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IN THIS ISSUE:

Geopolitical Challenges Cloud Next Chapter in Xi's Triumphalist History

By John S. Van Oudenaren.....pp. 1-6

Did Xi Jinping Secure "Leader for Life" Status at the Sixth Plenum?

By Willy Wo-Lap Lam.....pp. 6-10

Infrastructure Development in Tibet and its Implications for India

By Suyash Desai.....pp. 10- 17

Australia-China Tensions Simmer Amid Trade War and AUKUS

By William Yuen Yeepp. 18-23

Evolving Missions and Capabilities of the PLA Rocket Force: Implications for Taiwan and Beyond

By Yuan-Chou Jing and Yi-Ren Lai.....pp. 23-32

Geopolitical Challenges Cloud Next Chapter of Xi's Triumphalist History

By John S. Van Oudenaren

The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Resolution on its first 100-years of history cements "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想, *Xi Jinping xin shidai Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi sixiang*) as the official ideology of China ([CPC](#), November 11). A central premise of the document, which was adopted at the Sixth Plenum of the 19th CCP Central Committee held in Beijing last week, is that General Secretary Xi Jinping's continued leadership is essential to consolidate the hard earned gains made by China over the last century ([China Brief](#), November 12). The new historical account celebrates the Xi era as a time of triumph when the CCP and the Chinese people have "written the most magnificent epic in the thousands of years of the history of the nation" ([People.cn](#), November 16). In a

People's Daily commentary, Xi observes that the CCP has always emphasized evaluating its history, and that a third resolution on party history is necessary to unify the nation in pursuit of "great new victories" (新的伟大胜利, *xin de weida shengli*) at this "critical juncture" ([People's Daily](#), November 17). Achieving "new victories" alludes to the CCP's second centenary goal of China becoming a "strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious, and modern socialist country" by 2049, i.e., a preeminent world power with a fully developed economy and control of Taiwan ([CPC News](#), September 6, 2017).



Front page of the November 17 edition of *The People's Daily*. The main headline states that the CCP has published the *Resolution* on a "century of achievements," the top right corner highlights an editorial on the resolution by Xi, and the bottom left corner highlights the previous day's video summit between Xi and Biden (Source: [People's Daily](#), November 17).

The *Resolution* depicts the Xi era as the apex of a hundred-year long CCP drive to transform China in to “a thriving nation that stands tall and firm in the East” [1]. However, Xi’s vision of a new Sino-centric era is imperiled by major geopolitical headwinds. The front page of yesterday’s *People’s Daily* underscores the link between domestic political dynamics and international politics (see picture). Above the fold, the party mouthpiece trumpets the *Resolution*, while the bottom of the broadsheet features a picture of Xi and President Joe Biden in discussion at the US-China virtual summit ([People’s Daily](#), November 17). For example, days after meeting with Xi, Biden stated the US was seriously considering a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics; a stark contrast to the robust US participation in the 2008 Summer Olympics, when the US President George W. Bush led the US delegation to Beijing ([Axios](#), November 18). A lack of diplomatic representation from the US and potentially other major countries would diminish the domestic political value of the games to Xi and the CCP.

Under Xi, China has gone from cordial ties with most other major countries, to increasingly strained, if not outright contentious relations with the US, Europe, Japan, India, the UK, Australia, Canada, and others. None of these relationships will likely experience dramatic improvements soon, particularly as Beijing remains internationally isolated (both physically and diplomatically) due to its doctrinaire “zero-COVID” policy ([SCMP](#), October 16). Notwithstanding the modest reduction in tensions that led to Monday’s Xi-Biden meeting, US-China relations have gone from a mix of engagement and competition to outright strategic rivalry in half a decade. Even as China’s relations with the international community have deteriorated over the last several years, Xi has not recalibrated his foreign policy in any significant way ([Foreign Affairs](#), October 6).

A Century of Striving to Overcome Foreign and Domestic Opposition

One difference between the original Chinese text of the *Resolution on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century of Striving* (中共中央关于党的百年奋斗重大成就和历史经验的决议, *Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu dang de bainian fendou zhongda chengjiu hé lishǐ jīngyàn de juéyì*) and the official translation is that the word - 奋斗 (*fendou*), which means “to strive” or “to struggle”, is omitted from the title of the English version ([People.cn](#), November, 16; [Xinhua](#), November 16). Nevertheless, the term is invoked throughout the document, often in the context of China’s “century of striving” since the CCP’s founding in 1921. According to the *Resolution*, China’s path from subjugation to national rejuvenation occurred in four stages. Throughout this history, the CCP struggled against various sources of real and perceived opposition: residual feudal and capitalist forces, counterrevolutionary rightist and/or leftist elements, and hostile foreign powers. [The below list is derived from the full text of the *Resolution* on CCP history ([People.cn](#), November, 16; [Xinhua](#), November 16)].

Four Stages of CCP History

- 1) **1921-1949: New Democratic Revolution** (新民主主义革命, *Xin minzhu zhuyi geming*): After a civilizational nadir when China was reduced to a “semi-colonial, semi-feudal society”, the CCP rids China of imperialist, feudal and bureaucratic-capitalist oppression, and achieves national liberation through victories in the 1927-1949 Civil War against “reactionary Guomindang forces” and the 1931-1945 “War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression” ([China Brief](#), October 8).
- 2) **1949-1978: Socialist Revolution and Construction** (社会主义革命和推进社会主义建设, *shehui zhuyi geming he tuijin shehui zhuyi jianshe*): During this period, the CCP grapples with political, economic and military challenges as it seeks to foster conducive conditions for the internal development of socialism. The CCP eradicates what it perceives as the primary internal impediment to achieving this goal, which are the remnants of traditional Chinese, or “feudal” society. Externally, the CCP struggles to “oppose imperialism, hegemonism, colonialism, and racism” including in the 1950-1953 “War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea.” The *Resolution* acknowledges Mao’s mistakes, namely the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. However, the chaos of the late Mao era is blamed on “counter-revolutionary cliques” led by opportunists who exploited Mao’s errors- PLA Marshall Lin Biao and Mao’s wife Jiang Qing. This era concludes with the CCP “smashing” Jiang and the Gang of Four, the coterie of leftist radicals who achieved prominence in the Cultural Revolution
- 3) **1978-2012: Reform, Opening Up, and Socialist Modernization** (改革开放和社会主义现代化建设, *gaige kaifang he shehuizhuyi xiandaihua jianshe*): From 1978 on, the party focuses on economic development as the primary means to boost China’s composite national strength. The resolution asserts the party overcame severe “political unrest” in 1989 (Tiananmen), which was encouraged by hostile foreign forces seeking to weaken China and divert it from the socialist path. Subsequently, the narrative asserts that the CCP successfully guided China through several financial crises and other economic shocks; several natural disasters, and the SARS epidemic.
- 4) **2012- : New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics** (中国特色社会主义新时代, *zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi xin shidai*) The onset of the current “New Era,” which coincides with Xi’s ascension to power, is defined by the re-assertion of party centrality as the CCP strives to transform China into “a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful by the middle of the 21st century.” The *Resolution* identifies several impediments to achieving this goal. Foremost is the “principal contradiction” of uneven and unequal development, which the CCP vows to solve through “well-rounded human development” and continued pursuit of “common prosperity.” Another serious ill is corruption, which under previous periods of “lax and weak governance”, i.e., the Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin administrations, infected the party and harmed its relationship with the public; but is now being rectified through Xi’s sweeping anti-corruption campaign. The *Resolution* commends Xi’s efforts to strengthen external and internal security, credits the CCP for taking a vigorous stand on Xinjiang, Tibet, and China’s “territorial waters”, and avers that “stability will be maintained in Hong Kong and Macao.” Finally, the

Resolution reiterates that “resolving the Taiwan question and realizing China’s complete reunification is a historic mission and an unshakable commitment of the Party,” and forecasts that “reunification” is “certain to become a reality.”

