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Beijing Rejects Any Involvement in Nuclear Arms Limitation Talks

By John Dotson

Introduction

Recent years have been contentious in terms of nuclear arms control negotiations between the United States and the Russian Federation. The United States withdrew from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in February 2019, citing Russian violations of the agreement. In April 2019, U.S. representatives initiated efforts to seek a new arms control agreement with the Russian Federation, reportedly with interest in bringing the PRC into the negotiations for a potential tripartite agreement ([China Brief](#), July 16, 2019). On May 22 of this year, the U.S. Government announced intention to withdraw from the Treaty on Open Skies (effective November 22) on grounds of alleged Russian violations of that same treaty, the INF treaty, and other commitments ([U.S. State Department](#), July 6).

U.S.-Russia talks have continued throughout 2020, conducted primarily under the framework of the “New START” talks (evoking Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START, agreements signed between the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia in the early 1990s, and the New START treaty that entered into force in 2011) ([Eurasia Daily Monitor](#), March 4; [Eurasia Daily Monitor](#), September 24). [1] In mid-October, negotiations hit a snag after a Russian proposal to extend New START for a year was rejected by the U.S. side, unless the extension were also to be accompanied by a freeze on the number of nuclear warheads maintained by each country ([WSJ](#), October 16; [TASS](#), October 16).



Image: PRC representative Geng Shuang speaking at the 75th session of the U.N. General Assembly on October 12. In his speech, Geng vowed that the PRC would “never” take part in trilateral nuclear arms control talks with the United States and Russia. (Image source: [CGTN](#), October 13)

These controversies have brought renewed attention to U.S.-Russia arms control talks, as well as to the contentious issues between the two countries relating to the future of their nuclear arsenals. They have also brought attention to the fact that the People’s Republic of China (PRC), assessed to be the world’s third-largest nuclear weapons power ([Arms Control Association](#), August 2020), has remained carefully aloof from nuclear arms control regimes of the sort negotiated between the United States and Russia. Throughout the summer and autumn of this year, Chinese officials and state media have categorically rejected the prospect of PRC participation in any theoretical trilateral U.S.-Russia-China arms control talks. In their messaging, these sources have asserted both the small and self-defensive nature of the PRC’s nuclear arsenal, and that U.S. calls for Chinese participation represent “blackmail” intended to maintain American strategic hegemony (*see discussion below*).

U.S. Assessments Regarding Chinese Nuclear Developments, and Calls for China to Engage in Arms Control Negotiations

This year, U.S. Government representatives and official publications have issued statements of concern about China’s expanding and advancing nuclear forces. The 2020 edition of the U.S. Department of

Defense's *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* noted in particular the expansion of the PRC's inventory of DF-26 intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs), capable of both conventional and nuclear strikes against ground and naval targets. It noted as well the development of new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) possessing multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) capabilities, and assessed that "the number of warheads on the PRC's land-based ICBMs capable of threatening the United States is expected to grow to roughly 200 in the next five years." [2]



Images: Still images from video of a reported DF-26 intermediate-range ballistic missile test launch conducted at an unidentified location in "northwest China's desert region" in early 2019.

(Image source: [CGTN](#), January 30, 2019)

In mid-October, Marshall Billingslea, U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control and a leading figure in the U.S.-Russia New START negotiations, offered both critical comments about Chinese nuclear developments and renewed calls for the PRC to enter into trilateral arms control negotiations. Ambassador Billingslea commented on the PRC's ongoing nuclear weapons testing at the Lop Nur facility in Xinjiang, and its ambitious program of ballistic missile test launches in 2019-2020. He asserted that China's absence from arms control frameworks had left it "totally unconstrained for the past three decades," allowing the construction of between 1000 to 2000 medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles of 13 different types.

Ambassador Billingslea further stated that "China is repeatedly and aggressively expanding the size and scope of [its] nuclear arsenal"—and that, as a result, "binary Cold War era arms control approaches no longer apply... any treaty or agreement that does not account for this is by definition incomplete [and] ineffective." He also asserted that the PRC, as a signatory to the *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* ("Non-Proliferation Treaty," or NPT), was obligated under Article 6 of the treaty to negotiate in good faith for arms limitations to prevent a nuclear arms race—and that China is "perilously close to violating its NPT obligations in this respect" ([Heritage](#), October 13).

**The PRC Propaganda Campaign to Support U.S.-Russia Bilateral Arms Control Talks—
and to Oppose Any Trilateral Talks Involving China**

In the face of U.S. calls for trilateral negotiations, in recent weeks PRC officials and state media have undertaken a concerted effort to head off diplomatic pressure for the PRC to participate in any nuclear arms control talks. Speaking in July, Fu Cong (傅聪), Director-General of the Department of Arms Control at the PRC Foreign Ministry, held a press conference in which he stressed the large gap between U.S. and Chinese nuclear capabilities. Fu rejected the idea of any potential trilateral talks, and asserted that "Hyping up the China factor is nothing but a ploy to divert world attention, and to create a pretext under which the United States could walk away from [New START]... We urge the United States to respond positively to Russia's call to extend the New START, and on that basis, to further reduce its huge nuclear arsenal" ([Xinhua](#), July 8; [PRC Foreign Ministry](#), July 8).



Image: Fu Cong, Director-General of the PRC Foreign Ministry's Department of Arms Control, speaking at a press conference on July 8. (Image source: [Haokan Shipin](#), July 9)

Speaking to the Aspen Security Forum in early August, PRC Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai (崔天凯) stated that it was "not yet the right time" for China to take part in any such talks. Cui opined that "China has a very small amount of nuclear weapons [that is] far behind the U.S. and Russia... the United States and Russia have the largest nuclear arsenal[s]... so they should take the lead in international nuclear disarmament" ([Xinhua](#), August 11). In statements made to the United Nations General Assembly on October 12, Geng Shuang (耿爽), the Deputy Permanent Representative of the PRC to the United Nations, reiterated traditional PRC talking points: that China's nuclear forces were maintained at a minimal level for self-defense, and that China would never engage in a nuclear arms race with any other country. Going further, Geng asserted that:

Given the huge gap between the nuclear arsenals of China and those of the U.S. and the Russian Federation, it is unfair, unreasonable and infeasible to expect China to join in any trilateral arms

control negotiation... This is just a trick to shift the focus of the international community. The U.S. intention is to find an excuse to shirk its own special and primary responsibility for nuclear disarmament, and seek a pretext to free its hands and gain absolute military supremacy...China will never participate in such a negotiation and will never accept any coercion or blackmail. (Xinhua, October 13)

Conclusion

The controversy surrounding the PRC's participation (or lack thereof) in nuclear arms control negotiations is another example of the tensions inherent between Beijing's legacy messaging—which always emphasizes the limited and self-defensive nature of its strategic nuclear capabilities—and its rapidly growing capabilities, and attendant assertiveness, as a rising military power. As noted by analysts Toshi Yoshihara and Jack Bianchi in 2019, “even as Beijing rhetorically adheres to longstanding principles of restraint, it has in recent years steadily modernized its nuclear arsenal [and] increased the size of the force...Chinese leaders may... adopt changes in nuclear strategy in order to shape the external environment in ways that better reflect Beijing's perceived newfound status and that accommodate China's growing power and ambitions” ([China Brief](#), June 26, 2019; [China Brief](#), July 16, 2019).

The PRC will likely continue to resist any calls for nuclear weapons limitations until its strategic forces have achieved parity, or near-parity, with those of the United States and Russia. It is also likely to continue to reject any potential restrictions on its intermediate-range ballistic missile forces, which have dramatically expanded the PLA's ability to conduct conventional power projection operations in the Indo-Pacific region. In doing so, Beijing's spokespersons will likely refrain from any criticisms of the PRC's semi-ally Russia, while characterizing any public calls for trilateral negotiations as a manifestation of U.S. geopolitical hegemony. The size and sophistication of the PRC's missile arsenal, both conventional and nuclear, will likely continue to advance unimpeded by any international arms control regime.

