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Note from Head CS3

Dear all,

We are happy to publish the first issue of the *Sinometer: The China Strategic Monitor*, a monthly magazine by the Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (CS3), the United Service Institution of India, with you.

The presence of China as a prominent power in the evolving global geopolitics and geo-economics, and its role in the international community's security, economic and political relations has been a focal point of discussion in recent years. The magazine, taking into consideration the above-mentioned development, has aimed to lay out a comprehensive picture of the vital happenings in China's security, economic and political domains along with providing analyses on the implications for India, and the world, at large.

The issue in its first section includes commentaries on China's much-discussed Wolf Warrior diplomacy and its evolving and contested policies towards the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. The second section examines China's present and future domestic and global outlook highlighted during the Communist Party of China (CPC)'s 100 year celebrations. It also discusses the developments in the India-China relations and in the region of Tibet, having significant implications for India. Further, the magazine delves into the transformation from China's One Child policy to its 'Three Child Policy', along with the happenings in the Russia-China, US-China and China-ASEAN ties. Lastly, magazine examines the advances in the regions of Hong Kong, South China Sea, and Taiwan, and discussed the global implications of the country's space developments.

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ANALYSIS

Wolf Warrior Diplomacy is Here to Stay

Varun Bhagat

Chinese President Xi Jinping had made a call to present a reliable, respectable and more so a loveable image of China while addressing the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee in early June.¹ Xi, who is also the General Secretary of the CPC stressed on "improving the country's capacity for engaging in international communication to present a true, multi-dimensional and panoramic view of China".²

The reason for such a plea on part of the Chinese President can be attributed to the country's growing isolation in the international realm owing to its perception of being a strategic threat to both major powers and small states alike. But does it mean China will totally abandon its aggressive and confrontational style of conducting foreign affairs, popularly known as the Wolf Warrior Diplomacy? Named after a series of patriotic action-packed movies, China's Wolf Warrior Diplomacy has been largely attributed to the present regime. It is imperative to note that a shift from the former leader Deng Xiaoping's watchful policy of 'Tao Guang Yang Hui', meaning "hide capabilities and bide time", had started taking place way back in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008.³ While the economies of the West crashed, Beijing managed to keep its economic growth robust by extending a generous economic stimulus of \$600 billion amounting to a whopping 20% of its GDP to the domestic populace.⁴

In a speech the following year, the then President Hu Jintao laid emphasis for the country to "actively accomplish something". This phrase meant using infrastructure to tie neighbors together. In Hu's words, "we must actively participate in and vigorously promote the construction of surrounding highways, railways, communications, and energy channels in the periphery [i.e., neighborhood] to form a network of interconnected and interoperable infrastructure around China."⁵ This can be understood as a foundational basis upon which the present framework of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) rests and is used by the Chinese state machinery to expand its influence in the geopolitical domain.

Lately, Wolf-warrior diplomacy has been in the limelight since the outbreak of the pandemic. An apt example of the same would be when China's foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian, in an attempt

¹ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-06/01/c_139983105.htm

² http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-06/01/c_139983105.htm

³ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/hus-to-blame-for-chinas-foreign-assertiveness/>

⁴ <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/ecri/2012/468347/>

⁵ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/hus-to-blame-for-chinas-foreign-assertiveness/>

to quash foreign criticism of the country's handling of the COVID-19 outbreak and the poor quality of exported Chinese medical equipment, tweeted "if someone claims that China's exports are toxic, then stop wearing China-made masks and protective gowns."⁶ In another instance, responding to US politicians calling the Coronavirus as "Chinese Virus", he hit back saying that "It might be (the) US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan."⁷

This blazing style of Chinese diplomacy is practiced not just through fierce words but also via aggressive actions. For illustration, in April last year, when Vietnam government protested against the Chinese action which had allegedly sank one of its fishing vessels near the Paracel Island, China's Foreign Ministry responded by simply saying that Vietnam's has no sovereign rights over the given Island.⁸

China further went ahead when its Ministry of Natural Resources and Ministry of Civil Affairs jointly announced the naming of 80 islands, reefs, seamounts, shoals, and ridges in the South China Sea, triggering angry protests from other claimants which were eventually negated by Beijing. The last time China named islands and other geographical features in the South China Sea was way back in 1983.⁹

Just as the international community was beginning to ponder upon the possibility of the Chinese ceasing their aggressive nature as part of their external relations following Xi's message to the Political Bureau, his address on the occasion of CPC's centenary proved the idea to be a distant reality. He spoke on how the Party and the Country has stood steady through their struggle, referring to the common Chinese notion of century of humiliation, and added that "the time in which the Chinese nation could be bullied and abused by others was gone forever."¹⁰

Any sovereign nation would strongly oppose to the idea of being played around by other powers in the world stage but what was really defining in that speech was Xi's indirect denouncement of abiding by the global norms and principles on key issues like human rights, by stating that " (China) won't accept sanctimonious preaching from those who feel they have the right to lecture us."¹¹

Taking an indirect jibe at the US for steering the present international order, Xi said that "we will oppose hegemony and power politics, and strive to keep the wheels of history rolling toward bright horizons".¹² China's latest economic sanctions on Australian goods and industries primarily because of the latter's ideological leaning towards the fundamentals of democracy championed by US in the present order suggest that Chinese will use various aspects of their comprehensive national power in an attempt to fine tune the developments in the international arena to their own liking.

