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**White Paper Offers Chinese Wisdom at the Crossroads of History**

*By Arran Hope*



The opening ceremony on April 15 of an exhibition titled “A Great Country's Peace and Rejuvenation—Theme Exhibition on the 10th Anniversary of National Security Education for the People.” (Source: [China Daily](#))

**Executive Summary:**

- A new white paper titled “China’s National Security in the New Era” is targeted to both domestic and international audiences and offers “Chinese wisdom” and solutions to contemporary challenges.
- In a bid for global leadership, the document frames “unstoppable” world historical trends as aligning with its mission of national rejuvenation and rebukes the United States for being a destabilizing international actor.
- Claiming the world is at an “historical crossroads,” the document is a call for countries to fall in line behind its vision of ensuring peace, development, stability, and order in the international system.

For the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the world is in constant, complex motion; in flux. There are “trends” (动态) and “flows” (流动). History has “tides” (历史潮流) and thought has “currents” (思潮). A scientific analysis of the world tells us that any movement in time and space has two qualities: magnitude and direction. Time moves relentlessly in one direction. Nothing else does. In some cases, the direction of travel is upward (升); in others, it is in reverse (逆). There is, however, an overall direction (大方向). The Party, in a white paper on “China’s National Security in the New Era” (新时代的中国国家安全), now tells us with confidence that that direction aligns with its vision: “The historic tide ... is unstoppable; the overall direction of human development and progress, and the overall logic of world history, have not changed” (历史潮流不可阻挡, 人类发展进步的大方向、世界历史曲折前进的大逻辑没有变) ([State Council Information Office](#), May 12).

Ingrained in the Party’s ideological frame is a fear of the human vulnerabilities that exposure to unwelcome movement—turmoil (变乱) and turbulence (动荡)—brings. Its response to this fear is an overwhelming preoccupation with immovability—or, in other words, stability (稳) and order (序). (‘稳’ appears more than 70 times in the text, which runs to over 20,000 characters, and ‘序’ nearly 20.) Stability is achieved through shaping one’s environment. [1] Stability over the long term relies on controlling one’s environment to the greatest extent possible. For a nation-state operating in an interconnected world where conflict threatens the social fabric (变乱交织的世界) and in which “the spatial and temporal domains are wider than at any time in history, and the internal and external factors are more complex than at any time in history” (时空领域比历史上任何时候都要宽广, 内外因素比历史上任何时候都要复杂), stability is achieved by ensuring national security. “Among the great matters of state,” the preface of the White Paper begins, “security is essential” (国之大者, 安全为要). “National security,” the preface later explains, “is an important basis for the stability and longevity of Chinese modernization” (国家安全是中国式现代化行稳致远的重要基础).

### **White Paper Promotes Party Concepts on Security for the World**

The preface provides a succinct articulation of national security. The definition is worth quoting in full:

“China’s national security in the new era is the general security of holistic, systemic, and relative power. It is a security that takes the people’s security as its guide, political security as its root, and national interests as its criterion. It is a security that serves and promotes high-quality development, that adjusts according to trends in economic and social development, that supports stepping up high-level opening up, and that functions within the norms of the path of ruling by law. China plans as a whole for its own security and common security. It opposes the generalization of security, does not carry out security coercion, and does not acquiesce to threats or pressure. It maintains its independence and autonomy, and is confident and self-reliant. It resolves security issues on the basis of its own power, maintaining the path of national security with Chinese characteristics.” [2]

This definition lays out some of the main themes that the rest of the white paper explores in detail. In particular, these include the Party’s assessment of its own power and position within the international system, its approach to interacting with all other parts of the international system, the identity of security with development, and the reforms needed within the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to better ensure national security.

The preface concludes by presenting a rationale for releasing the white paper. It has done so, the authors write, to “explain the innovative conception and active implementation and construction of the work of China’s national security in the new era, to share its experience and methods, to promote world peace and development together with other countries, and to promote the construction of a community of common destiny for mankind” (为全面阐释新时代中国国家安全工作的创新理念、生动实践和建设成果，分享经验做法，与其他国家一道推动世界和平和发展，推动构建人类命运共同体).

The PRC government releases white papers for both a domestic and an international audience. According to the State Council Information Office’s website, it has published 173 since 1991—roughly five per annum. Although it only began publishing official English translations in 2010, the topics—which tend to focus on aspects of PRC governance that have been most concerning to foreign observers—reinforce the notion that the intended audience is global. The latest white paper is the first to be dedicated specifically to “national security” (国家安全), though national defense has been a regular focus since 1998 (China Brief, [June 19, 2015](#), [July 31, 2019](#)). Another first is the release of a short English “abstract” to accompany the white paper, in lieu of a full English translation ([Xinhua](#), May 13). While the absence of a full translation might not appear to square with the desire to court an international audience, it aligns with a general trend toward curtailing public government information. The Party may also believe that there are certain aspects of its approach to national security that the international community should focus on, while other elements are better not stated so explicitly. [3]

### **The Party Bids for Global Leadership**

The Party sees the current moment as critical—both for itself and for the world. The white paper repeatedly describes the present as a “critical period” (关键时期) or a “key stage” (关键阶段) in the country’s development and on its path to achieving “national rejuvenation” (民族复兴) through Chinese modernization. This characterization is based on an assessment of the PRC’s place within the *longue durée*. History, another preoccupation of the Party’s, features prominently throughout the white paper. (历史 appears 21 times in the document.) In part, this is done to intone the articles of faith in the Party’s narrative arc of historical inevitability: China was born 5,000 years ago; China has risen from the brink of death through the Party’s shouldering of the historic mission; China will come again, providing “new concepts and methods” (新理念、新办法) for bringing about a secure and peaceful world.

The Party’s assessment of the contemporary context is laid out in the first of its six main chapters, which is titled “China Injects Determinacy and Stability Into a World in Turmoil” (中国为变乱交织的世界注入确定性和稳定性). The first section of the chapter, one of thirty in the document, is titled “The World, Amid New and Turbulent Changes, Stands at a Crossroads in History” (世界在新的动荡变革中站在历史的十字路口). [4] At present, the Party believes that “changes in the world, the times, and history are unfolding in an unprecedented manner” (世界之变、时代之变、历史之变正以前所未有的方式展开) and that society is faced with “the critical choices of peace or war, prosperity or recession, and unity or confrontation” (和平还是战争、繁荣还是衰退、团结还是对抗的关键抉择). The previous century—often referred to as the American Century—was plagued by war, and “old thinking, such as spheres of influence, hegemonic

stability, and the alliance system” (势力范围、霸权稳定、同盟体系等旧思维) dominated. Such thinking “cannot cope with new security challenges” (应对不了新安全挑战). The PRC, which does not have such “genes” (基因), offers an alternative path to the world, which it brings on an “unstoppable historic tide” (不可阻挡历史潮流) of peace, development, cooperation, and mutual profitability (“win-win”).

The Party argues that it has stellar credentials for taking on the mantle of global leadership. From its perspective, it is the great power with the best record on matters of peace and security (在和平和安全问题上，中国是世界上纪录最好的大国). It has “always stood on the right side of history” (始终站在历史正确的一边) (a line so good it appears twice in the paper) and has never initiated any war or conflict (从来没有主动挑起过任何一场战争和冲突). [5] Looking ahead, the Party asserts that its ability to maintain and shape its national security “has never been greater, and its determination is unwavering” (前所未有，决心矢志不渝). As a result, “it is certain to make new and greater contributions to ... the promotion of world peace and development (必将为 ... 促进世界和平发展作出新的更大贡献).

The Party frames Xi Jinping Thought, which integrates traditional Chinese culture with Marxism, as twenty-first century Marxist orthodoxy ([The Asan Forum](#), May 7). The white paper indicates the importance of traditional culture by referencing ancient texts, including the *Daodejing*, the *Lost Book of Zhou*, the *Book of Documents*, and the *Zuozhuan*. The combination of these ideas with Marxism—which holds the “guiding position” (指导地位)—underpins the “holistic national security concept, which General Secretary Xi Jinping has creatively put forward” (习近平总书记创造性提出总体国家安全观). As the white paper explains, one part of this concept is promoting international common security, because national rejuvenation “requires a peaceful and stable international environment” (需要和平稳定的国际环境).

To engineer an environment in which it can thrive, the Party offers solutions packaged for the rest of the world as “Chinese Wisdom” (中国智慧). In a section titled “The Global Security Initiative Contributes Chinese Wisdom” (全球安全倡议贡献中国智慧), the white paper describes the initiative as a “new ‘Security Chapter’ of the community of common destiny and a ‘World Chapter’ in the concept of holistic security” (既是人类命运共同体的“安全篇”，也是总体国家安全观的“世界篇”). The scholar Daniel Tobin has argued that the community of common destiny concept—also known as the community of shared future—refers to a proposed alternative global order ([The Asan Forum](#), May 7). As of 2024, it had the support of 119 countries and international organizations. The white paper goes on to describe the Global Security Initiative as “a Chinese solution that China offers for global security governance ... rooted in China’s practice and implementation of an independent and autonomous peaceful diplomacy and originating from a Chinese culture and wisdom that fosters trustworthiness, friendship, harmony, and coexistence” (是中国对全球安全治理给出的中国答案 ... 植根于中国独立自主的和平外交政策与实践，来源于讲信修睦、和合共生的中华文化与智慧).



## Conclusion

According to “China’s National Security in the New Era,” since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, the PRC’s comprehensive national power, international influence, and ability to resist risks have strengthened significantly (进入新时代，中国综合国力、国际影响力、抵御风险能力显著增强). The white paper concludes, however, by warning that the country still has work to do: “On the new journey,” it says, China’s national security “will still rely on the people to make history” (新征程上，仍然要依靠人民创造历史). In a symbolic rhetorical flourish, it calls for “building an unbreakable Great Wall of national security” (筑起国家安全坚不可摧新的长城) and finishes by saying that this will take “hard work and struggle” (努力奋斗)—thereby finishing on an appropriate, ideologically charged, note.

