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Chinese and Indian troops conduct a joint counter-terrorism exercise in 2008. (Credit: Xinhua)

China Brief is a bi-weekly journal of information and analysis covering Greater China in Eurasia.

China Brief is a publication of The Jamestown Foundation, a private non-profit organization based in Washington D.C. and is edited by Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga.

The opinions expressed in China Brief are solely those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Jamestown Foundation.



For comments and questions about China Brief, please contact us at
< beauchamp@jamestown.org >

1111 16th St. NW, Suite 320
Washington, DC 20036

Tel: 202.483.8888
Fax: 202.483.8337

In a Fortnight

CHINA CYNICAL OVER U.S. MIDTERM ELECTIONS, BUT EXPECTS POLICY CONTINUITY

By Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga

On Tuesday, November 4, the United States held its 2014 midterm elections and voted the Republican Party into the majority in the U.S. Senate, giving them control of both houses in Congress and, as Chinese analysts noted, a major political victory. The overall Chinese response was cynical about the lack of real democracy in the elections and dismissive of U.S. President Barack Obama's influence in the last two years of his presidency. Despite some concerns for U.S.-China relations with a more hawkish Republican Congress, Chinese commentators remain optimistic about the future of the bilateral relationship and look forward to President Obama's visit to Beijing for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit (APEC) later this month (see "Regional Maneuvering" in this issue).

Setting the Stage for Irrelevance

In the run-up to the elections, the official *People's Daily* ran a series of articles criticizing the U.S. political system and electoral process as corrupt and disconnected from the American people. The first article traced the history of corruption in

the United States and asked “is American-style ‘legal’ corruption democratic?” (*People’s Daily*, October 15). The second article discussed “money-dominated politics” and explained the two major recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions—*Citizens United* in 2010 and *McCutcheon* this April—that “released the tiger of ‘dark money’ out of its cage” (*People’s Daily*, October 20). The article documented the “arms race” in fundraising by profiling major corporate and individual campaign donors, including Microsoft and Google, and quoted former U.S. Vice President Al Gore as saying, “Our democracy has been invaded.” A third article focused on the “moral and political issue” of income inequality in the United States and concluded that “as more special interest groups control a greater voice in public policy...the U.S. political system has turned cold to the appeals of the poor” (*People’s Daily*, October 27). The last article documented the endemic “disease” of corruption in Alabama and declining interest in politics, leaving people more susceptible to campaign advertising (*People’s Daily*, October 31). The article asserted that “the United States is unable to drive money out of politics” because it is too “proud” of its electoral system.

These articles were seemingly intended to set a cynical and dismissive tone for China’s domestic audience that elections are unrepresentative, easily manipulated and an inferior form of governance compared to China’s own socialist system. The message also applied to the United States—with so much dysfunction and malaise in Washington, how can the U.S. government attempt to critique China’s meritocratic political system? This much was made clear in comments by Chinese Ambassador to the United States, Cui Tiankai, published on Election Day. Ambassador Cui remarked on the unpredictable nature of U.S. political candidates: “In the United States, you could have somebody just a few years ago totally unknown to others, and all of a sudden he or she could run for very high office because you use all kinds of media... [and] Super PACS [...] in China, you cannot have somebody from a village who the next day could be a national candidate for president. That’s impossible” (*Foreign Policy*, November 4).

Bad Omen for U.S. Political System

The “United States’ most expensive midterm elections ever” “shuffled the political deck” and left President Obama as a “lame duck” president for his remaining

two years in office (*Global Times*, November 5, *Xinhua*, November 5). Diao Daming, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences’s Institute of American Studies, argued that Democrats performed poorly at the polls because despite the improved employment numbers, the U.S. people have not yet felt the benefits, enabling Republicans to focus on jobs; and Obama’s low approval rating—tied to the Affordable Care Act website, Veterans Affairs hospitals, the illegal immigration crisis, Ferguson, Ukraine, Iraq and Ebola—hurt the larger party on election night (*People’s Daily Online*, November 5). The article highlighted the continued influence of the Tea Party, citing former House Majority Leader Eric Cantor’s primary loss this June—the first since 1899—as foreshadowing that the election will not solve Washington’s gridlock. Indeed, one article cited Francis Fukuyama’s “vetocracy” argument to predict political paralysis (*Beijing Times*, November 4). Chinese analysts fear inter-party fighting may lead to another government shutdown over the budget or a vote against raising the debt ceiling next March (*Beijing News*, November 3). Chinese analysts also saw former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton’s chances for a successful presidential run in 2016 diminished with the Republican’s current popularity (*Phoenix*, November 6; *Global Times*, November 6).

Short Term Concern, Long Term Faith in Washington’s China Policy

Despite the official Chinese government line that U.S.-China relations will be unaffected by the midterms, the Chinese media uniformly predicted short-term changes to Washington’s China policy. Ambassador Cui dismissed expectations or any desire that the midterm elections would impact U.S.-China relations, citing “continuity” between Republican and Democratic governments for China policy (*China News*, November 5). *Xinhua* wrote “under Obama’s second term, although China-U.S. relations have had twists and turns, there has been still been an overall stable development” (*Xinhua*, November 5). *Xinhua* also said that both political parties will maintain positive U.S.-China relations, because it is in their interests and the country’s interests.

Diao Daming included a lengthy discussion of the major shakeup in Congress’ China and Taiwan lobbies (*People’s Daily Online*, November 5). In the House, 17 out of 127 pro-Taiwan Representatives left office, as well as six

of 38 pro-China and eight of 44 U.S.-China Working Group Representatives—including known human rights advocate Frank Wolf and currency stickler Mike Michaud. In the Senate, 11 of 25 pro-Taiwan Senators also left. This led Diao to hope Congress would take a softer line toward China, while *Global Times* argued that Congress will instead be “more wolf-like and more acrimonious toward China,” if only because the Republicans will want to oppose President Obama (*Global Times*, November 6). Yet *Global Times* ultimately concluded that U.S.-China relations had seen bigger changes in Congress and had weathered worse periods than now. This means that “the existing system in Washington will not necessarily encourage a radical change in its China policy. As long as we do not deliberately provoke the United States, while their China policy may be contentious and have some incidents, there will also be a certain inertia to it.”

With President Obama facing his last two years with an opposition Congress, Diao Daming expects the “Rebalance to Asia” to play a prominent role in Obama’s efforts to shape his legacy, as it is his only major foreign policy success (*People’s Daily Online*, November 5). Yet, Diao argued that the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) may now be more difficult to pass through Congress, as certain parts of the Republican Party oppose it. He predicted U.S. foreign policy would be even more limited by domestic constraints, as evidenced President Obama’s “inward” decision to not attend the last APEC summit during the 2013 shutdown.

Echoing concerns raised by Ambassador Cui, Diao worried about the damage caused to U.S.-China “trust” by China again becoming a campaign issue. Arguing that the 2008 Financial Crisis returned the economy to the forefront of U.S. politics, Diao claimed China has again become a “foil” for U.S. domestic issues, with the 2006 midterms being dominated by discussions of China as a currency manipulator and the 2010 midterms features vicious anti-China attack ads.

Taking Stock

Chinese criticism of the U.S. political system, especially when done without any introspection about the similar shortcomings of China’s own political system, raises the question—does China dismiss U.S. elections out of sincere beliefs, insecurities over political legitimacy at home, or

as a soft power attack on “American exceptionalism?” Despite this cynicism, China does pay a great deal of attention to U.S. politics and Chinese leaders, likely more informed than the average U.S. voter, are able to make sensible predictions about U.S. policy. While China’s accurate labeling of President Obama as a “lame duck” may appear to suggest the Chinese government now sees the United States as vulnerable, weak or dysfunctional and thus may take this opportunity to become more assertive, Beijing is unlikely to change its current approach to bilateral relations. Ultimately, U.S.-China relations are so important to Beijing that the Chinese leadership will continue to engage with President Obama, despite the setback of the U.S. midterm election.

Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga is the editor of China Brief.

China's Espionage Against Taiwan (Part I): Analysis of Recent Operations

By Peter Mattis

The last few weeks put Chinese espionage against Taiwan back into the headlines with a series of arrests and sentencing pronouncements. In the first week of October, a Taiwanese court sentenced Vice Admiral Ko Cheng-sheng, a former deputy commander of the Navy, to 14 months in prison for violating the National Security Act by providing military secrets to a naturalized Australian businessman Shen Ping-kang, whom Chinese intelligence recruited sometime during the 1990s (*Taipei Times*, October 2; *Liberty Times*, September 30). Taiwan's defense attaché in the United States, Major General Li Hsien-sheng, is under investigation for providing secrets to Chinese intelligence after being tangled up in an extramarital affair; yet despite so far failing three polygraph tests, the Taiwanese government denies any investigation (*China Post*, September 25; *Taipei Times*, September 25). Taiwanese security authorities catch a number of Chinese spies every year, making this year no different; however, as the military balance tips ever in China's favor, every secret bought or stolen by China further diminishes any remaining advantages Taiwan has for its self-defense. The last three years of Chinese espionage against Taiwan reinforce the notion that retired Taiwanese officials doing business in China remain the island's greatest weakness.

In this two-part series, the first part will evaluate China's recent intelligence operations against Taiwan and explore the operational implications. The second part will discuss the organizational landscape of Chinese intelligence operations against Taiwan. The Ko case, in particular, highlights new information about the Chinese intelligence bureaucracy and the overlapping roles that many of the agencies have.

China's Espionage Campaign Continues

In the last three years, Taiwan uncovered at least 13 cases, involving more than 23 Taiwanese citizens, and several other suspicious cases still being investigated by the authorities. The predominant Chinese collection targets related to the Taiwanese military, including

Taiwan's radar and passive early warning detection systems, military exercises (such as Taiwan's major annual exercise Han Kuang), the U.S.-supplied Patriot missile systems, and military mobilization and defense plans as well as command, control, computers, communications, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) infrastructure. The latter specifically included the Po Sheng, Anyu-4 and Shuan-Ji programs that affect unit connectivity, air defense awareness and electronic warfare, respectively (*Taipei Times*, October 3; *Taipei Times*, February 7, 2013).

The most important of these cases was Vice Admiral Ko Cheng-sheng, who retired as a deputy commander of Taiwan's navy. A naturalized Australian citizen of Taiwanese extraction, Shen Ping-kang, recruited him for Chinese intelligence services. This case, however, was not any sort of "false flag" operation in which the admiral was unaware of whom he was dealing with. Shen eventually introduced Vice Admiral Ko to Chinese intelligence officers as well as the United Front Work Department and the Liaison Office of the General Political Department. Moreover, Ko also agreed to work with Shen to recruit subordinate officers in order to create an internal network after he retired from the navy (*Sydney Morning Herald*, October 4; *Taipei Times*, October 3). Reportedly, Taiwanese security officials uncovered Ko and Shen's activities while investigating an espionage case at the Naval Meteorology Oceanography Office (*Want China Times*, April 19, 2013). It remains unclear how much damage Ko caused—he provided at least the late-1990s version of the "Gu'an Combat Plan" for the defense of Taiwan—nor is it clear if Taiwanese authorities have run down all the potential leads from Shen's activities. Amazingly, the sentences handed down at the beginning of October for Ko and Shen are measured not in years but months—14 and 12, respectively (*Taipei Times*, October 3).

The Taiwan Air Force case involving Yuan Hsiao-feng and retired lieutenant Chen Wen-jen also revealed an important vulnerability in the management of classified information. Yuan pulled several flash drives worth of data off of classified military systems to deliver to his Chinese handlers at the Second Department of the PLA's General Staff Department (2PLA). Yuan's theft went undetected before he retired in 2007, suggesting a lack of computer security audits and loose regulations on

portable media devices. Yuan and Chen continued to search for potential agents for the 2PLA to recruit, even after Yuan's retirement in 2007. Their greed proved their undoing as two junior officers, who the pair approached in 2011, reported a recruitment attempt. Ultimately, the 2PLA paid Yuan roughly \$260,000—the figure for Chen or other benefits that his mainland business received remains out of the public eye—but the courts sentenced Yuan to twelve life sentences (*Taipei Times*, February 7, 2013).

One of the few cases where Taiwan authorities have described the China-side of an espionage case involves a well-known fortune reader and senior academic at Taiwan's Central Police University, Wang Chang-yu. Wang traveled regularly and extensively in China for both his academic work and his fortune readings. A Chinese intelligence officer, ostensibly from the Taiwan Affairs Office's Beijing municipal government branch, developed a relationship with Wang, promising that, in exchange for the professor's assistance, he could expand the mainland side of Wang's fortune-telling business. As the relationship developed, Wang was introduced to "Xiao Zhang," who would serve as his principal contact and go-between (*Taipei Times*, June 20, 2012; *Epoch Times*, June 19, 2012).

This is fairly consistent with the tradecraft employed by China in a number of cases, including against the United States, where Chinese intelligence provided couriers and/or handled the agent using more than one case officer at the same time. Taiwanese-American businessman Kuo Tai-shen—known for his role suborning two U.S. Department of Defense officials—was given a courier, Kang Yuxin, to handle his contact with the 2PLA (*U.S. District Court for Eastern Virginia*, February 2008). In the case of Glenn Duffie Shriver—a U.S. student who was paid by his Chinese handlers to apply to the Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. Department of State after his recruitment during his studies in China—one Chinese intelligence official managed the relationship with Shriver, while another more senior official, "Mr. Wu," became part of the operation when money was put on the table (*The Washingtonian*, June 7, 2012; *China Brief*, November 5, 2010).

One of the more aggressive attempts to penetrate Taiwan's intelligence agencies was the Chinese arrest

in 2012 of Lin Linghui, the spouse of a Taiwanese Military Intelligence Bureau (MIB) colonel. The Chinese intelligence service—most likely the Ministry of State Security (MSS)—then contacted the officer in an effort to lure him to China (*China Post*, January 17). Similarly, retired MIB Major Chen Shu-lung lured a government acquaintance to Shanghai, where the acquaintance was interrogated for three days (*Central News Agency* [Taiwan], October 7, 2013). If this sounds incredible, it is worth remembering that Chinese intelligence in 2006 lured two senior MIB officers to Vietnam with the prospect of a high-level Chinese defector, where they kidnapped the Taiwanese officers and brought them to China (*China Post*, December 12, 2013; *Boxun*, July 20, 2006). Just as Taiwan's effort to negotiate the release of the kidnapped MIB officers has failed, so too have efforts to negotiate Mrs. Lin's release (*China Post*, January 17).

Several spying allegations remain unresolved, including Taiwan's most recent defense attaché to the United States, who lingers under a cloud of suspicion after multiple failed polygraphs. The most prominent is the dismissal this August of the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) deputy director, Chang Hsien-yao, for passing classified documents to Beijing via a Taiwanese businessman. Chang was reportedly dismissed after a two-year investigation, started after Investigation Bureau officials intercepted a fax from the MAC offices that contained sensitive information about cross-Strait airspace management (*China Post*, August 30). Chang publicly has maintained his innocence, claiming that the government is fabricating evidence and that he only ever followed official instructions (*Want China Times*, August 26; *South China Morning Post*, August 25). Superficially, the description of how Chang purportedly passed information to Chinese authorities bears the hallmarks of many Chinese espionage cases on the island, but the investigation remains ongoing, with Chang under curfew and innocent until proven guilty (*United Daily News*, October 8; *China Times*, October 8).

