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**Hong Kong Cracks Down on National Security Imperatives
Amid Electoral Reforms**

By Elizabeth Chen

On April 15, Hong Kong celebrated National Security Education Day (NSE Day) for the first time in the special administrative region (HKSAR)'s history. The mainland has held a National Security Education Day on April 15 each year since the holiday was designated in a July 2015 National Security Law of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In Hong Kong, NSE Day was marked by a symposium of events held by the Committee for Safeguarding National Security, a body established by a new national security law implemented last June and led by the city's chief executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor ([China Daily](#), April

13). The theme of the day was to “Uphold National Security, Safeguard Our Home—Improve Electoral System, Ensure Patriots Administering Hong Kong.”



Image: Leaders of the HKSAR took part in the opening ceremony of National Security Education Day 2021 in Hong Kong, including (from left): Major General Chen Daoxiang, Yang Yirui, Zheng Yanxiong, Luo Huining, Tung Chee-hwa, Carrie Lam, Zhang Jianzong, Chen Maobo, Zheng Ruohua, Leung Junyan, and Chen Zhiyi
Source: [Info.gov.hk](http://info.gov.hk).

NSE Day was heralded by a concerted propaganda effort, as pro-Beijing forces appeared to signal their victory over the opposition. Upon reviewing the day's events, foreign analysts could not help but question “what, exactly, is being celebrated on National Security Education Day, if not the police force and its use of force tactics ([China Digital Times](http://ChinaDigitalTimes.com), April 15).[1] More than anything, it signaled the success of Beijing's effective crackdown on the autonomy and independence of the HKSAR.

National Security Education Day 2021

The day was marked by speeches from Carrie Lam and Director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the HKSAR Luo Huining (骆惠宁); police force and correctional service open days; school activities throughout the city organized by the Education Bureau; and a “National Security Exhibition,” among other events ([Info.gov.hk](http://info.gov.hk), April 13; nsed.gov.hk, accessed April 22). In her opening speech, Carrie Lam said that national security was inseparable from regime security, and that “to genuinely secure national security, the right to rule must be tightly gripped in the hands of patriots” ([HKFP](http://HKFP.com), April 15). This echoed PRC leader Xi Jinping's words in response to a work report that Lam delivered in January that Hong Kong's stability and

security can only be ensured through “patriots governing Hong Kong” (爱国者治港, *aiguozhe zhi gang*) ([Xinhua](#), January 27).[2]

At the police academy, officers staged “Chinese military-style drills and ‘goose-stepping,’” while prison officers showed off their capabilities to put down a mock riot by fending off “inmates” wielding canes and slippers (HKFP, [April 15](#), [April 15](#)). For onlookers, these bore eerie callbacks to police brutality during the 2019 Hong Kong protests (see [1], [China Digital Times](#), April 15). Schools organized national security-themed activities such as knowledge quizzes, poster design and slogan creation competitions under the direction of the Education Bureau ([Info.gov.hk](#), April 15), which has played a major role in the dissemination of an all-encompassing concept of national security that covers sixteen priority areas, including “political security, homeland security, economic security, ecological security, cyber security, and cultural security...” ([Nsed.gov.hk](#), accessed April 20; [ST Daily](#), April 14).

Beijing’s top official in the HKSAR Luo Huining gave a speech calling the day’s events “a significant effort made by the SAR to fulfill its constitutional obligation of safeguarding national security” and noted that “security is the foremost prerequisite for development.” “Now that we have a law, a mechanism, and a team the implementation is ever more important,” Luo said, adding “For all who endanger national security, hard resistance should be stricken down by law, [while] soft resistance should be regulated by law” ([Central People’s Government Liaison Office in the HKSAR](#), April 15).

Electoral Reforms

The Improving the Electoral System (Consolidated Amendments) Bill 2021 was introduced to the Legislative Council (LegCo) for the first and second readings a day earlier, after the basic reform outlines were first signaled at the PRC’s “Two Sessions” annual legislative meetings in early March ([China Brief](#), March 15). City administrators and official news sources have all signaled that the electoral reforms are an integral part of ensuring the “political” element of national security in the HKSAR. Amendments to Annex I and Annex II of the Hong Kong Basic Law preparing the way for the reforms, also referred to as the “patriots governing Hong Kong” resolution, were approved by the NPC and passed into law on March 31 ([Global Times](#), April 14). It is expected that the electoral reform bill will pass after its third reading in May, establishing new election regulations ahead of the upcoming Election Committee contest on September 19, LegCo polls (delayed last year ostensibly due to the coronavirus pandemic) on December 19, and the Chief Executive election to be held on March 27, 2022.

Overall, the changes are designed to undercut the ability of the popular opposition—already effectively stifled after pan-democratic lawmakers resigned in protest last November—to participate in government. They include cutting the number of directly elected seats from 35 to 20 in LegCo, which has also been restructured and expanded from 70 to 90 seats. The reforms will also set up a new vetting committee for aspiring political candidates, which is not subject to judicial review and will be overseen by the Hong Kong police national

security unit and the Committee for Safeguarding National Security. The biggest change, however, revolves around empowering and expanding the Election Committee—originally tasked with picking the Chief Executive, it will now select 40 members of LegCo and effectively control all elections in the city. The remaining 30 LegCo seats will go to trade-based functional constituencies, long seen as being loyal to Beijing. The Election Committee itself will be expanded from 1,200 to 1,500 members, with the 300 new representatives coming from so-called “ultra-loyalist” groups that have strong ties to mainland organizations or government bodies ([SCMP](#), April 14).

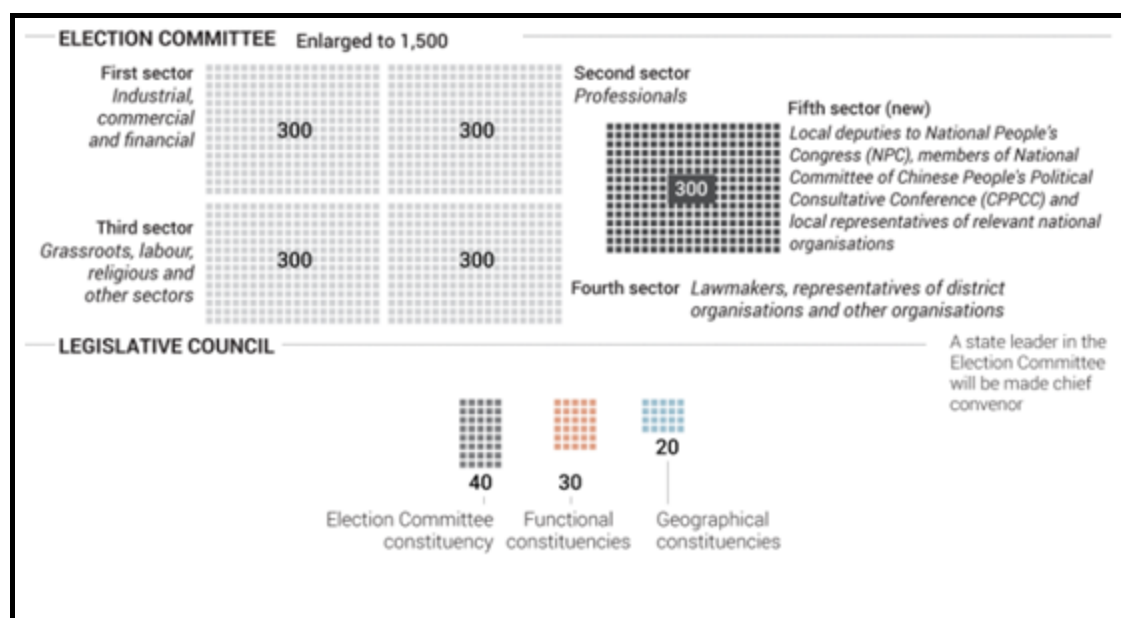


Image: A graphic showing the breakdown of electoral reforms in Hong Kong. Source: [SCMP](#).

Lawmakers preempted an expected public outcry by planning to criminalizing acts of “openly inciting” people to cast a blank vote or spoil their ballot ([Nikkei Asia](#), April 13), although legal experts warned that such legislation could have “real constitutional problems” and raise legitimacy problems for Hong Kong’s future elections ([SCMP](#), April 15).

Crackdown on Education, Arts, Media

According to one mainland expert, the combination of last year’s national security law and this year’s electoral reforms have effectively controlled “secessionist voices” in the political area, but other aspects of Hong Kong’s economy and culture are infiltrated by subversive anti-China elements and still need to be dealt with ([Global Times](#), April 14). To this end, the Education Bureau issued sweeping guidelines to improve national security education back in February, with new regulations covering everything from school management to new curricula and guiding student behavior off campus ([SCMP](#), February 4, [China Digital Times](#), February 4). A campaign to reform so-called “liberal studies”—designed to enhance students’

understanding of “national security, lawfulness and patriotism”—was rolled out in early April ([Global Times](#), April 14).