White papers may not be authoritative policy documents and may serve specific messaging purposes. They nevertheless provide a useful window into how the Party wishes to frame its ideas for the world and the broad contours of the policies it is taking to achieve its goals. This latest document indicates that it sees significant risks for itself and the international system, of which the United States is the primary source. More importantly, however, it evinces confidence that world historical trends favor the Party and its ambitions of achieving national rejuvenation. The rhetorical question it poses to all other countries is crystal clear: We have now come to a historical crossroads; which path will you choose?

*Arran Hope is the Editor of China Brief.*

## Notes

[1] One framework for Chinese civilization writ large conceives of it as an “hydraulic society.” Originally associated with the Marxist historian Karl August Wittfogel and his theory of “oriental despotism,” its claims that the need for flood control and irrigation in certain societies gave rise to a centrally-coordinated and competent bureaucracy have largely been invalidated. (In China, for instance, the rise of the state predated the ability to exert control over water through large infrastructure projects.) The ability to marshal resources to control the flow of water throughout the state, however, were characteristic of many successful early Chinese polities. It is interesting to speculate that such a view of state capacity and state functions might inform the Party’s approach to exercising power today. If you are aware of any research on this topic, please get in touch with the editor: [cbeditor@jamestown.org](mailto:cbeditor@jamestown.org).

[2] 总体 can also be translated as “comprehensive”; however, official English translations tend to use “holistic.” The original text reads as follows: 新时代的中国国家安全是总体的、系统的、相对的大安全，是以人民安全为宗旨、以政治安全为根本、以国家利益为准则的安全，是服务和促进高质量发展的安全，是根据经济社会发展动态调整的安全，是支撑进一步扩大高水平开放的安全，是在法治轨道上规范运行的安全。中国统筹自身安全和共同安全，反对安全泛化，不实施

安全胁迫，不接受威胁施压，坚持独立自主、自信自立，把解决安全难题放在自身力量的基点上，坚持中国特色国家安全道路。

[3] An analysis of the English “abstract” is beyond the scope of this article, so this claim ought to be taken as somewhat speculative.

[4] The document includes a preface, 27 sections across the six chapters, a conclusion, and an appendix listing 15 key laws from the new era that relate to national security.

[5] If this claim provokes skepticism in the reader, there is good reason for it. Such patently false assertions offer a window into the Party’s primary mode of messaging, which operates by rules that place a much higher value on utterances that are ideologically correct and coherent than on those that seek to present empirical facts.

**PRC and Russia Operationalize Strategic Partnership**

*By Matthew Johnson*



Presidents Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin shake hands after signing their latest strategic joint statement in Moscow. (Source: [Xinhua](#))

**Executive Summary:**

- The People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia advanced operational bloc-building at their May 2025 summit, issuing dense agreements and three joint statements that laid out a shared strategic vision across defense, technology, law, and multilateral governance. The summit marked a shift from symbolic reaffirmation to functional coordination, particularly in sectors under U.S. scrutiny, including artificial intelligence, energy, cross-border payments, and legal standards for international order.
- The joint statements portrayed the PRC-Russia partnership as a normative response to U.S. hegemony, invoking World War II memory, defending sovereign development rights, and opposing Western-led institutions and coercive measures. While framed as defensive, the alignment reflects a deeper ideological and structural commitment to constructing parallel systems in trade, security, and information governance.
- This strategy will be tested in the months ahead, with Beijing expected to use the BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summits to deepen bloc architecture, promote renminbi-based financial integration, and push regional security initiatives.
- Underlying asymmetries, geopolitical caution, and competing interests—particularly in Central Asia and the Arctic—may constrain how far this convergence extends beyond coordinated rhetoric.



The May 8 summit in Moscow between People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin marked a forward step in strategic convergence between their two countries. The meeting produced a detailed joint statement and over 20 new cooperation agreements across the energy, finance, and digital infrastructure sectors, as well as on multilateral coordination. Framed around World War II commemorations, the summit outlined practical mechanisms for tighter alignment, particularly in high-impact sectors subject to U.S. scrutiny, such as artificial intelligence (AI), biosecurity, and cross-border payments.

To reinforce this posture, Beijing and Moscow issued three separate joint statements, each articulating a distinct but interlocking rationale for closer coordination across security, legal, and geopolitical domains.

Framed as a historical and normative reaffirmation of wartime partnership, the “Joint Statement on Further Deepening the China-Russia Comprehensive ‘Strategic Coordinated Partnership’ Relationship for a New Era” underscored shared resistance to U.S. dominance, NATO expansion, and what both sides call “subversion” (颠覆) of the postwar order. It outlined expanded cooperation across key strategic domains—including defense, AI governance, energy, cross-border payments, and Arctic logistics—while reaffirming mutual support for sovereignty claims over Taiwan and Ukraine. The statement also deepened alignment in multilateral arenas such as the United Nations, BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and World Trade Organization (WTO) reform, portraying the PRC and Russia as co-architects of a multipolar world order resistant to external sanctions and power projection ([Xinhua](#), May 8). [1]

In the parallel “Joint Statement on Global Strategic Stability,” Beijing and Moscow accused U.S. missile defense systems, “nuclear sharing” (核共享) alliances, and space weaponization efforts of eroding deterrence and heightening risks of nuclear conflict. The two sides positioned themselves as defenders of the principle of “equal and indivisible security” (安全平等且不可分割), calling for new multilateral arms control mechanisms and condemning efforts to politicize export controls, AI, and biotechnology. While affirming their January 2022 pledge to avoid nuclear war, they emphasized the need to manage arms control and disarmament with “no reduction in the security of any country” (各国安全不受减损) ([MFA](#), May 9).

The “Joint Statement on Further Strengthening Cooperation In Safeguarding Authority of International Law” asserted the PRC’s and Russia’s shared commitment to a UN-centered international legal order. The statement reaffirmed principles such as non-interference and sovereign equality but framed these selectively to shield both countries from legal scrutiny over their external behavior. By emphasizing the “equal, universal, and good faith” (平等普遍善意) application of international law, the document aimed to reframe PRC-Russia joint commitments as a defense of international order—even where they challenge prevailing global governance mechanisms ([MFA](#), May 9).

Taken together, these documents outline an ambitious, multipronged attempt to frame bloc alignment as both defensive and legally justified. This alignment is normative, not merely strategic. For all its rhetorical coherence, however, this convergence has not erased enduring asymmetries and caution on both sides. The summit therefore remained bounded by familiar constraints amid all the density and symbolism. Beijing remains wary of overcommitting to Moscow’s more explicitly revisionist agenda in Europe, while Moscow must navigate its growing dependency on the PRC without ceding too much autonomy or control over its strategic frontiers.

### **The Meeting: Xi and Putin Advance Operational Bloc Building**

The meeting between the two heads of state advanced PRC-Russia relations beyond symbolic reaffirmation, offering an updated roadmap for operational convergence across multiple strategic domains. Concrete indicators of future action emerged in several critical areas. Xi described the current phase of relations as “more calm, confident, stable, and durable” (从容自信、稳定坚韧). He called for the two countries to “uphold the general direction of cooperation, eliminate external interference” (坚持合作大方向，排除外部干扰), and to make the “foundation of ‘stability’ in cooperation more firm and the momentum of ‘progress’ more sufficient” (让合作“稳”的基础更坚实、“进”的动能更充足). He also called for expanded cooperation in high-impact sectors such as AI, aviation and aerospace, energy, and agriculture—areas already subject to sanctions pressure and Western scrutiny ([Xinhua](#), May 8).

The meeting’s proposed joint buildout of cross-border infrastructure under the One Belt One Road framework, docked with the Eurasian Economic Union, signals intent to hardwire integration across Eurasia. [2] If realized, this would create overlapping connectivity platforms that reduce dependence on maritime chokepoints and Western financial systems—an explicit hedge against future decoupling or conflict.

References to biosecurity, digital economy, and global strategic stability in the list of agreements were equally notable. While details remain vague, these sectors have clear implications for dual-use development, critical infrastructure protection, and financial system independence. As such, these agreements hint at a methodical effort to construct a parallel system that insulates the PRC and Russia from Western pressure, using technological, legal, and institutional tools to do so. They also suggest increasing willingness to align regulatory standards, legal practices, and digital ecosystems between the two countries, with potential spillover to other multilateral frameworks that the two dominate.

Multilateral positioning also featured prominently. Xi urged that the PRC and Russia should “closely coordinate and cooperate” (密切 ... 协调和配合) in multilateral platforms such as the United Nations, the SCO, and the BRICS countries. He emphasized the importance of uniting the so-called Global South to lead the “correct direction” (正确方向) of global governance reform. According to the PRC readout, Putin explicitly echoed this framing.

The meeting nevertheless stopped short of crossing escalation thresholds. There were no references to Ukraine in Xi’s statements, and no mention of formal military cooperation or new defense commitments. This restraint remains consistent with the PRC’s strategy of “support short of sanctions” as outlined in prior meetings ([International Centre for Defence and Security](#), April 25, 2023). Still, the inclusion of “global strategic stability” (全球战略稳定) among the signed agreements suggests that discussions around security and deterrence continue under the surface, possibly through opaque military-technical channels, and perhaps even via the regular bilateral prime ministerial meeting (中俄总理定期会晤), which has served as a key platform for cooperation in satellite navigation and space.

## **The Joint Declaration: A Partnership in Motion, not Overdrive**

Xi and Putin signed a joint statement on May 8, reaffirming their alignment against the United States, anchoring their cooperation in a narrative of historical grievance, and expanding it across key strategic sectors ([Xinhua](#), May 8). Both leaders framed the relationship as rooted in World War II victory, declaring that the PRC and Russia “shoulder the common responsibility and mission of maintaining a correct view of World War II history” (肩负维护正确二战史观的共同责任和使命). This phrase signals that the two men see their respective countries—not the United States and its allies—as the principal victors of the war, and therefore as the legitimate guardians of the postwar international order.