Select Chinese Espionage Cases in Taiwan (2010–2014)

Name	Case Officer and Recruitment Location	Incentives Used	Agent's Access to Information	Type of Intelligence Collected
Ko Cheng-sheng & Shen Ping-kang	Inside China	Cash	Second-Hand	Military
Lo Chi-cheng & Lo Ping	Inside China	Cash	Second-Hand	Counterintelligence (CI)
Hao Chih-Hsiung & Wan Tsung-lin	Inside China	Cash	Retired	Military
Chang Chih-hsin & Chien Ching-kuo & Lu Chun-chun	Inside China	Cash	Second-Hand	Military
Chou Tzu-li & Chen Hsiao-chiang	Inside China	Cash	Retired	Military
Lai Kun-chieh	Inside China	Cash & Coercion	Second-Hand	Military
Tsai Kuo-hsien & Wang Wei-ya	Inside China	Cash	Second-Hand	CI
Chiang Fu-chung & Unnamed Uncle	Inside China	Cash & Coercion	Second-Hand	Military
Chung Min-chun	Inside China	Cash	Retired	CI
Yuan Hsiao-feng & Chen Wen-jen	Inside China	Cash	Second-Hand	Military
Wu Chang-yu	Inside China	Cash	Second-Hand	Stability/Dissidents
Chen Shu-lung	Inside China	Cash	Second-Hand	CI/Military/Stability
Liao Yi-tsung & Hu Kuang-tai	Inside China	Cash	Second-Hand	Military

Sources: *China Post*, *Taiwanese Central News Agency*, *China Times* [Taiwan], *BBC* and *Taipei Times*.

Conclusions

A few conclusions can be taken away from Taiwanese espionage cases over the last several years. First, not much has changed. The General Lo Hsien-che case, whom the Chinese recruited in Thailand and handled exclusively outside of China, remains an anomaly. Perhaps, because of the increased difficulty for Taiwanese authorities to uncover such operations or because the marginal gains for Chinese intelligence are not worth the increased costs of posting officers abroad, no similar espionage cases have emerged. Only one of the cases above, involving Chien Ching-kuo, Lu Chun-chun and Chang Chih-Hsin, involved even third-country meeting sites (not China, not Taiwan) ([Central News Agency](#) [Taiwan], October 18, 2013; [Taipei Times](#), January 5, 2013).

The cases here bear out the author's previous assessments that Chinese intelligence would continue to rely on Taiwanese agents who had interests inside the People's Republic and traveled back and forth regularly, despite the emergence of China's willingness and ability to run operations outside China and Taiwan. Most of the Chinese intelligence infrastructure is domestic, dominated by the sprawling apparatus of the MSS and its many subordinate departments at the provincial and local level ([China Brief](#), July 1, 2011).

The second lesson relates to what Chinese intelligence looks for in prospective foreign agents that they try to recruit. The seemingly universal presence of a Taiwanese businessman or retired official with interests on the mainland suggests Chinese intelligence focuses on people who can serve as bridges to the intelligence target. These are people whose economic livelihoods and careers depend upon China, making the threat implicit when intelligence officers approach them. Although this is more indirect than familiar Western forms of clandestine agent operations in which an intelligence officer recruits a source inside the target (e.g. a terrorist organization, a foreign ministry or a foreign military), China's approach to Taiwan still offers some operational benefits. Instead of expending a great deal of effort to identify key people inside Taiwan on their own, Chinese intelligence is putting the onus on its Taiwanese recruits, who already have existing relationships and, perhaps, even some idea of who among their government contacts could be approachable. By doing so, Chinese intelligence make their job easier by focusing on Taiwanese inside China over whom they can

develop leverage and meet away from the prying eyes of Taiwanese security agencies. Moreover, by virtue of their presence inside China and local registration requirements, Chinese intelligence already has access to a great deal of information about prospective Taiwanese agents prior to conducting any surveillance.

This approach also would be substantially lower risk than using a mainlander to attempt to recruit Taiwanese in sensitive positions inside Taiwan itself. A mainland intelligence officer caught in Taiwan while trying to recruit government officials could result in contractions of cross-strait openness; however, even if there are no policy repercussions, a Chinese intelligence officer would still be sitting in a Taiwanese jail. And Taiwan and the Kuomintang have a long, successful history of exploiting such people.

Critiquing Taiwan's counterintelligence posture could only prove the old security adage that there is no good time to catch a spy. With at least 20 distinct cases of espionage in the last decade, Taipei's friends in the United States have justifiable concerns about the security of U.S. defense systems sold to Taiwan. Former American Institute of Taiwan director Bill Stanton summed up these concerns at a conference last year when he said China's intelligence successes "undermine U.S. confidence in security cooperation with Taiwan" ([Taipei Times](#), November 15, 2013). Taiwan has made several substantial efforts to improve security—including trip reporting and routine polygraphs for personnel with sensitive access as well as boosting its counterintelligence staff—and serious offenders can, but not always, receive heavy prison sentences ([China Post](#), October 25, 2013; [Taipei Times](#), March 8, 2011; [Taipei Times](#), May 17, 2005). One of the few measures that might alleviate anxiety is the sharing of damage assessments to help make way for improved U.S.-Taiwan counterintelligence cooperation of the kind that reportedly helped close the General Lo Hsien-che case three years ago ([China Post](#), March 9, 2011; [Taipei Times](#), February 18, 2011). Without knowing the degree of severity of Taiwan's espionage losses, the U.S. government has no choice but to assume the worst case in spite of the many questions that could be raised about how much damage each spy did, such as whether technical information was transferred via documents or electronic files versus word of mouth ([China Brief](#), March 15, 2012).

Peter Mattis is a Fellow in the Jamestown Foundation's China Program and a PhD student in Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge. He served as Editor of China Brief from 2011 to 2013.

Regional Maneuvering Precedes Obama-Xi Meeting at APEC Summit

By Richard Weitz

As we approach this month's 22nd Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Beijing, relations between China and the United States stand at a tipping point. On the one hand, Beijing and Washington still cooperate on certain issues related to renewable energy, Islamist terrorism, global economic development and nonproliferation ([Xinhua](#), November 2). U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry recently praised China for cooperating with the United States on North Korea and other regional security issues ([Yonhap](#), November 3). On the other hand, Beijing and Washington continue to spar over China's promotion of regional institutions that exclude the United States, such as Beijing's new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and U.S. regional security policies that many in China describe as a form of containment. For example, recent Chinese media commentary, perhaps designed to prepare the intellectual battlefield for the summit, fault the United States for providing weapons and diplomatic support to mobilize China's neighbors into taking a harder line against Beijing. The summit will likely see a clash over the issue of whether these policies conflict with China's vision of the "new type" relationship it wants with the United States. China evidently wants Washington to show more deference to Beijing's desire for a sphere of influence in East Asia, which neither the United States nor its regional allies and friends will accept.

Arming Vietnam to Sabotage Its Reconciliation with China

Chinese analysts denounced the Obama administration's early October decision to end a 30-year-old arms embargo and permit Vietnam to purchase defense items to

strengthen its "maritime domain awareness and maritime security capabilities" ([U.S. Department of State](#), October 2). They saw the move as a U.S. attempt to disrupt an ongoing reconciliation between Vietnam and China. The two countries' ties have recovered following the acute escalation earlier this year of their territorial dispute over the Parcel Islands in the South China Sea after the state-owned China National Offshore Oil Company moved an oil rig to an area within Vietnam's declared 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone ([China Daily](#), October 8).

