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**SPECIAL THEME ISSUE:
CHINA'S POLICIES TOWARDS ITS CONTINENTAL ASIAN PERIPHERY**

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Editor's Note:

This is a special theme issue of China Brief, focused on the policies adopted by the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) towards the regions on its continental Asian periphery—to include both China's continental neighbors, as well as Central Asian border regions within the PRC itself. In this issue, Adrian Zenz offers an abridged version of a longer report published by Jamestown in late June, which details efforts by the Chinese government to forcibly suppress birth rates among Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in the western region of Xinjiang. Sudha Ramachandran, a regular contributor to Jamestown on issues related to both terrorism and China, offers an assessment of the causes underlying the violent clashes between Indian and Chinese troops that occurred in the Galwan Valley region in June. Sergey Sukhankin, another frequent writer

for Jamestown on issues related to private military contractors, offers the first in a series of planned articles on PRC security policy directed towards the countries of Central Asia. Antonio Graceffo, an economic analyst residing in Mongolia, offers an overview of the issues within that country impacting its potential engagement with China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative. Finally, my own contribution examines the ways in which the PRC is attempting to leverage its Beidou satellite navigation system to seek greater influence throughout continental Asia—and thence onwards to Europe and Africa. We modestly hope that this special issue will make a further contribution towards Jamestown's long-standing mission to better inform both policymakers and the public about developments in Eurasia that bear implications for U.S. foreign policy and national security.

The Beidou Satellite Network and the “Space Silk Road” in Eurasia

By John Dotson

Author's note: This article was informed by research and analysis on the PRC's Beidou satellite program conducted by Pointe Bello, a strategic intelligence and advisory firm.

Introduction

On June 23, a *Long March-3B* carrier rocket was successfully launched from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan Province, carrying with it the latest satellite of the *Beidou* (“Big Dipper”) Global Satellite Navigation System (北斗全球卫星导航系统, *Beidou Quanguo Weixing Daohang Xitong*). This launch was a capstone event in an ambitious series of satellite launches conducted by the People's Republic of China (PRC) throughout the early months of 2020 ([China Brief](#), May 15). The June 23 launch delivered into orbit the 30th and final satellite of the *Beidou* third-generation constellation (and the 55th *Beidou* satellite overall), reportedly completing the third-generation network six months ahead of the original timetable ([Beidou.gov.cn](#), June 23). The launch was hailed in PRC state media as “a complete success,” and “a milestone in the nation's space endeavor” ([Xinhua](#), June 23; [Xinhua](#), June 24).

The *Beidou* third-generation constellation (hereafter, “*Beidou-3*”) consists of: 3 satellites in geostationary orbit (GEO); 24 satellites in middle earth orbit (MEO); and 3 satellites in inclined geosynchronous orbit (IGSO) ([China Satellite Navigation Office](#), December 2017; [Xinhua](#), June 23). *Beidou-3* represents a noteworthy advancement over the capabilities of the earlier first- and second-generation *Beidou* satellite navigation networks. [1] Per official PRC information issued in December 2018—when *Beidou-3* was proclaimed to be operational, if not yet complete—the system offers positioning accuracy within 10 meters horizontal and 10 meters vertical (5 meters in the Asia-Pacific Region); a velocity measurement accuracy within 0.2 meters per second; and a timing accuracy of 20 nanoseconds. [2]



Image: A Long March-3B carrier rocket, carrying on board the 30th and final satellite of the Beidou third-generation constellation of global positioning satellites, was launched from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center (Sichuan Province) on June 23, 2020. (Image source: [Xinhua](#), June 23)

The completion of the third-generation *Beidou* system is a development with significant implications for the PRC's military capabilities. Like the U.S. Global Positioning System (GPS) and the Russian GLONASS network, *Beidou* was originally created for military purposes: the impetus for the program dates back to the 1990s, when People's Liberation Army (PLA) planners realized their dependence on the U.S.-controlled GPS network. [3] In recent years, the PRC has actively sought to promote the image of *Beidou* as a civilian-led program intended primarily for commercial and scientific purposes; however, the program is under overall military direction, with the PLA in charge of *Beidou*'s senior-most program management organizations. [4]

***Beidou* as a Component of the BRI and the “Space Silk Road”**

Military and commercial applications aside, *Beidou* is also serving a key role in the PRC's diplomatic outreach and geopolitical presence in Eurasia. PRC propaganda has gone to great lengths to promote expanding usage of *Beidou* as a key component of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and to market *Beidou* services to clients—both commercial and national—throughout Central and South Asia. This aspect of *Beidou* is frequently encapsulated under the slogans of building an “Information Silk Road” (信息丝绸之路, *Xinxi Sichou zhi Lu*), a “Digital Silk Road” (数字丝绸之路, *Shuzi Sichou zhi Lu*), or a “Space Silk Road” (太空丝绸之路, *Taikong Sichou zhi Lu*) throughout Asia—and then onwards to Europe and Africa ([Renmin Luntan](#), May 10, 2017; [Zhongguo Duiwai Maoyi Zazhi](#), February 8, 2019).

These themes date back to at least 2016, when the PRC issued its white paper *China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System*. In that document, the PRC asserted that “China applies the principle that ‘[*Beidou*] is developed by China, and dedicated to the world’ to serve the development of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” ([Beidou White Paper](#), June 2016, Preface). The document further predicted that “In line with the [BRI], China will jointly build satellite navigation augmentation systems with relevant nations, provide highly accurate satellite navigation, positioning and timing services, improve the

overseas [*Beidou*] service performances, and promote international applications of navigation technologies” ([Beidou White Paper](#), June 2016, Section V).

The PRC’s official English-language propaganda website for the BRI has reiterated these themes, stating that *Beidou* “is of significant importance for China’s Going Global strategy and the [BRI]... Within the BRI, [*Beidou*] is a part of China’s Space Silk Road [which] aims at creating an entire range of space capabilities including satellites, launch services, and ground infrastructure and at supporting related industries and service providers going global” ([BRI Official Website](#), 2018). As its satellite navigation network has developed in recent years, the PRC has offered prioritized (and free) access to *Beidou* data and services to BRI member nations—thereby providing an additional incentive for countries to sign on with the PRC’s signature foreign policy initiative. As stated in a recent research report for the U.S. Congress performed by Pointe Bello and the Project 2049 Institute, “In offering *Beidou* to [BRI] partners, the PRC is undoubtedly attempting to gain influence as a regional technological power.” [5]

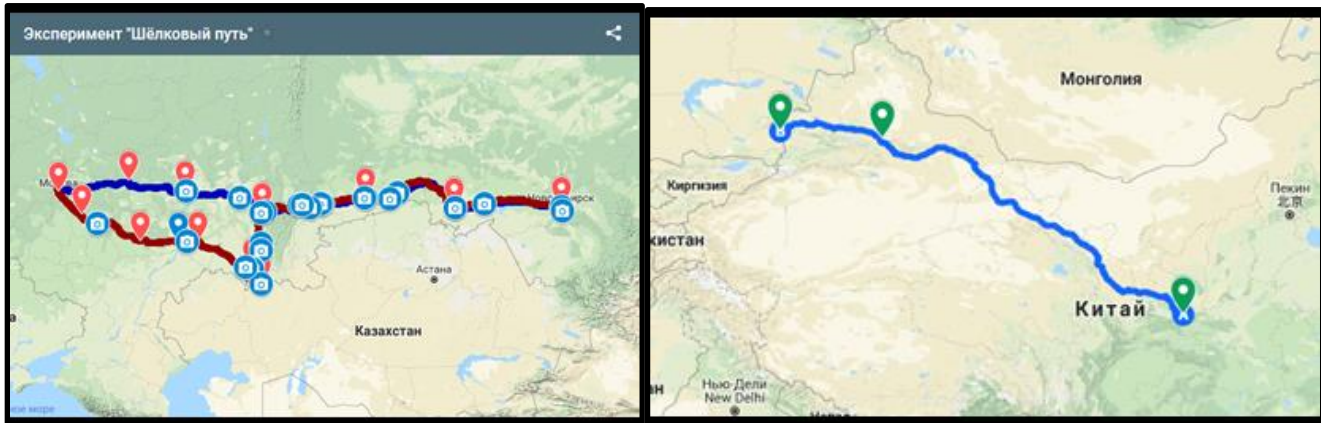
China and International Partnerships in Promoting *Beidou* in Eurasia

Sino-Russian Collaboration on Satellite Navigation

The PRC is actively seeking to engage with international partners in promoting *Beidou* services as a vanguard component of this new “Information Silk Road” through Central and South Asia. Russia became one of the PRC’s key partners when the “Russia-China Project Committee on Important Strategic Cooperation in Satellite Navigation” (中俄卫星导航重大战略合作项目委员会 / *Zhong-E Weixing Daohang Zhongda Zhanlue Hezuo Xiangmu Weiyuanhui*) was first formed in January 2014 ([Beidou.gov.cn](#), July 11, 2018). Between 2015 and 2017, Chinese and Russian representatives signed a series of agreements pertaining to the sharing of *Beidou* and GLONASS data—as well as the joint development of navigation products to be marketed in the states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and countries connected to the BRI. This culminated in a July 2017 agreement to create a “Silk Road Experiment,” or “Silk Way,” for the sharing of civil application GLONASS-*Beidou* data in a corridor through central Russia (see *images below*) ([Sputnik News](#), December 16, 2015; [GLONASS Official Website](#), undated).

Russia and the PRC have held high-level annual meetings of the “Project Committee” since its founding in 2014, with the venue shifting year-by-year between the two countries. The fifth annual meeting was held in Beijing in September 2018, and was chaired by Wang Zhaoyao (王兆耀), who serves a senior role (and a dual military-civilian role) in managing the *Beidou* program within the PRC (see *photos below*, and *endnote #4*). ([Yidian Zixun](#), October 18, 2018). The sixth and most recent meeting of the committee was held in the Russian city of Kazan in late August 2019. In coverage of this meeting, PRC state press praised the achievements of Sino-Russian cooperation in conducting surveys of locations for “satellite navigation monitoring stations” (卫星导航监测站, *weixing daohang jiance zhan*); success in jointly developing “global satellite navigation system signal multi-mode, multi-frequency chips” (卫星导航系统全球信号多模多频射频芯片, *weixing daohang*

xitong quanqiu xin hao duomo duopin shepin xin pian); and in “jointly developing [Beidou-GLONASS] “functions and testing to service the BRI” (联合开展两系统“一带一路”服务性能测试等, *lianhe kaizhan liang xitong “Yi Dai Yi Lu” fuwu xingneng ceshi*) ([Xinhua](#), September 3, 2019).



Images: Maps depicting the planned “Silk Road Experiment” corridor for Sino-Russian cooperation on satellite navigation development. In Russia, the corridor extends through central Russia between Novosibirsk, Moscow, and Ufa; in China, it extends from the border of Xinjiang to the city of Xian.
(Image source: [GLONASS Official Website](#), undated).

The official outlets of the two governments have maintained consistently positive coverage of their collaborative efforts in satellite navigation—and Russian state media went so far as to claim in April 2018 that the *Beidou* and GLONASS systems would be integrated into a combined network offering worldwide coverage ([RT](#), April 1, 2018). Given the military significance of satellite positioning systems, as well as their extensive commercial applications, it appears unlikely that the two sides would ever truly agree to such a complete merger of their networks. Technical cooperation in particular areas, however, is likely to continue.

Satellite Navigation Technology Outreach in the Middle East

A second prominent example of the PRC’s *Beidou* diplomacy is the effort to promote the system in the Middle East. The PRC first hosted a “China-Arab States BeiDou Cooperation Forum” (中阿北斗合作论坛, *Zhong-Ah Beidou Hezuo Luntan*) in Shanghai in May 2017 ([Xinhua](#), April 2, 2019). This was followed by the creation of a “China-Arab States BDS/GNSS Center” (“BDS” for *Beidou*, and “GNSS” for “global navigation satellite system”), which opened its doors in Tunis, Tunisia in April 2018. This institution, hailed in PRC media as “the first overseas center for China’s indigenous BeiDou Navigation Satellite System,” was established as a joint project between the PRC and the Arab Information and Communication Technology Organization (AICTO), an organization subordinate to the Arab League ([Xinhua](#), April 11, 2018).



