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## Taiwan, Hong Kong & Macau in China's infrastructure-diplomacy and the China Dream: Will the dominions fall?

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### ABSTRACT

The “China Dream” is a native imagination of a great renewal of the Chinese nation. Mao Zedong had a dream to save the nation and promised the Chinese people utopian socialism tomorrow at the cost of sacrifices that needed to be borne today. Deng Xiaoping brought in economic reforms so that the Chinese people could dream of becoming rich. Xi Jinping's China Dream has focussed upon China's sphere of influence extending beyond its regional space. While Xi Jinping's “China Dream” revolves around connectivity and infrastructure, using shades of affirmative, assertive and aggressive nationalism, as necessary, his Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is likely to affect over 68 countries, 65% of the world's population, and 40% of global GDP. At the regional level, China's 55-km-long Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge is geared to transform the political geography of the South China Sea sub-region. This paper attempts to contextualise the notion of the contemporary “China Dream” and deconstruct the implications of Xi Jinping's aggressive “infrastructure diplomacy” upon Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau.

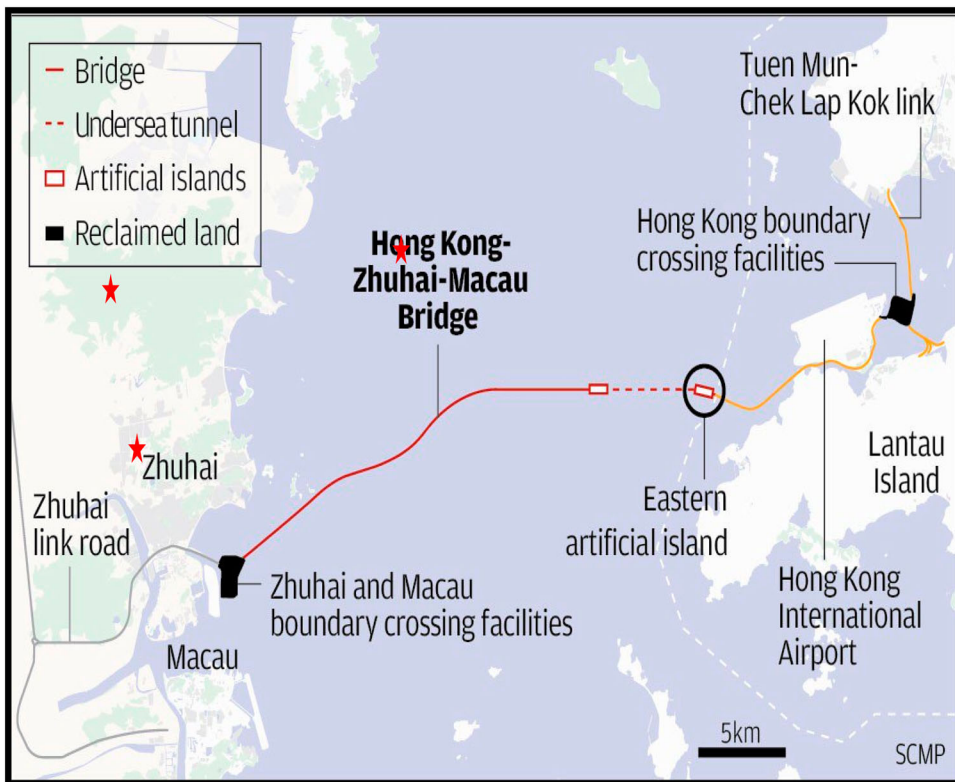
### KEYWORDS

Taiwan; Hong Kong; Greater Bay; China; dream; dominions; Guangdong; Zhuhai

## Introduction

President Xi Jinping's New Year message of 2019 was a loaded one. In his televised speech on 01 January 2019, he unequivocally announced that “China must be [and] will be reunified with Taiwan”. While the imagination of the Chinese mainland might well have been fired by nationalistic fervour, this New Year message brought anxiety and political ripples on the far side of the Taiwan Strait.