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Notes

[1] See: “Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties, 1991 and 1993,” U.S. Department of State (undated), <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/pcw/104210.htm>; and “New START Treaty,” U.S. Department of State (Oct. 8, 2020), <https://www.state.gov/new-start/>.

[2] *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020* (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020), p. 55.

<https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

Beijing Raises Shenzhen's Status at the Expense of Hong Kong

By Willy Lam

Introduction

In mid-October, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping unveiled reformist rhetoric by pledging to turn the southern city of Shenzhen (Guangdong Province) into a "comprehensive reform pilot project" (综合改革试点, *zonghe gaige shidian*), and a "socialism with Chinese characteristics advance demonstration zone" (中国特色社会主义先行示范区, *Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi xianxing shifanqu*) for the country's economic development policies.

Speaking at an October 14 ceremony marking the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ), Xi called upon the city of 13 million to "expand and accelerate all-round opening up policies," with "institutional guarantees such as rules and norms." In his address, Xi said that Beijing had allowed Shenzhen to "explore a more flexible policy system and a more scientific management system in terms of domestic and foreign trade, investment and financing, finance and taxation, financial innovation, as well as personnel exit and entry." Stressing the importance of Shenzhen as a model, Xi vowed that "Reform must never stop and there is no end to opening up [the economy]... Shenzhen must push forward reform and open door policies from an even higher vantage point" ([People's Daily](#), October 15; [Xinhua](#), October 14).

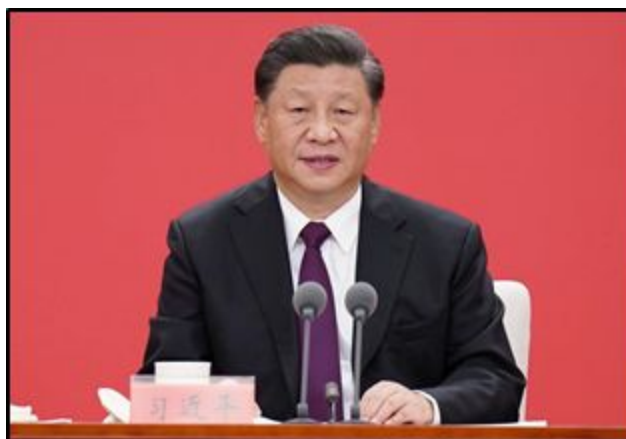


Image: CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping delivering a speech on October 14, in which he called for further economic reforms to make the southern city of Shenzhen a "socialism with Chinese characteristics advance demonstration zone." (Image source: [PRC State Council](#), October 14)

Xi's apparent determination to render Shenzhen into China's foremost showcase for reform stands in stark contrast to his conservative and statist pronouncements that emphasize tight control of the economy by the party apparatus. While Shenzhen has often been touted as "China's Silicon Valley," this is the first time that the budding metropolis has been exhorted by supreme leader Xi to excel in the financial sector and services

such as accounting, design, and the legal arena. What has brought about this new focus on Shenzhen as a “demonstration zone” for China’s economic development?

New Party Directives for Economic Reforms in Shenzhen

On October 11, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) State Council released the Plan on Implementing Comprehensive Reforms to Build Shenzhen into a Pace-Setting and Pilot Area of Socialism With Chinese Characteristics (2020-2025) [深圳建设中国特色社会主义先行示范区综合改革试点实施方案（2020—2025年）, Shenzhen Jianshe Zhongguo Tese Shehui Zhuyi Xianxing Shifanqu Zonghe Gaige Shidian Shishi Fang'an] (hereafter “Plan”). The document listed reforms in 27 areas, intended to make the Shenzhen economy “more marketized, legal-minded and internationalized.” New ways and systems of doing things cover areas including: land use; attraction of both Chinese and foreign capital and talents; expanding the financial and stock markets; and renminbi digitalization. Under the plan, more high-tech firms will be listed on Shenzhen’s Nasdaq-like second bourse. The city has also been designated one of the nation’s foremost “platform[s] for innovation in fintech” (Gov.cn, October 13; Xinhua, October 12).

In his October 14 speech, Xi declared that reforms in the Shenzhen SEZ would open up a “new development scenario whereby domestic and international dual circulations will complement each other” (国内国际双循环相互促进, guonei guoji shuangxunhuan xianghu cujin). In this context, “dual circulation” reiterates a theme unveiled following a Politburo meeting in July—referring to the smooth operation of supply chains, production, logistics, sales, and consumption, in terms of both domestic trade and the world market (China Brief, August 14).

Analysts have noted that while Xi made no reference in his speech to the trade war with the United States—and the possible decoupling of the world’s two biggest economies and supply chains—Xi hoped that the city’s high-tech advancement would help the country minimize U.S.-imposed sanctions on China’s ultra-ambitious “Made in China 2025” program. As Cao Zhongxiong, director of the New Economy Research Centre at the China Development Institute, has indicated, “At this critical moment when international supply chains have blockaded China, how can Shenzhen come up with its own innovation supply chain?” Cao added that this challenge was one of the major tasks for Shenzhen (SCMP, October 14).

Reinforcing Party Leadership Over the Private Sector Economy

At the same time that new reforms are being unveiled, Xi has reminded the bosses of Shenzhen’s predominantly non-state enterprises that they must heed the party’s orders: “We must boost party leadership... Party construction must underpin the entire process of comprehensive reform experiments [in the SEZ].” The practice of setting up CCP cells in private firms—and giving more decision-making powers to party cadres—was the subject of a major CCP Central Committee policy document issued in mid-September (China Brief, September 28).

This tightening of party control over the private sector has also been followed in Shenzhen, a supposed haven of market forces. As veteran Hong Kong-based commentator Johnny Lau has stated, Shenzhen's development will remain handicapped "if it does not take up reforms in the areas of politics, administration and ideology" (Apple Daily, October 17). Indeed, even though Xi repeated one of the most famous axioms of late patriarch and SEZ founder Deng Xiaoping—"crossing the river while feeling out for the boulders" (摸着石头过河, *mozhe shitou guohe*)—he stressed in his Shenzhen keynote that Deng-style empiricism must be balanced by *dingcengsheji* (顶层设计), or design by the top echelon of the CCP. Such top-level design is precisely the guiding spirit of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) that the CCP is currently drafting (Gov.cn, August 7).



*Images: CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping visiting the Chaozhou Sanbei (潮州三环) Group Ltd. Company during his inspection tour of Guangdong Province in October 2020. The state media article that accompanied these photos touted the theme of economic "self-reliance" (自力更生, *zili gengsheng*) promoted during Xi's trip. (Image source: [CPC News](#), October 13)*

Promoting Economic Autarky and the "Greater Bay Area" Concept

Moreover, during his visit to Chaozhou—another Guangdong city noted for its market-oriented economy—Xi underscored the imperative of autarkic, Mao-style "innovation via self-reliance" (自主创新, *zizhu chuangxin*). "Innovation through self-reliance is an indispensable path for enterprises to boost their core competitiveness and to realize high-quality growth," Xi indicated. And while the supreme leader also urged senior managers to simultaneously implement "domestic and international dual circulations," he noted that domestic circulation—meaning relying on the market within China—should be their "main consideration" ([Xinhua](#), October 16; [People's Daily](#), October 13).

Xi's speech also carries immense significance for the development of the entire Pearl River Delta, now usually referred to as the "Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area" (粤港澳大湾区, *Yue-Gang-Ao Dawanqu*), or GBA. Consisting of Hong Kong, Macau, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Dongguan, Huizhou,

and four other Guangdong cities, the GBA is supposed to spearhead the growth—particularly in high technology, finance, and the service sectors—of all of southern China. Even though Shenzhen's GDP surpassed Hong Kong two years ago, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR)—which is China's only international financial center with close business connections with most Western countries—has always been regarded as the dragon head of this region ([Hong Kong Economic Times](#), October 16; [Gov.HK](#), August 27). In his Shenzhen speech, Xi designated the SEZ as an “important engine” for GBA development. In the *Plan*, Shenzhen was even eulogized as “the core engine” for growth in this experimental region.