Li Kaisheng, an associate research fellow at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, claimed that the U.S. reversal came "at a critical moment in relations between Beijing and Hanoi" when "bilateral relations are beginning to get back on track," leading him to remark that it is "fair to doubt the timing and motivation of the U.S. policy shift" ([China Daily](#), October 9). In particular, "What it [Beijing] is concerned [about] is that the momentum toward improving Sino-Vietnamese relations and stabilizing the situation in the South China Sea may be reversed by the latest U.S. move" since "a Vietnam supported by U.S. weapons may be more reluctant to negotiate a peaceful settlement to territorial disputes." Li regretted that, in embracing the decision, Hanoi failed to understand that, "The weapons sales benefit the U.S., as it can easily push Vietnam to the front line of its strategy to contain China, stacking another chip in the great power game" ([China Daily](#), October 9). Wang Hui, a senior writer at the state-run *China Daily*, further believes Washington is trying to "beef up its military presence in the region" and enhance its ability "for interfering in regional disputes" ([China Daily](#), October 9). The official newspaper of the People's Liberation Army adds that the Pentagon is interested in restoring naval access to the Cham Rahn Bay, a strategic port that could be useful in controlling the South China Sea ([People's Liberation Army Daily](#), October 26).

Wang Hui warns Vietnam to "understand that it is only one small piece on the U.S.' strategic rebalancing chessboard" ([China Daily](#), October 9). Other Chinese writers claim that U.S. actions "put regional stability and peace in jeopardy" ([Global Times](#), October 9). For example, "conflicts triggered by U.S. arms sales will only hurt the two instead of the U.S." since, according to Li Kaisheng, the United States "will definitely not send troops to help Vietnam in the event of a conflict" since U.S. interests are not directly involved ([Global Times](#), October 9). When

they met on October 18, Fan Changlong, vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission, told Vietnamese Defense Minister Phung Quang Thanh, “It is in the interests of both China and Vietnam to get along well with each other and to handle differences appropriately” (*South China Morning Post*, October 19). Zhang Mingliang, a regional security expert at Jinan University, interpreted Fan’s remark as “reminding Hanoi not to try to curry favour with great powers like the United States, but to focus on developing good ties with China, because ‘a good neighbour is better than a distant brother’ ” (*South China Morning Post*, October 19). Although Vietnam might like to obtain U.S. security guarantees, differences over human rights and both countries’ fear of antagonizing Beijing will likely constrain important Vietnam-U.S. defense ties for years to come.

Missile Defenses Must Be Modest

Relations between China and South Korea (ROK) continue to improve due to their increasingly overlapping interests—deepening economic ties, Beijing’s irritation at how Pyongyang’s provocations are undermining China’s regional security policies, Seoul’s hope that Beijing will finally apply sufficient pressure on North Korea (DPRK) to reign in its wayward stepchild and a mutual unease at Japan’s expanding regional security ambitions. But the close military relationship between South Korea and the United States remains a recurring irritant for China.

The latest manifestation of this irritant is Chinese alarm at conflicting foreign media reports that South Koreans are prepared either to allow the United States to base Lockheed Martin’s Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), an advanced ballistic missile defense (BMD) system, in their country or that South Korea will purchase such a weapon for their own national missile defense system, which though aimed at lower-level threats, will remain interlinked with the BMD systems operated by the U.S. forces based on the Korean Peninsula. Both the South Korean and U.S. governments have denied that any formal discussions on the issue have occurred, but the Korean media suggests that some U.S. and ROK officials want the system. Although THAAD’s sophisticated 1,000-kilometer radar could help identify and track North Korea’s intermediate-range missiles, the system could in theory launch unarmed interceptors against any such Chinese ballistic missiles that happen to take off nearby.

Another Chinese concern is that South Korea might join the more robust missile defense architecture that Japan and the United States are building in the region, which may include some Indian and Australian participation (*Global Times*, October 9).

Back in May, a Xinhua commentary warned that, “It would be bad news for both South Korea and the region at large if Seoul should decide to answer the U.S. call and mount on its [BMD] chariot” (*Xinhua*, May 29). The author, Huang Yinjiazi, explained that, “Facing a very complicated and unstable situation in the Korean Peninsula, a missile defense system could become a blasting fuse rather than a guard, as it would most possibly trigger [the] DPRK, already feeling insecure because of the South Korea-U.S. alliance, to respond vehemently” (*Xinhua*, May 29). More recent Chinese media coverage has noted that the deployment issue remained unresolved (*Xinhua*, October 1). Perhaps in an attempt to influence the debate, *Global Times* published an article by a Korea University professor who argued that “the South Korean government has persistently denied the possibility that its missile defense could be incorporated into the U.S. system” because officials recognized that “Seoul’s official participation in U.S. missile defense could lead to the worst possible scenario for its national security, by being hustled onto the front lines in a major power conflict pitting the U.S. and Japan against China and Russia. This would make it impossible for Park to carry out her policy goals of cooperating with China while maintaining an alliance with the U.S. and bringing about change in North Korea” (*Global Times*, October 13). Influential Nanjing University professor Zhu Feng related a similar message in a South Korea media outlet, warning that, “Seoul should stay away from meddling in the strategic rivalry between China and the United States” (*Korea JoongAng Daily*, October 24).

Chinese objections to U.S. missile defenses extend to Japan, which is preparing to host a second advanced X-Band radar as well as two more U.S. Aegis BMD destroyers at the Yokosuka naval base (*Reuters*, October 23). On October 23, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying criticized unnamed countries that “have pushed forward anti-missile system deployment in the Asia-Pacific region to seek [their] unilateral security, which runs against regional stability and mutual trust as well as peace and stability in Northeast Asia.” This came a

few days after the United States deployed an Army Navy Transportable Radar Surveillance system, which can cue the Navy's ship-based Aegis missile defense systems and link them to THAAD batteries, at the Kyogamisaki military base in Kyoto Prefecture in western Japan. Calling on these countries to take a "broader picture of regional peace and stability," Hua admonished that, "Relevant countries should not take [their own security concerns] as excuses for damaging others' security interests" ([Xinhua](#), October 23). A week earlier, Xu Bu, China's deputy chief envoy to the Six-Party Talks, warned that the deployment of U.S. missile defenses in northeast Asia and Washington's strengthening of its military alliances with South Korea and Japan were making it harder to persuade North Korea to renounce its nuclear weapons program ([Yonhap](#), October 17).

Although Chinese objections to U.S. missile defenses have become more vocal in recent months, it is still noteworthy that Beijing's stance on U.S. BMD is less alarmist and vocal than that of Russia, even though China's nuclear forces are smaller than either Russia or the United States, suggesting that Chinese policy makers either appreciate the limited goals and technological capabilities of the U.S. BMD programs or remain confident that China can deter U.S. threats through means other than threatening a nuclear second strike, such as by threatening to disrupt the U.S. economy by cyber weapons.

Revised Japan-U.S. Defense Guidelines Directed Against Beijing

Chinese analysts also vehemently attacked the mid-October interim report of the Japanese and U.S. governments describing how Tokyo and Washington were revising their defense cooperation guidelines to permit a wider range of joint geographical and functional activities. Zhou Yongsheng, a professor of Japan studies at China Foreign Affairs University, describes the recent revisions as effectively annulling the ban on collective defense and empowering Japan and the United States to cooperate in defense of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea, which are administered by Tokyo but claimed by Beijing. Zhou argues that, while Washington is seeking to avoid a direct clash with China over the East China Sea, Tokyo is using the revision of the defense guidelines "to 'pre-secure' U.S. military support should there be a military clash over the Diaoyu Islands" ([China](#)

[Daily](#), October 13). The *People's Liberation Army Daily* published an article by Liu Qiang, warning that the United States was "inviting calamities by nurturing a tiger" in the form of a remilitarized Japan that Washington could find difficult to control ([PLA Daily](#), October 9). Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei cautioned that, while Beijing recognized the reasons why Japan and the United States established a limited military partnership during the Cold War, China would not want to see the alliance transform into a regional or global institution: "The Japan-U.S. alliance is a bilateral arrangement made under special historical conditions. It should not go beyond its bilateral scope or undermine third parties' interests, including China's" ([Xinhua](#), October 9).

In addition to closely studying the results of the Xi-Obama dialogue, observers of the APEC summit will watch closely to see whether China and Japan can set aside their recent tensions and address some of the issues that divide them: If not their disputed islands, than at least some of the troublesome historical issues of which the United States is not a party (see also [China Brief](#), October 23).