Geopolitical Constraints

China faces enormous domestic challenges that may yet obstruct the CCP’s quest for “national rejuvenation”: unsustainable debt levels, an aging population, environmental catastrophe, and energy insecurity; but Beijing’s growing international isolation is also a formidable obstacle to Xi’s ambitions. Despite Xi’s exhortation to “tell China’s story well” international frustrations with China are growing ([Qiushi](#), June 2). A strident approach to international politics, and frequent gaps between Beijing’s rhetoric and its actions, have generated increasingly negative perceptions of China across much of the world. In Western and East Asian countries, which are both China’s primary economic partners and its main geopolitical competitors, perceptions of China are at historically unfavorable levels. Per a late 2020 Pew survey, 86% of people in Japan hold negative views of China as do 81% in Australia 75% in South Korea, 73% in the US, 71% in Germany, and 70% in France ([Pew](#), October 6, 2020). In response to this external backlash, a “siege mentality” has taken hold in Beijing, which has only worsened due to the self-imposed isolation of China’s zero-COVID policy ([The Australian](#), June 23, 2021).

The *Resolution* cites China’s goal of developing relations and boosting cooperation with other major countries. However, a survey of China’s relations with major countries reveals a tangle of strained ties. The once privileged relationship that Xi’s predecessors carefully cultivated with Washington through a series of routinized strategic and economic dialogues is in disarray. China’s growing assertiveness and military power has pushed Japan to grudgingly revise its post-war pacifist orthodoxy and rearm. Australia has abandoned any consideration of taking a middle road between China and the US. India, long a partner in China’s efforts to foster a multipolar world (e.g. through BRICS), has de-emphasized its non-alignment tradition and upgraded cooperation with its Quadrilateral Security Dialogue partners, the US, Japan and Australia. European states are reconsidering their stances on Taiwan, and aligning with Washington against Beijing on many issues. Even Russia, while still a strategic partner, has grown uneasy with China’s rapid development of new nuclear and other strategic weaponry, and encroachment into its traditional sphere of influence in Central Asia ([China Brief](#), October 22). Finally, most of the leading Southeast Asian states, Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore, continue to hedge between China and the US to varying degrees.

Xi’s heavy-handed diplomacy has been especially damaging to cross-strait relations. His January 2019 “Letter to Taiwan Compatriots” explicitly linking One Country Two Systems with the 1992 consensus, the foundation of the more pro-China KMT party’s approach to cross-strait relations, proved disastrous for the KMT in Taiwan’s 2020 elections ([State Council Taiwan Affairs Office](#), April 12, 2019). Xi’s statement was ill-timed as it preceded the eruption of mass protests in Hong Kong against the erosion of the city’s autonomy under One Country Two Systems.

It remains to be seen whether Xi will recalibrate Chinese foreign policy, and if so, what course a correction might take. One route would be to continue to pursue China's core interests, but to adopt a less strident, more patient and tactful approach to international politics. This re-orientation would be a throwback to the "hide and bide" approach of Xi's predecessors, Hu, Jiang and Deng, who sought to dial down geopolitical competition in order to focus on economic development. The opposite but perhaps more likely approach would be for China to double down on going it alone. Should Xi adopt this course, Beijing may seek to apply overwhelming strength to secure core interests such as Taiwan. Historically, rising powers that have gone this route have courted disaster by provoking balancing coalitions of disparate partners, which consolidate based on shared threat perceptions. Either way, for Xi, the path to completing China's national rejuvenation is not immediately apparent, at least not in the international arena.

[1] This article refers to *The Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century of Striving*, November 16, 2021, as the *Resolution* throughout. For the full text of the *Resolution* in Chinese see- [People.cn](http://people.cn), November, 16. For the official English translation see- [Xinhua](http://xinhua.com), November 16.

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Did Xi Jinping Secure "Leader for Life" Status at the Sixth Plenum?

By Willy Wo-Lap Lam

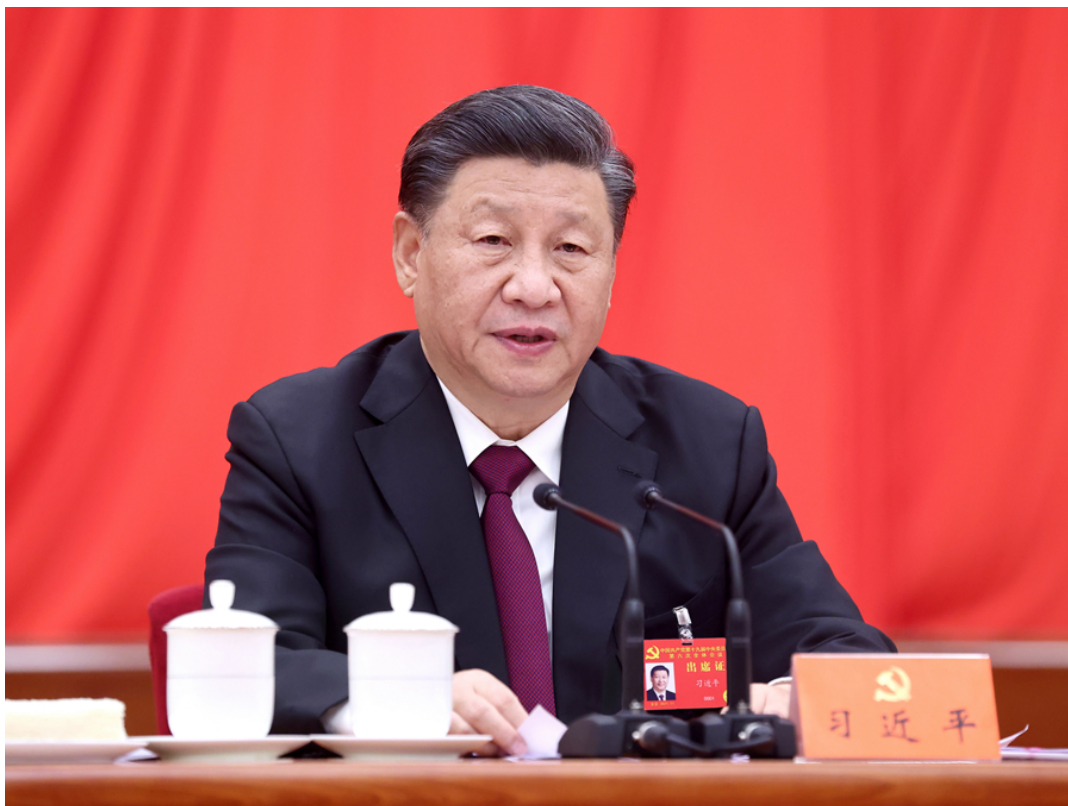
The words "leader for life" do not appear in the communique summarizing the Resolution on History passed at the Sixth Plenum of the 19th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee held in Beijing from November 8 to 11 ([CPC](http://cpc.com), November 11). Nevertheless, there is little doubt that President Xi Jinping has won the approval of the ruling Central Committee to stay in office for one, if not two more five-year terms. The major task of the plenum, which convenes 197 full Central Committee members and 151 alternates, was to pass a *Resolution on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century* (hereafter the *Resolution*). The *Resolution* amounts to an unqualified affirmation of the achievements of the CCP's three titans: Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping ([Xinhua](http://xinhua.com), November 11; [Chinanews.com](http://chinanews.com), November 11).

The *Resolution* coincides with the ongoing centenary celebrations of the CCP's establishment. Major excerpts of the Resolution are included in the Sixth Plenum communiqué, which was released on November 11. The Resolution divides Communist Chinese history into three major periods (for the full text of the 6th plenum communique see [CPC](http://cpc.com), November 11; for an English translation see [CGTN](http://cgtn.com), November 11).

A Third Resolution on Party History

According to the *Resolution*, the 1949-1976 era under the Great Helmsman Mao Zedong laid the foundations for socialism with Chinese characteristics after a long and painful civil war to unify the nation. The second period is the era of reform and opening (改革开放, *gaige kaifang*) inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping, who is lauded for liberating minds with his pragmatic philosophy of “seeking truth from facts” (实事求是, *shishi qiushi*). Deng is particularly credited for shifting the focus of the party to economic development and for marketizing the economy. The names of Xi’s two predecessors – ex-presidents Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao – also appear as leaders who helped to implement Deng’s ideas.

