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In a Fortnight

After the Tour: Xi Jinping’s Southeast Asian Diplomacy

By Peter Wood

Even for China’s unusually well-traveled president, Xi Jinping, the past month has seen a large number of important visits, culminating in the Asia Pacific Economic Partnership (APEC) Economic Leaders Meeting in Manila. Xi conducted his first state visits to Vietnam and Singapore, which included the historic face-to-face with Taiwan’s President Ma Ying-jeou, as part of a flurry of meetings on his way to the G20 Summit in Antalya, Turkey. Singapore and Vietnam represent an important legs of China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative, and are part of a region where tensions have the biggest chance of derailing China’s plans. Of the meetings, Xi Jinping’s discussions with Southeast



Chinese President Xi Jinping arrives in Hanoi (Credit: China News)

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Asian leaders—during the state visits and at APEC—are likely to have the greatest meaning for the region.

China is shoring up its relations with Southeast Asian states, attempting to reassure them of China's peaceful intentions and undercut the emerging alliances that are tying states like Vietnam and the Philippines closer to each other, and to outside balancers, such as Japan and the United States. *People's Daily* described the state visits to Singapore and Vietnam as representing a “new height of regional relations,” built on more than a decade of major investments by Singapore (such as a development zone in Suzhou) and close trade and financial relations with Vietnam ([People's Daily Online](#), November 4).

As Xi attends APEC this week, some of the results of this diplomatic offensive are already in evidence. While this year's location for the meeting might have suggested an opportunity to discuss the biggest issue of contention between Beijing and Manila, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Hong Lei announced that the issue of territorial disputes in the South China Sea would be tabled for the APEC summit ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs \[China\]](#), November 13). In response, U.S. President Barack Obama made a point of reaffirming the United States' military alliance with Philippines, which recent saw the transfer of two naval vessels to bolster Philippine maritime capabilities ([Global Times](#), November 18).

Unlike the Philippines, whose use of international arbitration and close relations with the U.S. has made their position on the South China Sea less tractable, Singapore and Vietnam, among others, represent opportunities for greater Chinese influence in the region. China uses cultural ties and calls for investment by overseas Chinese in its relationship with Singapore, and communist ideology, where it shares a close “Party-to-Party” relationship with the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). These

“softer” routes have allowed China to sidestep popular national discontent or more general unease about Chinese assertiveness.

Vietnam, then, is in the unusual position of having close governmental relations despite popular animosity and strong national positions in conflict with Chinese territorial claims. Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Le Hai Binh, for example, recently stated that:

The declaration of the so-called “Sansha City Administration” on the completion of two lighthouses on Vietnamese features in the Hoang Sa Archipelago [Paracel Islands] is yet another serious violation of Viet Nam's sovereignty... China's actions in Viet Nam's Hoang Sa Archipelago, in any form and on any purpose, are null and void” ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs \[Vietnam\]](#), October 13).

Moreover, Vietnam has committed to building a strategic partnership—which includes defense and security cooperation—with the Philippines ([Tuoi Tre News](#), October 22). With major city streets named after a number of national heroes and heroines who threw off successive waves of Chinese domination, the Communist Party of Vietnam will have to tread a fine line to maintain, as put by China, the “deep, traditional friendship” between the two nations ([People's Daily Online](#), November 4).

Although the focus of President Xi's speeches during this diplomatic sprint has been the economic benefits of relations with China—particularly the role Southeast Asian nations can play in the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” initiative, he did not shy away from security issues. During his subsequent stop in Singapore, Xi restated China's claim that “since ancient times the islands of the South China Sea have been Chinese territory” in a speech at Singapore's National University ([Xinhua Online](#), November 7). China's non-negotiable stance on territory and need to expand trade lock it into a stance that combines confrontational rhetoric with offers of enhanced trade. In several cases in the region, such a stance might still pay off.

Xi's visits take place against a background of deeper Chinese engagement throughout Southeast Asia. Thailand, for example, represents a tremendous opportunity for China. Its military junta is lukewarm in its relations with the United States—traditionally one of Thailand's strongest allies. Dating back to the Vietnam War, the U.S. has used Thai airbases as regional logistics hubs, and has held the large annual U.S.-Thai Cobra Gold military exercise for decades.

Though the exercises continue to be held, Thailand has clearly expanded its options. Thailand's prime minister met with Chinese Central Military Commission Vice-Chairman Xu Qiliang in April, with both sides promising to "deepen military training" and "industrial cooperation" ([Chinese Ministry of Defense Online](#), April 24). The meeting recently bore fruit in the first Joint Sino-Thai air force exercise at Korat air base in Thailand ([People's Daily Online](#), November 17). Chinese diplomacy traditionally characterizes Thailand and China as "One Family," a phrase used by Xi during a state visit in 2011 ([China Online](#), December 25, 2011).

China continues to deepen its defense and security relationships throughout the region, selling shoulder launched anti-aircraft missiles and other military equipment to Cambodia, and working to improve coordination between security services throughout the region ([Global Times](#), November 10; [Xinhua](#), October 24; [Defense Ministry Online](#), October 29). These, latter links between the security agencies in the region may be viewed by China as a path toward normalization and acceptance of a more active Chinese military in the region.

China's economic diplomacy has been warmly welcomed along the western route of its Silk Road Economic Belt. The 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road's path through the contentious South China Sea will make this component of the Belt and Road Initiatives much more difficult to implement. It remains to be seen if Chinese economic and cultural power can override other nations concerns and

competing territorial claims—and the influence of external balancers like Japan and the United States.

China's Turn Toward Regional Restructuring, Counter-Intervention: A Review of Authoritative Sources

By Timothy Heath and Andrew S. Erickson

Note: This piece is based on a longer article published in The Washington Quarterly (Fall 2015, available [here](#)).

Beginning after the global financial crisis in 2008, and transforming further with Xi Jinping's ascent to power in 2012, Chinese security policy has undergone a remarkable shift in direction. China's leaders have directed efforts to strengthen control of disputed maritime regions in the East and South China seas. Chinese maritime law enforcement forces wrested control of Scarborough Reef from the Philippines and scaled up their presence in the East China Sea in 2012. During the past year, China has also augmented features it occupies, adding port facilities capable of harboring small naval combatants, and building three military-grade airfields. Meanwhile, China's leaders have proposed security mechanisms, based on Chinese-led organizations such as the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building (CICA) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), as alternatives to the current security order dominated by U.S. alliances. At the operational level, Chinese forces continue to invest heavily in military capabilities that serve anti-access/area denial (A2/AD), or counter-intervention, purposes; such as the DF-21D anti-ship

ballistic missile (ASBM), DF-26 intermediate range ballistic missile (which has an ASBM variant), YJ-12 anti-ship cruise missile (ASCM), HQ-9 surface-to-air missile (SAM), and J-20 stealth fighter—some of which China displayed prominently during its September parade commemorating the country's victory over Japan in World War II. [1]

While observers continue to debate the reasons for and drivers of the shift, discussion of authoritative sources remains scarce. Among the most important publicly available sources, however, are the 2015 Defense White Paper (DWP), entitled *China's Military Strategy*, and the 2013 version of the *Science of Military Strategy* (SMS), a periodically reissued strategy textbook. The DWP offers an authoritative view of China's security policy and military strategy, while the SMS, published by the military's center for strategy analysis, the Academy of Military Science (AMS), serves as an important representation of the PLA's thinking on these topics.