The statement signals the greatest forward motion in energy, finance, and digital infrastructure. The two sides agreed to “consolidate the comprehensive energy cooperation partnership” (巩固全面能源合作伙伴关系) across oil, gas, liquefied natural gas (LNG), coal, and renewables, with a clear emphasis on “maintain[ing] the stable operation of relevant cross-border infrastructure” (维护相关跨境基础设施稳定运营). Financial cooperation is set to deepen through expanded interbank transactions, local currency settlement, and collaboration in insurance, credit ratings, and securities. These areas are critical: they represent the foundation of an alternative economic system capable of operating outside the dollar-based architecture. On the digital front, both sides pledged to strengthen cooperation on AI, cybercrime, and information security, including through the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime and the establishment of “a future permanent mechanism for international information security” (国际信息安全未来常设机制) ([UN Office on Drugs and Crime](#), accessed May 12).

Military cooperation is reaffirmed but, again, carefully bounded. The statement describes PRC-Russia military ties as “of special significance” (具有特殊意义) and calls for expanded joint exercises, air and maritime patrols, and military-technical exchange. This wording is consistent with earlier statements. [3]

Logistical integration and Arctic cooperation are other areas of note. The two sides emphasized improving PRC-Russia cross-border infrastructure, customs capacity, and transit corridors, while also committing to “mutually beneficial cooperation on the Arctic route” (北极航道互利合作). The absence of institutional detail or new Arctic agreements, however, suggests limits to Russia’s willingness to share governance over this critical frontier.

Multilateral coordination and bloc expansion remain central pillars of the joint vision. The statement affirms efforts to strengthen cooperation within BRICS and the SCO, accelerate the creation of regional security centers in Tashkent and Dushanbe, and promote “BRICS+” expansion (China Brief, [September 8, 2023](#); [July 12, 2024](#)). The parties pledged to assist new members, explore local currency trade settlement, and align regional frameworks such as the Eurasian Economic Union with the One Belt One Road initiative. Still, these remain mostly process-oriented commitments. They reinforce long-standing ambitions rather than marking a step-change in institutional structure.

The latest joint statement advances the PRC-Russia axis in the sectors most vital to their long-term strategic positioning. It reaffirms military cooperation and multilateral alignment—a statement of intent to keep pressure on the United States and Europe. The closer Beijing and Moscow move toward each other’s strategic redlines,

however, the more likely constraints are to appear, most notably in Central Asia and, for Russia, the Arctic. The statement codifies direction but does not substantively increase velocity, indicating that while the PRC and Russia remain committed to long-term alignment, they are still constrained by strategic caution, regional rivalry, and the need to manage external economic blowback.

### **Beijing and Moscow Tighten Bloc Blueprint**

The latest joint statement reinforces many of the themes from the Joint Declaration signed in 2024 but adds sharper ideological alignment, more expansive multilateral ambitions, and denser detail in specific areas of cooperation ([China Brief](#), April 12, 2024; [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), May 16, 2024).

Both documents assert that PRC-Russia relations are at their “highest level in history” (历史最高水平), rooted in non-alignment, and “not targeting third parties” (不针对第三方). The 2025 statement intensifies the ideological framing by invoking World War II memory as a moral and geopolitical foundation, claiming legitimacy based on historical sacrifice and anti-fascist credentials and directly challenging U.S. and European interpretations of the postwar order.

Whereas the 2024 statement placed more emphasis on the longevity of bilateral ties (75 years of diplomacy), the 2025 statement shifts the frame to shared bloc identity. Beyond ideological alignment, three key operational shifts are evident. The first is in military cooperation. Both years’ statements call military ties “special,” endorse joint exercises and increased operational coordination, and stress mutual support in sovereignty and territorial defense; however, the 2025 version deepens this slightly by emphasizing peaceful Arctic cooperation and committing to “raising the level” (提升 ... 水平) of maritime and air patrols.

The second shift is in institutional layering and bloc construction. In 2024, the PRC and Russia expressed strong support for BRICS, the SCO, and the “Greater Eurasian Partnership.” The 2025 statement enhances this integration, endorsing mutual initiatives such as the PRC’s “Global Civilization Initiative” (全球文明倡议) and Russia’s “Eurasian Security Architecture.” The language now envisions a connected mesh of multilateral institutions, positioned explicitly as a rival to U.S.- and NATO-aligned systems.

The third is economic integration, where asymmetry is deepening. Both years’ statements stress expanded trade, energy, and financial ties, but 2025 introduces more formal mechanisms, including a new investment protection treaty and upgraded commitments on cross-border payments and logistics. The PRC’s dominant economic role is now tacitly acknowledged through expanded references to yuan-based trade settlement and supply chain coordination. While Russia remains an indispensable commodities partner, the 2025 language suggests a growing economic asymmetry favoring Beijing.

The 2025 joint statement is more detailed and likely reflects Xi’s emphasis on building more “firm” and “sufficient” cooperation—an attempt to draw Russia deeper into the PRC’s strategic orbit at a time when U.S.-Russia relations are inching toward tentative normalization. While the statement does not fundamentally alter the bilateral trajectory, it marks a more explicit ideological and geopolitical alignment, signaling a shared intent to reshape global order from outside the U.S.-led system.

## **Moscow was the Message—BRICS and SCO will be the Test**

PRC state media covered Xi's Moscow trip less as a diplomatic report than as a narrative of unbroken national ascent—a continuation of what Party propagandists are now portraying as a series of victories across multiple fronts. A widely republished Xinhua feature cast the visit as the embodiment of the country's strategic resilience, with Xi's presence at the 80th anniversary of the Soviet victory in World War II symbolizing the PRC's position as both heir to historical legitimacy and architect of a new international order ([Xinhua](#), May 12).

The rhetorical core of the narrative came directly from Xi's signed article to the Russian public: "We should not be confused by the moment or the events, nor be unsettled by the storm" (不为一时一事所惑, 不为风高浪急所扰). Repeated verbatim across outlets, these lines served as a message to Party cadres at home: stay the course—the PRC is not only weathering external pressure, but gaining ground. Xi was quoted emphasizing that both countries "have clear historical logic, strong endogenous driving force, and profound civilizational heritage" (具有清晰历史逻辑、强大内生动力、深厚文明底蕴), and saying that their partnership is "not directed against any third party, nor subject to any third party" (不针对第三方, 也不受制于任何第三方). This disavowal of bloc logic was contradicted, however, by the article's portrayal of the PRC and Russia as co-leaders of a global justice axis that has been forged through wartime sacrifice and is now tasked with resisting U.S.-led efforts to rewrite postwar norms.

By invoking shared trauma and glory, the coverage positioned the PRC's current geopolitical assertiveness as a continuation of its historical role in defeating fascism, now extended to countering hegemonism in a "new era" of strategic flux. Most importantly, the coverage reinforced the message that the PRC's strategic line is succeeding without adjustment. According to Xinhua, Xi's presence released "stability and certainty in relations between major powers" (大国关系的稳定性和确定性). This framing was widely and visibly circulated across Party media and given clear priority over coverage of the concurrent U.S.-PRC trade talks in Geneva.

The optics were deliberate, as with all editorial decisions made in Party media newsrooms. While the Geneva outcome was framed as tactical management, Xi's Moscow visit was elevated as a strategic milestone—a reaffirmation that the PRC's rise will not be negotiated with Washington but achieved through deeper alignment with Russia and the reshaping of global order on Beijing's terms.

## **Conclusion**

The next phases of this strategy will be tested on multiple fronts. In the coming months, the PRC will likely use its presidency of the SCO—culminating in an autumn summit in Tianjin—to push forward regional security frameworks and promote Eurasian economic integration aligned with its interests. The summer BRICS summit, now featuring an expanded membership, will offer another opportunity for Beijing and Moscow to present themselves as co-leaders of a more "representative" and "multipolar" global order. And as Washington continues to adjust tariffs and tighten technology controls, Beijing will intensify efforts to build alternative economic institutions, promote RMB internationalization, and expand bilateral partnerships aimed at securing critical technology and commodity access beyond the reach of U.S. and allied constraint.



These next summits will not merely reaffirm alignment. They will reveal how far the PRC and Russia are prepared to go in translating joint rhetoric into operational blocs. Whether this hardens into durable architecture or stalls under the weight of asymmetries and local interests will shape the next phase of global order competition.

*Dr. Matthew Johnson is a Senior Fellow at the Jamestown Foundation.*

## Notes

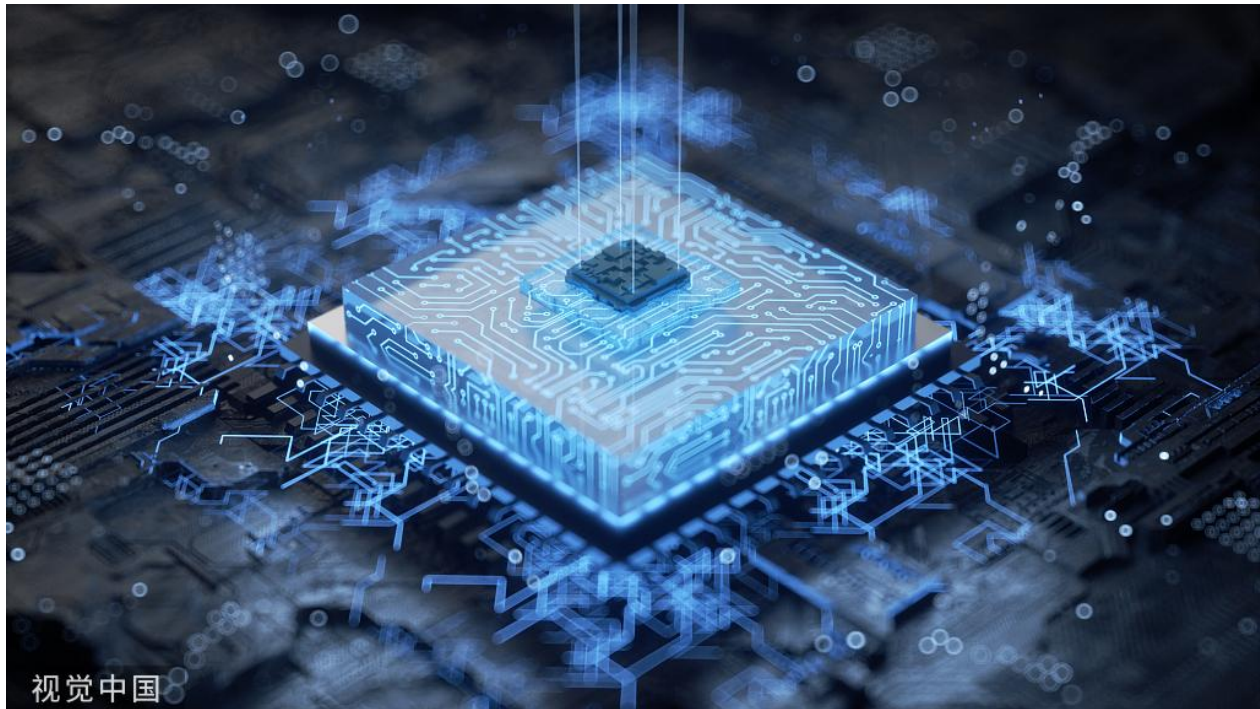
[1] BRICS is a loose political-economic grouping originally comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, the PRC, and South Africa, but now comprising 11 member states ([BRICS Info](#), accessed May 12).

