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New Editor's Introductory Note:

The changes currently underway in China are immense and their outcome uncertain. 2021 has been a momentous year in Chinese politics, with more big changes set to come out of the Communist Party Central Committee's sixth plenum in November. Next year will lead up to the 20th Party Congress in the fall, which will set the course for China's trajectory over the next decade and beyond.

As a long-time reader, and the new Editor-in-Chief of *China Brief*, I aim to continue this publication's record of providing in-depth, policy-relevant research and analysis on China that is based primarily on indigenous sources. I look forward to engaging with you, the members of the China-watching community, at this time of tremendous change in China.

Finally, if you have suggestions or would like to submit an article for consideration, please do not hesitate to e-mail me at cbeditor@jamestown.org.- John S. Van Oudenaren, China Brief- Editor-in-Chief

In China's Shifting Historical Narrative, "War of Resistance" with Japan Retains Key Role

By John S. Van Oudenaren

Last month, China commemorated the 90th anniversary of the September 18 incident—the false flag railway explosion that sparked Imperial Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931. In China's official historical narrative, the incident, which is colloquially known simply as "9-18" (九一八, *jiu yiba*), marks the beginning of the "War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression" (抗日战争, *Kangri zhanzheng*) ([PLA Daily](#), September 18). In addition to the usual blanket state media coverage, the milestone anniversary was met with moments of silence and air raid sirens intended to evoke history ([Haiwai Net](#), September 18). In schools across the country, class time was devoted to "patriotic education activities" (爱国主义教育, *Aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu huodong*) ([Sohu](#), September 23). For example, a kindergarten in Guang'an, Sichuan held a moment of silence, watched a patriotic documentary to understand the horrors of the invasion, and made paper flower bouquets to express their sorrow for the lives lost in the struggle against Japan ([Baijia Hao](#), September 21). Politburo Standing Committee Member and Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection Zhao Leji (赵乐际) addressed a ceremony at the September 18 Incident History Museum in the northeastern city of Shenyang near the site of the 1931 bombing. At exactly 9:18 AM on September 18, Zhao, the highest-level official to attend the annual vigil since 2014, led other dignitaries as they rang the museum's "warning bell" 14 times to signify 14 years of arduous resistance against Japan. ([People's Daily](#), September 19; [Nikkei](#), September 19).

Always a key date in modern Chinese history, 9-18 has assumed additional political significance in the Xi era. In early 2017, party-affiliated historians reached a consensus that the war with Japan began on September 18, 1931 and not on July 7, 1937 with the Lugou Bridge incident that ignited full scale conflict between Japan and Nationalist China, and was previously considered the war's start date ([Xinhua](#), January 17, 2017). Based on this determination, the war's official name was changed from the "Eight-year War of Resistance against Japanese aggression" to the "14-year War of Resistance against Japanese aggression". The Ministry of Education ordered revisions of all text books to reflect the war's new name and start date ([Peoples' Daily](#), January 11, 2017).



Politburo Standing Committee Member Zhao Leji leads a bell tolling ceremony at the September 18 Incident History Museum in Shenyang (Source: Xinhua)

“Never Forget”

Putting aside questions of historical accuracy, the 2017 decision to revise the dates of the second Sino-Japanese war to 1931-1945 indicates the increased emphasis on the conflict in China’s official historical narrative. As *People’s Daily* acknowledged, the historical revision refocuses China’s account of the 1930s away from the civil war between Nationalist and Communist forces to the conflict with Japan ([Peoples’ Daily](#), January 11, 2017). This is evidenced by the consistently high-level of official and popular ardor for commemorating not only 9-18, but also other key dates in the War of Resistance. In July, China observed the 84th anniversary of the Lugou Bridge Incident, which is now termed “the beginning of China’s whole-nation resistance” against Japan ([Xinhua](#), July 7). The anniversary of the allies’ victory over Japan on September 3 is another key date of remembrance. Last year on the 75th anniversary of allied victory in the “World Anti-Fascist War”, General Secretary Xi Jinping addressed a historical symposium held by the CPC Central Committee, the State Council and the Central Military Commission, where he recalled China’s “great victory” as “a historic turning point at which the Chinese nation rose from severe crisis in modern times and embarked on a journey toward great rejuvenation.” ([Xinhua](#), September 4, 2020). Each year on December 13, which was designated as a National Memorial Day in 2014, candlelight vigils are held across China to remember the victims of the 1937 Nanjing massacre ([Xinhua](#), December 14, 2020).

China’s increased historical emphasis on the legacy of Japanese imperialism traces back to the party’s efforts to address the legitimacy deficit it faced following the 1989 Tiananmen crisis. In the early 1990s, China launched the patriotic education campaign, which sought to ground the party-state’s legitimacy in popular

nationalism by emphasizing unresolved historical grievances, particularly toward Japan. In the narrative that emerged, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) plays a starring role in leading China to national rejuvenation after a century of humiliation at the hands of the Western colonial powers and Japan. The campaign effectively shifted China's historical account away from the triumphalist Marxist-Leninist narrative of the Mao era wherein the party defeated its adversaries through class struggle, to a new narrative centered on national humiliation and rejuvenation. [1] This humiliation-cum-rejuvenation narrative is epitomized by the slogan: "Never forget the national humiliation, undertake self-strengthening for our generation" (勿忘国耻, 吾辈自强, *wu wang guozhi, wubei ziqiang*), which is ubiquitous on 9-18 and other historical anniversaries ([Xinhua](#), September 18). This narrative has become even more central under Xi, who views China's National Rejuvenation as his central project. For example, Xi used the phrase "national rejuvenation" 26 times in his July 1 speech commemorating the CCP's centenary anniversary ([ASPI](#), July 3).

The CCP has a tradition of re-evaluating or emphasizing elements of its past to shape the politics of the present; this in turn informs popular conceptions of China and its place in the world. A recent example of this phenomenon is the greater public attention that the Korean War (1950-1953)- the "War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea" has received amidst China's intensifying strategic rivalry with the United States. Presently, the film *The Battle at Lake Changjin* (长津湖, Changjinhu) has shattered box office records in China. The film, which was released on the eve of China's national day, portrays Chinese soldiers' heroism against a more technologically-advanced American adversary ([Global Times](#), October 1). Last year, *the Eight Hundred* (八百, *ba bai*), which was originally opposed by some party censors for its glowing portraying of the CCP's longtime rival Guomindang (GMD) army's heroic resistance to the Japanese assault on Shanghai in 1937, grossed approximately \$460 million ([SupChina](#), December 18, 2020). The film's release and ensuing popularity- it was "2020 Weibo Movie of the Year", demonstrates that opposition to Japan is afforded pride of place over a traditional Maoist interpretation of history in which the GMD are portrayed as feudal oppressors ([Sina](#), February 28).

History as a Mirror

Throughout 2021, Xi has devoted great effort to reshaping the party's history in order to consolidate the ideological foundation of his leadership ahead of next year's 20th Party Congress. In February, Xi launched a campaign at the Party History Study and Education Mobilization Conference to study the party's history ([China Brief](#), June 18). The campaign will set the stage for the sixth plenum this November, when Xi will oversee the release of only the third resolution on the CCP's history since its founding in 1921. The resolution will likely rehabilitate much of the party's Mao-era past, and provide further ideological basis for a system predicated on "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era" (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想, *Xi Jinping xin shidai Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi sixiang*) ([Xinhua](#), August 31; [China Brief](#), September 23). In June, as part of this history study campaign, the CCP's main theoretical journal, *Qiushi*,

published an essay by Xi exhorting the party to treat “history as a mirror” to demonstrate love of the party, knowledge of history, and patriotism ([China Brief](#), June 18).