Both sources suggest that despite a nominal adherence to a purely defensive posture, China has in fact revised that policy to support a peacetime expansion of national power. Like its predecessors, *China's Military Strategy* upheld China's "defensive" security policy. However, it also acknowledged that China's evolving situation set "new requirements" for the military to help build a "favorable strategic posture" and "guarantee the country's peaceful development." It highlighted in particular the need to better protect the country's "growing strategic interests." This, the white paper explained, required the military to "actively expand military and security cooperation" and "promote the establishment of a regional framework for security and cooperation." Hinting at the expanding focus of military activity, the DWP noted that the military intended to conduct preparations, planning, and activities in "all directions and in all domains" and to "effectively secure China's overseas interests" ([State Council Information Office](#), May 26).

A 2009 article by Colonel Chen Zhou, a defense policy expert at AMS, provides insight into the policy shift hinted at in the white paper. Colonel Chen affirmed the country's commitment to a "defensive" policy. However, he also highlighted the need for an "expansion of scope" due to the reality of an "intermingling of security and developmental interests" and the "close connection between China's interests and the interests of other countries." The expanded scope, he argued, should "break through the limits of China's coastline, actively construct a strategic foundation in the periphery, expand the defensive forward positions, and stretch the line of national defense in the air and sea." [2]

The DWP outlined some of the changes to military activity required to implement the new policy. Criticizing a "traditional mentality" that regarded the value of land as "outweighing the sea," it called for "developing a modern maritime military force structure commensurate with China's national security and developmental interests" ([China Brief](#), May 29). The white paper noted the need to develop capabilities to defend Chinese interests in outer space and cyberspace. The focus on expanding capabilities to defend growing interests is complemented by direction to support efforts to reform the regional security order. It noted the military will "strike to establish a new framework for security and cooperation conducive to peace, stability, and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region." The paper underscored, however, that the push to secure core interests and reform the international security order should be done peacefully, with strong consideration given to the impact on stability.

SMS affirms and elaborates on the policy shift. It notes the need to create a "strategic situation" (战略态势) "favorable for internal stability and external expansion" (阔外) that is "lasting in stability and durable in peace" (长治久安). [3] This phrase evokes a stable, peaceful Asian security environment in which China plays a leadership role and in which countries lack the ability and/or motivation to

militarily challenge China over its “core” interests. Noting that the task of expansion has historically proven perilous for any rising power, authors of SMS reject the path of military conquest and warfare. Instead, SMS declares, China seeks a “peaceful, cooperative expansion” principally thorough “economic exchange and cultural blending.” It acknowledges, however, the possibility of “contradictions and conflicts” arising from resistance to the peaceful expansion. [4] To shape the strategic environment and tighten control of “core” interests in peacetime, *Science of Military Strategy* prioritizes non-war military actions. China should “rely more upon non-military powers, such as political, economic, and diplomacy” to address the “contradictions, friction and struggles generated by the country’s expansion of interests.” However, the military is expected to play a “powerful role” in supporting and ensuring the realization of these goals. [5]

At the strategic level, the move toward a security policy of peacetime expansion has led Chinese political and military leaders to pursue a restructuring of the regional security order in the least destabilizing manner possible, an idea that we believe is best captured in the term, “regional restructuring.” The goal is to shape a security order that is more amenable to the exercise of Chinese power. Misunderstanding of the expansionary nature of the current policy—often expressed as criticism of Beijing for acting in a presumably unnecessary “bullying” or “provocative” manner—underpins much of the criticism of Chinese behavior and Beijing’s dismissal of that criticism. Beijing well understands that its actions generate friction—expansion by any rising power necessarily antagonizes the beneficiaries of the status quo that stand most to lose from that expansion. The goal of a policy of peacetime expansion is to hold those tensions to a manageable level, not avoid them.

The Chinese military envisions a broad array of responsibilities to support this strategic line of effort.

Some present opportunities for the United States and its allies, while others pose serious challenges. Efforts to bolster Beijing’s credibility and authority as a political and security leader against non-traditional threats open opportunities for collaboration on issues such as anti-piracy and humanitarian assistance.

Among the more serious challenges from Washington’s perspective, however, are efforts to undercut the ability of the United States and its allies to frustrate China’s expansion through the development of counter-intervention capabilities.

Counter-Intervention

The *Science of Military Strategy 2013* itself contains important references to counter-intervention. A section entitled “The Wars China May Face in the Future” states: “regardless how great the probability of a powerful enemy implementing large-scale military intervention [强敌对我实施大规模军事干预]...we...must keep a foothold at the foundation of having ample war preparations and powerful military capabilities of our own, rather than at the assessment that the enemy will not come, intervene [不进行干预], or strike.” The likelihood of intervention by “the powerful enemy,” almost certainly the United States, “depends upon this trade-off [analysis] between war risks and costs.” Geographically, “the main direction that may face war is the direction of oceans in the east and in the south.” Accordingly, “when contending with a powerful enemy in the sea direction, we must...form a strategic momentum disposition of controlling seas by relying on land, and controlling oceans by using

seas [倚陆制海, 以海制洋].” To this end, China must “continue to innovate a series of fighting methods for fighting unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), stealth aircraft, cruise missiles, carrier formations and space-based platforms.” [6]

As Beijing’s September 3 military parade showed, China has already made tremendous progress in developing such counter-intervention systems. The missiles on display included no fewer than 16 each of

the world's only ASBM-type missiles: the DF-21D and DF-26. Official commentary described the DF-21D as an “assassin’s mace weapon” (杀手锏武器), one of several counter-intervention megaprojects that former Chinese paramount leader Jiang Zemin championed following U.S. intervention in the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis and the 1999 Belgrade Embassy Bombing, reasoning, “That which the enemy fears most, that is what we must develop.” [7] We are seeing the fruits of Jiang’s labors today: every weapon displayed, including the DF-21D, DF-26, and YJ-12, are already in PLA service, operational in PLA units. In fact, as documented in a detailed study of the ASBM’s development, China began deploying the DF-21D in 2010. [8]

