putting its military training and hardware on public display in a combat-like setting with strategic partners), and its desire to shape its broader security environment and the world's image of China as an important player on the global military stage (Allen, Saunders and Chen, 2017).

Being Where the United States is Absent. The U.S. hegemonic footprint has a distinct, geographical shape that was molded in the early postwar years as the United States asserted itself politically over the capitalist core Western Europe and Southeast Asia and then used these industrial hubs to spread its influence across the global south (Gowan 2004). That project was aggressively pursued in Latin America, Southeast Asia and the Middle East, but less so on the African Continent. That pattern, established in the postwar-Cold War decades, has largely persisted and, as revealed by table 3 below, has therefore provided space for China to advance its own global interests.

In the 1990s, most of China's major FDI partners were located in southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. As foreign investment activities grew rapidly in the 2000s, that regional pattern began to diversify. FDI expanded significantly in Western Europe, and Latin America and the Middle East, but it also intensified on the African continent as shown by the doubling of major FDI partners in the region by the end of 2010. The 2000s also saw a significant expansion of China's oil import network, much of which took place in three regions. By the late 1990s China had begun importing oil from coastal Southwest African nations and then, over the course of the 2000s, tapped into the oil reserves of a growing number of countries across the African continent. In 2006, oil imports from Latin America became much more important, complementing oil imports from its longer standing partners in the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

Similar regional partners to China's global economic expansion emerge when we look at the regional distribution of China's global political military expansion. The peak year for Chinese military operations was 2005 with engagements in twelve countries. Most of those were on the

African continent and were conducted as part of UN peacekeeping operations. Much of the growth in the size of China's arms export network over this period comes from the signing of new arms trade deals with sub-Saharan African countries. In the early 2000s, China's economic aid was distributed broadly across the poorer regions of the globe, with a marked expansion in economic aid to Sub-Saharan African countries in this period. The growth in China's economic aid network that occurred after 2005 saw further expansion into Sub-Saharan Africa as well as expansion across Latin America and the Middle East and North Africa.

Taken together, these trends point to Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America as being key to Chinese economic and political-military expansion, which China's economic and political-military expansion into sub-Saharan Africa standing out for two reasons. First, while the United States certainly has an economic presence on the African continent, China maintains strong export, foreign investment, and oil importing relationships with a greater number of African countries than the United States does. Particularly striking is the vast difference in the number of major Chinese FDI partners versus the number of major U.S. FDI partners among the sub-Saharan African nations. Second, China has buttressed its economic ties in the region with political-military ties.

We do see evidence that the United States has sought to address its economic absence in the region through a stronger political-military presence—contributing troops to those same peacekeeping missions and, in recent years, spreading more military aid around—but, this has not been matched by a growing economic commitment to the region. China has more strong foreign investment and oil import partners in Sub Saharan Africa than the United States does, has more arms export partners, sends economic aid to more countries, and deploys its military forces (again, as part of UN peacekeeping missions) to the same number of countries in the region. It is therefore in Sub-Saharan Africa where we see a gap in the hegemonic influence of the United States which China has been able to move into just as the United States did in Western Europe after World War II.

Table 3: Size of U.S. and Chinese economic and political-military networks by region (avg. countries per region per period)

	United States				China				United States				China				
	93-99	00-05	06-10	11-15	93-99	00-05	06-10	11-15	93-99	00-05	06-10	11-15	93-99	00-05	06-10	11-15	
Arms Exports									Commercial Exports								
SS Africa	4	1	3	5	2	3	6	7	6	7	6	8	13	11	11		
EE/FSU	5	4	6	5	2	0	0	0	8	9	10	10	9	13	15		
LA/Caribbean	10	8	7	9	1	1	2	3	26	26	26	25	15	14	12		
Mid. E. & N. Af.	9	9	11	12	2	4	3	3	15	15	16	14	14	14	15		
NA/WE/OECD	18	19	18	18	1	1	1	1	24	24	23	23	24	25	25		
Asia	9	8	8	10	4	4	6	7	13	12	12	12	16	16	16		
Deployments									FDI								
SS Africa	2	3	5	8	1	4	5	4	4	5	6	6	7	10	15		
EE/SU	4	7	5	4		1			5	8	7	6	5	5	7		
LA/Carib	6	6	9	3					19	21	18	18	5	5	9		
Mid. E. & N. Af.	7	10	8	8	4	3	3	3	7	7	7	7	2	5	7		
NA/WE/OECD	11	11	12	12	1	2			22	22	23	23	7	9	13		
Asia	3	6	6	4	2	2	1	2	9	9	8	10	9	10	14		
Economic Aid									Oil Imports								
SS Africa	21	25	28	30		28	37	36	5	6	7	6	4	7	8		
EE/FSU	16	17	15	15		8	7	6	2	3	5	5	1	2	2		
LA/Carib	12	13	15	13		4	9	8	10	11	10	10	2	4	6		
Mid. E. & N. Af.	4	6	8	9		4	6	5	6	7	9	8	7	9	10		
NA/WE/OECD	2	2	3	3		1		1	13	14	13	14	7	6	7		
Asia	12	14	17	16		15	18	18	7	6	6	5	8	9	9		
Military Aid/Diplomacy																	
SS Africa	7	6	9	17		13	15	10									
EE/FSU	18	21	21	21		15	15	13									
LA/Carib	15	16	17	13		10	10	7									
Mid. E. & N. Af.	7	8	10	11		6	9	7									
NA/WE/OECD	3	2	1	2		19	17	17									
Asia	5	7	9	11		14	16	18									

