



## Analyzing China's Security Policy in East Asia within the Framework of Offensive Realism (2013–2025)

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**Abstract:** In recent years, China's security policy has attracted growing attention in discussions of international relations and the regional order in East Asia. While a substantial body of research has examined China's foreign policy, comparatively little attention has been given to understanding its security behavior through the perspective of offensive realism. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the development of China's security policy in East Asia between 2013 and 2025 within an offensive realist framework. The research employs a descriptive and analytical approach based on documentary sources. It focuses on several key aspects of China's strategic evolution, including the introduction of the Comprehensive National Security Doctrine in 2014, reforms and modernization of the People's Liberation Army, the consolidation of political authority under Xi Jinping, and the increasing connection between security objectives and geo-economic initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative. The findings indicate that China has gradually moved away from a largely defensive orientation toward a more assertive, power-centered strategy aimed at expanding its regional influence and shaping the security environment in East Asia in line with its interests. This shift has contributed to rising security concerns among neighboring states and has intensified strategic competition with the United States. Overall, the study argues that China's current security strategy reflects a broader structural transition from defensive deterrence to a more offensive form of deterrence, indicating a long-term trend toward greater rivalry and a more unstable regional order in East Asia.

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, East Asia has become one of the most important regions in international politics. It is now a complex space shaped by great power rivalry, economic and technological competition, and layered security challenges that have influenced global politics. At the heart of these changes is the People's Republic of China. Since the economic reforms of the late 1970s, China has moved from being a limited regional player to a major

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power with growing global ambitions (Asemani, 2022). In the early 2010s, especially after Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, China's security policy began to take a new direction. Many analysts describe this period as a shift from strategic caution to a more active and assertive approach. This change has put pressure on the traditional East Asian order, which for decades was largely based on U.S. leadership and its system of alliances.

China's recent security approach reflects several parallel trends. The country has invested heavily in modernizing the People's Liberation Army and has steadily increased its defense budget (fig.2). It has also expanded its economic reach through initiatives such as the Belt and Road project (fig.4), while taking a firmer stance in the South China Sea and applying growing military and political pressure on Taiwan (Caballero-Anthony & Gong, 2021). At the same time, Beijing presents itself as a responsible and peace-seeking power, often describing its vision through the idea of a *community of shared future for humankind*. The contrast between this peaceful language and China's efforts to strengthen its influence highlights the complexity of its security policy and shows why closer analysis is necessary.

The shift in China's security strategy from 2013 to 2025 has become one of the key factors influencing the balance of power in East Asia. This change goes beyond simple economic growth and is closely linked to changing threat perceptions, concerns about survival, and broader geopolitical goals (Ghanbarloo, 2013). Whereas China once followed a more cautious path within the liberal international order, it has increasingly adopted a firmer and sometimes coercive approach in the region. In effect, Beijing is working to reshape the East Asian order in ways that better reflect its own strategic interests.

Analysis China's security policy through the lens of offensive realism helps clarify its actions as more than just reactions to external threats. Instead, they can be seen as deliberate efforts to achieve regional dominance. From this viewpoint, China aims to increase its relative power and influence in its neighborhood, securing long-term safety through military strength, economic leverage, and institutional advantage (Kargar, 2025). This perspective allows us to move beyond mere description and offers a causal explanation for China's strategic choices.

The significance of this study can be seen in three areas. Theoretically, it offers a chance to evaluate how well realist theories, especially offensive realism, explain state behavior in today's rapidly changing international politics. Empirically, East Asia is shifting from a U.S.-centered order toward a more multipolar regional structure, where China has gained both economic strength and institutional influence. Understanding China's security actions is therefore crucial for assessing the region's future stability or risk of conflict (Sadat, 2025). From a policy perspective, a careful analysis of China's behavior can help regional actors including U.S. allies and ASEAN countries, develop more balanced strategies to manage coexistence or competition with China.

A review of the literature shows that although there is substantial research on China's foreign and security policy, few studies have analyzed it systematically through the lens of offensive realism. For example, Liu (2016) argues that China's approach blends conditional

reassurance with selective coercion; Mearsheimer (2010) emphasizes the gradual decline of U.S. influence in the Asia-Pacific; Nishida (2023) examines Japan's nuclear dilemmas in the context of China's rise; Ghanbarlou (2013) links China's foreign policy shifts to internal security vulnerabilities; and Asemani (2022) highlights the importance of military diplomacy in extending China's regional reach. Together, these works highlight the increasing complexity of East Asia's strategic environment and point to the need for a focused analysis of China's security strategy using offensive realism as a theoretical framework.