Counter-interventionist doctrine to support these weapons’ potential employment has proceeded apace. Published in 2004, the *Science of Second Artillery Campaigns* warned, “Militarily strong nations might use various types of excuses to directly or indirectly engage in military interventions.” “The primary activities of conventional missile forces include...participating in operations to resist military intervention by the powerful enemy, the doctrinal handbook stated. [9] “When a strong enemy’s carrier strike group invades our maritime territory and when it directly uses military force to engage in a military intervention, we can communicate to the enemy,” it explains, “that the use of conventional missile weaponry in fire strikes against the enemy’s nuclear aircraft carrier will not be removed from possibility. Moreover, in order to protect national unity, we can send a strong warning about the defense of the sovereignty of territorial waters in order to restrain and scare away the enemy’s interventionist activities.” [10]

A section entitled “Participating in Operations of Resistance Against Powerful Enemy’s Intervention,” elaborates: “Modes of military intervention by the powerful enemy often include: a show of military strength through a carrier battle

group, naval escorts, establishing no-fly and restricted sea zones, naval and aerial intervention, in-shore fire assaults, and deep strategic air raids.” To operationalize “the principle of making the powerful enemy’s carrier battle groups the focal points for attacks,” a two-page spread describes five ways to use ASBMs against carrier groups. [11] In 2006, *Science of Campaigns* likewise listed “resist[ing] the military intervention of a powerful enemy” as a “basic mission” for China’s Second Artillery Force. [12]

PLA sources discuss cruise missiles in similar terms. Writing in one of the PLA’s premier journals, sponsored by AMS, an expert at Nanjing Military Region Headquarters states that China should “use coastal-based cruise missiles to carry out surprise attacks” to “weaken the supporting capability of enemy bases, obstruct and interfere with the enemy’s aircraft carrier battle groups, and greatly frighten enemies that take part in intervention in our operations.” [13]

Conclusion

Within the past decade, China’s security policy has undergone some of the most profound changes of the entire reform and opening-up period. The most recent changes, stemming from around 2010, seek to orient defense policy toward the tremendous task of supporting an expansion of national power, albeit in as peaceful and stable a manner as possible. At the strategic level, this requires a highly coordinated military and non-military effort to restructure the security order by weakening the U.S. alliance system and establishing in its place an alternative based on Chinese-led multilateral institutions, an effort that can be summarized as “regional restructuring.

Beijing hopes to achieve its goals without resorting to force, but is realistic enough to realize its peacetime expansion may incite friction or pushback from others. As Chinese scholars themselves note, the risk of a militarized crisis is thus increasing, and the possibility of a military clash, however improbable, cannot be ruled out. As one way to prepare for such a

possibility, China is pursuing counter-intervention at the operational level. Rather than seeking war, counter-intervention seeks—through development, deployment, and doctrinal support of asymmetric weapons—to make U.S. intervention in its island and maritime claims disputes so risky and potentially costly that Washington will recalibrate its policies and deemphasize its alliance commitments. Should deterrence fail, Beijing envisions counter-intervention capabilities as a backstop to compel the United States to cease hostilities and pursue a negotiated settlement or other off-ramp.

Both “regional restructuring” and “counter-intervention” should be regarded as Western terms designed to describe Chinese behavior, but these concepts draw heavily from ideas and directives provided in Chinese authoritative sources. Making the distinction between these two levels can help policy makers and planners distinguish between important but substantially different challenges to U.S. policy. Regional restructuring, for example, offers both challenges and opportunities. Chinese efforts to build multilateral efforts to combat transnational threats or to increase infrastructure investment do not inherently threaten U.S. interests, and may offer opportunities for collaboration. However, efforts to weaken the alliance system directly challenge the foundation of U.S. power and threaten regional stability. The U.S. must resist such efforts, while developing countermeasures to pace China’s deployment of counter-intervention capabilities.

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Notes

1. For in-depth analysis of Counter-Intervention, see Timothy Heath and Andrew S. Erickson, “Is China Pursuing Counter-Intervention?” *The Washington Quarterly* 38.3 (Fall 2015).
2. Chen Zhou, “On the Development of China’s Defensive National Defense Policy Under the New Situation,” *China Military Science* [中国军事科学], No. 6, 2009, pp. 63–71.
3. AMS Military Strategy Research Department (ed.), *The Science of Military Strategy* (Beijing, China: Military Science Press, 2013), p. 112
4. *Ibid*, p. 104.
5. *Ibid*, p. 111.
6. *Ibid*, pp. 98–102.
7. Zhang Wannian, “敌人害怕什么, 我们就发展什么” [We Must Develop for Ourselves That Which the Enemy Fears],” Speech given November 5, 1999, in Zhang Wannian, 张万年军事文选 [Selected Military Writings of Zhang Wannian] (Beijing: PLA Press, 2008), p. 733.
8. Andrew S. Erickson, *Chinese Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile Development: Drivers, Trajectories and Strategic Implications*, The Jamestown Foundation, 2013, pp. 10–11, 14, 20, 22–23, esp. 44.
9. 第二炮兵战役学, [The Science of Second Artillery Campaigns] (Beijing: PLA Press, 2004), p. 293, 397.
10. *Ibid*, p. 283.
11. *Ibid*, pp. 401–402.
12. Zhang Yulang, chief ed., et.al. 战役学 [Science of Campaigns] (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2006), p. 629.
13. 张维平 [Zhang Weiping], “浅谈联合反封锁作战的地位作用” [Introduction to Importance and Role of Joint Anti-Blockade Operations], 军

事学术 [Military Art Journal] (December 2003), pp. 16–18.

Ensuring Comprehensive State Security in the “Ideological Battleground” Online

By Samantha Hoffman

Mao Zedong once warned: “Whenever you want to overthrow a regime, you must first create public opinion... If the military defense line is not stable, it will break down after one blow, if the ideological defense line is not stable, it will fall of its own accord, without a blow,” (*PLA Daily*, May 12). The warning remains central to the Communist Party of China’s (CCP) thinking, where the primary perceived security threats do not come from abroad, but from domestic sources of political instability.

A key battleground for the Party’s ideological war is in cyberspace, and so far under Xi Jinping there have been numerous legal and institutional developments that lay out a clearer picture of how the Party works to prevent a destructive loss of its stability and legitimacy in cyberspace. The Party is attempting to achieve this goal largely through the process of social management innovation, where (in part) the Party is constantly adapting its methods of not simply censoring thought but also its attempts to actively shape it.