The arts and media have also been targeted. After pro-Beijing politicians and media attacked the West Kowloon Cultural District’s M+ Museum’s plans to exhibit a work by the Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei, the cultural district authority chairman promised that M+ would not be “run like a grocery store” and that there would be no room for “vulgar” exhibits that violated the national security law ([The Standard](#), March 30). Chinese regulators’ calls for the technology company Alibaba to divest its media assets, including the South China Morning Post, sparked concerns in March that a Chinese state-owned enterprise could soon acquire the 117 year-old paper and end long-running internal debates about its editorial independence ([Quartz](#), March 19). Most recently, the pro-Beijing paper Ta Kung Pao issued a call to shut down the pro-democracy tabloid Apple Daily in order to “plug loopholes in national security,” just as the paper’s notorious founder Jimmy Lai Chi-ying was sentenced to fourteen months in prison for his participation in the 2019 protests ([Ta Kung Pao](#), April 16; [CCTV News](#), April 16).

Conclusion

As China has continued its crackdown on freedom of expression and political activities in Hong Kong, foreign criticism and sanctions have done little to blunt the central government’s determination to control the HKSAR at all costs. By applying a wide-ranging holistic definition of national security, the PRC under Xi Jinping’s leadership has moved rapidly to crack down on political debate, artistic expression, and educational and media freedoms in the HKSAR, while retroactively reframing its definition of “one country, two systems” to justify increasing control. There are also signs that the PRC will move to impose its censorship regime on the Internet in Hong Kong, which was previously exempted from mainland restrictions. Amid these rapid changes, the future of the island’s long-standing liberal autonomy looks grim.

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

Notes

[1] Although there have been no official investigations into the numerous accounts of police brutality during the 2019 Hong Kong protests, multiple independent investigations as well as international human rights groups have found evidence of police misconduct and abuse (hkpfreport.org, accessed April 20; tl.hkrev.info, accessed April 20; [HRW](#), November 19, 2020). As a result, the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), although technically a nonpartisan entity, has long been seen as a key Beijing ally and has consistently ranked low in public opinion polling ([HKFP](#), May 20, 2020).

[2] Since Xi's statement in January, central government propaganda organs have worked to establish the historical context of "patriots governing Hong Kong," arguing that it is merely a reformulation of Deng Xiaoping's declaration that "the people of Hong Kong [should] govern Hong Kong" (港人治港, *gangren zhigang*) ([CGTN](#), March 4). A recent article in the Chinese Communist Party theoretical journal *Qiushi* lays this logic out clearly, while also arguing that the notion of "patriots ruling Hong Kong," not autonomous and independent governance, is the core principle of the "one country two systems" framework governing mainland-Hong Kong relations ([Qiushi](#), April 16).

**The Xi Administration Openly Challenges American Global Leadership
And Takes Multiple Measures to Counter Washington's Containment**

By Willy Wo-Lap Lam

Introduction

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership has openly challenged Washington's role as global rule-setter. The administration of CCP General Secretary and state president Xi Jinping (习近平) has also taken multi-pronged measures to counter perceived efforts by a U.S.-led "coalition of democracies" to contain China.

At the first high-level diplomatic meeting between the U.S. and China in Alaska on March 18, Politburo member and director of the General Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪) told Secretary of State Antony Blinken that "most countries in the world do not recognize that the U.S. values represent the international values..." Yang, a former ambassador to the U.S., added that "the U.S. is not qualified to talk to China in a condescending manner" ([Xinhua](#), March 19). This tough talk followed instructions given by President Xi at the National People's Congress last month that powerful China can now treat with the world on an equal footing (平视世界, *pingshi shijie*). Implying that China will soon overtake the U.S., the CCP leadership "core" has claimed that "the East is rising and the West is declining" (东升西降, *dongsheng xijiang*). "Both the timing and the [developmental] trends are on our side," Xi said, adding that "our opportunities trump the challenges [facing us]" ([Apple Daily](#), March 27; [VOA Chinese](#), March 14; [Xinhua](#), January 13).



Image: Following a rare public diplomatic spat in which both sides accused the other of breaking protocol, Chinese media touted the Anchorage talks between CCP Politburo member and director of the General Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission Yang Jiechi, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan as a “candid, constructive dialogue, keeping the door open to further communication,” while also touting the event as a major diplomatic win back home (Source: [Xinhua](#)).

These assertions contrast with often-repeated statements that China has no intention of disputing American “hegemony.” At a talk in New York in late 2018, Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) indicated that “China will not challenge or [seek to] displace the U.S.” A 2019 government white paper on “China and the World in the New Era” (新时代的中国与世界, *xin shidai de zhongguo yu shijie*) similarly pointed out that “China has no intention to challenge the U.S.; nor does it want to replace the U.S” ([China News Service](#), September 27, 2019; [Ming Pao](#), September 30, 2018). And Xi said in his address to the United Nations last year that his country had “no intention to fight either a Cold War or a hot war with any country” ([China Daily](#), September 23, 2020). Yet while fending off pressure from U.S. presidents Trump and Biden, the Chinese leader has recently also proclaimed a much more hawkish approach to foreign affairs. “We must uphold the bottom line of the core national interests of sovereignty, security and developmental interests,” Xi noted late last year, adding that China would “guide the reform of global governance based on principles of equality and justice,” and reiterated his belief in Beijing’s leading role in building a global “community of common destiny” for mankind ([CNR.cn](#), January 18; [Seeking Truth](#), October 24, 2020).

Countering A “Coalition of Democracies”

The pugnacious statements of Chinese leaders seem geared toward countering Biden's initiative to consolidate a “coalition of democracies,” which is aimed at reining in the PRC's combative hard and soft power projections. Washington has called upon its allies and friends to join America's “extreme competition” with China, which, Biden has said, is led by a leader who is “without a democratic, small D, bone in his body” ([RTHK.hk](#), March 26). On March 12, Biden conducted a virtual summit with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)—comprised of the U.S., India, Japan and Australia. The group called for the Indo-Pacific Region to be “anchored by democratic values.” It supported freedom of navigation (FON) trips in the South China Sea (SCS) and condemned China's perceived “coercion” and “aggression” ([SCMP](#), March 13). Twelve days later, Secretary of State Blinken went to Brussels to strategize joint tactics with European Union and NATO officials to blunt what he called “China's aggressive and coercive actions, as well as its failures... to uphold its international commitments” ([U.S. State Department](#), March 24).

In mid-March, Blinken and the U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin met with their counterparts in South Korea and Japan during so-called “2+2” meetings, which Chinese media viewed as an effort to coordinate responses to China's rise ([Global Times](#), March 15). Later on the same trip, Austin also visited India to firm up defense cooperation. Despite long-standing strategic tensions between Japan and South Korea, the U.S. secured some vocal commitments to cooperate against China. U.S. and South Korean senior officials committed themselves to “opposing all activities that undermine and destabilize the rules-based international order.” ([U.S. State Department](#), March 18; [VOA Chinese](#), March 18). A communique issued after the Tokyo 2+2 meeting was aimed squarely at the PRC: it stressed that “China's behavior, where inconsistent with the existing international order, presents political, economic, military, and technological challenges to the alliance and to the international community.” Washington and Tokyo declared their support for “peace and stability” in the Taiwan Strait and contested Beijing's territorial claims in the South China Sea (SCS). The U.S. also reiterated its support for Japan's claim to the Senkaku Islands, which are administered by Japan but also claimed by China ([Japanese Ministry of Defense](#), March 16).

The outcomes of the Biden administration's multi-faceted offensive have been impressive. Along with the Netherlands and Canada (as of the time of writing), the U.S. has declared that China's policies to repress Muslim minorities in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) amount to genocide. For the first time since the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, the European Union (EU) levied sanctions against several Chinese cadres allegedly responsible for enacting said policies in the XUAR in late March. The U.S., UK and Canada have issued similar sanctions. ([RTHK.hk](#), March 23; [BBC Chinese](#), March 21). Western European countries including France, Germany and the U.K. are due to join America on FON trips in the SCS, and the U.S. has boosted the dispatch of naval vessels through the Taiwan Strait ([Radio Free Asia](#), March 12; [Sina.com.cn](#), March 11). Moreover, a number of EU countries have followed the U.S. initiative of cutting off the supply of microchips and other high-tech components to PRC tech firms. Japan has augmented its

defense cooperation, including arms sales, to countries such as India, Indonesia and Vietnam, which all have ongoing territorial and economic disputes with China ([Nikkei Asia](#), March 29; [21jingji.com](#), March 11).

In response, Beijing has levied counter-sanctions against government officials and others in the U.S. and EU. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has increased the frequency of its "patrols" in the SCS as well as air force and naval incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone and surrounding waters. According to Yu Maochun (余茂春), a one-time advisor on China to former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the recent statements by Yang Jiechi and Wang Yi showed that "even top Chinese officials have adopted a wolf warrior diplomacy" ([Central News Agency](#), March 21; [Radio French International](#), March 20).