More than half of the communique on the *Resolution* is devoted to praising President Xi as having made contributions at least as weighty as those of Mao and Deng. Xi is eulogized for single-handedly founding “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.” “This is the Marxism of contemporary China and of the 21st century,” observes the *Resolution*. The document observes that Xi Jinping Thought “embodies the best of the Chinese culture and ethos in our times and represents a new breakthrough in adapting Marxism to the Chinese context.” Thus, if Mao and Deng were the helmsmen charting the CCP’s course in the last century, Xi and Xi Jinping Thought pave the way for the “great renaissance of the Chinese nation” in the present century. Due to these contributions, the *Resolution* states that “the Party has established Comrade Xi Jinping’s core position on the Party Central Committee and in the Party as a whole.”



(General Secretary Xi Jinping addresses the Sixth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the CCP in Beijing (Source: Xinhua).

Unlike the party's two previous historical resolution documents – the 1945 resolution tabled by Mao Zedong and the 1981 summation of history orchestrated by Deng Xiaoping – the newly passed *Resolution* consists mostly of approbation for the work of past leaders. In 1945, however, Mao used *The CCP's Resolution on Certain Historical Questions* to denigrate early party founders such as Chen Duxiu, Qu Qiubai, Zhang Guotao and Wang Ming, who were faulted for either ultra-leftist or ultra-rightist blunders ([The CCP Central Committee](#), April 20, 1945). Deng's *Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China* cast aspersions on Mao's ultra-radicalism, particularly the damage he did to the party and the country during the Cultural Revolution ([China.org.cn](#), October 29, 2018). The 2021 *Resolution* does mention Mao's aberrations, especially the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), which it says resulted in "the most serious setback and loss suffered by the people" since 1949. Nevertheless, the *Resolution's* critique of Mao largely follows Deng's 1981 resolution document, and does not touch upon the fundamental defects of the CCP system. The *Resolution* also mentions the Tiananmen Square incident, but follows the party's time-honored characterization of the 1989 student movement as anti-CCP "turmoil" (*dongluan*, 动乱), which occurred due to the "support and instigation" (*zhichi he shandong*, 支持和煽动) of anti-Communist and anti-socialist forces in the West.

"Chairman of Everything"

The *Resolution* praises Xi for "his many profound thoughts and scientific theories and their implementation... and a series of original and new concepts and strategies on governing the nation." Achievements attributed to Xi include the anti-graft campaign, the abolition of extreme poverty and the attainment of a "moderately prosperous society" (*xiaokangshehui*, 小康社会); the "substantial progress [regarding the goal of] common prosperity"; the further development of Deng's open-door policy; "the modernization of China's [ruling] system and capacity for governance," as well as the improvement of China's global status. However, many of these claims seem dubious. The Sixth Plenum has apparently achieved what it set out to do, which is establishing Xi's role as the sole guiding force for the party, the government and the army in the 21st century. However, it remains in question whether ten or more years of Xi's ironclad rule will improve the party's statecraft as well as its international status.

Take, for example, the *Resolution's* claim that Xi has improved the country's governance systems and institutions. One fallout of the Sixth Plenum decision may be that the phenomenon of the "one voice chamber" – one man making all the decisions – will continue at the top echelons of the party-state apparatus. This is despite Xi's oft-repeated claim that "I shall become 'selfless' in order not to fail the people... I am willing to go into a state of selflessness so as to devote myself to China's development" ([People's Daily](#), November 11). Over the past year, central policymaking reflects how Xi, nicknamed "the Chairman of Everything," has made apparently impetuous decisions without broad consultation of fellow leading cadres in the party and

government. Examples include the sudden decision to prevent Jack Ma's Ant Corporation from being listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in late 2020; the withdrawal of support from the taxi-hailing company Didi Chuxing, which successfully listed on the New York Stock Exchange earlier this year; and the surprise announcement in July that all private tutoring schools must become non-profits ([SCMP](#) September 7; [136.com](#), July 16; [BBC Chinese](#), July 15). As Xi is Chairman of the Central Commission for Finance and Economics – the nation's highest decision-making body on financial and economic matters – these decisions could not have been made without his imprimatur.

Implications for 2032 and Beyond

Backed by the *Resolution*, it is very probable that Xi (born 1953) will serve for ten more years as CCP General Secretary, Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), and State President until the 22nd Party Congress in 2032, when he will be 79 years old (US President Joe Biden will turn 79 later this month) ([Wall Street Journal Chinese Edition](#), November 12; [Radio French International](#), November 11). After the 22nd Party Congress, Xi might emulate Deng by remaining CMC Chairman – the post with the most power in China – while relinquishing the titles of party General Secretary and/or State President. This scenario, however, will upend the party convention of orderly generational succession as stipulated by Deng. Cadres belonging to the Sixth Generation (6G) —those born in the 1960s —will have a relatively slim chance of succeeding Xi, who represents the Fifth Generation, in 2032 because by then, those born before 1964 will have reached the usual retirement age of 68 for PBSC members. Moreover, most 6G candidates will not be young enough to serve for two successive five-year terms on the PBSC ([Creaders.net](#), May 23). As a result, the chances of a Seventh-Generation (7G) cadre succeeding Xi as supreme leader are rather high.

At present, only a few dozen-odd 7G officials, who were born in the 1970s, have attained Vice Minister rank. Due to their relatively junior positions, none of those neophyte “rising stars” have yet to demonstrate that they have what it takes to reach the Politburo or higher. Leading 7G cadres include the Secretary-Generals of the Shanghai, Jiangxi and Shandong provincial or municipal party committees, respectively Zhuge Yujie (诸葛宇杰, aged 50), Wu Hao (吴浩, 49) and Liu Qiang (刘强, 50) as well as the Head of the Jiangsu and Yunnan provincial Political and Legal Affairs Committee, respectively Fei Gaoyun (费高云 50) and Liu Hongjian (刘洪建, 48) ([South China Morning Post](#), June 26; [China Brief](#), April 9, 2019).

Conclusion

In terms of economic policy, the *Resolution* claims that “with regards to reform and opening up, the Party has consistently promoted broader and deeper reform across the board.” However, this claims conflicts with the Xi leadership's ongoing crackdown on a host of quasi-private conglomerates – which include Alibaba, Tencent and Bytedance as well as several huge real-estate corporations –that has included placing more party cells in these firms and giving more decision-making powers to relevant party functionaries ([BBC Chinese](#), September 16, 2020). Indeed, Xi's most consistent dictum on running the economy is “top-level design” (*dingcheng shezhi*

顶层设置) and devoting more government resources to 95-odd giant state-owned-enterprise conglomerates ([Qiu Shi](#), January 30). Furthermore, Xi's penchant for setting industrial policies, subsidizing export-oriented firms as well as forcing foreign companies with footholds in China to share their intellectual property with local counterparts have become areas of contention in trade negotiations with the U.S. and other Western countries. Moreover, while the *Resolution* asserts that the Chinese economy has achieved satisfactory "comprehensive, balanced and sustained" growth, Xi has essentially followed the Jiang and Hu strategies of relying on injections of state funding in to infrastructure and real-estate projects to jack up GDP numbers. This approach has generated unprecedented debt accumulations at all levels of government, and has also contributed to enterprises and consumers incurring large debts ([Deutsche Welle Chinese](#), October 6; [Sohu.com](#), January 8). In foreign policy, Xi is praised for raising China's profile internationally through slogans such as attaining a "human community with a shared future" and leading "major-country diplomacy" with the other great powers. However, it is well-known that Beijing has used its investments to bolster relationships with a host of client states in the developing world. Meanwhile, China has become quite isolated in the global arena in part due to the Biden administration's relatively successful efforts to assemble coalitions such as the Quad and AUKUS that seek to rein in China's overweening power projection ([163.com](#), June 8; [Sina.com.cn](#), May 30). This may have spurred Xi's recent call to officials to build up an image of China as a "trustworthy, lovable and respectable" country ([China Daily](#), June 2; [Hong Kong Standard](#), June 2). The *Resolution* does not mention Deng Xiaoping's famous dictum of "taking a low profile and never taking the lead" in world affairs, which many consider a more rational dictum to guide China's foreign policy ([Chinatimes.com](#), April 29).

According to veteran U.S.-based Sinologist Chen Pokong, Xi has encountered opposition to his one-upmanship at the plenum. This helps to explain why one relatively long paragraph in the communique on the *Resolution* is devoted to the policies of ex-presidents Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, who are well-known as Xi's political rivals. The unexpected inclusion of Jiang and Hu in the *Resolution* may be a concession to their followers, many of whom still hold positions at the ministerial level and above ([Radio Free Asia](#), November 11). Furthermore, Xi has continued to use the anti-corruption campaign as a weapon to eradicate real and potential enemies particularly in the sensitive political-legal apparatus. This lack of party unity below the surface indicates that despite the hagiographic language used to lionize Xi's exploits in the *Resolution*, the future of his leadership may well depend on whether he can solve the multi-faceted problems that bedevil China.