[2] The Eurasian Economic Union is an organization for regional economic integration of five post-Soviet states: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia.

[3] For more on military language in the statements, see: [Eurasia Daily Monitor](#), May 12.

## Encircling the West: The PRC Gains Ground in Legacy Chips

*By Sunny Cheung*



File photo from Visual China. (Source: [Huangjiu](#))

### Executive Summary:

- Beijing is on course to dominate innovation in and production of legacy semiconductor chips, which strategists see as a way to push back against U.S.-led containment in critical technologies. These chips, used everywhere from vehicles to defense, offer a scalable and resilient path for latecomers to build industrial leverage without needing frontier innovation.
- The Chinese domestic industry relies on vast state subsidies and fosters internal competition that leads to brutal price wars between firms. This ultimately allows manufacturers to undercut overseas competitors and drive them out of business, thereby capturing the global market share and reshaping supply chain dependencies.
- This strategy prioritizes market dominance over profitability, part of a broader shift from growth-centric to security-driven industrial planning.
- Chinese experts hold up Japan's past missteps as a key lesson, and advocate remaining aligned to market demand to avoid stagnating.

In February 2025, Peking University scholar He Pengyu (何鹏宇) published an article titled “Why China Must Establish a Competitive Advantage in Traditional Chips” (中国为什么要在传统芯片上形成竞争优势) ([Tencent News/Wenhua Zongheng](#), February 24). He argues that legacy chips should be viewed as strategic assets: technologically adaptable, economically essential, and geopolitically consequential. While not a prominent figure in the semiconductor policy community, He is among the first to make a comprehensive and analytically rigorous attempt to explain the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) sustained and largely understated focus on foundational chip technologies. His essay fills a critical gap in a policy landscape where official strategies are rarely transparent, effectively articulating the underlying logic of Beijing’s long-term industrial maneuvering for leadership in mature-node technologies.

He’s arguments have rapidly gained traction online, resonating with analysts and observers who recognize the strategic importance of a domain long overlooked in mainstream policy debates ([China News](#), February 25; [Huxiu](#), April 16). While media headlines focus on the pursuit of artificial general intelligence, computing power, and advanced-node innovation, Beijing is quietly pursuing a parallel strategy. PRC strategists are pushing for dominance in areas the West deems peripheral, drawing from a Maoist principle, “using the countryside to encircle the city” (以农村包围城市). By investing heavily and coordinating state support, the PRC is turning what appears to be a technological backwater into a platform for countering U.S. chokepoints, leveraging the underestimated to challenge the overemphasized. The country aims to become the world’s largest producer of legacy chips by 2027. He’s lens—and evaluating it against empirical realities—is essential for grasping the broader contours of the PRC’s semiconductor ambitions.

### **At the Bleeding Edge of Legacy Chip Innovation**

To He Pengyu, legacy chips (often defined as those with nodes at the 28-nanometer (nm) scale and above) are not outdated remnants of earlier industrial cycles. They constitute the majority of global semiconductor consumption. Legacy chips are the technological backbone for large-scale, stable, and security-relevant systems. He argues that the Western tendency to equate innovation exclusively with leading-edge chips obscures a broader industrial logic in which mature-node chips continue to evolve and dominate.

The misconception that legacy chips are technologically obsolete has led many outside the PRC to underestimate their innovative potential. Traditional chips are integrated into emerging industrial applications, from electric vehicles and smart grids to defense and dual-use systems such as missiles, satellites, and radar. Their deployment across such varied contexts has spurred continuous innovation in chip architecture, power efficiency, and materials science ([CSIS](#), March 3, 2023; [DSET](#), April 1). In recent years, the adoption of silicon carbide (SiC) and gallium nitride (GaN) in power electronics has enabled mature-node chips to meet higher thermal and performance requirements. Both materials were promoted in the 14th Five-Year Plan ([NDRC](#), March 2021, p.12). [1]

The centrality of legacy chips is reflected in their economic value. He argues that these semiconductors account for roughly 70 percent of global chip production by volume and remain irreplaceable in automotive electronics, industrial automation, white goods, and telecommunications. The U.S. Department of Defense has previously estimated that 99.5 percent of its capabilities rely on legacy chips ([Wilson Center](#), December 22, 2023).

Demand for such chips is large-scale, recurring, and diversified, creating favorable conditions for industrial upgrading, economies of scale, and resilient market returns.

This centrality was laid bare in the supply disruptions the United States experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2022 report by the U.S. Department of Commerce revealed that the most acute disruptions occurred not in advanced chips, but in legacy semiconductors at the 40-nm node or larger—components which are still essential across industrial and consumer sectors ([Commerce](#), January 25, 2022). While U.S. firms continued producing these chips, they could not meet domestic demand. This shortfall was evident in the automotive sector. A single electric vehicle contains over 1,700 semiconductor chips, most of them being legacy components ([Automotive News](#), August 11, 2022). As automakers miscalculated pandemic-era demand and reduced orders, consumer electronics manufacturers absorbed the limited chip supply. By mid-2022, this misalignment had forced North American automakers to cancel the production of over 4.3 million vehicles. As a result, the United States missed out on a full percentage point of GDP growth, according to the government's report. This underscores the importance of legacy chips to economic stability and national competitiveness, as well as the national security vulnerabilities incurred by reliance on their offshore supply.

Market trends are currently validating He Pengyu's analysis. Over the next three to five years, PRC firms are projected to contribute nearly 50 percent of new global capacity in legacy semiconductor manufacturing. This transformation is fueled by vast state support in the form of industrial planning and focused investment initiatives, which have exceeded \$150 billion since 2014, according to some estimates ([Economist](#), March 13, 2024; [BIS](#), December 6, 2024). In 2023, the PRC commanded a 34 percent share of this segment, trailing Taiwan's 43 percent, while the United States lagged at just 5 percent. By 2027, projections indicate that the PRC will surge to 47 percent, overtaking Taiwan, which is expected to fall to 36 percent, and leaving the United States effectively stalled at 4 percent ([TechNews](#), February 11).

### **Strategic Opportunity for Latecomers**

For He Pengyu, the legacy semiconductor sector represents a strategic terrain where latecomers like the PRC can build capability, scale, and influence. Unlike the heavily monopolized and IP-saturated landscape of leading-edge semiconductors, legacy chips provide more pathways for technological advancement that do not require catching up to the global frontier on its own terms. Instead, performance benchmarks can be recalibrated to align with domestic market demands and existing industrial strengths.

Flexibility in performance criteria, whether in cost efficiency, thermal resilience, power management, or product lifecycle stability, allows PRC firms to innovate. Mature technologies can be adapted to meet the demands of high-growth sectors such as electric vehicles, the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT), and renewable energy systems. In this view, maturity is not a constraint but a foundation for scalable innovation. Leveraging volume production and vertical integration, PRC firms can iterate rapidly and optimize performance, transforming mature nodes into competitive platforms ([36Kr](#), January 9; [DSET](#), April 1).

PRC consolidation in the legacy chip sector also leads to spillover effects, stimulating production across the rest of the semiconductor stack. Local suppliers of silicon wafers, photomasks, and electronic design automation (EDA) tools have secured footholds that previously eluded them. According to He, this self-reinforcement cycle, in which legacy chip demand drives upstream innovation, has become a hallmark of the

PRC's industrial strategy. Unlike traditional models of technological catch-up through frontier imitation, this approach aims to build sovereignty from the industrial middle outward.

He sees much to praise in the PRC's efforts, though he also offers a warning, using Japan's earlier experience as a historical analogue. In the 1970s and 1980s, Japan's semiconductor industry grew by aligning with the demands of the consumer electronics boom. Japanese firms leveraged cost-effective CMOS technology and built manufacturing capabilities to create chips for calculators, gaming devices, and early personal computers (PCs). [2] Although they did not initially lead in design, they eventually surpassed U.S. producers in volume and reliability. He frames this not as an isolated episode but as a replicable developmental pathway—provided the PRC can avoid the pitfalls that led Japan's trajectory ultimately to falter. By the 1990s, Japanese firms had overcommitted to technological advancement for its own sake, losing sight of evolving market needs. Too much focus on frontier technology allowed competitors to undercut their existing technologies, eroding their market share. He advises that the PRC's domestic industry should stay closely aligned with market demand while steadily advancing production capabilities to avoid repeating missteps.

### **Price Warfare: Legacy Chips as an Economic Weapon**

The importance of legacy chips has become more pronounced in the context of U.S.-PRC technology rivalry. Early rounds of U.S. export controls and entity listings primarily targeted advanced technologies such as extreme ultraviolet (EUV) lithography tools, high-end graphical processing units (GPUs), and AI accelerators. This fostered the perception that mature nodes were of secondary concern. An effect of this oversight was the rise of a relatively uncontested space in which PRC firms could scale rapidly.

PRC policymakers increasingly view traditional chips as both a defensive buffer and a strategic countermeasure to Western containment. Their reasoning rests on three arguments. First, legacy chips are indispensable to economic stability and technological resilience, underpinning industries like automotive and energy. Second, their ubiquity makes them inherently resistant to sanctions and export controls. Third, Beijing can gain leverage over the United States by undercutting Western competitors and dominating this market segment. This latter approach sees domestic firms engage in a brutally competitive “price war” (价格战)—a phenomenon seen across different sectors in the last few years and that is now evident in mature-node chip manufacturing ([Baijiahao](#), December 18, 2024).

