



VOLUME 19 • ISSUE 20 • NOVEMBER 19, 2019

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The Xiangshan Forum and Emerging Themes in PRC Military Diplomacy

By John Dotson

Introduction: The Beijing Xiangshan Forum and the PRC’s International Security Propaganda

In October, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) hosted two events that illustrated the PRC’s continuing and expanding efforts in the field of military diplomacy. The first of these was the seventh Military World Games, which opened on October 18 in the city of Wuhan ([Xinhua](#), October 18). The second major event was the ninth meeting of the Beijing Xiangshan Forum (北京香山论坛, *Beijing Xiangshan Luntan*), held in the Chinese capital from October 20-22. The Xiangshan conference, first held in 2006, has become a prominent component of the PRC’s security-oriented propaganda efforts directed to international audiences. PRC state press has called the event one “created on the principles of equality, openness, inclusiveness and

mutual learning,” and noted that “multilateral platforms like the Xiangshan Forum [are] very important for China's military diplomacy” ([China Daily](#), November 1).

The Xiangshan Forum is sponsored by the China Association for Military Science (subordinate to the PLA Academy of Military Science) and the China Institute for International Strategic Studies (a state think tank affiliated with the PRC Foreign Ministry) ([Xiangshan Forum](#), undated). PRC media claimed attendance at this year's event by over 1,300 people from “76 official delegations” from around the world ([Xinhua](#), October 21). The conference included a range of academics and military officials, as well as defense ministers (or vice ministers) from countries to include: Afghanistan, Brazil, Cambodia, Egypt, Malaysia, Nepal, North Korea, Russia, Rwanda, Serbia, Singapore, and Vietnam. Representatives from international organizations also participated, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the United Nations, and the International Red Cross ([Xiangshan Forum](#), undated).



Image: Participants at the Ninth Beijing Xiangshan Forum, held from October 20-22 in the Beijing International Convention Center. The Xiangshan Forum is an annual conference that plays an important role in the PRC's broader efforts in military diplomacy and security-related propaganda. (Source: [Xinhua](#))

U.S. Participation in the Xiangshan Forum

The United States was represented at the conference by Chad Sbragia, the first person to hold the newly-created position of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for China. In response to questions regarding whether or not the United States was seeking to “decouple” its economy from that of China, DASD Sbragia denied that this was the case, and stated that US policy was to “rebalance and right relationships to ensure that we have equity... it's actually in some ways [intended to] deepen those relationships.” He further

asserted that “the United States will not ask any country to choose between Washington and Beijing... That’s not how the logic of our framework, our approach, is set” ([Reuters](#), October 21).

Amidst harsher statements about the PRC made in October by U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo ([C-SPAN](#), October 24; [U.S. State Department](#), October 30), this more conciliatory tone was welcomed in PRC state media. In one commentary, Li Zheng, a research fellow with the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (associated with the Ministry of State Security), praised Sbragia’s comments as representing “the rational voice of the U.S. military.” Li further opined that DASD Sbragia’s comments indicated that “the U.S. military has been more rational in China policy than the U.S. Department of State [or] Commerce” ([CGTN](#), October 23).

Major Propaganda Themes from the Xiangshan Forum

Giving a Greater Voice to Smaller Countries in Security Affairs

Beijing has at times in the past run roughshod over its neighbors in international meetings, as when PRC Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi reportedly told his counterparts at the 2010 ASEAN Regional Forum that “China is a big country and other countries are small countries and that is just a fact” ([SCMP](#), December 1, 2018). However, a major theme of this year’s Xiangshan Forum was that China wished to provide a greater voice in security affairs to smaller countries that have heretofore exercised lesser influence in established fora. The official *China Daily* cited a conference spokesman to comment that the forum was “a key platform for defense officials, especially from small and medium-sized countries, to voice their opinions, build strategic trust with peers and find common ground for cooperation” ([China Daily](#), November 1). Similarly, the *Global Times* quoted a conference official as stating that “Many non-Western countries and victims of U.S. hegemony have no chance to express their dissatisfaction at forums in Munich or Shangri-La, which are dominat[ed] by the West, and have finally found a fair platform to speak and express themselves” ([Global Times](#), October 22).

PRC state press actively touted the statements of visiting foreign officials in support of this theme, and to promote the benefits of security cooperation with China. Cambodian Minister of Defense Tea Banh was quoted as stating that “competition between big nations can often sacrifice the interests of smaller nations... Yet China has maintained a fair and cooperative relationship with other Southeast Asian countries regardless of their size” ([China Daily](#), November 1). Serbian Minister of Defense Aleksandar Vulin, also visiting Beijing for the event, was quoted as stating that “in [Serbia’s] dialogue and cooperation with the PRC, we never feel the difference in size or power...the People’s Republic of China has shown that it is a peace-loving country, that it doesn’t have any territorial pretensions, that it doesn’t want anything from anyone, and strongly advocates the international law” ([Belt and Road News](#), October 24).

Standing Up to the “Big Stick Policy” of U.S. Hegemony

Such a positive role for China was contrasted at the forum with a strongly negative view of the policies of the United States. Despite repeated protestations that “Beijing is not organizing an anti-U.S. forum” at Xiangshan, official coverage asserted that “many representatives from different countries voiced their dissatisfaction and anger at Washington’s unilateral and hegemonic behavior, [and thus] the U.S. should rethink its inappropriate policies that have offended many in the world.” PRC state media accounts focused on a host of criticisms of U.S. policy reportedly made by conference attendees, to include defense officials from Cuba, Serbia, and Belarus ([Global Times](#), October 22).

PRC officials themselves used the forum to criticize U.S. policies more directly. In his opening address to the conference, PRC Defense Minister General Wei Fenghe (魏凤和)—a figure whose position involves little real authority over the armed forces, but is instead focused on military diplomacy—repeated once more many of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)’s standard accusations against an unnamed country, clearly understood to be the United States. He addressed alleged U.S. covert aggression by stating:

[T]o interfere in other countries’ internal affairs, to incite “color revolutions,” even to the point of subverting other countries’ lawful governments, this is the true source of war, chaos, and upheaval in regions [of the world]... In fact, a “big stick policy” (大棒政策, da bang zhengce) and “long arm jurisdiction” (长臂管辖, changbi guanxia) cannot solve any problem, and [when using] sanctions to exert pressure it is hard to achieve the objective—and the Chinese people will not let themselves be pushed around, and are not afraid of this. [1]