On 6th July Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian admitted that Australia was being

⁶ <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/interpreting-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>

⁷ <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/interpreting-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>

⁸ <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/interpreting-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>

⁹ <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/interpreting-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>

¹⁰ <https://news.cgtn.com/news/files/Speech-by-XiJinping-at-a-ceremony-marking-the-centenary-of-the-CPC.pdf>

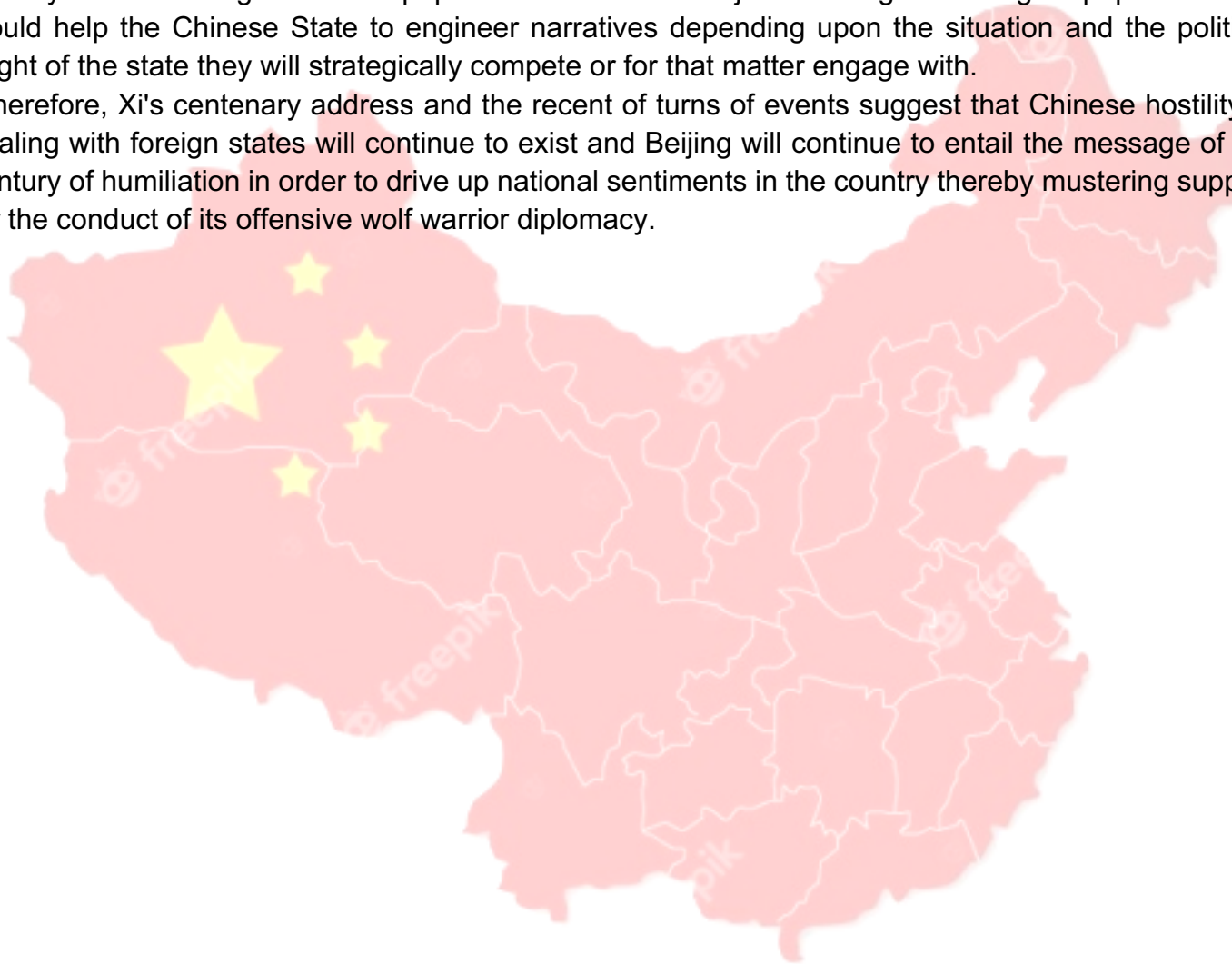
¹¹ <https://news.cgtn.com/news/files/Speech-by-XiJinping-at-a-ceremony-marking-the-centenary-of-the-CPC.pdf>

¹² <https://news.cgtn.com/news/files/Speech-by-XiJinping-at-a-ceremony-marking-the-centenary-of-the-CPC.pdf>

penalized for acting on the behalf of US government when he responded to the question of drop in Australian farm exports by replying that " (China) will not allow any country to reap benefits from doing business with China while groundlessly accusing and smearing China and undermining China's core interests based on ideology."¹³

Interestingly enough, a website solely dedicated to China's Diplomacy in the New Era was launched both in Chinese and English at end of June¹⁴ thereby underscoring the Chinese effort to rebuild the country's tainted image and also popularize the national rejuvenation goal among its populace. This would help the Chinese State to engineer narratives depending upon the situation and the political might of the state they will strategically compete or for that matter engage with.

Therefore, Xi's centenary address and the recent of turns of events suggest that Chinese hostility in dealing with foreign states will continue to exist and Beijing will continue to entail the message of the century of humiliation in order to drive up national sentiments in the country thereby mustering support for the conduct of its offensive wolf warrior diplomacy.