It was as recently as October 2018 that China's “Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge”, which spans a distance of 55 km and connects eleven Chinese cities with Macau and Hong Kong, was opened to the public (Figure 1). While the bridge physically connects mainland China with Macau and Hong Kong, its real significance is political. It reflects Beijing's larger game plan of developing the Chinese Greater Bay Area – a campaign to connect Hong Kong and Macau to the eleven Chinese cities in order to form a high-tech region that will be the Chinese alternative to USA's Silicon Valley and/or Japan's Tokyo Bay. It is in this larger game plan that China's unilateral declaration of Taiwan's



**Figure 1.** Hongkong – Zhuhai – Macau.

Source: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6302317/Hong-Kong-Zhuhai-Macau-Bridge-Worlds-longest-sea-crossing-open-week-China.html>.

unification with the mainland fits. It completes the Chinese domestic circle of political consolidation and indicates China's intended pathway to the future.

Back in November 2012, in his inaugural address as the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Xi Jinping first articulated his "Chinese Dream". Since he used the reference several times, the "China Dream" aroused political curiosity both within and outside China. Although it is not adequately clear what the Dream ("meng") denotes, several scholars opine that Xi Jinping's "China Dream" seems to be taking political shape through China's infrastructure connectivity-projects.

"The China Dream", "Greater China" or "Chinese Unifications" are frequently used references today to capture China's larger policy posture. Given the large global constituency of China-watchers, there is a plethora of available literature, with varying explanations, interpretations and bits of empirical evidence, all of which compete for intellectual space and attention, in the frenetic speculation of what the China Dream possibly intends to achieve. Two fundamental questions constitute the core motivation for this paper. First, deconstruct the "China Dream" vis-à-vis future engagement-dynamics of the PRC with Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. Second, based on China's policy as it manifests itself on the ground, explore whether the "Dominions" (Taiwan in particular) are likely to fall.

## Deconstructing the China Dream

Xi Jinping is the undisputed leader of China today. He holds the top three positions in China, viz., the head of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC), the head of State and Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), and, the head of the military (PLA). He is expected to lead China in the foreseeable future, too. His China Dream therefore assumes political significance in many quarters and, soon after his reference to the same during the CCP address, the global media, as also a host of Chinese scholars, set out to decipher it.<sup>1</sup>

The Chinese State media has, since then, unleashed a veritable propaganda blitz, extolling the virtues of President Xi Jinping's China Dream. In Chinese schools, universities, scientific fora, cultural associations, and perhaps in the Chinese social psyche itself, images of China Dream began to take shape with varying degrees of imaginativeness. In schools and learning centres, students were even given the task of writing their own dreams that might better capture and communicate the leader's vision.<sup>2</sup>

As a prelude to Xi Jinping's dream, it was Liu Mingfu, a retired PLA Colonel, who published a book titled "The China Dream: Great Power Thinking and Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era". While this book, originally published in 2010, initially garnered only limited success in capturing scholarly attention, it suddenly assumed great intellectual space after Xi Jinping's reference to his China Dream, and an English edition was published in 2015.<sup>3</sup>

### Liu's China Dream

Xi Jinping's China Dream might possibly have been borrowed from Liu's book. The China Dream in Liu's book is subject to several interpretations. At one end, it could be considered to be a call for the achievement of all-round national prosperity, as witness the comment, "We must achieve the great revival of the Chinese nation, and we must ensure there is unison between a prosperous country and strong military".<sup>4</sup> It is a dream of China becoming a strong nation; and, naturally, for the military, it is a dream of becoming a strong military. At the other end, Liu also extols Chinese civilizational values and virtues which he contrasts with the Western model of territorial colonisation. Historically, "China" represents a great Chinese mainland power without militarisation, conquest or domination.<sup>5</sup>

Seven years into Xi's leadership, the Chinese strongman has successfully weathered the South China Sea controversy without yielding an inch to international pressure. The conspicuously planted theory of an imminent economic collapse of China has also now fallen flat. With China sitting pretty in the US-China trade war and playing negotiator between Washington and Pyongyang, Xi has truly emerged as a leader in absolute control, whose "China Dream" is not mere intellectual imagination but flows along policy lines, too.