Experts have taken up Xi’s call to use “history as a mirror” to reflect on Sino-Japanese relations, which have worsened in 2021. For example, Huang Jiping (胡继平), a Japan specialist and Vice President of the government think tank- China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, wrote a *Global Times* editorial on why Japan should “deeply reflect” on the September 18 incident and its legacy ([Global Times](#), September 16). Huang links Japan’s imperial past to its current rapprochement with Taiwan. Huang specifically criticizes Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso, who in July stated a Chinese invasion of Taiwan would pose an existential threat to Japan, for linking Japan’s national security to the “Taiwan issue” (台湾问题). Huang laments that politicians like Aso perpetuate Japan’s legacy of militarism, and “give the [Japanese] people the illusion they are still living in the pre-war era of militarism,” 让人错觉他们还生活在战前的军国主义时代, *rang ren cuojue tamen hai shenghuo zai zhan qian de junguo zhuyi shidai*). Another editorial in the *Global Times* slams Japan’s ruling Liberal Democratic Party for turning its then ongoing leadership election campaign into an “anti-China contest” as China mourned the victims of Japanese aggression on September 18. The piece blames rising popular anger toward Japan, which has resulted in boycotts against Japanese cultural products such as a “Little Kyoto” shopping street in Dalian, on “Japan’s recent provocation and hostility toward China, including challenging China’s bottom line on the Taiwan question.” ([Global Times](#), September 17).

Conclusion

In the post-Tiananmen era, the CCP has sought to use patriotic education to nurture historical grievances, particularly toward Japan, and to cultivate popular nationalist sentiment as a source of regime legitimacy. In the coming years, nationalism is liable to become even more salient to the CCP’s legitimacy as economic growth slows, and the party-state imposes a growing array of restrictions on personal behavior. However, for China’s leaders, stoking popular nationalism is a double-edged sword as compromise or retreat in a crisis involving Japan, Taiwan and/or the United States is likely to generate immense popular anger. This Catch-22 heightens the risk of conflict in an already volatile region.

John S. Van Oudenaren is Editor-in-Chief of China Brief. For any comments, queries, or submissions, please reach out to him at: cbeditor@jamestown.org.

Notes

[1] For an explanation of this shift see Zheng Wang, “National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 52, Issue 4, December 2008, Pages 783–806, <https://academic.oup.com/isq/article/52/4/783/1797043?login=true>

Far From a Panopticon, Social Credit Focuses on Legal Violations

By Jeremy Daum

Introduction

Two new pieces of draft authority on China's social credit system, directories of data inputs and punitive outputs from the General Office of the State Council, provide further clarity into the system's ultimate form and purposes.[1] These official guidance documents present a picture of a social credit structure that is more of a bureaucratic interface for existing legal and regulatory systems than the widespread Western perception of a dystopian algorithm that uses "big-data collection and analysis to monitor, shape, and rate individual's behavior"(China Brief, January 17, 2017). Social credit includes new enforcement mechanisms but is an extension of the law rather than an independent rule-making authority. Furthermore, the new draft guidance documents emphasize that all collection of data and imposition of punishments requires a legal basis.

The Social Credit System in Practice

No national-level authority has defined 'social credit' yet, but high-level regional regulations uniformly describe it as an organization's or individual's record of compliance with laws and legal obligations. (for example, see "[Shanghai Social Credit Regulations](#)", August 17). This is something of a departure from the earlier 2014-2020 planning outline, which used "social credit" as a blanket term encompassing three major aspects: a financial 'credit reporting' system, an administrative 'credit regulation' system, and a propaganda campaign aimed at increasing individual 'creditworthiness'.[2]

The 'credit reporting' (征信, *zhengxin*) component, like credit elsewhere, is concerned with measuring individuals' likelihood of meeting their financial obligations. Many in China remain unbanked, with no personal accounts or borrowing history, and the goal is to extend the credit economy to them by exploring alternative financial risk indicators. The 'creditworthiness' (诚信, *chengxin*) component is part of China's 'core socialist values' campaign that attempts to fill a perceived moral void and foster individual trustworthiness among the public. Publicity surrounding creditworthiness and education focuses on promoting tales of good samaritanism and compassion through all aspects of government. (Examples can be found in the "Stories of Creditworthiness" section of the governments' "Credit China Website", [Credit China](#)). Work on these two elements has progressed increasingly independently, both from each other and from 'credit-regulation' (信用监管, *xinyong jianguan*), which has emerged as the key pillar of the social credit system and is the exclusive focus of regional social credit regulations.

At the heart of credit-regulation is the concept of hierarchical and categorical management, which means the extent that regulatory agencies scrutinize market actors is based on their past compliance with laws and

regulations, and the nature of the industry or field involved.[3] It is not surprising, then, that the system is almost entirely concerned with regulatory and enforcement information created or obtained by government agencies in the performance of their normal duties, collectively referred to as Public Credit Information (PCI) (公共信用信息, *gonggong xinyong xinxi*). This includes legal records such as registration filings, professional licenses, court judgments, criminal and administrative penalties, permits, and inspection results. (NDRC, July 13) PCI and voluntary disclosures are the sole basis for national credit appraisals that rate a market entity's overall legal compliance as excellent, good, fair, or poor. [4]

A new draft catalog of PCI seeks to further standardize the information that is collected and used in credit-regulation. Most PCI is relevant only to businesses; the use of PCI about individuals is more limited, usually relating to their position in an offending organization. Information on juveniles and others with limited capacity is entirely excluded, as is information on religious faith, or data concerning personal privacy, absent an express legal basis.[5] Records of minor legal infractions such as public transit fare skipping and running red lights, which some local social credit schemes had included as PCI, may only be considered where there is a finding that the situation was particularly serious or demonstrated malicious intent. Credit-regulation is intended to help regulatory agencies allocate resources appropriately and to reduce the burden on entities with a history of compliance, so information that does not help anticipate the likelihood of violations should be excluded as a distraction.



A bank teller counts RMB notes (Source: China Daily)

In order to further increase its efficacy, credit-regulation also focuses on information sharing and joint enforcement by including PCI in centralized databases and sharing blacklists of more serious offenders.[6] Agencies for different sectors were instructed to create rules for administering blacklists for violations of the

laws under their jurisdiction, including determining standards for entry and removal from the respective industry's blacklist, and the consequences of being blacklisted. Each sectors' blacklisting rules are not only made public, but must also be released for public comment for 30 days before they are adopted.[7] Moreover, entry into a blacklist must be reserved only for the most serious violations of the law that endanger health and safety, disrupt the marketplace, violate a judicial or administrative order, or involve a refusal to perform national defense duties.

Through a complex series of inter-ministerial memorandum of understandings, the various agencies have agreed to take enforcement action against those blacklisted by other agencies. Cross-agency enforcement is not intuitive and because other agencies usually lack motivation or legal authority to directly punish those who have not broken laws in their jurisdiction, the penalty measures tend to be restrictions in the exercise of their discretion, such as decisions to grant permits, and are rarely outright prohibitions.

A major exception is a unique blacklist operated by the courts. That blacklist focuses on 'judgment defaulters', who are defined as persons with the ability to fulfill obligations given to them in an effective court judgment, but who refuse to do so, or who otherwise illegally evade enforcement such as by concealing assets. This was the first blacklist, begun in 2013, and due to the courts' pre-existing power to limit spending by those with outstanding judgments in order to preserve assets, requires other agencies to enforce other more direct restrictions, which have attracted international attention, such as blocks on purchasing flights, home renovations, vacation travel, and even sending children to expensive private schools. [8]

The State Council's draft directory of national credit penalty measures now lays out the potential consequences included as social credit but clarifies that any penalty must have an articulated basis in law and policy documents.[9]The punishments include professional restrictions on obtaining practice credentials, holding specified positions, and even industry exclusions for more serious offenses. Other measures involve restrictions on participation in government projects, procurement, and resource trading, or access to government benefits. The most commonly imposed measures are increased scrutiny in routine regulatory oversight or when applying for permits, and the publication of information on infractions that may be viewed and considered by both government agencies, market entities, and the public, which is considered its own penalty. Different regions and industries are able to draft their own supplemental penalty catalogs, but must never increase penalties beyond those provided by local laws and regulations.