SS Africa = Sub-Saharan Africa
 EE/FSU = Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union
 LA/Carib = Latin America and Caribbean
 Mid. E. & N. Af. = Middle East and North Africa
 NA/WE/OECD = N. America, W. Europe and OECD in Pacific
 Asia = All other Asia

Laying the Foundation for the Belt and Road. Both the BRI and AIIB mark a new stage in China's growing global influence. The BRI was launched as an explicit strategy for global economic expansion through targeted infrastructure investments; the AIIB has been correctly understood as an effort to supplant Western-dominated global financial institutions with one that is explicitly China-led. Both are thus clear statements of China's intent to take a leading role in organizing the global economy. What role has China's existing political-military practices, its years of building up relationships through military engagement, arms dealing, providing economic development aid, or military diplomatic activities, played in setting the stage for these latest developments? Our strategy for addressing this question is to compare the similarity between the network of countries receiving BRI investments and the network of AIIB partner countries, with established economic and political-military networks.

The Heritage Foundation maintains the China Global Investment Tracker database, which tracks Chinese foreign investment abroad since 2005 and, for investments since 2013, labels those tied to the BRI. Data on the membership of the AIIB is listed on the AIIB's website.¹⁰ For this analysis, we look at all countries receiving BRI investments between 2013 and 2016 (the most recent year for which the data is complete) and all members of the AIIB as of June, 2018.¹¹ We then compare these countries against those which have been part of China's strong economic or political-military networks in any of the years leading up to the beginning of the BRI, 2000 to 2012. This allows us to see if BRI and AIIB countries are more likely to have existing economic or political-military ties to China. We further test whether having a sustained economic or political-military relationship with China makes a BRI investment or AIIB membership more likely by comparing BRI recipient countries and AIIB member countries against those countries which have been a member of a strong economic or political-military network for seven or more years over the 2000-2012 period.

Table 4, below, our results for five groups of countries: all 55 countries that have received at least one BRI investment in the 2013-2016 period, the 34 countries that have received BRI investments for at least three of these four years (what we call "core" BRI countries), the remaining 119 countries that have not received any BRI investments, the 61 members of the AIIB, and those countries that are not members of the AIIB.

As Table 4 reveals, the 55 countries receiving BRI investments between 2013 and 2016 were much more likely to have pre-existing, sustained economic and political-military ties to China than those countries that have not received BRI investments. This finding is stronger when we look just

¹⁰ <https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/governance/members-of-bank/index.html>

¹¹ For this analysis, we include both investments (where the Chinese state maintains some interest in the project) and construction aid under the short-hand label "investments."

core BRI countries. Core BRI countries are much more likely to have sustained ties to China's strong export, FDI, and oil import networks than non-BRI countries. Particularly noteworthy is the large difference in the proportion of countries in each of these groups that have been part of the strong FDI and oil import networks for seven or more years. Relatively few non-BRI countries (19% and 13.5%) have been consistent members of these strong networks in the years leading up to BRI, whereas core BRI countries have had sustained foreign investment and oil import ties to China at roughly three times that rate.

A similar pattern holds when we look at political-military ties. Less than one quarter of non-BRI countries have been part of China's arms trade network since 2000 and almost none have had a sustained arms trade relationship with China. In contrast, more than half of the core BRI countries have been part of China's growing arms export network, with one in five having a sustained arms transfer relationship. Military deployments in the 2000-2012 period, though relatively rare for China in general, were more likely to take place in countries that later received BRI investments.

Table 4: Proportion of countries in strong networks, 2000 - 2012, receiving Belt and Road Investments or investing in AIIB.