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¹³https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/china-hits-australian-industries-with-economic-sanctions-amid-sourcing-ties-121070900082_1.html

¹⁴<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-06-28/China-s-Diplomacy-in-the-New-Era-website-launched-11srMaRDnIS/index.html>

The Dalai Lama Reincarnation Politics through Chinese Prism: An Analysis

Mrittika Guha Sarkar

On the event of the 70th anniversary of signing of the 17-point agreement between Beijing and Lhasa, China issued another White Paper on Tibet,¹⁵ emphasising on the imperatives of consolidating control over the region and ensuring the Communist Party of China (CPC)'s stronghold over the Dalai Lama reincarnation process. The commitment to "managing religion in the Chinese content" and the adaptation of the Tibetan Buddhism to "socialist society" to become a bastion of stability and underpin the fight against "separatists and anti-China forces" stood out in the white paper to mark the CPC's efforts in promoting the "Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism" and sculpt the Tibetan Buddhist beliefs and doctrines in adherence to the party's value system.¹⁶ Viewing these developments in the context of the CPC's growing aggressive behaviour and assertive policies, particularly with the party moving to fulfil its second centennial goal by 2049, what do Chinese actions and policies vis-à-vis the Dalai Lama reincarnation politics convey? More importantly, what does the future hold for Tibet and its people with Xi Jinping at the helm?

China's actions and policies towards reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, in many ways, have been shaped by its imperative to consolidate control over the region and its people. Its perspective on the issue has been gradually becoming firmer as it continues asserting that any successor to the present Dalai Lama has to be approved by the Chinese government. If anything, Tibet holds immense regional significance for China, majorly for geographically bordering India and holding abundance of natural resources. Thus, Tibet remains one of China's most prominent "core interests". Further, it seeks to ensure absolute security and stability of Tibet, particularly against what Beijing views it, as the growing sentiments of separatism encouraged by Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in Exile (TGIE).

However, notwithstanding the 70 years of CPC's efforts to consolidate control over Tibet, the 14th Dalai Lama continues to endure considerable amount of reverence in the region, as well as in the global arena. Moreover, the TGIE's global awareness campaigns continue to facilitate international support for the cause. Thus, as the current Dalai Lama turns 86, the reincarnation issue turns more pressing for the CPC and Xi Jinping, particularly for the implications it has over the future of Tibet and the Tibetan community, the fate of the institution of the Dalai Lama, and the legitimacy of the CPC.

It is in this context, that China has been witnessing the 'spiritualisation' of the leadership in Tibet by increasingly enhancing the party's interests in spiritual matters and promoting several reincarnated Lamas,¹⁷ in an effort to further consolidate its authority over the selection of the successor of the Dalai Lama. For instance, the Chinese appointed the 11th Panchen Lama, witnessing a sharp reaction by the TGIE,¹⁸ has been praising the CPC's religious and social policies.¹⁹

¹⁵http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/21/c_139959978.htm

¹⁶ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-08/29/c_139327360.htm

¹⁷ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09700161.2013.821296>

¹⁸ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/china-appointed-panchen-lama-s-election-draws-flak/story-CqsJtMfTVA3VXwFGC2DMN.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2074674/china-appointed-panchen-lama-praises-nations-religious>

In fact, the Panchen Lama stated that Buddhism in Tibet will be Sinicised and would adopt socialist traits,²⁰ in an effort to legitimise the C narrative in the reincarnation issue. Further, China has been seeking to tilt the reincarnation narrative to its favour by repeatedly questioning the traditional process of selecting a successor. To this, China has been strategically re-emphasising the Golden Urn process, a procedure only used to pick two of the fourteen Dalai Lamas, according to the present Dalai Lama,²¹ to guarantee the CPC involvement in deciding the future leadership of the Tibetan community and the thus, the fate of Tibet.

But most importantly, China has been transforming Tibet into a communist entity by facilitating investments for infrastructure development of roads, airports, railways, schools and hospitals, and controlling the religious affairs in the region. For instance, in its recent 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), China announced USD\$ 30 billion for infrastructure development in Tibet,²² including the Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway, dubbed as the fastest Bullet train,²³ a strategically vital highway through the world's deepest canyon in Tibet along the Brahmaputra river,²⁴ and more. These have only been highlighting the centrality of the region in China's strategic, economic and political calculus. Further, China has been toughening its control over religious activities in Tibet. According to a report by the Human Rights Watch published in 2020, Chinese authorities in the Tibetan region continue to "severely restrict religious freedom, speech, movement and assembly" and often resort to "unlawful use of force by security personnel" against dissidents. In fact, authorities have also been reported to penalise people having sympathy for the exiled Dalai Lama or opposing the CPC.²⁵

A reiteration of these efforts was further witnessed with the recent visit of Xi Jinping to Tibet, the first by a top Chinese leader since 1990, which likely aimed to send a clear message about its dominant role in the region, both in regard to political and religious affairs, and further flex its muscles in Tibet. The visit was further designed to "counter foreign accusations that China is suppressing or damaging Tibetan culture", and at the same time, warn countries like US and India against meddling in the affairs of Tibet, which Beijing considers an uncompromisable and internal matter of China.²⁶ More importantly, Xi's visit to major infrastructure project sites, particularly along the border, sent an assertive signal to its Asian neighbour by facilitating a glimpse of the fast developing border infrastructure along the Line of Actual Control.