Beijing's Tightening Control Over Hong Kong

As long as Beijing maintains rigid control over capital-account movements and refuses to adopt internationally accepted practices of the rule of law, it is unlikely that Shenzhen can rival Hong Kong as a global financial hub. However, what has particularly alarmed highly-educated citizens of the HKSAR is the bald way in which Xi has advocated the de facto merger of Hong Kong with Shenzhen, Macau, and other GBA cities. After all, the passage of the controversial National Security Legislation last June has subsumed Hong Kong under the mainland's police-state apparatus ([China Brief](#), July 29).

This was followed by Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam's open declaration that there is no “threefold division of power”—including independence of the judiciary—in the HKSAR ([RTHK.hk](#), September 1). In his Shenzhen speech, Xi urged Hong Kong, Macau and the Pearl River Delta to “raise their level of the unification of the marketplace” and in general enhance the compatibility of rules and systems (規則銜接, 機制對接 / *guize xianjie, jizhi duijie*) throughout the GBA. The Chinese leader went so far as to ask well-educated young people in Hong Kong to build their careers in the GBA.

That the CCP leadership has decided to take a more aggressive stance in shaping Hong Kong's future is demonstrated by the fact that Chief Executive Lam had originally scheduled to give her annual policy address on the HKSAR's development on the same day as Xi's Shenzhen keynote. Now the annual address, which is the most important policy statement of the HKSAR government, has to be postponed until late November. Lam is due to visit Beijing early next month to talk to the heads of various financial and economic ministries. It is understood that she had been told by Beijing to incorporate elements of China's 14th Five Year Plan into her annual address—and to more closely align the HKSAR's development with the GBA ([HK01.com](#), October 12; [Radio French International](#), October 12). As Andrew Fung Ho-Keung, head of the Hong Kong Policy Research Institute, has pointed out: “Beijing is becoming more proactive in guiding the governance of the Hong Kong government,” insisting that Hong Kong's policy address must incorporate elements of the national development game plan ([SCMP](#), October 16).

Conclusion

In mid-September, the CCP passed a new series of *CCP Central Committee Work Rules and Regulations* (中国共产党中央委员会工作条例, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Zhongyang Weiyuanhui Gongzuo Tiaoli*). The rules and regulations stipulate that all organizations in the PRC, including the National People's Congress, the State Council, the military and police, enterprises, and people's organizations must "self-consciously accept the leadership of the *zhongyang* [central party authorities]." These units and individuals must also "resolutely uphold the authority of the *zhongyang* and [its] concentrated and unified leadership, and self-consciously maintain a high degree of unison with the *zhongyang* in terms of thought, politics, and action" ([Ming Pao](#), October 14; [Xinhua](#), October 12).

Irrespective of the outcome of Xi's grandiose plans for Shenzhen and the GBA, it is notable that the CCP General Secretary wants to garner support for himself during the Fifth Plenary Session of the CCP Central Committee that opened in Beijing on October 26. Xi regards himself as the personification of the *zhongyang*, and it seems clear that Xi wants to more emphatically assert his authority as the party's "core for life." Xi's recent and relatively liberal rhetoric, as evidenced by his Shenzhen speech, could be interpreted as an effort to secure the loyalty of party cadres and members who have privately faulted him for being ultra-conservative. These oppositionists include fellow princelings who have criticized Xi for reviving Maoist edicts ([Radio French International](#), September 25; [VOA Chinese](#), September 25). The question remains, however, as to whether giving lip service to market-oriented reforms can help consolidate Xi's already elevated status as China's supreme leader.

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**Evaluating the Utility of Global Data Collection
by Chinese Firms for Targeted Propaganda**

By Devin Thorne

Introduction

A series of media leaks in recent months have put a spotlight on Chinese firms engaged in global social media data collection—one of several prerequisites to realizing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s vision of a data-driven propaganda apparatus ([China Brief](#), May 15). [1] In August and September, Western media outlets reported on such data collection efforts, to include: documents reportedly hacked from three Chinese firms that suggest those companies conduct social media monitoring and data collection for People's Republic of China (PRC) security organs; and a reported database that allegedly contained identifying information, social media accounts, and personal history profiles for more than 2 million individuals, including American, Australian, and European politicians, military personnel, academics, and business executives. [2]

This article seeks to contextualize bulk social media data collection in relation to the CCP's goals for future propaganda work, and to evaluate Chinese firms' ability to exploit bulk data for actionable insight. To do this, the author investigated the outputs of a particular Chinese company active in this space: TRS Information Technology Company Ltd. (北京拓尔思信息技术股份有限公司, *Beijing Tuoer Si Xinxi Jishu Gufen Youxian Gongsì*). [3]

Bulk Data Collection in Context

Systematically accessing the opinions, interests, and behavior of social media users both in China and abroad is critical to the future of the CCP's "public opinion guidance" (舆论引导, *yulun yindao*) work. The Party hopes to create an early warning system by monitoring public opinion and sentiment to pre-empt the destabilizing effects of so-called "black swan" or "gray rhino" events ([China Brief](#), February 20, 2019; [China Brief](#), May 15). The CCP's other stated goals for China's future propaganda work, which include automated content creation and targeted distribution capabilities, likewise demand broad access to online behavioral data ([China Brief](#), May 15). Plans for the application of such an agile, responsive propaganda apparatus are not limited to China's borders: this system will also be critical to ensuring that the CCP can "improve [its] ability to engage in international communication so as to tell China's stories well, make the voice of China heard, and present a true, multi-dimensional, and panoramic view of China to the world" ([Xinhua](#), August 22, 2018).

If reports that Chinese firms are selling bulk social media data (and analysis derived from that data) to the CCP and state security organs are true, the data may be facilitating propaganda campaigns and online influence operations. One company named in recent reporting, OneSight, has allegedly held a contract to

amplify the state-operated China News Service on Twitter ([ProPublica](#), March 26). Knowlyses, another company featured in recent reports, has previously held demonstrations focused on using its services to “monitor public opinion for election” (*sic*) ([Freedom House](#), 2019).

Using bulk social media data and other open-source information for the kind of propaganda work envisioned by the CCP requires breakthroughs in a host of interconnected technologies. Raw data collection is just the first step; moving toward actionable insight requires enriching the data, including through natural language processing methods like sentiment analysis, named-entity extraction, and event extraction. These techniques will be key to building a warning system that alerts the CCP to looming security crises. Since at least the early 2000s, China’s state-funded research enterprise and technology firms have been working towards many of the technologies needed to exploit massive open-source data for propaganda purposes. While these technologies have many legitimate applications in business, they are also critical to enriching bulk data to make it useful for state surveillance.

The State Key Lab of Intelligent Technology and Systems at Tsinghua University (清华大学智能技术与系统国家重点实验室, *Qinghua Daxue Zhineng Jishu yu Xitong Guojia Zhongdian Shiyen Shi*) and the Key State Lab of Pattern Recognition within the China Academy of Science’s Institute of Automation (中国科学院自动化研究所模式识别国家重点实验室, *Zhongguo Kexueyuan Zidonghua Yanjiusuo Moshi Shibie Guojia Zhongdian Shiyen Shi*) are two such government-funded programs that have produced research applicable to ends. A non-exhaustive list of relevant topics researched by these institutions follows in the table below:

Table: Topics of selected papers by researchers at the State Key Lab of Intelligent Technology and Systems and the Key State Lab of Pattern Recognition

Year	Research Topic / Year	Source
2005	Automated Image Annotation	(ACL Anthology)
2007	Speech-based Emotion Recognition	(ACL Anthology)
2008	Song-based Sentiment Classification	(ACL Anthology)
2008	Keyphrase Extraction	(ACL Anthology)
2010	Word Relation-based Sentiment Classification	(ACL Anthology)
2012	Opinion Target Extraction	(ACL Anthology)
2012	Machine Translation	(ACL Anthology)
2012	Social Media Misinformation Identification	(ACL Anthology)

2014	New Sentiment Word Identification	(ACL Anthology)
2018	Multi-lingual Relationship Extraction	(ACL Anthology)
2019	Automated Text Generation	(ACL Anthology)
2019	Automated Response Generation	(ACL Anthology)
2019	Named-entity Recognition	(ACL Anthology)

Source: Compiled by author.