Editor's Note: *This article was updated on November 17, 2021 following the release of the full-text of the resolution on CCP history.*

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Infrastructure Development in Tibet and its Implications for India

By Suyash Desai

Introduction

The People's Republic of China (PRC) considers Tibet an intrinsic part of Chinese territory, which it has controlled since the early 1950s. When the People's Liberation Army (PLA) entered the region in 1951, Tibet was sparsely connected, both internally and with China proper. Today, it is well connected by a comprehensive network of highways, railroads, and air routes. This dual-use infrastructure (along with China's recent military modernization and ongoing PLA reforms) helps China to manage the threats emanating from its unresolved border dispute with India, which is the PRC's secondary strategic direction after Taiwan and the Western Pacific [1]. Infrastructure development also supports China's efforts to maintain internal stability within the restive Tibetan region.

This article surveys the civilian infrastructure that China has built in Tibet over the last two decades, including roads, railroads and airports - all of which are dual-use in nature. In doing so, it also briefly discusses the implications of these developments for China's unresolved border dispute with India.

Infrastructure Development

The total road network in Tibet in 1959 was only 7,300 km ([CGTN](#), March 25, 2019). In 2021, however, Tibet's road system has increased to 118,800 km, which means it has expanded approximately 4.93 km per day since 1959 ([State Council of the PRC](#), May 21). Although the central leadership has invested heavily in improving Tibet's infrastructure and connectivity, the speed and scale of projects has only really accelerated since 1999, when China launched its "Go West" campaign as a part of the western development strategy (西部大开发, *xibu da kaifa*) ([China.org.in](#), January 17, 2005). Under its 10th and 11th Five-Year Plans, China invested RMB 31.2 billion (US\$4.2 billion) and RMB 137.8 billion (US\$ 21 billion) to undertake 117 and 188 key infrastructure and development projects in Tibet ([Tibet.cn](#), December 3, 2015). Under the 11th Five-Year plan, the center encouraged Chinese cities and companies to assist Tibetan cities and counties by providing them aid under the 101 Aid Program (对口支援, *dui kou zhi yuan*) ([State Council Bulletin](#), March 14, 2006).



(The Lhasa- Nyingchi in Tibet, source: [Xinhua](#))

This emphasis on infrastructure development for the region has continued under General Secretary Xi Jinping. During the 2020 Work Symposium, Xi cited the need for “promotion and construction of a number of major infrastructure and public-service facilities around the Sichuan-Tibet railway line and other roads, and to build more unity lines and happiness roads (in and connecting the region)” ([Xinhua](#), August 30, 2020). He highlighted this as one of the five developments to improve people’s livelihood and unite people’s hearts (五大部署 改善民生、凝聚人心, *wuda bushu gaishan minsheng, ningju renxin*) ([Court.gov.cn](#), August 30, 2020). Under the current 14th Five-Year Plan (FYP), China aims to spend over RMB 190 billion (approximately \$30 billion) on infrastructure projects in Tibet between 2021 and 2025 ([Xinhua](#), March 6). The regional transportation department states that by 2025, Tibet will exceed 1300 km of expressways, and have over 120,000 km in highways total.

Tibet-related projects in the 14th FYP include the Ya’an to Nyingchi phase of the Sichuan Tibet Railway line, preliminary work on the Hotan-Shigatse and Gyirong-Shigatse (China-Nepal border) railway lines, and the Chengdu-Wuhan-Shanghai high-speed railway network ([Gov.cn](#), March 13). The plan also mentions upgrading the national highways G219 and G318 – both of which run parallel to the China-India border near Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh.

The following table outlines China's ongoing and completed road and railroad projects in Tibet. It includes national highways and railroads connecting China Proper to Tibet, Tibet to Xinjiang, and the intra-province network.

Table 1: Tibet's Roadway and Railroad Network

Project Description	Project Details
Roadways	
National Highway G6/ G109	G109 connects Beijing to Lhasa. The G6 is the portion that connects Lhasa to Xining in Qinghai. The construction for the 1,897 km Xining-Lhasa stretch began in February 2018 [2].
National Highway G219 / G564	G219 connects Xinjiang to Tibet. It originates from Yecheng in Xinjiang and terminates at Lhatse in Tibet. The road was constructed in 1957, however, under 13th FYP, China started upgrading it. G564 will emerge from G219 and will reach Purang near the China-India-Nepal tri-junction. It will pass between Mansarovar and Rakshas lake.
National Highway G318	The 14th FYP discusses the extension of G318. G318 connects Shanghai to Tibet through Chengdu in Sichuan. It then enters Nepal near Zhangmu near the China-Tibet border. The road passes through Nyingchi, close to the China-India border near Arunachal Pradesh, and a feeder road originating from G318 also reaches opposite Tawang near Cono county.
National Highway G317	G317 originates in Chengdu, Sichuan and runs parallel to G318 through Chamdo and Nagqu before meeting G109- which meets G318 at Lhasa.
National Highway G 580	G580 is currently under construction, and on completion, will connect Ashu to Kangxiwar through Hotan. It would be completed by 2022.
Other Important Highways	G315 (East-west highway connecting Qinghai and Xinjiang); G314 (connecting Urumqi and Khunjerab Pass); G216 (linking northern Xinjiang to Kyirong County in Tibet by meeting G218 near Hejing county in Xinjiang).

Other Roads/Provincial Highways/Feeder roads	Important Pei-Metok Highway (Nyingchi to Mehtok), Lhasa-Nagqu highway, Nagqu-Ngari Ali Highway, Bome to Medok Highway, Qiongjie to Cona Highway, Bayi-Manling Highway, G214 Kunming-Lhasa Highway and more.
Railroads	
Sichuan-Tibet Line	Divided into three sections: 1) Chengdu to Ya'an Section (140 km): Opened in December 2018 2) Lhasa to Nyingchi Section (435 km): Opened in June 2021 3) Ya'an to Nyingchi Section (1, 011 km): Estimated to finish by 2030.
Qinghai-Tibet line	The construction began in 2001 and was completed by 2006. This line was further extended up to Shigatse in 2014. The only railway that connects China proper to Tibet.
Shigatse-Yadong Extension	The Lhasa-Shigatse line will be further extended from Shigatse to Yadong County. Yadong County is the last county on the China-India border near Sikkim and adjacent to India's Nathu la pass.
Shigatse-Gyirong-Katmandu (Nepal)	To be completed by 2022.
South Xinjiang-Tibet Loop	Hotan-Shigatse line (825 km – under construction) largely follows G219 route – unknown if it would enter Aksai Chin region like the highway, Hotan-Ruoqiang line (Xinjiang – under construction), Ruoqiang-Korla Section of the Golmund-Korla line (in operation since 2014) and Gomund-Lhasa Section of the Qinghai-Tibet line (in operation since 2006). Together, these lines form the Tibet-South Xinjiang loop connecting most major cities in the region.
Other Important lines	Yunnan-Tibet line (still planned); Dunhuang-Golmud Railway (opened in 2019).

Source: Compiled from multiple sources including the TAR Government Work Reports from 2009-2021.
<http://www.xizang.gov.cn/zwgk/xxfb/zfgzbq/>

Furthermore, the 14th Five Year Plan (FYP) also sets out that China will develop the Chengdu-Chongqing “world-class” airport cluster, and expand Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport ([Gov.cn](#), March 13). The FYP states that China will add 30 more civilian transport airports, but does not specify the location of these facilities. The construction of these 30 airports will be in addition to the 12 existing operational or under construction airports in Tibet and the South Xinjiang region around the Indian borders.

Map 1: Airports in Tibet [3]



Map by Aneesh Jaganath, Researcher at The Takshashila Institution.