Image: Ran Chengqi (冉承其) (fifth from right), a prominent spokesman for PRC efforts to promote Beidou, appears with representatives of Arab countries at the inaugural ceremony for the “China-Arab States BDS/GNSS Center” established in Tunis, Tunisia in April 2018. (Image source: [Xinhua](#), April 11, 2018)

PRC state media has touted the center’s value as “a window to showcase the BDS, and a platform for promoting international exchanges and cooperation” between China and countries in the Middle East. It has also cited persons affiliated with the center to promote the benefits of *Beidou* for Middle Eastern countries. Xinhua has quoted Mohamed Ben Amor, the secretary-general of AICTO, as vowing to “intensify... cooperation with China in the field of satellite navigation to boost technological advance[s] and economic development in the region” ([Xinhua](#), April 11, 2018); and Slim Khalbous, Tunisian Minister of Higher Education, as calling *Beidou* “the best example for the strategic cooperation between China and Arab states, as satellite navigation integrates many high-tech areas, including telecommunication and space technologies” ([Xinhua](#), April 2, 2019).

The early months of 2019 were a noteworthy period for such collaborative efforts to develop *Beidou* capabilities. From January to March 2019, AICTO and officials from the China Satellite Navigation Office “jointly carried out test and evaluation activities of [*Beidou*]... including static testing and dynamics [throughout] the main areas of the Arab region” ([Beidou.gov.cn](#), April 2019). This was capped off by a second PRC-Arab States BeiDou Forum, which was held in Tunis in April ([Xinhua](#), April 2, 2019). Similar to previous engagements, much of the agenda focused on the potential benefits of *Beidou* for agriculture in the Middle East and North Africa—to include demonstration of a self-driving tractor maneuvering through the streets of Tunis ([UN Office for Outer Space Affairs](#), November 2018; [Xinhua](#), April 2, 2019).



Image left: Wang Zhaoyao (王兆耀), the chairman of the China Satellite Navigation Systems Committee (CSNSC)—nominally, a civilian body that manages the Beidou program—speaks at the “Second China-Arab States BeiDou Navigation Satellite System Cooperation Forum” in Tunis, Tunisia (April 1, 2019). (Image source: [Xinhua](#), April 2, 2019) / Image right: Despite the adoption of a civilian identity at international fora, Wang Zhaoyao is a PLA major general who is dual-hatted as the deputy director of the Central Military Commission Equipment Development Department (see endnote #4). In this photo, Wang (second from right) appears in PLA uniform at a September 2018 exhibition in Mianyang (Sichuan Province). (Image source: [Yidian Zixun](#), October 18, 2018).

Conclusion

For the past quarter-century, the *Beidou* Global Satellite Navigation System has been one of the PRC’s highest-priority technology development programs. The successful completion of the network has significant implications for Chinese military capabilities, commercial competitiveness, and geopolitical freedom of movement vis-à-vis the United States and Europe. However, the examples profiled above—only a partial picture of the PRC’s *Beidou* technology and diplomatic outreach—demonstrate how the system is also serving a key role in the PRC’s geopolitical ambitions to expand the Belt and Road Initiative. Although the substance behind its slogans might be debatable, Beijing clearly intends to promote *Beidou* as a worldwide alternative to the U.S. GPS network—and to use the “Space Silk Road” as another channel to expand its influence throughout Eurasia, and beyond.

John Dotson is the editor of China Brief. For any comments, queries, or submissions, feel free to reach out to him at: cbeditor@jamestown.org.

Notes

[1] The *Beidou Mark 1* (北斗一号系统, *Beidou Yi Hao Xitong*) constellation became operational in 2003, and possessed a reported locational accuracy within 20 meters, as well as a short message service (SMS) communications function that enabled the transmission of short messages of 120 Chinese characters. The *Beidou Mark 2* (北斗二号系统, *Beidou Er Hao Xitong*) constellation became operational in December 2011

with a network of 10 satellites; it offered velocity, timing, and location services (with reported positioning accuracies of up to 10 meters), as well as the SMS function. [See: Pollpeter, Besha, and Krolikowski, "The Research, Development, and Acquisition Process for the Beidou Navigation Satellite Programs," University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation policy paper (Jan. 7, 2014),

https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/alannak/files/beidou_rda_pb.pdf; and "China GPS Rival Beidou Starts Offering Navigation Data," *BBC News Online*, March 8, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-16337648>.]

[2] "The BDS-3 Preliminary System Is Completed to Provide Global Services," *Beidou.gov.cn* (official PRC information website for Beidou, in English), December 27, 2018.

http://en.beidou.gov.cn/WHATSNEWS/201812/t20181227_16837.html.

[3] See: Minnie Chan, "'Unforgettable Humiliation' Led to Development of GPS Equivalent," *South China Morning Post*, Nov. 13, 2009, <https://www.scmp.com/article/698161/unforgettable-humiliation-led-development-gps-equivalent>; and "Beidou Equipment Covers Most Operational Units of Regimental Level

and Above" (北斗装备覆盖大部分团以上作战部队, *Beidou Zhuangbei Fugai Dabufen Tuanyishang Zuozhan Budui*), *People's Daily Online*, undated, <http://military.people.com.cn/GB/8221/71065/370766/>; and Kevin Pollpeter, "To Be More Precise: The Beidou Satellite Navigation and Positioning System," *China Brief*, Vol. 7 Issue 10 (May 25, 2007), <https://jamestown.org/program/to-be-more-precise-the-beidou-satellite-navigation-and-positioning-system/>.

[4] Research performed by the author in 2018-2019 turned up multiple points of evidence to indicate that the PLA exercises primary control over the *Beidou* program. For example, the nominally civilian China Satellite Navigation Systems Committee (中国卫星导航系统委员会, *Zhongguo Weixing Daohang Xitong*

Weiyuanhui), or CSNSC, often serves as the public face of the *Beidou* program. However, the CSNSC appears to operate as a public relations front organization for the CCP Central Military Commission

Equipment Development Department (中央军委装备发展部, *Zhongyang Junwei Zhuangbei Fazhan Bu*), or

CMCEDD. Wang Zhaoyao (王兆耀), who has been the designated head of the CSNSC since September

2018 (as a nominal civilian), is a PLA major general who also serves concurrently as the deputy head of the

CMCEDD. [See: "The Satellite Navigation Committee's New Chairman" (中国卫星导航系统委员会的新主

席), *Yidian Zixun*, October 18, 2018. <https://www.yidianzixun.com/article/0Kl63cZS>.] The author may respond

to further inquiries on this subject upon request. For further discussion of the PLA's role in the *Beidou*

program, see also: Stokes, Alvarado, Weinstein, and Easton, *China's Space and Counterspace Capabilities and Activities*, report by the Project 2049 Institute and Pointe Bello on behalf of the U.S.-China Economic and

Security Review Commission (March 2020), pp. 12-13. https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/China_Space_and_Counterspace_Activities.pdf.

[5] Stokes, Alvarado, Weinstein, and Easton, *China's Space and Counterspace Capabilities and Activities*, report by the Project 2049 Institute and Pointe Bello on behalf of the U.S.-China Economic and Security

Review Commission (March 2020), p. 88. https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/China_Space_and_Counterspace_Activities.pdf.

**Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control:
The CCP's Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birth Rates in Xinjiang**
By Adrian Zenz

Editor's Note: This article is an abridged version of a longer and more detailed report by Dr. Zenz, which was published by the Jamestown Foundation on June 28. The full-length report, to include a large volume of supporting data, is available [here](#). The Associated Press has also published [reporting](#) based on Dr. Zenz's research, which includes further personal accounts from persons affected by the repressive policies detailed in the report. Even in abridged form, this China Brief article is significantly longer than our usual standards; but in light of the significance of Dr. Zenz's research, we are making an exception to our normal guidelines.

Introduction

A sweeping crackdown starting in late 2016 transformed Xinjiang into a draconian police state ([China Brief](#), September 21, 2017). While state control over reproduction has long been a common part of the birth control regime in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the situation in Xinjiang has become especially severe following a policy of mass internment initiated in early 2017 ([China Brief](#), May 15, 2018) by officials of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

In 2019, a growing number of witnesses testified to the fact that Xinjiang authorities were administering unknown drugs and injections to women in detention, forcibly implanting intrauterine contraceptive devices (IUDs) prior to internment, coercing women to accept surgical sterilization, and using internment as punishment for birth control violations ([Washington Post](#), November 17, 2019; [Associated Press](#), November 26, 2018; [Washington Post](#), October 5, 2019). These initial claims were recently further corroborated by additional testimonies ([Associated Press](#), June 28).

For the first time, the veracity and scale of these anecdotal accounts can be confirmed through a systematic analysis of government documents. Key findings include:

- Natural population growth in Xinjiang's minority regions declined dramatically since 2017. Near-zero population growth targets for 2020 published by one Uyghur region raise concerns that the state is seeking to drastically suppress minority population growth.
- Government documents bluntly mandate that birth control violations are punishable by extrajudicial internment.
- Documents reveal a targeted campaign of promoting "free" birth prevention surgeries and services in southern Xinjiang's rural minority regions starting in 2019, with two counties publishing targets for sterilizing up to 34 percent of all rural females of reproductive age in 2019 alone. This project had sufficient funding for performing hundreds of thousands of tubal ligation sterilization procedures in 2019 and 2020, with at least one region receiving additional central government funding.

- By 2019, Xinjiang planned to subject at least 80 percent of women of childbearing age in the rural southern four minority prefectures to intrusive birth prevention surgeries (IUDs or sterilizations). In 2018, Xinjiang performed 963 net added IUD placements (calculated as placements minus removals) per 100,000 of the population, far higher than the national average of 21.5. (the region only makes up 1.8 percent of the nation's population).
- Between 2015 and 2018, about 860,000 ethnic Han residents left Xinjiang, while up to 2 million new residents were added to Xinjiang's Han majority regions. These figures raise concerns that Beijing is doubling down on a policy of Han settler colonialism.

These findings provide the strongest evidence yet that Beijing's policies in Xinjiang meet one of the genocide criteria cited in the *U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, namely that of Section D of Article II: "imposing measures intended to prevent births within the [targeted] group" ([United Nations](#), December 9, 1948).



Image: Rural Uyghur women in Hotan Prefecture receive free physical exams (November 2016). The article accompanying this photo describes the details of how gynecological examinations are performed.

(Source: [Renmin Wang](#)).

1. Ethnic Population Growth Trends in Xinjiang: From “Excess” to Near-Stagnation

1.1 Han Versus Uyghur Population Shares

Since 1949, the Chinese government has increased control over the remote Xinjiang region by dramatically increasing the number of ethnic Han Chinese residents. Between 1949 and 1978, their population share grew from 6.7 percent to 41.6 percent. [1] Han in-migration received another boost in the late 1990s and early 2000s (see *Figures 1, 2, 3*).

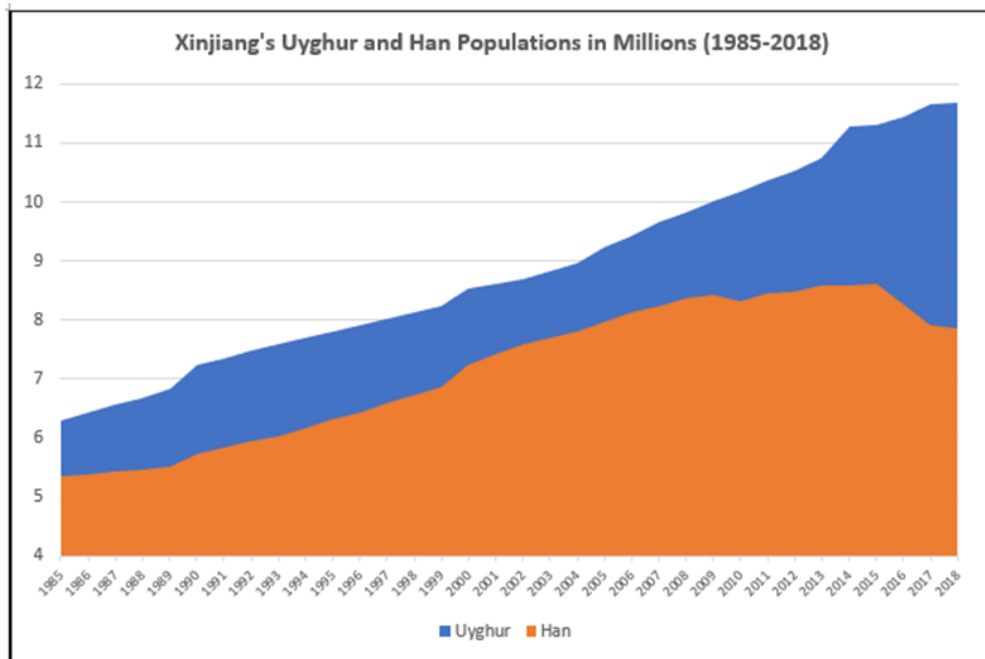


Figure 1. Source: XUAR 1990/2005/2019 Statistical Yearbooks, tables 3-2/4-8/3-8.