Who Is Manipulating Whom?

These Chinese analysts see the United States and its Asian partners as trying to use and maneuver one another against China. In their view, the United States is trying to maintain its "rebalance" in Asia and global superiority by enlisting local powers as Washington's proxies, specifically to manage and constrain China's rise. They routinely dismiss U.S. assertions that its diplomatic interventions, arms sales and alliance-building activities are not aimed at China. For example, they see the United States as de facto siding with Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines and other countries against China's maritime claims, as building up its regional military power under the guise of defending allies against North Korea and as selling arms to Japanese right-wing militants and Vietnamese socialists but not to China, which remains under a U.S. arms and high-technology embargo ([People's Daily Online](#), October 10). Meanwhile, Asian countries are trying to secure U.S. intervention to challenge China.

Su Xiaohui, a deputy director at the China Institute of International Studies, describes how this discourse is at play in the way Japan and the United States are expanding

their defense cooperation guidelines. He warns that Tokyo is seeking “to dismantle the postwar international order, and especially those rules in the Constitution of Japan maintaining restrictions on Japanese military development and self-defense,” by securing U.S. support for its goals against the objections of China, South Korea and other countries. But the United States, “facing internal and external problems,” wants to empower Japan as “a new ‘international police force’ and a cheerleader for ‘neo-interventionism’ ” by Washington against other countries. In his view, whereas previous revisions aimed to allow Japan to cooperate with the United States more against the Soviet Union and then North Korea, “China is treated as an assumed enemy in this revision” ([People’s Daily Online](#), October 13).

PRC analysts believe that, through their exchanges, both parties embolden each other into taking actions that damage their common interests in having better relations with China. They deny that “Beijing has become ‘assertive’ on territorial issues in recent years” and insist that China is taking “compensatory” actions in response to “wrongdoings” by other parties and that Beijing “stands ready to negotiate at any time” ([Global Times](#), October 9). Yet, they warn that “China will take further steps if these countries don’t put a stop to their actions” and that “[any] insistence on a so-called ‘internationalized’ solution that drags in an irrelevant country will only push solutions further out of reach. The victims of the resulting disturbances to regional stability and peace will be the countries of the region” ([Global Times](#), October 9).

Many Chinese analysts frame these U.S. actions as designed to bolster the U.S. containment strategy against China and prevent realization of the “new type of great power relations” proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping. Claiming that Obama told Foreign Minister Wang Yi that the United States would support this “new type” framework at the upcoming APEC summit, Xu Lifan argues that Washington is violating the principles of “mutual respect, no conflict and mutual benefit” that should underpin the “essence of the new Sino-U.S. relationship” ([People’s Daily Online](#), October 10). Similarly, Li claims that these U.S. “duplicity tricks” violate the principles of “mutual respect, non-conflict, non-confrontation, equality and mutual benefit” ([China Daily](#), October 8).

Of course, the Obama administration has been careful to avoid using the Chinese formulation since, among other problems, it implies a spheres-of-influence arrangement for Asia that neither the American people nor their Asian allies can accept. But the president’s team has been forewarned that their Chinese hosts plan to hammer home the argument that U.S. policies are violating agreed principles of mutual conduct at the APEC meeting.

Richard Weitz is a Senior Fellow and Director of the Hudson Institute’s Center for Political Military Analysis as well as an Adjunct Senior Fellow at the Center for New American Security. The author would like to thank the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for supporting his nonproliferation research and Qin Lei, Man Ching Lam, Tzu-Hsuan Li, Zibao Liu, Qifei Zhangand, and Ran Zheng for research assistance with this article.

A Family Divided: The CCP's Central Ethnic Work Conference

By James Leibold

For over a decade, academics and policymakers have been engaged in an unusually public and at times *ad hominem* debate over the future direction of China's ethnic policies. [1] A group of maverick Chinese thinkers claim current policies engender disunity and could cause China to implode along its ethnic seams. Many others contend China's diversity is its greatest strength and call for new legal provisions aimed at protecting ethnic cultures, autonomy and identities. The stakes have increased markedly since Chinese President Xi Jinping took power in November 2013, with hundreds of violent incidents revealing obvious fault-lines in ethnic relations across the country.

The recently convened Central Ethnic Work Conference sought to resolve this disagreement: "to unite thinking, clarify tasks and objectives and steady confidence and resolve" (*Xinhua*, September 29). The two-day meeting was chaired by Xi Jinping and attended by the entire Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) (with the exception of Zhang Gaoli, who was overseas) and over a thousand other leaders in Beijing on September 28–29. The meeting received extensive coverage in the Chinese state-run media, including four front-page editorials in the *People's Daily*, yet virtually no attention in the international media.

In his speech at the conference, Xi stressed the need to "resolutely walk the correct road of China's unique solution to the ethnic question." He spoke for the first time about adhering to the "eight persistences" (*bage jianchi*)—a typically awkward formulation that seeks to juggle contradictory positions within China's ethnic policy community by placing minority autonomy side-by-side with safeguarding the unity of the motherland (*Qinshi*, October 13). [2] As such, the meeting produced some subtle rhetorical adjustments while failing to bridge the differences in opinion or pioneer any bold new direction in policy. In fact, both sides in the debate are already using Xi's speech to advance their own positions.

Xi Put His Own Stamp on Ethnic Work

On the evening of September 29, the *People's Daily* broke the news of this important gathering on its official Weixin social-media account with a post entitled: "Xi Jinping's 'Fresh Thinking' on Ethnic Work" (*NetEase*, September 29). The report highlighted several "completely new angles" emerging from this Party confab; yet it incorrectly identified the meeting as the third Central Ethnic Work Conference, mentioning the two gatherings convened by former Chinese president Jiang Zemin in 1992 and 1999 but omitting the last conference held in 2005 under the leadership of Xi's predecessor, former Chinese president Hu Jintao (*Xinhua*, May 27, 2005). [3]

The oversight appears to have been accidental, with subsequent reports including Hu's conference. However, it does highlight Xi's determination to put forward his own formula for achieving ethnic harmony. Like other policy areas, he has staked his personal authority on the management of this contentious and sensitive policy arena. In the face of the current spate of ethnic violence—which reached the political center in October 2012 when a gasoline-laden car exploded in front of the Forbidden City in Beijing—Xi wants to look strong and decisive on ethnic issues.

In his first two years in office, Xi Jinping has chaired no fewer than eight gatherings of the Politburo or PBSC on ethnic work, including this May's Second Central Work Forum on Xinjiang (*China Brief*, June 19), while also personally touring ethnic minority communities in Gansu (February 2013), western Hunan (November 2013), Inner Mongolia (January 2014) and Xinjiang (April 2014). The State Ethnic Affairs Commission (SEAC) has even created a special website to highlight Xi and other PBSC members' activities on ethnic affairs (*SEAC*).

For all of the Party's public emphasis on their efforts, none of Xi's speeches on ethnic policy have been made public. The official Xinhua New Agency provides summaries of key meetings as well as select excerpts, leaving analysts to piece together a range of inconsistent and often divergent messages. Xinhua's summary of the recent Central Ethnic Work Conference is a consensus document: one that pastes over deep divisions on how best to end the current cycle of violence and engender harmonious ethnic relations.

Carefully Walking the Chinese Road

In his speech, Xi Jinping stressed the need for patience and confidence with the current approach. Like previous pronouncements, the conference affirmed the “correctness” of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) ethnic theory and policies since 1949. “Ethnic relations in our country are generally harmonious,” Xi is quoted as saying, “and our country’s ethnic work has been successful” ([Xinhua](#), September 29). Yet, the conference summary also speaks about the “distinctive features” of ethnic work in a “new stage.” On the one hand, the Party must “unflinchingly walk the correct road of China’s unique solution to the ethnic question,” yet also “pioneer new thinking” and “forge new methods.” This reflects the Party’s never-ending quest to adapt outdated policies to new conditions without abandoning outright their predecessors’ policies and pet-slogans.