Impact on Border Dispute with India

Mobilization of Forces for Counter-attack Campaigns

Chinese military texts describe an approach to securing its territory through 'border area counter-attack campaign' (边境地区反击战, *bianjing diqu fanji zhan*). As international security expert M. Taylor Fravel argues, these campaigns occur in two phases. The first phase begins with defensive operations to create favorable conditions for the counterattack after the adversary's initial strike. The second phase includes counter-attacking after main force units have arrived in the theater of operation from the interior [4]. For China, a contingency with India would play out in Tibet and the Southern Xinjiang border regions involving the Western Theater Command's 76th and 77th Group Armies, as well as forces from the PLA's Central and possibly Southern Theater Commands.

The improved infrastructure that China has built over the last two decades makes mobilization of the armed forces to counter India relatively faster and easier. For instance, the Sichuan-Tibet railway connects Chengdu to Lhasa. Chengdu and the adjacent municipality of Chongqing host the PLA's 77th Group Army, which would be one of the first units to mobilize after the Tibet and Xinjiang Military Districts in the event of an escalation of conflict with India. The average travel time from Chengdu to Lhasa through the existing road and railway network is around 40 hours or more. However, upon completion, the Sichuan-Tibet railway will reduce this trip to 15 hours - making mobilization much quicker. This is just one example of the PLA's improving capacity for mobilization using China's improved connectivity in and around Tibet. As highlighted in table 1, China is raising

multiple road and railroad lines to connect Tibet internally, Tibet with China proper and Tibet and Xinjiang autonomous regions. This rail and railroad network, on completion in the next 10- 15 years, would help the PLA, the People's Armed Police (PAP), the border defense forces and the militia to mobilize quickly in case of a contingency on the border with India.

Logistics Supply during Protracted Conflicts

China and India have been involved in multiple stand-offs along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh over the past 20 months. Both countries have also forward deployed their forces along the entire border since the beginning of the ongoing stand-off since May 2020. With the recent failure of 13th Corps Commander-level talks in October 2021, it looks like the forces will have to withstand another harsh winter of forward deployment along the border.

Table 1 highlights that China has constructed national and provincial highways and connected the important border points to these highways and major Tibetan towns with feeder roads. As witnessed over the course of the past twenty months, these feeder roads help ensure forward-deployed troops receive timely resupply of food, ammunition and other essentials despite tough terrain and harsh conditions. This is unlike the Indian side, which is still trying to strike a balance between national security and environmental concerns – impacting its combat ability and preparedness ([The Times of India](#), November 10).

In addition to facilitating mobilization of forces and logistical supply, improved infrastructure also helps China to integrate the restive Tibetan region with China proper and monitor cross-border Tibetan migration, which could impact internal stability and security.

Conclusion

Although the CCP has ruled Tibet since the early 1950s, the scale and scope of regional development increased only after the PRC launched the Go West campaign in 1999. Under President Xi Jinping, China has continued building a vast network of infrastructure projects like roads, railroads and airports in Tibet - all with dual-use capabilities. The combination of the dual-use civilian infrastructure development and the recent military modernization has helped China to gain an operational advantage along the border with India.

Besides roadways and railways, China's three major arteries (oil pipeline, internet and power connectivity) and the latest "well-off villages in border areas" have also played a vital role in stabilizing the region and securing the border. Part II in this series focuses on these developments and their impact on the border dispute with India.

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Notes:

[1] M. Taylor Fravel, "China's "World-Class Military" Ambitions: Origins and Implications," *The Washington Quarterly*, March, 2020 43:1, 85-99.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1735850?journalCode=rwaq20>

[2] The construction of G6 was started after the 2017 China-India Doklam stand-off. However, it was planned long before the standoff.

[3] The data for this map is compiled from multiple sources including the TAR Government Work Reports from 2009-2021 <http://www.xizang.gov.cn/zwgk/xxfb/zfqzbg/>; Sim Tack, "A Military Drive Spells Out China's Intent Along the Indian Border," *Stratfor*, September 22, 2020, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/military-drive-spells-out-chinas-intent-along-indian-border>; Tyler Rogoway, "Tracking China's Sudden Airpower Expansion on its Western Border," *The Drive*, June 16, 2021. <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/41065/tracking-chinas-sudden-airpower-expansion-along-its-western-border>

[4] For more see M. Taylor Fravel, "Securing Borders: China's Doctrine and Force Structure for Frontier Defense," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 30:4-5, 722-723.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01402390701431790>

Australia-China Tensions Simmer Amid Trade War and AUKUS

By William Yuen Yee



(Australian and Chinese flag next to another (Source: China Daily).

Introduction

In a speech about the impact of the ongoing trade war with China on Australia, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said that the “economy has shown itself to be highly resilient” ([Department of the Treasury of Australia](#), September 6). In his address, Frydenberg conveyed a defiant message to Beijing that Australia will not be deterred by economic coercion. Frydenberg’s speech is part of a series of recent episodes that have driven escalating tensions in Sino-Australian relations.

In response, Chinese state-owned media outlets published articles criticizing Frydenberg’s remarks. An op-ed in the *Global Times* described Frydenberg’s thinking as “deluded” and his speech as “parroting” the rhetoric of US officials ([Global Times](#), September 7). Articles from Xinhua frequently cited the analysis of James Laurenceson, director of the Sydney-based Australia-China Relations Institute, who said that Australia should not “automatically” follow the United States in viewing China as a “strategic competitor” ([Xinhua](#), September 14).

This exchange of rhetorical barbs has spiraled into a China-Australia trade war. Since early 2019, Beijing has imposed restrictions and tariffs on a host of Australian exports such as wine, barley, sugar, lobster, coal, and copper ore ([Australian Broadcasting Corporation](#), December 16, 2020). Australia has responded by voicing concerns about China's increasingly assertive behavior in the Indo-Pacific region, calling for an independent inquiry into the origins of the coronavirus, and most recently, joining AUKUS. In collaboration with Britain and the United States, Australia will receive nuclear-powered submarine technology through the security pact in a trilateral effort to counter Beijing, which China claims undermines nuclear nonproliferation norms ([Xinhua](#), October 13). It has been nearly a year since the start of the trade war and a month since the announcement of AUKUS. Current relations remain tense and their future uncertain.

Background

Ties between China and Australia were not always so frosty. Less than a decade ago, both countries enjoyed a warm relationship. In his 2014 visit to Australia, Chinese President Xi Jinping received an enthusiastic ovation and said that the friendships between the people of both nations were "able to climb over mountains and fly over seas" ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China](#), November 17, 2014). One year later, both states signed a bilateral free trade agreement ([Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China](#), March 27, 2017). In October 2018, Victoria, the wealthiest state in Australia, signed a memorandum of understanding for the Belt and Road Initiative with China's government.

But relations started to sour over concerns about Beijing's expanding political influence in Canberra. Worsening US-China relations also heightened Australia's tensions with China, making it more difficult for Canberra to straddle the middle ground between both superpowers. In 2018, Australia became the first country to publicly ban Chinese telecom firms Huawei and ZTE from constructing its domestic 5G network ([The Sydney Morning Herald](#), August 23, 2018). Earlier, Australia urged Beijing to abide by the 2016 Hague tribunal ruling that rejected China's expansive claims in the South China Sea. In a fiery op-ed, China's state-backed *Global Times* warned: "If Australia steps into the South China Sea waters, it will be an ideal target for China to warn and strike" ([Global Times](#), July 30, 2016). Relations further plunged in 2020 when Prime Minister Scott Morrison called for an independent investigation into the origins of COVID-19 ([Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Sydney](#), July 14, 2020). Hu Xijin, the editor-in-chief of the *Global Times*, responded by characterizing Australia as "chewing gum stuck on the sole of China's shoes" on Weibo, China's version of Twitter. In August 2020, Chinese authorities detained Cheng Lei, a popular Chinese state-television news anchor of Australian descent, and charged her with allegedly "supplying state secrets overseas" ([Australian Broadcasting Corporation](#), April 28). Finally, this year, the Australian government canceled Victoria's BRI agreement ([Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia](#), April 21).

Trade War

China is Australia's largest trading partner by far. In 2007, China overtook Japan to become Australia's biggest trading partner, and today accounts for 31 percent of Australia's global trade ([Department of Foreign Affairs](#)

[and Trade of Australia](#), accessed November 12). Australia's economy is heavily dependent on trade and particularly its exports of natural resources. China purchased 39.1 percent of Australia's total exports in 2019, which included a whopping 81.7 percent of its iron ore ([Observatory of Economic Complexity](#), accessed November 12).