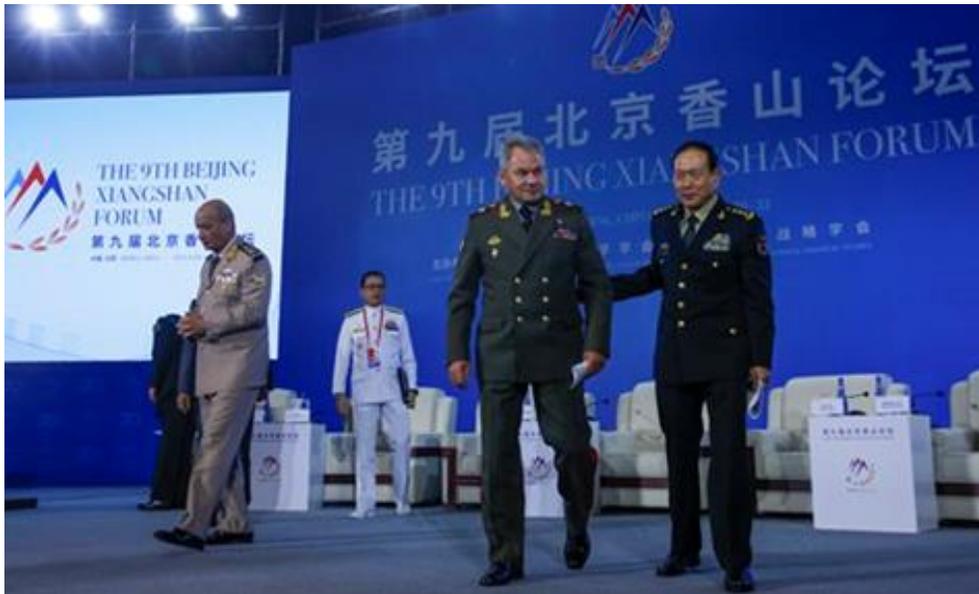


Image: Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu (left) and PRC Defense Minister Wei Fenghe (right) appear on stage together at the opening session of the Xiangshan Forum. (Source: [Global Times](#))

The PRC's Positive Role in Multilateral International Security (and the Declining Role of the United States)

A third prominent theme was that the PRC is working to uphold the international security order—and by clear implication, that it is doing so in contrast with U.S. neglect of (or active undermining of) that same international order. PRC Defense Minister Wei Fenghe touted the PRC's positive contributions to international security as demonstrated by its commitment of 40,000 troops to United Nations peacekeeping missions, its naval patrols in the Gulf of Aden, and its range of joint exercises with more than 30 countries (Chinamil.com.cn, October 22). Such efforts were part of China's dedication "to advancing cooperation through dialogue, and promoting peace through cooperation" (China.org.cn, October 21). In case anyone might miss the point, official media commentary noted that "while the U.S. was distancing itself from multilateral systems, China [has] always promoted multilateral cooperation and multilateralism" (Global Times, October 22).

In its efforts to promote this message, the PRC has been granted openings by the U.S. Government. The most prominent recent example was the U.S. failure to provide any high-level political representation to the 35th ASEAN Summit, held from October 31 – November 5 in Bangkok. U.S. President Donald Trump declined to attend, and the U.S. delegation was instead represented in meetings by National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien. (Premier Li Keqiang attended the ASEAN Summit on behalf of the PRC.) A side meeting was arranged on November 4 between O'Brien and ASEAN leaders, but in an apparent diplomatic snub, only summit host Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha of Thailand, and the prime ministers of Vietnam and Laos, took part; other ASEAN member states were represented by their foreign ministers (AP, November 4; ASEAN 2019, November 4).

As a result of the U.S. diplomatic retreat from multilateral initiatives in Asia, PRC representatives were not the only ones to criticize the United States at the Xiangshan Forum. Singapore Minister of Defense Ng Eng Hen made a speech before the conference in which he criticized the "America First" posture of the Trump Administration, and stated that the United States was "no longer the prime architect and champion of multilateralism" in either international trade or security affairs (Singapore Ministry of Defense, October 22).

Conclusion: The Continuing Effort to Create an Alternative International Security Order

The theme of this year's Xiangshan Forum, as offered in the official English slogan, was "Maintaining International Order and Preserving Peace in the Asia-Pacific" (维护国际秩序, 共筑亚太和平 / *Weihu Guoji Zhixu, Gong Zhu Yatai Heping*) (People's Daily Overseas Edition, October 23). However, a more literal translation of the second Chinese phrase would be "Building Peace in the Asia-Pacific Together"—a subtle but significant difference, for it implies creating a new order rather than maintaining one already in existence.

This is expressive of the broader purpose of the Xiangshan Forum and other elements of the PRC's expanding efforts in military diplomacy. Through such initiatives, Beijing aspires to build an alternative international security order in Asia: one in which China plays the central role, and "hegemonic" powers such as the United

States are sidelined; the governments of smaller countries are recruited into new international alignments under PRC leadership; PRC territorial ambitions are secured; and an absolute premium is placed on state sovereignty (as defined by the CCP). Beneath the veneer of language about multilateralism and international cooperation, the PRC's military diplomacy is successfully advancing, by gradual degrees, a geopolitical environment and security norms more amenable to Beijing's ever-expanding list of international interests.

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Notes

[1] "Wei Fenghe: The Land Left to Us by Our Ancestors, We Cannot Lose an Inch of It"

[魏凤和：老祖宗留下来的土地，我们一寸也不能丢], *People's Daily*, Oct. 21, 2019.

<http://www.hinews.cn/news/system/2019/10/21/032198310.shtml>. [Original text: “干涉他国内政，煽动“颜色革命”，甚至颠覆别国合法政权，是造成地区战乱动荡的真正乱源... 事实上，“大棒政策”“长臂管辖”解决不了任何问题，制裁施压也很难达到目的，中国人不吃这一套，也不怕这套。”] Translation by the author.

The Central Committee Fourth Plenum Gives Further Powers to the CCP Leadership “Core”

By Willy Lam

Introduction

Is the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) finally putting systems and institutions before the rule of personality? The much-delayed Fourth Plenum of the 19th CCP Central Committee, an annual meeting of about 300 top cadres that wrapped up on October 31, passed a “Decision on Some Major Issues Concerning How to Uphold and Improve the System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and to Advance the Modernization of China’s Governance System and Capacity for Governance” (hereafter “Decision”). The communique of the plenary session of the Central Committee said that by the year 2049, China would “fully realize the modernization of the state governance system and governance capacity.” By that time, the whole society would “boost systemic governance, governance according to the law, coordinated governance, [and] ‘governance at the source’” (源头治理, *yuantou zhili*), so that China’s “institutional superiority” would be even better transformed into state governance capacity ([China Daily](#), November 6; [Xinhua](#), October 31).

Official commentators have characterized the modernization of governance systems as China’s “Fifth Modernization” (after the “Four Modernizations” of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense). According to Han Xu, a politics expert at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, “the internal need

for modernizing the state governance system has provided a ‘chemical reaction’ [in the form of a] catalyst for institutional reform.” Han added that China urgently needed a “responsive government” that would respond to the “strong demands of the people in the areas of democracy, rule of law, equality, justice, the environment and security” (DWNNews.com, October 30; HK01.com, October 28; Chinanews.com, July 15).