A price war in the PRC domestic industry has resulted in a rapidly expanding domestic ecosystem capable of sustaining production, even amid minimal profitability and structurally unsustainable business models. This has been seen in other sectors, too. A typical example comes from Lei Jun (雷军), the CEO of tech giant Xiaomi, who sees price wars as an inevitable part of market competition. He emphasized that companies like Xiaomi are never afraid of engaging in price wars and leverage their low costs to stay competitive ([China News](#), April 29, 2024). The finances of Hua Hong Semiconductor (华虹半导体) provide a good example of how this approach can play out within the chip sector. The company's 2025 first-quarter revenue grew over 18 percent year-on-year to renminbi (RMB) 3.9 billion (\$540 million), even as its net profits plummeted nearly 90 percent ([JRI](#), May 12). In the PRC's strategic calculus, financial sustainability often takes a backseat to broader industrial and geopolitical objectives. Profitability is secondary to market dominance as state-backed



campaigns prioritize long-term displacement of Western competitors through prolonged, coordinated economic pressure.

For years, the National Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund—also known as the “Big Fund” (大基金)—has injected capital into key players like the Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC, 中芯国际) and Hua Hong Semiconductor to accelerate localized production ([Yiling Press](#), February 27; [DSET](#), April 1). This scale advantage is particularly evident in segments such as power management chips, microcontrollers, and display driver chips, where PRC firms consistently price their products 20–40 percent lower than their Western counterparts. For example, Guangzhou Nansha Wafer Semiconductor (广州南砂晶圆半导体) has slashed the price of six-inch silicon carbide (SiC) wafers from the international benchmark of \$1,500 to just \$500. This price war has had dramatic consequences: U.S.-based SiC leader Wolfspeed, unable to compete, has reported consecutive losses, seen its share price collapse by 96 percent over three years, and has been forced to sell one of its fabrication plants ([Nikkei Asia](#), February 25; [DSET](#), April 1). SMIC, meanwhile, has captured market share in consumer electronics and automotive chips by offering 28-nm products at just 60 percent of the prevailing market price, pushing competitors like Samsung and Micron to scale back production in an effort to stabilize the market ([Yiling Press](#), February 27).

Firms in other countries have not been able to mount an effective response. As most major global foundries are preoccupied with the “arms race” for advanced nodes, they have underinvested in the mature segment, according to Bosch China President Xu Daquan (徐大全). As a result, renewed shortages for mature-node processors could arise soon. Xu argues that this presents an opportunity for domestic manufacturers in the PRC to fill the gap if they move decisively ([36Kr](#), January 9).

## Conclusion

He Pengyu’s analysis, echoed across PRC academic and policy circles, implies that achieving dominance in legacy chip production is a necessary—though not sufficient—step toward achieving broader technological sovereignty. This strategy is predicated on PRC firms entrenching themselves as indispensable players in global markets. Accompanying this push is a recognition that strategic reciprocity may be needed, including selective market denial and policy levers to counter U.S.-led technological containment.

Potential pitfalls nevertheless persist in such a strategy. The shadow of Japan’s trajectory haunts He’s argument, reflecting an awareness that technological leadership cannot rest on scale alone. Japan’s decline, rooted in its detachment from market needs and an overcommitment to frontier technologies, stands as a cautionary tale. The PRC, he warns, must maintain a disciplined focus on market demand, manufacturing resilience, and strategic flexibility.

The PRC’s approach to legacy chips is conceived as a durable and scalable platform for advancing industrial maturity, not an endpoint. It allows Beijing to buy time, accumulate expertise, and gradually shift the locus of competition. For now, the priority is consolidating a sector where geopolitical scrutiny is lower and global dependence remains high. If sustained through policy support and market-responsive execution, legacy chips may well prove to be the foundation, not just of production capacity, but of a future bid for global semiconductor leadership.

*Sunny Cheung is a Fellow for China Studies at The Jamestown Foundation.*

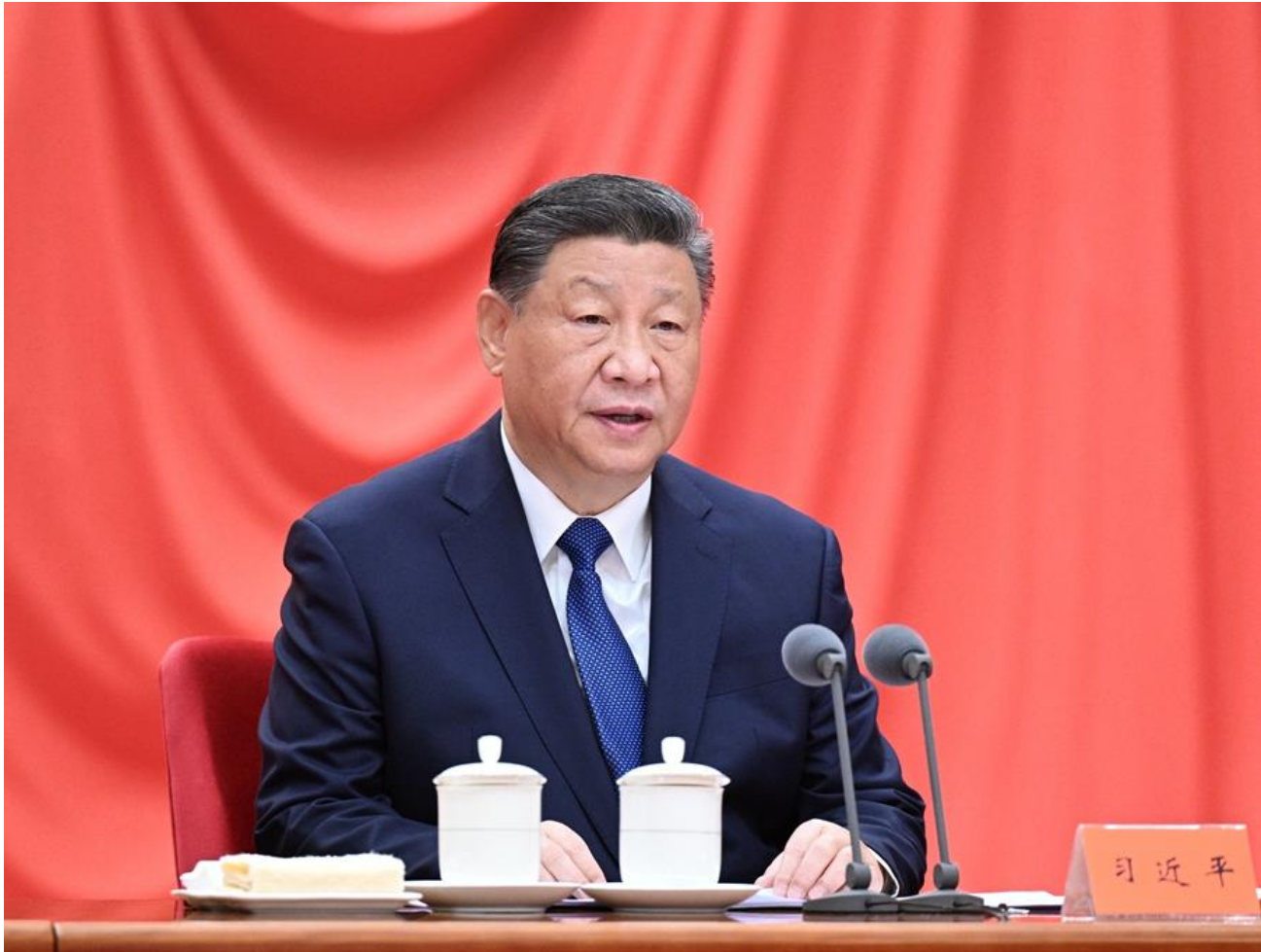
## **Notes**

[1] The full title of the document is “The Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development (2021–2025) and Long-Range Objectives through the Year 2035 of the People’s Republic of China” (中华人民共和国国民经济和社会发展第十四个五年规划和 2035 年远景目标纲要).

[2] CMOS stands for “Complementary Metal-Oxide-Semiconductor” and refers to a dominant technology used to manufacture chips.

**Latest PLA Anti-Corruption Campaign Enhances Xi Jinping's Control Over the Military**

*By K. Tristan Tang*



Xi Jinping delivering a speech at the fourth plenary session of the 20th CCDI of the CPC on January 6.  
(Source: [Xinhua](#))

**Executive Summary:**

- The PLA followed the overall disciplinary work of the Chinese Communist Party to promote the “all-around battle” against corruption.
- The “all-around battle” against corruption includes strengthening vertical control and enhancing horizontal coordination. The former focuses on centralizing power while delegating responsibility, and the latter aims to expand the reach and power of disciplinary work.
- By expanding the reach of disciplinary work in the military and further tightening control over the disciplinary system, Xi Jinping is taking another step to strengthen his control over all aspects of the PLA's operations.

In late April, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) held its annual training session for newly appointed discipline inspection committee secretaries and supervisory committee directors at the military corps level and above (全军军级以上单位新任纪委书记监委主任培训班). This session aimed to help senior military officers responsible for maintaining discipline better understand their responsibilities and the expectations of their superiors regarding disciplinary work. Given that this training event took place after Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission He Weidong (何卫东) was reportedly put under investigation and Deputy Secretary of the Military Discipline Commission Tang Yong (唐勇) was dismissed, it may reveal recent shortcomings in the PLA's disciplinary system and the Party's efforts to address these issues (China Brief, [February 14](#); [April 11](#)).

A new emphasis in this year's disciplinary work is the “all-around battle” (总体战) against corruption ([Xinhua](#), January 6; [Xinhua English](#), January 6). The phrase was mentioned during the plenary meeting of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), the expanded meeting of the Central Military Commission Discipline Inspection Commission, and the training session for key PLA disciplinary officials in 2025. It signals a new phase in Xi's efforts to exercise oversight of the military as he attempts to construct a loyal and operationally ready force.