Parsing the Rhetoric

Details of the CCP’s thirteenth five-year plan for economic and social development released at the end of the Fifth Plenary Session reiterated an objective,

“to strengthen the online battleground for ideology and culture,” (*Xinhua*, November 3). The idea that the internet is an ideological battleground well pre-dates Xi Jinping, even though the description has been used to an even greater extent under Xi (For example, see: *Chinese Cadres Tribune*, November 17, 2008; *China Digital Times*, November 4, 2013). It might be easy to dismiss such statements as mere rhetoric, but in reality analysis of these texts over an extended period provides insight into the CCP’s cyber governance policy, which is an extension of a social governance process aimed at protecting the party-state’s security. [1]

The key to understanding this policy is China’s concept of *guojia anquan* (国家安全), which is often, and misleadingly, translated as “national security.” This translation connotes the western “national security” concept. In reality, the Chinese concept—while inclusive of traditional national security aims—heavily emphasizes a political stability dimension whereby the primary goal of the CCP is to protect itself as the head of the Chinese Communist Party-led political system. With this in mind, a more accurate translation is “state security.”

Since early 2014, the Communist Party has regularly emphasized that “without cyber security there is no state security” (*Xinhua*, February 27, 2014). [2] In fact, the Party has on numerous occasions said that its “comprehensive” state security concept is quite different than the western “national security” concept, which includes, among other things: political security, homeland security, military security, economic security, cultural security (implying CCP sanctioned “culture”), social security (implying state stability management) and information security (*Xinhua*, April 15).

The tactic for ensuring “comprehensive” state security includes effective implementation of the Party’s “social governance” (社会治理), which broadly defined is the process by which the government manages its relationship with society to ensure that it remains in power. The linkage between

social management and state security has been increasingly prominent since the 18th Party Congress in November 2012. Notably, the plan to establish the new State Security Commission, which was announced in the Party's communiqué from third plenum the 18th congress, was done in a paragraph on social governance. In a clarification issued shortly after the announcement, Xi Jinping said that state security and social stability were preconditions for China's continued reform and development. [3]

Several state media editorials have expanded on this concept as it relates to network security, essentially arguing the internet/information age have greatly influenced the state's ability to ensure state security and social stability, and therefore the state must actively implement public safety and social order strategies in cyberspace (Examples: [Guangming Daily](#), October 14; [China Youth Daily](#), April 30; [Red Flag Manuscript](#), December 2013).

Furthermore, the state alone cannot only rely on policing—it requires the continued management of and participation by both the Party and non-Party masses. This explains why director of the Central Politics and Law Commission Meng Jianzhu emphasized in a September speech this year that the government must establish innovative public safety mechanisms. Meng included the warning that individuals (not only government) have a duty to participate in and uphold the social governance process, particularly in cyberspace ([Seeking Truth](#), November 1). The implication is evident in the actions taken under Xi to ensure state security.

Legal Developments

Even though the membership and role of the aforementioned State Security Commission remains uncertain at time of writing, the state security law enacted in July 2015 is a clear indication of what ensuring China's "comprehensive state security" entails. One element of the legislation, which has been broadly overlooked in western analysis, is the

personal responsibility the legislation places on both Party and non-Party masses for ensuring state stability ([Xinhua](#), July 1). This is particularly evident in articles 9, 11 and 23:

- Article 9: "Preservation of state security shall treat both symptoms and root causes, putting prevention first, combining special efforts and the mass line, fully bringing into play special organs' and other relevant departments' functions in maintaining state security, widely mobilizing citizens and organizations to guard against and punish conduct endangering state security."
- Article 11: "Citizens of the People's Republic of China, every state organ and the armed forces, each political party, the militia, enterprises, public institutions and social organizations, all have the responsibility and obligation to maintain state security."
- Article 23: "The State perseveres in the orientation of the advanced socialist culture, carrying forward the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese people, cultivating and practicing the a core socialist values, defending and resisting against negative cultural influences, grasp leadership power in ideological work and reinforcing education and publicity on the core socialist values, and increasing the strength and competitiveness of the entire culture."

Effectively, the law states that individuals are obliged to actively ensure state security, which includes the key component of protecting the Party and its values.

Another important piece of legislation is the draft cyber security law, which was also released in early July ([NPC.gov](#), July 6). Similar to the language of the state security law, it contains passages on individual responsibility for maintaining social order in cyberspace:

- Article 9: "...Any person and organization shall, when using the network, abide by the constitution and laws, observe public order and respect social morality, they must not endanger network

security, and must not use the network to engage in activities harming state security.”

- Article 10: “All individuals and organizations have the right to report conduct endangering network security to departments, such as for network information, industry and information technology and public security...”

More important than this legislation, the CCP under Xi Jinping’s leadership has consolidated network security governance. The Central Leading Group for Cyber Security and Informatization was formed in 2014. President Xi Jinping chairs the group, and the powerful head the State Internet Information Office (SIIO) Lu Wei serves as its director. The SIIO’s authority was vastly expanded in late August 2014 when it was given the authority to supervise and regulate all online content in China.

Beyond Censorship

If the Party’s strategy online is to implement the social governance process aimed at pre-empting social demands for political reform, then it must go beyond tight censorship of content to more actively shaping social demands. [4] Importantly, the CCP aims not only to implement an online code-of-conduct, but also to put systems into place that can effectively manage the many incidents of potentially destabilizing political and social conflict that emerge, or at least thrive, in cyberspace.

The individual responsibilities emphasized in the aforementioned laws have been prominent in the actions taken to ensure network security under Xi Jinping. “Content management” is one key theme. The concept is not limited to censorship aimed at preventing the spread of “infiltrative” ideas from the west or anti-CCP protest from within, but is about actively pushing the Party’s social governance efforts inside the cyber domain.

“Content management” then requires controlling ideology online, which is increasingly referred to as enforcing “ethical” behavior online. “Ethics” might

include near-universal issues such as preventing cyber bullying, illicit content (such as pornography and graphic violence), and other behaviors deemed “immoral.” Like many things in China, it also includes a political stability element, which is carrying forward Chinese socialist values with the aim of ensuring “public safety.”

This campaign to clean up the internet has been prominent early under Xi’s leadership, starting with an anti-rumors campaign that began in late summer 2013, and the silencing of the so-called “Big Vs,” who are high-profile users of Sina’s *Weibo* micro-blogging tool ([MPS.gov](#), August 21, 2013; [China Digital Times](#), August 21, 2013). The Big V users’ special status on *Weibo* gave them a platform to influence millions with their thoughts, which were often critical of the government. One such user, Chinese-American entrepreneur Charles Xue (also known as Xue Manzi) was detained for eight months on charges of seeking prostitutes, and later released on bail ([BBC](#), October 1, 2013). Another prominent micro-blogger Qin Zhihui was sentenced to three years in prison in April 2014 for “seriously harming social order” and “provoking troubles” by circulating “false” reports on *Weibo* ([China Daily](#), April 18, 2014). The campaign is at least partially responsible for a massive decrease in *Weibo* use and increased self-censorship since 2013 ([BBC](#), February 24).