As shown in the following case study on TRS Information Technology, advances in core data management and natural language processing capabilities are not limited to China's state labs; some Chinese companies are working hard to ensure their data collection is useful to the CCP, civil government, security services, and the military.

TRS Information Technology Company's NetInsight

TRS Information Technology Co. Ltd. is a publicly traded software company whose business strategy revolves around various CCP initiatives, including “media fusion” (媒体融合, *meiti ronghe*) and “military-civil fusion” (军民融合, *junmin ronghe*) strategies (Sina Finance, [March 30, 2016](#), [March 30, 2017](#), [March 30, 2018](#), [March 30, 2019](#), [April 23, 2020](#)). Platforms developed by TRS and its subsidiaries like Keyun Big Data (科韵大数据, *Keyun Da Shuju*) serve a wide array of purposes that include: conducting “full-web” (全网, *quanwang*) data collection and monitoring; improving the Party-state's external communication (对外宣传, *duiwai xuanchuan*); and sentiment analysis on large datasets ([TRS.com](#), undated; [TRS-DSJ.com](#), undated; Sina Finance, [March 30, 2019](#), [March 30, 2018](#)). The company claims that more than 8,000 organizations use its products, including “80 percent of national ministries and commissions (国家部委, *guojia bu wei*) and 60 percent of provincial government organs, more than 300 new and traditional media outlets... and public security [organizations], military units, and other users involved in security” (Sina Finance, March 30, 2018; [TRS.com](#), undated). One client appears to be the PRC Ministry of State Security ([TRS.com](#), undated).

Among TRS Information Technology's core platforms for monitoring online public sentiment is TRS NetInsight (TRS网察舆情大数据分析平台, *TRS Wang Cha Yuqing Da Shuju Fenxi Pingtai*) ([TRS.com](#), undated). Three internet data centers continually collect data from “traditional media outlets, Weibo, WeChat, and other new media sources,” including mobile applications, to provide real-time early warning alerts ([TRS.com](#), undated; [TRS.com](#), November 7, 2019; [NLPiR](#), November 2, 2019). Presentation materials suggest that data is also collected from e-commerce platforms, international news outlets, Twitter, and Facebook ([NLPiR](#), November 2, 2019). One public report from NetInsight's website at the height of China's fight against COVID-19 claimed that Netinsight collected and analyzed more than 9 million articles and online comments related to the virus within a 24-hour period ([NetInsight](#), February 18).



Image: Customers listed on TRS Information Technology's website, including the General Office of the Communist Party of China, the Cyberspace Administration of China, the Ministry of State Security, and the Ministry of Public Security (Source: TRS.com).

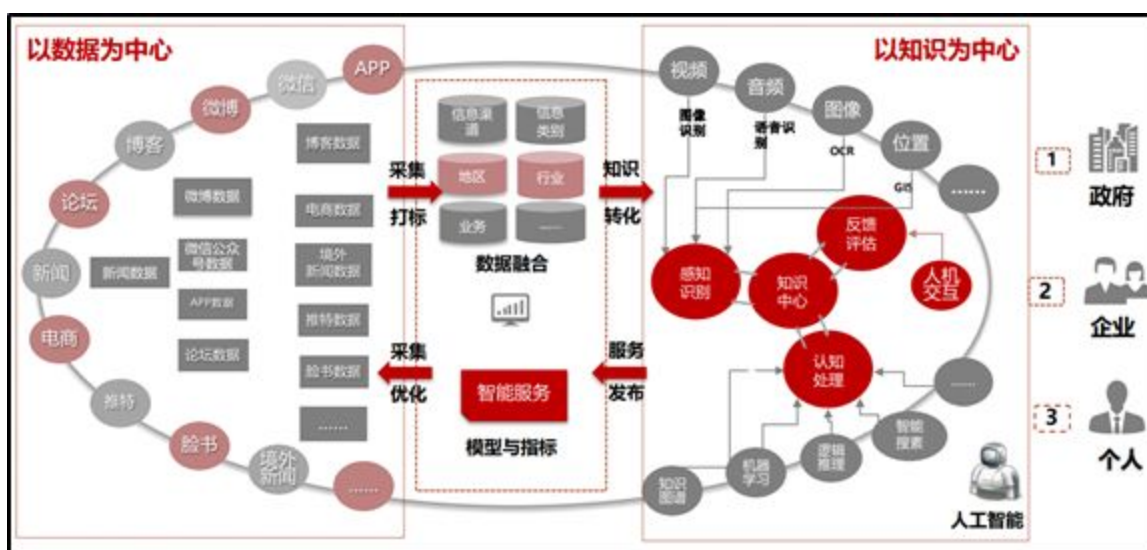


Image: A TRS Information Technology presentation slide showing some of the company's data sources and analytical processes (Source: NLPIR, November 2, 2019).

NetInsight's public reports often distinguish news outlet activity from netizen activity, enabling comparisons between the two spheres of communication. For each category, the reports may provide an overview of hot topics or articles by locality; a list of viral headlines and summaries of their content; word clouds to highlight heavily discussed topics; and trending hashtags on social media, both in general and in response to specific events (NetInsight, [May 26](#); [February 17](#); [June 17](#)). Some in-depth reports also quantify a percentage of

online posts that agree with certain sentiments ([NetInsight](#), November 4, 2019). It is unclear to what extent the issue summaries and analyses presented in NetInsight's public reports are automatically generated. The level of detail achieved by TRS Information Technology, and its mix of analytical outputs, appears similar to public products produced by Knowlesys ([Knowlesys](#), November 14, 2014; [Sina Blog](#), December 24, 2018).

Examples of the platform's insights include:

- On May 28, during the 2020 "Two Sessions," [4] Chinese netizens most heavily focused on a proposal to increase protection for companion animals and ban consumption of cats and dogs. Articles on these topics attracted 210 million views and generated 33,000 posts ([NetInsight](#), May 28).
- Chinese netizens support the Hong Kong National Security Law, as assessed through trending hashtags like "#Hong Kong National Security Takes Effect#" (#香港国安法正式生效#) and "#More Than 70 Countries in the United Nations Express Support for Hong Kong National Security Law#" (#70余国在联合国发言支持香港国安立法#) ([NetInsight](#), July 6).
- American netizens criticize the "double standard" (双标, *shuangbiao*) seen in U.S. politicians' reaction to protests in Hong Kong and the Black Lives Matter demonstrations ([NetInsight](#), June 17).

After a review of available public products, TRS Information Technology's NetInsight platform appears capable of filtering incoming bulk data to answer granular questions like "What is attracting the most attention in different parts of the country?" or "How are netizens engaging or not engaging with certain news reporting?" However, on any given issue, NetInsight's public products heavily favor Chinese media sources. Even in a special report on Black Lives Matter protests in the United States, 62.16 percent of more than 23.5 million messages and articles analyzed by NetInsight were pulled from Weibo or WeChat. In contrast, just 3.43 percent of the messages analyzed came from non-Chinese media sources. Indeed, only 0.03 percent and 0.02 percent of the data came from Twitter and Facebook, respectively ([NetInsight](#), June 17). This kind of imbalance may suggest that NetInsight's ability to collect and process information from non-Chinese sources is weak, with implications for whether the platform could effectively support the CCP's international propaganda work.[5]

Weibo and WeChat appear to be NetInsight's primary data sources across TRS Information Technology's public analysis. Furthermore, these products are largely oriented toward understanding events in China. However, the formulaic approach to NetInsight's analysis—word clouds, hashtags, and issue summaries that distinguish between location and type of media—could easily be replicated using foreign sources. If TRS Information Technology decides to invest in foreign language processing and improving collection from non-Chinese media, NetInsight could facilitate propaganda campaigns that seek to amplify societal rifts and divisive narratives, crowd out dissenting opinions, and reshape unfavorable views. [6] Notably, these tactics have all been seen in China's international propaganda efforts on issues such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and COVID-19 ([China Brief](#), September 16, 2019; [ProPublica](#), March 26; [Belfer Center](#), July 2020). In theory,

NetInsight could also enable the CCP to evaluate whether its current propaganda campaigns are having a desired effect, and to tweak existing campaigns to improve those in the future.