Beijing has sought to punish Australia's tougher political stances toward China by using its economic heft and launching a trade war. The northern Chinese port city of Dalian banned imports of Australian coal in February 2019. In 2020, China levied anti-dumping and anti-subsidy duties on Australian barley, launched anti-dumping and anti-subsidy probes on Australian wines, and halted beef imports from four of Australia's largest meat processors ([Reuters](#), December 10, 2020). Beijing has also sanctioned other Australian exports for obscure technical reasons. Chinese customs officers delayed imports of shellfish products from Western Australia over "inspection and quarantine measures." Authorities banned imports of timber from the northeastern state of Queensland over the detection of "live pests such as longicorn and buprestid beetles" ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China](#), November 2, 2020).

Trade statistics show that Australia's economy has mostly weathered the negative effects of the trade war, as Frydenberg pointed out in his address. Roland Rajah, an economist at the Sydney-based Lowy Institute, called China's attempt at political and economic coercion a failure ([The Australian](#), April 14). While trade of the Australian goods targeted by Chinese sanctions fell by \$5.4 billion, exports of those same goods to the rest of the world increased by \$4.4 billion, signaling a relatively modest \$1 billion net loss. Australia's coal exports to China over 2021 fell by around 30 million tons, but its coal exports to the rest of the world rose by 28 million tons ([Department of the Treasury of Australia](#), September 6).

Not all Australian products have rebounded from the costs of Chinese sanctions. In November 2020, China imposed punishing tariffs of up to 212 percent on Australian wine, which crushed domestic distributors. At the time, Australian wine had 40 percent of the world's import market "value in 2020. Now, it has just 6 percent" ([The Sydney Morning Herald](#), October 16). To make matters worse, competing winemakers from other countries have benefited at Australia's expense: France's global wine market share increased from 28 to 35 percent, and Chile's share rose from 16 to 23 percent. China's punitive tariffs have led some members of the Australian Parliament to push for protectionist policies such as increased domestic subsidies for manufacturers and a "Buy Australian Act" that favors local suppliers. Such policies are the only way to "fight fire with fire," according to these politicians ([National Party Manufacturing Paper](#), January 26). Despite these concerns over economic vulnerability to China, the governing center-right Liberal Party has said that Australia does not plan to abandon its commitment to free and open international trade.

Notwithstanding losses in some sectors, much of Australia's economy has largely adjusted, and even thrived, by embracing new products and finding new export markets. A significant portion of Australia's coal exports have been redirected to consumers in India, and exports are now higher than before China imposed sanctions. As West Australian barley farmer Graeme Robertson put it: "One door closes and another one opens." After Beijing imposed a crippling 80 percent tariff on Australian barley, just 33,000 tons of barley were exported to

China. Yet Saudi Arabia replaced China as the biggest market, importing 1.5 million tons of Australian barley ([Australian Broadcasting Corporation](#), May 16). Other barley farmers switched from growing barley to canola. As a result, Australia is expected to harvest a record canola crop of more than 5 million tons in 2021, according to government data ([South China Morning Post](#), October 15).

The current trade dispute violates prior economic agreements involving Australia and China. Both countries signed a bilateral free trade agreement in 2015 and recently ratified the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which is arguably the world's largest trade deal and includes 15 Asia-Pacific countries. In December 2020, Australia accused China of undermining their bilateral trade agreement with tariffs. Trade Minister Simon Birmingham said that officials in Beijing have denied repeated requests for meetings, further contravening the terms of the 2015 trade deal ([BBC News](#), December 9, 2020). At the 2020 Caixin Summit in Beijing, Australian deputy trade secretary Christopher Langman said that RCEP should remind both countries to abide by international trading rules and "to engage with each other as equals" ([South China Morning Post](#), November 16, 2020). Nevertheless, Chinese economic pressure on Australian exports is unlikely to abate anytime soon.

AUKUS Security Pact

The AUKUS trilateral security pact between Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, which was announced in September, further roiled Sino-Australian relations. Under the agreement, the US and UK will share advanced nuclear submarine technology with Australia. The three countries will also share information about long-range strike capabilities, artificial intelligence, and underwater systems ([The Sydney Morning Herald](#), September 16).

Some observers have hailed the pact as a strategic victory for Australia, but the move has not come without criticism. Chinese and some Western security experts have voiced concerns that the nuclear cooperation involved might inspire increased proliferation to non-nuclear states and incur scrutiny from the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency ([China Military](#), October 28). Regardless, the deal underscores that Canberra sides with Washington over Beijing, signaling a departure from its previously more ambiguous stance that sought to avoid choosing between both countries. To many observers, the deal also exemplified clumsy diplomacy. In order to join AUKUS, Canberra abruptly terminated a \$90 billion deal with French submarine maker Naval Group, signed back in 2016, to build 12 diesel-electric submarines. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian described AUKUS as "a stab in the back." President Emmanuel Macron recalled his ambassadors from Canberra, although he later reinstated them ([Australian Financial Review](#), September 16). The move has effectively frozen progress toward an EU-Australian free trade agreement and significantly damaged Canberra's standing in Europe.

The defense pact has divided the nation's former prime ministers: While Tony Abbot, a member of the Liberal Party, supports it, Paul Keating of the center-left Labor Party opposes it. Malcolm Turnbull, a former Liberal prime minister who signed the now-axed French submarine deal, described the move as an "own goal"

([Malcolm Turnbull](#), September 29; [Foreign Policy](#), October 6). Regardless, current Liberal Prime Minister Scott Morrison remains steadfast in his support of the move, which he previously described as a “forever partnership” ([The Sydney Morning Herald](#), September 25).

China has publicly blasted the agreement. Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin described the pact as an “Anglo-Saxon clique” that “smacks of obsolete Cold War zero-sum mentality” ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China](#), October 22). He also claimed that the deal to share nuclear submarine technology with Australia violates the “object and purpose” of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. At the Beijing Xiangshan Forum in October, Chinese experts criticized the pact as seeking to confront “imaginary enemies” and reflecting Washington’s “unilateral and narrow-minded security outlook.” Others argued that the pact exemplified America’s longstanding use of “double standards” on nuclear non-proliferation, in which Washington prohibits states like Iran from developing such technology but willingly exports similar weapons to allies like Australia ([China Military](#), October 28).

Public Opinion

Not all Australians support the shift to a strategy with greater focus on countering China. Former Prime Minister Paul Keating has criticized Australia for “its needless provocations against China” and “fawning compulsion to please America” ([Australian Financial Review](#), September 3). Keating has long pushed for Australia to develop a more independent regional policy that does not overly rely on US assistance. Former Australian ambassador to China Geoff Raby has said that Australia should avoid raising every human rights issue with China and instead criticize “the ones that really matter.” ([The Sydney Morning Herald](#), November 11, 2020) [1]. Penny Wong, a Labor senator, has previously urged the government to “stop focusing on splashy headlines” and instead focus on assisting the domestic exporters who depend on China for their jobs ([Australian Broadcasting Corporation](#), December 5, 2020).

Surveys indicate that most Australians back the increasingly tough China stance adopted by Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s government. A poll from the Lowy Institute found that nearly two out of three Australians view Beijing as more of a security threat than an economic partner ([South China Morning Post](#), June 23). 56 percent of Australians believe that “China is more to blame” than Australia for current bilateral tensions. In November 2020, a separate Lowy survey found that 82 percent of respondents expressed concern about China’s political influence in Australia ([Lowy Institute](#), accessed November 12).

Most Australian politicians seem to be on the same page as well. Despite its somewhat more conciliatory rhetoric toward China, the opposition Labor Party has supported the Morrison government’s major policies, including the Huawei ban, the passage of laws aimed at combating foreign interference, and the call for an independent inquiry into the origins of the coronavirus in Wuhan. Members of Labor are mostly in “lockstep with the government,” explained Dave Sharma, an Australian politician and former ambassador to Israel ([Financial Times](#), December 16, 2020).

Conclusion

“Our external environment has become more challenging,” Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said in his speech on Beijing’s trade war with Canberra. “And it is likely to remain that way for some time to come.” His remarks reflect the reality that China-Australia tensions are unlikely to improve anytime soon. The signing of the AUKUS security pact in September only affirms this.