So, this study aims to examine the logic, patterns, and consequences of China's security policy in East Asia. It focuses on the key question: How can China's security policy from 2013 to 2025 be understood through the lens of offensive realism? The main hypothesis is that, during this period, China has pursued an assertive security strategy designed to achieve regional dominance and rebuild the existing security order to serve its own interests.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative, analytical-explanatory approach and relies on documentary research using secondary sources. Data were collected from scholarly articles, academic books, and policy reports on China's security policy in East Asia between 2013 and 2025. In the first stage, a structured search was carried out across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ESCI, DOAJ, and relevant university journal platforms. Keywords related to China's security policy and strategic behavior were used, resulting in 158 sources: 108 journal articles, 26 academic books, and 24 policy reports or analytical studies. In the second stage, these sources were screened according to clear inclusion and exclusion criteria:

The inclusion criteria consisted of: (1) direct relevance to China's security or strategic policy in East Asia or the broader Asia-Pacific context; (2) analytical or empirical engagement with the period 2013–2025, or provision of essential background for this period; (3) the use of conceptual or analytical perspectives related to security and power studies, particularly realist and power-oriented approaches; and (4) publication in peer-reviewed journals, academic presses, or reputable policy institutes in Persian or English.

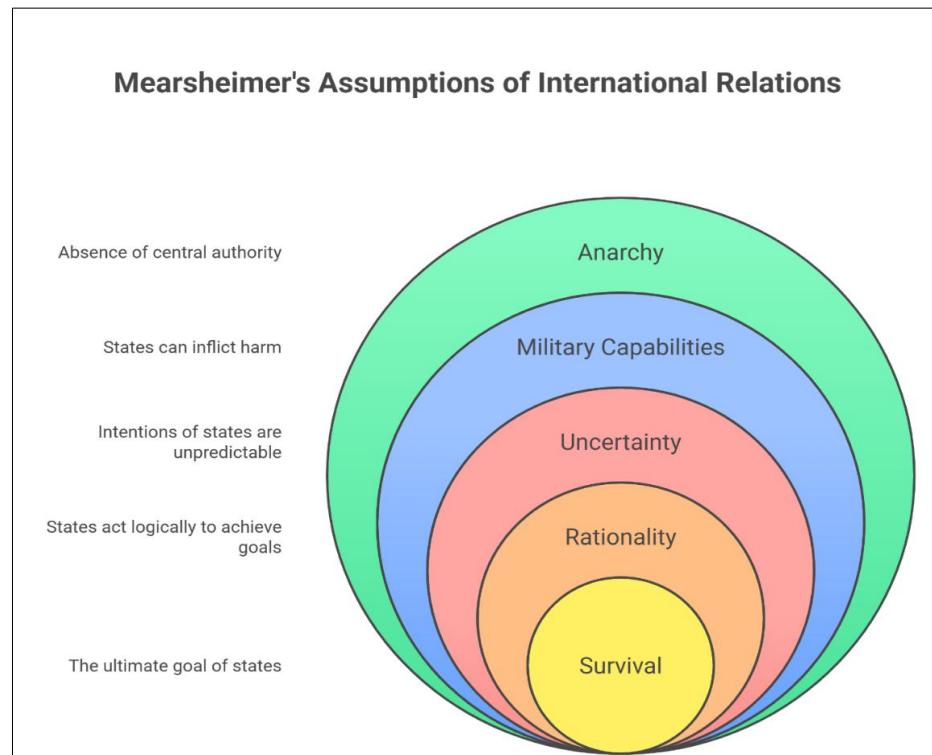
The exclusion criteria included: (1) articles focused exclusively on economic or commercial aspects without a precise security dimension; (2) works unrelated to the contemporary East Asian security environment; (3) sources with serious methodological weaknesses or purely descriptive content lacking analytical contribution; and (4) duplicated or highly overlapping materials. On this basis, 132 sources were excluded, leaving a final set of 26 for analysis.

### ***Theoretical Framework: Neorealism (Offensive)***

Structural Realism, also called Neorealism, is a theory in International Relations that highlights how the anarchic of the international system shapes state behavior. From this perspective, a state's primary goals are survival and security, and its actions are largely determined by the distribution of power among states. Unlike Classical Realism, which emphasizes leaders'

personalities or domestic politics, Neorealism focuses on the constraints and recurring patterns created by the structure of the international system itself.