Xi played a pivotal role in trying to drive a wedge between the U.S. and the EU in late 2020, which culminated with the virtual signing in late December of the China-EU Comprehensive Investment Agreement despite the incoming Biden administration's concerns ([Jake Sullivan via Twitter](#), December 22). Xi told the German Chancellor Merkel in an early April phone call that "China's development has been an opportunity for the EU." Without referencing the U.S., he urged Europe "to make correct judgment[s] independently and truly achieve strategic autonomy" ([Global Times](#), April 7). China also shored up its quasi-alliance relationship with Russia. After holding talks with his counterpart Wang Yi in Guilin, Guangxi Province in late March, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov affirmed the "comprehensive partnership" between the two neighbors. In an apparent reference to American pressure, Lavrov said: "We reject zero sum political games and the illegal unilateral sanctions, which our Western colleagues have been using increasingly more often." He added that Western nations' interference in other countries' internal affairs was "unacceptable to international life" ([Russian Foreign Ministry](#), March 23).

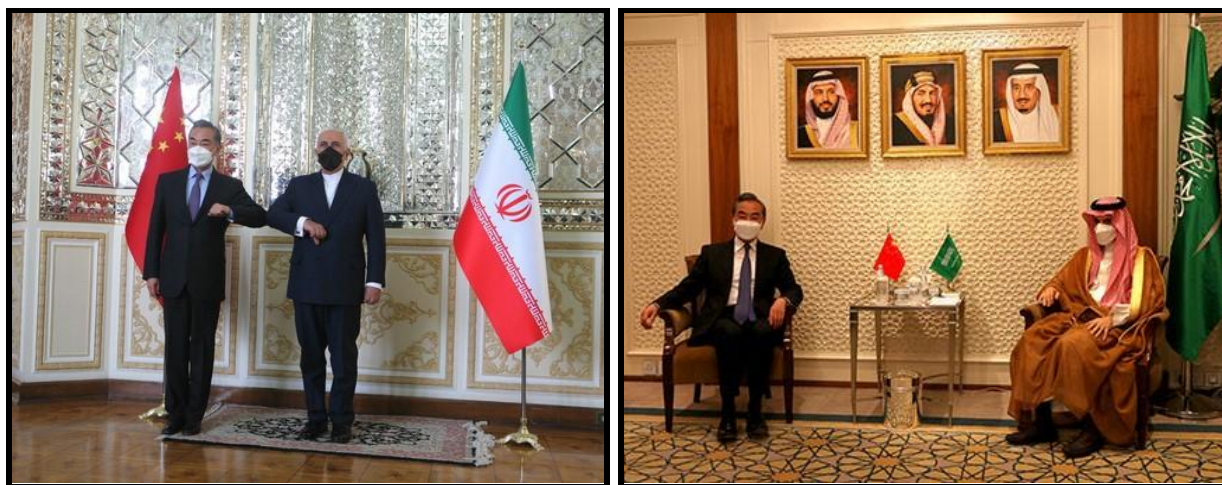
Shoring Up Support Across the Middle East and Southeast Asia

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang also embarked on a marathon visit to the Middle East and meetings with his counterparts from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—countries outside the traditional Western alliance system. Wang began a six-nation tour of Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman on March 24. While the Middle East is not within China's usual sphere of interest, China-Arab trade during the first half of 2020 was valued at \$115 billion, making the PRC the top trading partner of Arab countries ([Chinese Foreign Ministry](#), December 25, 2020). China Daily reported that Beijing was "seeking the support of countries in the Middle East to counter the pressure being applied by the United States and its allies." At the beginning of his trip, Wang said that "outside forces in the region should put aside their self-calculation and stop treating the region as a chessboard in their strategic maneuvering" ([China Daily](#), March 28).

Of particular significance is an agreement signed between Wang and his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif confirming the two countries' "strategic partnership" for the next 25 years. The Tehran government is set to break a Western sanctions embargo by supplying oil and gas to China. Beijing also

noted its willingness to invest in “the up-and-downstream projects of the energy industries” in the Middle East country during press releases announcing the agreement. A plethora of potential cooperative ventures in areas ranging from banking and mining to infrastructure and space exploration were also raised. With possible finance from Chinese banks, Tehran has expressed interest in signing on to Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in the region ([BBC Chinese](#), March 29; [Xinhua](#), March 28).

On the one hand, Beijing has urged the Biden administration to rejoin the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) regulating Iran’s nuclear activities, from which former President Trump pulled out in 2018 ([Xinhua](#), December 1, 2020). On the other hand, the special relationship cemented by Wang could boost China’s influence in Iran at the expense of the U.S., demonstrating how China has continued to hedge its bets in the region. The state-run China Global Television Network ran an opinion piece saying that the China-Iran deal would “totally upend the prevailing geopolitical landscape in the West Asia region that has for so long been subject to U.S. hegemony” ([CGTN.com](#), March 29).



Images: Chinese Foreign Minister holds talks with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif (Left) and Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (Right) during a whirlwind trip to shore up relations between China and the Middle East (Sources: Chinese Foreign Ministry, [March 28](#), [March 24](#)).

Beijing must ensure that the Islamic world does not decry its treatment of Muslims in the XUAR and elsewhere. During his meeting with Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Wang repeated the time-honored principle of non-interference in other countries’ internal affairs. The crown prince indicated that his country “firmly supports China’s legitimate position on the issues related to Xinjiang and Hong Kong... [and] rejects the attempt by certain parties to sow dissension between China and the Islamic world” ([HK01.com](#), March 30; [Xinhua](#), March 25). Given the long-standing close relations between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, it is unlikely that Beijing could weaken the two nations’ ties. However, the CCP leadership is eager to secure reliable supplies of oil from the Middle East. Wang has also tried to erode “petrodollar

hegemony” by persuading his Middle Eastern hosts to accept oil payments in renminbi ([SCMP](#), April 3; [Asia Times](#), April 2).

Perhaps more urgent is Beijing’s anxiety to prevent the Biden administration from forming a united front with Asian countries to push back on China’s occupation of disputed islets in the SCS. These mostly barren rocks are also claimed in parts by Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the self-ruled island of Taiwan. Wang was also eager to push a China-ASEAN solution to the Myanmar crisis, another issue on which Washington has tried to rally the support of its allies. From March 31 to April 2, Wang met with the foreign ministers of Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines at Wuyi Mountain in southeastern Fujian Province ([China Daily](#), April 5; [Asia Nikkei](#), April 2).

On the face of it, Wang and his guests seemed to agree that one solution to the SCS imbroglio could be to speed up the negotiation of a Code of Conduct for China and ASEAN to clarify the use of sea lanes around contentious spots in the vast ocean. In a joint press conference with his Malaysian counterpart Hishammuddin Hussein on April 1, Wang said, “China and Malaysia agree to strengthen dialogue and cooperation on maritime affairs and properly manage differences.” He added that both sides should “promote offline consultations on the COC.” Wang also implied that Western countries should not pressure the military junta in Myanmar by imposing sanctions: “Calling on all relevant parties to exercise restraint, China and Malaysia agreed that the international community should uphold the basic norm of non-interference in internal affairs, and create a good environment for domestic political reconciliation.” Hussein agreed, stressing that “Malaysia and China are members of the same family.” Turning to Wang, the Malaysian politician said, “you are forever my bigger brother.” Although he did not mention Myanmar directly, Hussein was also quoted in the official readout as supporting non-interference in Asian countries’ internal affairs. “Attempts by outside forces to divide regional countries will not succeed,” Hussein said. This quote was repeated by Chinese media. ([Chinese Foreign Ministry](#), April 1; [Ming Pao](#), April 5; [CGTN.com](#), April 2).

Conclusion

Will Xi’s counter-encirclement policy succeed? One factor is whether China—whose total social debt amounts to more than three times its gross domestic product (GDP)—can afford to continue its generous financial support of BRI-related and other projects in regions such as the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific. Recent Chinese investment in BRI undertakings has shrunk due to the country’s shortage of foreign exchange ([Radio French International](#), December 12, 2020; [Apple Daily](#), October 24, 2020). Of greater significance is whether the defensive elements of Beijing’s “wolf warrior diplomacy” could trigger a military confrontation or even a hot war in powder-keg areas such as the Taiwan Strait and the SCS. In speeches over the past year to the PLA, Xi, who also holds the position of commander in chief of the Central Military Command (CMC), has emphasized the Chinese military’s “readiness for military struggle” and ability “to fight and win wars” ([Chinamil.com.cn](#), January 4; [Xinhua](#), January 4). In early April, Beijing sent the Liaoning aircraft carrier battle group to drill in the SCS and the Taiwan Strait. The *USS Theodore Roosevelt* aircraft carrier battle group and

the *USS John McCain* destroyer were in the area during the same period, raising the risk of possible escalation (Xinhua, April 8; [U.S. Naval Institute](#), April 7). Given Xi's propensity to buttress China's power projection with military muscle, Beijing's measures to counter American "containment" could easily threaten peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

*Dr. Willy Wo-Lap Lam is a Senior Fellow at The Jamestown Foundation and a regular contributor to China Brief. He is an Adjunct Professor at the Center for China Studies, the History Department, and the Master's Program in Global Political Economy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He is the author of five books on China, including *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping* (2015). His latest book, *The Fight for China's Future*, was released by Routledge Publishing in July 2019.*

The CCP is Retooling its Censorship System at a Brisk Pace in 2021

By Angeli Datt and Sarah Cook

Introduction

Earlier this month, a Chinese video-gaming site revealed that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Propaganda Department had introduced a trial review and scoring system for online games produced in China, effective April 1 ([Games Teahouse](#); April 14). Under the new system, games can be prohibited if they do not sufficiently promote core socialist values, the “correct” view of history, or traditional Chinese culture.