At this point, it is too early to determine whether Beijing’s campaign of political and economic coercion against Australia has “failed.” So far, at least, it has not succeeded in pushing Canberra toward a more pliant and accommodating approach to China. While some Australian industries have suffered under China’s trade sanctions, most have successfully navigated the uncertain waters by diversifying export markets and products. With AUKUS, Canberra has secured access to top-secret nuclear submarine technology from the world’s most powerful military. Beijing struck Canberra with a fusillade of tariffs to coerce it into adopting more pro-China political viewpoints, but the Morrison government has not budged. China significantly trails in the battle for the hearts and minds of Australia’s citizens, and domestic public support for Canberra’s outspoken anti-China posture has only increased.

For now, Australia’s government and domestic industries have stood firm and weathered China’s attacks. Only time will tell what happens next.

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Notes

[1] Raby runs a business advisory firm in Beijing and sits on the board of the coal producer Yancoal, which is majority owned by a state-backed Chinese company.

Evolving Missions and Capabilities of the PLA Rocket Force: Implications for Taiwan and Beyond

Yuan-Chou Jing and Yi-Ren Lai

Introduction

According to a recent Taiwan Ministry of National Defense (MND) report, the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is strengthening its superior capabilities within the battlespace of the first island chain, and bolstering its deterrence capabilities beyond the second island chain in order to fully develop the ability to invade Taiwan by

force ([Central News Agency](#), August 31). A central assumption in the MND report is that the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF) will conduct saturation strikes against critical military and political facilities in Taiwan during the initial phase of the war.

However, the PLA may be shifting toward a strategy against Taiwan that is not limited solely to saturation strikes, especially as Taiwan's defenses against these kinds of attacks have improved [1]. For the PLARF, a far more cost-effective approach than eliminating all of Taiwan's forces on the battlefield, is to launch a series of surgical strikes that paralyze its combat capabilities. As a result, the PLARF has improved its technology in an effort to develop its "effective damage" (有效毁伤, *you xiao hui shang*) capabilities ([CCTV](#), December 17, 2017).

Chinese state-owned media recently announced a "new type of missile" (新型导弹, *xinxing daodan*), which is part of the PLARF 1st Conventional Missile Brigade (常规导弹第一旅, *Changgui Daodan di yi lu*) ([CCTV](#), August 22). The media claimed that the missile system can hit "targets under multiple protections" (多重防护下目标, *duochong fanghu xia mubiao*) after flying hundreds of kilometers. The report also emphasized that live ammunition training "expanded the choice of new warheads" (拓展新质弹头种类, *tuozhan xinshi dantou zhonglei*) and can "effectively paralyze information nodes" (有效毁瘫信息节点, *youxiao hui tan xinxi jie dian*).

According to Song Zhongping (宋忠平), a former PLARF official, this type of missile can be used to destroy sea and air bases and thereby obtain naval and air dominance in order to facilitate subsequent waves of fighters, warships, and amphibious landing forces onto Taiwan proper ([Netease](#), August 22).

This article uses PLA sources, Chinese military industry publications, and analyses of PLARF launch units and their battle performance to argue that China's newly tested guided missile is primarily intended for action in the Taiwan theater. The new missile is more accurate and lethal than previous ordinance intended for first strikes. This capability strengthens the PLARF's ability to target radar stations, communication nodes, and Command and Control (C2) systems in order to negate Taiwan's early-warning and battlefield awareness capabilities.



Figure 1: **The PLARF's new-type of missile** (Source: CCTV, August 21, 2021)

Missions and Roles of the 1st Conventional Missile Brigade

The 2015 military reforms established both the PLARF (previously the second artillery force) as a service on par with army, navy and air forces; and created a joint regional theater command system. The Eastern Theater Command (ETC) is the main joint force responsible for operations targeting Taiwan, and includes command and control of the conventional missile forces in Base 61 (Anhui, Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangxi, Zhejiang). Nuclear forces are still under the control of the Central Military Commission (CMC). The 61st base comprises seven missile brigades (611-617) each of which is responsible for operating a specific type of missile system [2].

The 1st Conventional Missile Brigade refers to the 613th Brigade, which is deployed in Shang Rao, Jiangxi Province and armed with DF-15B short-range ballistic missiles. Since its initial deployment in 1993, the chief mission of this unit has been to target Taiwan. In the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis, the Brigade fired as many as 10 missiles into the Taiwan Straits ([China Youth Daily](#), June 11, 2013). Taiwanese officials stated in 2004 that the primary task of PLA missile brigades deployed on the southeast coast of mainland China is to attack Taiwan. The 613th Brigade's target list includes government authorities that are mainly in Northern Taiwan [3].

Figure 2: **PLARF Base 61: Headquarters and Launch Brigades**

PLARF unit (MUCD)	Location	System	Possible target
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61 Base (96601)	Huangshan, Anhui (Headquarters)		
611th Brigade (96711)	Chizhou, Anhui	DF-21A*	Northeast Asia
612th Brigade (96712)	Jingdezhen, Jiangxi	DF-21A*	Western Pacific
613th Brigade (96713) (The 1 st Conventional Missile Brigade)	Shangrao, Jiangxi	DF-15B	Northern Taiwan
614th Brigade (96714)	Yong'an, Fujian	DF-11A	Central Taiwan
615th Brigade (96715)	Meizhou, Guangdong	DF-11A	Southern Taiwan
616th Brigade (96716)	Ganzhou, Jiangxi	DF-15B	Southern Taiwan
617th Brigade (96717)	Jinhua, Zhejiang	DF-16A	Northern Taiwan

Source: compiled by authors.

Due to the 613th Brigade's Taiwan-focused mission and its relatively advanced training level, the PLA leadership has been willing to invest resources in the unit over the long-term. PLA news accounts confirm that the 613th Brigade enjoys a special status and receives additional training resources. For example, the 613th Brigade took 17 years (1993-2010) to conduct 100 live-fire training exercises making it the first PLARF unit to reach this benchmark ([China Youth Daily](#), June 10, 2012). The Brigade took only seven more years, from 2010-17, to complete its 200th live ammunition training ([China Military Network](#), February 8, 2018). In comparison to other missile brigades, the training resources devoted to the 613th Brigade is much higher. This is because the ETC (successor to the Nanjing Military Region) would be at the front line of an attack against Taiwan, and the 613th brigade targets would play a central role in any assault as it is responsible for targeting political and economic centers in Taipei and surrounding areas in northern Taiwan.

Figure 3: Currently known PLARF Brigades that have Completed 100 Live Fire Exercises

PLARF Brigade	Establishment	Missiles	Year of completion of 100 th live-fire exercise	Avg. trg. [4]
<u>613th Brigade</u>	1993	Unknown	2010 (reached 200 in 2017)	4-5
<u>614th Brigade</u>	1997	Unknown	2015	2
<u>615th Brigade</u>	unknown	Unknown	2016	2
<u>623th Brigade</u>	2009	Unknown	2019	2

Source: compiled by authors; Avg. trg.: Average live-fire training times per launch vehicle.

A Tactical Shift From Surface-Oriented Saturation Attacks to Precision-Strikes

According to the Science of Military Strategy (战略学, *zhanlue xue*), the textbook used by most high-level PLA commanders, the main tactic of the 613th Brigade is conventional missile assault (常规导弹突袭, *changgui daodan tuxi*), which is also the “first strike” tactic that the PLARF is organized to undertake. This tactic serves multiple purposes of containment, deterrence, and control. It has a deterrence function to “contain the outbreak of conventional local wars in peacetime” (在和平时期遏制常规局部战争的爆发, *zai heping shiqi ezhi changgui jubu zhanzheng de baofa*);” and can also “control the spread and escalation of the conflict after the outbreak of the war (在战争爆发后遏制蔓延和升级, *zai zhanzheng baofa hou ezhi manyan he shengji*)” [5].

First strike tactics involve saturation attacks using a great deal of missiles against enemy “surface” targets, including airports, military ports, and concentrated ground forces. Their goal is to destroy the enemy’s defense systems and disrupt its counter-attack capabilities. As a CCTV report reiterates, missiles seek to “paralyze information nodes under multiple protections.” In addition to carrying out saturation strikes against surface targets, the PLARF is now likely capable of precision-striking “point” targets (CCTV, August 22) Furthermore, the newly tested missiles mentioned above may be able to deliver electromagnetic pulse missile (EMPM) or graphite payloads, that can destroy electronic equipment, as well as bunker-busting warheads that can penetrate underground fortifications.