### **‘All-Around Battle’ Focuses on Unified Leadership and Integrated Management**

The “all-around battle” against corruption has now become a key focus of disciplinary work. In recent years, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) main disciplinary meetings have opted for alternative terms like “tough battle” (攻坚战) and “protracted battle” (持久战) to describe the anti-corruption campaign. CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping used these terms in CCDI plenary meetings in 2015, 2017, and 2022, and they were also included in the 20th Party Congress report in 2022. None of these mentioned the “all-around battle” (Party Members Net, [January 13, 2015](#); [January 6, 2017](#); [January 18, 2022](#); [Xinhua](#), October 25, 2022).

The term “all-around battle” began to be used and discussed in important meetings and articles starting in 2022. In the 40th Collective Study Session of the Politburo of the Central Committee (中央政治局学习会议) in June 2022, Xi Jinping mentioned the need to fight the “all-around battle,” though the phrase appeared only in part of Xi's remarks at the session ([Xinhua](#), June 18, 2022). Although the 20th Party Congress report did not include the term, in his analysis of the report the head of the CCDI's publicity department referred to the need to “fight the all-around battle” (打好总体战) and repeated some of the key points made by Xi at the earlier study session ([Party Members Net](#), October 28, 2022). The term was not mentioned in Xi's speeches at the CCDI meetings in 2023 and 2024, but finally achieved parity with “tough battle” and “protracted battle” in 2025, when it appeared alongside them in the headline of the session's readout ([Xinhua](#), [January 9, 2023](#); [January 8, 2024](#); [January 6](#)). The annual meeting of the Military Discipline Inspection Commission also mentioned the “all-around battle” for the first time in 2025 ([PLA Daily](#), January 10).

According to an explanation of the “all-around battle” in the CCDI's official publication, *China Discipline Inspection and Supervision Magazine* (中国纪检监察杂志), corruption is a complex problem that results from the long-term accumulation and continuous festering of various negative factors within the Party. An “all-

around battle” is required to combat it. This involves a full deployment of anti-corruption forces, a comprehensive coordination of anti-corruption resources, and full-process prevention and treatment of corruption issues, to eliminate the root causes of the problem ([China Discipline Inspection and Supervision Magazine](#), August 1, 2022).

Two themes emerge in Xi Jinping’s articulation of the “all-around battle”: unity and integration. The emphasis on unity refers to the concentration of power and responsibility, especially the centralized and unified leadership of the Party Central Committee over anti-corruption work and the responsibility of Party committees at all levels to govern the Party strictly. It is primarily the top leader’s responsibility to ensure the implementation of relevant supervisory duties by the functional departments and establish a system in which all parties are responsible and coordinated for managing the Party. The second aspect of the “all-around battle,” integration, highlights the need to merge disciplinary work with other elements of political work. Xi said that the anti-corruption struggle must be coordinated with the Party’s political, ideological, organizational, work style, disciplinary, and institutional construction. He also called for political supervision, ideological education, organizational management, work style reform, discipline enforcement, and institutional improvement to play an important role in dealing with corruption ([Xinhua](#), June 18, 2022).

The *China Discipline Inspection and Supervision Magazine* article expands on the integration aspect of the “all-around battle.” Focusing on “full-cycle management” (全周期管理), it details addressing the sources of corruption, improving the system and mechanism for managing power and officials, and building an ideological defense against corruption and moral degeneration. It also calls for cadres to actively assist Party committees at their level to manage anti-corruption work, including through promoting the coordination of various measures in terms of policy orientation, helping with implementation, and ensuring measures are aligned and achieve effective results.

The PLA has also discussed the “all-around battle” against corruption. Li Xin’an (李新安), a researcher at the Academy of Military Science’s Institute of Military Political Work, defines the anti-corruption “all-around battle” as emphasizing a “systemic” (系统性) approach, while the “tough battle” aims to aggressively and thoroughly address every corruption issue, and the “protracted battle” focuses on maintaining long-term efforts against corruption. Li emphasizes the unity aspect of the all-around battle and calls for strengthening responsibility for strict Party governance. In this view, Party committees are expected to take the initiative to lead and manage, the CCDI to perform its supervisory duties, and all responsible parties to be aware of, to be accountable for, and to fulfil their responsibilities. Each entity must take responsibility, coordinate, and form synergies ([China National Defense Daily](#), April 25).

### **PLA Follows CCDI into ‘All-Around Battle’ Against Corruption**

Each year, coverage of the PLA’s anti-corruption work meetings or related documents generally appears after that of the CCDI’s plenary meetings. The content of these meetings is based on the Party’s overall disciplinary priorities and is then adjusted for the specific context of the PLA. In a departure from the last two years, the PLA’s anti-corruption efforts in 2025 follow the rest of the Party in emphasizing the deployment of the “all-around battle.”



The 2025 expanded meeting of the Military Discipline Inspection Commission included work items that are not purely disciplinary but focus on the integration aspect of the “all-around battle” approach. Introducing the term “all-around battle” for the first time, the meeting called for correcting the selection and use of personnel and rectifying ideology, personnel management, organization, work style, and discipline. It also called for continuously purifying the political ecosystem and facilitating inter-departmental, cross-sector, and military-civilian coordination and joint governance. This was a departure from the previous two years, which primarily focused on disciplinary work itself, and made no mention of any of the “battles” (Xinhua, [January 13, 2023](#); [January 12, 2024](#); [January 10](#)).

On January 21, 2025, the *PLA Daily* published an “interpretation of the PLA’s discipline inspection and supervision tasks” (军队纪检监察工作任务解读) for the year. These included several important points related to the “all-around battle,” all of which were new additions from previous years. The work requirements included items that focused on fostering unity through the “all-around battle,” such as ensuring ideological, political, and operational alignment with the Party with Xi Jinping at its core” (确保思想上政治上行动上同以习近平同志为核心的党中央保持高度一致) and “improving the institutional regulations and supporting measures for managing power, while minimizing discretionary authority” (完善管权治权的制度规定和配套措施, 最大限度压缩权力自由裁量空间). Other work items focused on integration, such as calls to “cultivate ideals, Party spirit, and moral character that align with the new era and new mission” (培养同新时代新使命相适应的理想信念、党性修养、官德人品) and to strengthen coordination and communication between military and civilian departments. The document also outlined concrete tasks for the year, including establishing an evaluation and supervision mechanism for Party committees to “oversee inspection rectification” (抓巡视整改) (PLA Daily, [January 30, 2023](#); [January 29, 2024](#); [January 21](#)).

The 2025 training session for newly appointed discipline inspection committee secretaries and supervisory committee directors at the military corps level and above also followed this trend. As with other relevant documents released this year, coverage of the session indicates that it placed greater emphasis on disciplinary personnel engaging in the “all-around battle” than in previous years ([PLA Daily](#), May 7). Again, the insertion of the phrase was a new addition, while “tough battle” and “protracted battle” were mentioned in both 2023 and 2024, the all-around battle was not introduced until 2025. According to the report, a key task of the training was learning and understanding Xi’s strategic deployments on deepening political training, improving conduct, and fighting corruption—part of the emphasis in the “all-around battle” approach on instilling unity. Integrative work was a key focus of the session, too. Discipline inspection personnel engaged in cross-unit and cross-functional work integration must understand the regulatory basis and operational scope of coordination, as failing to do so could lead to violations of discipline or law, making them subjects of disciplinary investigations. As such, the session aimed to strengthen the understanding and application of laws such as the “Supervision Law” (监察法) ([Xinhua](#), March 26, 2018). This placed greater emphasis on mastering and applying regulations rather than simply explaining them, as was the case in 2024. [1] The training’s expected outcomes include continuously improving the ability to perform duties in accordance with regulations, discipline, and law. This indicates a shift in focus from 2024. Now, instead of merely seeking to promote standardization, legalization, and formalization of discipline inspection and supervision work, the Party will seek to ensure that individual disciplinary personnel have the ability to carry out their tasks (PLA Daily, [June 12, 2023](#); [June 30, 2024](#); [May 7](#)).

**Table 1: New Discipline Work Focuses of the PLA's All-Around Battle Against Corruption in 2025**

‘All-Around Battle’ Against Corruption	Aspect	Unity	Integration
	Logic	Strengthen vertical control	Enhance horizontal coordination
	Effect	Centralize power while delegating responsibility	Expand the reach and power of disciplinary work
Major meetings or reports	Meeting of the Military Discipline Inspection Commission	(No new content)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>correcting the selection and use of personnel</li> <li>rectifying ideology, personnel management, organization, work style, and discipline, while continuously purifying the political ecosystem</li> <li>facilitating inter-departmental, cross-sector, and military-civilian coordination and joint governance</li> </ul>
	The interpretation of the PLA's discipline inspection and supervision tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensuring ideological, political, and operational alignment with the party, with Xi Jinping at its core</li> <li>improving the institutional regulations and supporting measures for managing power, while minimizing discretionary authority</li> <li>an evaluation and supervision mechanism for Party committees to oversee inspection rectification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cultivating Party spirit and moral character that align with the new era and new mission</li> <li>strengthening coordination and communication between military and civilian departments, promoting information sharing</li> </ul>
	The training session for newly appointed discipline inspection committee secretaries at the military corps level and above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>learning and understanding President Xi's strategic deployments on deepening political training, improving conduct, and fighting corruption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>strengthening the understanding and application of laws such as the Supervision Law of the People's Republic of China</li> <li>continuously improving the ability to perform duties in accordance with regulations, discipline, and law</li> </ul>

(Source: Compiled by the author)

## **Xi's Distrust of the Disciplinary System**

Comparison of the three important meetings and reports above—the expanded meeting of the Central Military Commission Discipline Inspection Commission, the “interpretation” published in the *PLA Daily*, and the training session for officials—makes clear that the PLA’s discipline work in 2025 will coalesce around the “all-around battle” against corruption. This will take place on the one hand by strengthening vertical control (unity) through centralizing power while delegating responsibility to lower levels and ensuring that even lower tiers are held accountable. On the other hand, it will occur via improved horizontal coordination, through broadening the reach of disciplinary work and expanding its power (integration). A summary of this analysis is laid out in Table 1 above.