The rules are just one of many new measures that the CCP and state agencies have ushered in since January to tighten regulatory control over political speech and online content. The changes have extended the party-state’s authority to new frontiers even in the context of China’s already robust censorship apparatus and signaled ongoing CCP nervousness about domestic dissent and alternative power centers. Most of the new actions fall into one of three categories: codes of conduct for elites, pressure on technology companies, and updates to decades-old media regulations.



Image: A photo from the “Social Responsibilities of the New (Media) Platform” event, part of the 2020 China New Media Conference in Changsha, Hunan Province, which took place on November 19, 2020. According to an event readout, new (media) platforms which have grown “like springtime bamboo shoots” will be critical tools for the party and state’s governance of the country. (Source: [2020 China New Media Conference](#)).

Formalized Rules to Regulate Elite Speech

One of the first groups that the CCP targeted recently for tighter speech controls was its own membership. On January 4, the official Xinhua news agency published the CCP Central Committee's December 2020 revisions to the Regulations on Safeguarding Party Members' Rights ([中国共产党党员权利保障条例], *Zhongguo gongchandang gandyuan quanli baozhang tiaoli*), which had not been updated since promulgation in 2004 ([Xinhua](#), January 4). The new rules reduced party cadres' ability to express dissent, prohibiting them from publicly criticizing CCP decisions. The changes came after several prominent party members—including real-estate tycoon Ren Zhiqiang (任志强) and retired Central Party School instructor Cai Xia (蔡霞)—spoke out against President Xi Jinping (习近平) and his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 ([Freedom House](#), October 2020).

On January 12, the National Press and Publication Administration (NPPA) issued new rules requiring Chinese journalists to have their social media posts reviewed as part of the annual verification process for issuing or renewing press cards, effective immediately ([NPPA](#), January 19). Journalists who opened social media accounts without authorization or posted content that was deemed objectionable during the review period from December 2019 to January 2021 could be denied a press card. The measures effectively extended official editorial controls from journalists' places of employment to their personal accounts.

The third set of recently issued rules targeted Chinese celebrities, who already refrain from politically controversial commentary to avoid potential backlash from officials or fans. On February 5, an entertainment industry association under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced that performers would be subjected to a new code of conduct, effective March 1 ([China Association of Performing Arts](#), February 5). Public entertainment figures will be required to abide by 15 rules that largely codify long-standing unwritten rules, such as promoting “the party’s line” while not “undermining national unity” or “endangering national security.” Some of the rules are less overtly political, including bans on fake singing and drunk driving. Violators face suspension and even a permanent industry ban.

The new measures all targeted groups of people who were already tightly controlled or relatively compliant, indicating acute CCP concern over internal dissent and a desire to head off any potential opposition from within the country's political, economic, or media elite.

Warning Shots to Technology Companies

Chinese authorities have also moved in recent months to rein in some of the country's most prominent technology firms. The most prominent target has been Alibaba. Jack Ma (马云), the company's cofounder and executive chairman until 2019, had criticized China's financial regulations in an October 2020 speech, which was widely perceived to have triggered official reprisals. Among other actions, in mid-March, authorities reportedly ordered Alibaba to divest its extensive media holdings because of growing concerns

among party officials that they gave the company outsized influence over public opinion ([Nikkei Asia](#), March 16). These include Alibaba or its affiliate Ant Group's full ownership of the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post*, 30 percent of the social media platform Sina Weibo, and stakes in a number of major video-sharing, streaming, and digital advertising services ([Hexun.com](#), March 16). CCP leaders reportedly became concerned about tech giants' media power after Sina Weibo censored news in early 2020 about Alibaba executive Jiang Fan's (蒋凡) affair with a prominent online influencer, which earned it a rebuke from the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) ([CAC](#), June 10, 2020).

Chinese tech companies are also at the forefront of the CAC's latest crackdown on "self-media," meaning independently operated social media accounts that publish or comment on business or current affairs. New CAC provisions targeting "self-media" accounts went into effect on February 22 ([CAC](#), January 22), with the agency citing a need to further combat "false information" following the COVID-19 pandemic ([Xinhua](#), January 23). Under the new rules (the first since 2017) "self-media" accounts are required to obtain an Internet News Information Service Permit from the host platform and are prohibited from not registering with real names, providing news information without permission, and "using emergencies to incite extreme emotions," among other restrictions ([CAC](#), January 22). Platforms must enforce the provisions, including by imposing temporary or permanent bans on delinquent accounts. Tighter enforcement appears to have already begun. On April 12, Radio Free Asia reported that a host of WeChat accounts covering military affairs, including "self-media" accounts, had been shuttered in recent weeks ([Radio Free Asia](#), April 12).

Domestic companies are not alone in facing regulatory pressure. The CAC reportedly ordered Microsoft's professional networking platform LinkedIn—the only major U.S. social media site that is not blocked in China—to suspend new sign-ups for 30 days and undergo a self-evaluation for not censoring enough content during the politically sensitive National People's Congress session in March ([New York Times](#), March 18). On March 9, LinkedIn said it would "work to ensure we remain in compliance with local law" ([LinkedIn](#), March 9). The company has over 52 million users in China and had agreed to censor content when it expanded to the country in 2014 ([LinkedIn](#), February 24, 2014), including preventing content on overseas accounts from being viewed inside China ([Zhou Fengsuo Twitter](#), January 3, 2019).

Updating Old Regulations for a New Era

In recent months, government departments have issued draft revisions of two important decades-old regulations to bring them into the modern era and further entrench CCP leadership.

On January 8, the CAC released a draft update of the Regulations on Internet Information Service ([互联网信息服务管理办法 (修订草案征求意见稿)], *hulianwang xinxi fuwu guanli banfa (xiuding caoan zhengqiu yijian gao)*) for public comment. The original regulations date back to 2000 and remain unchanged, despite an attempted update in 2012. The new proposal deals with contemporary issues like e-commerce and online fraud, but also expands the list of prohibited online content to include "false information" and

material that “incites illegal assemblies” or “endangers the physical and mental health of minors.” The draft brings in the concept of “cyber sovereignty” from the 2017 Cybersecurity Law, calling for the state to “monitor, prevent, and address illegal and criminal activities using domestic or foreign internet resources to harm the security or order of the nation’s cyberspace” ([CAC](#), January 8).

Another draft update to old regulations targets the explosion of privately owned online video services that compete with traditional CCP-aligned media like the state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV). On March 16, the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) released the draft text of a new Radio and Television Law ([中华人民共和国广播电视法 (征求意见稿)], *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guangbo dianshi fa (zhengqiu yijian gao)*), replacing 24-year-old broadcasting regulations ([NRTA](#), March 16). In explaining the draft, the NRTA cited the CCP Central Committee and State Council’s “Opinions on Accelerating Integrated Media Development,” ([关于加快推进媒体深度融合发展的意见], *guanyu jiakuai tuijin meiti shendu ronghe fazhan de yijian*), which laid out a response to party concerns about the rise of private digital outlets and the need to integrate traditional and emerging media to ensure continued CCP media leadership ([CCP Central Committee and General Office of the State Council](#), September 26, 2020). The draft law covers video-sharing websites, internet television platforms, and online broadcasters for the first time, extending controls long applied to traditional media to platforms that have come into being since a comprehensive broadcasting law was last enacted in 1997.

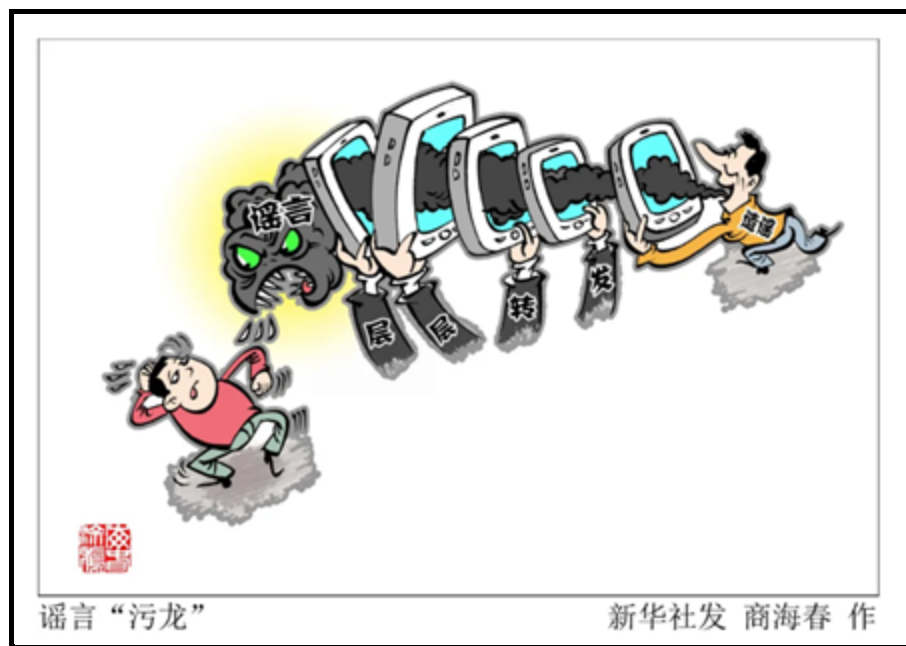


Image: A cartoon depiction of the “dirty dragon” of online rumors accompanies a state media article published on September 1, 2020, discussing the dangers of “self media” (Source: [Xinhua](#)).