Image: The 19th CCP Central Committee met for its long-delayed fourth plenary session in Beijing from October 28-31, 2019. Here, the full CCP Politburo (closest to the stage) presides over a symbolic vote.

(Source: Xinhua)

The Historical “Struggle Between Two Lines” in CCP Governance

The long trajectory of CCP history has demonstrated the “struggle between two lines” (两条路线斗争, *liang tiao luxian douzheng*)—that is, ruling the country via institutions and systems versus the rule of personality. According to a November *Xinhua* commentary, the CCP needed to “build a systemic foundation for China’s long reign and perennial stability.” The commentary revealed that in his famous “southern tour” in 1992, Deng Xiaoping expressed the hope that “in 30 years’ time, we will establish more mature, more consolidated systems and institutions in different sectors” (Qstheory.cn, November 7).

In his landmark 1980 speech entitled “The Reform of the Leadership System of the Party and State,” Chief Architect of Reform Deng castigated Mao-style cult of personality in favor of institutions that could be approved by the people. “A good system means bad people can’t do as they please,” Deng said. “A bad system means good people cannot fully do good. There is even a possibility that they might be forced to do the opposite.” Apart from abrogating life tenure and putting into place a system of succession, Deng also advocated some

degree of the separation of party and government, as well as the separation of party and economic enterprises. In the latter case, a firm's board of directors and professional managers, not party functionaries, would be its highest decision-makers ([CCTV News](#), September 16, 1980; [People's Daily](#), August 18, 1980).

The Fourth Plenum “Decision” Points Towards Further Centralization of Power

However, the communique of the Fourth Plenum paid no attention to “responsive institutions or systems” that emphasize the supervisory or at least participatory role of the people. This is despite the “Decision” having indicated that modernization of the governance system must incorporate “thought liberation, seeking truth from facts, and upholding reform and innovation.” The main thrust of the “Decision” was “upholding and improving the institutions and systems of party leadership... so that party leadership will be applied to all arenas, all aspects and all sectors of state governance.” In fact, the “Decision” gave the impression that the institutions and systems to be modernized are all geared toward boosting party authority: “We must improve and resolutely uphold different institutions that safeguard the authority of the central [party authorities] and its concentrated and unified leadership... We must perfect the system of the party's overall leadership.” That the role of ordinary party members or citizens is minimal can be seen from the document's insistence on the “major institutional guarantee of [the party's] self-purification, self-perfection, self-reform and self-enhancement” ([Xinhua](#), November 1; [Xinhua](#), October 31).

If the goal of the modernization of the governance system is the enhancement of one-party dictatorship—and if leadership must be exercised in a “concentrated and unified” fashion—then most of the decision-making powers will accrue to party chief Xi Jinping, the acknowledged “lifelong *hexin*” (核心, “core”) of the party, who is expected to rule as General Secretary until the 22nd Party Congress in 2032. One recalls statements made by Xi protégé Li Zhanshu, Chairman of the National People's Congress, that Xi has the power to *yichuidingyin* (一锤定音) and *dingyuyizun* (定于一尊), or “set the final tone and make the ultimate top-level decisions” ([China News Service](#), July 17, 2018; [New York Times Chinese Edition](#), March 20, 2018).

Indeed, “Decision” emphasized that modernization of institutions must dovetail with the goal of “the fourfold consciousness” (“political consciousness, consciousness of the entire situation [of the country], consciousness about [obeying the] *hexin*, and consciousness about seeing in unison with the *hexin*”). Another goal cited by the “Decision” is that party members must “resolutely uphold Xi Jinping's *hexin* status in the party... and resolutely safeguard the authority as well as the concentrated and united leadership of the party central authorities” ([People's Daily](#), November 8; [New Evening Post](#), October 24). But if institutional reform means upholding the unquestioned authority of a *hexin*, this is much more akin to Mao-style rule of man rather than modernized institutional rule.

Other Policy Issues Addressed at the Fourth Plenum: Trade Disputes and Hong Kong

Apart from theoretical issues, the Fourth Plenum also touched on three main pressing questions: the state of the economy, China-U.S. relations, and the Hong Kong imbroglio. A key reason underpinning the fact that

economic growth has dropped to the lowest point in recent decades is that the state sector—including close to 100 state-owned enterprise (SOE) conglomerates—continues to underperform despite being given monopolistic status. The plenum communique noted that the party-state must “uphold the public sector as the mainstay” of the economy (China-cer.com.cn, November 8; Jiefang Daily, November 8).

Moreover, senior departments—such as the State Assets Supervision and Administration Commission, as well as the Central Commission for Disciplinary Inspection—have used Cultural Revolution-style language when they scolded market-oriented SOEs for “building their own empires.” Trusted SOEs are being encouraged to take over star performers among private enterprises under the so-called model of *gongsihaying* (公私合营) or “public-private co-ownership” of the 1950s. There was apparently no opposition from Central Committee members against this transgression of Deng’s “separation of party and enterprises” dictum (Ming Pao, October 24; Radio Free Asia, August 5).

Surprisingly, there was no mention of the Sino-U.S. disputes over trade and other issues in the Communique. What many China specialists have characterized as an inchoate new Cold War between the two most powerful countries in the world is in fact a clash of models. While it is true that President Trump is happy that Beijing is buying more American farm produce to lower Beijing’s trade surplus, what the Trump leadership wants is a remodeling of the Chinese party-state’s tight control over the economy. The Americans have been demanding that the Chinese government stop or curtail its vast subsidies to exporters and to the high-tech sector, as well as alleged state-sponsored theft of the intellectual property of Western multinationals (HKO1.com, September 26; South China Morning Post, August 27). However, Xi emphasized in his plenum speech that all institutional reforms must dovetail with the “Chinese spirit, Chinese values and Chinese forces”—an unlikely sign of willingness to accept American demands.

There was ample discussion of Hong Kong during the conclave. It has been suggested that the protests since early June have been the result of the Xi leadership undermining the institution of “one country, two systems” by quashing such core values of the special administrative region (SAR) as freedom of expression and independence of the judiciary. A basic demand of the demonstrators is that Beijing lives up to its promises, made at the time of the handover of British sovereignty to the Chinese in 1997, that the SAR be allowed to enjoy universal suffrage elections when picking the city’s Chief Executive.

Instead, the “Decision” has doubled down on state security issues, stating that the “SAR must establish and perfect legal systems and execution mechanisms [so as] to safeguard national security.” This has led to heavy speculation that Beijing will soon introduce the much-feared Article 23 National Security Legislation—the prospect of which was behind the half-a-million person demonstration on July 1, 2003. Remarks made by Shen Chunyao, a senior NPC official in charge of the Legislative Affairs Commission, that Beijing would “improve [the institution of] the NPC Standing Committee interpreting the Basic Law [on Hong Kong],” have also raised suspicions—namely, that Article 23 might become law simply through an NPC interpretation, without going through the Legislative Council of the SAR ([Apple Daily \[Hong Kong\]](http://Apple Daily [Hong Kong]), November 5; South China Morning Post, November 1; China Daily, November 1).