While the draft penalty directory is new, its principles are not. Interagency enforcement agreements have always come with attached lists of the legal basis for every punishment included. The specific types of penalties have been consistent throughout the joint-enforcement system's evolution, and the directory itself was called for as early as 2016.[10]

Conclusion

Despite widespread interpretations to the contrary, social credit is not an all-seeing citizen-rating system. The

perception of an all-seeing social credit system likely stems from early analyses that conflated the credit-regulation enforcement mechanisms with morality propaganda aspects, and further confused pilot private financial credit score systems with government regulation. The government had tentatively authorized major technology and finance companies to develop the systems, but ultimately rejected them. Hyperbolic promotion by corporate spokespersons about their scores' predictive abilities may have also resonated with Western anxiety surrounding corporate data profiling and government access to personal information.

The actual social credit system is not without real problems of course. The central authorities have released increasingly detailed rules for 'credit restoration', but some individuals have reported being blacklisted without receiving required notice or have experienced problems getting unlisted despite their eligibility for removal ([State Administration for Market Administration Regulation Rules](#), July 9). More importantly, saying that the system is an extension of the law only means that it is no better or worse than the laws it enforces. As China turns its focus increasingly to people's social and cultural lives, further regulating the content of entertainment, education, and speech, those rules will also become subject to credit enforcement.

Similarly, while social credit's mechanisms are decidedly not tech-intensive, this does not mean there is no need for concern about China's use of emergent technologies in areas such as censorship, surveillance, or predictive policing. It only means that continuing to describe social credit as futuristic mechanism for regulating citizens' daily lives is a needless distraction from the many areas of more legitimate concern.

Jeremy Daum is a Senior Fellow of the Yale Law School Paul Tsai China Center. His principal research focus is criminal procedure law, with a particular emphasis on the protection of vulnerable populations such as juveniles and the mentally ill in the criminal justice system, and is also an authority on China's 'Social Credit System'. He is also the founder and contributing editor of the collaborative translation and commentary site [Chinalawtranslate.com](#), dedicated to improving mutual understanding between legal professionals in China and abroad.

Notes

[1] National Basic Directory of Public Credit Information (Draft) (全国公共信用信息基础目录 (征求意见稿)), National Reform and Development Commission, July 13, 2021 https://hd.ndrc.gov.cn/yjzx/yjzx_add.jsp?SiteId=365; and China's National List of Basic Penalty Measures for Untrustworthiness (Draft for Solicitation of Comments) (2021 Edition) (全国失信惩戒措施基础清单) (征求意见稿), http://www.gov.cn/hudong/2021-07/18/content_5625819.htm

[2] State Council Notice Concerning Issuance of the Planning Outline for the Establishment of a Social Credit System (2014-2020) (国务院关于印发社会信用体系建设规划纲要 (2014—2020年) 的通知) State Council General Office Issuance [2014] No.21, June 27, 2014. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2014-06/27/content_8913.htm

[3] See Item (7) of Guiding Opinion on Accelerating the Advancement of the Establishment of the Social Credit System with New Forms of Credit-Based Regulatory Mechanisms (关于加快推进社会信用体系建设构建以信用为基础的新型监管机制的指导意见, State Council General Office Issuance [2019] No. 35, July, 9, 2019, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2019-07/16/content_5410120.htm

[4] See items (5),(6) in 关于加快推进社会信用体系建设构建以信用为基础的新型监管机制的指导意见 http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2019-07/16/content_5410120.htm; Notice of the General Office of the National Development and Reform Commission on Advancing and Utilizing the Results of Comprehensive Public Credit Appraisals of Market Entities(国家发展改革委办公厅关于推送并应用市场主体公共信用综合评价结果的通知, [2019] 885号, particularly section VI. http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-09/16/content_5430181.htm

[5] 全国公共信用信息基础目录（征求意见稿）

[6] Guiding Opinions on Strengthening and Regulating Efforts on the Management of Lists of Persons Receiving Joint Incentives for Trustworthiness or Joint Punishment for Untrustworthiness (关于加强和规范守信联合激励和失信联合惩戒对象名单管理工作的指导意见), National Development and Reform Commission and the People's Bank of China, 2017, https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/xxqk/zcfb/gxwj/201711/t20171103_960925.html?code=&state=123

[7] Further Improving Systems for Restraining the Untrustworthy and Building Mechanisms for Building Creditworthiness that have Long-term Effect (关于进一步完善失信约束制度构建诚信建设长效机制的指导意见), General Office of the State Council, December 18, 2020, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2020-12/18/content_5570954.htm

[8] For court blacklists see several Provisions of the Supreme People's Court on Announcement of the List of Judgment Defaulters (最高人民法院关于公布失信被执行人名单信息的若干规定), July 1, 2013, 法释[2013]17号 <http://fgcx.bjcourt.gov.cn:4601/law?fn=chl394s051.txt>; Several Provisions of the Supreme People's Court on Restricting High Spending by Persons Subject to Enforcement(最高人民法院关于限制被执行人高消费的若干规定), Supreme People's Court, May 17, 2010, <http://www.court.gov.cn/shenpan-xiangqing-1650.html>

[9] (全国失信惩戒措施基础清单) (征求意见稿), http://www.gov.cn/hudong/2021-07/18/content_5625819.htm

[10] 国务院关于建立完善守信联合激励和失信联合惩戒制度加快推进社会诚信建设的指导意见, May 30, 2016, item 20, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2016-06/12/content_5081222.htm

China's Development of Hypersonic Missiles and Thought on Hypersonic Defense

By Holmes Liao (廖宏祥)

Introduction

Hypersonic weapons are defined as able to travel at speeds above Mach 5 and can be broadly classified into two types: hypersonic glide vehicles (HGV) and hypersonic cruise missiles (HCM). The former is launched into the upper atmosphere via ballistic missiles. The HGV is then separated from the booster to glide/maneuver towards its target. The latter can be launched from a jet plane or rocket to reach supersonic speed before igniting its scramjet engine for hypersonic speed.

As the U.S. engages in great power competition with China and Russia, all three countries are racing to field hypersonic weapons. Beijing sees hypersonic weapons as a critical means to shape China's strategic environment, and has seized the opportunity to gain an edge in this contest. China has reportedly fielded DF-17 missiles mounted on DF-ZF HGVs and is making progress on its Starry Sky-2 HCM.

Chinese Hypersonic Shock Tunnel Development

To aid research and development into hypersonic technology, the Institute of Mechanics (IMECH) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) (中国科学院力学研究所, *Zhongguo kexue yuan lixue yanjiusuo*) launched the "shock tunnel reproducing hypersonic flight conditions" program in 2008. The tunnel became operational in 2012.[1] A news report on the JF-12 hypersonic wind tunnel (复现高超声速飞行条件激波风洞, *Fuxian gaochao shengsu feixing tiaojian jibo fengdong*), which cited CAS's *National Science Review* journal in April 2020, implies that the tunnel is being used for the development of the Starry Sky (星空, *Xingkong*) HGV ([China News](#), April 20, 2020). According to the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), Starry Sky-2 can carry nuclear warheads and travel at six times the speed of sound ([SCMP](#), August 6, 2018).[2] The JF-12 tunnel can duplicate flight conditions between Mach 5-9 speeds and altitudes ranging between 25-50

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kilometers (15.5-31 miles) ([China News](#), April 20, 2020; [SCMP](#), August 6, 2018). [3] The tunnel can sustain test times of more than 130 milliseconds (ms), which is enough to support the data collection of flow field, shock structure, and other high speed aerodynamic parameters ([IMECH](#), November 28, 2017). Based on publicly available information, the shock tunnel is used to analyze thermal characteristics such as flame-holding stability and recovery temperature for combustion. It is possible that the JF-12 tunnel, along with other hypersonic tunnels at the China Aerodynamics Research and Development Center (CARD C) (中国空气动力研究与发展中心, *Zhongguo kongqi dongli yanjiu yu fazhan zhongxin*), which are located in Mianyang, Sichuan and directly controlled by the People's Liberation Army (PLA), could be used to help design hypersonic weapons ([Baidu](#)).[4]



