

**Professor Steve Tsang, Director, SOAS China Institute, SOAS University of London – Written evidence (TRC0015)**

*This submission is made by me as an academic specialist who works on the politics and foreign policy of China and believes the government's new approach to China requires refinement. I am currently engaged in a research project on the Political Thought of Xi Jinping. The views articulated are personal and do not represent that of the institution for which I work.*

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The China section of the Government's Integrated Review suggests that the Government is attempting to have the cake and eat it when it deals with China. On the one hand, it identifies China as posing a systemic challenge to the UK. On the other hand, it underlines the importance of economic relations with China. This falls short of the preference of the Chinese Government, which would have preferred the UK not to have mentioned, even only rhetorically, China as a systemic challenge. But it is still comforting from Beijing's perspective. As far as the Chinese Communist Party is concerned, the UK Government has reassured it that Lenin was right: the capitalists will sell the rope with which one intends to hang them.

With Xi Jinping working to make China the dominant global power, the UK can no longer afford not to have a well thought through and sustainable China policy that upholds British national interests. We must engage with China to face global challenges such as climate change and the Pandemic. But putting economic relations ahead of confronting the systemic challenge risks undermining the long-term resilience of our democratic system.

The Government is right that China poses a systemic challenge to the UK. To ensure the UK is well prepared to face it, we must recognise what China under Xi Jinping, who will stay as leader for life, intends to do. This requires us to appreciate that a key thrust of Chinese foreign policy is to make the world safe for authoritarianism, one which is conducive to the Communist Party perpetuating its monopoly of power in China. Xi's government is also transforming China from a rule taker to a rule maker in the international community. Recently, it has gone further. By enacting the Hong Kong National Security Law (2020), the Chinese Government has, for the first time in the history of the People's Republic, extended the jurisdiction of a Chinese law overseas. More specifically, under Article 38 of this law, regular critical academic research and teaching on contemporary Chinese politics and society on British

campuses can now be deemed a crime. How the Chinese authorities will enforce this remains to be seen, but criminalisation has already taken place. The idea that Chinese assertiveness will not have a direct negative effect on the British way of life is now a gentlemen's pipedream.

Indeed, under Xi's leadership China has developed a global strategy, which aims to secure the uninterrupted rise of China, in contrast to the strategy of peaceful rise advocated by his predecessor, Hu Jintao. At the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in late 2017 when Xi consolidated power and assumed the role of supreme leader, he promised to make China strong, rich, and, generally speaking, second to none by 2050 at the latest. By staking the Communist Party's legitimacy and that of his own power on China's rise, Xi has transformed this objective into the party-state's mission. This in essence is the China Dream of national rejuvenation, which he proclaimed soon after he took power as the General Secretary of the Communist Party five years earlier, in 2012.

Xi's uninterrupted rise strategy focuses domestically on strengthening the party-state, and externally on engaging with the world to build up China's technological capacity and global leadership. It means that China will continue to strive to make the Chinese economy innovative and not vulnerable to external pressure by increasingly shifting from an export-oriented to a domestic consumption dependent model. In practical terms it amounts to a kind of smart (but not full) decoupling and temporary tolerance of the liberal world order: China will continue to support globalization as long as it enables Chinese industries to acquire advanced technologies to make themselves innovative and world-leading. When we seek to strengthen economic ties with China, we should bear this in mind.

In addition, the Chinese Communist Party not only blocks China from Western ideas and influences it deems undesirable, as required under Document 9 of 2013, but also actively attempts to make new international rules to protect the regime security of autocracies. Whether China is a reformist or revisionist power depends on the perception of the observer. What is certain is that China under Xi is not a status quo power. In the foreseeable future, China will focus on four measures to secure its uninterrupted rise. They are:

- building up the core of China's 'comprehensive national strength' by reinvigorating the Communist Party as an effective and efficient Leninist instrument;
- making the Chinese economy innovative via national champions, investments, and cooperation with foreign companies willing to share cutting-edge technologies;

- making the Chinese people proud of their heritage and history and reject Western and in particular liberal or democratic ideas; and
- using economic leverages to persuade most countries to befriend or at least refrain from being 'hostile' to China.

In terms of its foreign policy Xi will steer China to:

- proactively engage with the rest of the world via the Belt and Road Initiative, vaccine diplomacy and support (which can be moral and/or material) for authoritarian states, in order to reduce, if not eliminate the risk democratic ideas may pose to the Communist Party;
- assertively put its narrative across through its expansion of Chinese media and diplomatic presence globally and countering negative portrayals of China; and
- play a leading role in reshaping international organizations and rules by proactively securing leadership and other key positions in international organizations for citizens of China or friendly states.

It will dismiss all criticisms of Chinese repression in Xinjiang, Hong Kong and anywhere else as hostile propaganda. It will also build up its military capabilities to enable it to impose its rule on Taiwan and secure the maritime spheres it claims, particularly in the South China Sea. Xi's commitment to take Taiwan cannot be achieved without either deterring the USA from coming to Taiwan's aid under the American Taiwan Relations Act or defeating the US forces deployed to help Taiwan defend itself. If China prevails over the USA on Taiwan, it will be the 'Suez moment' for the USA, an event that will re-shape the world order. Hence, when the time comes for China to attempt to take Taiwan, the UK will have to be prepared to respond to an American request for support.

All in all, the UK is not well placed to confront effectively the systemic challenge China poses and enhance its economic ties with China at the same time, no more than an individual can have the cake and eat it too. Even in the area of economic cooperation, it is essential that we do not lose sight of the reality that the scope for British businesses to benefit from economic partnerships with Chinese partners will be limited by how beneficial such partnerships will be to the Chinese party-state. We should not ignore the reality that in China even genuinely world class private enterprises like Alibaba and the Ant Group must fall in line when the party-state so demands. As a Leninist party-state China's political system is inherent anti-democratic.

With the Government having rightly identified China as a systemic challenge, it is essential that this should be the starting point for the

British approach to engage with China, be it in facing global threats like climate change or in economic ties.

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