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**China’s Shifting Approach to Alliance Politics**

*By John S. Van Oudenaren*

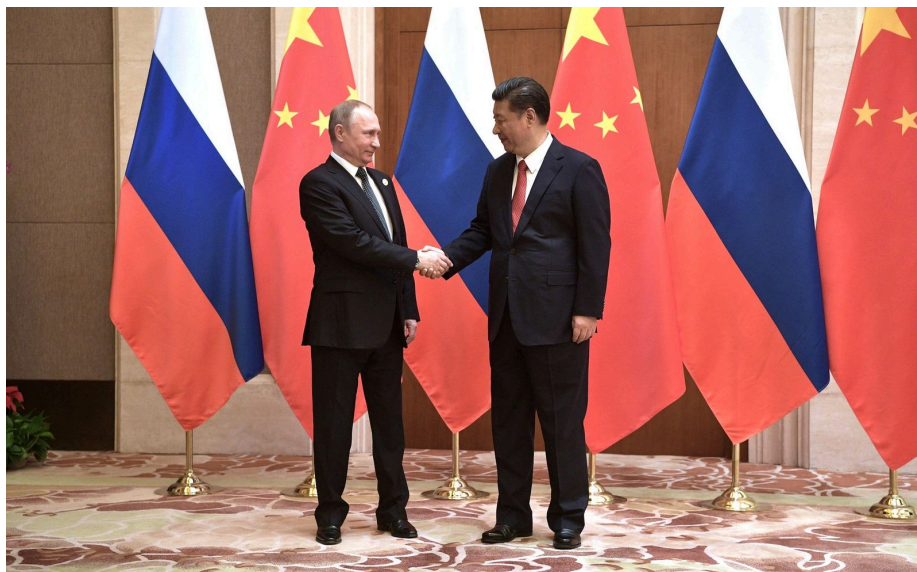
For decades, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has abstained from seeking formal alliances. Chinese leaders often invoke the principle of advancing state-to-state relations through “dialogue rather than confrontation [and] partnerships rather than alliances” (对话不对抗、结伴不结盟, *duihua bu duikang, jieban bu jiemeng*) ([Xinhuanet](#), June 23; [Gov.cn](#), November 22, 2021). The PRC highlights its multitude of strategic partnerships and lack of official alliances as emblematic of its self-proclaimed anti-hegemonic approach to international relations, which is predicated on inclusivity, mutual respect and “win-win cooperation.” Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propaganda regularly juxtaposes this purportedly positive-sum approach to

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world politics with its stock depiction of the United States as a decaying but violent empire, which practices a ruthless brand of power politics based on zero-sum thinking. For the CCP, America’s “cold war mentality” manifests in its global military presence and formal security alliances in Europe and Asia, which Beijing characterizes as “closed and exclusive cliques” ([PRC Foreign Ministry \[FMPRC\]](#), April 12; [China Brief](#), October 22, 2021).

Under President Xi Jinping, the PRC has gone beyond promoting virtues such as inclusivity, dialogue, mutual respect, peace-building and common development in world politics as a kind of rhetorical armor against Western criticism, and has begun to invoke these principles to justify its efforts to reshape the existing international order. The blueprint for these efforts is Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, which sets forth achieving a “community with a shared future for mankind” through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and other programs as a central goal ([People’s Daily](#), May 16). Beijing’s efforts to develop new multilateral institutions were originally economic and diplomatic in nature, but the PRC has now begun to position itself as a global security leader. This spring, Xi announced the launch of a new Global Security Initiative ([China Brief](#), May 13). At the recent BRICS leaders’ virtual summit, Xi stated that the initiative is a response to unprecedented international instability and insecurity, which he primarily blamed on “some countries,” i.e. the U.S. and its allies, “seeking absolute security, coercing other countries to choose sides and fostering confrontation between blocs, and ignoring the rights and interests of other countries” ([People.cn](#), June 29). Indeed, Beijing has evinced growing concern that in the Indo-Pacific region the U.S. and its allies are moving from a “hub and spokes” model of bilateral security alliances to a collective security system.

Clearly, the emergence of a collective security organization in the Indo-Pacific region, akin to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Europe, would impede the PRC’s quest to achieve a more Sinocentric order in Asia and beyond. Would an “Asian NATO” drive China to break from its longstanding aversion to formal alliances? Any tangible benefits such security pacts might provide to Beijing would need to be weighed against the potential normative costs of abandoning a longstanding operating principle of PRC foreign policy. As a result, China will likely continue to deepen its ties with close strategic partners, developing relationships that are alliances in all but name.