DF-17 missiles on display in China's National Day parade on October 1, 2019 (Source: Global Times)

CARD C has research institutes with revealing names that indicate its key role in the development of hypersonic technology, i.e. Low-speed Aerodynamics, High-speed Aerodynamics, Hypersonic Aerodynamics, Computational Aerodynamics, and Testing Technology. Consequently, it is probable that CARD C is responsible for the PLA's research and development of hypersonic weapons ([CARD C](#)). Given China's military-civil fusion approach to defense technology, it's highly likely that IMECH supports CARD C's simulations and engineering tasks, especially since the former has the country's most advanced hypersonic shock tunnels. Chinese media reports have frequently claimed that the JF-12's performance is superior to NASA's Hypersonic Tunnel Facility (HTF) ([Meiri Toutiao](#), October 11, 2017; [Wen Wei Po](#), September 3, 2012; [Ta Kung Pao](#), June

2016). Such claims appear dubious in light of contemporaneous emphasis on the JF-12 tunnel's cutting-edge five degree of freedom mechanism, a technology that NASA has had since the 1980s [5]. The claim that a 130 ms testing time is a world record is also false; NASA's shock tunnel for the X-43A experimental vehicle can sustain similar test conditions for longer durations.

In March 2018, the same group responsible for the IMECH's JF-12 began work on the JF-22 "detonation-driven ultra-high-speed and high-enthalpy shock tunnel" (爆裂驱动超高速高焓激波风洞, *Baohong qudong chao gaosu gao han jibo fengdong*) (IMECH, January 2021). The JF-22 can reportedly achieve higher speeds and altitude conditions than the JF-12. Located in Beijing's Huairou District, the program passed a major milestone (roughly equivalent to the U.S. DoD's Production Readiness Review [PRR] and System Verification Review [SVR]) in December 2020. The IMECH press release claims that the JF-12 and JF-22 combined can cover all hypersonic flight profiles, although the timeline for the JF-22 to achieve initial operational capability is uncertain.

Taking Advantage of U.S. Knowledge and Technology

In the past, innovative computational fluid dynamics (CFD) algorithms developed by U.S. institutions such as the NASA Glenn Research Center were published and openly discussed at academic conferences. The Chinese and American CFD communities frequently overlap; the principal investigator of both JF-12 and JF-22 shock tunnels, Jiang Zonglin (姜宗林), received the Ground Testing Award from the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) in 2016 (Guancha, May 25, 2016). Chinese experts have likely acquired much-needed knowledge from such CFD community events. In addition to powerful wind tunnels, hypersonic vehicle design requires sophisticated CFD computer simulations. The U.S.'s open sharing of advances in CFD has aided China's hypersonic research and development efforts. The powerful computer simulations requiring computation-intensive algorithms are run on indigenous supercomputers built with U.S.-designed GPUs, CPUs, and memory chips. (Washington Post, April 9, 2021) This kind of knowledge diffusion is currently not preventable under existing national security safeguards such as the U.S. Economic Espionage Act.

PLA Thinking on Defense against Hypersonic Weapons

PLA strategists fear that the U.S. may deploy hypersonic weapons on the first island chain and/or the second island chain, directly threatening China.[6] In particular, they recognize that Chinese long-range kinetic interceptors lack precision to kill, and precision interceptors lack the range to strike targets at long distance. As early as 2012, the China Aerospace Science & Industry Corporation (CASIC) Academy of Defense Technology (中国航天科工防御技术研究院, *Zhongguo hangtian ke gong fangyu jishu yanjiuyuan*) proposed an architecture capable of defending against hypersonic weapons.[7]

The first component of the proposed 2012 CASIC defense architecture is an efficient and optimized detection network comprised of various sensors covering a distance of 800-1000 km (497-621 miles). The second is a high-speed information center capable of processing large amounts of heterogeneous data and discriminating

against noise and other interference in real-time. The third element of the hypersonic defense plan is a high-performance command and control system to support an integrated air picture with rapid sensor-to-shooter cycle. The fourth component is a mixture of fast response airborne and near space-based interceptors. CASIC advocates air-to-air missiles for this purpose. However, hypersonic cruise missiles also pose significant technical challenges for low-angle detection and tracking over long distance, and the 2012 CASIC proposal does not seem to have reached sound solutions to this problem.

Researchers from the China Air-to-Air Missile Research Institute (中国空空导弹研究院, *Zhongguo kong kong daodan yanjiuyuan*) recommended a similar architecture in 2016.[8] They also advocate implementing airborne interceptors using both kinetic and direct energy, because of their advantages of low risk, low R&D and deployment cost, as well as the ability to offer rapid response with maximum operational flexibility. One challenge involved with air-to-air interceptors is their reliance on powerful airborne fire control radar to lock onto targets hundreds or even thousands of kilometers away. Whether China has fully developed this technology is unknown.

Researchers from the Space Engineering University (航天工程大学, *Hangtian gongcheng daxue*) under the command of the PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF) (战略支援部队, *Zhanlue zhiyuan budui*) indicated that they could use existing surveillance assets consisting of early warning aircraft and ground radars for early detection.[9] Additionally, they propose fielding ground-based and ship-borne high power, high resolution, and long-range phased array radars that can detect and track small, high-speed targets such as ballistic missile warheads and hypersonic vehicles. For warfighting, they envisage “forward deployment” of air-to-air missiles for head-on intercept, though due to the HGV’s high maneuverability, the deployment area would need to be quite large, and the rate of success would likely be small.

Two engineers from PLA Units #31002 and #32032 of the Strategic Support Force (SSF) recommend a similar architecture for hypersonic defense systems, but propose to deploy layered global networks for early warning and kinetic interception.[10] They indicate that though an infrared sensor cannot render precise three-dimensional target coordinates, it can still effectively provide early warning capabilities.[11] The PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) Engineering University (火箭军工程大学, *Huojianjun gongcheng daxue*), previously known as PLA Second Artillery Engineering University, divides the engagement of hypersonic weapons into four stages.[12] In the first stage, early warning satellite constellations detect the launch of an enemy weapon, immediately issue alerts and begin tracking the projectile. In the second stage, early warning radar detect and track the incoming target based on satellite data feeds. During the third stage, surveillance systems distinguish targets from decoys and report to the command and control center. Lastly, the command center directs weapon platforms to intercept the incoming projectile.

Based on these four stages, researchers from PLARF Engineering University identify a few capabilities requiring improvement, namely, early warning, positioning and tracking, and interceptor guidance. They largely

follow the U.S. Missile Defense Agency's thinking on interception, and separate the trajectory of a hypersonic target into boost, midcourse, and terminal phases and proposed technologies they could develop in each phase accordingly. [13] Perhaps more importantly, PLA experts recommend shortening a long chain of command to build a flat command and control organization that optimizes information flow and reduces response time. [14]

Chinese researchers at the First Aircraft Institute of Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC) (中国航空工业集团公司, *Zhongguo hangkong gongye jituan gongsi*) recognize that laser weapons can be valuable in hypersonic defense because they can illuminate a target instantaneously using laser beams.[15] Laser weapons installed on aircraft, however, are susceptible to vibration and noise, which creates technical difficulties for beam control, high-precision aiming, tracking, and rapid damage assessment. Additionally, hypersonic vehicles are typically shielded by ceramic matrix composites, which protect their structures from extreme heat, especially in the nose cone section. The ceramics would be naturally effective at diffusing heat from laser beams for a prolonged period, rendering the laser weapon less effective. ([Weapon News](#); [MDPI Open Science](#))

In general, Chinese strategists assess that hypersonic defense systems based on airborne platforms are advantaged by flexible deployment, high initial launch speed of kinetic interceptors, and incoming targets' relatively weak maneuverability in the cruise/glide phase. Some Chinese researchers believe these limitations can be remedied by the use of unmanned aerial systems (UAS).