Conclusion

In an October article in the CCP's official theoretical journal *Seeking Truth*, entitled "We Must Persevere in Pushing Forward the New Great Engineering in Party Construction," Xi revisited the question of "historical cycles." Shortly after coming to power in 2012, Xi had raised the issue of why dynasties inevitably collapsed after reigns of various lengths. Historical cycles, he said in his *Seeking Truth* essay, are "the fate that feudalistic empires cannot shake off in our history" ([Xinhua](#), October 2). During his meeting with respected pro-democratic scholar Huang Yanpei in 1945, Mao Zedong had asked Huang the same question. Huang upheld the theory of the inevitable boom-and-bust cycles of feudalistic regimes. Yet Mao retorted: "But we have found a new road which can enable us to jump out of this cycle. This new path is called democracy" ([China.com.cn](#), February 27, 2016; [People's Daily](#), October 24, 2013).

Despite the apparent awareness of Xi and his advisers that the CCP must come up with viable institutions and systems—which need to be periodically scrutinized and endorsed by the people—the "lifelong *hexin*" has opted for well-nigh unchecked powers and privileges. Moreover, the corollary of putting the rule of man over the rule of law and institutions is that Beijing can't go very far in solving problems—ranging from the economy and Sino-U.S. relations, to the imbroglio into which Hong Kong has been plunged.

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A State Visit by Kazakhstan's President Demonstrates China's Increasing Influence in Central Asia

By Leo Lin

Introduction

Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's recent visit to the People's Republic of China (PRC) on September 10-12 was not merely a state visit, but also signaled a new era in bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and China. During his visit, Tokayev met top officials of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), including CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang, and Li Zhanshu, the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. Tokayev also stopped in Hangzhou, where he visited the headquarters of the Alibaba Group and spoke with founder Jack Ma, as well as the new chairman and CEO Daniel Zhang ([Sina Tech](#), September 12). The September visit has symbolic meaning for both Xi and Tokayev

as they prepare for a new stage of their partnership—in the same year as the 70th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, and the 30th anniversary of Kazakhstan’s independence.

A New High Point in Kazakh-Chinese Relations

This visit and the events surrounding it produced numerous achievements for both sides. On a personal level, Kazakh President Tokayev has impressed Chinese audiences with his language ability. With his strong foreign service background and previous work experience in China and Russia, Tokayev can speak Russian, Chinese, and English. In an exclusive September 9 interview with China Central Television (CCTV), he spoke in fluent Chinese ([CCTV](#), September 9), which raised a lot of positive attention in China prior to his trip.

The most important achievement of Tokayev’s visit was a bilateral agreement to develop a “permanent comprehensive strategic partnership” (永久全面战略伙伴关系, *yongjiu quanmian zhanlue huoban guanxi*) ([Xinhua Net](#), September 12). In a joint statement, both leaders vowed to build their relations in the context of “an eternal comprehensive strategic partnership in the spirit of mutual benefit, unshakable friendship, mutual trust and comprehensive cooperation in front of common challenges” ([Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in China](#), September 15). In addition, the two leaders attended a signing ceremony for several bilateral cooperation agreements on economy, security, and technology ([Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in China](#), September 12).

Although Kazakhstan is the largest country in Central Asia, it needs to diversify its economy and work with rising neighbors to maintain its growth. The PRC is one of Kazakhstan’s most significant foreign trading partners, accounting for 15.7 percent of the country’s total trade. China has invested roughly \$20 billion in joint projects, and is the fourth largest source of foreign direct investment in the Kazakh economy ([The Astana Times](#), September 15). Working closely with China will be key for Kazakhstan’s economic and technological development, particularly in the fields of 5G, big data, and blockchain. Deals made during Tokayev’s visit will also boost Kazakhstan exports, as with an agreement to soon begin the export of dry camel milk concentrate to China ([Sina Financial News](#), September 17).

Table: Summary List of PRC – Kazakhstan Agreements Signed in September 2019

<u>Area of cooperation</u>	<u>Area of Focus</u>	<u>Full Name of the Agreements</u>
Economy	“Nurly Zhol” (光明之路, <i>Guāngmíng zhī lù</i>) New Economic Policy and the “Silk Road Economic Belt”	The Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Kazakhstan and the Government of China on the Implementation of the Cooperation Plan for the Connectivity of the “Nurly Zhol” New Economic Policy and the Construction of the “Silk Road Economic Belt”
	MOU between trade governmental bodies	The Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Trade and Integration of Kazakhstan and the Ministry of Commerce of China
	Dairy products	The Protocol between the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan and the General Administration of Customs of China on Inspection, Quarantine, Veterinary, and Sanitary Requirements for Dairy Products exported from Kazakhstan to China
	Flax	The Protocol between the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan and the General Customs Administration of China on Inspection, Quarantine, Veterinary, and Sanitary Requirements for Flax Exported from Kazakhstan to China
Security	Aviation search and rescue of civil aircraft	The Agreement between the Government of Kazakhstan and the Government of China on Cooperation in the Field of Aviation Search and Rescue of Civil Aircraft
	Intellectual property rights protection	The Memorandum between the Ministry of Finance of Kazakhstan and the General Administration of Customs of China on Strengthening Cooperation in the Field of Border Protection of Intellectual Property Rights
	Information sharing on goods and vehicles	The Technical Specification of the Exchange of Preliminary Information on Goods and Vehicles Transported Across the Customs Borders of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the People's Republic of China
Technology	Supercomputer	The Agreement between the Government of Kazakhstan and the Government of China on Cooperation on the Project of Providing a Supercomputer to the Kazakh Side by the Government of China

Source: Compiled by the author.

By deepening its cooperation with China, the Kazakh government will be able to maintain its economic growth and geopolitical standing in Central Asia. Specifically, Kazakhstan plans to strengthen its cooperation with China under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on issues such as trade, infrastructure, energy, 5G, science and technology research, and people-to-people and cultural exchanges ([Xinhua Net](#), September 11). Also, by taking advantage of the construction transport corridors under the framework of the China-driven 21st Century Silk Road, Kazakhstan will be able to gain easier access to markets in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.



Image: CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev attend a welcoming ceremony for the latter's visit to Beijing, September 11, 2019. (Source: [Xinhua](#))

Developing “Comprehensive Cooperation” Between Kazakhstan and the PRC

Xi first introduced the concept of the BRI when he visited Kazakhstan in 2013, and the PRC has now taken further steps to deepen its comprehensive partnership with Kazakhstan through several mechanisms. First, “all-around cooperation” (全方位合作, *quan fangwei hezuo*) with Kazakhstan means combining the Chinese Silk Road Economic Belt with Kazakhstan’s own economic “Bright Path” program ([Xinhua Net](#), September 11). Second, “the spirit of mutual benefit, unshakable friendship, mutual trust” (睦邻友好、互惠互信精神, *mulin youhao, huhui huxin jingshen*) reflects Kazakhstan’s and China’s mutual respect for each other’s national interests, and confirms the inviolability of borders and the principle of territorial integrity ([The Astana Times](#), September 15). Third, the “comprehensive cooperation before common challenges” (全面合作应对共同挑战, *quanmian hezuo yingdui gongtong tiaozhan*) means that the two countries will continue to work together to strengthen stability and maintain regional security through multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) ([The Astana Times](#), September 15).