By 2018, however, Han population shares had declined to 31.6 percent. Between 2015 and 2018, Xinjiang's Han population declined by an estimated 863,000. [2] Between 2005 and 2015, Uyghur annualized population growth was 2.6 times higher than that of Xinjiang's Han, outpacing Han growth rates by a greater margin than during any 10-year period since 1965 (see Figure 2).

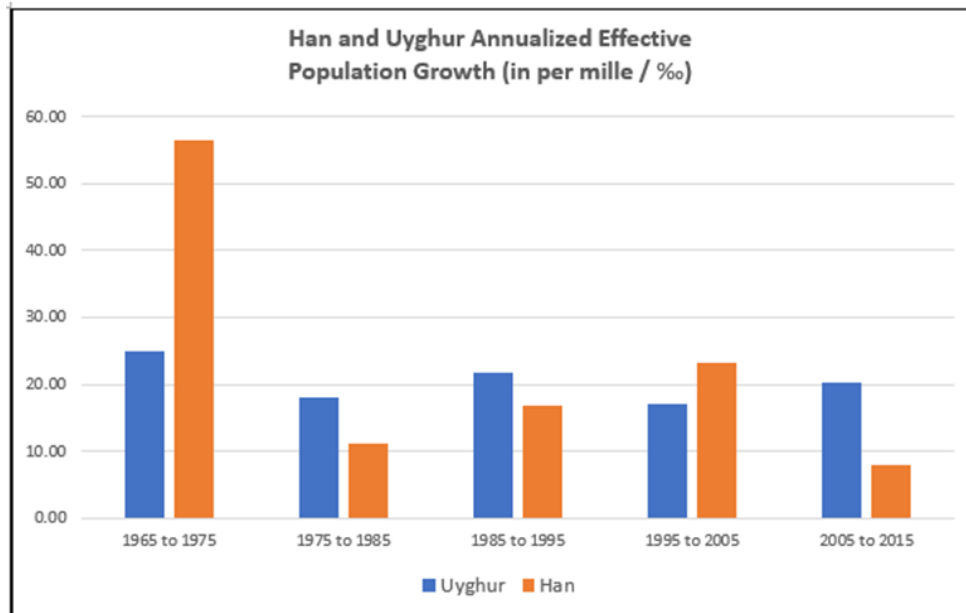


Figure 2. Source: see Figure 1.

However, between 2015 and 2018, 2.03 million residents entered Xinjiang from other parts of China (see Figure 3). [3] Of these, 1.29 million were reported in Urumqi, and 0.71 million in the Xinjiang Construction and Production Corps, or XPCC (a paramilitary settler force that engages especially in agriculture and cotton

production) regions—all regions with Han majority populations. [4] Consequently, Xinjiang’s actual Han population share in 2018 can be estimated at 39.8 percent, near its historical peak. [5]

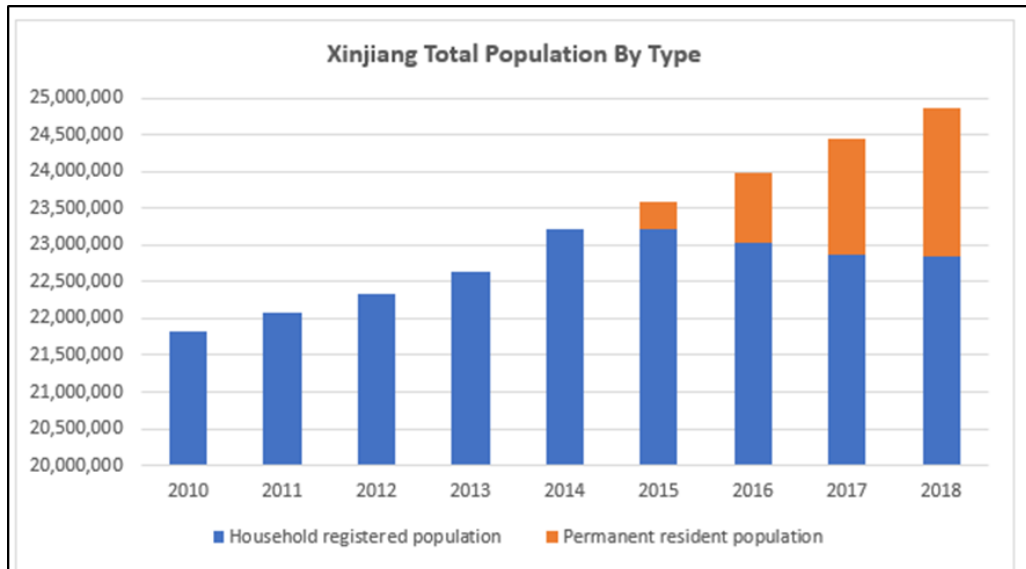


Figure 3. Source: Xinjiang Statistical Yearbooks 2011 to 2019, tables 3-1 and 3-8.

While no ethnic breakdowns for permanent resident populations are provided, this most likely conceals a massive influx of Han, many of whom have been lured to Xinjiang with promises of stable employment, high wages, free housing and other types of subsidies ([XPCC](#), February 13).

1.2 Population Growth, Religious “Extremism” and Social Stability

Xinjiang’s Han Chinese academic and government circles have consistently described minority population growth as “excessive” (过分, *guofen*). According to a paper published in April 2017 by Li Xiaoxia, Director of the Institute of Sociology at the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences, Uyghur population growth rates in regions that have been traditionally dominated by Uyghurs have exacerbated spatial ethnic segregation. This “weakens national identity and identification with the Chinese Nation-Race (中华民族, *Zhonghua Minzu*), [thereby] impacting long-term rule and stability (长治久安, *changzhi jiu’an*)” ([PKU Thesis](#), 2017). “Excessive” Uyghur population growth is in turn linked to “religious extremism.” To quote: “It is undeniable that the wave of extremist religious thinking has fueled a resurgence in birth rates in Xinjiang’s southern regions with concentrated Uyghur populations” ([Journal of Ethnology](#), 2016).

In Xinjiang government circles, the relationship between “religious extremism” and population growth became prominent from 2015, with a May 2015 government teaching broadcast on ethnic unity stating that “religious extremism begets ... illegal extra births” ([Ili Prefecture Government](#), May 21, 2015).

1.3 Xinjiang’s Natural Population Growth Trends

Population growth in minority counties began to decline in 2015—the very year that the government began to single out the link between population growth and “religious extremism” (see *Figure 4*). [6]

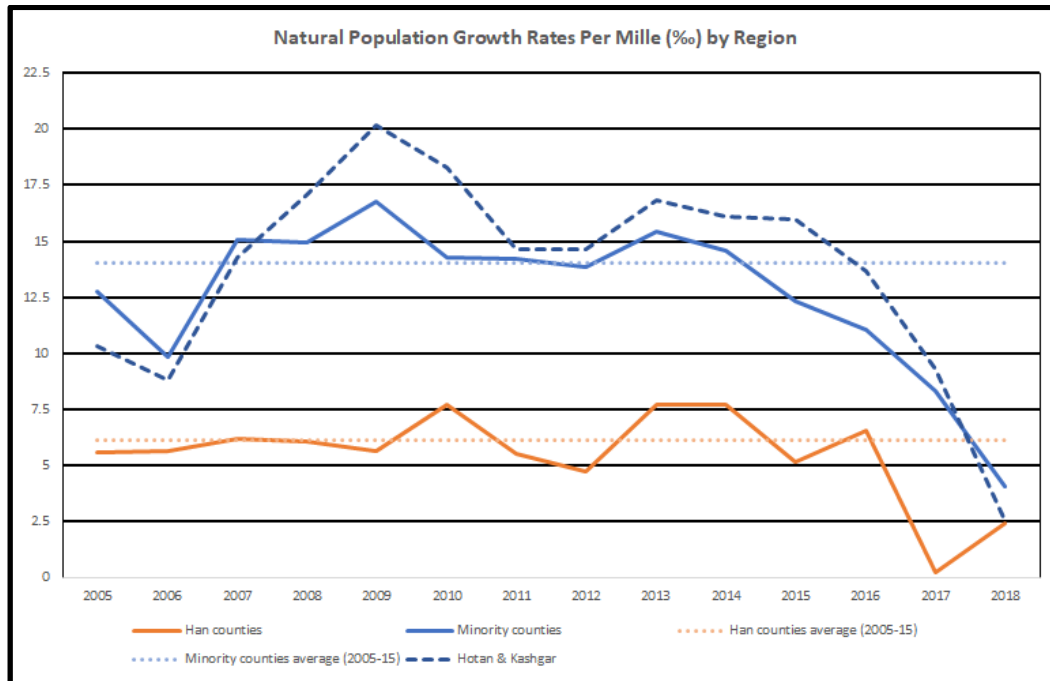


Figure 4. Calculated by the author based on annual Xinjiang Statistical Yearbooks (tables 3-6 and 3-7), and local Social and Economic Development Reports. “Minority counties” have an ethnic minority population share of 50 percent or higher. Combined Han and minority counties growth rates are weighted by population.

In 2018, minority natural population growth rates declined dramatically: to 4.06‰ in all minority regions and 2.58‰ in Kashgar and Hotan. The declines were most drastic in the Uyghur countryside. Keriya County in Hotan had one of Xinjiang’s highest natural population growth rates in previous years, but by 2018 that growth turned negative (to -0.49‰). Birth rates in minority regions declined further in 2019, with declines ranging between 30 and 56 percent (e.g. [Kizilsu Prefecture](#), April 2; [Qira County](#), June 1; [Qiemo County](#), April 4). Some minority regions such as Kashgar Prefecture stopped reporting their birth rates in 2019 ([Kashgar Prefecture](#), May 9). Kizilsu Prefecture, a minority region, reduced its target population growth rate for 2020 to an unprecedented low of 1.05‰, to be achieved through “family planning work.” [7]

Overall, it is clear that population growth in 2018 was not only depressed by the mass internment campaign, but also as the result of draconian new birth prevention measures.



Image: Members of the XPCC 2nd Division family planning office and family planning service station administer a free health examination to minority citizens in a village in Bagrax (Bohu) County, Bayingol Prefecture. These health checks have become ubiquitous, especially in Xinjiang's minority regions, as a means to control population growth and enforce the thorough implementation of increasingly intrusive birth control measures. (Source: [China News](#), May 17, 2017)

2. “Severely Crack Down on Illegal Births”: Xinjiang’s Minority Birth Control Policies and Practices from 2017 to 2019

2.1 Punishing Birth Control Violations with Internment

Prior to 2015, it was common for Uyghurs to have children in excess of state-mandated limits. When caught, they simply paid fines. As Xinjiang’s surveillance state grew and state intrusion into Uyghur families deepened, this changed drastically. In July 2017 Xinjiang reformed its family planning policy ([Xinjiang Health Commission](#)). Previously, urban Han Chinese were permitted to have one child, while urban minorities could have two. Rural residents could have one additional child: two for rural Han, and three for rural minorities. The new policy removed this ethnic distinction, permitting the Han to have the same number of children as the minorities. Minority birth quotas remained unchanged.