China's Air Force Engineering University (空军工程大学, *Kongjun gongcheng daxue*) has studied the feasibility of deploying a cluster of widely spaced UASs to intercept hostile hypersonic strikes.[16] The conceptual design makes use of high-altitude, long-endurance (HALE) UAS that can loiter in the forward theater. Because UAS payloads are smaller than manned warplanes, Chinese researchers envisage that the drone cluster will be divided between two missions: early warning and interception.

In order to provide effective early warning, the UAS that are involved need collaborative decision-making, networked target acquisition, and beyond visual range communications to provide long-range detection and tracking capabilities. The early warning UAS cluster would be part of the networked sensors comprising space-based infrared satellites, land-based early warning radars, and early warning aircraft. Per the Air Force Engineering University's conceptual design, the interceptor UAS will carry six 250 kg, 200 km range airborne missiles.[17] The proposed defense architecture also calls for robust battle management and C2 systems. The researchers divide warfighting into four stages: patrol and combat readiness, early warning, target acquisition, and intercept capabilities. They have conducted systems analysis to determine the optimal deployment strategy for both early warning and interceptor UASs.[18]

The Chinese open source literature summarized above provide a very high-level concept of operations (CONOPS) and warfighting applications against hypersonic weapons. Applied with systems engineering, CONOPS can be refined and transformed into top-level systems requirements for design, development,

integration, testing, and IOC. This does not mean that China is on the verge of developing these missile defense systems, but the extensive research undertaken thus far, nevertheless brings China a step closer to achieving a hypersonic defense capability.

Conclusion: Implications for U.S.-China Arms Control

Hypersonic vehicles are not currently subject to existing arms control treaties on ballistic missiles. The U.S. extended the bilateral New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia in February 2021, and still hopes to persuade China to join future strategic arms control negotiations. China presently has little incentive to be encumbered by any arms control treaty as it lags behind the U.S. and Russia in long-range intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and nuclear warhead stocks, while simultaneously maintaining a vast stockpile of short and intermediate range ballistic missiles that could potentially give it the edge in a Western Pacific contingency. China is not a signatory of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), a multilateral export control regime. Consequently, Beijing is not bound by missile nonproliferation obligations and has proliferated missile technologies to Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. ([USNI News](#), May 18, 2021)

However, the current situation, which is characterized by China's long range missile disadvantage vis-à-vis the U.S. and Russia, and huge advantage in short and medium range missiles, may be beginning to shift. In August 2019, the U.S. withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) because of repeated Russian violations and Chinese arms buildup in the Pacific and the South China Sea. The withdrawal has introduced the possibility of new U.S. land-based, conventional, intermediate-range, and hypersonic missile deployments in Asia.

The PLA Rocket Force believes hypersonic weapons possess powers of deterrence unmatched by nuclear weapons that can alter the strategic balance and affect an opponent's intent and determination. [19] Indeed, China's early interest in developing a hypersonic defense system demonstrates its concern over the U.S.'s development of hypersonic weapons. As a result, concerns over U.S. hypersonic weapons' development and missile deployments, along with revisions to the MTCR that enable allies and partners like Taiwan, Japan, and Australia to build long-range land-based offensive capabilities, could combine to alter Beijing's strategic calculus on arms control. President Reagan's secretary of state, George Shultz, believed that the U.S. deployment of short-range nuclear missiles in Western Europe played a key role in driving the former Soviet Union to join INF negotiations. ([NBR, February 20, 2021](#)) U.S. deployment of hypersonic weapons on either one of the Western Pacific island chains could induce Beijing to perceive a change in the strategic balance to its disadvantage, and compel it to participate in arms control negotiations with the U.S., Russia, and potentially other nuclear weapons states.

Mr. Holmes Liao (廖宏祥) has over 30 years of professional experience in U.S. aerospace industries. He previously served as an adjunct distinguished lecturer at Taiwan's War College.

Notes

[1] Han Guilai (韩桂来), Mou Qianhui (牟乾辉), “Shock wave wind tunnel to reproduce hypersonic flight conditions” [复现高超声速飞行条件的激波风洞], *Bulletin of the Chinese Academy of Sciences*, [中國科學院院刊], 33 (2018): 37-40. Note also that an unauthoritative website stated that CAS scientists previously supported the PLA to build wind tunnels including the JF-4 (1962), JF-4A (1964) and JF-10 (1998) at CARDC. “Only China’s shock tunnel technology has enabled Chinese missiles to surpass the U.S. and lead the world,” [仅中国掌握的激波管技术，使中国导弹超越美国领先世界], *Military Hobby (军事爱好)*, January 14, 2020, <http://www.chinaha.net/html/202001/20200174387.php>.

[2] Note that the original post from the China Academy of Aerospace Aerodynamics (CAAA, 中国航天空气动力技术研究院, *Zhongguo hangtian kongqi dongle jishu yanjiuyuan*) referenced by the SCMP article has been removed from the internet. CAAA is a unit under the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), which is the main contractor for China’s space program.

[3] Note that while China News states the JF-12 can replicate conditions ranging between Mach 10-25 and altitude 35-90 km, CAS’s own publication (cited in the SCMP article) returns a more conservative numbers, which are cited in this piece.

[4] Zhou Xiaogang (周晓刚), Hu Minglun (胡明伦), Bai Benqi (白本奇), Ling Zhongwei (凌忠伟), Zhang Wei (张伟), “Improvements of Five Degree of Freedom Support Mechanism in Hypersonic Wind Tunnel” [高超声速风洞五自由度机构技术改造], *Ordnance Industry Automation [兵工自动化]*, 10 (2013): 66-68; Xu Xiaobin (许晓斌), Shu Haifeng (舒海峰), Xie Fei (谢飞), Wang Xiong (王雄), Guo Leitao (郭雷涛), “Research progress on aerodynamic test technology of hypersonic wind tunnel for air breathing aircraft” [吸气式飞行器高超声速风洞气动力试验技术研究进展], *Journal of Experiments in Fluid Mechanics [实验流体力学]*, 5 (2018): 29-40.

[5] Zhou, et al., “Improvements of Five Degree of Freedom Support Mechanism in Hypersonic Wind Tunnel,” 2013.

[6] Liang Xiaogeng (梁晓庚), Tian Hongliang (田宏亮), “Analysis of the Development Status and the Defense Problem of Near Space Hypersonic Vehicle” [临近空间高超声速飞行器发展现状及其防御问题分析], *Aero Weaponry [航空兵器]*, 4 (2016): 3-10.

[7] Bao Yunxia (包云霞), Zhang Weigang (张维刚), Li Junlong (李君龙), Chen Yong (陈勇), “Challenge and consideration of early warning detection and guidance technique of near space weapons” [临近空间武器对预警探测制导技术的挑战], *Modern Defense Technology [现代防御技术]*, 1 (2012): 42-47. Note

that the authors are affiliated with the Beijing Institute of Electronic System Engineering (北京电子工程总体研究所), also called the Second Research Academy of CASIC or the CASIC Academy of Defense Technology (中國航天科工防禦技術研究院 (第二研究院)).

[8] Liang Xiaogeng, et al., “Analysis of the Development Status and the Defense Problem of Near Space Hypersonic Vehicle”, 2016.

[9] 刘晓慧 [Liu Xiaohui] , 聂万胜 [Nie Wanshen] , “反临近空间高速机动目标策略研究” [“Strategy for interception of near space high speed maneuvering target”] , *兵器装备工程学报* [Journal of Ordnance Equipment Engineering] , 1 (2017): 75-78

[10] 韩洪伟 [Han Hongwei] , 王鹏坡 [Wang Pengpo] , “高超声速武器发展及防御策略研究” [“Research on development of hypersonic weapon and defense strategy”] , *飞航导弹* [Aerodynamic Missile Journal] , 12 (2019): 12-15。 Note that the lead author is affiliated with the PLA Unit, #31002 which is a research and development institute. The second author is with Unit #32032 under the PLA SSF.