The SCO and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program (CAREC) are among the most important multilateral institutions for China's outreach in Central Asia. Xi and Tokayev have both stated clearly that the SCO is going to play a more active role in jointly combating the "three evil forces" (terrorism, separatism, and extremism), maintaining regional security, and opposing alleged "external interference" ([Xinhua News](#), September 11). Since Russia is not a member of CAREC, this program has become a valuable platform for China to showcase its geopolitical influence and economic power in Central Asia. Together with the BRI, CAREC plans to create railway links that will connect China's Ürümqi city to Kazakhstan's Almaty, and ultimately terminate at Iran's capital city Tehran. If the project is successful, China would be able to offer a compelling alternative to Russia's historic influence in the region ([Xinhua Net](#), February 21).

Disagreements and Internal Dissent in Kazakhstan

In the joint statement, both sides reiterate that political trust is the vital foundation for their permanent comprehensive strategic partnership ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China](#), September 12). China and Kazakhstan have pledged not to harm each other's "core interests" (核心利益, *hexin liyi*) such as lending any support to separatists and extremist activities. From the Chinese point of view, everything seems to be on track and following the blueprint of China's grand strategy. However, in Kazakhstan, discontent and anti-China sentiment are spreading.

Three issues have been prominent sources of controversy. First, environmental pollution and the unfair treatment of workers are both endemic issues that have surrounded the installation of Chinese factories in Kazakhstan ([Radio France Internationale/China](#), September 11). As in other development projects around the globe, Chinese investors tend to bring in their own Chinese workers to build and operate factories in Kazakhstan. When Chinese investors do hire local workers, the rate of pay is quite low. Second, Kazakhstan citizens are also afraid that China may have territorial ambitions, and will seek to claim the eastern part of Lake Balkhash in Almaty Province. Third, Kazakhs worry about China's human rights record. Kazakhstan is a predominantly Muslim country, and the PRC's recent campaigns to "Sinicize" Islam ([China Brief](#), April 9) and repress religious expression in Xinjiang ([China Brief](#), May 18, 2018) have concerned many foreign onlookers. However, since President Tokayev has privileged Kazakhstan's relationship with the PRC, he has so far followed Beijing's political and security agenda ([Radio France Internationale](#), September 11) and refrained from openly criticizing its human rights record in Xinjiang.

For the Kazakh government, economic and geopolitical interests remain the top priority, as demonstrated by the close elite-level relationship with Chinese political leaders. Domestic pressures have so far done little to affect the foreign policymaking process. For example, President Tokayev conducted the state visit to China despite the fact that protests broke out in several cities in Kazakhstan, urging President Tokayev to cancel the trip ([RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty](#), September 10). After his visit, another round of anti-China protests broke out in both Kazakhstan's capital of Nur-Sultan, and largest city of Almaty, on September 21 ([Taiwan Central News Agency](#), September 22). This anti-China sentiment comes not only from the increased Chinese expansion in Kazakhstan, but also from the Chinese suppression of minority groups such as the Uyghurs.

Although protests in Kazakhstan have been on a small scale so far, their spread to various cities across the country indicates a potential for escalation that could include outbreaks of violence and business disruptions ([Stratfor Worldview](#), September 4).

Conclusion

Kazakhstan—and more broadly, Central Asia—is where Xi Jinping first introduced the BRI. In recent years, China has strived to connect Central Asian countries in a strategic revitalization of the ancient Silk Road. In Xi's foreign policy concepts, a “community of common destiny” (命运共同体, *mingyun gongtongti*) in Central Asia can be achieved through both a “community of security” (安全共同体, *anquan gongtongti*) and a “community of development” (发展共同体, *fazhan gongtongti*) ([Xinhua Net](#), June 16). President Tokayev's September visit to China signals a new stage in bilateral relations, and in deepening the geopolitical and economic interdependence between Kazakhstan and China. Through multilateral platforms such as the SCO and CAREC, China has created a platform for strong partnerships with Central Asian countries. From this state visit, the Chinese government has demonstrated its continued designs to implement an ambitious grand strategy in Central Asia.

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China's Presence in the Bahamas: A Greater Role After Hurricane Dorian?

By Jared Ward

Introduction

The Bahamas, an island paradise less than 60 miles off the coast of Florida, faces a long and expensive rebuild in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian. Nearly 50 percent of the Caribbean island nation's housing has been destroyed; and its infrastructure, upon which its tourism economy so badly depends, has been decimated. The international community has worked to stave off the immediate dangers of food and water shortages, but the task of rebuilding the Bahamas will be shouldered by its people for generations to come. The Inter-American Development Bank calculated \$3.4 billion in initial damages from Hurricane Dorian, and it is still uncertain where the funding for disaster relief will come from. ([IDB](#), November 15)

Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, whose state enjoys close ties to the Bahamas, warned in a recent editorial that the devastation caused by Hurricane Dorian could create an opening for the People's Republic of China (PRC) to use aid as a Trojan Horse to gain a foothold near American shores ([Miami Herald](#), September 14). However, while the destructive path of the hurricane has ostensibly created a blank slate for the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to rebuild badly needed infrastructure, Beijing's presence in the Bahamas has already

been growing for years: Chinese investors are major players in the Bahamas' lucrative tourism industry, and Chinese companies like the China Harbor Engineering Company (CHEC) have added to their growing Caribbean portfolio with infrastructure projects throughout the country.



Image: Bahamian residents salvage personal possessions amid devastated homes in the wake of Hurricane Dorian, September 2019. (Source: [Time](#))

The rise of Chinese presence and influence has placed the Bahamas and its leaders in the unenviable position of navigating Sino-American tensions in the Caribbean. Washington has responded to Beijing's recent spate of spending by warning the country against China's "predatory economic practices," yet has focused its foreign policy attention towards faraway regions considered more strategically important ([The Tribune](#), March 20). Beijing's role in the Bahamas will be watched intently by Caribbean leaders bracing for their own battles with climate change and other pressing issues. Inaction or mixed signals from the Trump Administration towards its neighbor in crisis will make the PRC an attractive and necessary partner—thereby lessening Washington's ability to draw upon the support of Caribbean leaders for important hemispheric issues like Venezuela.

The "Distracted Neighbor" Posture of the United States

Days after Hurricane Dorian finished its slow, two-day slog over the Bahamas, President Trump took questions in the White House. He voiced his support for the country but hedged at American responsibility, calling the Bahamas a "British protectorate" ([White House](#), September 4). The words likely took the sovereign nation of 400,000 people by surprise, but they also highlight the difficult political climate facing Bahamian leaders. Since the Bahamas broke free from the British Empire in 1972, America has carried unrivaled political and economic influence in the country.