More than imposing content management through censorship, the Party initiated a more prominent push to move into cyberspace its social governance effort to shape and control social demands. This year, attention has focused on the cultivation of youth. The Second Annual Network Security Awareness Week in June was focused on “protecting” youth online. During the awareness week, Lu Wei made a speech in which he outlined the so-called “Four Haves” for Chinese netizens ([CAC.gov](#), June 1). These include: (1) “They must have a high sense of security,” which emphasized that individuals are responsible for internalizing cyber security practices; (2) “They must have civilized online cultivation,” stressing that

individuals are expected to become involved in the elimination of “filth and mire” such as the spread of online rumors; (3) “They must have behavioral habits of observing the law,” meaning that the same rules off-line apply online; and (4) “They must have the skills to protect themselves,” meaning that individuals must be able to “see pitfalls” and “ward off underhanded attacks” from “unlawful elements.”

This has been seemingly coupled with a drive led by the Communist Youth League to recruit up to 18 million so-called “network civilization volunteers” (网络文明志愿者) tasked with spreading a “positive energy” and “purifying” cyberspace ([Global Voices](#), May 25; [People’s Daily](#), April 16). Different than the paid pro-government commentators Chinese netizens have sarcastically named the “50-cent Party” (五毛党), the “civilization volunteers” are responsible for more actively promoting Party policy and ideology aimed at shaping thought among the masses.

Conclusion

In practice, the implementation of this social governance process online is not a straightforward task. Many Chinese are critical of a civilization-army type of patriotism. Perhaps the most telling story is an incident in Wending, Beihai, in Shandong province this summer. [5] The incident began after an online quarrel turned into a street fight between teens, of which one was a network civilization volunteer. The volunteer’s peers promised revenge. Meanwhile many other netizens derided their bullying tactics as being disguised as patriotism. Even the Communist Youth League joined the fray, criticizing local police and suggesting foreign hostile forces could have been involved in taunting of the civilization volunteer.

Although the incident faded, it demonstrated how quickly the Party’s efforts to shape online debate could spiral out of its control. The CCP’s task is to identify how to effectively respond to a society that has unprecedented access to information, and more importantly, unprecedented ways to discuss it. This means the state must adopt a flexible and proactive

approach to control, particularly in cyberspace, because it is not fully in control of the spread of information.

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Notes

1. For example, read: “[Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Decision Concerning Deepening Cultural Structural Reform](#),” translation by Rogier Creemers, October 2011.
2. In fact, “cyber” security is another concept that is often mistranslated, and the phrase “network security” is a more appropriate translation. See: “[Warring State: China’s Cybersecurity Strategy](#),” by Amy Chang, December 2014.
3. Samantha Hoffman and Peter Mattis, “[Inside China’s New Security Council](#),” *The National Interest*, November 21, 2013.
4. Also See: Samantha Hoffman and Peter Mattis, “[China’s Proposed ‘State Security Council’: Social Governance under Xi Jinping](#),” *China Policy Institute Blog*, November 21, 2013.
5. See [Global Voices](#), July 30 for a detailed summary and [Qiushi](#), August 3.

China and the Quiet Kingdom: An Assessment of China-Oman Relations

By Chris Zambelis

China’s foreign policy toward the wider Middle East rests on advancing numerous objectives. Foremost

among these priorities is China's need to assure domestic energy security. As the world's largest consumer of energy overall and second largest importer of crude oil, safeguarding a stable flow of crude oil from the region is a paramount concern. As evidenced by its recent decision to increase financial support for humanitarian aid and relief capacity in the Middle East to help alleviate an increasingly dire humanitarian situation, China has also used the region as a platform to project its soft power and influence ([Xinhua](#), October 13).

In contrast with China's ties with major Middle East oil producers and regional heavyweights such as Saudi Arabia, Chinese relations with the Sultanate of Oman, a key source of China's oil imports, a leading producer of natural gas, and an important geopolitical actor in its own right, are often overlooked. Middle East specialists have often treated Oman as something of an afterthought: Oman's historic stability and its characteristically quiet profile, despite its proximity to perpetual geopolitical flashpoints and its penchant for navigating some of the world's most complex diplomatic fault lines, has relegated it to outlier status. This oversight belies Oman's strategic importance and obscures the extent of China's interests in Oman. In recent years, contacts between China and Oman have diversified beyond the energy sector, yielding notable developments on the diplomatic, military, and economic fronts. People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) warships engaging in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden off of Somalia have made over 20 port calls to Oman's Port Salalah for replenishment and supply, testament to the position Oman occupies in China's broader regional strategy ([Xinhua Online](#), May 14; [China Brief](#), December 10, 2010).

Evolution of Ties

For all of its notable progress, contemporary Sino-Omani relations emerged out of a milieu of distrust and hostility during a period of domestic unrest in the form of an armed uprising against the Sultanate in Oman's southern Dhofar Province in the 1960s.

China provided moral, diplomatic, financial and military assistance—overtly and covertly—to the Dhofar Liberation Front, a separatist insurgency inspired by Marxist-Leninism and Arab nationalism, as well as to its successor organization the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf. [2] China also trained Dhofari rebels in China, even going so far as to deploy military advisors to fight alongside the rebels in Oman. [3] Despite these inauspicious beginnings, Oman eventually recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1978.

More recent Chinese and Omani political discourse has focused on ancient historical ties. Sino-Omani diplomacy is replete with references to the earliest contacts between China and Oman that developed during the era of the ancient Maritime Silk Road trade route that linked Asia to Africa and Europe, suggesting a natural continuity in Sino-Omani relations. Notably, Oman figures prominently in China's efforts to revive these ancient trade contacts under the auspices of its Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (commonly referred to as One Belt, One Road). Oman has enthusiastically embraced China's project and has expressed an eagerness to leverage China's expanding regional footprint as a means to project its reach into territories that once fell under its sphere of influence. Oman's influence as a maritime and imperial power has extended beyond the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf to coastal East Africa and Gwadar in Balochistan in modern Pakistan—all areas that would be connected by the Maritime Silk Road.

[1]

China has likewise acknowledged Oman's importance in its plans. China's ambassador to Oman, Yu Fulong, echoed these sentiments by emphasizing Oman's strategic location and the history of friendly ties between both nations despite their dissimilar political systems and societies. He also noted the inherent complementarity in their approaches to economic development and areas of mutual benefit

([Xinhua](#), July 1). Oman's Sohar Port and Freezone, a deep-water seaport located on the Gulf of Oman in the northwestern part of the country near Oman's border with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the associated free trade zone that is counted among the world's largest developments of its kind, has attracted particular interest from China. China is also keen to benefit from Oman's expansion of road networks and a railway that will integrate Sohar Port and Freezone to existing Omani and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) transportation corridors extending into the UAE and Saudi Arabia. In the long run, these features will give Oman a competitive advantage over other established logistical and transportation hubs in the region ([Construction Week](#) [Dubai], August 13; [Oman Daily Observer](#) [Muscat], January 26).