Concern 1: PLARF use of EMP and Graphite Weapons

When covering PLA issues, Chinese state-owned media usually avoids using the word "destroy" (摧毁, *cuihui*) in an operational context, and instead uses the term "paralyze" (瘫痪, *tanhuan*). There are two possible reasons for this cautious word choice. First, as several analysts have pointed out, China may have tested electromagnetic pulse missile (EMPMs) ([Global Times, October 18, 2013](#)). As a result, when Beijing claims it can paralyze information nodes, it simply implies the capacity to disable Taiwan's early warning and combat capabilities. Secondly, before the PLA conducts a large-scale triphibious landing, it will seek to blind and paralyze Taiwanese forces from mounting a timely defense.

In addition, the PLARF has gained inspiration from the 1991 Gulf War and 1999 Yugoslavia air campaign, when the US attacked a power plant using graphite missiles thereby disrupting Serbia's national power supply ([PLA Daily](#), September 4, 2001) [6]. If the PLA models itself after the US in the fight against Taiwan, the deterrence effect of air and missile strikes will be straightforward and widespread, causing social turmoil and psychological panic. As a result, for the PLA, attacking Taiwan's power supply may allow it to achieve its objectives through limited warfare.

It is worth noting that the PLA historically regarded EMP weapons as part of the nuclear family because EMP create a large shockwave, optical emission and penetrating radiation. For example Major General (Ret.) Xu Guangyu (徐光裕), a nuclear expert at the previous General Staff Department, once classified "EMP weapons as a branch of nuclear weapons" (电磁脉冲炸弹属于核武器的一个种类, *dianci maichong zhadan shuyú hewuqi de yige zhonglei*) and "even an advanced version of the nuclear arms" (核武器更高一级的一种发展, *hewuqi geng gao yi ji de yi zhong fazha*) ([CCTV](#), June 30, 2011). This historical heritage leaves us to puzzle over the role of EMP weapons in China's current approach to conventional and nuclear deterrence, as well as warfighting.

Concern 2: Ground-penetrating bombs

According to *Weapon*, which is published by China North Industries Group Corporation (CNIGC) and data from other PLA-related units, the second artillery (PLARF's predecessor) tested a "new missile" in September 2013. The missile's warhead was identified as a DF-15C with a shooting range of about 900 kilometers [7]. The missile test's high degree of accuracy generated concern. State media reports indicate that it can effectively penetrate underground fortifications such as operation centers and command posts ([People's Daily](#), October 29, 2013). Further analysis also indicates that "ground-penetrating bombs" were provided to the 807th Brigade for firing tests. The 807th has now been renamed the PLARF 611th Brigade, and is currently deployed in the ETC in Chizhou, Anhui Province, where it is out of range of most of Taiwan's weaponry. Successful test firings using "ground-penetrating bombs", demonstrates that the PLA's lethality and accuracy when using these weapons has improved, and that weapons are progressing beyond the "test" stage toward "deployment".

Figure 4: PLA released the surface-to-surface tactical missile system, a variant of DF-15B



Source: *Weapon*, 2013

Is Taiwan the only country at risk?

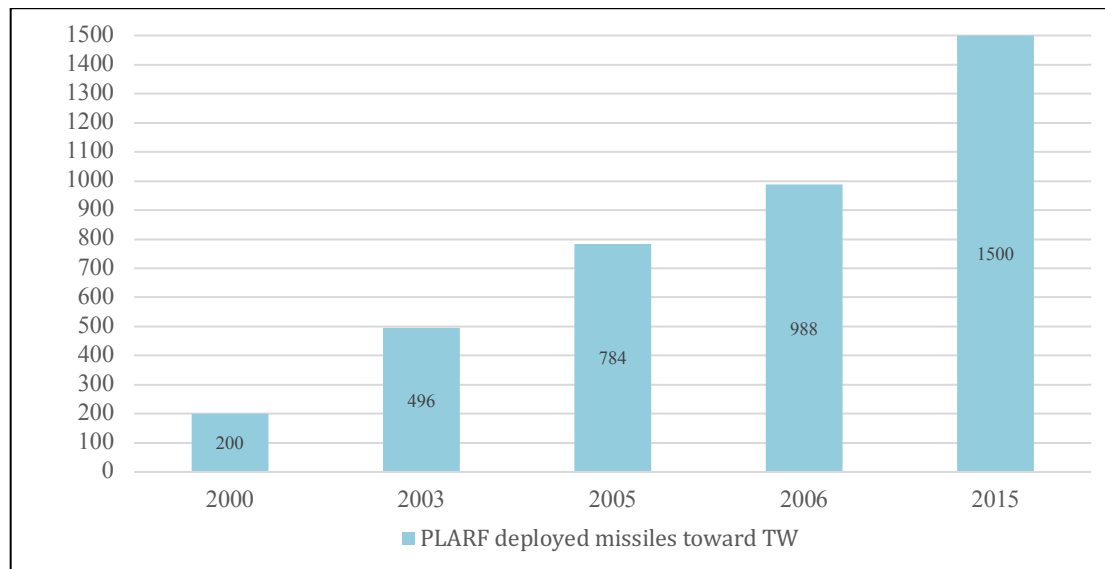
The PLA has already begun to install new ballistic missiles at Base 61 across the Taiwan Straits. The strengthening of the PLA's missile capabilities will enhance the Central Military Commission's confidence in the slogan of "Being capable of fighting and winning" (能打仗，打胜仗, *neng dazhang, da shengzhang*). The missile deployments also indicate that Beijing may be strongly tempted to use force (or the threat of force) to change the cross-strait status quo. According to Taiwan's official statistics, the Second Artillery/PLARF deployed about 200 missiles targeting Taiwan in 2000, 496 in 2003, 784 in 2005, 988 in 2006, and about 1500 in 2015 [8].

Figure 5: The nine PLARF bases within the five theaters commands



Source: compiled by authors.

Figure 6: Deployed PLARF missiles targeting Taiwan



Source: compiled by authors.

To date, the PLA has not justified its need for military modernization solely in terms of competition with the United States, at least not in propaganda terms. Anyhow, there are still 30 years of technological gaps to overcome before China will achieve its goal of "building a world-class military." However, there are many indicators that the PLA considers the U.S. military a potential adversary, and its primary obstacle to achieving its military objectives in a Taiwan contingency.

In the future, as the PLA's conventional missile force successfully develops and deploys new types of missiles, its mission will likely diversify further. In other words, the PLARF will develop the capacity to launch more types of missiles within the same force unit. At the same time, the PLARF will also seek to improve its battlefield efficiency, and to develop the capacity to paralyze the enemy's combat capability at a lower cost.

Finally, it is important to note that Taiwan is not the only country under threat from the PLARF's expanding missile arsenal. The PLARF's next deployment of its new precision strike missiles may be to units in the Northern Theater Command (NTC). Increasing the NTC's firepower will increase the threat not only to Taiwan, but also against U.S. troops stationed in Japan as well as other allied forces beyond the first island-chain. The stakes are higher than they appear at first sight.

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Notes

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[2] David Logan, "Making Sense of China's Missile Forces," in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, eds., Philp C. Saunders et al, (NDU Press, 2019), 404.

[3] Besides, missile forces deployed in Yong'an and Xianyou, Fujian province, primarily attack midterm and southern Taiwan, others deployed in Meizhou, Guangdong province target southern Taiwan [部署在福建永安和仙游的導彈則可攻擊我中南部，廣東梅州的導彈則以台灣南部為重點打擊目標]. See:

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[6] Liu Yue-Jun [刘粤军], Zhang Li-Ming [张利明], Xin-Xilu [辛锡禄]. *Non-contact Warfare* [非接触战]. Beijing: Military Science Press [军事科学出版社]. 2004. pp. 2-3.

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[8] Taiwan's National Security Council Secretary General's comments in the press, see: [Epochtimes](#), January 10, 2006; Mainland Affairs Council (Taiwan). Recent information on the PLA intimidation against Taiwan [中共近期對台軍事威嚇資料]. March 13, 2007. <https://reurl.cc/7okyed>; MND (Taiwan). National Defense Report 2015 [104年中華民國國防報告書]. Taipei: MND. 2015. p. 46.