[11] Liu Xiaohui, “Strategy for interception of near space high speed maneuvering target”, *Op. Cit.*

[12] 杨明映 [Yang Mingying] , 朱昱 [Zhu Yu] , 张笋 [Zhang Sun] , “防抗高超声速武器作战体系建设思考” [“Strategy for the construction of combat system for anti-hypersonic weapons”] , *飞航导弹* [Aerodynamic Missile Journal] , 7 (2019): 21-25

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] 张同鑫 [Zhang Tongxin] , 李权 [Li Ouan] , “对抗高超声速武器的机载激光武器发展研究” [“Research on the development of airborne laser weapons against hypersonic weapons”] , *航空科学技术* [Aeronautical Science & Technology] , 3 (2018): 5-8

[16] 肖吉阳 [Xiao Jiyang] , 康伟杰 [Kang Weijie] , 陈文圣 [Chen Wensheng] , “无人机集群反高超声速武器作战概念设计” [“Conceptual Design of UAV Cluster Anti-hypersonic Weapon Operations”] , *飞航导弹* [Aerodynamic Missile Journal] , 10 (2018)

[17] The maximum takeoff weight of PLA’s largest UAS, WZ-7翔龍 *Xianglong*, is about half of the U.S. RQ-4 Global Hawk. The CH-7 彩虹 *Caihong* UAS makes debut at Airshow China 2021 in Zhuhai in September 2021 seems capable of carrying heavier payload than WZ-7.

[18] Xiao Jiyang, et. al., “Conceptual Design of UAV Cluster Anti-hypersonic Weapon Operations”, *Op. Cit.*

[19] Yang Mingying, “Strategy for the construction of combat system for anti-hypersonic weapons”, *Op. Cit.*

Win Some, Lose Some: China's Campaign for Global Media Influence

By William Yuen Yee

Introduction

In 2016, Chinese President Xi Jinping instructed the state-owned China Global Television Network (CGTN) to “tell China’s story well” (讲好中国的故事, *jiang hao zhongguo de gushi*) ([Global Times](#), December 31, 2016). Xi’s exhortations entwine with his broader ambitions to increase China’s “international discourse power” (国际话语权, *guojia huayu quan*) and thereby augment the nation’s “comprehensive national power” (综合国力, *zonghe guoli*). ([People’s Daily](#), June 7). Since the 2008 Beijing Olympics, China has spent billions of dollars to increase the reach of its state-run media outlets and bolster its reputation abroad. CGTN, which was previously the international branch of China Central Television (CCTV) but rebranded in 2016, exemplifies this government-led effort. The state-owned Xinhua News Agency has expanded its overseas bureaus from 100 in 2008 to 181 as of February 2021, a move all the more notable as many Western outlets have slashed their numbers of foreign correspondents ([Xinhua](#), February 9; [The Conversation](#), January 10, 2019). Both CGTN and Xinhua extensively recruit foreign and English-speaking talent ([Facebook](#), April 14, 2018). The state-led effort to raise the international prestige of Chinese state media has produced tangible results. For example, in 2019, the International Olympic Committee recognized Xinhua as one of its four official international news agencies—alongside Reuters, the Associated Press, and the Paris-based Agence France-Presse ([Olympics](#), January 30, 2019).



Politburo members (left to right) Liu Qibao, Liu Yunshan and Liu Yandong attending the launching ceremony of China Global Television Network (CGTN) in Beijing in December 2016 (Source: State Council Information Office)

China's campaign to expand its media influence is not limited to CGTN and Xinhua. Lesser-known entities have ventured abroad including Hunan Province's Mango TV, which has a strong presence in Vietnam, and the Beijing-based StarTimes, which has expanded majorly in Africa. Beijing's global media strategy to cultivate a positive image of China has primarily succeeded in developing markets, likely due to these outlets' funding limitations, and the greater audience receptivity in developing areas. These challenges have prompted a strategy shift by Communist Party officials to "buying the boat," that is, directly acquiring foreign media outlets and shaping their coverage. However, sanctions against Chinese news organizations in the United Kingdom and the United States suggest that Beijing's campaign for hearts and minds abroad remains less effective in nations with more developed media institutions.

Few Can Tango with Mango TV

[Mango TV](#), a subsidiary of the state-run Hunan TV, is the company behind China's second most-watched television network after China Central Television (CCTV). Mango TV can roughly be understood as a Chinese video platform that combines elements of Netflix and YouTube. The streaming service is a tour de force in China's entertainment industry with hit shows like *Happy Camp* (快乐大本营, *kuai le dabenyong*) and *Sisters Who Make Waves* (乘风破浪的姐姐, *chengfengpolang de jiejie*). The latter, a reality show that follows 30 female celebrities over the age of 30 who compete to form a girl group, was an instant sensation and accrued over 44.5 billion total views ([Global Times](#), September 7, 2020). In 2020, *Sisters Who Make Waves* was among the top ten most-searched terms on Baidu, China's main search engine ([China Skinny](#), December 15, 2020).

Mango TV has also resonated with overseas audiences: its programming has amassed significant fanbases across Vietnam, Europe, and the United States. The streaming service launched an official YouTube channel in 2014 that currently has 4.45 million subscribers and is one of the largest Chinese-language media channels on the platform ([YouTube](#), accessed October 5). A channel dedicated exclusively to its dramas boasts 2.72 million subscribers ([YouTube](#), accessed October 5). Mango TV's popularity on YouTube is particularly notable, as the latter remains banned in China.

In Vietnam especially, the streaming service has become an entertainment powerhouse. Mango TV produced three of the nation's top ten television shows in 2020. As of the time of writing, the official YouTube channel for Mango TV Vietnam has 1.62 million subscribers ([YouTube](#), accessed October 5). Videos feature actors dubbing in Vietnamese over the Chinese dialogue, accompanied by subtitles in simplified Chinese. In June 2021, Mango TV was one of the top five most downloaded video apps in Vietnam ([Sohu](#), July 17). The Chinese platform recently collaborated with Vietnam TV, the largest state-owned broadcaster, to produce a Vietnamese-language edition of its popular variety show *XJR Sports Carnival* (小巨人运动会, *xiao juren yundonghui*) ([CGTN](#), July 30). At present, Mango TV seems well positioned to achieve its stated goal of creating a globally influential "Chinese culture going out platform" ([Mango TV](#), accessed October 5).

Winning Hearts and Minds in Africa

China's efforts to increase its media influence in Africa trace back to the transfer of Xinhua's regional editorial office from Paris to Nairobi in 2006. [1] These efforts accelerated in 2012 with the establishment of CCTV Africa (later rebranded as CGTN Africa). That same year, the *China Daily Africa* newspaper and *ChinAfrica* magazine were launched ([The Asia Dialogue](#), October 16, 2018).

The Beijing-headquartered StarTimes, a privately-owned television company that retains close ties to the Chinese government, has a robust presence in sub-Saharan Africa. Its cheapest packages combine African channels like Uganda Premier League soccer matches with Chinese language kung fu movies and family dramas—all priced lower than competitors like the BBC and Al-Jazeera. The “StarTimes Basic” package retails for \$5.99 per month ([Xinhua](#), April 3, 2019; [Xinhua](#), September 2, 2018). Since starting operations in Rwanda in 2008, StarTimes has expanded to 30 countries, and has over 10 million subscribers across Africa ([People's Daily](#), July 28, 2017). Its rapid growth and low prices have even sparked concerns that StarTimes aims to push local companies out of certain African markets ([The Daily Nation](#), February 17, 2015).

StarTimes offers more than just cheap television packages. The firm has revamped the continent's broadcast infrastructure, assisting African states with the transition from outdated analog to high-quality digital television. StarTimes was the Chinese government's primary contractor for the 10,000 Villages Project—announced by Xi in 2015—which sought to increase digital television access in impoverished parts of Africa. By 2019, StarTimes had delivered digital television to 8,162 villages in 23 countries and assisted over 150,000 families, according to the firm's website ([StarTimes](#), December 2, 2020).