### The several shades of the China Dream

The Western press, for its part has multiple interpretations of the China Dream. Mao Zedong, as per Western media, too, had a dream. He promised the Chinese people "utopian socialism tomorrow at the cost of a bit of social sacrifice today". Mao's dream was to save the nation from what he considered to be an existential threat. His successor, Deng Xiaoping, brought in economic reforms so that Chinese people could dream of

becoming rich.<sup>6</sup> Xi Jinping's China Dream, on the other hand, is to expand the ones inherited from his predecessors and visibly proposes to reinforce the Communist Party's hold on "matters China"; continue economic reforms and create a business climate that will generate jobs; ensure that China has the right ecosystem for sustainable growth and development; and, consolidate China's sphere of influence well beyond the regional space.<sup>7</sup>

### **China's nationalism and the China Dream**

From the 1860s onwards, China suffered successive defeats in a series of military confrontations with the West and with Japan. The succeeding period of roughly a hundred years, was a period of humiliation.<sup>8</sup> China's national pride, which had been assiduously built over a protracted period when it was considered to be the Middle Kingdom of the world, and certainly the leader of the orient, was deeply fractured as the nation perceived that it had been humiliated through defeats such as those suffered in the Opium Wars, the Boxer Rebellion, and, the Sino-Japanese War.<sup>9</sup> As James Harrison points out, Chinese nationalism, under the stress of several national humiliations and trying times, has more evolved around a sense culturalism of a common historical heritage that largely developed over more than two millennia, following the Qin-Han imperial unification that began in 221 BC.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, China's political discourse and its accompanying foreign policy underwent several transformations, especially after the mid-nineteenth Century.

The success of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms rejuvenated Chinese nationalism.<sup>11</sup> Nourished by economic success and incremental prosperity, Chinese culturalism, which was long suppressed, now began to flower anew. The common people began to see China as a strong and confident nation that could assert itself to realise its ambitions. Through 1990s, rallying around its vast historical heritage, cultural and common ethnicity and buoyed by a rapidly growing economy, Chinese nationalism served to unify the nation internally, as it found itself regaining its lost prestige. With this infusion of vigour and success, a larger, confident and assertive China has arrived upon the world stage, determined to influence not just its neighbourhood but the global order at large.

As China makes her way to centre stage in the global arena, she is increasingly demonstrating affirmative, assertive and aggressive nationalism. These three forms of Chinese nationalism are subtly different from one another and China uses and projects one or another of them in a "best fit" mode, as and where they were to be applied.<sup>12</sup> All these three modes of nationalism are tools that the PRC uses effectively in taking contemporary opportunities that are embedded in its historical challenges towards a decisive goal. For China, the immediate issues and nationalism experimentation – her boundary disputes with Japan, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and India in addition to continued quest for unification of Taiwan – needed to be tested. In the South China Sea case, China used aggressive nationalism; with majority of the ASEAN member countries, to resolve bilateral issues, it used a combination of all three, while affirmative nationalism was her option of choice while dealing with the Sino-Indian Doklam border issue.

As far as Hong Kong and Macau are concerned, China once again uses a higher degree of affirmative nationalism to give effect to both, physical and economic integration. In the case of Taiwan, on the other hand, while pursuing non recognition of Taiwan in Central America and Caribbean to halting Taiwan's runaway tendency, China has preferred aggressive nationalism.<sup>13</sup>

## Infrastructure diplomacy as new tool

Inaccessibility and poor road and rail connectivity at the ground level has been the bane of intra-regional trade in South Asia. While South East Asia has done reasonably well in terms of infrastructure, South Asia, with its huge population of over 1.8 billion people, has only around 5% intra-regional trade, largely because connectivity remains a formidable roadblock. Non-tariff barriers (NTBs) continue to plague the region and yet, as reports suggest, addressing infrastructure deficits in the region can do away with nearly 80% of the NTBs.<sup>14</sup>

The UN recognises road-rail connectivity and infrastructure as necessary prerequisites for intra-regional trade and economic growth. In 1959 itself, the United Nations Economic and Social Council for the Asia Pacific (UNESCAP), had evolved a regional transport cooperation initiative, involving thirty-two countries.<sup>15</sup> India, too, is a signatory of the Asian Highway Network architecture, since 2004.