Much of the ethnic policy debate has revolved around the most appropriate models for China. Critics of current policies, like Peking University sociologist Ma Rong and Tsinghua University economist Hu Angang, argue China’s Soviet-inspired policies possess all the preconditions for state disintegration (strong ethnic consciousness, ethnic homelands in the form of autonomous regions and ethnic leadership), thus creating the possibility that China will share the fate of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

These reformers call for the abandonment of the current “hors d’oeuvres-style” policies and the adoption of the “melting pot” model that has proven successful, in their eyes, in countries like the United States, India, Brazil and Singapore. They make it clear that they would like to see a “weakening” (*danhua*) of ethnic identity and the eventual elimination of ethnic-based preferences and the system of regional ethnic autonomy. Ma Rong recently referred to regional autonomy as “a viable option for a period of transition, but in the long run it has certain weaknesses” (*Asian Ethnicity*, January 9). And one of the Party’s top ethnic policy advisors, Zhu Weiqun, recently hinted there might come a day when the system outgrows its usefulness ([Xinhua](#), July 28).

Yet, as recent events in Ferguson, Missouri, demonstrate, the melting pot has failed to eliminate ethnic problems in countries like United States, a point that Hao Shiyuan,

the influential deputy secretary general of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), has long stressed in opposition to the reformers (*Global Times*, August 22, 2012). Hao and other members of the ethnic establishment are already talking up the fact that the system of regional ethnic autonomy was included amongst Xi’s eight persistencies ([Xinhua](#), September 30; [Xinhua](#), October 23).

According to the “guiding document” (*ganglingxingwenxian*) the SEAC issued for studying Xi’s conference speech, “Western countries have not developed any miraculous cure in their attempt to solve ethnic problems, and some developing countries have also failed to solve the ethnic problems after imitating the West” (*Qinshi*, October 16). The document paraphrases Xi as stating the system of regional ethnic autonomy exceeds not only the Soviet model of “national self-determination” but also previous Chinese approaches such as “the grand union” (*dayitong*) and “rule according to customs” (*yinsu erzhi*), and thus forms a fundamental part of the Party’s innovative and pioneering approach to ethnic contradictions.

The SEAC document, written by its director, Wang Zhengwei, admits a loss of confidence in the current approach among some Party members and differences of opinion. He refers to Xi’s speech as a “summary determination offering the final word” on this disagreement, and a “lofty judgment” aimed at “clearing up muddled thinking and providing a tranquilizer for the cadres and masses of each ethnic group so they can sturdy the foundation of ethnic unity and progress.” Wang flatly declares: “It’s time to stop suggesting that the system of ethnic autonomy should be abolished!” Rather, everyone should “consolidate their energies in order to carry out their work effectively” while “strengthening confidence in our own road” (*Qinshi*, October 16).

Yet, as another editorial in *Qinshi* noted after the meeting (*Qinshi*, October 13), Xi also spoke about the importance of the “two integrations” when it comes to “persisting and perfecting” the system of regional ethnic autonomy: the mutual link between autonomy and unity, as well as ethnic and regional factors. Here Xi seems to validate the concerns of those who argue regional autonomy and minority preferences hinder the free flow of capital, goods and people, thus undermining a single national market and shared national identity. Xi’s speech leaves open

the possibility of a future restructuring of provincial-level administrative structures, as recommended in Hu Angang's call for a "second generation of ethnic policies" (*China Brief*, July 6, 2012). Some influential Party members have argued in the past, for example, that Xinjiang and Tibet should be divided in two in order to dilute ethnic influences and conflicts ([Aisixiang](#), April 15, 2004).

In the Spirit of Unity

Unlike his immediate predecessors' narrow focus on economic development for improving ethnic relations, Xi Jinping is harking back to Maoist and Republican times in emphasizing the "spiritual," "political," and "cultural" basis of interethnic harmony and national unity. "Cultural identity," Xi is quoted as saying at the Central Ethnic Work Conference, "is the foundation and long-term basis for strengthening the great unity of the Chinese nation; we must build a shared spiritual homeland and energetically foster a shared consciousness of the Chinese nation" ([Xinhua](#), October 9).

The conference affirmed the need to accelerate development in ethnic areas with a special focus on addressing livelihood issues such as employment and education. At the same time, Xi stressed that these "material" concerns need to be complemented with a new focus on "spiritual" issues. Some minority cadres interpret this as paying closer attention to the religious needs of ethnic minorities ([Xinhua](#), October 23); yet, there is clear evidence that Xi Jinping shares the concerns of Ma Rong and others about the weak identification of some ethnic minorities toward the nation. National identity, Xi has often made clear, should always trump narrow religious and ethnic affiliations.

Since coming to power, Xi Jinping and other PBSC members have spoken repeatedly of the need to strengthen the "four identifications" (*sige rentong*)—identification with the motherland; the Chinese nation; Chinese culture; and the socialist road with Chinese characteristics—among the ethnic minorities. This theme again featured prominently at the conference and marks a significant departure from Hu Jintao's approach to ethnic work. Economic development is no panacea for ethnic problems, CASS researcher Ma Dazheng told *Xinhua*. Rather, interethnic "mingling" (*jiarong*) is also required to forge a collective sense of national belonging ([Xinhua](#),

October 23).

In fact, interethnic "contact, exchange and mingling" has emerged as the new "guiding principal" (*tifa*) for ethnic work under Xi Jinping. Recent Chinese media reports highlight efforts to boost interethnic marriage rates, build mix-residency communities, establish integrated schools and classrooms, as well as more diverse workplaces through export-labour schemes that lure Uyghurs and Tibetans to work alongside their Han compatriots in coastal cities ([People's Daily](#), September 2; [Tianshan](#), September 14; [Xinhua](#), September 15; [Southern Daily](#), October 30).

China's history, Xi argued in a 2011 speech on the importance of studying Chinese history, reveals a continual process of interethnic mingling and fusion in the pursuit of a "all-under-heaven grand harmony" (*tianxia datong*) ([Phoenix](#), September 5, 2011). Zhu Weiqun, the Director of the CPPCC's Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee, recently quoted former Chinese premier Zhou Enlai as saying in 1957: "If assimilation is one ethnic group using force to destroy another ethnic group, this is reactionary; yet if assimilation is each ethnic group naturally fusing together in search of common prosperity, this is progress" ([Xinhua](#), July 28). "Mingling is not Hanification," a *Xinhua* editorial asserts, "as it does not negate minority history and culture" ([Xinhua](#), September 16).

At the Central Ethnic Work Conference, the goal of ethnic blending was coupled with "respect for differences and tolerance of diversity," revealing again this attempt to balance competing concerns. There is a growing realization that mingling might increase ethnic tensions and conflict, especially in cities, and thus the importance of "urban ethnic work" was accentuated, with the conference calling on city officials to adopt neither a "close-door mentality" nor a "laissez-faire attitude" toward the minority floating population ([Xinhua](#), September 29).

All in the Family?

As elsewhere, the family is a frequent metaphor for the nation in China. "The relationship between the Chinese nation and each ethnic group is like that of a large family and its members," Xi told the conference, "and relations between different ethnic groups is like those of different members of this large family." While

kinfolk might disagree or even fight from time-to-time, they share a common bond in history and blood, rendering them a “community of shared destiny” (*mingyun gongtongti*), according to a front-page editorial in the Party’s mouthpiece (*People’s Daily*, October 10). “Through the long revolutionary struggle and resistance to outside invasion, the blood of each ethnic group has come together and fused in bonds of life and death, flesh and blood, weal and woe, so they are now reflected in the collective belonging and identification of all ethnic groups with the Chinese nation” (*Qiusbi*, July 31).