In 2018, Xinjiang issued a regionwide directive titled “Autonomous Region Health and Family Planning Committee Notice Regarding Continuing to Deeper Implement the Special Campaign to Control Birth Control Violations” (自治区卫生计生委《关于持续深入开展违法生育专项治理工作的通知》/ *Zizhiqu Weisheng Jishengwei Guanyu Chixu Shenru Kaizhan Weifa Shengyu Zhuanxiang Zhili Gongzuo de Tongzhi*). [8]

The campaign led to a much more draconian punishment of birth control policy violations, with three counties specifically mandating extrajudicial internment. On May 30, 2018, Qiemo County (Bayingol Prefecture) issued

a notice stating that violations that took place since July 28, 2017, and where women had exceeded the birth quota by two or more children, must “both adopt birth control measures with long-term effectiveness and be subjected to vocational skills education and training” (同时采取长效节育措施并进行职业技能教育培训, *tongshi caiqu changxiao jieyu cuoshi bingjin jinxing zhiye jineng jiaoyu peixun*) ([Qiemo County Government](#)). The latter phrase is a euphemism for Vocational Training Internment Camps (VTICs), a common form of extrajudicial internment ([Journal of Political Risk](#), November 24, 2019). In Xinjiang, the term “birth control measures with long-term effectiveness” (长效节育措施, *changxiao jieyu cuoshi*) essentially refers to either IUDs (节育环, *jiayu huan*) or sterilizations (结扎, *jieza*). [9] Two other minority counties issued similar directives to punish birth control policy violations with internment ([Nilka County](#), November 20, 2019; Qapqal County). [10]

These documents confirm evidence from the Karakax List—a leaked government document from Karakax (Moyu) County—where the most frequently cited internment reason was a violation of birth control regulations ([Journal of Political Risk](#), February 17; see *Figure 5*). Often, those interned had only had one illegal child. Many of them were interned in the spring of 2018, when the new punishments had been or were about to be enacted. [11] Karakax’s 2018 government work report stated that “[by] severely curbing behaviors that violate birth control [policies], birth and natural population growth rates declined dramatically.” [12]

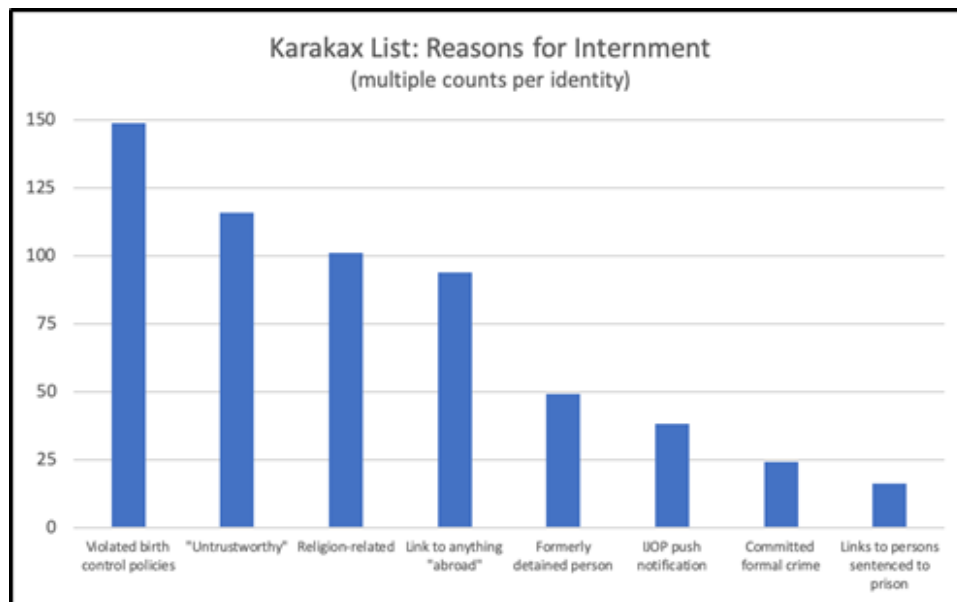


Figure 5. Source: [Journal of Political Risk](#), February 17.

2.2 Intrusive Birth Control Measures: IUDs

By 2019, Xinjiang planned for over 80 percent of women of childbearing age in the rural southern four minority prefectures to be subjected to “birth control measures with long-term effectiveness” (长效避孕率, *changxiao*

biyun lu) ([Xinjiang Health Commission](#), January 29, 2019). [13] This was to be verified through quarterly IUD checks (see Table 1).

库木艾日克社区季度查环登记表													
序号	男方姓名	女方姓名	身份证号	采取措施时间	孩子数	第一季度		第二季度		第三季度		第四季度	
						检查时间	结果	检查时间	结果	检查时间	结果	检查时间	结果
1	热合曼·吐	帕提古丽·	652923199109*****	2/16/16	2								
2	塔依尔·阿	西那夏古丽	652923198803*****	1/10/15	2								
3	买买提·依	帕提姑力·	652923197301*****	5/7/12	4								
4	艾衣丽·阿	热伊拉迪·	652925199507*****	2/18/15	1								
5	玉山江·库	努尔曼古丽	652926199301*****	5/10/15	1								
6	斯迪克江·	吐尔孙阿依	652923198908*****	8/5/15	2								
7	热合曼·依	阿娜古丽·	652923199204*****	12/28/10	2								
8	热合曼·阿	买尔哈巴·	652923199001*****	1/11/14	1								
9	阿布来提·	肉克亚木·	652923199003*****	5/25/13	1								
10	玉苏甫·艾	玛依热·买	652923198604*****	6/5/13	2								
11	吐尔洪·吐	买艳木·木	652923198508*****	8/4/15	2								
12	阿布力米提	帕提古力·	652923199111*****	2/10/15	2								
13	木合塔尔·	依米达木·	652923198803*****	2/15/10	3								
14	热合曼·阿	热力皮亚·	652923198711*****	2/25/13	2								
15	吐尔地·阿	依热木·沙	652925198812*****	8/11/15	2								
16	塔依尔·那	帕丽达木·	652923198402*****	3/10/15	2								
17	亚库普·加	萨拉买特·	654125198407*****	3/19/14	2								
18	阿里木·那	热尔西拉·	652923198507*****	3/20/15	2								

Table 1. Quarterly IUD check list for Kumarik District, Payzawat County. Source: District Population Information System (PIS). Names and ID numbers were partially redacted by the author.

The urgent and involuntary nature of this measure is reflected in Bayingol Prefecture's related stipulation ([Bayingol Prefecture Government](#), May 10, 2018), which says:

After checking... all [women] that meet IUD placement conditions and are without contraindications must have them placed immediately. If there are contraindications, a diagnosis certificate must be issued at a minimum by a level-two health care institution, and follow-up must be strengthened.

In 2014, Xinjiang fitted 545 net added IUDs (calculated as placements minus removals) per 100,000 of the population, compared to 362 in China as a whole. [14] In 2018, Xinjiang fitted 963 net added IUDs per 100,000 of the population, while the national average declined to 21.5 in the wake of loosened birth control restrictions (see Figure 6). [15]

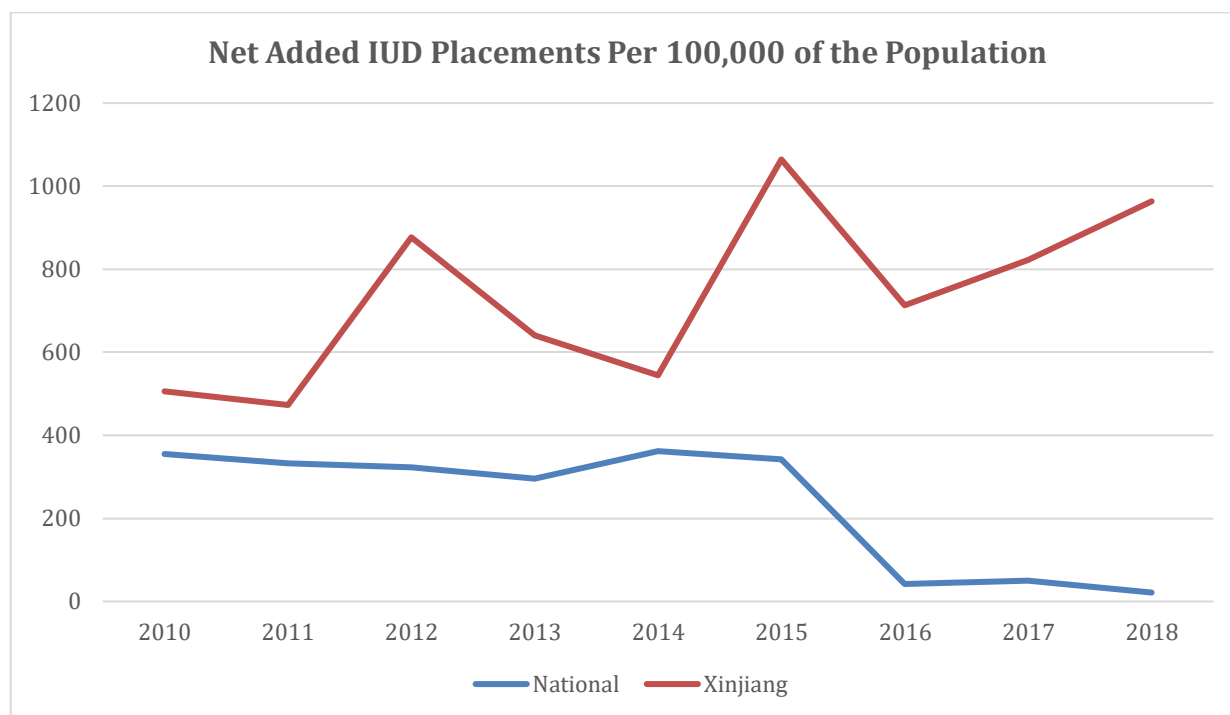


Figure 6. Sources: Annual Health and Hygiene Statistical Yearbooks, tables 8-8-2.
New IUD placements are estimated as total placements minus removals.

2.3 Intrusive Birth Control Measures: Sterilizations

In 2018, Zumrat Dawut was offered “free” surgical sterilization and threatened with internment if she refused. According to her Uyghur doctor, her tubal ligation sterilization procedure was done in the irreversible way. The related initiative of “Free Technical Family Planning Services to Farmers and Pastoralists” (农牧民计划生育免费技术服务项目, *Nongmumin Jihua Shengyu Mianfei Jishu Fuwu Xiangmu*) featured in the family planning documents of numerous regions, starting in 2017 ([Kashgar City](#); [Hotan City](#); [Tekes County](#); [Bole City](#); [Qitai County](#)). (Note: Further data about this program is available in the appendix to the [full-length report](#) on which this article is based, pp. 21-24.)

In 2018, the year that Dawut was forcibly sterilized, Kizilsu Prefecture published this blunt statement, explicitly linking the “free birth control surgery” campaign with an intention to move towards mass sterilizing rural populations:

Guide the masses of farmers and herdsmen to spontaneously carry out family planning sterilization surgery, implement the free policy of birth control surgery, effectively promote family planning work, and effectively control excessive population growth. [16]

In 2019 and 2020, the Xinjiang's Health Commission budgeted \$37 million (260 million RMB) for free “birth control surgeries” (节育手术, *jiéyù shòushù*) to all four southern regions in Xinjiang—to include health checks, IUD services, abortions, and sterilizations—with the aim to reduce these regions' 2020 birth and population growth rates by “at least” 4 per mille points below the 2016 level. [17]

Numerous local family planning documents testify to the ubiquitous nature of this initiative from 2018, but especially in 2019 and 2020. The author has identified related project descriptions for those two years that specifically mention free sterilization procedures in at least eight minority counties (see the appendix to the [full-length report](#), pp. 21-24). In Guma (Pishan) County, the 2019 family planning budget plan specifically called for 8,064 female sterilizations (结扎, *jiéza*)—as well as 5,970 IUD placements. [18] In the same year, Hotan City set a “target” (目标, *mùbiāo*) to administer 14,872 female sterilizations ([Hotan City](#), March 20, 2019). [19]

Nationwide, per capita sterilization procedures plummeted after the national family planning reform, which from January 2016 permitted Chinese citizens to have two children ([China Brief](#), February 28). In sharp contrast, sterilizations in Xinjiang surged in 2017 and 2018 (see Figure 7). In 2018, Xinjiang sterilized 1.1 percent of all married women of childbearing age. For 2019, Hotan City was scheduled to do the same to 34.3 percent of such women, and Guma County to 14.1 percent of them.

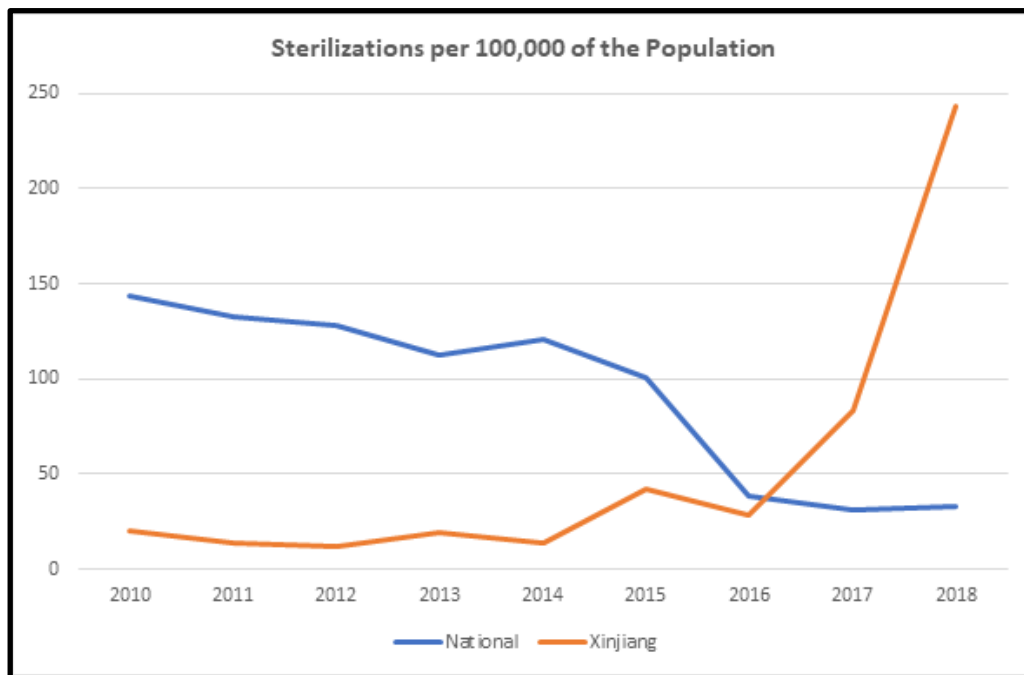


Figure 7. Source: 2011-2019 Health and Hygiene Statistical Yearbooks, table 8-8-2.