The Asian Highways AH-1 and AH-2 (see Figure 2) pass through the north-eastern states of India, and stretch from the Indo-Myanmar border at Moreh in the state of Manipur, via Imphal-Kohima (in Nagaland), Dimapur-Nagaon-Jorabat (in Assam) and Shillong-Dawki-Tamabil up to the Indo-Bangladesh border in the state of Meghalaya, over a length of about 740 km.<sup>16</sup>

While India's aspirations for enhanced connectivity with South East Asia hugely converge with the connectivity goals of the Asian Highways, China has taken the global



**Figure 2.** Great Asian highways of connectivity.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Asian\\_Highways.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Asian_Highways.png).

infrastructure revolution to new heights and has emerged as the world biggest and most proactive contractor, leading to a revolutionary movement for the development of infrastructure. Indeed, infrastructure is now China's new tool of nationalism. Be it Hambantota or Gwadar, or the China–Pakistan–Occupied-Kashmir Economic Corridor (CPEC) or the Belt Road Initiative (BRI), China's mega projects will directly impact over 68 countries in the world, 65% of the global population and 40% of the global GDP as of 2017.<sup>17</sup>

China is moving at lightning speed to create global-scale infrastructure and connectivity projects. Graham Allison, who coined the phrase, "The Thucydides Trap" to link China's rise to a possible global armed conflict, brilliantly captures China's speed at delivering infrastructure projects, stating that the Americans took good 48 months to build Harvard Anderson Memorial Bridge right in front of Cambridge University. The Chinese on the other hand, built the much larger Sanyuan Bridge in Beijing in just about 43 h.<sup>18</sup>

China's rise is backed by its military and economic efficiency. However, in the face of the current incremental decline in China's GDP, China's grand infrastructure drive at the global scale is an alternative plan to help paddle Chinese capital, technology and industrial over-productivity, for obvious reasons. The pace of infrastructure movement in the twenty-first Century, almost critically neglected in a good part of the world for very many years, has suddenly evolved and is defining the diplomacy of our times – infrastructure-diplomacy, one might call it – very often pushing developments of surprising scale and order. It is in this context that the Chinese infrastructure-drive proposes to simultaneously open-up new international economic avenues and create huge political influence for China, in its neighbourhood and beyond.

### **Greater China via the BRI and a naval corridor**

The notion "Silk Road", popularly used today, seems to be of German origin. The German geologist and geographer, Ferdinand von Richthofen, arrived in Shanghai in the early 1860s and, based on his travels over the next four years, coined the term *Seidenstrasse* (Silk Road).<sup>19</sup> While Richthofen's discovery of coal in Northern China opened the imperialist flood gates, nearly a century and half later, the same Silk Road both on land and in the maritime space, has assumed a pivotal position in Chinese foreign policy, particularly after 2012. Three seminal events: the standoff between China and the Philippines in April of 2012, over Huang Yan Island;<sup>20</sup> the standoff between China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in September of 2012;<sup>21</sup> and, finally, the arrival of Xi Jinping at the very epicentre of the circle of power in China, were all critical variables that set in motion China's Silk Road drive.