Calls to strengthen central oversight and expand disciplinary powers indicate that Xi does not trust the current state of disciplinary work within the PLA or the military discipline system more broadly. Corruption has persisted in recent years, and it is unclear why Xi only now is choosing to ratchet up disciplinary work. One clue lies in the 2025 “interpretation,” which warns of “severe punishment for those who remain stubborn and continue to resist after the 20th Party Congress, especially after the [2024] Central Military Commission’s Political Work Meeting” (对顶风违纪违法问题快查快办，对党的二十大后特别是中央军委政治工作会议后执迷不悟、仍不收手的严惩不贷) ([PLA Daily](#), January 21). This likely indicates that Xi was hoping for more progress to be made in implementing discipline-focused measures from the June 2024 Military Commission Political Work Meeting. These stipulated that the PLA’s Political Work Department and Discipline Inspection Commission must strengthen coordination and cooperation in ways that closely align with the framing of the “all-around battle” against corruption ([Xinhua](#), June 19, 2024).

Xi’s dissatisfaction with military disciplinary work to date could have triggered the new push for the “all-around battle.” It might even explain in part why He Weidong is suspected to have been put under investigation or removed in early 2025. Personnel mismanagement, which is precisely the focus of the integration aspect of this year’s PLA anti-corruption campaign, may have led Xi to lose trust in He ([China Brief](#), April 11).

## **Conclusion**

The essence of the “all-around battle” is to expand the reach of disciplinary work while tightening Xi’s control over discipline management. If the Party achieves a degree of victory in this battle, Xi will have taken another step toward strengthening his control over all aspects of PLA operations. Such an approach may have a dual impact on PLA readiness. On the one hand, operations and processes within the PLA may become more complex and cumbersome due to a strengthened disciplinary system. On the other, supervising combat readiness and training—a current focus of military discipline work—suggests that Xi’s emphasis on enhancing readiness capabilities may be further reinforced through the disciplinary system.

*K. Tristan Tang is a research associate at the Research Project on China’s Defense Affairs and a member of the Pacific Forum’s Young Leaders Program. His research focuses on China’s defense industry, the People’s Liberation Army, and Chinese foreign policy. You can connect with him on X: @KTristanTang.*

**Notes**

[1] The 2024 training session which focused on “a detailed explanation” (重点讲解) of the recently revised “Regulations on Disciplinary Sanctions of the Party” (中国共产党纪律处分条例) ([Xinhua](#), December 27, 2023; [PLA Daily](#), June 30, 2024).

## Desertification Control Drive Focuses on Food Security and Soft Power Influence

*By Matthew Gabriel Cazel Brazil*

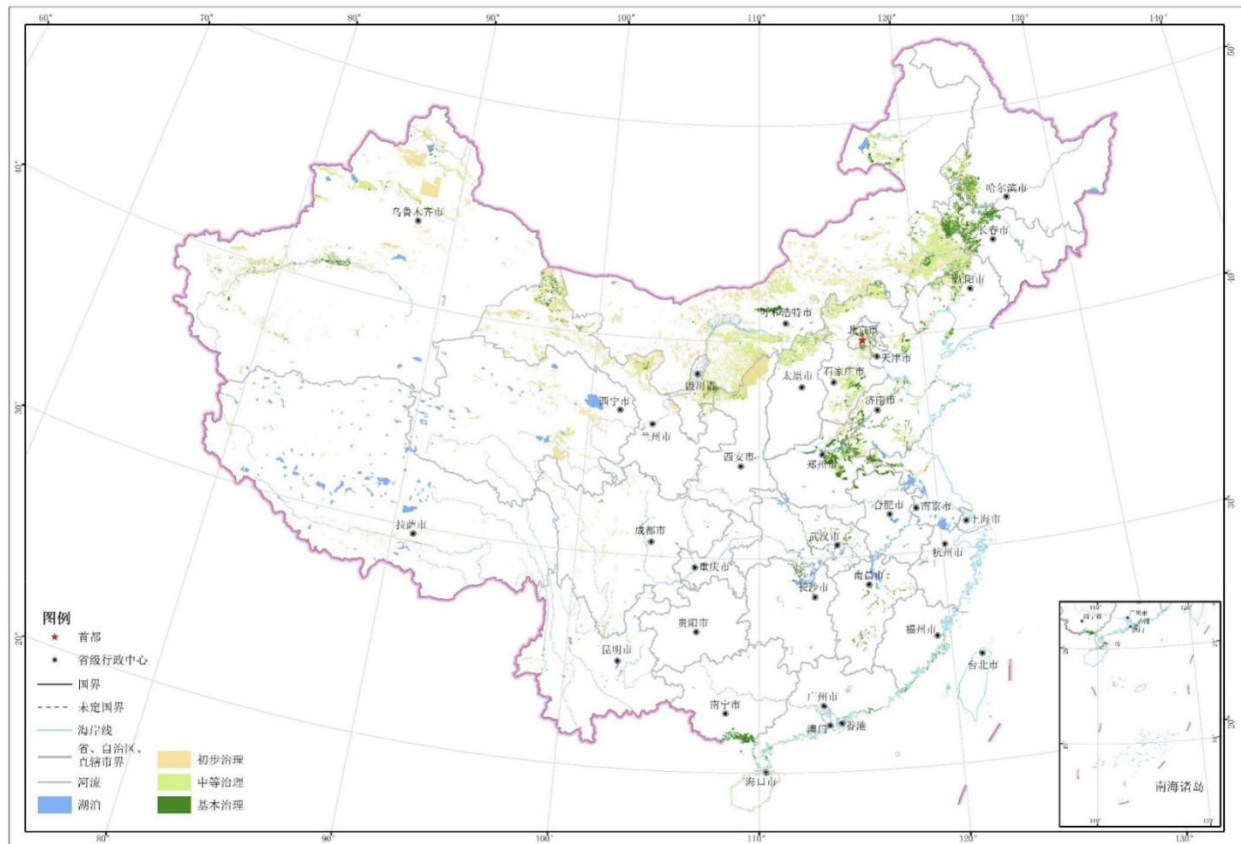


图 1-7 已治理沙化土地治理程度分布图 (2019)

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Distribution Map of the Degree of Desertification Control. (Source: "National Plan for Desertification Control 2021-2030")

### Executive Summary:

- Desertification control is central to People's Republic of China's (PRC) food security strategy, enabling the expansion of arable land and reducing dependence on U.S. agricultural imports amid rising geopolitical tensions.
- Xi Jinping has shifted the "Three Rural Issues" framework to prioritize grain self-sufficiency over rural economic development. These efforts underpin PRC's push for strategic resilience, with large-scale land reclamation, soybean substitution plans, and domestic meat production advances designed to ensure food stability during potential conflicts or trade disruptions.
- Desertification success is being exported as a soft power tool, with the PRC promoting its "Chinese Solution" to ecological governance in Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East through Belt and Road-linked partnerships, training programs, and international forums.



On April 9, 2025, the People's Republic of China (PRC) imposed additional tariffs on U.S. goods, including on over \$26 billion in agricultural items—roughly 16 percent of total U.S. imports. This move signaled a bold step toward reducing reliance on imported staples like soybeans ([Office of the Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council](#), April 9; [Sina Finance](#), April 11). Historically, the PRC has been reliant on foreign imports of meat, as well as the soybeans and other grains used in the animal feed needed for domestic meat production, to feed its population. Data from 2023 shows that oilseeds and grains made up \$19.5 billion or almost half of U.S. agricultural imports, while meat and poultry accounted for around \$4.5 billion. Out of all oilseed and grain imports, soybeans alone made up a massive \$15.6 billion in 2023 ([CF News](#)).

The PRC's Ministry of Finance maintained the steep new 125 percent tariff rate on agricultural goods, despite exempting other items such as pharmaceuticals, microchips, aircraft engines, and ethane. This suggests an increasing comfort in decoupling from agricultural trade with the United States ([CNBC](#), April 28). Since the early years of the Jiangxi Soviet in the 1930s, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has stressed building food independence to “ensure the Chinese people's rice bowl is firmly in their own hands” (确保中国人的饭碗牢牢端在自己手中). In the words of Mao Zedong—and quoted by Xi Jinping at the Central Rural Work Conference in December, 2019—“Eating is the most important thing” (吃饭是第一件大事) ([CPC News](#), October 16, 2019). As global supply chains face new challenges and trade tensions escalate, Beijing's drive to achieve self-sufficiency food production without relying on easily disrupted maritime imports is accelerating.

### **The PRC's Road to Self-Sufficiency**

Since 2022, American oilseed and grain exports to the PRC have steadily declined as the PRC government began to quietly implement three- and five-year plans explicitly designed to reduce reliance on imported foodstuffs, especially from the United States (PRC Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, [December 29, 2021](#), [April 12, 2023](#)).

This shift is rooted in decades of agricultural modernization and innovative land reclamation efforts, all aimed at the single goal of ensuring food security. Since the early 2020s, the CCP and Xi Jinping have explicitly stated that national rural and agricultural policies are now primarily oriented toward building a domestic agricultural sector capable of feeding PRC's massive 1.4 billion-strong population, even in the event of a major conflict or naval blockade.

National grain production exceeded 500 kilograms per capita in 2024, according to government statistics, meaning that the goal of total domestic food security has very nearly been achieved ([CCTV](#), January 20). At current domestic production levels, PRC authorities could provide each citizen with around 1,200 calories daily from rice alone, even if a naval blockade halted all grain imports. At about 94 million tons, domestic meat production in 2024 could provide about 67 kilograms of meat per person per year, which is just below PRC's current annual consumption rate of about 100 million tons ([China Statistical Year Book 2024](#), accessed May 12).

Pressure points do still exist, however. For instance, domestic meat production far exceeds meat imports, but the domestic industry is heavily reliant on imported soybeans and other oil seeds to sustain it.

## **An Introduction to Practical Desertification Control Methods**

The PRC has achieved self-reliance in food production in part via a nationally prioritized program to combat desertification. Under the “Three North Shelterbelt Project” (三北防护林工程) and other programs, the PRC has now massively increased the nation’s total area of farmland through reclamation of existing deserts and the active protection of existing arable land ([National Forestry and Grassland Administration](#), February 14).