Overall, it is likely that Xinjiang authorities are engaging in the mass sterilization of women with three or more children—who make up approximately 19.7 percent of Uyghur females in China ([Nilka County](#), November 20, 2019). [20] In past decades, women throughout China were pressured to submit to sterilization procedures

once they had the maximum permitted number of children ([Washington Post](#), October 29, 2015). Together with local and central government co-funding, project funds are sufficient to cover potentially up to nearly 200,000 tubal ligation sterilization procedures (priced at 600 RMB each). [21] It is likely that the project will continue beyond 2020—until the state’s birth prevention targets are reached.

In addition, rural women who “voluntarily” opt for sterilization after their second child, and hence forgo having a third child, receive one time payments of up to \$700 (5,000 RMB) and ongoing annual cash rewards ([Xinjiang Health Commission](#), January 5, 2018). In 2019 and 2020, Xinjiang’s Health Commission budgeted \$104.7 and \$102.4 million (750.4 and 733.9 million RMB respectively) for such award monies (which also cover rewards for “voluntary” IUD placements). [22]

3. Conclusions

Xinjiang’s population control measures have enabled the state to increase or decrease minority population growth at will, akin to opening or closing a faucet. This contrasts sharply with a nationwide relaxation of birth controls in early 2016, when the country moved towards state encouragement for two-child families ([China Brief](#), February 28). Xinjiang’s campaign to suppress minority population growth has been complemented with efforts to boost its Han population through increased births and in-migration. Additionally, regional authorities appear to encourage interethnic marriages ([SupChina](#), August 7, 2019). In tandem, these three strategies appear to undergird a wider game plan of ethno-racial domination.

These findings raise serious concerns as to whether Beijing’s policies in Xinjiang represent, in fundamental respects, what might be characterized as a demographic campaign of genocide per the text of Section D, Article II of the *U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*.

*Adrian Zenz is a Senior Fellow in China Studies at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, Washington, D.C. (non-resident), and supervises PhD students at the European School of Culture and Theology, Korntal, Germany. His research focus is on China’s ethnic policy, public recruitment in Tibet and Xinjiang, Beijing’s internment campaign in Xinjiang, and China’s domestic security budgets. Dr. Zenz is the author of *Tibetanness under Threat* and co-editor of *Mapping Amdo: Dynamics of Change*. He has played a leading role in the analysis of leaked Chinese government documents, to include the “China Cables” and the “Karakax List.” Dr. Zenz is an advisor to the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, and a frequent contributor to the international media.*

Notes

[1] Source: Xinjiang 1990 Statistical Yearbook, table 3-1.

[2] Calculated based on Han household registered population figures (Figure 1).

[3] Xinjiang 2019 Statistical Yearbook, tables 3-1 and 3-8.

[4] There is no ethnic breakdown for permanent residents. A small number of these may have been Uyghurs who were forced to return to their original home regions from other parts of China in 2017 and 2018.

However, it is unclear whether they had changed their household registration when they left Xinjiang in the

first place, or whether their household registration was changed upon return to Xinjiang. While Xinjiang's XPCC population also increased, their numbers are already included in Xinjiang's overall household registered population ([Urumqi City Government](#), June 4, 2019; [XPCC Government](#), April 26). Urumqi's 2019 figures only cite the permanent resident population ([Xinjiang Government](#), June 8).

[5] While it is possible that citizens move their household registration to another province, converting their status in Xinjiang to that of permanent residence, the vast majority of permanent residents can be estimated to result from in-migration.

[6] All combined Kashgar and Hotan figures cited in this report are weighted based on total populations.

[7] Original Chinese: “通过2020年计划生育工作，人口控制明显，全州人口过快增长和违法生育得到有效控制，人口出生率和人口自然增长率同比下降7.13和6.4千分点…人口自然增长率 ≤1.05%”。 Source: www.xjkz.gov.cn. Archived download at <https://bit.ly/2CbUalz>.

[8] Issued as 2018 no.2 document (新卫计生基层发〔2018〕2号). See e.g. <http://archive.is/111ml>. The original text of this directive is not publicly available.

[9] See e.g. <http://archive.is/wip/uX06n> or <http://archive.is/wip/n6ATv>. In theory, long-term effective birth control measures also include subcutaneous implants (皮下埋植). However, their adoption rate in Xinjiang is extremely low (Xinjiang Statistical Yearbooks tables 3-10). Local government birth control statistics between spring 2017 and autumn 2018 for 12 villages and urban districts in Kuqa County (Aksu Prefecture) do not show a single such case among a total of 5,477 married women of childbearing age.

[10] Original source: www.xjyl.gov.cn/info/1068/127191.htm. As social media post: <http://archive.is/wip/iPIRT>. Alternative download at <https://bit.ly/2WY4C4Q>.

[11] Between March and May 2018, 36.0 percent of all those shown in the Karakax List as interned for birth control reasons were put into camps, as opposed to 22.5 percent of all detainees regardless of reasons (figures only pertain to those with a stated internment date). In May 2018, at least some regions also specifically mandated that all birth control violations since 1981 were now subject to “comprehensive clean-up investigations” (全面清理清查; [Qapqal County Government](#), June 14, 2018).

[12] Chinese. 严厉打击违法生育行为，人口出生率和人口自然增长率大幅下降. Source: <http://archive.is/hlcZi>.

[13] Download page: <http://archive.is/hfGL6>. Archived download of the spreadsheet: <https://bit.ly/31FcsWE>.

[14] 2015 and 2019 *Health and Hygiene Statistical Yearbooks*, table 8-8-2.

[15] 2019 *Health and Hygiene Statistical Yearbooks*, table 8-8-2.

[16] Original Chinese: “引导广大农牧民群众自发进行计划生育绝育手术，实施节育手术免费政策，有效推进计划生育工作，有效控制人口过快增长”。 Download page: <http://archive.is/ZDatc>. Archived download for the Word document: <https://bit.ly/2YLKVXp>.

[17] Spreadsheet download:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20200514143056/http://xjhfp.gov.cn/system/resource/storage/download.jsp?mark=OTczMjg2ODhEREYzRTU0NEI2OURBNTk3NzA5RkYwMDQvNUExMURFNzkvNTZFMDA=>. Overview and download page: <http://archive.is/PuDIV>. An earlier 2016 iteration was funded with 73.3 million RMB (source: <http://archive.is/wip/tuiiF>).

[18] Source: Guma County government website, download page at <http://archive.is/F86ts>, file 皮山县计生委.pdf contained in archive at <http://www.ps.gov.cn/Upload/main/InfoPublicity/PublicInformation/File/2019/03/04/201903041238580250.rar>. Alternative archived download at <https://bit.ly/3fOCTEH>. For both Guma County and Hotan City, the 600 RMB price tag shown in the respective government planning documents indicates that these are female sterilizations (输卵管结扎), which throughout Xinjiang are budgeted at a standard 600 RMB per procedure, while male sterilizations (输精管结扎) are budgeted at 220 RMB. See e.g. <http://archive.is/wip/m2b9x>.

[19] Source: <http://web.archive.org/web/20200514171345/https://www.hts.gov.cn/file/upload/201904/02/161938677.pdf>. See a similar document at (download page): <http://archive.is/LqXLF>. Alternative archived download at <https://bit.ly/3fOqdxw>.

[20] Source: *Xinjiang 2019 Statistical Yearbook*, table 3-9, assuming a 21.3 percent share of married females of childbearing age among a combined rural population (乡村人口) of 7.72 million.

[21] The regionwide project also covers monthly subsidies for rural family planning propaganda workers (which are additionally co-funded from local budgets). If half of the regionwide project budget was earmarked for birth prevention services, 60 percent of these funds were available for sterilizations (versus 75 percent in Guma), and county co-funding averaged 20 percent (versus 50 percent in Guma), then this would amount to sufficient funds to perform $117,000,000 / 600 = \text{approx. } 195,000$ tubal ligations. This would result in the sterilization of approximately 11.9 percent of all such women. Since co-funding may additionally also be provided by the respective prefectures as well as the central government, these are fairly conservative estimates. For example, Hotan Prefecture's 2018 regionwide budget specified 72.9 million RMB for "family planning services" (计划生育服务; source: <http://archive.is/wip/CMD8K>). In 2019, Kashgar Prefecture 2019 spent 63.3 million RMB on this budget item, and for 2020 it budgeted: 74.3 million RMB on it (source: <http://www.kashi.gov.cn/UploadFiles/News/2020/5/202005261307401203.zip> or <http://web.archive.org/web/20200618164959/http://www.kashi.gov.cn/UploadFiles/News/2020/5/202005261307401203.zip>; archived download of the PDF at <https://bit.ly/2NblHes>). Kizilsu Prefecture received 1.33 million RMB in 2019 for birth prevention measures and such a propagation of free surgeries. Source: www.xjkz.gov.cn. Alternative download at <https://bit.ly/3fzUJdK>.

[22] 2019 figure: spreadsheet download at <http://web.archive.org/web/20200514143056/http://xjhfdc.gov.cn/system/resource/storage/download.jsp?mark=OTczMjg2ODhEREYzRTU0NEI2OURBNTk3NzA5RkYwMDQvNUExMURFNzkvNTZFMDA=>; overview and download page: <http://archive.is/PuDIV>. 2020 figure: download page: <http://archive.is/LqXLF>. Alternative archived download at <https://bit.ly/3fOqdxw>.

Beijing Asserts a More Aggressive Posture in Its Border Dispute with India

By Sudha Ramachandran

Introduction

On the night of June 15, a violent clash occurred in the Galwan Valley between soldiers of the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which resulted in the death of 20 Indian soldiers and an undisclosed number of Chinese troops ([India Today](#), June 17; [Jamestown Foundation](#), June 29). In a first sign of efforts to de-escalate tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC)—the de facto border between Indian and Chinese-controlled territories—India and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have begun pulling back their troops from recent sites of confrontation in Ladakh.