Yet like an internal family feud, the ethnic policy debate will continue in the wake of the Central Ethnic Work Conference, with both sides finding new ground to push forward their positions. Reformers will likely look for more concrete proposals to spur mingling and cultural fusion: the removal of administrative barriers and new initiatives aimed at increasing interethnic mobility, marriage, schooling and cohabitation. They will likely seek to use adjustments to the household registration system, legal and administrative reforms and the state’s ambitious urbanization plan as springboards for building national cohesion and weakening minority autonomy and identity.

At the same time, those inside the vast ethnic bureaucracy will continue to rally around the system of regional ethnic autonomy, which is a formidable obstacle to any attempt to implement a “second generation of ethnic policies.” Yet, they are unlikely to gain any ground on their call for the passage of more detailed regulations and rules for implementing and strengthening regional autonomy. In an article celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy, Wang Zhengwei pointed out “the fundamental aim [of the system] is to achieve and safeguard state uniformity and national unity” (*People’s Daily*, September 3).

Both sides agree the “Chinese family” must remain united. And while they will continue to probe the effectiveness of current policies, few dare question the Party’s authority. As clan patriarch, the Party remains the final arbitrator of who and what can be said on behalf of the nation, as the recent silencing of moderate Uyghur academic Ilham Tohti forcefully reminds us. The “China Dream” is the collective dream of all Chinese people, Xi Jinping consistently stresses, meaning restive minorities and outspoken critics must ultimately yield before the

motherland if China hopes to achieve the great revival of the Chinese nation and race by 2049.

James Leibold is Senior Lecturer in Politics and Asian Studies at La Trobe University in Melbourne Australia. He is the author most recently of [Ethnic Policy in China: Is Reform Inevitable?](#) (Honolulu: East West Center, 2013).

Notes

1. For an overview of this debate, see: Mark Elliott, “The case of the missing indigene: Debate over the ‘Second-Generation’ Ethnic Policy,” *The China Journal* 73 (January 2015): 1–28; Ma Rong, “Reflections on the debate on China’s ethnic policy: my reform proposal and their critics,” *Asian Ethnicity* (2014): 1–10; James Leibold, *Ethnic policy in China: Is reform inevitable?* (Honolulu: East West Center, 2013); Barry Sautman, “Paved with good intentions: Proposals to curb minority rights and their consequences for China,” *Modern China* 38:1 (2012): 10–39.
2. The “eight persistences” (*bage jianchi*) are: the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party; China’s unique socialist road; safeguarding the unity of the motherland; the uniform equality of all ethnic groups; the perfection of the system of regional ethnic autonomy; striving for mutual unity and prosperity for all ethnic groups; forging an ideological basis for an integrated Chinese nation; and governing the country according to law.
3. The message was deleted from the *People’s Daily’s* Weixin feed but remains on the Internet in the form of a September 29 article published by Pengpai News in Shanghai, which reproduced the entire Weixin message, and has subsequently been posted on several websites, including an information portal ([Zhongguo minzu zongjiao wang](#)) managed by the SEAC.

Sino-Indian Joint Military Exercises: Out of Step

By Sudha Ramachandran

The Indian and Chinese militaries will participate in joint counter-terrorism exercises on November 16–27, in the western Indian city of Pune. The exercises will quickly follow Chinese President Xi Jinping’s three-day visit to India in September, which was intended as an economic summit with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but was overshadowed by a tense standoff between the two militaries for over a fortnight at Chumar in Ladakh along their disputed border. While the decision to go ahead with the exercises as planned in November is welcomed by Indian analysts and military officers as a signal of some calming in bilateral tensions, there is deep skepticism in India over the benefits of joint military exercises with China.

The upcoming exercises are the fourth since the “Hand-in-Hand” bilateral military exercises began in 2007. The two militaries have exercised together so far at Kunming and Chengdu, China in 2007 and 2013, respectively, and in Belgaum, India in 2008. The Kunming joint exercise generated considerable interest in the Indian media in 2007, as this was the first time that the Indian and Chinese armies, which fought a war in 1962, exercised together. Prior to 2007, only the two navies had participated in joint maneuvers. Interaction between the two armies was previously limited to border meetings, joint mountaineering expeditions and attending courses at each other’s military training facilities, making the Kunming military exercises in 2007 historic. At the outset, some in the Indian army were cautious in their assessment of the exercises’ likely impact, emphasizing that it would “not lead to any settlement of the border issue,” but the general mood was positive ([Outlook](#), December 10, 2007). It was viewed as a sign of “thawing relations,” with some even hailing it as marking a return to the Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai (in Hindi, “Indians and Chinese are brothers”) phase of Sino-Indian relations in the 1950s ([The Tribune](#), December 20, 2007; [Rediff](#), December 20, 2007).

However, seven years and three military exercises later, Indian skeptics appear vindicated. Indian security analysts now have marginal expectations of the process in building

confidence or enhancing counter-terrorism cooperation with China.

Underlying Motives

The joint military exercises were conceived primarily as a confidence-building measure (CBM) between the two militaries, especially in the context of the mutual suspicions that have clouded Sino-Indian bilateral interaction for decades (Author’s interview, Senior officer of the Indian Army’s South-Western Command, New Delhi, October 22). Although Sino-Indian relations have improved in recent decades with the two sides cooperating in an array of fields, the 1962 war continues to cast a long shadow over the relationship. The dispute over the Line of Actual Control (LAC)—their de facto border and the cause of the 1962 war, as well as the bloody skirmishes at Nathu La in 1967 and Sumdorong Chu Valley in 1987—remains unresolved. [1] In the absence of a commonly delineated LAC and no shared understanding of where it lies, even routine troop activity—patrolling, road repair, and constructing border posts—has resulted in the two sides accusing each other of incursions. The LAC has frequently bristled with tension.

To prevent escalation of tensions along the LAC and to ease mutual suspicions, India and China established a carefully crafted architecture of CBMs, especially in the military field. In May 2006, the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding providing for “joint military exercises and/or training programs in the fields of search and rescue, anti-piracy, counter-terrorism, and other areas of mutual interest.” [2] The counter-terrorism focus of the joint military exercises was announced subsequently ([Daily News and Analyses](#), June 6, 2007).

Beijing requested that counter-terrorism be the focus of its joint military exercises with India, following China’s military exercises with other nations ([China Brief](#), July 27, 2007). The roots of this “singular focus on counter-terrorism” can be traced to the Chinese government’s concern over secessionist aspirations among ethnic minorities dominant in the border regions of the country, primarily Tibet and Xinjiang. Determined to stamp out the unrest and secessionist aspirations in these regions, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is eager to learn from other militaries’ operational techniques for countering terrorism. In this context, the PLA is interested in drawing

from the Indian military's rich experience in tackling terrorism and insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast (Author's Interview, Col. R. Hariharan, a former military intelligence specialist in the Indian Army, Chennai, October 23).

Despite doubts on the practical value of counter-terrorism exercises with China, Delhi went along with the terrorism focus of the exercises, hoping perhaps that this would nudge China into expanding cooperation with India on terrorism-related issues. Between January 2001, when the Chinese government first indicated willingness "to cooperate with India in countering this menace [terrorism] to regional security and stability" and 2006–2007, when the two governments were discussing joint counter-terrorism exercises, there was some progress ([The Hindu](#), January 14, 2001). The two sides were engaging in annual talks within a counter-terrorism dialogue mechanism set up in 2002. Besides, concern in China was growing over the religious radicalization of Uighurs in Xinjiang and Pakistan's role in this process. These developments opened up the possibility, however small, of some empathy, if not cooperation, from China over India's troubles with terrorism emanating from Pakistan. Indeed, such hopes may have played a role in India giving in to some Chinese requests for counter-terrorism exercises in the hope that Beijing would reciprocate. [3]

For India, participating in joint military exercises with China helped counter criticism at home and abroad over its excessive tilt toward the United States from 2005 to 2007. India's interest in the Quadrilateral Initiative, an "axis of democracies" proposed by the Japanese government that was to include India, Japan, the United States and Australia, and India's hosting of a massive naval exercise in 2007 in the Bay of Bengal involving these countries, caused concerns: Left parties at home argued that India was being drawn into the United States' orbit, and Beijing alleged that these moves were aimed at containing China. The Sino-Indian joint military exercises were useful to counter such criticism ([Frontline](#), September 8, 2007; [Outlook](#), December 10, 2007; [The Hindu](#), June 14, 2007).

