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"Rich Country, Strong Army" China's Comprehensive National Security

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China's security strategy, which is termed Comprehensive National Security in official documents, seeks close interrelations among economic and military development goals, among other things. This raises the question whether and how economic cooperation with China should also be looked at from a security policy angle more closely than hitherto. This, in turn, presupposes that China's development must be seen as the development of an actor all of whose actions are strategic. More attention should be paid to the question of China's strategy development in the context of "comprehensive strategic partnership" between Germany and China.

For several years, China has regularly used the term Comprehensive National Security (*zongti guojia anquan guan*) in articulating its security policy, but has not published a central keystone document on national security that provides information on or explains the term.

Despite this, the main elements of what China means by Comprehensive National Security can be inferred from official and publicly available documents of the Chinese government and its ruling party. This raises a number of questions: To what extent can China's security strategy be inferred from official documents? What are the central pillars of that strategy? Does it make a valid claim to be China's internal and external security strategy? And how will its implementation affect other countries in general and Germany and Europe in particular?

One party, multiple strategy dimensions

The statute of the Communist Party of China (CPC), decisions of its Central Committee (CC), white papers published by the State Council on a variety of national issues, five-year plans and keystone documents published by ministries are key documents on national security. To a lesser extent, laws hold clues to elements of Comprehensive National Security. Among all these documents, the status of a source of law must be given to the statute of the CPC and to decisions of its CC. Five-year plans consolidate China's long-term goals and contain concrete directives on how to achieve those goals, while white papers and white paper-type publications of ministries elaborate aspects of individual sub-strategies and in terms of terminology and argumentation place them into the context of an overall strategy. Related legislation (national security law, cybersecurity law and other laws) regulates concrete issues and completes the picture.

The term Comprehensive National Security was first used in an address of President and CPC Secretary-General Xi Jinping at the founding session of the Central National Security Commission of the CPC (*zhongyang guojia anquan weiyuanhui*) on 15 April 2014. Later party documents implemented the formula swiftly. Xi named eleven aspects of this security concept: political security, territorial security, military security, economic security, cultural security, social security, scientific-technological security, information security, ecological security, resource security and nuclear security. The white paper titled *China's Military Strategy of 2015* places these aspects of security in a wider context: [...] "Uniform and comprehensive planning of internal and external security, territorial security and security of the population, traditional and non-traditional

security, our security and common security." The primary purpose of Comprehensive National Security is to "maintain the stability" (weiwen) of China's political system. "Common security" should not be interpreted as collective security within an alliance, either, because China has almost consistently pursued a policy of non-alignment in security and defense matters.

The legitimacy of China's political leadership rests on successful national development, among other things. It regards national development as a core national interest. The concept of Comprehensive National Power is used to control and measure development. As China understands its uniform centralized system of governance, the combination of internal security and national stability with external security, to be enforced by military means, leads to the combination of traditional and non-traditional fields of security policy.

"Rich country, strong army" – the fusion of economic and military development objectives

Numerous documents emphasize that a strong army is indispensable to the protection of the CPC and of China's economic prosperity. The formula "rich country, strong army" is the most concise and still most meaningful description of the interrelationship between a prospering economy and a strong army. The leadership of the CPC regards economic and military strength as two mutually dependent aspects of the overriding state goal of a "strong China". A strong army is needed to defend the interests of a large country. A strong economy, in turn, is a precondition for the creation and upkeep of modern armed forces. In concrete terms, this includes the creation of A2/AD capabilities, the development of multiservice command and control and information systems, the development of powerful engines for jet aircraft but also the construction and enlargement of military structures in the South China Sea and of overseas bases.

The modernization of industrial production has been a priority for the CPC leadership and for the Chinese government for some time. China does not want to be the "workbench of the world" anymore. Instead, it wants to do its own research and development. Since the military reforms of 2015, China for the first time has also had an organizational framework, including the relevant agencies, for the improvement of its armed forces, which white papers on defense using varying terminology have been demanding for years. It has been making a huge research effort in the subject of Revolution in Military Affairs for many years. It is no coincidence that the key technologies needed to modernize China's industry, national economy and social communication but also its administrative apparatus, its police, its armed forces and intelligence services are the same: automation, digitalization, "informatization" (see below), quantum computers and Artificial Intelligence. Policy documents have underpinned all these fields of knowledge and technologies as essential to the maintenance of national security. Even the Made in China 2025 industrial strategy, which at first glance seems to have little to do with national security from a German point of view, expressly states in its preamble that it serves a national security purpose. Although China has often drawn parallels between Made in China 2025 and Germany's Industry 4.0 initiative, these parallels are misleading: Made in China 2025 is a central economic and technological planning document with political ambitions while Industry 4.0 sketches a digital production infrastructure. China comprehensively and in all relevant documents frankly subsumes all future technologies under the guiding principle of national security and "civil-military fusion". This means that future technologies are used as dual-use technologies in that country in general without exception.

"Informatization" (xinxihua) is a Chinese term that includes the means (information and communication technologies), purpose (achieve an effect in the information domain) and objective (control the other actors in the information domain). While the military dimension of information and communication technologies and of cyberspace has figured in China's white papers on defense for more than a decade, their social, economic and industrial meanings are not yet fully understood although they have also figured in official documents for more than ten years. It does not only call for the modernization of information and communication infrastructures. It also regards them as a comprehensive means of state influence and control. Practical consequences range up to complete control over private communication and over the social credit rating of people or to the far-reaching and selective exclusion of the people of China from the internet.