Energy

Though infrastructure projects will certainly help grow relations further, petroleum exports serve as the foundation of Sino-Omani relations. Despite enduring an economic slowdown, China for the first time surpassed the United States as the world's largest importer of crude oil in June and April. Even as China continues to diversify its network of relationships with oil producers outside of the Middle East, relationships with nations like Oman remain vital. With a daily yield of just under one million barrels per day, Oman is a major oil producer and is counted among the world's top 25 oil producing nations. Oman was the first member of the GCC to export oil directly to China. [4] Omani oil represents an estimated ten percent of China's total oil imports. For its part, China is the top destination for Oman's oil exports. Over 97 percent of Omani oil finds its way to markets in East Asia with an overwhelming percentage destined for China. About 95 percent of Oman's oil exports in September were delivered to China ([Muscat Daily](#), October 14). While most of Oman's exports of LNG in 2015 were delivered to Japan and South Korea, China continues to show interest in Oman's natural gas sector ([Platts](#) [London], August 15).

Oman's Geopolitics

Oman's geopolitical idiosyncrasies cast light on the deeper implications of the flourishing Sino-Omani relationship. Oman is situated in the southeastern Arabian Peninsula adjacent to the Strait of Hormuz, the vital maritime artery between the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea and wider Indian Ocean. Between 35 and 40 percent of the world's seaborne oil traverses the Strait of Hormuz. Oman shares borders with Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates. Oman's geographic placement puts it into close proximity to other areas of central concern to China, including Djibouti, Somalia, and the wider East Africa expanse, Iran, Pakistan, India, and the wider Indian Ocean space. In contrast to many of its neighbors, Oman's strategic value to China in the context of its One Belt, One Road initiative and other interests is further enhanced by its relative peaceful and stable disposition. Oman's location opposite Pakistan's Gwadar Port—an important link to China through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—could make it a major link through western China. These stepping stones through the Middle East are not without their dangers; an insurgency in Pakistan's Balochistan Province has prevented China from realizing Gwadar Port's potential as a trade hub that would connect Western China's Xinjiang Province to the Indian Ocean ([Dawn](#) [Karachi], April 20).

As a region that remains largely within the purview of U.S. diplomatic influence and concomitant U.S.-led alliance architecture, China's engagement with Oman and the wider Middle East raises important questions about Sino-U.S. relations. At first glance, Oman appears to share a great deal in common with its fellow Gulf Cooperation Council partners. Oman is an authoritarian state led by a hereditary Arab Muslim royal dynasty. In addition to boasting significant energy reserves typical of the GCC, albeit at a lesser quantity, Oman maintains a close strategic partnership with the United States and other U.S. allies. Oman was the first GCC member to enter into

a formal military basing agreement with the United States following the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Oman hosts a number of U.S. military installations, including three air force prepositioning sites located at Thumrait Naval Air Base, Masirah Air Base and Seeb International Airport ([al-Jazeera](#), May 1, 2012). Omani territory has played a central role in launching and sustaining the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and other military operations.

Similarly, Oman hosts U.K. military assets and engages in close military coordination, including military exercises, and is reportedly host to a Government Communications Headquarters facility, the U.K.'s equivalent to the U.S. National Security Agency, devoted to extracting a range of digital data in and around the Middle East ([Wired U.K.](#), June 3, 2014).

There are no indications to suggest that Oman is contemplating a shift its traditionally pro-U.S. and pro-Western foreign policy orientation. Nevertheless, China stands to benefit by increasing its footprint in Oman. For example, greater Chinese inroads in Oman can serve as a potentially effective lever of influence over the United States down the line, especially during periods of heightened tensions in Sino-U.S. relations over disputes related to the South China Sea, Taiwan, and other matters. Oman also figures prominently in the growing rivalry between China and India. Oman and India have a tradition of close diplomatic, cultural, and economic ties that include extensive cooperation in the military and defense spheres ([World Politics Review](#), January 7).

At the same time, Oman has long charted an independent foreign policy trajectory predicated on principles of pragmatism, moderation, and neutrality. Oman has likewise positioned itself as a diplomatic mediator. This outlook is critical to understanding its embrace of China. For example, Oman has maintained cordial diplomatic ties and a robust economic relationship with Iran, hosting Iranian naval vessels and holding joint military exercises,

even as it has drawn the ire of GCC members such as Saudi Arabia that are on the forefront of a region-wide campaign to curtail Iranian influence ([Middle East Eye](#), February 12; [Press TV](#) [Tehran], June 9). This position made Oman instrumental in facilitating the back channel negotiations between the United States and Iran that led to the landmark nuclear agreement. Oman has also involved itself in the diplomacy surrounding the conflicts in Yemen and Syria ([National](#) [Abu Dhabi], September 21).

Oman's independent foreign policy stance is also illustrated by its decision to remain outside of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Oman is the largest oil producer in the Middle East that is not a member of OPEC, a position it has used to criticize fellow GCC and OPEC members such as Saudi Arabia on oil pricing and production strategies undertaken by the cartel. Notwithstanding OPEC's waning influence, China may view Oman's position outside of the cartel as a valuable asset in which to exert indirect influence over established OPEC members—many of which are major sources of China's oil imports—on a range of matters.

Despite its autocratic character, Oman has been spared the kind of unrest and instability—including sectarian violence and radical Islamist terrorism—witnessed elsewhere in the Arab world, a consequence, according to many observers, of the widespread legitimacy enjoyed by the Sultan and the characteristically tolerant brand of Ibadi Islam practiced by most Omanis. Indeed, the climate of volatility and turmoil that has come to typify the wider Middle East in recent years will only increase Oman's value to China. However, a nascent opposition to the ruling system does exist and may become more pronounced as Sultan Qaboos's reign—the longest of any Middle East leader—eventually comes to an end ([Gulf State Analytics](#), August 7, 2014). Indeed, Oman is on the precipice of political change. The septuagenarian Sultan suffers from ill health and, given that he does not have any

children, has no heir apparent ([Middle East Eye](#), January 13). A potential succession crisis may usher in a state of unrest that will have important implications for China's regional strategy and well beyond.

Conclusion

On the surface, the confluence of mutual interests between China and Oman indicates that Sino-Omani relations will continue to flourish. Oman's favorable geographic disposition, notable influence in international energy markets, and independent foreign policy posture makes it an attractive partner for China. At the same time, the coming changes in Oman may shape up as a test of the durability of the Sino-Omani relationship.