Building Confidence?

Despite the joint exercises' origins as an important part of bilateral CBM measures to tackle mutual suspicions over the border dispute, the exercises have not only failed

to prevent or even reduce escalating tensions along the LAC—there has been an increase in the frequency and magnitude of flare-ups here in recent years—but they have fallen victim to the border dispute itself. For example, India suspended the joint military exercises and other exchanges between 2010 and 2013 when Beijing refused a visa to the Indian army's Northern Area Commander, Lt. Gen. B. S. Jaiswal, in 2010 because he "controlled" a "disputed area," Jammu and Kashmir ([The Hindu](#), August 27, 2010). Clearly, the border dispute determines the fate of the joint exercises, rather than the joint exercises contributing to easing suspicions over the border. According to one retired Indian military officer, given the "limited say" the Indian military has in determining the bilateral CBMs, even on security and strategic issues, and the "peripheral role" that the joint exercises play in the larger confidence building between the two countries, the joint exercises are more of a "barometer of the progress of CBMs" between the two countries, rather than a major influence in shaping it (Author's Interview, Col. R. Hariharan, a former military intelligence specialist in the Indian Army, Chennai, October 23).

The utility of the exercises is greatly hindered by the size and deployment zone of the participants. While the joint exercises have contributed to building trust between participants at a personal level between the two militaries, evident in the bonhomie and camaraderie visible at the exercises, the troops participating are not actually those deployed at the border, meaning tensions and mistrust along the border have yet to be addressed ([The Hindu](#), December 27, 2007). Furthermore, the number of troops participating in each exercise is too small to even begin having a positive impact on the two armies—the upcoming exercise, for instance, is expected to include around 130 soldiers from each side. Unlike the joint exercises between the Indian and Chinese navies, which are more substantial in content as well as productive in results, the joint army exercises have been disappointing so far. [4]

Elephant in the Room

As for facilitating learning from each other's tactics and best practices, the value of the Sino-Indian counter-terrorism exercises is limited by their basic content. Compared with the content, frequency, regularity and magnitude of

its joint military exercises with Russia, China's counter-terrorism exercises with India are miniscule and marginal. The low-level counter-terrorism exercises with India are a reflection of the limited cooperation on terrorism-related issues between the two countries, which is an outcome of the complex India-China-Pakistan relationship.

While China and Pakistan are close allies and have what their governments refer to as an "all-weather relationship," India's relations with Pakistan, in contrast, have been acrimonious, especially over Islamabad's support and sanctuary to anti-India terrorist groups. On terrorism-related issues which impact India, China has preferred to stand by Pakistan. For instance, Beijing repeatedly blocked United Nations Security Council (UNSC) action against the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), a front of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). The LeT, which is a Pakistan-backed terrorist organization that the UN outlawed in 2002, has carried out several attacks in India. It was only after the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, where the JuD and LeT's involvement was laid bare, that China, fearing global isolation on the issue, voted in the UNSC to declare it a terrorist organization and impose sanctions on its leaders ([First Post](#), August 2, 2011).

China is unlikely to cooperate with India on terrorism-related issues, as this would "impinge on its 'special relationship' with Pakistan," according to an Indian terrorism analyst. Indeed, Beijing has been careful to ensure that its joint counter-terrorism exercises with India do not ruffle feathers in Islamabad. The venue of the upcoming exercises was originally Bhatinda in the northern Indian state of Punjab, which borders Pakistan. The location was changed on China's request, as Beijing was concerned that Bhatinda's proximity to Pakistan's border would send the "wrong message to its all weather friend" (Author's Interview, Ajai Sahni, Executive Director, Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi, October 22). This "sensitivity" to its relationship with Pakistan rather than to India's concerns has prevented counter-terrorism cooperation from deepening.

Some Indian analysts are drawing attention to China's unease with Pakistan in the context of growing evidence of terrorist groups in Xinjiang receiving sanctuary and support from Pakistan. They point to cracks in the Sino-Pakistani relationship opening up space for greater

Sino-Indian counter-terrorism co-operation ([First Post](#), October 19). However, this is unlikely. China's traditional approach to Pakistan's role in Xinjiang has been to resolve these issues directly with Islamabad. Beijing seems "confident" of this approach, as it has yielded results: On several occasions, Pakistan has picked up and handed over Uyghur terrorists to China (Author's Interview, Ajai Sahni, New Delhi, October 22). Consequently, the possibility of the joint counter-terrorism exercises leading to operational cooperation, especially in the case of terrorist attacks that have Pakistani linkages and origins, seems rather remote.

The Road Ahead

India's approach to counter-terrorism cooperation with China is pragmatic. While Delhi would have liked more meaningful joint counter-terrorism exercises and more robust cooperation, it is aware that these are unrealistic expectations given the Sino-Pakistan relationship. Therefore, Delhi has set its sights low and India has not challenged China's reluctance to cooperate publicly on counter-terrorism issues. India has also not pressed China to publicly acknowledge Pakistan's support of terrorist groups. Yet, India hopes that China will prod Pakistan in private to halt such support, driving India to continue its counter-terrorism cooperation with China, including the largely symbolic and marginally fruitful counter-terrorism exercises.

The joint military exercises, along with other military CBMs, were put in place to ease mutual suspicion and build confidence. Yet the absence of confidence on multiple fronts has resulted in the two sides putting in place weak, insubstantial and ineffective joint exercises. Thus the joint exercises are caught in a dangerous cycle of suspicion. The process needs to be institutionalized, and Delhi and Beijing can draw inspiration and ideas from the far more successful Sino-Russian joint military exercises. The joint military exercises could facilitate a more potent CBM if the two sides act to step up its content, participation and frequency. Most importantly, joint exercises and other CBMs can only do so much to prevent conflict escalation. The underlying cause for the tension—the border dispute—needs to be addressed, as even the most robust CBMs cannot be a substitute for a long-term resolution of the border dispute.

Dr. Sudha Ramachandran is an independent researcher and journalist based in Bangalore, India. She has written extensively on South Asian peace and conflict, political and security issues for The Diplomat, Asia Times and Geopolitics.

the joint army exercises.

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Notes

1. The two sides also differ on how long the LAC is. While India puts the length at 4,056 kilometers (km), China holds the length of the disputed boundary to be approximately 2,000 km, which implies exclusion of the section that is part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.
2. For an analytical overview of the Sino-Indian bilateral agreements and CBMs, see Jabin T. Jacob, "Bilateral Agreements and Sino-Indian Confidence-Building Measures," in Dipankar Banerjee and Jabin T. Jacob (eds), *Military Confidence-Building and India-China Relations: Fighting Distrust* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2013), pp. 151–161).
3. For instance, India had objected to holding the 2007 joint counter-terrorism exercises in Chengdu. The Chengdu military region is responsible for security in Tibet and adjoining regions and India did not want the counter-terrorism exercises to appear focused on Tibet. However, India agreed to hold the 2008 exercises in Chengdu.
4. Relations between the Indian and Chinese navies have been far less acrimonious in the past. This is partly because the navies played a defensive role in the 1962 war, unlike the two armies and air forces, which engaged in combat. However, this less hostile past and the present cooperation in joint exercises must not be over-stated, as rivalry between the two navies is rising rapidly. The navies have benefitted from the fact that maritime trade is central to the economies of the two countries. The need to secure sea lanes from piracy and maritime terrorism has strengthened the possibility of operational cooperation between the two navies. This has not been the case with