²⁰ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/panchen-lama-says-buddhism-in-tibet-will-be-sinicised-adopt-socialist-traits-101615439553367.html>

²¹ <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/retirement-and-reincarnation/reincarnation>

²² <https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/world/story/china-to-invest-30-billion-for-infra-development-in-tibet-over-next-5-years-290330-2021-03-09>

²³ <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202106/28/WS60d96811a310efa1bd65e606.html>

²⁴ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/china-completes-strategic-tibet-highway-near-arunachal-border/article34607474.ece>

²⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/china-and-tibet#>

²⁶ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3142911/what-message-was-xi-jinping-trying-send-his-visit-tibet>

These, if anything, signify a more assertive China with its hardened stance on Tibet and the reincarnation issue. As China's objective to achieve its second centennial goal becomes more and more imperative, the call to integrate Tibet more closely to China, Sinicise and socialise it becomes further urgent. With a goal of transforming the very core of the principles of Tibetan Buddhism by questioning the institution of the Dalai Lama, and establish itself as the absolute paramount leader throughout China, Tibet and the question of reincarnation is set to become more contested, with an ever more nationalistic China at its helm.



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NEWS DEVELOPMENTS

CPC at 100

On July 1, 2021, the Communist Party of China (CPC) turned 100 years old. On the occasion, the general secretary of the CPC and the chairman of the Central Military Commission delivered an important speech which not only discussed the evolution of the CPC over the past 100 years, but also chalked out the future trajectory of the party and China.²⁷ Xi announced that China has realised the first centenary goal - building a moderately prosperous society in all respects. In particular, the speech stated that the CPC has "brought about a historic resolution to the problem of absolute poverty in China, and we are now marching in confident strides towards the second centenary goal of building China into a great modern socialist country in all respects."

The speech further summed up the four great successes of the CPC: (1) The party united and led the Chinese people in fighting bloody battles with unyielding determination (2) it united and led the Chinese people in endeavoring to build a stronger China with the spirit of self-reliance, achieving great success in socialist revolution and construction (3) it united and led the Chinese people in freeing the mind and forging ahead, achieving great success in reform, opening-up, and socialist modernisation and (4) it united and led the Chinese people in pursuing a great success for socialism with a Chinese characteristics in a new era.

Looking forward to a new era, the speech stated that China is advancing with unstoppable momentum towards rejuvenation. In particular, the CPC would ensure that the central government exercises overall jurisdiction over Hong Kong and Macao, resolve China's Taiwan question and realise "China's complete reunification" as a "historic mission and an unshakeable commitment of the CPC. It would further, continue to adapt to Marxism in a Chinese context. To achieve these, the Chinese people, according to CPC, must never allow any "foreign force to bully, oppress or subjugate them", or else, they would find themselves on a "collision course with a great wall of steel".

To the world, and especially to China's rivals and competing powers, the speech is likely to emerge as a covert warning that illustrates Xi's determined focus to achieve glory for the country, CPC and himself. For India, particularly, the speech denotes a China moving towards greater aggressiveness at the former's northern borders. If anything, on the occasion of crossing the 100-year mark, the speech is likely to push the limits and test the resolve of its competitors and adversaries to further its power consolidation in the region and move towards achieving its strategic goals.²⁸

²⁷ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2021-07/01/c_1310038244.htm

²⁸ <https://idsa.in/system/files/issuebrief/ib-ccp-at-100-xi-jinping-future-jpanda.pdf>

India-China Ties

India-China Meet at Dushanbe

The External Affairs Minister (EAM) met State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China H.E. Mr. Wang Yi on 14th July 2021 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on the sidelines of the SCO Foreign Ministers' meeting. The two Ministers had a detailed exchange of views on the current situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh and also on other issues related to the overall India-China relations.

The MEA stated in its press release after the meeting that a prolongation of the existing situation was not in the interest of either side. It was visibly impacting the relationship in a negative manner. It further stated that the attempts to change status quo last year disregarded commitments under 1993 and 1996 agreements and have inevitably affected ties. Both sides agreed for the facilitation of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) to deal with the recent disagreements.²⁹ The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs had a different take on the entire issue. According to the ministry, Wang remarked that "the two sides must place the border issue in an appropriate position in bilateral relations, expand the positive momentum of bilateral cooperation and create favorable conditions for resolving differences through negotiation."³⁰

Irrespective, the press releases of both the countries did not break the impasse and did not contribute significantly to ease the situation. And thus, unless a full restoration of peace and de-escalation on the borders take place, the relations would likely to sustain elements of distrust.

Developments in Tibet

- The past few months has witnessed multiple developments in Tibet, which hold strategic significance for India. In a new development along the Line of Actual Control(LAC), reported on June 1, 2021, China and Pakistan conducted a joint military exercise in Tibet. It has two-pronged goals—targeting warships besides launching land attack from sea; honing air-defence skills to target enemy aircraft, missiles or UAVs.³¹The exercise comes in the backdrop of a recent move of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which has, for the first time, integrated its units with air-defence assets with PLA-Air Force (PLAAF) along the LAC.
- In addition, the Chinese army has been recruiting Tibetan youth in its territory and training them for operations along the LAC with India. According to reports, the youth are being inducted in the Chinese forces after going through a number of loyalty tests, which include learning the mainland Chinese language and accepting the supremacy of the Chinese communist party over any other beliefs such as following the

²⁹ <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34016/External+Affairs+Ministers+meeting+with+State+Councilor+and+Foreign+Minister+of+China+HE+Mr+Wang+Yi+on+the+sidelines+of+SCO+Foreign+Ministers+Meeting>

³⁰ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/t1892327.shtml

³¹ <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/lac-chinas-air-defence-at-play-joint-drill-with-pak-261828>