Image: NetInsight's public, limited-functionality demonstration portal. (Source: [NetInsight](#))



Image: A TRS Information Technology presentation slide on the state of public opinion monitoring in China and the company's trajectory (Source: [NLPIR](#), November 2, 2019).

Achieving TRS Information Technology's current capability has been a years-long pursuit. Founded in 1993, the company developed alongside the rest of China's public sentiment analysis industry across three discrete eras, according to the company's own histories ([TRS.com](#), undated). Between 2006 and 2010, technology was focused on "monitoring" (监测, *jiance*) news, fora, and blogs on the "traditional internet" (传统互联网,

chuantong hulianwang) ([NLPIR](#), November 2, 2019). Between 2011 and 2016, technologies began “analyzing” (分析, *fenxi*) mobile and social media information through applications like Weibo and Weixin during the “big data era” (大数据时代, *dashuju shidai*) ([NLPIR](#), November 2, 2019). Since 2017, TRS Information Technology has seen itself and the industry moving toward “situational awareness” (态势感知, *taishi ganzhi*) across multi-media formats, and operation at a more personal level in the “era of intelligentization.” In other words, TRS Information Technology is working toward achieving the capability to answer highly granular questions about an individual’s behavior across platforms ([NLPIR](#), November 2, 2019; [Sina Finance](#), April 23).

Conclusion

The CCP has been attempting to maximize social control through online public opinion and sentiment monitoring since at least 2004 ([PRC State Council Information Office](#), May 20, 2013). Safeguarding the Party’s rule requires massive amounts of data from as many sources as possible, both within China and abroad. However, collecting this data is the easy part. The real difficulty is generating actionable insight through advanced data management, classification, and natural language processing techniques—technologies that numerous Chinese firms are striving to develop for legitimate purposes. Although TRS Information Technology’s current public products are not very detailed, if the company’s current development efforts are successful, it will aid the Party in eventually realizing its vision of next-generation propaganda. A combination of state-sponsored research and corporate contracting are facilitating the CCP’s realization of data-empowered “thought management.”

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Notes

[1] There are many legitimate business reasons for collecting open source data in bulk, including for advertising, and such activity is not unique to Chinese firms. Indeed, some of the companies discussed in recent reports allegedly buy portions of their data from North American data providers. The key questions for investigators are to what extent and by which companies is such data being provided to Chinese government and security organizations.

[2] The reporting on hacked documents related to social media monitoring and data collection for Chinese security organs was published by *Vice* in August ([Vice](#), August 21). The reported database containing profiles on foreign officials, academics, and other persons was reported on by the *Washington Post* and *Australian Broadcasting Corporation News* in mid-September. ([Washington Post](#), September 14; [ABC](#), September 14).

[3] Exposed companies include Knowlyses (深圳市乐思软件技术有限公司), Yunrun Big Data (云润大数据), OneSight (一网互通(北京)科技有限公司), Zhenhua Data (深圳振华数据信息技术有限公司), and

Global Tone Communications (中译语通科技股份有限公司) ([Vice](#), August 21; [Washington Post](#), September 14; [ABC](#), September 14; [ASPI](#), October 14, 2019).

[4] The “Two Sessions” (两会, *Liang Hui*) refers to the annual meetings of the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, which usually take place concurrently (or with overlapping dates) in the month of March. This year’s meetings were delayed until May as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[5] The author acknowledges that public demonstration products may not reveal the full extent of any company’s capability. However, the public products assessed here provide one of the only windows into this market’s level of advancement.

[6] It is far from certain that TRS Information Technology has a weakness in in foreign language processing and improving collection from non-Chinese media. Even if they do not, other companies like Knowlesys that produce similar analytical products appear to have the stronger foreign language capability.

Rethinking the “Quad” Security Concept in the Face of a Rising China

By Rajaram Panda

Introduction

On October 19, it was announced that Australia would be joining India, Japan, and the United States in the 2020 Malabar Exercises for the first time since 2017. The 2020 Malabar Exercises are anticipated to be held in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea later this year ([Press Information Bureau \(India\)](#), October 19). The announcement of Australia’s participation followed recent high-level meetings in Tokyo between the foreign ministers of the four countries, and signalled a renewed strengthening of the Quadrilateral Initiative (aka “Quad”) security framework—which is aimed at advancing a “free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific,” and “preserving and promoting the rules-based order in the region” ([U.S. State Department](#), May 31, 2019).



Image: A meeting of the “Quad” foreign ministers, and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga of Japan, at official talks in Tokyo on October 6, 2020. (Image source: [Indian Ministry of External Affairs](#))

The Quad concept was initially spearheaded in 2007 by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(Japan\)](#), August 22, 2007), and paralleled the start of the 2007 Malabar Exercises, which were conducted in the Bay of Bengal and involved a record participating 25 vessels from India, the United States, Japan, Australia, and Singapore. However, support for the new alliance system rapidly waned almost as quickly as it had begun, and the Quad framework quickly fell into disuse—largely overshadowed by other regional trilateral agreements—until it was resurrected in 2017 in response to concerns over a more assertive People’s Republic of China (PRC) under the leadership of Xi Jinping. Beijing has viewed the Quad negatively from the start, lodging diplomatic complaints with all four participating nations almost immediately after its founding and generally viewing it as an alliance aimed at containing China’s expanding regional power. At

various times, member states have sought to distance themselves from the Quad as they balanced their support for the initiative against maintaining positive economic and political relationships with China, with the framework effectively lying dormant for over a decade.

India's Growing Support for the "Quad 2.0"

Unlike some ASEAN countries, which maintain exclusive economic zones in the contested South China Sea (SCS), none of the Quad members have a direct stake in the region. However, the PRC's efforts to exert sovereign control over parts of the South China Sea arguably violates the 1982 United Nations Conventions on the Laws of the Seas (UNCLOS), which sets the rules for conducting international commerce in open seas. The overseas arm of India's Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) is engaged in oil exploration activities in Vietnam's EEZ, and it is possible that India's economic interests in the region could one day be threatened by Chinese activities ([China Brief](#), May 29). Additionally, over \$5 trillion in global commerce passes through the SCS every year, underpinning the importance of maintaining peace and tranquillity in the region. If a single nation were to disrupt the peaceful status quo, it would become the collective responsibility of law-abiding nations to secure the area and maintain freedom of movement in the region.

To this end, "Quad 2.0" talks were held on the sidelines of the 31st ASEAN summit in November 2017, with the Indian government reporting that officials from Australia, India, the United States and Japan "exchanged views on addressing common challenges of terrorism and proliferation linkages impacting the region as well as on enhancing connectivity" ([The Hindu](#), November 12, 2017). Just ahead of a second Quad meeting which took place on June 8, 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid out India's Indo-Pacific vision at a keynote address to the Shangri-La Dialogue, emphasizing the need for countries to "rise above divisions and competition to work together" to maintain peace in the region. Modi emphasized the need for a common rules-based order for the region, saying:

Such an order must believe in sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as equality of all nations, irrespective of size and strength. These rules and norms should be based on the consent of all, not on the power of the few. This must be based on faith in dialogue, and not dependence on force. It also means that when nations make international commitments, they must uphold them. This is the foundation of India's faith in multilateralism and regionalism; and, of our principled commitment to rule of law ([MEA \(India\)](#), June 1, 2018).