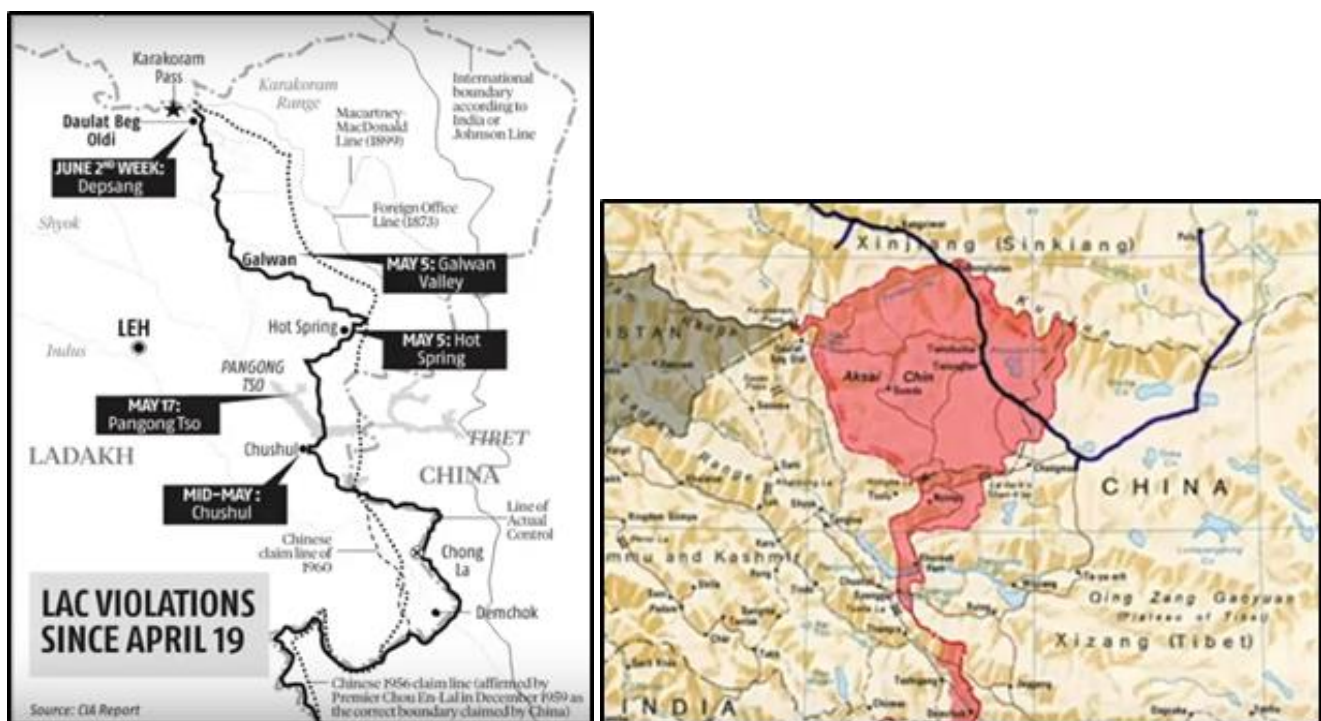


Image left: A locational graphic of incidents in May and early June along the “Line of Actual Control” (LAC) on the disputed Sino-Indian border in Ladakh / Aksai Chin. Image right: A map showing the Aksai Chin region (shaded in red), which is claimed by both countries but administered by China. The June 15 clash, which resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers and an undisclosed number of PLA soldiers, occurred in the Galwan Valley (shown on the map at left). [1]

According to Indian media reports, the step-by-step disengagement process began on July 6, following a two-hour telephone conversation between India’s national security adviser Ajit Doval and PRC State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅). Citing unnamed

sources in the Indian Army and security establishment, the reports say that Indian and Chinese troops have moved back 1.8 kilometers from the Galwan Valley's Patrolling Point (PP) 14—the site of the June 15 clash—and that the PLA has dismantled a military camp and tents it had erected here ([Indian Express](#), July 7). Both sides are said to have pulled back from Gogra-Hot Springs as well, although no such action has been taken at Pangong Tso, a lake that straddles the LAC in Ladakh ([Indian Express](#), July 7).

Tension along the LAC in Ladakh has been rising since early May, when Chinese troops began crossing the LAC into the Indian side at various points—including the Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso, Hot Springs, and more recently, at Depsang. Indian soldiers were prevented from entering areas they have been patrolling for decades. Following the bloody clashes at the Galwan Valley in mid-June, tensions soared and both sides stepped up deployment of soldiers and military equipment along the LAC. The possibility of a military confrontation loomed.

On the face of it, the current pullback of troops is a positive development, as it can be expected to reduce tension. However, the nature of the pullback is disadvantageous to India, as New Delhi appears to have ceded to China territory that was, until recently, under Indian control. Not only has China not pulled out of all of the Galwan Valley, but it continues to claim this area. So, what is driving China's heightened territorial aggression against India in the LAC's western sector, and why is it seeking control over the Galwan Valley?

The Dispute over Aksai Chin

The entire India-China border is disputed. Not only do the two countries disagree on where the LAC runs, but they also claim chunks of territory under the other's control. In the eastern sector, China claims 90,000 square kilometers of territory, which is roughly coterminous with the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. In the western sector—which is the focus of the current tensions—India claims 38,000 square kilometers of land in Aksai Chin, which is under Chinese control. India also disputes China's possession of another 5,180 square kilometers of territory in the Shaksgam Valley that Pakistan ceded to China in 1963.

Aksai Chin's importance to China rose in the wake of the latter's invasion of Tibet in 1950-1951. Beijing needed overland routes to transport soldiers, equipment and supplies to Tibet. Of the three routes into Tibet available at that time, the western route from Xinjiang to Tibet was the most convenient. Like the other routes, the western route ran through difficult terrain, but it was an all-weather route that was easier to navigate. However, this route ran through Aksai Chin. Control over Aksai Chin was therefore vital for the PRC's consolidation of control over Tibet, and in the early 1950s China began construction of a road through the region capable of supporting vehicular traffic. The value of this road, which was completed in 1957, grew in the wake of the 1959 Tibetan uprising as China had to send in large numbers of troops to crush the uprising and tighten its grip over Tibet.

The military capture of Aksai Chin became necessary, and this was achieved through the 1962 war with India. [2]

India and Aksai Chin

Although India has never withdrawn its claim over Aksai Chin—it claims Aksai Chin as part of Ladakh and the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, and has always depicted it in maps as part of Indian territory—it was the Indian government's assertion of this claim with greater vigor in August 2019 that appears to have prompted China's recent aggression ([India Today](#), June 4). On August 5, the Indian government announced the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's autonomy, and bifurcated the state into two Union Territories: Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. The following day, India's Home Minister Amit Shah reasserted India's claims in the region in unambiguous terms: "Kashmir is an integral part of India, there is no doubt over it. When I talk about Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and *Aksai Chin* are included in it" (*emphasis added by the author*) ([The Hindu](#), August 6, 2019).

India's Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar sought to reassure the Chinese that the August 5 decision had "no implication for the external boundaries of India" or for the LAC, and that "India was not raising any additional territorial claims" ([The Hindu](#), August 12, 2019). However, Beijing was unconvinced and described the Indian decision as a "unilateral move" that "challenges China's sovereignty" ([Global Times](#), October 31, 2019). Such statements suggest that Beijing suspected India of having "bigger geo-strategic plans" ([India Today](#), June 4).



Images: PRC state press actively publicized PLA exercises and troop movements in early June, explicitly linking these activities to increased tensions with India. Image left: PLA troops conducting high-altitude infantry training at an unidentified location in Tibet (undated, late May or early June). (Image source: [SCMP/Youtube](#), June 3) / Image right: PLA troops on board an aircraft, reportedly deploying from Hubei Province to an unidentified location in northwest China for field exercises. (Image source: [SCMP](#), June 8)

Strategic Infrastructure Construction Along the LAC

Beijing's suspicions of India have likely been fueled by India's growing infrastructure building activity near the LAC over the past decade. [3] Since 2008-09, India has reactivated abandoned airfields at Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO), Fukche, Depsang, and Chumar in Ladakh, and these airfields now serve as landing grounds for Indian Air Force (IAF) transport aircraft. It has also been constructing a network of "strategic roads" near the LAC. Work on these roads has accelerated in recent years, and 61 of the planned 73 roads are in various stages of completion ([Economic Times](#), January 20). Importantly, India has completed construction of the 255 kilometer-long Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road, which links Leh (the capital of Ladakh) with DBO, India's northern-most post (located just 9 kilometers south of the Karakoram Pass that separates Ladakh from Xinjiang) ([Economic Times](#), June 8).

Its development of infrastructure near the LAC has improved India's capacity to defend its borders. In the past, Indian forces relied on dropping supplies via helicopter to soldiers deployed near the LAC. However, they are now able to ferry troops, and even tanks, by C-17 Globemasters and C-130 Super Hercules aircraft to landing strips at DBO and other places ([The Tribune](#), June 29). As for the DSDBO road, it is an all-weather road and runs almost parallel to the LAC. It enables India to transport troops and equipment overland right up to the strategic point of DBO. Since the road runs almost parallel to the LAC it facilitates a lateral movement of troops. As stated by a senior officer of the Indian Army, "Feeder roads that are being built from the DSDBO road to forward posts near the LAC will help movement of troops closer to the LAC. The need for soldiers to undertake arduous treks has reduced and mobilization up to the LAC will be faster." [4] Importantly, the DSDBO road "significantly improves India's position in the local balance of forces," especially since China "lacks a road similar to the DSDBO that runs parallel to the LAC" ([The Hindu](#), May 27).

The improvement of border infrastructure has enhanced India's capacity to defend its territory—but also, "worryingly for China, to carry out offensive operations." [5] Indeed, since 2014, India has "adopted a more 'assertive posturing' to 'interdict' Chinese troops" ([The Tribune](#), May 28). It is in the context of an increasingly assertive India and its improving border infrastructure that the Indian Home Minister's statement last year, reviving a largely dormant claim over Aksai Chin, would have triggered apprehension in Beijing.

Implications for CPEC

It is likely that China is concerned as well over the DSDBO road's potential implications for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship component of its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative. The corridor, which links the Pakistani port city of Gwadar to Kashgar in Xinjiang, traverses Gilgit-Baltistan, a part of Pakistan Administered Kashmir. This is territory that India claims, and New Delhi has strongly opposed CPEC on grounds of the corridor running through Gilgit-Baltistan ([Deccan Herald](#), May 14). While reiterating its claim over Aksai Chin last year, the Indian Home Minister also mentioned Pakistan Administered Kashmir as being part of India. Gilgit-Baltistan was subsequently included in the declared Union Territory of Ladakh ([Deccan Herald](#), November 3, 2019). Earlier in 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spoken of the need to draw the world's attention to the grave human rights situation in Gilgit-Baltistan, prompting fears in Pakistan and China that India would stir trouble in the restive region, and possibly sabotage CPEC projects ([Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst](#), September 29, 2016).

For China, any attempt by India to destabilize Gilgit-Baltistan or wrest control over this region would be disastrous for CPEC. Gilgit-Baltistan lies to the west of DBO, and it is likely that India's development of landing facilities at DBO and other places in Ladakh—as well as construction of the DSDBO road—has worried China, as these developments could pose a threat to its substantial interests and investments in Gilgit-Baltistan.



Image left: A map depicting the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) Road, which links Ladakh's provincial capital Leh with Daulat Beg Oldie, India's northernmost military post. (Image source: [Indian Defense Review](#), April 27) / Image right: An Indian Air Force C-130J Super Hercules transport aircraft lands on the newly-reopened airfield at Daulat Beg Oldie, August 2013. (Image source: [India Today](#), August 20, 2013)

The Threat to Indian Road Connectivity

Although China's infrastructure building on its side of the LAC has gone on for decades and has far outpaced that of India, it has objected to India engaging in similar activity ([The Hindu](#), May 7, 2013). It has sought to pressure India to halt infrastructure building through incursions into Indian held territory. In April 2013, for instance, some 40 PLA soldiers intruded 19 kilometers into the Indian side of the LAC at DBO. Indian and Chinese soldiers clashed repeatedly, and it was only three weeks later, after India agreed to demolish bunkers in the Chumar sector, that PLA soldiers withdrew ([Economic Times](#), May 7, 2013).

Unlike in the past, when tactical objectives drove Chinese incursions, this time it seems that Beijing is aiming at unilaterally altering the LAC. It aims at taking control of the Galwan region. From its perch on the ridges surrounding the Galwan Valley, the PLA will be able to monitor the DSDBO road and rain artillery and missile fire down on it. This would cut off the Indian Army's lone overland access to DBO. The PLA is keen to dominate the DSDBO road "permanently"—and to this end, wants control over the Galwan Valley ([Business Standard](#), June 3).

China's Claims over Galwan

Through its incursion into the Galwan Valley in May, the PRC lay the foundation for taking control over the area. Following the face-off in June, it has laid claim to the area. The day after the clashes, the spokesperson of the PLA's Western Theater Command, Senior Colonel Zhang Shuili, asserted that China has "always" exercised "sovereignty over the Galwan Valley region" ([Global Times](#), June 16). Since then, China has repeatedly said that the Galwan Valley lies on its side of the LAC ([CGTN](#), June 24).

The last time the Galwan Valley witnessed fighting was during the 1962 war. Although the LAC has witnessed clashes from time-to-time, the border at the Galwan Valley has been peaceful, as the LAC here was not disputed. This was because the two sides had accepted that the Galwan Valley was on the Indian side of the LAC ([Business Standard](#), May 23). That has now changed, with the Chinese claiming sovereignty.

India has rejected the Chinese claims as "exaggerated and untenable," and maintained that the "position with regard to the Galwan Valley area has been historically clear" ([Times of India](#), June 21). Hitherto, Indian troops have been patrolling around PP 14, but under the "mutual disengagement" agreement are pulling back 1.8 kilometers from this point. India has pulled back from territory it controlled for decades, and by agreeing to the mutual pullback from the Galwan Valley, the Indian government has ceded ground to the Chinese. The Modi government seems to have "aided and abetted" China's land grab in Ladakh ([Business Standard](#), July 7).