"Civil-military fusion" is defined as the pursued reciprocal penetration of China's civilian and defense industries. This concept is not new, either. It has been used for some time in white papers on defense and in five-year plans, e.g. in the 12th five-year plan of 2011. "In accordance with the requirements of a strong army", it calls for a "revolutionized, modernized and standardized approach". The civil-military fusion agencies to be created at all levels of the Chinese government shall promote the exchange of technologies, specialists, capital and information between the civilian economy and the defense economy. It becomes clear in this context that the demanded capability of "indigenous innovation" (zizhu chuangxin nengli, 2017 government report) is not only a matter of national pride but is regarded as necessary for the improvement of China's performance in defense engineering. Therefore, it is an element of China's national security.

Four recommended actions for Germany and the EU

China is placing ever larger areas of government, economic and social action under its national security concept. There is an urgent need to watch this concept in its entirety and changes to it systematically because it already has a noticeable effect on German interests and because it will affect German interests even more in the future. The following four recommendations for action are made:

1. China's Comprehensive National Security concept and Germany's Networked Approach, on the surface, have similar names, but that is where the similarity ends. The common use of the term "comprehensive" suggests things in common where there are none.
2. German actors should give serious thought to the strategic dimensions political and economic cooperation with China can acquire.
3. As China as a whole is a strategic actor, Germany needs a cross-ministerial approach in its relations with China.
4. Sino-German relations are defined as a "comprehensive strategic partnership". Germany should make use of the large number of permanent mechanisms for dialog in strategic decision-making processes more comprehensively than in the past.

1. China's Comprehensive National Security should not be confused with Germany's Networked Approach. The latter is dynamic and active in nature because it is process-oriented and because it relies on flexibility and agility in dealing with known and unpredictable challenges. It demands resilience to direct attacks from the German state, economy and society and indirect influence. This results in the demand for a strategic capability from the state, economy and society (including non-governmental actors). This, in turn, does not imply that a collision between a potential national overall strategy and principles of governance and administration enshrined in the constitution (departmental principle, power of direction and collegial principle) would be tolerated. In contrast, China's Comprehensive National Security concept is essentially reactive and static and primarily focused on the CPC. The National Security Commission reports to the Central Committee of the CPC. The People's Liberation Army is the army of the CPC. Beyond that, all activities are steered centrally, even though interaction between the different subject areas of security is emphasized.

One thing the two concepts have in common in various degrees is an awareness that internal security has become inseparable from external security, but Germany's positions on national and regional developments, alliance policy, crisis prevention, crisis intervention and post-crisis rehabilitation are fundamentally different from those of China. Germany pursues a policy of Europeanization and multilateralism while China pursues a unilateralist and centralized, vertical approach that primarily serves the purpose of maintaining its political system. China supports the peacekeeping organization of the United Nations, but it does not see itself as a partner of lasting military alliances. The Chinese attitude to crisis prevention is characterized by the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of foreign countries. At the same time, China expects relatively little of its development cooperation partners in the area of governance.

2. China's economic and technological rise and its positive and negative effects on German and European industries are only the most visible element of strategically motivated technology acquisitions and of the deliberate use of growing market shares abroad by China. Vigorously pursued regional initiatives such as the One Belt One Road initiative are also essential building blocks for the protection of China's interests. The target figures for proficiency in the use of key technologies for the next decade, which China has already made public, indicate that China does not think that a world order based on the division of labor is to its benefit and that it does not want to trade its independence for the comparative cost advantages that can be achieved in foreign trade.

Much more than in the past, German enterprises with interests in China shall therefore give thought to the question of whether cooperation with China serves purely economic interests of both countries or of what further reaching strategic and possibly military implications economic cooperation and technology transfers have. This applies mainly to the abovementioned fields of technology, especially the vast field of computer, communication and automation technologies, as such technologies are specifically promoted by China for state purposes, too.

3. Therefore, it is imperative to perceive China as a strategic actor. This presupposes the existence of comprehensive and networked capacities in Germany and Europe for watching changes in China's strategy in all spheres, i.e. in the political, economic, scientific, social and military sphere, in a consistent and coordinated manner. Much more than linguistic, technical and (inter)cultural competence is required for this. What we need is closer interaction between ministries, scientific fields and economic sectors. Even though close networking exists among some actors in Germany (for example, the economic and research ministries, industry and research facilities, political consulting and universities), a concerted approach to China's strategy development that takes account of the country's world power status is still a desideratum.

4. German-Sino relations are highly important to both countries. Not only is China Germany's main trade partner and vice versa – for example, the volume of trade between the two countries was € 170 billion in 2017 – but they also maintain a lively and open political exchange at the highest level of government as part of their "comprehensive strategic partnership" formed in 2014. It is facilitated at the working level by more than 80 permanent mechanisms for dialog in all important policy fields. Readily usable trustworthy communication channels are also available in principle for difficult issues.

One of the things the exercise of political control in China is notable for is that the adoption of basic laws and rules at the state level is often preceded by a period of experiments that are limited in scale and duration and to certain regions. The purpose of these experiments is to test the effectiveness of a policy approach and the reactions of those affected by it. The majority of profound changes are circulated in the form of position papers or draft laws in advance. In addition, there often is a transition period between the entry into force of regulations and their regular enforcement. This gives time to deliver opinions. These time slots should be used by the abovementioned ministerial mechanisms for dialog to influence policy- and decision-making processes in China, even in the area of security policy.

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