Realist theories have long provided some of the most influential analytical frameworks for understanding state behavior in the international system. Among these, offensive realism, as articulated most clearly by John J. Mearsheimer in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, offers a structural, power-oriented explanation of state behavior. Unlike other variants of realism, offensive realism holds that states can achieve lasting security only by maximizing their relative power within the international system (Aria, 2025). From Mearsheimer's perspective, competition among great powers does not stem from animosity or ambition per se, but rather from the structural logic of an anarchic international order.



**Figure 1. Mearsheimer's Assumptions of International Relations**

Without a central authority to enforce rules, the international system offers no firm guarantee of survival. States can never be entirely sure of others' intentions, and this constant uncertainty pushes them to build as much power as possible to guard against potential threats (Kang et al., 2025). As a result, competition over power is not an occasional problem but a lasting and unavoidable feature of international politics. In such conditions, states that acquire substantial material capabilities are likely, over time, to pursue regional dominance to secure their long-term safety.

Mearsheimer outlines five core assumptions that form the foundation of his theory:

1. The international system is anarchic, operating without a central authority.
2. States possess military capabilities that allow them to harm one another.
3. The intentions of states can never be known with certainty.
4. Survival is the primary main aim of every state.

5. Finally, states are rational actors (Mearsheimer, 2011).

Taken together, these assumptions shape a pattern of behavior in which states are inclined to pursue greater power and seize opportunities to improve their standing in the international system (Karimi, 2022). As a result, even states that appear peaceful at one moment may adopt more assertive or aggressive policies when shifts in the balance of power favor them. For Mearsheimer, this pattern reflects the core of the “tragedy of great power politics.” In trying to ensure their own security, states accumulate power, but this very pursuit often fuels fear, suspicion, and, ultimately, conflict.

Corresponding to offensive realism, great powers strive for regional hegemony because dominance in their own neighborhood is the most reliable way to keep outside powers at bay. The United States’ position in the Western Hemisphere is a clear example of this outcome. Mearsheimer argues that China is now moving along a similar path in East Asia, seeking to establish regional dominance and limit the influence of other great powers, much as the United States did during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Liu, 2016).

This theory offers a strong theoretical lens for examining China’s security behavior since 2013. Over the years, China’s approach has shifted noticeably from a largely defensive posture to a more active stance. Several pillars of Mearsheimer’s theory help explain this evolution in China’s strategy:

1. **Relative Security and Power Competition:** Offensive realism believes that security in an anarchic system is always relative. When one state becomes more secure, others feel afraid. In East Asia, improvements in China’s military capabilities or its expansion into disputed areas, especially the South China Sea, are widely viewed by neighboring states as potential threats. This reaction reflects the core logic of seeking security through greater power.
2. **Regional Hegemony as a Strategic Target:** Mearsheimer argues that although global hegemony is unrealistic, regional dominance is both possible and desirable. Under Xi Jinping, China’s policies, from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to military modernization and the creation of alternative regional institutions, suggest a deliberate effort to build a China-centered regional order (Mearsheimer, 2010).
3. **Balance of Threats and Structural Constraint:** Offensive realism emphasizes that states respond to perceived threats rather than power alone. Despite China’s use of reassuring language, its expanding capabilities have raised serious concerns in Japan, South Korea, and among ASEAN members. These concerns have encouraged closer security cooperation with the United States through arrangements such as QUAD and AUKUS. From this angle, China serves as a structural threat in line with Mearsheimer’s expectations (Lande, 2018).
4. **Strategic Rationality and Multidimensional Tools:** According to Mearsheimer, states act rationally and rely on a combination of military, economic, and institutional tools to increase their power. China’s strategic use of financial influence, including control

over key maritime routes, investment in regional infrastructure, and the conversion of economic ties into political leverage, reflects the geo-economic logic at the heart of offensive realism.

From these views, it is the structure of international politics, rather than the personal intentions of individual leaders, that shapes how states behave. China's security strategy after 2013 should therefore be understood not as a reflection of leadership preferences, but as a response to changes in the international environment. China's extraordinary economic rise has generated intense pressure to reshape the regional order, not simply as a political option, but as a structural requirement tied to its long-term security and survival.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Transformation of China's Security Policy after 2013***

Since Xi Jinping took power in 2013, China's security policy has changed significantly. This shift cannot be explained simply by a change in leadership or short-term regional developments. Instead, it reflects a bigger change in how China understands power and security. Over this period, China moved from being a rising power operating mainly within the existing international order to a more confident and consolidated actor seeking to reshape that order in line with its own interests (Walt, 2025).