The Bahamian economy heavily relies on American tourists and wealthy individuals that use its financial industries, but in recent years America's political role has waned. America's ambassadorial position to the Bahamas has been unfilled since 2011, by far the longest span in the nearly fifty-year history of U.S.-Bahamian bilateral relations. While the muck of political partisanship can help explain slowed confirmations, it's only one indication that America's influence is, as one Bahamian newspaper editorial put it, "slowly slipping away" ([The Tribune](#), August 3, 2017).

According to the Bahamian Consulate General in Miami, Prime Minister Hubert Minnis pledged to President Trump in March to help keep Chinese influence out of his country ([Palm Beach Post](#), October 15). Holding Chinese companies accountable was a campaign issue that helped propel Minnis to his 2017 election victory, but campaign promises won't solve the messy reality his country faces. Publicly, Bahamian officials have said they will stay out of Sino-American conflicts, instead focusing on their own economy and interests; however, it's not entirely clear where those interests lie. As then-Vice President Joe Biden reportedly said in 2014 to Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) chairman Fred Mitchell that while America had no money to give, "China has money; and if they want to give you money, God bless you, go right ahead" ([EW News](#), May 21).

Beijing's Relations with the Bahamas

The Bahamas are a relative latecomer in opening diplomatic relations with the PRC. For over three decades Nassau recognized Taipei exclusively, before announcing in 1997 its decision to agree to Beijing's "One-China" mandate—thereby effectively ending any relationship with Taiwan. That same year, Hubert Ingraham became the first Bahamian Prime Minister to visit China. The first decade of relations was uneventful, and nations like Cuba and Jamaica were a bigger focus of Beijing's Caribbean interests.

In 2009, in the wake of the global financial crisis, signs of a closer relationship emerged. In February 2009, the PRC sent a high-ranking cadre, then-Vice Premier Hui Liangyu, to sign a number of agreements, including a \$30-million dollar grant to build the Thomas A. Robinson National Stadium ([Bahamas Government](#), February 17, 2009). That same year Beijing opened a Confucius Institute at the University of the Bahamas to act as a cultural bridge, teaching language and Chinese culture to Bahamian students. In 2010, the China EXIM Bank provided over \$54 million in preferential loans to build a four-lane highway that runs from Sir Lynden Pindling Airport to Nassau's city center. China has also granted preferential loans to build a \$3 billion mega-port at Freeport ([Roll Call](#), March 25), and another \$40-million to build a port off the island of Abaco ([The Abaconian](#), December 12, 2018). The controversial Chinese tech-firm Huawei has upgraded the Bahamas' digital infrastructure, connecting the island's grid to 4G service and the surrounding region. Over 3,500 kilometers of cables run between the Bahamas and Haiti, carrying data around the hemisphere. In 2018, China Worldwide agreed to build wind turbines, which will move the nation toward cleaner energy while preserving its natural tropical beauty ([Nassau Guardian](#), March 5).

Besides infrastructure, many Chinese investments in the Bahamas are aimed at reaping the benefits of its robust tourism industry. In 2011, the China EXIM Bank loaned nearly \$3 billion dollars to build the Baha Mar

Resort; and in 2015, the China State Engineering Corporation purchased the iconic British Hilton Colonial as part of the construction of a \$250 million complex near Nassau's cruise terminals called "The Pointe" ([The Bahamas Investor](#), August 11, 2015).

Despite talk of China "colonizing" the Bahamas, the country has benefited from a relationship with China in tangible ways. Baha Mar created thousands of jobs for locals who work in the hospitality business. America's trade war with China has also opened up new opportunities for Bahamian exports: for example, the Chinese market has opened for fishermen to sell their lobster and crayfish catches in record numbers. As one fisherman said, "For years we have been trying to get into the Chinese market. We are allowed to ship seafood from here to China. We don't just have to depend on Europe and America. Our lobster is number one in the world. It's all about supply and demand" ([The Tribune](#), September 2).



Image: At a March 2010 ceremony, representatives of Baha Mar Resorts Ltd., the China EXIM Bank, and the China State Construction Engineering Company sign agreements to proceed with the financing and construction of the Baha Mar Resort complex in the Bahamas. (Source: [Global Construction Review](#))

Problems in the Sino–Bahamian Relationship

Despite such economic benefits, China's presence in the Bahamas has not been without controversy. The Baha Mar resort, the largest of its kind in the Caribbean, was plagued with delays and shortfalls in funding. More recently, it has become the target of a \$2.5 billion dollar suit alleging "massive fraud" ([Reuters](#), December 26, 2017). Among Bahamian society a disquiet has emerged that Chinese projects have little trickle-down effect: jobs go to Chinese workers and companies, while saddling their country with debt.

For America, China's growing presence exacerbates worries that expensive port facilities in the Bahamas might be seized by the PRC for delinquent payments, as has occurred in Sri Lanka ([China Brief](#), January 5). In 2016,

Latre Rahming, an influential member of the People's Liberation Party (PLP), fanned these fears by stating in a speech that China “will actively provide military assistance to the Bahamas and defense dialogue” ([Sunshine State News](#), September 10). According to a State Department report, American officials expect the Caribbean to become an increasingly popular transit space for drug and human smugglers ([State Department](#), July 23). Given reports that 200,000 Chinese nationals have been illegally smuggled into America through the Caribbean, a growing Chinese presence in the Bahamas could also become a matter of national security ([ReliefWeb](#), June 20, 2017).

Why Is China Interested in the Bahamas?

There are pragmatic explanations for China's presence that don't involve the Chinese navy operating off the coast of Florida. The success of China's projects in the Bahamas, including its ability to have loans repaid, depends on a healthy American economy. Chinese tourism has made little headway in the region—and therefore, multi-billion projects like Baha Mar and other high-traffic tourist enterprises require American travelers to fill the rooms. Furthermore, the value of high-capacity port access for China outweighs the antagonisms that a naval base would cause. China's port access in the Bahamas means that China will have access to ports on each side of the expanded Panama Canal—thereby giving Beijing access to an important corridor of the Western market.

A more plausible and immediate concern is that increased Chinese leverage in the wake of Hurricane Dorian could give the PRC greater access to natural resources. The Bahamas lacks mineral or timber wealth like some other Caribbean nations, but Beijing has long tried to gain a greater role in the fishing industry. Shortly after Hurricane Matthew, China proposed a joint fishing venture that would give Chinese commercial ships access to Bahamian waters. One such deal was scrapped in 2016—due at least in part to pressures by Florida fishermen ([Sun Sentinel](#), November 29, 2016)—but Nassau will be looking for new revenue streams following Hurricane Dorian. This could pressure the Bahamas' fishing industry to rethink turning away Beijing, and to invite Chinese competition into Caribbean waters—thereby squeezing the Florida fishing industry ([Seafood Source](#), April 12, 2016).