Dalai Lama and other religious gurus.³²

- Subsequently, China's armed forces recently took part in a "record-breaking" high-altitude drill in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) focusing on combat training, reported by the Chinese defence ministry on June 24, 2021. Organised by the Tibet Military Region, the training simulated battle situations that required integrated operations or joint training between different units of the troops deployed in the region. The ministry added that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has carried out more than 100 tactical exercises this year in which the quantity of ammunition had significantly increased.³³
- Further, China on June 25 started operating the first bullet train line in Tibet, linking Lhasa to Nyingchi near the border with Arunachal Pradesh. The China State Railway Group said the 435-km line, on which construction began in 2014, has a designed speed of 160 kilometres per hour and would connect the capital city of the Tibet Autonomous Region to the border city of Nyingchi with a travel time of three and a half hours.³⁴
- The Lhasa-Nyingchi rail is one among several major infrastructure projects recently completed in Tibet's southern and southeastern counties near the Arunachal border. Last month, China completed construction of a strategically significant highway through the Grand Canyon of the Yarlung Zangbo river, as the Brahmaputra is called in Tibet. This is the "second significant passageway" to Medog county that borders Arunachal, the official Xinhua news agency reported, directly connecting the Pad township in Nyingchi to Baibung in Medog county.

Three Child Policy

On May 31, 2021, China's Communist Party Politburo meeting, chaired by President Xi Jinping, announced it will allow each couple in the country to have up to three children in a marked departure from its previous two-child limit. A statement released after the meeting said major steps were needed to address the deepening problem of the ageing population.³⁵

China officially ended its One Child policy on January 1, 2016, with signing into law of a bill which allowed all married couples to have a second child, in an effort to cope with an ageing population and shrinking workforce.³⁶

³² <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/chinese-army-recruiting-tibetan-youth-for-operations-along-lac-india-1825975-2021-07-09>

³³ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/china-carries-out-military-drill-in-tibet-101624544749959.html>

³⁴ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/china-launches-first-bullet-train-in-tibet-close-to-indian-border/article34959794.ece>

³⁵ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-builds-key-highway-through-brahmaputra-canyon-in-tibet-close-to-arunachal-pradesh-border/articleshow/82802285.cms?from=mdr>

³⁶ https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3136092/chinas-three-child-policy-why-was-it-introduced-and-what-does?module=perpetual_scroll&pgtype=article&campaign=3136092

Irrespective, as per a well-known economist and the dean of the National School of Development at Peking University, Prof. Yao Yang, the recently-announced three child policy is unlikely to prevent a long-term trend toward lowering birthrate in China, while the country would struggle to raise the retirement age by more than a couple of years by 2025.³⁷

Russia-China Ties

Extension of China-Russia Friendly Cooperation Treaty

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a joint statement on June 28, 2021, officially deciding to extend the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation. The announcement came during talks between the two heads of state via video link. Hailing the upcoming 20th anniversary of the signing of the treaty, Xi said that the treaty has established the idea of enduring friendship, which conforms to the fundamental interests of the two countries as well as the themes of peace and development. Notably, the two sides agreed to continue maintaining close high-level exchanges, strengthening vaccine cooperation, expanding bilateral trade, and expanding cooperation in low-carbon energy, digital economy, agriculture and other fields and promote the alignment of the Belt and Road Initiative with the Eurasian Economic Union.³⁸ Further importantly, China's foreign minister, speaking at a reception in Beijing on June 11, 2021, described the relationship with Russia as "Not an alliance, but better than allies."³⁹

However, their relationship is far more complicated than a simple bolstering partnership. In regions such as Central Asia, Moscow and Beijing strike an uneasy balance as China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative quietly builds its influence in former Soviet republics that Russia still sees as its backyard. In other areas, the complex geopolitics of the 2020s defies simple efforts to divide the world into pro-and anti-western camps.⁴⁰

Hong Kong

HK Report by Britain

Britain released its latest six-monthly report on its former colony Hong Kong for the period July to December 2020.⁴¹ Britain publishes this period report to assess. The UK Government through the report has argued witnessing a "pattern of behaviour by Beijing intended to crush dissent and suppress the expression of alternative political views in Hong Kong."⁴² It further added that "China has broken its

³⁷ <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3136890/china-population-three-child-policy-will-not-dramatically>

³⁸ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-06/29/c_1310032860.htm

³⁹ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/russia-and-china-not-allies-but-better-than-allies/articleshow/84437525.cms>

⁴⁰ <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/china-russia-a-strategic-partnership-short-on-strategy/>

⁴¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/992734/hong-kong-six-monthly-report-48-jul-dec-2020.pdf

⁴² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/992734/hong-kong-six-monthly-report-48-jul-dec-2020.pdf

legal obligations by undermining Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy, rights and freedoms, which are guaranteed under the Joint Declaration."⁴³ Furthermore, the unilateral decision of the Chinese National People's Congress (NPC) regarding electoral reforms without a requisite approval from Hong Kong's Legislative Council has greatly undermined "China's promise to Hong Kong in the Basic Law of gradual progress towards a system of universal suffrage, and further hollows out the Legislative Council."⁴⁴

The National Security Law has been stated to not serve its intended purpose of maintaining tranquility in the region but instead the legislation has been used as a tool to "drastically curtail the space for the expression of alternative political views and deter freedom of expression and legitimate political debate".⁴⁵ As one would expect, Hong Kong government reacted sharply to the accusations in the report calling it inaccurate remarks" that could not be "further from the truth and are clearly double standards".⁴⁶

Even though they received support from Mainland China which rebutted the report by calling it full of ideological basis and adding that "the so-called Six-monthly Report on Hong Kong has, as always, confused right and wrong"⁴⁷, the International community at large remains deeply concerned about the growing authoritarian Chinese rule in the Special Administration Region of Hong Kong.