At the same time, Modi failed to explicitly censure China's activities in the region in his Shangri-La Dialogue speech, and did not mention the Quad directly—leading some critics to worry that India sought to elevate the role of ASEAN as a mechanism for regional cooperation at the expense of the Quad. ([NDTV](#), July 13, 2018; [The Wire\(India\)](#), June 8, 2018). India also engaged with Russia and China on maritime dialogues around the same time ([The Hindu](#), July 5, 2018).

Coping with China in 2020

Events this year have changed India's earlier hesitation about signing on with the Quad. Amid an ongoing global health crisis sparked by a coronavirus that originated in China, India's tensions with China have increased. COVID-19's impacts on global supply chains have underscored the dangers of economic dependence on China, and India's willingness to risk its economic relationship with China was demonstrated by the public's widespread calls to boycott Chinese goods following a military standoff in the Galwan Province this summer, and later on the eastern border of Ladakh ([China Brief](#), October 19). Citing national security and data privacy issues, India also moved to ban over a hundred Chinese apps shortly after the border conflict broke out, accelerating its trend towards technology nationalism and further hurting its economic relationship with China ([The Hindu](#), September 3).

The June border conflict also hardened anti-China sentiments in New Delhi. One former national security advisor noting that the conflict amounted to a "massive escalation" and an attempt to change the status quo, saying that "Chinese behaviour has been very different to anything in the past...and it is even more serious because it is a part of a broader Chinese behaviour, not just *vis-à-vis* us, but with other people as well." ([The Wire \(India\)](#), June 18). A retired chief of the Indian Navy wrote in July: "The time for ambivalence is over and while India will have to fight its own territorial battles with determination, this is the moment to seek external balancing...[a] formal revival and re-invigoration of the Quad is called for" ([Indian Express](#), July 22).

The Quad is increasingly seen in India as a potential counterweight to growing Chinese influence and aggression in the Asia-Pacific region. The influential *Hindustan Times* argued in a recent editorial that "China wants to limit New Delhi's power and ambition; it wants India to accept Beijing's primacy in Asia and beyond." The editorial urged that New Delhi should "double down on its partnership with the U.S., [and] make [the] Quad...a more permanent arrangement, and be a part of any club that seeks to contain Chinese power" ([Hindustan Times](#), June 17).

The Malabar Exercises and Enhanced Security Bargains Cement the Quad's Power

The relevance of the Malabar naval exercises to the Quad's evolution cannot be understated. First started as a series of annual bilateral exercises between the United States and India in the Indian Ocean, the exercises were expanded to include all four members of the Quad plus Singapore in 2007, and encompassed maritime drills off the coast of Okinawa and in the Bay of Bengal. In 2015, Japan was added as a permanent member to the joint exercises. Australia has requested to participate in the exercises since 2017, but this year marks the first time that it will participate since 2017. Australia's involvement underscores the increased power of Quad 2.0 in 2020, with the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command chief Admiral Philip S. Davidson emphasizing that the Quad represents not only a military, but also a diplomatic and economic counter to China ([FDD](#), October 13).

Australia's participation was made possible by recent increased ties in the Australian-Indian military relationship. As part of the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, India and Australia signed two landmark defence arrangements in June 2020: the Mutual Logistic Support Agreement (MLSA), which aims to increase military interoperability through bilateral activities; and the Defense Science and Technology Implementing Arrangement (DSTIA), which provides for defense cooperation between the two countries ([Ministry of Defence \(Australia\)](#), June 4). This agreement followed the first-ever virtual bilateral summit between Prime Minister Modi and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison. The June defense agreements paved the way for greater cross-service military activity, building on the success of the most complex exercise to date, AUSINDEX 2019, which focused on anti-submarine warfare ([The Hindu](#), September 5).



Image: A U.S. Navy officer and an Indian Navy officer consult on submarine exercise planning activities on board the Indian Navy destroyer INS Mysore during the Malabar Exercise held in April 2007.

(Image source: [Defense.gov](#))

Three months later, Japan's Prime Minister Abe held a virtual summit with his Indian counterpart on 10 September—shortly before he left office—and signed the much-anticipated Mutual Logistic Support Arrangement. Going further, during the third “2+2” meeting between the United States and India in New Delhi on October 27, both sides signed the Basic Exchanges and Cooperation Agreement for GeoSpatial Cooperation (BECA), paving the way for India to acquire armed drones like Reapers or Predators for long-range precision strikes against hostile targets on land and sea ([Times of India](#), October 28, 2020). For the first time, the South China Sea was specifically mentioned, with Pompeo using strong language that called China's policy on the South China Sea “tyranny.” The clinching of these agreements in such quick time demonstrates these countries' renewed interest in keeping an eye on China's expansionist behaviour in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, giving the Quad stronger teeth ([Times of India](#), September 10).

The India-Japan MLSA agreement will enhance inter-operability between the armed forces of both countries. The significance of the pact cannot be missed, as it comes amid border tensions with China and Beijing's aggressive behaviour across the Indo-Pacific region. It is difficult to dispute that the deepening of defense ties in recent years between India and Japan is in response to China's growing influence across the region. The agreement will provide their militaries with access to each other's bases for supplies and services. The agreement will also facilitate the smooth provision of supplies and services between the forces on the ground.

India has signed similar agreements with the United States, France, South Korea, Singapore and Australia. The 2016 India-U.S. Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) gives India refuelling facilities and access to American bases in Djibouti, Diego Garcia, Guam and Subic Bay. Based on these agreements, India and the six signatory countries can now support each other's warships and aircraft—as well as boosting defense ties more generally. Such agreements enhance India's strategic reach in the Indian Ocean and help to counter China's expanding footprint across the Indo-Pacific on a bilateral basis ([Rediff](#), September 12).

Japan, under Shinzo Abe, was the original proposer of the Quad framework. With Abe's departure in September, one might ask whether the Quad 2.0 would lose some of its salience, since he was the most important proponent for this framework? In a word, no. U.S. leaders such as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have shown themselves willing to throw their hearty support behind the concept, and the participating members of the Quad all have stronger reasons to support the framework than they did in 2007. [1] Also, Abe may have relinquished office, but will remain in government as a member of the lower house of Japan's Diet until September 2021 (unless his successor Yoshihide Suga opts for a snap election). Abe will presumably provide Suga with the right support to take the Quad forward. In view of the growing synergy that the Quad members have found on Indo-Pacific affairs, it is unlikely that the Quad's utility as a security framework will decline in the coming years.

Conclusion

In this evolving scenario, it is in the interests of both India and the United States to hone their military cooperation efforts. For the two other Quad members, Japan and Australia, India's strong foothold in the Indo-Pacific provides a key counterbalance to China's growing footprint in the Indian Ocean. The noted Indian strategic analyst Brahma Challeney has argued that "as long as the costs of expansionism remain manageable, Chinese President Xi Jinping will stay the course, seeking to exploit electoral politics and polarization in major democracies. The Indo-Pacific's major democratic powers must not let that happen, which means ensuring that the costs for China do not remain manageable for long." [2] Indian policymakers spent years attempting to appease China, to little avail. As events in 2020 have unfolded and security risks in the Asia-Pacific have become heightened, Indian analysts have reached a consensus that a successful Indo-Pacific policy must include more overt security frameworks that can combat—even contain—China's growing regional power.

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Notes

[1] For an example of Pompeo's support for the Quad, see: "Pompeo seeks to institutionalize Quad ties to counter China," *Asia Nikkei*, October 6, 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/Pompeo-aims-to-institutionalize-Quad-ties-to-counter-China>.

For a discussion of the Quad's future viability, see: "Assessing the Quad: Prospects and Limitations of Quadrilateral Cooperation For Advancing Australia's Interests," May 19, 2020, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/assessing-quad-prospects-and-limitations-quadrilateral-cooperation-advancing-australia#_edn3.