Factors Driving Increased Regulation

The party-state is constantly adapting and upgrading its content-control system to smother embers of dissent and tackle new threats, but several factors appear to be driving this latest burst of activity and influencing the forms it has taken.

The first is Xi Jinping himself. The crackdown on Chinese tech companies, for example, has been led from the very top. In March, Xi called for regulators to step up enforcement and personally chaired a meeting in which officials called for the country to “accelerate the improvement of laws governing platform economies in order to fill in gaps and loopholes in a timely fashion” ([Xinhua](#), March 15). Xi’s stylistic fingerprints are also evident in the effort to update old legislation for the digital age, a reflection of his *modus operandi* of “law-based governance”—or strengthening the party’s control through legislation ([Xinhua](#), December 10, 2020).

Second is the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the CCP eventually got a handle on the coronavirus outbreak in China, its initial official cover-up as well as the suffering inflicted by its response and the virus itself left the party sensitive to any potential criticism. The above controls on journalists and self-media emerged after many shared information—including investigative reporting—on the government’s mismanagement of the pandemic that ran counter to official narratives. Prominent party members’ expressions of doubt about Xi’s leadership during the crisis likely contributed to the new rules for CCP cadres. In 2021, the regime seems determined to enforce what Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying (华春莹) referred to as the “correct collective memory” (正确的集体记忆, *zhengque de jiti jiyi*) of the pandemic ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), June 8, 2020).

The third factor is anxiety over competition that threatens the party’s monopoly on information control. This explains the CCP’s efforts to weaken Chinese tech giants and break up their massive holdings in media and online video services. In a November 2020 speech, Xu Lin (徐麟)—deputy head of the CCP Central Propaganda Department and director of the State Council Information Office—warned that integrated media could “dilute the party’s leadership” and said that officials must “resolutely prevent the risk of capital manipulating public opinion” ([State Council Information Office](#), November 20, 2020).

Conclusion

The regime is determined to baton down public opinion ahead of the CCP’s 100th anniversary in July and the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, especially as it faces growing international criticism over repression in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. The party is clearly concerned about critical views on its recent history and long-term legacy. On April 9, the CAC established a hotline for netizens to report users who “distort the history of the party,” “attack the party leadership,” or defame national heroes and martyrs ([CAC](#), April 9).

Those reported for speech that “defames martyrs” could face up to three years in prison under legislation that took effect on March 1 ([Xinhua](#), December 26, 2020).

Given this context, observers in the coming months should watch for the following:

- Additional restrictions and penalties related to the discussion of history, with a likely crackdown around the July anniversary;
- Reports of enforcement of the new rules and codes of conduct, including journalists losing accreditation over their social media posts, celebrities facing bans, “self-media” account suspensions, and disciplinary action against party cadres for public expressions of dissent;
- Smooth adoption, with little debate, of the draft rules on radio, television, and internet services; and
- New rules and regulations for other avenues of relatively free expression, such as podcasts or voice-based apps built on the Clubhouse model.

Regardless of how these events unfold, it seems certain that the CCP and its leaders will continue to refine and enhance what is already the world’s most sophisticated apparatus for media and internet censorship.

Angeli Datt is a senior research analyst for China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan at Freedom House.

Sarah Cook is Freedom House’s research director for China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

Prospects of China-U.S.-Climate Diplomacy: The Perspective From Beijing

By Kevin Jianjun Tu

Introduction

As U.S.-China tensions have continued into the Presidency of Joseph R. Biden, climate change is seen by some to be a rare area for bilateral collaboration ([21st Century](#), December 22, 2020; [The Paper](#), January 20). Despite the U.S.' official return to climate diplomacy with its rejoining of the Paris Agreement on February 19, sustained bilateral tensions over issues including disagreements over the origin of the coronavirus, trade frictions, an ongoing military standoff in the South China Sea and human rights-related disputes in Hong Kong and Xinjiang make the prospects of bilateral climate cooperation uncertain.

To fend off rising domestic concern that climate diplomacy with China would be transaction-oriented and detrimental to other foreign policy goals, the U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry has said unequivocally that climate would be a “critical, standalone issue” that will never lead to a weaker China policy ([VOX](#), January 27). His remarks immediately sparked a negative response from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) spokesperson Zhao Lijian (赵立坚), who stressed that “China-U.S. cooperation in specific areas, unlike flowers that can bloom in a greenhouse despite winter chill, is closely linked with bilateral relations as a whole” ([MOFA](#), January 28).



Image: Chinese Vice Premier Han Zheng meets with U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry via video link in Beijing, China, on April 16 (Source: [Xinhua](#)).

After President Biden invited Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) to attend the Leaders Climate Summit on April 22 and 23 ([White House](#), March 26), Beijing did not confirm Xi's attendance until after Kerry had

accepted an invitation from the Chinese Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE) to meet his counterpart Xie Zhenhua (解振华) in Shanghai ([MEE](#), April 14). During the trip, Kerry also met with Chinese Vice Premier and Politburo Standing Committee member Han Zheng (韩正) via video link. Following Kerry's trip, a Joint Statement was issued, with both countries agreeing to cooperate with each other and with other countries to tackle the climate crisis ([MEE](#), April 18).

Beijing's Perspective on U.S.-China Relations

To better understand the prospects of China-U.S. climate diplomacy, it is necessary to first examine bilateral relations. From the start of official diplomatic relations in 1979 until September 11, 2001, China-U.S. relations could in retrospect be defined as a “win-win” state of mutual collaboration and benefit. With the economic ascendancy of the so-called G-2 (China and America), the two countries together increased their aggregate share of total global GDP by 6 percentage points and global carbon emissions by 3 percentage points during this time. China remained a junior partner in the bilateral relationship: its GDP was only 12 percent of America's and its carbon emissions were about half that of the U.S.' by the end of this period.

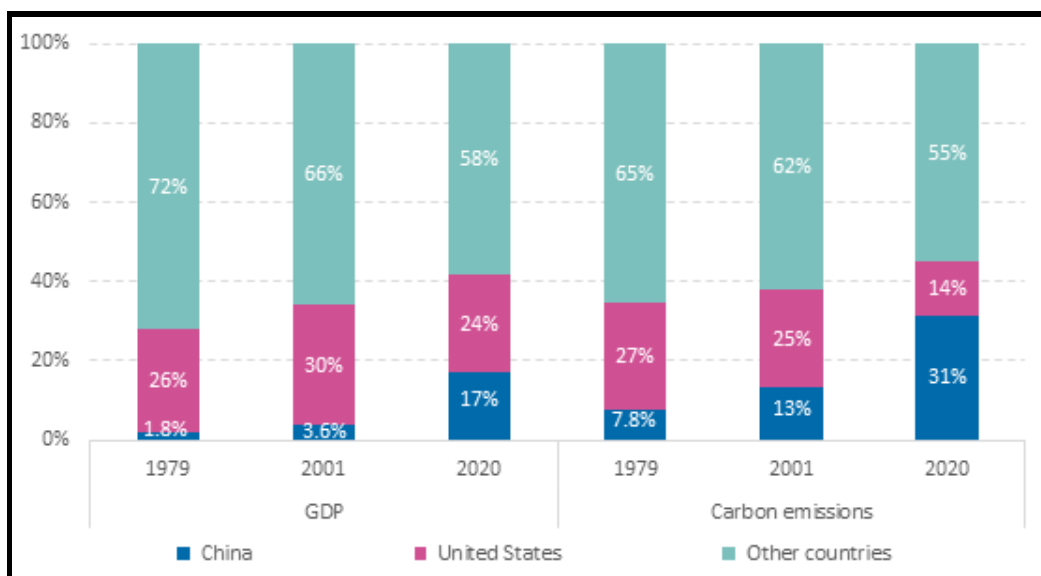


Image: Shares of China and the U.S. in Global GDP and Carbon Emissions: 1979 vs. 2001 vs. 2020 (Source: Author's calculations based on data from [IEA](#), [World Bank](#), and [IMF](#)).

After China joined the World Trade Organization in December 2001, although the G-2's importance kept growing, China's rapid ascendancy was thereafter partially achieved at the relative expense of America. While China's share in the global economy rose from a mere 3.6 percent in 2001 to 17.2 percent in 2020, the author calculates that approximately 45 percent of Chinese gains were made at America's expense.[1] And as U.S. carbon emissions began to shrink, rising emissions from China more than made up the difference (see image above).