Apple Daily

The newspaper which is regarded as Hong Kong's most vocal pro-democratic voice printed its last edition on 24th June 2021 after being in service for 26 years.⁴⁸ This was the culmination of a series of events which had begun with raids of police and arresting of its tycoon owner and ultimately other key staff members all under the stringent National Security Law. After the latest round of arrests were made by the police, the authorities froze its assets worth HK\$18m (\$2.3m) thereby financially crippling it to the end. The impact of Apple Daily in its cause of ensuring the due freedom in Hong Kong was so profound that the day it ceased publications, the staff unions at Citizen News and six other media

⁴³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/992734/hong-kong-six-monthly-report-48-jul-dec-2020.pdf

⁴⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/992734/hong-kong-six-monthly-report-48-jul-dec-2020.pdf

⁴⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/992734/hong-kong-six-monthly-report-48-jul-dec-2020.pdf

⁴⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/uk-report-says-hong-kong-security-law-used-drastically-curtail-freedoms-2021-06-11/>

⁴⁷ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-06/11/c_1310003285.htm

⁴⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-police-arrest-apple-daily-columnist-under-security-law->

groups wore black in protest of what they described as “the government’s blow against freedom of the press”.⁴⁹

With Apple Daily being shut, the Hong Kong government would be facing a relatively less tedious job in subduing the pro-democratic voices and in the near future will be able to align the Special Administered Region of HK with legislations from mainland China more comprehensively.

G7 Communiqué

The statement released by G7 members at the end of their Summit clearly indicated that the respective grouping had spent great time dwelling upon China across various themes.

Regarding the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, the grouping called for a "timely, transparent, expert-led, and science based WHO-convened COVID-19 Origins study including, as recommended by the experts' report, in China". This follows US President Joe Biden's order to his Intel Department on undertaking a report on the possible origin of the COVID-19 virus. These calls for study are largely aimed at asserting if at all the virus had originated in a laboratory, accidentally or otherwise, in Wuhan, China.

Furthermore, in its agenda of promoting multilateralism and shared values, the Group decided to call on "China to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially in relation to Xinjiang and those rights, freedoms and high degree of autonomy for Hong Kong enshrined in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law".

The Grouping without calling out China sent a clear message by reiterating the "imperativeness of maintaining a free and open Indo Pacific which is inclusive and rule-based as well as stability in the Taiwan-Strait"; both being the region where China has been exerting its influence in the attempt of altering regional as well as global order.

Chinese responded by arguing that the present circumstances required international community to strengthen solidarity and cooperation and practice true multilateralism. instead of engaging in "group politics" based on "small cliques".

Their displeasure with the G-7 statement was ,however, evident by their comment that "the United States is sick" and that the G7 should feel its pulse and prescribe medicine for it."

ASEAN

China-Indonesia

China and Indonesia had their first meeting on high-level dialogue cooperation mechanism on 5th June 2021. This marked a watershed moment in the bilateral relationship of the two countries who had

⁴⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-police-arrest-apple-daily-columnist-under-security-law-media-2021-06-23/>

almost entered into an armed conflict against each other in early 2020.⁵⁰ Like the hostile situation, the two countries have been frequently at logger-heads with each other owing to China's interpretation of Indonesia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the Natuna Sea as being a traditional Chinese fishing region.⁵¹

At the meeting, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was also signed to strengthen maritime cooperation which included among other things "speeding up of consultations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea to make cooperation the main theme of the situation in the South China Sea" which has been the bow of the contention till date.⁵²

Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, Indonesian president's special envoy and Indonesia's coordinator for cooperation with China stated post his meeting with State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi that "Indonesia is willing to work with China to accelerate the joint construction of the Belt and Road, deepen the construction of the regional comprehensive economic corridor, and forge the completion of the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway on schedule." This signifies a strategic convergence between the two nations for enhancing the development of the entire region and their respective countries as well.

ASEAN- China Meet

A Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held on the occasion of 30th Anniversary of Dialogue Relations between the two partners in Chongqing on 7th June. Significance of China's relationship with ASEAN can be understood by looking at the trade volume which rose from "less than 8 billion U.S. dollars to 684.6 billion U.S. dollars, an increase of more than 80 times".⁵³ On the issue of military coup in Myanmar, China expressed its "China stands ready to cooperate with ASEAN on Myanmar issues."⁵⁴ However it further stated that the country "stands ready to continue to play a constructive role in its own way".⁵⁵ Key development of the meet was both sides agreeing to "restart the COC (Code of Conduct) consultations, and continue with the full and effective implementation of the DOC (Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea), thereby showcasing to the world that we have the confidence, capability and wisdom to maintain regional peace and stability." The U.S., which maintains an active naval presence in the South China Sea and strong relations with the region, has time and again expressed concerns over China's growing presence, particularly "Beijing's political influence over fragile democracies"⁵⁶. Therefore the scenario agreed in the meeting would enable Chinese to leverage its substantial comprehensive national power (CNP) over the relatively smaller Southeast Asian States to strategically tilt the discussions in its favor while keeping external powers like US, France, etc to bay. Lastly, China had also put forward the suggestion to "focus on the next 30 years and jointly realize, maintain, and develop a road of regional cooperation with East Asian

⁵⁰ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/07/indonesia-china-jokowi-natuna-sea-military-bri-cooperation-biden-united-states/>

⁵¹ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/07/indonesia-china-jokowi-natuna-sea-military-bri-cooperation-biden-united-states/>

⁵² https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1881769.shtml

⁵³ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/t1882097.shtml

⁵⁴ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-06/08/c_139994556.htm

⁵⁵ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-06/08/c_139994556.htm

⁵⁶ <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/china-hosts-southeast-asian-ministers-competes-us-78123740>

characteristics, build a higher level of China-ASEAN strategic partnership".⁵⁷

China Space Developments.