China's naval nationalism, with huge Chinese maritime claims stretching up to 800 km of maritime space in the South China Sea, which China claimed as her territorial waters, is directly conflicting with the maritime-boundary claims of most South East Asian countries. Strategically considered within the realm of the First Island Chain, the South China Sea dispute is at the centre of nearly one third of global maritime traffic and an estimated US \$ 5 trillion trade.<sup>22</sup> It is a full throttle test-case of China's aggressive naval nationalism in the high seas.<sup>23</sup>

Admiral Liu Huaqing, former commander of the PLA Navy, widely regarded as the mastermind of China's modern naval build-up and strategy, had, way back in 1982, stated that

it would be necessary for China to control the First and Second Island Chains by 2010 and 2020. Thereafter, the PLA Navy had to be ready to challenge US domination over the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean by 2040. If China is able to dominate the Second Island Chain seven years from now, the East China Sea will become the backyard of the PLA Navy (see Figure 3).<sup>24</sup>

Spiralling outward from the South China Sea dispute, China has also expanded her experimentation in respect of naval nationalism to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which are claimed by Tokyo to lie within Japanese waters. It may, however, be noted that while China had a decisive advantage in the South China Sea and dispute with her smaller ASEAN neighbours, this is hardly the case while dealing with Japan. Simultaneously, China appears to be dangerously close to direct confrontation with Washington. Thus, the Chinese experimentation in terms of naval nationalism is a mixture of both, “affirmative” and “assertive” nationalism – an experimentation designed to test the waters.<sup>25</sup> Further, China’s infrastructure-diplomacy through the BRI and other extensive (and extended) connectivity projects that are ongoing today, both around First and Second Island Chains and even beyond in the Indo-Pacific, explains Chinese method and maturity of combining the economics of development with Chinese nationalism – a combination that greatly favours China’s larger goal of international influence.

China’s twenty-first Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR), as part of an economic development strategy, is a brilliant inter-regional exercise of high-level public, cultural- and connectivity-diplomacy, with the potential to deliver interdependent and interconnected patterns of dynamic engagement, simultaneously sowing the seeds for a new geopolitical era. Although it is largely driven by the concept of a Eurasian bridge and the historical architecture of the old Silk Route, the MSR, in the Chinese vision, is about connecting



**Figure 3.** China’s Pacific naval corridor architecture.

Source: <http://www.economist.com> (accessed on 13 September 2018).

the Indo-Pacific region with Europe. Chinese leaders presented the idea in the Indonesian parliament in October of 2013 by declaring 2013 as the “Year of China-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation” to “streamline flows of material and non-material connectivity features”. China’s MSR has subsequently been described as an open-ended, participatory, mutually beneficial project with global and regional impact. China’s “String of Pearls” construct, propounded by the West, seeks to describe China’s geopolitical endeavours in the Indian Ocean Region. These endeavours have the net effect of encircling India and marginalising other military powers by increasing China’s economic engagement and the development of as many as eighteen ports in the Indo-Pacific region. Although China itself states that these endeavours do not represent anything more than economic initiatives, they are certainly also aimed at enhancing its maritime capability.

### **The BRI and Taiwan-Hong Kong-Macau**

China’s Maritime Silk Route/Road (MSR) begins from Quanzhou in the eastern Chinese province of Fujian (Port Fuzhou and Port Quanzhou), then runs southerly along China’s coast to Guangzhou (Guangdong province), Beihai (Guangxi) and Haikou (Hainan) before heading to the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait. As it leaves the Chinese coast, the MSR runs from Kuala Lumpur to Colombo/Hambantota to Kolkata and then crosses the rest of the Indian Ocean to Nairobi, goes north around the Horn of Africa, moves through the Red Sea into the Mediterranean, with a stop at Athens before meeting the land-based Silk Road in Venice. The MSR covers a nautical distance of approximately 2122 km by sea, touching 12 countries, and forms a part of the BRI. If the road and belt components are summated – 17829 and 2122 km respectively – the total distance covered is 19,951 km (these distances are derived from the authors’ own calculations). When compared with India’s total road network of 54, 72,144 kilometres, the BRI initiative of China is set to develop a third of India’s entire road network.