Contrasting Perspectives From the U.S. and China

Following a gradual downturn in bilateral relations, with Washington's initiation of a bitter trade war in 2018, experts on both sides have turned to different frameworks to explain the decline in relations. On the U.S. side, influential analysts have frequently touted the "Thucydides Trap" as an explanation for the structural stress that arises when a rising power challenges a ruling one ([The Atlantic](#), September 24, 2015).

In contrast, some Chinese analysts framed the new era of U.S.-China relations as a by-product of Beijing's abandonment of Deng Xiaoping's long-standing 1990 dictum to "hide your strengths and bide your time" (韬光养晦, *taoguangyanghui*) ([Xinhua](#), August 15, 2015; [163.com](#), February 13). During the author's private conversations with Chinese elites, the so called "Zhou Yu-Zhuge Liang complex" (瑜亮情结, *yu liang qingjie*) was also frequently mentioned to explain the perceived inevitability of U.S. containment of China. In the classic Chinese story, a jealous Zhou Yu (周瑜) relentlessly attempts to outwit the smart Zhuge Liang (诸葛亮), who is nevertheless innocent.

There is a strong conviction among many Chinese elites that the Japanese economy's recent stagnation could at least be partially explained by the U.S. containment of Japan, best exemplified by the U.S.-initiated Plaza Accord in 1985 ([Global Times](#), March 28, 2018; [People's Network](#), June 10, 2019).[2] If Washington could not even tolerate the economic ascendance of its ally Japan in 1980s, Chinese analysts reason, then China's avoidance of a similar fate cannot depend on its ability to make concessions to the U.S. ([People's Daily](#), August 10, 2018).

Given China's deep suspicion of Washington's intentions, why then did Beijing still push for a Xie-Kerry meeting and express its support for Biden's upcoming climate summit?

Chinese Thinking on Climate Diplomacy with the U.S.

China considers itself to be one of the most vulnerable countries to the adverse impacts of climate change ([China Third National Communication on Climate Change](#), accessed on April 18). Consequently, its climate stance has become increasingly progressive over time. In 2015, China helped the Obama administration conclude the Paris Agreement, with the added benefit of less contentious bilateral relations.

Last September, Beijing sensed little appetite in either Washington or Brussels for a similar style of climate cooperation, so China unilaterally announced a goal to peak its national carbon emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060, sending shock waves through the climate policy world ([CGTN](#), September 23, 2020).

As a major world power that is not yet a fully advanced economy, China could be categorized as the first ever "hybrid superpower" in the modern era ([Center on Global Energy Policy](#), July 3, 2020). Beijing's two-phase

climate pledge demonstrates how China views its own hybrid status. In the first phase leading up to 2030, China's carbon neutralization goals are less ambitious due to the country's chronic developing country mentality. But after 2030, China's leaders expect their country to have already become a high-income country. This rising "superpower" mentality is behind China's timeframe of achieving carbon neutrality just 10 years later than the American pledge to hit net-zero emissions by 2050.

China's climate pledge is thus a proactive defensive move aimed at eliminating potential pressures that might otherwise be generated from a strengthened transatlantic alliance against China in the climate arena. It is ambitious enough in the long-run, aiming to eliminate some 10 billion tons of annual carbon dioxide emissions—or close to one third of the global total—within just three decades from 2030 onward. At the same time, it still leaves sufficient room for incremental collaboration ([Project Syndicate](#), November 26, 2020).

In the "Joint Statement Addressing the Climate Crisis," China and the U.S. both committed to "tak[e] enhanced climate actions that raise ambition in the 2020s," "support the transition from carbon-intensive fossil fuel based energy to green, low-carbon and renewable energy in developing countries," and "address emissions of methane and other non-CO2 greenhouse gases" ([MEE](#), April 18)—all examples of the embedded flexibility in Xi's climate pledge that had been intentionally left out last September.

China's 14th Five Year Plan (FYP) and Long-Term Targets for 2035, released in March, set an 18 percent reduction target for "CO2 intensity" and a 13.5 reduction target for "energy intensity." In total, four out of eight "binding" targets in the 14th FYP were related to energy consumption and climate change, demonstrating the state's prioritization of climate policy.[3]

Given the magnitude of the climate crisis and its own outsized role in mitigating climate change, Beijing believes that "the Biden administration's green recovery centered climate plan will not go far without Chinese cooperation." On the other hand, Beijing's own climate goals "will also be difficult to attain if it cannot secure U.S. technological cooperation in clean transportation, hydrogen fuel, and energy storage" ([SIIS](#), April 14). But because of Washington's track record of reversing on both the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, Beijing does not consider the U.S.' climate pledge to be a particularly reliable national commitment ([MOFA](#), April 17). Unless China-U.S. climate collaboration "could serve as an icebreaker for the current frosty bilateral relationship" ([SIIS](#), April 14), there is little incentive for Beijing to support the Biden administration's self-proclaimed "international leadership of the United States on climate issues" ([White House](#), January 20).

One Red Heart Preparing Two Outcomes (一颗红心 , 两手准备, *yi ke hongxin, liang shou zhunbei*)

U.S.-China climate diplomacy currently faces more threats than opportunities, and China hawks in Washington may try to weaponize international climate policy as part of broader efforts to contain China. To guard against this, and as a means of preempting a potential transatlantic climate alliance against China, Beijing has signaled that it has alternative partners to move its climate agenda forward. The most substantial

clause in the China-U.S. Joint Statement, regarding the phasedown of hydrofluorocarbon production and consumption under the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, was thus first announced at a video summit that took place between Xi, the French President Emmanuel Macron and the German Chancellor Angela Merkel ([Xinhua](#), April 16).



Image: Chinese President Xi Jinping attends a video summit with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel on April 16 (Source: [Xinhua](#)).

To hedge against the worst-case scenario that toxic China-U.S. relations will prevent any meaningful bilateral cooperation, Beijing has drastically upgraded the political priority of “security”—including energy security—in the 14th FYP. Consequently, rising anxiety over energy security has translated into a blessing for both renewables and for domestically abundant but carbon-intensive coal, as evidenced by Beijing’s plan to build coal-to-oil and coal-to-gas strategic bases despite the coal industry’s sizable climate and water footprint ([Xinhua](#), March 13). To make the situation more murky, while China accounts for 52 percent of the world’s coal-fired power capacity ([Kevin Tu](#) via WeChat, March 22), the future of coal in the 14th FYP remains ambiguous.

Conclusion

Chinese analysts have largely agreed with the former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s claim that China-U.S. relations will never return to what they once were ([RFI](#), November 14, 2018; [China Brief](#), December 10, 2020). But Beijing still opted for issuing a Joint Statement ahead of the U.S.’ Leaders Climate Summit and hopes that climate collaboration may serve as a bumper to prevent the free fall of bilateral relations. Given the looming danger of the climate crisis and the necessity of engaging China in climate neutral solutions, Washington should resist the worst instincts among its China hawks to wage an all-out war to contain Beijing.

As the Chinese saying goes, “one hand clapping makes no sound” (一个巴掌拍不响, *yige bazhang pai bu xiang*). In other words, blaming Washington is unlikely to reset China-U.S. relations in a mutually acceptable direction. If Beijing could instead seriously re-examine its disruptive foreign policy and ideological gestures since 2013 through the lens of other countries, especially America, it would benefit China’s understanding of how to alleviate rising anxiety over its rapid political, ideological and economic ascendance in certain parts of the world. Amid worsening attitudes towards China worldwide ([Pew Research](#), October 6, 2020; [NYU Shanghai](#), March 6), the issue of climate change also represents a rare opportunity for “win-win” collaboration.

Finally, it is in the interests of the rest of the world—especially the European Union—to urge the two largest carbon emitting nations to cooperate instead of undermining each other on climate issues. Otherwise, the planet cannot hope to meet the Paris Agreement goals.

Kevin Jianjun Tu is a Beijing-based energy and climate advisor. The opinions expressed herein are solely his own, and do not represent the views of any organization that he is affiliated with.

Notes

[1] Between 2001 and 2020, China’s share of global GDP increased from 3.6 percent to 17.2 percent, or 13.6 percentage points. Based on the author’s calculations, 6.1 of these percentage points were due to a relative decline in U.S. GDP. Hence, 45 percent ($6.1\%/13.6\%=45\%$) of Chinese gains were made at the U.S.’ expense.

[2] See also: Wang Yungui (王允贵) “Lessons Learned from the Influence of the ‘Plaza Agreement’ on Japan’s Economy [‘广场协议’ 对日本经济的影响及启示],” *International Economic Review* (国际经济评论), Issue 1, 2004, <http://www.cqvip.com/QK/90440X/200401/9080164.html>; Wang Fan (王凡) and Li Xianjun (李向军), “Strategic Thinking on Renminbi Appreciation Under the Background of US Dollar Hegemony—Reflections on German and Japanese Responses to the ‘Plaza Agreement’ [美元霸权背景下人民币升值的战略思考—日德应对 ‘广场协议’ 之镜检],” *Financial and Trade Economy* (财贸经济), Issue 4, 2012, <http://www.cqvip.com/QK/96197X/201204/41446956.html>.