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Notes

1. A joint Sino-Omani venture led by China's Merchant Holding International and Oman's State General Reserve Fund to develop Tanzania's Bagamoyo Port and associated special economic zone—a project estimated to be worth over \$10 billion—is emblematic of the collaborative facets of Sino-Omani relations ([Daily News](#) [Dar es Salaam], October 17; [Gulf Africa Review](#), November 14, 2014).
2. For a summary of China's interests in the Dhofar Rebellion, see Bin Huwaidin, Mohammed. *China's Relations with Arabia*

and the Gulf: 1949-1999. New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002, pp. 102–04.

3. Marc DeVore, "The United Kingdom's Last Hot War of the Cold War: Oman, 1963-1975," *Cold War History*, Vol. 11, Issue 3 (2011).
4. Oman's proven oil reserves are estimated at around 5.5 billion barrels, placing it 23rd worldwide among oil producers ([Oil and Gas Journal](#) [Tulsa], January 1, 2014).

Sino-Nepalese Relations: Handshake Across the Himalayas

By Sudha Ramachandran

A landmark agreement signed in October saw China extend "emergency fuel assistance" to Nepal in the wake of the serious fuel shortage there. It is expected to pave the way for greater bilateral cooperation. The fuel agreement was preceded by a sharp deterioration in India-Nepal relations, sparked by differences regarding provisions in Nepal's new constitution in September. Meanwhile, the people of Nepal's Terai region, which borders India (and who largely originate from India), escalated their protests against discriminatory provisions in the constitution. An "unofficial Indian blockade" of trucks carrying essential supplies to Nepal followed, resulting in a crippling shortage of fuel and food items. With the fuel crisis worsening, the Nepalese government turned to China for help ([China News Online](#), October 31). On October 28, the two governments signed an agreement under which Beijing is providing Nepal with a grant of 1.3 million liters of petroleum to ease the crisis immediately. The two

countries could opt for a long-term agreement on fuel supply ([Himalayan Times](#), November 13).

China's supply of gasoline to Nepal marks the end of India's decades-old monopoly over fuel sales to that country. This new arrangement will begin to erode India's grip over Nepal's foreign trade or will geography continue to favor India? An examination of Nepal's geography and historical ties with India and China provides pointers to what the future holds for its relations with the two Asian giants.

Nepal's Geography

Sandwiched between India and China, Nepal is a landlocked country making it dependent on its neighbors for international trade and access to the sea. Geography creates a stark contrast between Nepal's borders with its northern and southern neighbors. Of its two neighbors, India provides it with the geographically more convenient trade route. The terrain between Nepal and India is comprised of mountains ranging between 600 meters and 2,200 meters in height, valleys and plains. In contrast, the terrain to Nepal's north consists of mountains of an average height of 6,100 meters, which face the icy and arid Tibetan plateau. Most of the passes between Nepal and China are snow-bound throughout the year. Hence, travel and transport through the Indian plains is the easier option. From Nepal, the distance to Indian industrial towns, trading hubs and ports is also far less than to those in China. With travel to the Indian plains easier—and with less daunting terrain—the 1,751 km long India-Nepal border is a porous one. Population flow between Nepal and India has always been “continuous and unrestricted.” [1] Thus it is with India that Nepal has traditionally had closer relations and greater socioeconomic interaction and cultural exchange.

Nepal's location between nations as large as India and China, particularly given their history of conflict, has enhanced its strategic value.

Consequently, their decades-long competition for influence in Nepal has sharpened in recent years.

India's Influence

Nepal's strategic value to India soared after China's annexation of Tibet. With its Tibetan buffer gone, Nepal emerged as India's shield against China. It was in this context that Kathmandu and Delhi signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950. The 1950 treaty and related documents attached to it tied Nepal's security to that of India; the treaty stated that any aggression against Nepal would be considered as aggression against India, which would respond accordingly. The treaty also regulated Nepal's acquisition of military equipment. Nepal could acquire military hardware from India or through the territory of India, but the latter required the Indian government's “assistance and agreement.” The treaty also dealt with economic aspects of the bilateral relationship. It provided for an open border between India and Nepal. Their nationals could travel freely to each other's countries, live and work there, engage in business and own property. [2]

The 1950 treaty and other agreements that followed provided a shot in the arm to the historically strong India-Nepal interaction. Economic cooperation deepened. Around six million of Nepal's 28 million-strong population live and work in India, and around 600,000 Indians do the same in Nepal. Despite Nepal's efforts to diversify its trade partners, its dependence on India persists—India is Nepal's largest trade partner, accounting for nearly two-thirds of Nepal's foreign trade and providing a market for around 70 percent of its exports ([MEA](#), July 2014). According to a Nepal Rashtra Bank report, “India's share of Nepal's exports ballooned fourfold while its share of imports swelled three times” between the 1990s and 2010 ([Kathmandu Post](#), February 4, 2014). As for foreign direct investment (FDI), until recently, India was Nepal's

largest investor ([Kathmandu Post](#), July 21, 2014). It has played a huge role in Nepal's infrastructure building, especially in the construction of roads, bridges, airports and hydropower projects as well as in the development of its human resources.

Bilateral defense relations have also been robust. India is Nepal's largest supplier of military equipment. Besides, the two militaries cooperate through joint exercises, training and educational exchanges.

Cultural and religious bonds and socioeconomic ties have drawn India and Nepal closer. However, Nepal's extreme dependence on India and the latter's rather overbearing approach and insensitivity to its smaller neighbor's sovereignty has undermined friendly relations and generated anti-India sentiment in Nepal. "Vested interest groups" have also fueled anti-India sentiment to serve their narrow political and economic interests ([Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses](#), April 18, 2011; [Hindustan Times](#), September 30). Nepal's monarchs, peeved with India's support to pro-democracy movements, reached out to China to undermine India's influence, and Nepalese political parties have stoked anti-Indian protests to trigger unrest and destabilize governments. Playing the "China card" has also enhanced Kathmandu's leverage and helped it gain more from an insecure India.

China's Rising Profile

From China's perspective, Nepal's significance stemmed largely from the fact that it borders Tibet. Unsurprisingly then, Chinese engagement with Nepal has aimed at getting it to crackdown on Tibetan activism on Nepalese soil ([China Brief](#), June 17, 2011). Nepal's importance to China grew in the wake of deteriorating Sino-Indian relations. Especially in the context of its sanctuary to the Dalai Lama and the large Tibetan exile community, India's dominating presence in Nepal, so close to restive Tibet, aroused fear in China that India would stoke unrest in that region, and is the underlying reason for Chinese attempts to weaken India's presence and influence in Nepal. Nepal also offers China potential use against India in times of war ([Chennai Centre for China Studies](#), July 12, 2011). Lastly, China sees Nepal as its gateway to the vast South Asian market.