Chinese farmers have used a method for “fixing” (风固沙) desertified sandy soil in place known as “straw checkerboarding” (草方格) since the 1950s as the primary method of countering and reversing desertification. [1] The process involves inserting stalks of straw or other dried plant material into the desertified sand in a grid pattern, with each grid typically measuring about one square meter. Once this grid pattern is in place, the area is typically planted with drought-resistant seeds or seedlings. These straw grids prevent wind erosion from shifting the sand, allowing for the formation of a layer of topsoil and, eventually, the growth of grasses and shrubs. Initially an incredibly labor-intensive technique, it has been mechanized since the early 2010s, greatly reducing the time and manpower needed for large-scale checkerboarding projects and allowing vast areas of desert in regions like Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, and Xinjiang to be processed into grasslands with topsoil that does not erode with shifting sands.

PRC scientists have also developed more technical solutions to combat desertification. Lab-cultured cyanobacteria—microorganisms capable of photosynthesis—have been deployed to augment the effectiveness of more traditional methods. Application of these cyanobacteria form biological soil crusts over sandy soil. This reduces the time needed for the development of a stable topsoil layer from 10 years to just twelve months. [2] As with many other food security-related drives, officials sanctioned the use of cyanobacteria in 2020 in Tibet, Ningxia, and Inner Mongolia.

As of 2024, these efforts had resulted in the “Green Line” (绿线) in the Yellow River Basin moving 300 kilometers westward and 65 million mu (亩) (4.3 million hectares) of desertified land had been “controlled” (治理) into land with stable topsoil, according to PRC state media ([People’s Daily](#), December 2, 2024).

In March, the PRC State Council built on these programs by implementing a plan for “Gradually Converting Permanent Basic Farmland into High-Standard Farmland” (逐步把永久基本农田建成高标准农田实施方案). This plan set out a concrete list of objectives: reaching a total of 1.4 billion mu (90 million hectares) of high-standard farmland by 2030 while also “transforming and upgrading” (改造提升) 280 million mu (19 million hectares) of degraded land into arable land. Even more ambitiously, the plan aims to have converted all “permanent basic farmland” (永久基本农田) into high-standard farmland by 2035 ([Xinhua](#), March 30).

## **Desertification Control and Domestic Food Security Policy**

Food security has always been a central plank of CCP governance. Since the 1920s, the Party has prioritized grain production as a symbolic and practical tool for building public support and legitimacy. It frequently publicizes successful land reclamation programs and grain production figures to domestic audiences, and Xi Jinping often mentions land reclamation efforts in speeches, stressing its links with increasing domestic food production and broader national security imperatives.

Desertification control and food security fall under the broad umbrella of the “Three Rural Issues” (三农问题), a set of priorities consistently promulgated in official publications since the early 2000s ([Sina News](#), March 11, 2003). They issues are summarized, per the Party slogan, as “farmers are suffering; rural areas are impoverished; and agricultural industry is in danger” (农民真苦、农村真穷、农业真危险). They first became well-known after a letter with the same title was sent to PRC Premier Zhu Rongji (朱镕基) in 2000 by Li Changping (李昌平), a local party secretary in rural Hubei province. The letter bluntly outlined core structural weaknesses in the country’s rural and agricultural policies, and it is now frequently cited in official publications. At its core, the “Three Rural Issues” is an attempt to ensure social stability and food security in the PRC’s rapidly changing society, not just by reducing inequality between urban and rural populations via rural economic development and agricultural modernization, but by encouraging new generations of citizens to see agricultural work as a profitable and viable career, thus ensuring long-term food security.

In a speech at the fifth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee in late 2020, Xi Jinping shifted the focus of the “Three Rural Issues” from economic development to food security, in an apparent change in policy. He said that “ensuring the secure supply of important agricultural products such as grain is the top priority of the ‘Three Rural Issues’ work” (保障粮食等重要农产品供给安全，是“三农”工作头等大事), and warned that “absolute security” (绝对安全) was needed for grain provisions ([Qiushi](#), August 31, 2022). Since 2020, this change in priorities has manifested in various directives and in the allocation of resources from economic development to food security.

Like many other rural development objectives that fall under the “Three Rural Issues” umbrella, desertification control efforts in the PRC go hand-in-hand with directives from the center. Since Xi’s 2020 speech, these directives expressly advocate for decreasing reliance on foreign agricultural imports. One example the “Three-Year Action Plan for Reducing and Substituting Soybean Meal for Feed” (饲用豆粕减量替代三年行动方案), released by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs in 2023 ([MARA](#), April 12, 2023). This plan directs feed producers to reduce soybean meal in animal feed from 14.5 percent in 2022 to 13 percent by 2025, and to reduce national consumption of soybeans by at least 4 million tons annually, with projections for additional future reductions. Food security and supply chain stability are specifically mentioned in the text of the plan, which built on topics outlined in “document number one” from earlier that year, which focused—as it does every year—on rural issues ([Xinhua](#), February 13, 2023).

Besides efforts to reduce soybean consumption, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs launched the Soybean and Oilseed Production Capacity Enhancement Project (大豆油料产能提升工程) in 2022. PRC-based media described the project as an effort to reduce reliance on U.S. imports, as well as the driving force behind planting an additional 27 million mu (1.9 million hectares) of soybeans that year ([China Business Journal](#), January 3, 2023). The ministry also targeted Northeastern China and the Yangtze River Basin for the planting of new soybean and oilseed farmland. These regions have also been the focus of desertification control efforts ([People’s Daily](#), July 12, 2022). Directives like these, alongside land reclamation efforts, have significantly reduced dependence on foreign imported staples—even for crops which the PRC has historically struggled to produce domestically in sufficient quantities to meet national demand.

## **Foreign Influence Operations and the ‘Chinese Solution’ for Global Ecological Governance**

Beijing frequently touts its successes at home as a model worthy of emulation by countries overseas ([China Brief](#), May 9). Its successes in combating desertification have received the same treatment. They have been promoted in foreign influence campaigns, especially in Africa and Central Asia, where events such as those hosted by the Xinjiang Institute of Ecology and Geography and the PRC Pavilion at the United Nations Conference on Desertification aim to “tell China’s story well” (讲好中国的故事) in this domain ([Xinhua](#), December 7, 2024). A recent initiative has been the promotion of a “‘Chinese Solution’ for Global Ecological Governance” (全球生态治理“中国方案”) to foreign audiences, especially in Mongolia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa ([People’s Daily](#), June 18, 2024).

PRC government entities have engaged in several ways with other countries on desertification. These include holding exhibitions at global summits on desertification, most notably in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in December 2024; and establishing and funding permanent centers dedicated to evangelizing the “Chinese Solution” to foreign governments. Examples include the “China-Arab International Research Center for Drought, Desertification and Land Degradation” (中阿干旱、荒漠化和土地退化国际研究中心成立) opened in cooperation with the League of Arab States in August 2023, and the “China-Mongolia Cooperation Center for Combating Desertification” (中蒙荒漠化防治合作中心在乌兰巴托揭牌设立) in September 2023 (Chinese Academy of Forestry, [September 9, 2023](#), [accessed May 12](#)). In Africa, the PRC has held multiple workshops and hosted various seminars in pursuit of cooperation in various projects, including supporting the African Union’s “Great Green Wall” project. Recent coverage has detailed the PRC’s “six-in-one” (六位一体) solution to fighting desertification in the region. One expert from the Chinese Academy of Sciences is quoted as saying that, “as a big and strong country, we have a responsibility and a duty to share our ... models ... This is our solemn commitment” (作为一个世界上的大国、强国，我们有责任、有义务把我们 ... 模式 ... 推广应用。这也是我们的一个庄重承诺) ([Guancha](#), March 13; [Chinese Academy of Forestry](#), [accessed May 12](#)).

PRC policy also openly links desertification control efforts to One Belt One Road projects that “serve the national strategy” (服务国家战略). The National Plan for Desertification Control and Prevention 2021-2030 (全国防沙治沙规划 (2021–2030 年)) articulates an ambition to strengthen exchanges and cooperation with developing countries in desertification control to serve the national strategy. The goal of such cooperation is to “highlight the PRC’s image as a responsible major country and win wide praise from the international community” (彰显了我国负责任大国形象，赢得了国际社会的广泛赞誉) ([National Forestry Bureau](#), December 15, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

By transforming deserts into farmland and reducing reliance on foreign imports, the PRC has bolstered its ability to feed its 1.4 billion citizens, even amid global trade disruptions or potential conflicts. These efforts, part of broader food security work, also position the PRC as a leader in ecological governance beyond its borders—providing opportunities for advancing influence among “Global South” countries. Despite challenges posed by

strained international trade relations and a historical legacy of famines, the PRC maintains robust control over its food security in 2025—all by careful and deliberate design.

*Matthew Gabriel Cazal Brazil is an independent China analyst interested in technology exchange and evolving global trade between the US, China, and Latin America.*

## Notes

[1] Li, Xiaodong [李小东]. “Study on Wind Prevention and Sand Fixation Benefits of Mechanized Straw Barriers with Different Specifications on the Southern Edge of the Tengger Desert [腾格里沙漠南缘不同规格机械化草沙障防风固沙效益研究].” *Forestry Machinery & Woodworking Equipment* [林业机械与木工设备] 50, no. 7 (2022): 114 – 119.

[2] Park, C. H., Li, X. R., Zhao, Y., Jia, R. L., and Hur, J. S. “Rapid Development of Cyanobacterial Crust in the Field for Combating Desertification.” *PLOS ONE* 12, no. 6 (2017): e0179903.  
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0179903>.

[3] “High Standard Farmland” (高标准农田) is defined as “arable land that is flat, concentrated and contiguous, has complete facilities, supporting farmland, fertile soil, good ecology, strong disaster resistance, and is suitable for modern agricultural production and management methods. It can ensure high and stable yields in drought and flood” (土地平整、集中连片、设施完善、农田配套、土壤肥沃、生态良好、抗灾能力强, 与现代农业生产和经营方式相适应的旱涝保收、高产稳产) ([Department of Nature Resources of Hubei Province](#), November 8, 2020). “Permanent Basic Farmland” is unoccupied arable land designated for agricultural use, whether or not it is currently being farmed ([Department of Nature Resources of Hubei Province](#), December 30, 2019).