[3] These four targets are: 1) Reduce energy consumption per unit of GDP (%); 2) Reduce CO2 emissions per unit of GDP (%); 3) Forest coverage rate (%); and 4) Comprehensive energy production capacity ([Xinhua](#), March 13). For more discussion of the 14th FYP’s implications for China’s climate change goals, see: “Q&A: What does China’s 14th ‘five year plan’ mean for climate change?” *Carbon Brief*, March 12, 2021, <https://www.carbonbrief.org/qa-what-does-chinas-14th-five-year-plan-mean-for-climate-change>.

New Concept Weapons: China Explores New Mechanisms to Win War

By Marcus Clay

Introduction

The idea of “New Concept Weapons” (NCW, 新概念武器, *xin gainian wuqi*) is not new. In the parlance of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), NCW was once almost a synonym for directed energy weapons (DEW) programs, with roots dating back to the 1960s.[1] In recent years, NCW has been increasingly associated with the PLA’s discourse on “new mechanism (新机理, *xin jili*) weapon systems.” ([81.cn](#) January 20, 2017; [PLA Daily](#), September 28, 2017) It is often discussed in the context of broader military applications of disruptive technologies to create enduring asymmetric advantages. The majority of NCW operate in the information domain and overlap with the mission of the PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF). Because of this, NCW thinking may provide useful insights into the “new technology testing” (新技术试验, *xin jishu shiyan*) responsibilities of the PLASSF ([Xinhua](#), October 1, 2019).

While this article does not delve into significant details of China’s NCW development, it provides an overview of the field and seeks to understand what factors shape Chinese views on NCW. It first summarizes the evolution of the PLA thinking on NCW over the past two decades. It then categorizes the main focus areas and analyzes the PLA’s key considerations for NCW development. Finally, it calls for better understanding China’s NCW programs as an integral component of the PLA’s deterrence strategy.



Image: A digital rendering of a potential “new concept weapon” accompanies a 2017 article in China Military Online calling NCW the “new darling” of future warfare (Image source: [China Military Online](#)).

Something Old, Something New

The Chinese conceptualization of what constitute NCW has evolved and appears to have gained clarity over the past decade or so. In the mid- to late- 2000s, PLA writers approached NCW more holistically, broadly defining them as weapons that embodied technological innovation and breakthroughs.[2] NCW were said to have the potential to deliver “surprise effects,” and could fundamentally change the patterns and efficacies of military activities.[3]

In the 2010s, Chinese academic and military interest in NCW increased. For instance, China Electronics Technology Group’s (CETC) *Journal of China Academy of Electronics and Information Technology (CAEIT)* published a featured series of papers on NCW in April 2011.[4] Chinese authors increasingly placed “new mechanism” as the core characteristic—the “soul”—of NCW ([PLA Daily](#), September 28, 2017). Disruptive technologies, through which NCW deliver effects, were placed front and center. More recent discussions on NCW focus on “new energy sources, new principles of action (作用原理, *zuoyong yuanli*), and new destruction mechanisms (毁伤机理, *huishang jili*).” ([PLA Daily](#), September 28, 2017) According to researchers from the National Key Lab for Laser Propulsion and Applications (激光推进及其应用国家重点实验室, *jiguang tuijin ji qi yingyong guojia zhongdian shiyanshi*), which is housed at the PLASSF Space Engineering University ([China Brief](#), July 29, 2020), NCW systems are developed on “fundamentally new principles,” adopt “new mechanisms for destruction,” and “often employ different combat methods.”[5]

Based on analysis of over a dozen published Chinese studies on NCW in the 2010s, the table below summarizes their broad categories ([PLA Daily](#), September 28, 2017).[6] Notably, while PLA-affiliated authors generally use the type of energy source to categorize NCW, there has also been a more recent trend towards emphasizing on “effects.” For instance, PLA authors have demonstrated interest in the convergence of NCW and non-lethal/disabling weapons (非致命失能武器, *fei zhiming shineng wuqi*) ([Science and Technology Daily](#), July 14, 2015).[7]

Energy NCW as “New sword”	Information NCW as “Force multiplier”	Biological/chemical NCW as “Invisible card”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinetic energy weapons (动能武器, <i>dongneng wuqi</i>) • DEW e.g. Laser weapons, microwave weapons, electromagnetic pulse, particle beam • New atomic weapons e.g. neutron bomb, antimatter • Sonic weapons e.g. noise, infrasound (次声波, <i>ci shengbo</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intelligent network and electromagnetic spectrum attack and defense weapons “Computer chip virus” (芯片细菌, <i>xinpian xijun</i>) weapon • New-type psychological intervention/warfare weapons e.g. noise intervention (噪声干扰, <i>zaosheng ganrao</i>), holography display (空中投影, <i>kongzhong touying</i>) • Nanosatellites for intelligence collection • Intelligence and decision-making support systems based on big data analytics • Military cloud computing platforms • Logistic support systems built on Internet of Things (IoT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gene (editing) weapons e.g. genetic virus weapons (基因病毒武器, <i>jiyin bingdu wuqi</i>); “animal worrier” • Non-lethal/Disable chemical weapons
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather warfare/weather modification (81.cn, August 23, 2019) [8] 	

In 2006, a group of PLA researchers used the Delphi method to identify future focus areas for China’s NCW research and development.[9] Key considerations were given to: 1) if the technologies of NCW are forward-leaning (i.e., maturing in 20 years); 2) feasibility (i.e., if a relatively established industry base can support the weaponization process); 3) facilitation (带动性, *daidong xing*) (i.e., if NCW development could drive industrial S&T development in one or more fields; and 4) urgency.[10] Similar assessments for NCW development priority areas were conducted in 2011 and likely also in 2014.[11]

<i>List (2006)</i>	<i>List (2011)</i>	<i>List (2014)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network Attack and Defense Weapons (网络攻防武器, <i>wangluo gongfang wuqi</i>) • Anti-Satellite (ASAT/反卫星, <i>fan weixing wuqi</i>) • Laser weapons (激光武器, <i>jiguang wuqi</i>) • Radio frequency weapons (射频武器, <i>shepin wuqi</i>) • New Energy Artillery (新能源火炮, <i>xin nengyuan huopao</i>) • Stealth weapons (隐身武器, <i>yinshen wuqi</i>) • New Type of atomic weapons (新型原子能武器, <i>xinxing yuanzi neng wuqi</i>) • Hypersonic kinetic (energy) weapons (超高速动能武器, <i>chao gaosu dongneng wuqi</i>) (81.cn, December 25, 2020; Simons Center, 2017) • Micro-weapons (微小型武器, <i>weixiaoxing wuqi</i>) • Future combat systems (未来战斗系统, <i>weilai zhandou xitong</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network Attack and Defense Weapons • ASAT • Laser weapons • Radio frequency weapons • New energy artillery • Stealth weapons • New Type of atomic weapons • Hypersonic kinetic (energy) weapons • Micro-weapons • Future combat systems • Particle beam weapons (粒子束武器, <i>lizi shu wuqi</i>) • High-rate of fire weapon system (高射速武器系统, <i>gao shesu wuqi xitong</i>) • Non-lethal chemical weapons (非致命化学武器, <i>fei zhiming huaxue wuqi</i>) • Sonic weapons (声波武器, <i>shengbo wuqi</i>) • Plasma weapons (等离子体武器, <i>dengliziti wuqi</i>) • Gene weapons (基因武器, <i>jiyin wuqi</i>) • Multi-tasking weapon and munition systems (多任务武器与弹药系统, <i>duo renwu wuqi yu danyao xitong</i>) • Environmental weapons (环境武器, <i>huanjing wuqi</i>) • Long-range artillery systems (超远程火炮系统, <i>chao yuancheng huopao xitong</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network Attack and Defense Weapons • ASAT • Laser • Microwave weapons (微波武器, <i>weibo wuqi</i>) • New Energy Artillery • Stealth weapons • New Type of atomic weapons • Hypersonic kinetic (energy) weapons • Particle beam • Non-lethal chemical weapons

Network and electromagnetic spectrum (EMS) weapons – including multiple types of DEW, such as laser and microwave weapons, are top priorities for China's future-minded weapon experts and researchers. ASAT weapon systems, both kinetic and non-kinetic, have also been ranked consistently high. Interestingly, official Chinese media has at times alluded to linkages between the PLASSF and disruptive weapons development as well as the PLASSF serving as a growth point for PLA's new-quality combat capabilities (新质作战能力,

xin zhi zuozhan nengli) ([People's Daily](#), January 24, 2016; [CCTV](#), August 30, 2016). Western analysts have also documented the PLASSF's possible involvement in a number of priority areas for NCW development.[12] Taking into consideration its organizational structure, the PLASSF is likely involved in the development and testing of some, if not all, of China's NCW.[13]

A Different Form of Guerilla Warfare?

Chinese writings suggest that the United States military is involved in or has led various categories of NCW development.[14] Nevertheless, Wei Jinghe (魏敬合), an expert on very large-scale integration (VLSI) and a leading engineer at CETC, has said that China should view the use of NCW as waging “a different form of guerrilla warfare,” that seeks to build asymmetric advantages through irregular means.[15] While this captures the broad thrust of Chinese discourse on the topic, three more key observations are also worth noting.