[2] Brahma Challeney, "China Alone", 21 August 2020, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/indo-pacific-security-quad-chinese-expansionism-by-brahma-c-hellaney-2020-08>

China's Discourse and Interests Related to Its Role in U.N. Peacekeeping

By Nikita Savkov

Introduction

In his video message marking the International Day of United Nations (UN) Peacekeepers on May 29, the People's Republic of China (PRC) Ambassador to the UN Zhang Jun (张军) said that China is a major contributor to UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKO) and will “implement its commitment to multilateralism and world peace with concrete actions and make greater contributions to peacekeeping operations for the maintenance of international peace and security” ([Xinhua](#), May 30). On September 18, the PRC State Council Information Office published its first white paper on peacekeeping operations, noting in the introduction: “The Chinese government is issuing this white paper to review the glorious journey of China's armed forces in the UNPKOs over the past 30 years, to expound their ideas on safeguarding world peace in the new era, and to elaborate on the efforts they make” ([Xinhua](#), September 18). Together, these recent messages show the importance that China places on participating in UNPKO, and underscore China's future readiness to deploy more troops and provide more funding for peacekeeping operations.



Image: PLA soldiers serving with the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) stand in formation for an awards ceremony in October 2017. (Image source: [PRC Foreign Ministry](#), October 2, 2017)

China's participation in UNPKO began in 1988, when it officially joined the UN Special Committee on PKO. The PRC sent few engineering, transport, or medical units to UNPKO throughout the 1990s. However, this began to change in the new millennium. From January 2000 to January 2009, the number of Chinese personnel deployed to UNPKO increased from 52 to 2,146. [1] The new era of Chinese peacekeeping officially began in September 2015, when PRC President Xi Jinping gave a speech to the United Nations General Assembly announcing that China would shoulder more responsibilities in maintaining world peace. Xi

pledged that China would train 8,000 troops for UNPKO, commit \$1 billion to a ten-year joint China-UN Peace and Development Fund, and provide \$100 million in military assistance to the African Union ([Xinhua](#), September 29, 2015).

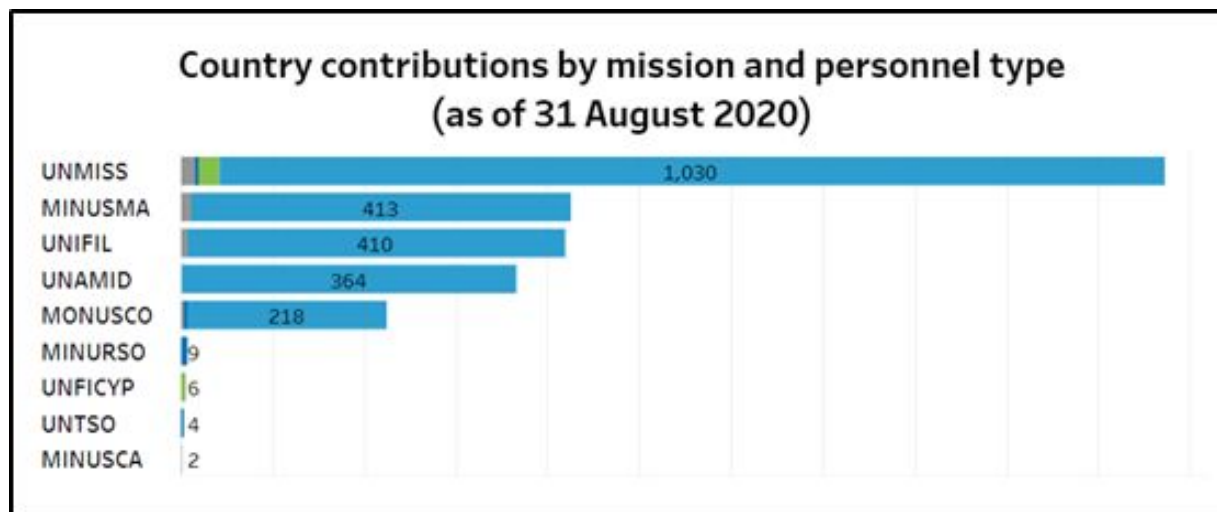


Image: China's troop contributions to UN PKO by mission type (Source: [UN Peacekeeping](#))

Today, President Xi's 2015 pledge has been fulfilled. In addition to supplying around 3 percent of total UNPKO forces, China contributes around 15 percent of the UNPKO budget ([USIP](#), September 2018; [UN Peacekeeping](#), undated). Since 2018, China has maintained a 8,000-person standby force to carry out peacekeeping missions for the United Nations ([China Daily](#), March 31, 2019). Further, although for many years no Chinese national held a senior post on any UNPKO missions, last year Ambassador Huang Xia was appointed special envoy for hotspot regions in the African Great Lakes Region ([Xinhua](#), January 23, 2019).

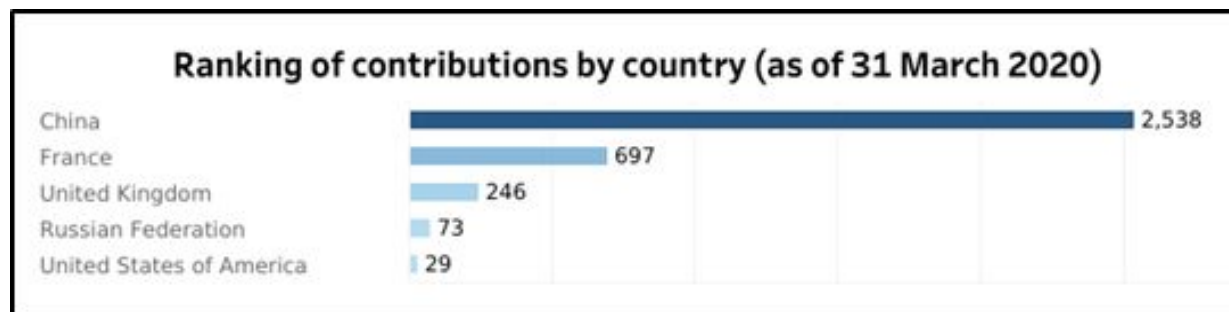


Image: Troops provided to UNPKO by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. (Source: [UN Peacekeeping](#))

The number of Chinese troops deployed for UNPKO has remained largely steady since 2004. Chinese troops are mostly engaged in missions on the African continent, and do not constitute a majority of peacekeeping personnel in any of the missions. China is currently the second largest financial contributor to the UNPKO

budget, following the United States. It is also worth noting that while China ranks tenth in countries' troop contributions to UNPKO, its contributions are significantly larger than those of other permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) (*see accompanying graphic*). In March 2020 the UN Security Council adopted China's proposed resolution on the "safety and security of peacekeepers," thereby demonstrating a new development in China's contributions to UNPKO ([UN](#), March 30). This demonstrates that China now also shapes the mechanisms of UN peacekeeping.

The Ideology and Discourse of Chinese Peacekeeping

Wang Jingwu (王京武), Dean of the National University of Defense Technology's School of International Relations (国防科技大学国际关系学院, *Guofang Keji Daxue Guoji Guanxi Xueyuan*), has written that China's participation in UNPKO is based on four principles. According to Wang, these principles are:

- 1) "Chinese concept" (中国理念, *zhongguo linian*): China promotes the development of the international political and economic order in a more just and reasonable direction, and supports the peace and development of all countries in the world.
- 2) "Chinese standpoint" (中国立场, *zhongguo lichang*): China emphasizes that UNPKO should not interfere in the internal affairs of the party concerned. China resists the hegemonic policies and double standards of certain Western countries, and supports the rights and interests of developing countries.
- 3) "Chinese contribution" (中国贡献, *zhongguo gongxian*): China provides funding to the UN peacekeeping budget, sends troops to mission areas, supports the China-United Nations Peace and Development Fund, and helps the African Union.
- 4) "Chinese power" (中国力量, *zhongguo liliang*): China is the mainstay of UN peacekeeping. From the beginning of its involvement with peacekeeping, China has gradually increased the number and variety of its peacekeeping personnel. ([PLA](#), October 11, 2018)

These principles are in line with the PRC's promotion of what one analyst has called "peacekeeping with Chinese characteristics" ([The Diplomat](#), September 25). Beijing has consistently refused to adopt the "responsibility to protect" (R2P) principle—distancing itself from military interventions lacking the host government's consent, which could undermine state sovereignty. A PRC Foreign Ministry position paper published in September lays out China's stance on peacekeeping more explicitly, calling on UNPKO to "observe the three principles of [the] consent of parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate, and help post-conflict countries build lasting peace" ([PRC Foreign Ministry](#), September 10). Critics will note that this vision of peacebuilding heavily limits the ability of UNPKO to intervene in humanitarian disasters—and parallels the recasting of human rights violations in places such as Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang as being part of China's "internal affairs." In short, such an articulation of peacekeeping takes the teeth out of UNPKO, leading to a vision of "peace and development" that is more rhetorical than anything else.