This shift is defined by three central cores: first, the definition of a new National Security Doctrine in 2014; second, the structural reform and modernization of the People's Liberation Army; and third, an unprecedented concentration of political and strategic authority in Xi Jinping's hands. Together, these elements form the core framework of China's new security strategy.

### ***The New National Security Doctrine (2014)***

The first formal step in China's evolving security policy was the introduction of the Comprehensive National Security Doctrine in 2014, marked by the creation of the *National Security Commission* under the direct leadership of the president. This commission, the first significant step in China's changing security policy, came in 2014 with the introduction of the Comprehensive National Security Doctrine and the establishment of the National Security Commission under the direct authority of the president. Placed above both the State Council and the military command structure, the commission was intended to coordinate domestic and external security policy under a single framework.

The doctrine broadened the meaning of *security* well beyond traditional military concerns. It incorporated economic, technological, ideological, and cyber dimensions, emphasizing that China's security is no longer limited to its territorial borders but is closely tied to global supply chains, the international order, and cyberspace (Nishida, 2023).

According to offensive realism, this shift reflects an effort to expand China's sphere of influence and to redefine security from territorial defense to structural dominance. Rather

than simply reacting to threats, the doctrine signals a move toward actively shaping the security environment through material capabilities and institutional power.

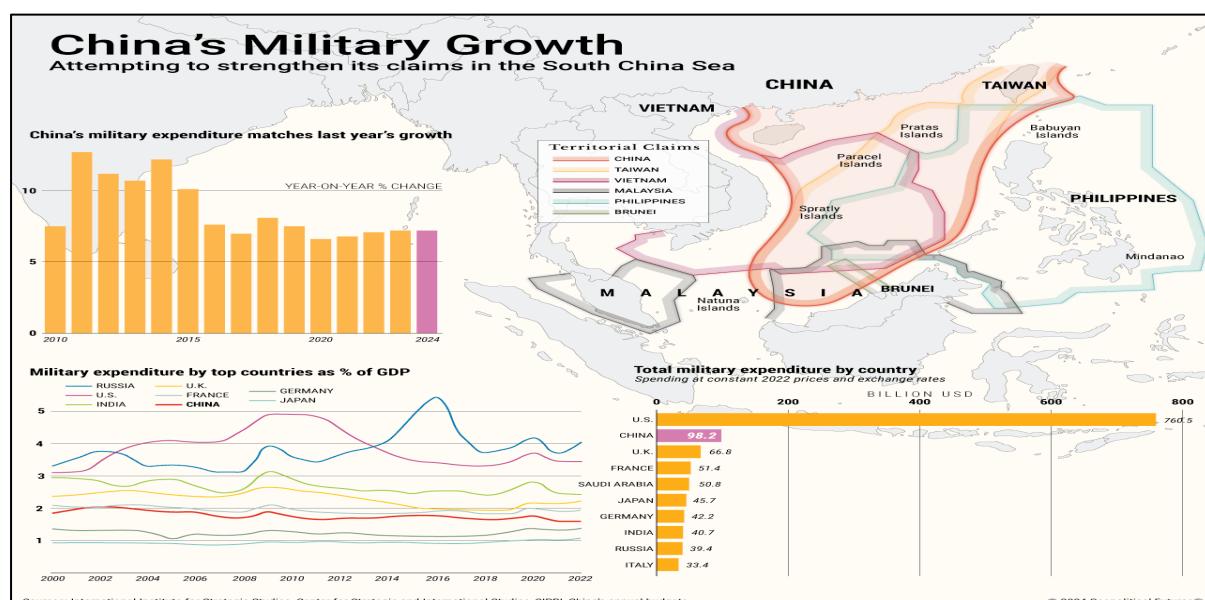
This issue also marked a clear transition from strategic restraint to proactive engagement. For the first time, official policy documents explicitly included protecting interests beyond China's borders as part of the mission of both the military and the diplomatic apparatus (Liu, 2016). This change was especially evident in maritime policy, where China's claims to *historical rights* in the South China Sea were used to justify military deployments and the construction of overseas bases.

### **PLA Reform and Modernization (2015–2020)**

The second pillar of China's security transformation after 2013 was the restructuring and modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Launched in 2015 and largely completed by 2020, these reforms amounted to the most extensive military overhaul since the 1950s. Key elements of the transformation of China's security policy included:

- replacing the former seven military regions with five joint theater commands to improve coordination across services,
- creating the Strategic Support Force to oversee space, cyber, and electronic warfare,
- reducing the size of traditional ground forces while expanding naval and air power,
- and strengthening the Communist Party's direct control over the military through the Central Military Commission, chaired by Xi Jinping (Asemani, 2022).