Beijing has spent billions expanding and modernising its network of seaports, so as to secure its Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and establish itself as a maritime power. Its global port-ownership hovers around key trade routes and maritime choke points from its eastern and southern coastlines.<sup>26</sup>

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GHM-GBA), with a population of 68 million, is one of the largest urban agglomerations in the world, with a GDP of about US \$1.5 trillion (equal to that of South Korea and exceeding that of Australia). The construction of China’s GHM-GBA makes the latter the world’s fourth technological and high-end manufacturing base, after New York, San Francisco, and, Tokyo Bay. The GHM GBA connects eleven Chinese cities, including Hong Kong, Macao, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, providing the nation with an intensive technology and trade hub incorporating huge foreign collaboration and capital flows. In addition, it will develop a pathway for industrial manufacturing centres in Guangdong, provide modern services (such as finance, law and shipping) in Hong Kong, and promote Macao tourism as a leisure centre, in addition to enabling both Hong Kong and Macao to better integrate into the major changes taking place in China’s national development, and also help the Chinese mainland to open up to the outside world, through Hong Kong and Macao. The opening of the Hong Kong- Zhuhai- Macao Bridge on 23 Oct 2018 further augments the new wave of development, social security and governance.

The GHM GBA targets industrial transformation, i.e. moving up the value chain with technology, branding and services. Hong Kong's world-class competitiveness and market professionalism, combined with Guangdong's capacity to mobilise resources, makes a potent combination supporting President Xi Jinping's concept of coordinated development. Given China's heavy investment in innovation and manufacturing-technology over the past two decades and more, while GBA will be a productivity hub, the scenario has spread to the Yangtze River Economic Belt (YREB) centred around Shanghai, with new industries being supported by next-generation IT, bio-technology, high-end equipment-manufacturing, new materials, and, most important of all, a culture of innovation and creativity. However, from Hong Kong's perspective, in addition to being regionally selective in its dealing with the markets of mainland, it will also now have to compete with the YREB. This will inevitably lead to both, the GHM-GBA and the YREB embracing marketing and trade initiatives based on functional capabilities and a comprehensive developmental pattern.

### China's Taiwan gamble

China's Taiwan gamble has been an intricate theme for Beijing, Taipei and Washington as well. The dispute over Taiwan's sovereignty emanates from China's unambiguous claim that the island province, to which the nationalist government of the Republic of China (ROC) fled in 1949, after losing a lengthy civil war against the Communist Party, is a province of China that must be "reunited" with the mainland, by force if necessary.<sup>27</sup> However, Beijing has not yet initiated any military action to forcibly take over Taiwan. The PRC and ROC have simultaneously followed the so-called "One China" policy, which means that diplomatic relations with China by third countries can only be maintained with one of the two governments. The PRC, as is now a well-known fact of contemporary history, had successfully applied for representation of all of China, in a variety of international organisations, including the United Nations.<sup>28</sup>

As Beijing moves more aggressively to implement the "One China Policy", it is now backed by very significant economic clout, military confidence and a much larger nationalist consolidation than hitherto. Options for Taipei seem drastically reduced. Xi Jinping's New Year message this January (2019),<sup>29</sup> was unequivocal in declaring, "China must be, and will be reunified", and adding, "we do not forsake the use of force". This recasts the scenario, and quite differently at that.<sup>30</sup> Ever since Hong Kong and Macau re-joined mainland China in 1997 and 1999, respectively, and with the Hong Kong-Macau-Bridge providing further physical integration, Chinese expectations of an integration with Taiwan have certainly risen. Moreover, China's sustained pressure and financial aid has also resulted in the restriction of international recognition of Taiwan to only handful countries of the world.<sup>31</sup>

In the face of the PRC's aggressive "One China Policy", Taiwan's future greatly hinges on Washington's response and support for Taiwan. The United States and Taiwan enjoy a robust albeit unofficial relationship. In 1979, the USA-PRC Joint Communiqué switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing. In the Joint Communiqué, the United States recognised the Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China, acknowledging the Chinese position that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of it. The Joint Communiqué, however, also stated that the people of the

United States will maintain cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan. The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) is responsible for implementing US policy toward Taiwan.<sup>32</sup> Washington's engagement with Taiwan is guided by the 1979 Carter administration's Taiwan Relations Acts (TRA), which, however, seems quite inadequate in the present day.