	Years in strong network (Avg. country years)	Export	FDI	Oil Imports	Arms Exports	Deploy*	Economic Aid	Mil. Diplomacy
All BRI	<7 years	13%	40%	15%	26%	15%	28%	50%
	7+ years	67%	46%	31%	13%	4%	43%	46%
		(9.1)	(6.0)	(4.6)	(2.2)	(0.7)	(5.2)	(6.2)
BRI 3&4	<7 years	6%	35%	15%	34%	20%	26%	37%
	7+ years	79%	56%	41%	20%	6%	46%	57%
		(10.1)	(7.0)	(5.7)	(3.3)	(1.0)	(5.6)	(6.9)
Non-BRI	<7 years	6%	42%	12%	22%	8%	24%	50%
	7+ years	45%	19%	14%	2%	4%	39%	27%
		(5.5)	(3.1)	(1.9)	(0.6)	(0.6)	(4.9)	(3.7)
All AIIB	<7 years	10%	38%	17%	17%	11%	13%	35%
	7+ years	79%	52%	29%	10%	2%	35%	60%
		(10.5)	(6.8)	(4.4)	(1.6)	(0.5)	(3.9)	(6.8)

Finally, while both BRI and non-BRI countries have had some military-diplomatic engagement with China, BRI countries were much more likely to have sustained military-diplomatic ties. The membership of the AIIB is similarly made up of countries with established economic and political-military ties to China, though with some notable exceptions. Table 4 shows that AIIB members have similarly strong, long-standing connections to Chinese trade, foreign investment, and oil import networks as “core” BRI countries and are similarly much more likely to have established economic ties with China than non-AIIB members. On the other hand, AIIB members have only slightly stronger ties to some Chinese political-military networks, specifically arms exports and military diplomacy, but the degree of difference between AIIB members and non-AIIB members is not as great as that between BRI and non-BRI countries. Like BRI countries, AIIB members countries are much more likely to have sustained military-diplomatic relationships with China, but AIIB member countries average only slightly more years being part of China's arms export network than non-AIIB members countries (1.6 versus 0.9). Moreover, Chinese military deployments in the 2000-2012 period were in countries that did not become AIIB members.

Taken together, these findings show how the BRI and AIIB both build upon existing economic and political-military relationships, and (especially the AIIB) serve as a framework for expanding Chinese influence beyond its existing economic and political-military ties. The membership of the AIIB consists of two groups: 37 regional partners who were likely to be direct recipients of AIIB funded projects or who had their own interests in supporting infrastructure development in the region, and 24 non-regional partners, most of whom are Western European economies with whom China has had relatively few political-military ties over the last two decades. China does not deploy troops to Europe, and Western Europe does not need economic aid nor show much interest in Chinese arms. Yet, this does not mean that China has not used political-military means to shore up commitments from Western European partners. As shown in Table 2, above, the PLA's military diplomatic activity in Western Europe is nearly as frequent as it is in Sub-Saharan Africa, with roughly half of the countries in Western Europe participating in military diplomacy with China in every year 2000-2011.¹² This suggests two things. First, the BRI and AIIB both facilitate Chinese investment abroad, but their likely effects with respect to China's global influence differ. In its early years, the BRI has served more to consolidate existing relationships than to expand China's influence around the world. The AIIB has acted more as a vehicle for expanding Chinese influence, notably into the wealthiest countries of the West. Whether the AIIB ultimately serves to create a real alternative to existing multilateral financial

¹² Only six Western European countries participated in military diplomacy with China in 2012, but then it increased to 13 countries in 2013.

bodies still needs to be seen, but this is clearly a step towards China taking a lead role in organizing the distribution of global investments and further developments along this line would certainly shore up its position as a global economic leader. Second, this analysis reinforces the point that softer forms of political-military engagement are doing more to help China achieve its global ambitions than direct military conflict. Both the pattern of BRI investments and AIIB partner countries suggest that military diplomacy supported, and perhaps even helped establish, these relationships.

Conclusion

Our goal in this paper has been to situate current debates over the shifting balance of power in the global political-economy in a structural analysis of Chinese and U.S. hegemonic and imperialistic practices. Our findings cast doubt on the ‘bifurcation’ theory which posits that the current era is one of a new kind of global order, with U.S. power maintained through political-military means and Chinese power through economic means. The macro-level picture that we provide does not supply evidence supporting a decoupling of U.S. political-military relationships from its economic relationships. At the same time, we are able to show that just as China’s global economic engagement has grown, so too has the Chinese state built up its global political-military apparatus, supplying the world with arms, deploying more of its troops abroad, and routinely participating in joint military exercises with other states. These activities do not reach the scale of those of the United States, but it would be a mistake to expect them to. By taking a broad view on what constitutes political-military engagement our analysis shows how China has conducted its political-military activities within and around global structures crafted by decades of U.S. dominance.