Conclusion

There are lessons that India should draw on from previous experiences with disengagement agreements with China. An agreement on the "expeditious disengagement" of troops from the standoff site near Doklam that was reached in August 2017 ended that crisis. However, a few months later, satellite images available in the public domain revealed that Chinese soldiers were back and building military structures, including helipads and a full-fledged military complex, near the site of the standoff ([NDTV](#), January 17, 2018). More recently, on June 6 Indian and Chinese military officials agreed to pull back from the Galwan Valley. The Chinese did not do so, and when Indian soldiers went to check out the ground situation on the night of June 15, they were ambushed by PLA soldiers. A brutal and bloody face-off ensued, triggering a sharp surge in bilateral tensions. India will need to remain on guard to prevent this history from repeating itself.

Dr. Sudha Ramachandran is an independent researcher and journalist based in Bengaluru, India. She has written extensively on South Asian peace and conflict, political, and security issues for The Diplomat, Asian Affairs and the Jamestown Foundation's Terrorism Monitor and Militant Leadership Monitor.

Notes

[1] Graphics taken from the Jamestown Foundation webinar, "Face-Off in the Himalayas: China's Active Defense and India's Reaction" (June 29, 2020), presentation of Ajai Shukla. <https://jamestown.org/event/webinar-face-off-in-the-himalayas-chinas-active-defense-and-indias-reaction/>.

[2] John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2001.

[3] For decades, India refrained from building roads and other infrastructure on its side of the LAC for fear of drawing Beijing's ire. Moreover, India's security establishment was of the view that building roads up to the LAC would facilitate a PLA advance into the Indian plains in the event of war. That thinking changed in 2006, when India's Cabinet Committee on Security decided to construct 73 'strategic roads' near its borders ([China Brief](#), September 13, 2016).

[4] Author's Interview, Retired Lt. Colonel of the Indian Army's Northern Command, New Delhi, June 29.

[5] *Ibid.*

**The Security Component of the BRI in Central Asia, Part One:
Chinese and Regional Perspectives on Security in Central Asia**
By Sergey Sukhankin

Introduction

On June 15, People's Republic of China (PRC) Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng (乐玉成) held consultations via video with Turkmenistan's Deputy Foreign Minister Vepa Hajiyev. During the meeting, two main topics were discussed: the first was reaffirming the strategic nature of bilateral ties between the two countries, and the second consisted of Hajiyev expressing Turkmenistan's commitment to further promote the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) ([Belt and Road News](#), June 15). Earlier in March, PRC State Councilor and former Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪) stated during a trip through Central Asia that China and regional countries had reaffirmed their determination to deepen cooperation through the BRI. He specifically highlighted the determination of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to "push forward cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative and further increase economic connectivity" ([Belt and Road News](#), March 6).



Image: PRC State Councilor and former Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi (left) meets with Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev (right) on March 3 in Nur-Sultan, during the course of Yang's early March trip to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. (Image source: [CGTN](#), March 4).

The PRC clearly views Central Asia as a key region for the BRI, its cornerstone foreign policy initiative. Beijing's ambitious plans in the region—one that holds a key strategic geopolitical location, as well as abundant natural resources—could be hampered by a number of different factors. Among these are security-related concerns that might jeopardize China's massive economic and diplomatic investments in the region. The region is diverse, but the main advantage for Beijing—which historically prioritizes an individual state-to-state approach to foreign relations—is that it is dealing with five countries who are weak and disunited politically, militarily, and economically. [1]

This article—the first in a planned short series—will examine why Central Asia is so strategically important for the realization of Beijing's goals in the land-based countries of the BRI, as well as considering some of the perspectives expressed within Central Asian countries themselves.

Beijing's Views on the Geopolitical Importance of Central Asia

Beijing's view of Central Asia is best expressed in a formula: "stabilize in the east, gather strength in the north, descend to the south, and advance to the west" (东稳, 北强, 南下, 西进 / *dong wen, bei qiang, nan xia, xi jin*), which perceives Central Asia to be a strategic theater for China's geopolitical advancement ([Xinhua](#), December 18, 2012). The strategic importance of the region is highlighted not only by the attention given to it by PRC government agencies, but also by the existence of more than thirty large research institutions—including those under the umbrella of China's largest and most reputable universities—specifically tasked with researching and monitoring developments in Central Asia ([CAA Network](#), June 27, 2019).

In summarizing the role of Central Asia in Beijing's plans—and the region's role in the BRI, in particular—three main categories of concerns may be identified. The first of these is natural resources: Beijing's geo-economic calculations in Central Asia are premised on the region's abundance of mineral and other raw materials instrumental for China's economy. As noted by Kubanychbek Toktorbayev, a senior researcher at the National Institute for Strategic Studies (NISS) of the Kyrgyz Republic, "The Chinese leadership quickly realized that the Central Asian region would play a role of a 'strategic home front' [for China]... Beijing has recognized the importance of Central Asia as a resource provider for the Chinese economy" ([lwep.kz](#), September 9, 2019).

Second, the PRC is reliant upon Central Asia as the main land corridor in the BRI. The region is a critical transportation hub and a bridge to other lucrative markets, including Western Asia, the Gulf Region, Russia, and the European Union (EU). The Chinese side aims to connect domestic producers with these markets through a complex network of highways and railways. Out of six proposed mega transportation arteries that are to form the land-based part of the BRI—the "New Eurasian Land Bridge" (NELB), the "China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor" (CMREC), the "China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor" (CCWAEC), the "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" (CPEC), the "China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor" (CICPEC), and the "Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor" (BCIMEC)—Central Asia plays a crucial role in four of them ([Xinhua](#), May 9, 2017; [Belt and Road News](#), April 16).



Image: A graphic depicting the PRC's envisioned "Eurasian Land Bridges" (亚欧路桥, Ya-Ou Luqiao) to be constructed as a component of the BRI. The first (black line) extends primarily through Russia; the second (red line) extends from China's Yellow Sea coastline through Central Asia; and the third (purple line) extends from China's southeastern coastline through South Asia and the Middle East.

(Image source: [Maritime Silk Road Society](#), undated)

China's Focus on the "Three Evils" and Regional Security in Central Asia

The PRC's third area of focus is that of national security, wherein Beijing fears that Central Asia could become a base of support for the so-called "Three Evils" (or "Three Forces") (三股势力, *San Gu Shili*): terrorism (恐怖主义, *kongbu zhuyi*), separatism (分裂主义, *fenlie zhuyi*) and extremism (极端主义, *jiduan zhuyi*). PRC media and officials have identified terrorists and religious extremists operating in Central Asian states—to include the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Jamaat Ansarullah, and Islamic Jihad Union—as threats to Chinese nationals both inside and beyond China ([Belt and Road News](#), February 18, 2019).

Beijing views with alarm militant activity in Central Asian countries. According to one Chinese researcher, Kazakhstan has more than 23 terrorist/extremist groups; Kyrgyzstan has detained approximately 520 radicals, while Tajikistan has detained more than 13,000, and Uzbekistan has detained 18,000; and in Turkmenistan, approximately 360 nationals have taken part in the Syrian Civil War and Iraq War. This trend could increase due to economic challenges and alarming trends in unstable Afghanistan, where many members of Central Asian extremist groups are undergoing training in terrorist camps ([Zouchugu Daohang Wang](#), April 22). Tajikistan, in particular, is seen as a buffer zone between the PRC and Central Asian militant groups, as well as between war-torn Afghanistan and China's own potentially rebellious Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

(XUAR). The PRC perceives Tajikistan as a vital “stronghold” against these threats ([Polit-asia.kz](#), August 16, 2018).

Beijing has sought multiple means to address this threat. Between 2015 – 2020, China made significant investments in security in Central Asia, expanding to 18 percent its share of the region’s arms deliveries. [2] The PRC has also strengthened security coordination with Central Asian countries through events such as the “Cooperation-2019” (协作-2019, *Xiezuo-2019*) anti-terrorism exercise, which was held in August 2019 between Chinese and Tajik forces ([CCTV](#), August 16, 2019). The PRC is also considering new measures for the protection of Chinese BRI investments in Asia, to include the greater use of private security companies (PSCs) such as the Frontier Services Group (FSG), which has been constructing a training camp in Xinjiang ([Polit-asia.kz](#), October 13, 2019; [China Brief](#), May 15).



Image: A still image of soldiers taking part in “Cooperation-2019” (协作-2019, *Xiezuo-2019*), an anti-terrorism military exercise conducted by Chinese and Tajik forces in August 2019. (Image source: [CCTV](#), August 16, 2019).

Viewpoints in Central Asia—and the Growth of Anti-Chinese Sentiment

Many commentators in Central Asia, particularly Tajik and Kyrgyz experts, have issued positive assessments of the BRI and its benefits to their countries. However, others have raised concerns. For example, Bakhtiyor Ergashev, director of the Ma’no Research Initiatives Center in Uzbekistan, stated in 2017 that:

[Much] has been said...about mutually beneficial solutions, equality and non-interference in domestic affairs as key principles of Chinese policy, but this has got nothing to do with reality. We can see that Chinese private military companies are securing deposits [of natural gas] in Turkmenistan... It is now openly discussed that Chinese special forces are to protect zones of the Kashgar-Gwadar route. [3] This is a blow

against national sovereignty... I hope that this will not happen in Uzbekistan, and that Chinese PMCs will not be allowed to work on our territory (Expertonline.kz, August 24, 2017).

Konstantin Syroezkin, a prominent Kazakhstani Sinologist and a Senior Research Fellow at the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies (KISI), has argued that Chinese advancement in Central Asia is “[B]ased on geopolitical calculations that clearly prevail over economics... I have not seen a single [example of] Chinese research proving economic profitability [of the BRI]” (Expertonline.kz, August 24, 2017).

Amid increasing Chinese presence, Sinophobia has been rapidly spreading in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan (Polit-asia.kz, September 11, 2019). Part of this results from routine conflicts between Chinese nationals and locals—sometimes accompanied by violence—that stem from inequalities (pay conditions, unequal treatment, instances of abuse) found within Chinese-owned businesses. While this is by no means a new phenomenon (Diapazon.kz, September 23, 2010), these tendencies have increased so much that some local sources have called 2019 “the year of anti-Chinese moods in Kazakhstan” (Central Asia News, January 17).

Anti-Chinese sentiments (and actions) in Central Asia have grown even more in the wake of developments in Xinjiang. In addition to its Uyghur population, Xinjiang is a home to ethnic Kazakhs (1.5 million), Kyrgyz (180,000), Tajiks (5,000) and Uzbeks (10,000). Revelations about Xinjiang’s massive network of labor camps for Muslims (China Brief, May 15, 2018) have triggered mass protests in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, accompanied by demands to get rid of Chinese influence (Ca-portal.ru, October 14, 2019). Furthermore, anti-Chinese feelings (accompanied by protests) have also grown as the result of corruption in the border control areas, in which local (Kyrgyz and Kazakhstani) authorities have been implicated in corruption-related scandals (document forgery, bribery, etc.) connected to China (Occrp.org, December 25, 2019; Carnegie.ru, March 25).

Conclusion

By betting on Central Asia as a key land-based route of its extremely ambitious BRI project, China is facing a range of challenges and tough choices. Without adequate security measures, Chinese economic engagement in this highly unstable region is very risky. At the same time, Chinese attempts to increase military and other security cooperation with regional players will be viewed with growing uneasiness and apprehension by many local actors. Maintaining an equilibrium will be difficult to achieve, but necessary if the continental Asian corridor of the BRI is to become fully functional.

Dr. Sergey Sukhankin is a Fellow at the Jamestown Foundation, and an Advisor at Gulf State Analytics (Washington, D.C.). He received his PhD in Contemporary Political and Social History from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. His areas of interest include Kaliningrad and the Baltic Sea region, Russian information and cyber security, A2/AD and its interpretation in Russia, the Arctic region, and the development of Russian private military companies since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War. He has consulted or briefed with CSIS (Canada), DIA (USA), and the European Parliament. He is based in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Notes

[1] Kamran Gasanov, *Problemi Obespecheniya Bezopasnosti Marshruta 'Novogo Shelkovogo Puti' Cherez Tsentralnoaziatskii Region* [Problems with Securing the 'New Silk Road' Route through the Central Asian Region], Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), *Postsovetskie Issledovaniya*, Vol.3, #2, Moscow (2020).

[2] This sharply contrasts with the PRC's 1.5 percent share in the region's arms market during the antecedent five-year period (2010 – 2014). See: Bradley Jardine & Edward Lemon, "In Russia's Shadow: China's Rising Security Presence in Central Asia," Wilson Center (May 2020).
<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no-52-russias-shadow-chinas-rising-security-presence-central-asia>.