China's role in Nepal has expanded steadily over the last seven decades. Although difficult geographic terrain has restricted bilateral trade, China's strategic road construction in the Himalayas has helped trade grow. In 2013, China was the fourth largest market for Nepal's goods, absorbing four percent of its exports and the second largest (15 percent) source of its imports ([Atlas of Economic Complexity](#), 2013). Sino-Nepalese trade was worth \$23 billion in 2014.

Since the 1960s, Chinese investment and development aid to Nepal has gone largely toward infrastructure. In 1967, China completed a highway linking Kathmandu to Kodari near Nepal's border with China. Several other roads followed such as the Kathmandu-Bhaktapur highway and the Kathmandu-Pokhara highway. China is also investing in hydropower projects, cement, real estate and tourism in Nepal. Chinese FDI in Nepal has surged in recent years; in fiscal year 2012–13, it touched \$19.39 billion (30.89 percent of Nepal's total FDI) to topple India as Nepal's top investor ([Global Times](#), August 21, 2013).

China's military relations with Nepal have intensified over the last decade. In 2005, when India halted military supplies to Nepal in the wake of King Gyanendra's imposition of emergency rule,

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China's military relations with Nepal have intensified over the last decade. In 2005, when India halted military supplies to Nepal in the wake of King Gyanendra's imposition of emergency rule, China quickly stepped in to provide weapons. In 2008, China announced a military aid package of \$1.3 million to Nepal, and pledged a further \$2.6 million in non-lethal military aid ([China Brief](#), June 17, 2011). It would be willing to consider arms sales to Nepal, but "would treat this with great caution." [3]

Unlike India's tempestuous relationship with Nepal, Sino-Nepal relations have been stable. This is largely because Beijing has cultivated all Nepalese regimes, whether autocratic or democratic. This is quite in contrast to India, which has backed anti-monarchy movements and insurgencies in Nepal. Moreover, anti-China sentiment in Nepal is "less intense" as the people of the two countries do not mingle as much as Nepalese and Indians. The Nepalese "like and respect the Chinese for keeping out of Nepal's internal politics." [4] China is also working assiduously to build bridges with the Nepalese people. It has set up Confucius Institutes and Chinese language centers across Nepal with a view to strengthen Nepal's understanding of China and its culture ([Xinhua](#), June 14, 2012).

Advantage India?

China's chipping away of India's dominant role in Nepal, whether in trade, investment or defense cooperation, stands to gain the most from the fuel supply deal. The "unofficial Indian blockade" has underscored to Nepal yet again its extreme vulnerability to Indian pressure and has set off a wave of anti-India sentiment outside the Terai. Calls for reducing dependence on trade with India are getting louder ([Kathmandu Post](#), October 11).

This isn't the first time that Nepal is in this predicament. In 1988–89, India imposed an economic blockade on Nepal when it entered into a secret deal with China on intelligence sharing and the purchase of weapons that included anti-aircraft guns. One account notes that in response to Nepal's request for help during this time,

China provided “modest assistance.” Difficulties of transportation and financial constraints were cited as the reason for its limited help. However, Beijing did not provide even “the monetarily costless forms of political support” to Nepal at the United Nations. Its public criticism of India was “indirect and opaque.” Indeed, Beijing told Nepal quietly not to expect it to bail it out and advised it to come to the best terms possible with India. [5]

Since 1989, not only is China in a stronger economic position to help Nepal, roads to Nepal from China have vastly improved. However, logistical challenges persist. Higher transportation costs make Sino-Nepal trade economically unviable. Nepal’s turn to China to meet its long-term fuel requirements is unrealistic. China is still not in a position to match India in supplying fuel to Nepal. Nepal’s annual purchase of fuel from India reached 1.37 billion liters. China’s recent supply of *1.3 million* liters of gasoline to Nepal—though it might make great press—can realistically only meet Nepal’s needs for a day or two (*Hindustan Times*, November 4). Furthermore, China encountered major logistical challenges when transporting the gasoline. According to one Nepalese commentator, “India cannot be substituted by any other county in Nepal. Its strong civilizational, cultural and historical ties with Nepal combined with its control of two-thirds of Nepal’s trade cannot be substituted overnight.” [6]

Importantly, is China willing to take the risk of drawing India’s ire when Sino-Indian relations are improving and trade is booming? The gains that robust trade with Nepal promises are unlikely to compensate for the losses that China would incur by provoking India. India regards Nepal as “a vital security zone and views growing Chinese influence there as creeping encirclement.” In the context of growing American and Japanese courtship of India, Beijing will have to tread carefully “lest its growing power prompt a coalition to balance or contain China. This gives New Delhi great leverage.” [7]

Conclusion

India continues to hold the advantage in Nepal, at least with regard to the geographic terrain. However, India cannot afford to sit back. Playing the China card may not be “immediately viable” but “opportunities have been opened for China in Nepal that may not give comfort to India in the long run” (*The Wire*, November 8). China’s infrastructure building in the Himalayas is moving at a furious pace. It is extending the Golmud-Lhasa railway line up to Khasa, a trading town on the Sino-Nepal border. When complete, Beijing will be able to send trainloads of fuel and other goods to Nepal. Worryingly, China is keen to extend the Lhasa-Khasa rail to Kathmandu, and Nepal is not averse to the idea. Such a train link would weaken India’s grip over Nepal’s foreign trade significantly (*Asia Times*, October 16, 2010).

To counter China’s inroads in Nepal, India will have to act speedily to improve its decrepit overland infrastructure in the Himalayas. It is several decades behind China in this regard. Importantly, Delhi will need to improve its diplomacy vis-à-vis Nepal. India’s big brother behavior toward its smaller neighbors is costing it heavily. India must realize that its “coercive diplomacy, intended or unintended, declared or undeclared,” has its limits (*The Wire*, November 8). And finally, Nepal as well as India and China are more likely to gain if they view Nepal as a bridge of opportunity between the Asian giants rather than a battlefield for influence.

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Notes

8. Sangeeta Thapliyal, “Movement of Population Between India and Nepal: Emerging Challenges,” *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 23, Issue. 5, 1999. <http://www.idsa-india.org/an-aug9-6.html>.
9. “Treaty Of Peace And Friendship Between The Government Of India And The Government Of Nepal,” July 31, 1950. Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6295/Treaty+of+Peace+and+Friendship>.
10. Author’s Interview, John W. Garver, Emeritus Professor in the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs, Georgia Institute of Technology and author of *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century*, November 2.
11. Author’s Interview, Yubaraj Ghimire, political commentator, Kathmandu, October 28.
12. John W Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 157–161.
13. Author’s Interview, Ghimire, October 28.
14. Author’s Interview, Garver, November 2.