Given that the United States remains committed to this degree of global military presence Chinese global military strategy is likely to avoid direct confrontation with the United States and will emphasize subtler forms of military engagement. At the same time, economic expansion may call on greater use of more aggressive militarism. The story of Chinese economic globalization over the last twenty years is one of expanding foreign direct investments and increased diversification of its oil supplies. It is perhaps no surprise then that it is within these networks in particular that we see the expansion of China’s global political-military activities and China’s growing oil dependency creates new security dilemmas. In recent years, nearly three-quarters of its oil imports have been transported through the Strait of Malacca, over which China had little control (Zhang 2011). In response to this dilemma, China took considerable efforts to control its demands for oil and to diversify sources and routes of its oil supply (Zhang 2011; Kennedy 2011). From the late 2000s, China stepped up in its sovereignty claim in the South China Sea. Some estimates consider this area as a major offshore oil field, and it is a vital shipping lane of oil for

not only China but also Japan and South Korea. As of 2016, around half of the world's oil tanker traffic flew through the South China Sea (Daiss 2016; Maxie 2016).

Our findings suggest that China's strategy for dealing with security matters will not take the form of U.S.-style unilateral intervention. Rather, China is more likely to boost its capacity to maintain order around the world by supporting, and increasingly leading, multilateral forces and alliances. Moves in this direction can be seen in the shifts in China's military diplomatic activities that have taken place in recent years. Since 2013, the People's Liberation Army has participated in a much higher number of joint military exercises and, since 2012, has been hosting roughly three times as many senior-level foreign military meetings as it has been attending (Allen, Chen and Saunders 2017).

Some observers also point to expanding arms exports as a means to support China's emerging global strategy by extending China's political, and possibly military reach in the post-2000 period (Luo 2017). Our analyses thus suggest that accounts of rising Chinese global influence will need to be less attendant to the conventionally understood, "hard" forms of military power (i.e., direct military conflict) and devote more attention to "softer" forms of military power that use military institutions to support economic and political agendas.

We are only beginning to understand the sources, and broader impacts of China's global political-military engagements. Take, for example, China's growing presence in the global arms market. "Made in China" is becoming a weapon-brand that not only appeals to a growing range of clients but also expands China's foreign policy influence with significant impacts on global and regional order (Ling and Matthews 2017). This is a reflection, in part, of the changing relationship between the Chinese Communist Party, the PLA, and domestic defense industries. From the late 1970s, the Chinese military was encouraged to engage in commercial activities to make up for reduced support from the state's budget (Mulvenon 2001). This strategy generated serious disciplinary problems in the military but boosted China's arms exports (Karmel 1997; Luo 2017). In 1998 the Chinese leadership finally made the decision to prohibit the military from commercial activities. Since then, the central government also expanded the budget for military expenditure and introduced a series of reforms to bolster defense research and innovation (Cheung 2009; Luo 2017).

At the same time, it is having real impacts on the domestic politics of China's arms trade partners. A growing body of literature contends that China is playing a very contradictory role in Africa with mixed consequences for democratization in the region (Brookes 2007; Campbell 2008, De Soysa and Midford 2012). In some African countries, China's arms sales, along with its contribution to peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities, are critically needed in an era when "UN peacekeeping is severely overstretched" (Gill and Huang 2009:9). In other instances, arms

deliveries from China to some African authoritarian regimes were used in civil wars and to support state repression of political movements (Conteh-Morgan and Weeks 2016; Ayabei 2017).

In drawing these connections, we have relied on a research method that privileges breadth over depth. As such, these findings lack the nuance, detail, and historical perspective that is needed to understand the causal processes behind the trends that we describe here. In our view, this sacrifice is worth the ability to contextualize geographically and temporally-specific manifestations of China's rise in a broader set of structural patterns. But it is a method that can certainly be developed and improved upon. Indeed, we hope that our contribution reinvigorates interest in structural-level analyses of this sort as there is much that can be gleaned from the perspective that it offers. Two potentially fruitful directions for this work come to mind. The first is to take a more fine-grained look at the distribution of trading partners. As we note, the size of China's overall trade network is nearly global, but distinguishing trade partners by types of commodities or degrees of value added could add some analytical dynamism to this critical component of China's economic role in the global economy. The second is to go further along the lines suggested by some scholars of U.S. hegemony and focus on key 'nodes' in China's global economic and political-military networks, countries with whom China has maintained strong ties for a sustained period of time across multiple dimensions.

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