China has also invested in private African media companies. In 2013, a group of state-backed investors—including a CCTV subsidiary—purchased a 20 percent stake in Independent Media, which is South Africa's second largest media company. In 2018, Independent Media dismissed a journalist at one of its digital publications, IOL News, over his coverage of Xinjiang ([The African Exponent](#), October 7, 2018). [2]

China's campaign to win hearts and minds via media influence in Africa, combined with infrastructure investments as part of its multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative, seems to be working. Polls show that 62 percent of Nigerians and 65 percent of Kenyans have a favorable opinion of China, and most African states view China's strengthening economy as positive ([USIP](#), June 23; [SCMP](#), June 26).

UK-China Media Clashes

In contrast to its successful campaigns for media influence in Southeast Asia and Africa, Beijing-backed outlets have struggled to gain traction in the West. In the United Kingdom, the state-owned *China Daily* has purchased a monthly “China Watch” supplement in *The Telegraph*. *China Daily* has purchased similar supplements in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, as well as other publications such as Australia's *Sydney Morning Herald*, France's *Le Figaro*, and even the Iowa-based *Des Moines Register* ([Des Moines Register](#), accessed October 5). In 2016, local UK media outlets reported that China paid the London-

based *Telegraph* over \$1 million each year to publish the supplement. *China Daily* also distributed a free weekly newspaper around London called the *China Daily European Weekly*, with content similar to that of “China Watch” ([Hong Kong Free Press](#), April 3, 2016). In response to criticism, however, many of these publications have since stopped publishing the *China Daily*-sponsored insert in their newspapers.

Over the past few years, however, previously cordial ties between London and Beijing have turned frosty over China’s crackdown on Hong Kong and human rights abuses in Xinjiang. Under its post-Brexit “Global Britain” foreign policy, the UK has increased its focus on the Indo-Pacific and augmented its military presence in the region.[3] London’s involvement with AUKUS, the recently concluded trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States to counter China, highlights this new posture. Britain’s ruling center-right Tory Party, which traditionally advocates for human rights, has seen the number of China skeptics among its ranks increase. Earlier this year, the House of Lords tried to amend a proposed international trade law that would allow the London High Court to judge if a trading partner like China has committed genocide. While the House of Commons ultimately rejected the amendment by a narrow vote of 319-308, the incident nonetheless reflected growing unease with China in Britain ([Nikkei Asia](#), February 20; [SCMP](#), January 20).

In this context, China’s campaign to win hearts and minds in the UK has been snarled by tit-for-tat restrictions on media access. London struck first. In February 2021, the government media regulator Ofcom revoked CGTN’s broadcasting license, a decision based on British laws that require license holders to exercise editorial oversight of their programs and be free of control from political bodies. CGTN’s broadcasts of the Hong Kong protests came under fire for biased and one-sided coverage ([Ofcom](#), February 4). In response, China banned BBC World News for an alleged “serious content violation” ([Xinhua](#), February 12). According to China’s National Radio and Television Administration, BBC World News “fail[ed] to meet the requirements to broadcast in China as an overseas channel” and violated “requirements that news reporting must be true and impartial.”

U.S.-China Media Restrictions

China’s push to tell its story well has similarly drawn ire and pushback in the U.S. In September 2018, then-President Trump’s Justice Department required leading Chinese state-run media organizations like CGTN and Xinhua to register as agents under the Foreign Agents Registration Act ([Xinhua](#), October 22, 2020). In June 2019, the U.S. Radio and Television Correspondents Association declined to renew CGTN’s credentials, which allowed its journalists to access congressional press galleries ([SCMP](#), June 2, 2019). In 2020, the State Department designated 15 Chinese media outlets as “foreign missions,” requiring them to register all staff in the same way that embassy and consulate employees must ([SCMP](#), February 19, 2020). The Trump administration further ordered five state-owned news outlets to cut their number of staff to a combined total of 100 Chinese citizens in the U.S.—a reduction of about 40 percent ([Taipei Times](#), March 4, 2020).

China responded by expelling 13 journalists from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal* on the grounds that it opposes any “fake news made in the name of press freedom” ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China](#), March 18, 2020). Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson

Geng Shuang decried one headline from *The Wall Street Journal* about China's management of COVID-19, written by three of the expelled American reporters, as discriminatory.

Conclusion

Apart from its relative gains in developing countries, the tribulations of China's media expansion in the U.S. and UK governments suggest that efforts to extend influence into the West remain a work-in-progress. Xinhua, CGTN, and Mango TV have increased Beijing's ability to "tell China's story well" abroad, but these organizations still lack the worldwide influence and wealth of Western media organizations such as the BBC, the *New York Times* and Netflix. For example, Mango TV trades for \$8.53 per share on the Shenzhen Stock Exchange, valuing the entertainment platform at around \$15.3 billion ([Sina](#), August 20). Conversely, Netflix has a current value of \$226.8 billion, and the value of Disney's streaming business, which includes platforms such as Disney+ and Hulu, is estimated to exceed \$100 billion ([NASDAQ](#), August 20; [CNBC](#), January 6, 2020).

Media has transformed into a new battleground between China and the West. Foreign journalists who strive to provide fair coverage find their work politicized and are caught in geopolitical crosshairs. And the conflict shows few signs of abating: on July 29, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the United States was "deeply concerned by the increasing trend of surveillance, harassment, and intimidation of foreign journalists in China" ([Twitter](#), July 29). Unfavorable views of China in the U.S. and elsewhere ultimately hinder Beijing's ability to expand the influence of its state-backed media outlets. Regardless, it seems that the campaign to "tell China's story well" will continue—at least for those willing to listen.

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Notes

[1] Xinhua recognized developing a presence in the capital of Kenya as central to achieving China's media aspirations abroad. For more, see Yu-Shan Wu, "The Rise of China's State-Led Media Dynasty in Africa," *South African Institute of International Affairs*, June 2012, pp. 17, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/146130/saia_sop_%20117_wu_20120618.pdf.

[2] The dismissed journalist, Azad Essa, published an op-ed about his experience. See Azad Essa, "China Is Buying African Media's Silence," *Foreign Policy*, September 14, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/14/china-is-buying-african-medias-silence/>.

[3] In October 2020, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab spoke before the Foreign Affairs Committee about the importance of the "Indo-Pacific tilt." For more, see "Oral evidence: Work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and

Development Office, HC 253," *Foreign Affairs Committee*, October 6, 2020, pp. 14, <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/1000/pdf/>.

Opportunities and Challenges for China's Plans in Afghanistan

By Syed Fazl-e-Haider

Introduction

In a September meeting between China's Ambassador to Afghanistan Wang Yu and Afghanistan's acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, China declared that its first batch of humanitarian aid will reach Afghanistan before the arrival of winter. ([The News](#), September 28). The emergency humanitarian aid is worth approximately \$31 million and includes three million COVID-19 vaccine doses, food, medicine and other winter supplies ([Global Times](#), September 8). China is the first foreign country to pledge humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan since the Taliban captured Kabul on August 15. The aid pledge from Beijing came days after the Taliban declared China as their "main partner" in rebuilding and developing Afghanistan. Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said "China will be our main partner and represents a great opportunity for us because it is ready to invest in our country and support reconstruction efforts" ([Express Tribune](#), September 2).

China has been a neutral player during the American military presence over the past two decades in Afghanistan with Beijing generally enjoyed good relations with the U.S-backed Afghan government. Now, after the withdrawal of U.S. forces, the Taliban are China's top choice to safeguard its strategic interests in the war-racked country. China's primary interests in Afghanistan are preventing Uyghur separatists from taking refuge there and developing ties with al Qaeda or ISIS, and extending the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) into Afghanistan and beyond.