First, the information domain will almost certainly remain the top priority for the PLA's strategic modernization efforts. All NCW, particularly those that operate in the information domain, are discreet, non-attributable, and cost-effective—traits which appear to be highly valued by Chinese writers ([PLA Daily](#), September 28, 2017). Similarly, Chinese researchers clearly favor ASAT and advanced cyber weapons because such weapons cause “destructive and irreversible damages” to expensive enemy systems without incurring huge cost for the offensive party. For instance, Pei Fei (裴飞), a researcher affiliated with the PLA National Defense University, has written that using space-based scalable high energy lasers (HEL) devices to interfere with or (partially) destroy enemy satellites is preferable, because it has “short duration of action (difficult to detect)... and it is non-attributable” ([PLA Daily](#), September 28, 2017).[16] It should be noted that China is keenly aware of the PLA's increased vulnerabilities in the information domain and PLA researchers have likely advised adopting strengthened information security and protection measures against NCW effects.

Second, exploiting the cognitive domain is critically important to the PLA ([China Brief](#), September 6, 2019). The exotic capabilities of various NCW systems have provided fascinating insights into how disruptive technologies may transform future battlefields. But the most critical aspect of understanding PLA NCW literature lies in the strategic effects that China seeks to deliver through such sophisticated weapon systems. NCW target not just the physical but also the cognitive domain. ([PLA Daily](#), July 28, 2015) China's expansive NCW list demonstrates that the PLA is exploring “new mechanisms,” such as advanced network and EMS weapons, DEW, and psychological warfare to achieve cognitive domination. In the PLA's own words, the desired effects include: “disorient enemy minds (乱其心智, *luan qi xinzhì*), weaken their willpower (弱其意志, *ruo qi yizhi*), and deprive their fighting spirit (夺其斗志, *duo qi douzhi*).” ([PLA Daily](#), July 2015)

Third, despite the wide-ranging academic interest in NCW, China's strategy for research, development and acquisition (RD&A) processes for NCW appears to be slow yet steady. Chinese analysts are keenly aware of the high cost, uncertainties, and high risk associated with NCW development, and have urged the PLA to

“correctly understand the return on investment.”[17] Evidence also suggests that the PLA is dedicating significant effort to the development of a credible and sustainable standards validation system to ensure that NCW RD&A will be properly executed. It is also plausible that—at least in part through the PLASSF—the PLA is actively testing and assessing the effectiveness of various types of NCW under development (e.g. DEW systems) against such validation standards.[18]

Conclusion

The Chinese defense community’s interest in exploring NCW is consistent with the PLA’s emphasis on pursuing asymmetric strategies to create and sustain advantages in warfighting. As the perceived weaker party in future conflicts, both in terms of technological and military capabilities, Chinese authors see the value of developing a “savvy NCW strategy” for China.[18] The PLASSF’s possible mission pertaining to NCW and military applications for disruptive technologies remains largely unknown. But the seriousness, depth, and scope of PLA efforts into the exploration of “new mechanisms” to win future wars warrants further research. Indeed, it may be useful for western PLA watchers to view Chinese thinking about NCW as an integral component of the PLA’s evolving deterrence strategy.

Dr. Marcus Clay is an analyst with the U.S. Air Force’s China Aerospace Studies Institute (CASI). The views expressed are those of the author, and do not reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Air Force, Department of Defense, or other agencies of the U.S. Government.

Notes

[1] For a focused discussion on this topic, see Mark A. Stokes, *China’s Strategic Modernization: Implications for the United States* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College, 1999). For discussion about weapons and technology systems that fall under China’s “New Concept Weapons” in the late 1990s, see Appendix IV “China’s Directed Energy Weapons,” p.199. Accessed at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep11962.13.pdf>.

[2] Guo Meifang (郭美芳), Fan Ningjun (范宁军), Zheng Bin(郑斌), “Identifying and Analyzing Key New Concept Weapons (重要新概念武器的确定与分析),” *Journal of Projectiles, Rockets, Missiles and Guidance* (弹箭与制导学报), 2006, Vol.26, No.2, p.77.

[3] Ibid.

[4] “Journal of China Academy of Electronics and Information Technology [中国电子科学研究院学报],” China Academy of Electronics and Information Technology (中国电子科学研究院), April 2011, Vol. 6 No. 2, <https://mall.cnki.net/magazine/magadetail/KJPL201102.htm>.

[5] Wang Mingdong (王明东), Wang Tianxiang (王天祥), "Current State and Development Trends of New Concept Weapons (新概念武器的现状与发展趋势)," *Journal of Sichuan Ordnance* (四川兵工学报) Vol. 35, Issue 6, June 2014. p.1. Accessed at <http://scbg.qks.cqut.edu.cn/newsinfo.aspx?id=311>.

[6] Wei Jinghe (魏敬合), "Characteristics and Policy Responses of 21st Century New Concept Weapons (21世纪新概念武器的特点及应对策略)," *Journal of China Academy of Electronics and Information Technology*, April 2011.

[7] Jiang Bin (姜斌), Liang Min (梁敏), Huo Bei(霍贝), "Research on the Development of Non-lethal Disable weapon (非致命失能武器发展问题研究) ", *Ship Electronic Engineering*, No. 7, 2020. <http://cnki.nbsti.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?filename=JCGC202007004&dbcode=CJFQ&dbname=CJFD2020>.

[8] Note that this was only mentioned in one author's widely cited work. See: Wei Jinghe, April 2011.

[9] The Delphi method was developed by RAND in the 1950s to forecast the impact of technology on warfare. A group of experts anonymously reply to questionnaires and receive feedback in the form of a statistical representation of the "group response," after which the process repeats itself. The goal is to reduce the range of responses and arrive at something closer to expert consensus. See: <https://www.rand.org/topics/delphi-method.html>; Olaf Helmer-Hirschberg, *Analysis of the Future: The Delphi Method*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1967. Accessed at <https://www.rand.org/pubs/papers/P3558.html>.

Guo Meifang(郭美芳), Fan Ningjun (范宁军), Zheng Bin(郑斌), "Identifying and Analyzing Key New Concept Weapons (重要新概念武器的确定与分析)," *Journal of Projectiles, Rockets, Missiles and Guidance* (弹箭与制导学报), 2006, Vol.26, No.2, p.77.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Wei Jinghe, April 2011; Wang Mingdong and Wang Tianxiang, June 2014, p.1-2.

[12] Roderick Lee, "China's Recent Ballistic Missile Defense Test May Have Actually Been An Anti-Satellite Test," *CASI*, February 9, 2021, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/CASI/Display/Article/2497584/chinas-recent-ballistic-missile-defense-test-may-have-actually-been-an-anti-sat/>; Mark Stokes, Gabriel Alvarado et al, *China's Space and Counterspace Capabilities and Activities*, The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, March 30, 2020, <https://www.uscc.gov/research/chinas-space-and-counterspace-activities>; Marcus Clay, "To Rule The Invisible Battlefield: The Electromagnetic Spectrum and Chinese Military Power," *War On the Rocks*, January 22, 2021,

<https://warontherocks.com/2021/01/to-rule-the-invisible-battlefield-the-electromagnetic-spectrum-and-chinese-military-power/>.

[13] Rachael Burton and Mark Stokes, “The People’s Liberation Army Strategic Support Force Leadership and Structure,” Project 2049 Occasional Paper, September 25, 2018. https://project2049.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/180925_PLA_SSF_Leadership-and-Structure_Stokes_Burton.pdf;

Marcus Clay, *Supporting the Infinite Battlefield*, China Aerospace Studies Institute, 2019.

[14] Wei Jinghe, April 2011; Guo Meifang and Fan Ningjun, 2006.

[15] For background on Wei, see: Innovation Talent Wei Jinghe profile, see: <http://expert.irsp.cn/resource/detail/5dcf8efa-35fb-4f6b-9386-bd992fbed9f9>; Wei Jinghe, April 2011.

[16] For the author’s possible affiliation with the National Defense University (NDU), see: <http://dtech.view.ckcest.cn/search/toDetail?id=1572943838833186>; also see: Tang Suyan(唐苏妍), Qi Yongqiang (祁永强), Pei Fei (裴飞), “Challenges and Responses for Disruptive technologies (颠覆性技术发展面临的挑战与对策),” <http://gfkj.nudt.edu.cn/gfkj/article/abstract/20170110?st=search>.

[17] Du Taijiao (杜太焦) Chen Zhihua (陈志华), Wang Jianguo (王建国), “Validation Methods for New Concept Weapons Capabilities (新概念武器性能指标评定方法),” *Journal of Sichuan Ordnance* (四川兵工学报), Vol.30, Issue 5, May 2009. pp.46-48.

[18] Authors of at least one of the key publications on such matters are affiliated with the PLASSF Northwest Academy of Nuclear Research(西北核研究院). See: Du Taijiao, Chen Zhihua, and Wang Jianguo, 2009.