From an offensive realism perspective, these reforms signal a clear shift from a primarily defensive, land-focused force to a multi-domain military designed for power projection and regional dominance. China's growing investment in naval assets and missile systems, particularly medium-range ballistic missiles, underscores an offensive deterrence strategy aimed at discouraging adversaries through the credible threat of superior force.



**Figure 2: Tracking China's Defense Spending** (<https://geopoliticalfutures.com>, 2024)

The modernization drive, captured in the policy "a strong army for a new century," is closely tied to the broader *Chinese Dream*, linking military strength to national rejuvenation and the legitimacy of the regime. In an offensive realism logic, this connection between identity and the army power enhances China's structural ability to pursue regional dominance, since states that base their legitimacy on power are naturally inclined toward expansion (Ghanbarloo, 2013).

Over the past decade, or more accurately, China's defense spending has grown by more than 10 percent annually, making it the world's second-largest military spender after the United States. This trend aligns with Mearsheimer's expectation that rising powers shift from deterrence to active competition for influence, and China's path offers a clear illustration of this dynamic.

### ***Concentration of Power under Xi Jinping***

The third and perhaps most important aspect of China's security transformation is the concentration of political and strategic power in Xi Jinping. Unlike previous leaders, who maintained some separation between the Party, state, and military, Xi has centralized authority over all major levers of power. He holds the roles of General Secretary of the Communist Party, President of the state, and Commander of the Central Military Commission, giving him direct control over China's security, intelligence, and foreign policy.(Akbari, 2024).

This centralization has had several significant effects. Decision-making in security and military affairs has become faster and more coordinated. Xi's ideological emphasis on *national security* and *the defense of core interests* has shaped China's increasingly assertive diplomatic and military stance. At home, it has legitimized a more robust concept of national security, strengthening public support for China's expanding regional role.

By elimination of internal rivals and creating a unified command structure, Xi has turned China's security apparatus into a cohesive instrument of Party control. National security has shifted from being just a policy area to the central framework of political life (Joel Atkinson, 2015). This has produced a more stable, structurally oriented system that is oriented toward pursuing greater relative power.

**Table 1.** Transformation of China's Security Policy after 2013

Main Dimension	Key Developments	Analytical Interpretation (Offensive Realism)
<b>New National Security Doctrine (2014)</b>	The creation of the National Security Commission under the president, the introduction of a <i>Comprehensive National Security</i> framework covering military, economic, technological, and cyber domains, and the recognition of overseas interests as a national priority.	The broadening of security from mere territorial defense to structural dominance, a shift from reactive responses to proactive management of the security environment, and a strategic effort to shape a China-centered regional order.
<b>PLA Reform and Modernization (2015–2020)</b>	The restructuring of the military from seven to five joint commands, the establishment of the Strategic Support Force for space,	Transformation from a defensive to an offensive, multi-domain force; institutionalization of offensive

Concentration of Power under Xi Jinping	<p>cyber, and electronic warfare, the enhancement of naval and air capabilities, and greater Party oversight through the Central Military Commission.</p>	<p>deterrence; reinforcement of China's capacity for regional hegemony consistent with Mearsheimer's logic of power maximization</p>
	<p>The concentration of political, military, and security authorities in Xi Jinping, the removal of Party rivals, direct control over strategic decision-making, and the promotion of <i>national confidence</i> alongside the defense of <i>core interests</i>.</p>	<p>Centralized authority enables swift and cohesive implementation of assertive policies; synergy between personal authority and military power fosters proactive behavior and facilitates China's transition toward regional hegemony.</p>

China has emerged not just as an economic powerhouse but also as a leading military, technological, and security actor. Its security strategy since 2013 illustrates Mearsheimer's power-focused logic: in an anarchic international system, states maintain their position through the ongoing accumulation of material and institutional power (Ansary Kargar, 2025). As a result, China's security policy from 2013 to 2025 reflects a structural trajectory toward a China-centered regional hegemony, reshaping the security landscape of East Asia.