Growing China-Taliban romance

The China-Taliban romance goes back further than this summer with the Taliban's emergence as the dominant force in Afghanistan following the U.S. decision to exit Afghanistan by the end of August. Rather, both sides developed backdoor contacts in the past, through China's closest friend and strategic partner, Pakistan ([Express Tribune](#), November 2, 2019). Pakistan is believed to have covertly brokered all peace consultations between China and the Taliban. In October 2018, the late Pakistani religious scholar and stalwart Afghan Taliban supporter, Maulana Sami Ul Haq, called on China to play a greater role in the Afghan peace negotiations. Popularly known as "Father of the Taliban", Maulana invited Beijing to play the role of arbitrator to the Afghan conflict ([SCMP](#), October 2, 2018). He stressed the importance of increased Chinese engagement because of its large stakes in the region, and asked that China not leave matters related to Afghanistan solely to the U.S.

Even a month before Kabul fell and President Ashraf Ghani fled Afghanistan, the Taliban expressed their good will and friendly inclination toward China. The Taliban opened the door to Chinese investment in post-US Afghanistan by addressing China's biggest concern over Uygur separatists, who had taken refuge under the previous Taliban regime in Afghanistan during the late 1990s. Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen reportedly said: "China is a friendly country that we welcome for reconstruction and developing Afghanistan." ([SCMP](#), July 9). The Taliban has also taken pains to stress that they will not permit Afghan territory to be used against China by other countries.

In July, a nine- member Taliban delegation led by deputy leader Mullah Baradar Akhund visited China on Beijing's invitation and held a meeting with Foreign Minister Wang Yi in the northeastern city of Tianjin. Wang expressed hope that the Taliban would play an important role in peace and reconstruction of the war-wracked country, and assured the delegation of China's assistance in this regard ([Express Tribune](#), July 28). Days before the formation of an interim government by the Taliban, China promised to keep its embassy open in Kabul and to strengthen relations with the new government ([Daily Times](#), September 3).



FM Wang Yi and other Chinese diplomats in a group photo with Taliban delegation to Tianjin in July (Source: PRC MOFA)

China's Master Plan for Afghanistan

China sees strategically located Afghanistan as a trade hub connecting the Middle East, Central Asia and Europe. China, which also shares a small border with Afghanistan, has already strengthened its position

through mega investments in neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Iran. China has a master plan worth billions of dollars for Afghanistan through the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) — the BRI's flagship project. China has long held ambitions to extend the BRI in to Afghanistan, and Beijing has made several offers to Kabul to join CPEC since its launch in 2013. However, the U.S-backed Afghan government did not join BRI for fear this might antagonize Washington. Even as the U.S. was getting set to depart, Beijing was in discussions with the former Afghan government about extending CPEC into Afghanistan ([The News](#), July 5). In May, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian revealed that Beijing and Kabul were having consultations through diplomatic channels on the CPEC extension plan. Zhao commented that “we notice that Afghanistan is importing and exporting goods through Gwadar and Karachi ports. High-speed highways are also being extended to Afghanistan” ([Express Tribune](#), May 24).

Terrorist Threat to China's Big Plans for Afghanistan

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) or Pakistani Taliban, the umbrella organization for the various Pashtun militant groups operating along the Af-Pak border, have been involved in targeting Pakistan security forces, Chinese nationals and Chinese projects underway through CPEC in Pakistan. The TTP is a hanging sword over China's mega development schemes across the Af-Pak region.

In Afghanistan, the TTP has a local presence of 6,000 trained fighters largely in the eastern districts of Nangarhar province, near the border with Pakistan per the 28th report of the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. The UN report warns that “a reunification took place in Afghanistan between TTP and certain splinter groups in the period from December 2019 to August 2020” ([Dawn](#), July 27).

On April 21, a suicide car bombing in the parking lot of a four star hotel in Quetta, Pakistan killed five people and injured 13 others. The TTP claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack, which apparently targeted the Chinese ambassador, who was staying in the hotel, but was not in the building when the explosion occurred ([Express Tribune](#), April 21).

On July 14, 13 people were killed including nine Chinese nationals and four Pakistanis as a result of a bus blast at the site of a China-funded hydroelectric project in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province ([Dawn](#), July 15). No terrorist group has yet to claim responsibility for the attack, but investigations carried out by Chinese and Pakistani authorities found that TTP and Uyghur separatists were involved in the bombing. Both Pakistan and China have asked the Taliban to break off their ties with the TTP, and have launched a massive crackdown on the TTP and Uyghur separatists in the area ([Express Tribune](#), July 28). However, the Afghan Taliban see the TTP not as their issue, but as a problem for Pakistan to address. Kabul wants Islamabad to reach a political settlement with the group, which has killed thousands of Pakistanis in hundreds of deadly attacks. Pakistan is in talks with the TTP, which have been facilitated by the Taliban in Afghanistan, and is considering amnesty for the group provided they renounce violence ([Dawn](#), October 1). China has yet to respond to this development.

Could China's Involvement in Taliban-led Afghanistan be mutually beneficial?

Given the Taliban's ostensible commitment to the safety of Chinese investment projects, and its promise not to provide safe haven for Uygur separatists, there appears to be, to borrow from China's foreign policy lexicon, potential for "win-win" cooperation between China and Afghanistan under Taliban rule. China is already the largest foreign investor in Afghanistan with its \$3 billion Aynak copper mine project, oil and gas exploration projects and infrastructure projects; progress on these projects has stalled but could accelerate as the security situation improves ([SCMP](#), July 9).

Some experts, however, are skeptical that a win-win situation will materialize for China in Taliban-led Afghanistan, as they believe China will not be able to fully implement its big plans due to the uncertain security environment in post-U.S. Afghanistan. Michael Kugelman, an expert on South Asia at the Wilson Center in Washington D.C., said: "Beijing has not been a major economic player in Afghanistan, largely due to the security situation. With the violence and instability sure to increase, that's unlikely to change. The U.S. withdrawal, and the destabilization that follows, means that Afghanistan's neighbors-including China-will be increasingly likely to act covertly to safeguard their interests." [1]

"China is investing heavily in infrastructure projects in Afghanistan's broader neighborhood, with the hopes of preparing the grounds for eventually expanding BRI into Afghanistan. But no matter what it does outside Afghanistan, bringing its investments into the country will be much more difficult, given the reality of an incredibly insecure investment environment. This is why China, like other countries in the region, would benefit in a big way from a peace agreement in Afghanistan--one that has been, and will continue to be, highly elusive," Kugelman said. [2]

Conclusion

China has been keen to extend its BRI program in to Afghanistan, particularly given the geopolitical importance of its central strategic location. However, the security challenges in Afghanistan may preclude China from implementing its sweeping plans, despite big promises. The TTP will continue to threaten China's CPEC extension plan due to the Taliban's reluctance to launch a massive crackdown on the group.

China's key security interest in Afghanistan is to check Islamic militants' push towards Xinjiang in Northwest China where Uyghur fighters could develop and strengthen their ties to ISIS or al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. For that purpose, the Taliban could be a promising security guarantor and strategic partner in China's master plan for Afghanistan. However, at the same time, there are risks involved in China's so-called partnership with the Taliban, which could be complicated by the Taliban playing the Uygur separatist card, or the TTP card.

Another issue that could challenge Beijing's hope for a reliable partner in Kabul is that the real key to a stable Afghanistan is the formation of an inclusive government representing all ethnicities and sectarian groups in Afghanistan. The Taliban have formed a government which is not inclusive and with no representation of

women or ethnicities other than Pashtuns. The infighting between different factions within the Taliban movement and the resistance from anti-Taliban groups, particularly in northern Afghanistan, could lead to chaos and anarchy in already the strife-torn country. This demonstrates that in order for China to extend its BRI program, it needs a peaceful, inclusive and stable Afghanistan.

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Notes

[1] Author's interview with Michael Kugelman, the deputy director and senior Associate for South Asia at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C.

[2] Ibid.