Conclusion

In the aftermath of Dorian, political debates regarding the longer-term implications of how the Bahamas should manage its relations with China will take a backseat to more immediate concerns. On one-hand, Hurricane Dorian could provide a reset for America's role in the country, providing a way to re-forge old ties and provide incentives for Nassau to stay in the U.S. sphere of influence. For Beijing, Dorian could push the Bahamas to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and serve as an example for Caribbean leaders bracing themselves for future hurricanes and wondering about their place between Washington and Beijing.

The Bahamas has not joined the BRI like many of its neighbors, but will likely become more attracted to the program to help build back up its shattered infrastructure. In the weeks following Dorian, the PRC sent Cai

Defeng, a high-level cadre and standing member of the National People's Congress, to the Bahamas. The symbolism of sending a high-ranking official shows that Beijing intends to take an active role in reshaping the Bahamas. During the meeting, Bahamian House Speaker Haison Moultrie said that Dorian is an opportunity to redistribute his nation's development resources to the country's southern islands—creating new commercial and tourist centers—effectively giving China a hand in molding the country in a new direction ([The Tribune](#), September 20).

America's influence in the Bahamas, and the entire Caribbean region, remains strong. However, Caribbean nations have a strong regional identity and face common problems like climate change. In Dominica, a nation recently ravaged by Hurricane Irma, Beijing has become Prime Minister Roosevelt Skeritt's principal ally and a benefactor to help make good on his election promises. America has been criticized for its efforts to rebuild Puerto Rico—its own territory—so the response to Dorian will provide a case study as to whether Caribbean nations can count on their neighbor to the north, or whether they should bind themselves more closely to China.

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The Battle for Motor Sich: a Sino-American Dispute in Ukraine

By Yuan Jiang and Vladimir Legenko

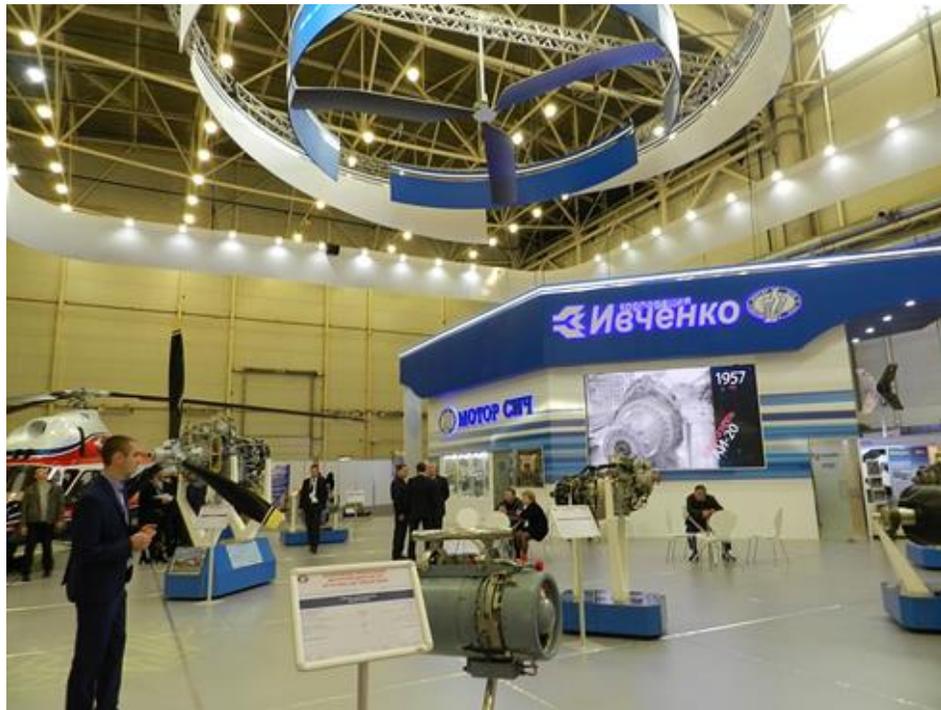


Image: Motor Sich equipment on display at the “XI International Aviation and Space Salon,” held in October 2018 at the International Exhibition Centre in Kyiv, Ukraine. (Source: MotorSich.com)

Introduction

This summer, Ukraine became another venue for competition between the United States and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). In August, then-U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton held several meetings with the Ukrainian leadership; according to the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, the hurriedly arranged trip was intended to “underscore U.S. support for Ukraine’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and Euro-Atlantic path” ([U.S. Embassy Kyiv Twitter Account](#), August 27). Many observers believed that a key purpose of Bolton’s trip was to convince the Ukrainian government to block the acquisition of the Ukraine-based company Motor Sich (Мотор Січ) by the Chinese enterprise Beijing Skyrizon Aviation ([UNIAN](#), August 25; [Nikkei Asian Review](#), September 3; [Eurasia Daily Monitor](#), Sep 6).

Motor Sich is one of the largest aviation companies in the world, and is a manufacturer of advanced engines for both rotary-wing and fixed-wing aircraft. Furthermore, Motor Sich has a 60-year contract to share design and operational documentation with the state-owned-enterprise Ivchenko-Progress ([Dzerkalo Tyzhnia](#), September 21)—and therefore, China’s recent efforts to acquire Motor Sich would also give access to Ivchenko-Progress’s vast archive of technical documentation. A Chinese acquisition of Motor Sich offers the

People's Liberation Army (PLA) the resources and knowledge to deploy more advanced engines in PLA combat helicopters—potentially raising PLA capabilities in areas such as logistics and close air support.

The History of Chinese Military Procurement in Ukraine

Washington's recent focus on Chinese military purchases in Ukraine may have come too late. In 1998, Beijing bought the unfinished aircraft carrier *Varyag*—which would later become the *Liaoning*—from the Ukrainian Black Sea Shipyard through an intermediary Hong Kong businessman. The PLA Navy (PLAN) was thereby able to leapfrog an estimated 15 years of research and development to achieve aircraft carrier capabilities in 2013, when the *Liaoning* entered active service ([SCMP](#), April 29, 2015). The PRC also obtained production technology for the UGT-25000 gas turbine from Ukraine in the 1990s (later re-developed as the QC 280) and incorporated it into the propulsion systems of several of the PLAN's large warships, to include the Type 052 *Renhai*-class destroyer, the Type 055 *Kunming*-class destroyer, and the forthcoming Type 011 *Shandong* aircraft carrier ([Yandex Zen](#), July 14; [Deagel](#), October 24; [Deagel](#), December 19, 2018).