### ***The Role of the South China Sea in China's Offensive Strategy***

The South China Sea is one of East Asia's most sensitive geopolitical regions and, over the past decade, has become the main issue for China's assertive strategy (Lin, 2025). The area is crucial to Beijing not only for its strategic location but also for economic and energy security, as a large portion of global trade, valuable hydrocarbon resources, and China's key supply routes pass through these waters. Since 2013, alongside Xi Jinping's consolidation of power, China has taken an unusually active and forceful approach in this maritime space. From an offensive realism perspective, this shift represents an apparent effort to secure regional dominance and assert greater control over the surrounding environment.



**Figure 3: Map of the South China Sea (nationsonline.org, n.d.)**

Claiming *historical rights* over more than 90 percent of the South China Sea, China launched a large-scale program to construct and militarize artificial islands. Built on features in the Spratly and Paracel groups, these outposts, equipped with runways, radar systems, anti-ship missiles, and air defenses, have been transformed into advanced military bases (Karimi, 2022). This effort has shifted the local balance of power in China's favor. It represents a shift from traditional deterrence to offensive deterrence, in which physical control of territory serves both as a coercive tool and a barrier to outside interference.

From the perspective of offensive theory, when a state perceives its vital interests to be at risk, it expands its military presence to protect survival. However, these actions have triggered a chain reaction among neighboring countries. Vietnam and the Philippines have pursued legal measures and strengthened security ties with the United States and Japan to counter Beijing. At the same time, Japan—dependent on these sea lanes for trade and energy—has increased its maritime activity through exercises and participation in frameworks like the Quad (Nishida, 2023).

The South China Sea has thus become a clear stage for power politics and balance-of-threat dynamics: China aims to solidify regional dominance through military and symbolic control, while other states respond with coalitions and reciprocal deterrence. The result is a central arena of great-power competition shaping the emerging regional order.

### ***China's Policy toward Taiwan and Northeast Asia***

A central pillar of China's security strategy over the past decade has been its intensified focus on Taiwan and the broader Northeast Asian region. For Beijing, Taiwan is not simply a domestic issue; it is essential to territorial integrity and a symbol of national rejuvenation as one China (Waldron, 2012). With Xi Jinping's consolidation of power, policy shifted from primarily political signaling to a combination of military deterrence and more direct coercive measures. Since 2016, following the rise of pro-independence forces in Taipei, China has conducted large-scale air and naval exercises around the island and sharply increased incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone.

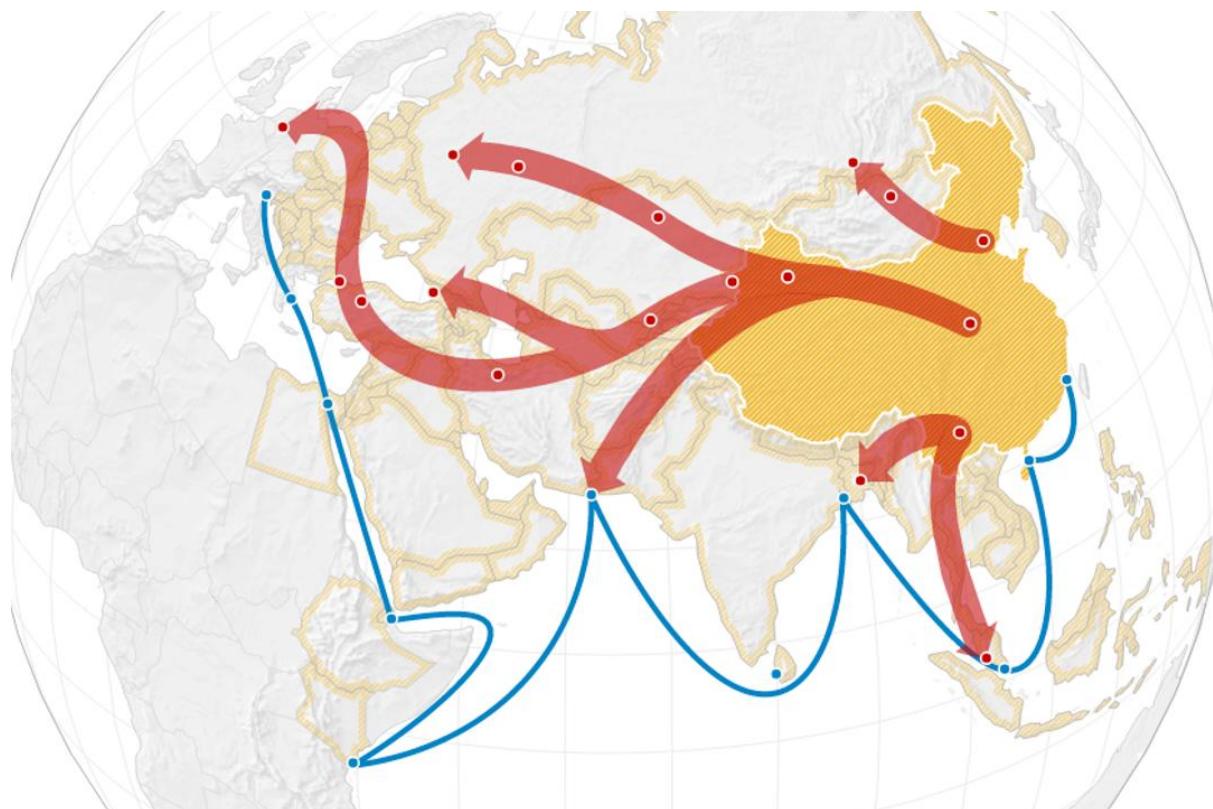
This behavior reflects a drive to gain relative advantage in China's near periphery. Beijing sees Taiwan as both a geopolitical barrier to unification and a critical node in U.S. and allied efforts to limit China's influence (Joel Atkinson, 2015). The heightened military pressure and symbolic blockades are intended to weaken Taiwan's resolve and raise the potential costs of U.S. intervention.