[3] Those talks amplified after an attack committed by the Baloch Liberation Army against Chinese nationals in early 2019. See: Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "Balochistan Liberation Army Launches Fresh Attack on Chinese Interests in Gwadar", *The Economic Times*, May 12, 2019.
<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/baloch-liberation-army-launches-fresh-attack-on-chinese-interests-in-gwadar/articleshow/69297997.cms>.

**Mongolia and the Belt and Road Initiative:
The Prospects for the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor**
By Antonio Graceffo

Introduction

Mongolia is a landlocked country with a population of roughly 3.3 million people, bordering on only two nations, China and Russia. The country's primary exports are largely minerals and raw materials, making trade with countries other than its immediate neighbors difficult. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—and specifically, its primary Mongolian component, the China-Mongolia-Russia-Economic Corridor (CMREC)—promises to facilitate trade between Mongolia and its neighbors, as well as granting Mongolia access to overland routes to the European Union and sea ports in Asia.

The possibilities under BRI/CMREC have drawn praise from a number of voices in Mongolia. Demberel Sambuu, CEO of the Economic Research and Training Institute at the Central Bank of Mongolia, has stated that irrespective of the name given to it, the corridor is natural, inevitable, and necessary. [1] Lakshmi Boojoo, Director General of Mongolia's Economic Policy and Competitive Research Center (EPCRC), agrees that the corridor is necessary, but that there are many considerations which must be taken into account before borrowing or spending begins. These factors include needs analysis, feasibility studies, regulatory reform, capacity building, and standardization, among others. [2]



*Image: Mongolian Foreign Affairs Minister Damdiny Tsogtbaatar (left) meeting with PRC Vice President Wang Qishan (right) during a diplomatic visit to China, April 1, 2019.
(Image source: [Mongolian News Agency](#), April 1, 2019)*

Mongolia and Its Economic Relationship with China

During the period of the Mongolian People's Republic (1924-1992), Mongolia was a client state of the USSR, and Soviet engineers built much of the country's infrastructure, including the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. There was steady urbanization during this period, a trend that further accelerated after the fall of communism in the early 1990s. Today, over 65% of Mongolians are urban dwellers, with Ulaanbaatar accounting for 45% of the

population ([Statista](#), July 9; [World Population Review](#), 2020). Mongolia is classified as a lower-middle income country, with a nominal annual GDP per capita in 2018 of \$4,200 ([CEIC Data](#), 2020).

Historically, Mongolia was almost completely dependent on animal husbandry; however, by 2014 exports accounted for more than half of Mongolia's GDP. These exports include: copper, apparel, livestock, animal products, cashmere, wool, hides, fluor spar, other nonferrous metals, coal and crude oil. Mongolia's primary export market is China, which purchases 84% of its export products ([USTR](#), undated). As it is largely reliant on commodities exports—and a single, large export partner—the economy of Mongolia is directly dependent on both global prices for minerals and the performance of the Chinese economy. Conclusions reached by Mongolia's Economic Policy and Competitive Research Center corroborate research conducted by international institutions: Mongolia needs diversification in both its exports and export partners, as well as a movement up the value chain. [3]

The BRI's Attractiveness to Landlocked Countries

Mongolia's status as a landlocked developing country (LLDC) poses particular challenges for its economy—a fact reflected in the creation of the United Nations-affiliated "International Think Tank for Land-Locked Developing Countries" in Ulaanbaatar ([United Nations](#), June 11, 2018). The transportation infrastructure possibilities of the BRI hold particular attractiveness for Mongolia: speaking at the "Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation" held in Beijing in April 2019, Mongolian Minister of Road and Transport Development Byambasuren Enkh-Amgala stated: "The BRI provides huge economic opportunities for landlocked countries like our country by mitigating their disadvantages of geographical position... Thus, Mongolia has actively participated in the BRI construction from the onset in order to accelerate its economic development by reducing the disadvantages associated with the lack of access to the sea" ([Xinhua](#), April 26, 2019).

The Central Asian republics, which are the countries most similar in geography and circumstances to Mongolia, are landlocked members of the BRI. [4] Being landlocked dramatically decreases a country's GDP: the average GDP of the Central Asian republics is only 57% of their neighboring countries who possess access to the sea. It has been estimated that export costs from the Central Asian states are 10% higher than those from countries with maritime access ([CACI Analyst](#), April 30, 2018). Lakshmi Boojo, Director General of EPCRC, estimates that export costs from Mongolia are even higher. Alongside the distances that must be travelled by rail and auto (both of which are less efficient than shipborne commerce), there is the additional problem of having to pay duties and meet standards for transshipping through a neighboring country. She estimates that this raises the cost of exports by as much as 40%. [5]

Mongolia's total production is quite small. The factors of distance, difficulties in shipping, and regulatory restrictions all reduce Mongolia's hopes of achieving economies of scale. These problems reduce the competitiveness of Mongolian exports, which in turn causes the country to focus on a very small number of products. In its recommendations to countries considering BRI investment, the World Bank recommends only

making the investment when a country expects to achieve economies of scale ([World Bank](#), undated). With Mongolia's small population, that may be very difficult to achieve.

The realities of the economic challenges faced by landlocked countries help to explain why landlocked countries such as the Central Asian republics and Mongolia have embraced the BRI. LLDCs like Mongolia see the BRI as a means of obtaining financing for large scale infrastructure projects necessary for economic diversification, accelerated structural development, participation in regional cooperation, and increased trade. Through BRI projects, they can access funding from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and other sources ([CACI Analyst](#), April 30, 2018). The Central Asian republics have also joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)—in which both China and Russia are leading participants—thereby creating a platform for economic development and cooperation throughout the region. Mongolia has not formally joined the SCO, but enjoys observer status.

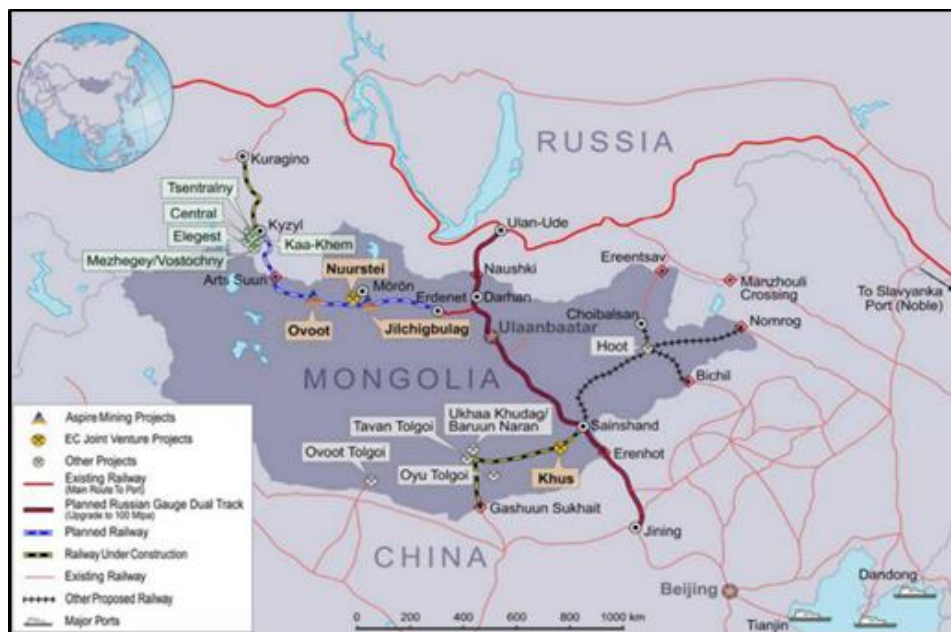


Image: A map of proposed railway construction to be undertaken for the “China-Russia-Mongolia Economic Corridor,” a key component of the BRI as envisioned for Mongolia.

(Image source: [Belt and Road Ventures](#), September 30, 2018)

The China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor

Plans to develop a “China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor” (CMREC) were jointly announced in 2016 by the leaders of the three countries. A Xinhua statement at the time indicated that the three countries would “renovate ports of entry and overhaul customs procedures;” conduct “closer cooperation in energy and mineral resources, high tech, manufacturing, agriculture and forestry;” and “expand trade at border regions and widen services trade... [and promote] cooperation in education, science and technology, culture, tourism, medical care and intellectual property” ([China Daily](#), September 16, 2016). Pursuant to these plans, the three countries

have signed various agreements to cooperate on improving rail transit and highways through Mongolia, offering increased connections between China and Russia. Freight traffic has increased dramatically over the past few years: in 2014, only 10 China-Europe freight trains passed through Mongolia, but in 2018 there were around 900 ([Xinhua](#), April 26, 2019).

The Mongolian government sees CMREC as a potential means of overcoming “landlockedness,” and as a program that could be integrated with Mongolia’s own domestic development plans. Mongolia is pursuing its own Steppe Road Plan, a reported \$50 billion infrastructure development program announced in 2014 that aims to boost energy, telecommunications, mining, and tourism, as well as to build or upgrade road and transport infrastructure ([Eurasia Net](#), July 7, 2017). The PRC has touted the BRI as being “highly consistent with Mongolia’s Steppe Road program,” and as an initiative that “will guide the win-win cooperation between the two countries” ([Xinhua](#), October 2, 2016).

Amid its benefits, one of the most salient potential drawbacks for the BRI/CMREC is the implications that it bears for Mongolian sovereignty. The completion of CMREC would require a large investment in transportation infrastructure, thereby increasing Mongolia’s external debt, which already stands at 221% of nominal GDP ([CEIC Data](#), 2020). Such a prospect carries the possibility of Mongolia being subjected to a BRI-related “debt trap” of the sort faced by countries such as Sri Lanka ([China Brief](#), January 5, 2019; [China Brief](#), April 13).

Analysis of the Economic Impact on Mongolia

The International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries (ITLLDC) in Ulaanbaatar has published models that examine three possible economic corridors, and their respective impacts on Mongolia and China. The models made several assumptions—including that the projects would be completed by 2020—and then measured what their impact would be in 2030. The models assumed that average highway speed would be raised from 19.25 kilometers per hour (km/h) to 38.5km/h, and that average rail speed would improve from 19.1km/h to 40.0km/h. The models further assumed that customs facilitations would be undertaken, cutting the time and cost of clearing borders in half ([ITLLDC](#), 2017).

Per this analysis, the first corridor, connecting China and Russia through the Western part of Mongolia, resulted in the largest economic benefit going to China. Consequently, ITLLDC speculated that China might be most interested in funding this corridor. The second corridor, connecting China and Russia through Ulaanbaatar, benefited the largest number of countries—thus potentially making the project eligible for international funding through China, the EU, and Russia. The third corridor, connecting Bichigt and Ulaanbaatar, had a positive impact for both China and Mongolia—therefore raising the likelihood that the two governments might collaborate on funding ([ITLLDC](#), 2017).

Conclusion

Despite the benefits, economic corridors such as the envisioned CMREC also carry with them some risks. These include a massive inflow of foreign direct investment, which could crowd out or decimate local industries;

as well as a dramatic increase in migrant labor and goods imports, which could threaten domestic small and medium sized enterprises. From a geopolitical standpoint, Mongolia also bears a certain amount of risk, as it must balance its engagement with Russia against its engagement with China, without alienating one or the other. Deeper engagement with China's BRI program could offer considerable economic benefits to Mongolia—but it also presents complex political issues for Mongolia's leaders to consider as they contemplate their country's future.

Antonio Graceffo, PhD is an economic researcher and China analyst based out of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Notes

[1] Lakshmi Boojoo, Director General of Mongolia's Economic Policy and Competitive Research Center, in-person interview conducted by the author, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (June 12, 2020).

[2] Demberel Sambuu, CEO of Economic research and Training Institute at Central Bank of Mongolia, social media interview conducted by the author (June 8, 2020); and follow-up in-person interview conducted by the author, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (July 8, 2020).

[3] *China's Belt & Road Initiative and the Economic Diversification of Landlocked Developing Countries: A New Pathway to Development? Mongolia Case Study.* Bonn, Germany: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), 2014.

[4] Other noteworthy land-locked BRI states include: Afghanistan, Lao, Nepal, and Bolivia. Africa has the most landlocked BRI members: Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Niger, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Several of the European BRI members are also landlocked: North Macedonia, Moldova, Belarus, and Slovakia, as well as European Union members Austria and Hungary.

[5] Lakshmi Boojoo, Director General of Mongolia's Economic Policy and Competitive Research Center, in-person interview conducted by the author, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (June 12, 2020).