China launched three astronauts into orbit to begin occupation of its new space station named Tiangong Space Station. The Shenzhou-12 capsule took off atop its Long March 2F rocket on 17th June in what will be China's longest crewed space mission to date and the first in nearly five years.⁵⁸ The three men - Nie Haisheng, Liu Boming and Tang Hongbo - are to spend three months aboard the Tianhe module some 380km (236 miles). After that a second crew of three astronauts will replace them. The station remains under construction, so the astronauts' main tasks will effectively be to continue to build it, installing equipment like cameras and testing various functions, including life support and waste management. They are scheduled to conduct two spacewalks as part of that effort.⁵⁹ The crew successfully docked with the space station just over seven hours after the launch. The launch and subsequent mission are another demonstration of China's growing confidence and capability in the space domain.

In the past six months, the country has returned rock and soil samples to Earth from the surface of the Moon, and landed a six-wheeled robot on Mars - both highly complex and challenging endeavours.⁶⁰ China has made its intentions of being the leading space power crystal clear with a perhaps distinct desire to also lead human settlement on Mars thereby bringing it into a direct Space Race with US and its space agency NASA.

Taiwan

In the first week of June, A delegation of US senators representing both parties visited Taiwan to announce the donation of 750,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccine. While, it proved to be a vital assistance for Taiwanese populace China "firmly rejected" it and registered "solemn complaints with the US".⁶¹ Another significant development was that of 28 Chinese fighter jets that entered Taiwan's airspace on 15th June 2021. This was the largest ever display of force ever since Beijing began sending planes on a regular basis from previous year. To counter China's offensive showcase of airpower, Taiwan's air force deployed its combat air patrol forces in response and monitored the situation in the southwestern part of the island's air defense identification zone with its air defense systems.⁶² This provocation came barely days after the G7 leaders in their Communiqué stressed for "peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encouraged the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues."⁶³ Through this display of air-strength, China signified its firm position in the region and its resolution to

⁵⁷ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-06/08/c_139994549.htm

⁵⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-57504052>

⁵⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/16/science/china-launch-space-station.html>

⁶⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-57504052>

⁶¹ <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/06/07/china/us-senators-taiwan-china-reaction-intl-mic-hnk/index.html>

⁶² <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/china-taiwan-fighter-jets-air-force-self-ruled-island-1815274-2021-06-15>

⁶³ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/50361/carbis-bay-g7-summit-communicue.pdf>

undertake unilateral decisions purely keeping its own national interests in mind contrast to the shared values of multilateralism proposed by global power, which in this case were G7 member states. Barely a week after Chinese intrusion, US's Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur sailed through the Taiwan strait.⁶⁴ Commenting on the operation, U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet said it was a "routine Taiwan Strait transit" in accordance with international law demonstrating "the U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific."⁶⁵ Chinese frustration was evident when the People's Liberation Army's Eastern Theatre Command remarked that "the U.S. side is intentionally playing the same old tricks and creating trouble and disrupting things in the Taiwan Strait."⁶⁶

Though, Taiwan and China had split during the 1949 civil war but China continues to claim Taiwan as part of its territory while Taiwan has been self-ruled since then. However, since the election of President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016 and following her refusal to agree to China's insistence that the island be considered part of latter's territory; China has increased diplomatic and military pressure on the island country⁵⁹ which is expected to only intensify in the coming times.

Sino-US Relationship

China's Ambassador to step down

Chinese ambassador to US, Cui Tiankai, in a farewell letter announced his resignation from the post at June end. This decision brought to the culmination eight years of service which is regarded as one of the longest stint by a top Chinese diplomat in Washington DC.

In his last address he described China-US relationship being "at a critical crossroads"⁶⁷ adding that the Biden administration is revamping its China's policy "facing a choice between dialogue and cooperation, or confrontation and conflict".⁶⁸ Urging the Chinese nationals in US to strengthen the two countries bilateral relationship he also issued a word of caution for them by stating the need to defend (their) rights to be in the host country.⁶⁹

Following Donald Trump's surprise electoral victory in 2016, Cui played an instrumental role in opening a line of communication with Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law thereby giving some ground to the Chinese authority to deal with the former administration. Even though the diplomatic outcomes during the last administration were troublesome for China, Beijing always entrusted Cui for the job. This is no surprise given the respect he commands in the US

⁶⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-warship-transits-taiwan-strait-week-after-large-chinese-air-incursion-2021-06-23/>

⁶⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-warship-transits-taiwan-strait-week-after-large-chinese-air-incursion-2021-06-23/>

⁶⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-warship-transits-taiwan-strait-week-after-large-chinese-air-incursion-2021-06-23/>

⁶⁷ <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/china-taiwan-fighter-jets-air-force-self-ruled-island-1815274-2021-06-15> ⁶⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/22/china-ambassador-us-leave-eight-years-cui->

⁶⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/22/china-ambassador-us-leave-eight-years-cui-tiankai>

⁶⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/22/china-ambassador-us-leave-eight-years-years-cui-tiankai>

power circle which stems from the fact that Cui, unlikely most of his colleagues, refrained from indulging in combative style of diplomacy and even called the idea of Covid-19 emerging in US lab as " crazy".⁷⁰ At the same time he remained resolute to the principles of national sovereignty and firmly rejected opposition on matters such as human rights, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

With rumors suggesting Qin Gang, a foreign ministry vice minister, who has also served Xi as his chief protocol officer between 2014 to 2018 to be appointed to fill in Cui's shoes suggest a mark change as the former does not have any comprehensive experience of engaging with US. Furthermore, unlike Cui, Qin is widely associated with the wolf warrior gang.