Tensions with Japan have also risen over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. China has stepped up coast guard and air patrols around these disputed areas, viewing control of key sea lines in the East China Sea as essential. From an offensive realist viewpoint, this represents a strategy of maritime dominance in adjacent waters, aimed at countering regional competitors and reducing U.S. influence through its alliances—especially with Japan (Joel Atkinson, 2015). Japan's response, including increased defense spending, a doctrinal shift toward counter-strike capabilities, and closer cooperation with the United States and Mini lateral groupings,

fits the classic pattern of balancing against perceived threats. The result is a structural and enduring security competition in Northeast Asia, marked by an elevated risk of crisis.

### ***The Intersection of Security Policy and Geo-Economics***

Over the past decade, China has treated the economy not just as a sphere for development, but as a strategic tool to advance power and national security. This approach, often called China's security geo-economics, uses economic instruments to pursue geopolitical and security goals. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) stand out as the most prominent example of this strategy (Ping, 2009).



**Figure 4: China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** ([iranchnaejob.ir](http://iranchnaejob.ir), 2023)

Since its formal launch in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has extended China's influence across Asia, Africa, and Europe through investments in infrastructure, including ports, railways, and energy grids. In East and Southeast Asia, the initiative goes beyond purely commercial goals: by creating financial and trade interdependence, BRI strengthens China's political and security leverage (fig. 4). In countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Pakistan, large-scale projects have been accompanied by political concessions and strategic access, including ports like Gwadar and facilities in Cambodia and Myanmar that could serve dual-use purposes (Budnyk, 2025).

This illustrates how economic power can be used to gain a relative advantage. Great powers do not rely solely on military tools; they also influence the balance of power through financial means. In this case, geo-economics complements geo-strategy: economic activity is harnessed to serve broader power politics (Ranjkesh & Bornah, 2022). One key effect is that neighboring countries become more economically dependent on China, giving Beijing indirect

coercive power and political influence. Some states align with China in regional forums, while others, cautious of over-dependence, adopt hedging strategies.

Overall, China's integration of economic and security policy demonstrates that financial capability is core to its structural offensive logic. By combining hard and soft power, Beijing aims to create a China-centered order in which economic predominance reinforces military influence, thereby sustaining long-term leverage and security (Tu, 2008). This multidimensional approach reflects a shift from defensive postures to structural, multi-domain dominance, entirely consistent with offensive realism's expectation that rising powers seek regional hegemony.

## DISCUSSION

The finding shows that China's security policy in East Asia shifted decisively from a defensive, reactive posture to a more offensive, power-oriented approach between 2013 and 2025. This transformation is evident across three main pillars: the adoption of the Comprehensive National Security Doctrine in 2014, comprehensive reforms and modernization of the PLA<sup>1</sup>, and the centralization of political and strategic power under Xi Jinping's hands. China's assertive actions in the South China Sea, intensified military pressure on Taiwan, and the strategic deployment of economic influence through the Belt and Road Initiative highlight a coordinated and multidimensional strategy aimed at strengthening its regional position.