Image: PRC President Xi Jinping addresses the UN General Assembly in September 2015 on peacekeeping issues. (Source: Xinhua)

Pragmatic Drivers of China's Peacekeeping Efforts

China's participation in UNPKO is frequently highlighted by state media, both domestically and abroad, to signal that China is a responsible stakeholder of the international system. This message has proven to be a steady means for the PRC to bolster its global reputation. At the same time, the PRC has not shied away from leveraging its role as a permanent member of the UNSC, and its role in directing peacekeeping operations, to pressure developing countries into complying with Beijing's "One China" policy. In 1997, China vetoed a UNSC draft resolution to send military observers to Guatemala because of Guatemala's official diplomatic relations with Taiwan ([El País](#), January 12, 1997). In 1999, China vetoed a draft resolution to approve the extension of a deployment in Macedonia because of Macedonia's diplomatic relations with Taiwan ([United Nations](#), October 18, 2005). And in 2003, China pressured Liberia to cut ties with Taiwan by threatening to veto a mandate for a UN Observer Mission in the country ([BBC](#), October 13, 2003).

Chinese companies have invested heavily in African infrastructure and energy sectors, and peacekeeping operations have also served as a way for the state to indirectly protect its citizens and investments abroad. For example, the largest contingent of Chinese peacekeeping troops is deployed in South Sudan, a country with the third-largest oil deposits in Africa. China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) started its business activities in Sudan in 1996. Because many foreign competitors were unwilling to do business amid an ongoing military conflict, the state-owned CNPC soon became the leading foreign investor in the local oilfields and infrastructure ([CNPC](#), May 27, 2015).

Unlike Western countries, China never imposed sanctions on the military and political leadership of South Sudan. Instead, Chinese companies exploited opportunities for market access and economic gains. In 2017,

China's CNPC joined a consortium with the two biggest local oil corporations ([Sohu](#), January 15, 2017). As CNPC expanded its shares in South Sudan's oil sector, China increased its PKO in the country. As of 2020, about a thousand Chinese personnel are deployed in different regions of South Sudan—including in the north of the country, where strategic oil deposits and pipelines are situated. CNPC has greatly benefited from a 2018 peace deal, gaining access in July 2019 to the Munga oil field, which was previously inaccessible due to the country's civil war ([CNPC](#), August 6, 2019). According to Hua Ning (华宁), a Chinese ambassador to South Sudan, peacekeeping troops from China “help create a favorable environment as the warring parties implement key outstanding provisions within the revitalized peace deal” ([Xinhua](#), September 19, 2019).

In a 2018 interview, Zhou Bo (周波), the director of the Security Cooperation Center of the Office of International Military Cooperation of the Ministry of Defense of China (中国国防部国际军事合作办公室安全合作中心, *Zhongguo Guofangbu Guoji Junshi Hezuo Bangongshi Anquan Hezuo Zhongxin*), asserted that China is a major peacekeeping power in Africa, and that its contribution helps maintain good relations between China and the African Union ([China Radio International](#), May 19, 2018). According to Zhou, China's peacekeeping missions benefit African countries directly, by deployment of Chinese military and civil personnel to the mission areas; and indirectly, by providing support and training to the forces of the African Union. For example, the PRC has previously provided military assistance to the soldiers in Burundi and Uganda to facilitate their peacekeeping missions in Somalia.

A persistent problem for the modern PLA is its comparative lack of real war experience. China's participation in UNPKO has facilitated opportunities for multilateral cooperation with a variety of militaries, and allowed it to take part in military operations other than war (MOOTW), an important part of the PLA's long-term reform goals. While peacekeeping operations do not provide the same experience of modern military conflict, they still can give the PLA some much-needed experience in combat, logistics, and multinational cooperation ([China Brief](#), December 5, 2016).

From a narrative standpoint, successful peacekeeping efforts shore up China's reputation as a major military power, lending support to Beijing's increasingly nationalist rhetoric and “wolf warrior diplomacy” (战狼外交, *zhanlang waijiao*). [2] As recently expressed by Wang Yi (王毅), PRC State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs: “[the] Chinese are principled and brave, and we will definitely fight back against the deliberate slander and firmly defend the country's honor and national dignity” ([People's Daily](#), May 24).

He Yin, an associate professor at the China Peacekeeping Police Training Center at the Chinese People's Police University (中国人民警察大学维和培训部, *Zhongguo Renmin Jingcha Daxue Weihe Peixun Bu*), notes that other countries may doubt China's motives for participating in UNPKO. He asserts that the PRC faces a dilemma: if the country actively participates in international affairs, it will be criticized for challenging the world order; but if China remains passive, it will be criticized for not shouldering the duties of a responsible nation. He criticizes developed countries for their declining interest in peacekeeping and their reluctance to dispatch more troops for missions, leading to the inefficiency of peacekeeping operations. [3]

He Yin argues that because of the inability of liberal Western countries to effectively build and maintain peace, non-Western countries should change the normative mechanism of peacekeeping ([China Daily](#), September 26, 2019).

Conclusion

During the last decade, the PRC has increased its participation in UN peacekeeping. At the same time, it has built a military base in Djibouti, and actively developed its cooperation with African countries and the African Union. China has also expanded its foreign policy commitments abroad via Xi Jinping's wide-ranging Belt and Road Initiative. As the United States has stepped back from actively supporting and funding international organizations, PRC commentators and official publications have called on China to increase its role in global peacekeeping. Peacekeeping operations represent one of many opportunities that China is seizing to increase its influence around the world, and particularly in Africa.

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Notes

[1] Statistics about Chinese contribution to UN PKO is available at : <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>; and <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/china>

[2] “Wolf warrior diplomacy” is a media term used to describe the pro-active style of Beijing’s foreign policy. The term originates from the title of the 2017 Chinese action movie “Wolf Warrior 2” (战狼2, *Zhan Lang 2*) that tells the story of a Chinese soldier who protects Chinese and locals during the conflict in Africa. The movie became widely popular in China, and it’s nationalistic style can be characterized by the slogan on its promotional poster, “Whoever offends China, no matter how far they are, will be executed” (犯我中华者, 虽远必诛). Another popular quote from the movie used in state media is “Chinese citizens, if you get into trouble while abroad, don’t give up! Remember that you have the powerful Motherland behind your back” (中华人民共和国公民：当你在海外遭遇危险，不要放弃！请记住，在你身后，有一个强大的祖国) ([PLA](#), August 4, 2017).

[3] He’s comments are slightly disingenuous: Western analysts have noted that so-called “medium powers” such as Australia, Canada, and South Korea have tended to be more involved in international peacekeeping efforts than “great powers” such as the U.S. and Russia, who are less likely to remain neutral (or be viewed as such) when participating in international conflicts. As a result, these countries have been less inclined to participate directly in UNPKO outside of a supporting role. Countries such as the U.S. and Russia also have considerably more forces deployed for peacekeeping efforts as part of non-UN missions. See: [USIP](#), September 2018.