China also acquired the production technology for the D136 aircraft engine and the AI222-25 engine from Ukraine. The latter engine system is used in the PLA Air Force (PLAAF)'s JL-10 aircraft. Converted Soviet AL-31F-M1 engines were adapted with Ukrainian engineering aid for use in the the J-11 and EMEI aircraft. Around the same time, the PRC created the WS 15 engine—which bears suspicious similarity to the Russian AL-31FN engine—for use in the PLAAF's fifth generation J-20 fighter jet ([Yandex Zen](#), July 14). The PRC has already had many years of successful procurement experience in the Ukrainian military technology market.

While Ukrainian technologies are not the only factor in the rise of modern Chinese military hardware, China has clearly benefited from opportunities presented by the current imbalance between Ukraine's ongoing economic and military quagmire and its historic expertise in high-tech industries. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, independent Ukraine became one of the poorest countries in Europe: Ukraine is ranked last in the international market research firm Growth from Knowledge (GfK)'s 2019 "Purchasing Power Europe" report, with a per capita purchasing power of \$2042 ([GfK](#), October 21). The 2014 Crimea Crisis and ongoing war in Donbass have exacerbated this situation, making it impossible to guarantee a stable environment for investment or economic development. In the past, a third of all industrial enterprises of the Soviet Union were located in the Ukraine, including factories for the production of aircraft, missiles, ships and tanks. Chinese entities have bought up many of these neglected technologies and employed Ukrainian experts at low cost.

The Process of Motor Sich Acquisition

Acquiring Motor Sich would have been a considerable victory for the PLA's efforts to develop a modern warfighting capability, but Chinese buyers quickly ran into trouble. Beijing Skyrizon Aviation's acquisition plan was first obstructed due to an inspection by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), which accused Motor Sich of continuing to sell products to Russia. The company maintains ties to the Russian government and defense industry, and according to the National Security Council of Ukraine, about 80 percent of Russian combat

helicopters are equipped with Motor Sich engines ([Hvylyya News](#), September 19). The SBU has also accused a branch of the company of providing financial support to the separatist authorities of the Donetsk People's Republic ([Eurasia Daily Monitor](#), Sep 19).

Beijing Skyrizon's attempt to purchase Motor Sich was conducted in a surreptitious manner. An SBU audit conducted in 2016 found that 56 percent of Motor Sich shares had been sold to various shell companies, with Skyrizon as the ultimate beneficiary. Skyrizon had, in turn, borrowed money for the purchase from the state-owned China Development Bank (CDB). If Skyrizon goes bankrupt, the Chinese government will gain control over Motor Sich via the CDB. Also in 2016, another Chinese company gave Motor Sich a soft loan of \$100 million dollars (at 0.3 percent interest for 10 years). This loan may explain why Motor Sich was able to purchase plants in Ukraine and Belarus, despite suffering huge losses from the Ukrainian trade ban with Russia during the same time period. After receiving a petition from the SBU in 2018, the Ukrainian court system froze 56 percent of Motor Sich's shares previously sold to the Chinese and banned further equity sales ([Dzerkalo Tyzhnia](#), September 21). Following these developments, Beijing Skyrizon Aviation was left with a 25 percent stake in Motor Sich—short of a controlling majority, but more than enough for a blocking minority.

Following this year's presidential and snap parliamentary elections in Ukraine, it was revealed in June that the Chinese companies Skyrizon Aviation and Xinwei Technology Group had applied to the Antimonopoly Committee of Ukraine for a controlling stake in Motor Sich ([061.ua](#), October 19). The compromise agreement made public provides that the companies receive an ownership stake of more than 50 percent in Motor Sich, but also that at least 25 percent of the shares be held by the Ukrainian state entity Ukroboronprom. The companies also pledged in the same agreement to contribute \$100 million for the development of the Ukrainian aviation industry. Aside from the risk of default, it is expected that more than 40 percent of the Ukrainian government's budget over the next two years will go to paying down the national debt; given this reality, the new Ukrainian government has been tempted to agree to this Chinese proposal ([112.ua](#), September 18).

Ukraine's Economic Ties with China and the United States

Regional analysts have noted that “Chinese investment [in Ukraine] has significantly increased by 50 times in the last decade [and] bilateral trade relations between China and Ukraine have grown dramatically... China has become the largest single nation trading partner [of Ukraine], bypassing Russia.” In recent years, the PRC has planned to invest over \$7 billion in joint projects ([Kyiv Post](#), September 14). Ukraine's geographic position also makes it “highly attractive as a logistic transit hub within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that links China with the European Union” ([The Diplomat](#), October 4). To this end, the Kyiv-based “One Belt One Road Trade and Investment Promotion Center” has worked to deepen Sino-Ukrainian economic cooperation, and to build up Ukraine's potential as a regional transit link ([Xinhua](#), July 6, 2018).

By contrast, Ukrainian-American economic relations have stagnated for decades. In 2018, the Ukrainian-American two-way trade in goods was worth \$3.8 billion; the equivalent trade between Ukraine and China in the same period was worth \$10.1 billion ([USTR](#), undated). According to U.S. 2019 import and export data,

Ukraine offers mostly low-tech products to the U.S. market, which are potentially substitutable ([Forbes](#), September 30).

Conclusion: Who Will Win in the Struggle Over Ukrainian Military Technology?

During John Bolton's September trip to Kyiv, the U.S. administration indicated it was only concerned with security, and did not offer any pragmatic economic deals. The recent withdrawal of troops from Syria and Afghanistan has greatly reduced the trustworthiness of American security support and severely weakened its perceived international standing. During the Cold War, a territory like Ukraine was a strategic priority in the U.S. effort to contain the Soviet Union; however, Washington has apparently decided that it is not worth wasting too much strategic energy in Kyiv.

Some Ukrainian political experts, such as Yuri Romanenko and Alexander Kochetkov, argue that the controversy over Motor Sich could have been avoided if a U.S. entity had purchased the company ([Hvyliya News](#), September 9; [UKR Life](#), September 3). American private companies (for example, General Electric) are engaged in the production of advanced aviation engines and compete with foreign counterparts such as Motor Sich for government contracts. The U.S. military procurement apparatus has privileged native suppliers for national security reasons, and has invested heavily in research and development for new military technologies, such as the development of 5th generation fighter aircraft. However, no U.S.-based company has yet indicated serious interest in competing with Chinese entities for the purchase of Motor Sich. [1]

If we ask who will win in this particular case—China or the United States—the question is essentially this: which nation is able and willing to offer more to Ukraine? In the future, Beijing Skyriзон Aviation—and therefore the PLA—may acquire the engines for 5th generation fighter aircraft, based on past successes in the Ukrainian market and the depressed economic reality of Ukraine. The question is not one of right or wrong, but rather the realities of competition between a rising power and the existing dominant power across the globe. In our view, there will be only one winner in this battle for Ukrainian technology: China.

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Notes

[1] Media reports in early November 2019 indicated possible interest on the part of Hong Kong-based Frontier Services (owned by Blackwater founder Eric Prince) in purchasing Motor Sich, but this remains unconfirmed ([WSJ](#), November 5; [Radio Free Europe](#), November 7).