President Xi Jinping's aggressive foreign-policy posturing in respect of Taiwan and other littorals of the South China Sea indicates that China feels no inhibition in the use of force against independent States that stake sovereignty claims that are inimical to those of China. The US and Taiwan, in mid-2018, enhanced their ties, in the aftermath of Chinese defiance of the Hague Tribunal's verdict. In addition to facilitating government to government talks between Taiwan and China, the USA passed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) to counter China's military influence in the region.<sup>33</sup> All this notwithstanding, the future of Taiwan greatly hinges on the larger picture unfolding vis-à-vis the US-China engagement. With the PRC using North Korea as a bargaining chip in its engagement with the USA, it may happen that Taiwan becomes a sacrificial lamb that enables Washington to prevail upon Pyongyang.

## Conclusion

All in all, the scenario may be seen to be fairly complex. Prominent political realists and maritime strategists such as Hans Morgenthau and Halford John Mackinder, respectively, had long predicted the rise of China. China has, indeed, arrived upon the international stage and is staking its position as the *prima donna*. It has more than US\$ 3 trillion by way of foreign currency reserves (ten times than that of US) with which to push forward its infrastructure projects and physical integration needs. Xi Jinping's China Dream is rapidly translating to a Greater China Vision. On 28 April, 2019, the second BRI meet ended with US\$62 billion in deals, and major changes in structure.<sup>34</sup>

As far as Hong Kong and Macau are concerned, physical and economic integration issues and considerations will penetrate deep into the region's very psyche, leaving them with limited options. It would be prudent to state that the perceived benefits economic integration will determine political choices. The success (or otherwise) of the GHB-GBA, too, will be an important determinant of regional coordination and integration. This raises its own set of concerns. While China experiences centralised Communist Party and government-controlled governance and regulated press-freedom, the GBA has very different political, economic and legal systems. As China integrates these "dominions" into the mainland, both physically and politically, the attendant erosion of the political freedom and democracy that the latter enjoy, is being viewed by the residents of Hong Kong and, more generally, those of the GBH-GBA, with increasing concern. The mainland's commitment to the "One Country Two Systems" policy has become a matter of considerable speculation and several fundamental questions arise from these newer dynamics. What would be the direct socio-political and economic architecture as real-time mobility and contact increases amongst the people and the politico-legal structures of the GMH-GBA? Will this integration degrade Hong Kong and Macao's distinct way of life while augmenting a larger circulation of the Chinese currency, the Renminbi? Could there be a reverse story, too, where these dominions and their respective free societies promote freer political thinking and ignite a desire for political and economic

freedom that has long been denied to the Chinese mainland? How might Beijing then react to the whole business of the “promise of economic-prosperity” as the principal driver of political and physical integration?

The case of Taiwan is more complex. While Taiwan’s international recognition is steadily diminishing, its only influential friend, the United States, seems to be far less committed than Taipei would like. Despite Washington having changed its official recognition of China from Taiwan to the PRC in 1979, Taiwan still counts the United States as its staunchest informal ally, particularly as a source of advanced weapons and associated systems. Taiwan and the US will hold talks in September 2019 in an effort to counter Beijing’s growing pressure. This notwithstanding, given the US–China standoff on several fronts – the US–North Korea face-off; the ongoing US–China “trade war”, frictions over issues such as infringements of copyright, tariffs, economic and political imbroglios; perceptions amongst US allies, stretching up to the First- and the Second island chains, of the inability or unwillingness of the USA to commit to a resolute regional security order in the western Pacific, the inherent risks of Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS); etc., it is indeed a transition time towards what may well be a new global order. Washington may trade space with Beijing in the Asian subcontinent with Guam as the dividing line/sphere of influence. In such a scenario, China’s leadership and space in the Western Pacific will receive impetus whilst Washington’s will significantly diminish. Therefore, in the face of Washington’s shrinking influence in the global order and with incremental space being accorded to China, Taiwan may well be a causality of bargain.

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