So, even though China's larger foreign policy would remain same, rumor of a usually aggressive representative makes it interesting to see what impact, if any, is brought about in the Sino-US relationship.

South China Sea

Great Power Competition

12th July, which marked the 5th anniversary of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) arbitration ruling that rendered Chinese claim on South China based on its 'nine-dash line' illegitimate, saw US Secretary of State issuing a press statement on the occasion.

Antony Blinken wrote that "nowhere is the rules-based maritime order under greater threat than in the South China Sea. The People's Republic of China (PRC) continues to coerce and intimidate Southeast Asian coastal states, threatening freedom of navigation in this critical global throughway."⁷¹

Through the statement US once again showed its solidarity with Philippines which was the complainant and the victor of the 2016 ruling against illegal Chinese expansive forces within its Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). The press release read, " We also reaffirm that an armed attack on Philippine armed forces, public vessels, or aircraft in the South China Sea would invoke U.S. mutual defense commitments under Article IV of the 1951 U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty."⁷²

US also asked Beijing to respect and adhere to international law and to "take steps to reassure the international community that it is committed to the rules-based maritime order that respects the rights of all countries, big and small."⁷³

As expected, Chinese rebuttal to the statement was fierce arguing that US continues to " disregard the historical merits and objective facts of the South China Sea issue " and the actual ruling of the UNCLOS arbitration " is nothing more than a piece of waste paper."⁷⁴

⁷⁰ <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/its-official-chinas-longtime-ambassador-to-the-us-is-leaving/>

⁷¹ <https://www.state.gov/fifth-anniversary-of-the-arbitral-tribunal-ruling-on-the-south-china-sea/>

⁷² <https://www.state.gov/fifth-anniversary-of-the-arbitral-tribunal-ruling-on-the-south-china-sea/> ⁶⁶
<https://www.state.gov/fifth-anniversary-of-the-arbitral-tribunal-ruling-on-the-south-china-sea/>

⁷³ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1891450.shtml

⁷⁴ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1891450.shtml

Chinese Foreign Ministry representative further went ahead and said that this arbitration is a "political farce" initiated by the US to "smear and suppress China."⁷⁵ Interestingly enough, Chinese military claimed to have "drove away" a US warship on that very day when according to the former the latter had illegally entered Chinese maritime space near the disputed Paracel Islands.⁷⁶ United States Navy 7th Fleet responded to the allegation by stating that the USS Benfold had "asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands, consistent with international law" and completely dismissed Chinese claims of a serious violation of its sovereignty as "false" and a misrepresentation.⁷⁷ The current developments between the two super powers suggest a continuation of the ongoing trend of tussle with China extensively attempting to lay claim on various reefs of the region while US would resist the Chinese expansion and promote rule of law projecting itself as a guardian of the small states that exist in the highly charged region of South China Sea.

Surveillance Operations

Report conducted on the basis of satellite images obtained by The Washington Times indicate deployments of PLA KJ-500 airborne warning and control aircraft to Mischief Reef in the Spratly Islands in May and June; and of a Y-9 transport aircraft and Z-8 helicopter to Subi Reef in June and this month.⁷⁸ A US military news website, USNI, in addition of having spot a Chinese navy Y-8Q maritime patrol aircraft and a KJ-500 airborne early warning and control plane also identified a Type-815G spy ship at a military base at Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratly Islands chain.⁷⁹

It has also been highlighted that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is regularly conducting airborne operations from the aforementioned islands.

This signify that Beijing wants to track US and its allies movement in the contested region of South China Sea and thereby strategically plan its action either militarily or diplomatically to counter any conceivable threat to its claim of 'nine dash line' in the region.

Other Developments

Philippines Coast Guard in a July 13 report mentioned the presence of a foreign vessel at Marie Louise Bank which had identified itself as "Chinese Navy Warship 189". According to the report, no confrontation took place and the vessel eventually moved away post a verbal warning.⁸⁰

Furthermore, in a crucial a development UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace has announced that the HMS Queen Elizabeth and her escort fleet will transit "international waters claimed by China" in the South China Sea next month. UK's willingness to play an active part in the geopolitics of the region

⁷⁵ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1891450.shtml

⁷⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/12/china-military-drove-away-us-warship-in-south-china-sea>

⁷⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/12/china-military-drove-away-us-warship-in-south-china-sea>

⁷⁸ <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/jul/13/china-begins-military-flights-disputed-south-china/>

⁷⁹ <https://www.businessinsider.com/chinese-spy-ship-planes-watching-south-china-sea-amid-tensions-2021-6?IR=T>

⁸⁰ <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/philippines-challenges-chinese-warship-in-south-china-sea-11626705757074.html>

became evident when along with the aforementioned announcement the government made public its strategic decision to permanently deploy warships in the region.⁸¹



⁸¹ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202107/1229291.shtml>



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