This shift reflects a deliberate structural strategy rather than a purely reactive one. By integrating military, political, and economic tools, China is working to enhance its relative power and secure regional hegemony. Activities in the South China Sea and toward Taiwan demonstrate a shift from conventional territorial defense to a broader strategy of structural dominance, consistent with offensive realism. Economic initiatives, notably the Belt and Road Initiative, are used strategically to build dependencies, extend influence, and reinforce China's leverage over neighboring countries. This approach illustrates that China's pursuit of security is closely tied to the acquisition and projection of power across multiple domains.

These findings are consistent with the predictions of offensive realism, which holds that rising powers seek regional dominance to secure their position in an anarchic international politics. Previous studies, such as Liu (2016) and Caballero-Anthony & Gong (2021), describe China's strategy as a combination of reassurance and coercion. However, this study emphasizes the integrated and structural nature of China's approach, showing that military, political, and economic measures are deliberately coordinated to reshape the regional order. Unlike earlier research that often focused on isolated aspects of China's strategy, this analysis highlights the interconnectedness of China's actions and their cumulative effect on regional security dynamics.

The study confirms that China's security policy from 2013 to 2025 can be understood through the lens of offensive realism. China's strategy is not a simple reaction to external

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<sup>1</sup>. People's Liberation Army (PLA)

threats but a calculated effort to maximize relative power, establish regional dominance, and influence the broader security environment. Military modernization centralized political control, and the strategic use of economic influence all demonstrate China's deliberate pursuit of structural advantage, aligning with the theoretical expectations of offensive realism.

**Table 2.** Analytical Summary of Findings within the Framework of Offensive Realism

Main and key dimensions	Key Findings	Analytical Explanation (Offensive Realism)
<b>Transformation of Security Policy (2013–2025)</b>	Shift from defensive to power-oriented, offensive behavior	Expansion of relative power under an anarchic system; pursuit of regional hegemony
<b>Comprehensive National Security Doctrine (2014)</b>	Broadening security to include economic and technological domains	Multidimensional security as an instrument of structural control; management of regional resources and routes
<b>PLA Reform and Modernization</b>	Reorganization of command; enhanced naval and space capabilities	Institutionalization of offensive deterrence; increased projection of power beyond borders
<b>Concentration of Power under Xi Jinping's Hands</b>	Unified political and strategic decision-making; elimination of internal opposition	Centralized authority enables coherent pursuit of national interests and structural activism.
<b>Action and interaction in the South China Sea and Taiwan</b>	Island-building, militarization, and coercion against Taiwan	Expansion of strategic depth; structural offensive behavior consistent with power-maximization logic
<b>Geo-economic Instruments (BRI)</b>	Control of transit routes and transnational infrastructure	Integration of geo-economics and geo-strategy in pursuit of regional dominance
<b>Regional Responses</b>	Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines align more closely with the U.S.	Security dilemma and balancing against China's expanding power

This study is based primarily on secondary sources, which may not capture all nuances, particularly classified or sensitive information. In addition, the focus on structural and systemic factors limits exploration of internal political debates, bureaucratic dynamics, or leadership variations beyond Xi Jinping.

Future research could analyse how domestic politics, institutional competition, or public opinion, along with a changing international and regional environment, shape China's security behavior. Comparative studies of other rising powers and their regional strategies could also deepen understanding of the broader applicability of offensive realism in contemporary international politics.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of China's security policy in East Asia from 2013 to 2025 shows a clear shift from traditional defensive postures to a more proactive, power-oriented strategy. This change, influenced by structural shifts in international politics and a narrowing power gap with the United States, aligns closely with offensive realism, which emphasizes the pursuit of relative power as the key to survival and influence. By adopting a comprehensive security doctrine, modernizing its military, and centralizing political authority, China has integrated its military,

economic, and technological strengths into a cohesive strategy. This approach has strengthened its regional leverage and created a form of structural deterrence, effectively blurring the boundaries between development and security in Chinese foreign policy.

China's militarization of the South China Sea, intensified pressure on Taiwan, and expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative all reflect an underlying ambition to reshape the East Asian security order in its favor. While Beijing presents these actions as essential for national rejuvenation and stability, they have simultaneously provoked balancing responses from regional states and intensified geo-strategic rivalry with the United States.

In sum, China's evolving security strategy over the past decade represents a systematic effort to redefine the regional order and secure relative hegemony. Its actions are not merely reactive responses to external threats but rather structural manifestations of growing internal capabilities and a shifting global power balance.

#### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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#### **AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS**

M.H.F and S.A.S.S designed the study framework and collected the relevant and appropriate sources. Author A.A.K analyzed the data, wrote, and submitted the manuscript. All authors read and approved of the final manuscript.

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Data will be available on request

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