(Image: Chinese President Xi Jinping shakes hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2017, source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

## Beijing's NATO Fixation

In the CCP's official narrative, the U.S. is a declining but militaristic hegemon, which cloaks its Machiavellian actions in high-sounding, liberal rhetoric. State media regularly depict U.S. ally and partner networks as enablers of Washington's addiction to hegemony ([Guangming ribao](#), May 2). This narrative has recently become even more pronounced as the PRC seeks to frame the Russia-Ukraine War primarily as a consequence of U.S. power politics— especially Washington's backing of NATO's post-Cold War eastward expansion. The constant criticisms of NATO serve to reconcile the contradiction between Beijing's claims to an altruistic foreign policy and its entente with Moscow, which has remained close throughout Russia's unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine. However, another key driver of the PRC's heightened criticism of NATO is growing anxiety about the Transatlantic security grouping's increasing focus and engagement with the Asia-Pacific region. Beijing's greatest fear may be that in the aftermath of the Ukraine invasion, the U.S. and its Indo-Pacific allies will come to see NATO as a model for the development of a new, U.S.-led collective security organization in Asia. As a result, although Beijing has traditionally viewed NATO as primarily an actor in Europe and its periphery, the PRC is now increasingly fixated on the Transatlantic alliance's shifting approach to the Indo-Pacific region ([China Brief](#), April 29).

At the Madrid summit in late June, NATO adopted a new Strategic Concept, which declares that the PRC's "stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values" and criticizes the deepening Russia-China partnership for "mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut the rules-based international order" ([NATO](#), June 29). In addition to explicitly identifying China as a threat, the new Strategic Concept also directs NATO to enhance "cooperation with new and existing partners in the Indo-Pacific to tackle cross-regional challenges and shared security interests." In a signal to Beijing that progress on this front is already well underway, the leaders of Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, all joined the Madrid meetings, the first time that leaders from the Indo-Pacific region have participated in a NATO summit ([NATO](#), June 29).

The PRC's official retort to the Madrid summit has been caustic. In response to NATO's increasing focus on China, the *People's Daily* published an editorial under its "Voice of China" (钟声, *zhongsheng*) byline, which denotes an authoritative perspective, entitled: "NATO is a Systemic Challenge to Global security and stability" ([People's Daily](#), July 5). The piece notes that NATO mentioning China in its Strategic Concept for the first time is a direct consequence of U.S. intimidation of other member states, and exemplifies Washington's growing reliance on the bloc to maintain hegemony and instigate a new Cold War. The editorial not only censures the Madrid Summit for its "escalation and exaggeration" of the 'China Challenge,'" it also criticizes the meeting for deliberately attracting U.S. allies from the Indo-Pacific region. As a result of NATO's designation of the PRC as a strategic competitor, the article posits that China has no choice but to respond forcefully in order to safeguard its interests and sovereignty.

## **Security Guarantees from Beijing?**

If the PRC's international ambitions were more circumscribed, its lack of alliances would be a minor issue. However, it will be very challenging for the PRC to achieve Xi's expansive foreign policy vision in an Indo-Pacific strategic environment where most of the other major powers are aligned with U.S., and where many middle powers and small states cling to nonalignment. In other words, most of the countries in the region are either cooperating with the U.S. in seeking to balance China, or hedging as they await further clarity on the outcome of the U.S.-China strategic competition. In order for China to improve its position through diplomacy, Beijing must repair its regional relationships and gain the trust of its neighbors.

The conventional view among Chinese experts is that the principle of “partnerships rather than alliances” reassures neighbors as it demonstrates that the PRC is not driven by old-fashioned realpolitik. For example, in a lengthy 2019 *People's Daily* feature on why Chinese diplomacy centers on partnerships over alliances, Su Changhe, an international relations scholar at Fudan University, stated that the difference between an alliance and a partnership is that the former approach is based on the “old international relations thinking of finding enemies,” whereas the latter way epitomizes a new kind of global politics that is focused on “making friends” ([People.cn](#), November 16, 2019). However, some of the PRC's leading international relations experts are reconsidering these long-held assumptions. In a recent interview with Phoenix TV, Tsinghua University Professor Yan Xuetong argued that China could gain the trust of its neighbors by providing them with “security guarantees” (安全保障, *anquan baozhang*) ([iFeng news](#), May 9). According to Yan, moving away from ambiguity is essential to reassuring neighbors concerned about China's growing military strength. He reasons that if the PRC, which is now the world's second strongest military power, “does not give other states security guarantees, they are bound to ask, what do you want with all these weapons? What are you doing?”

## **Selective Criticism**

In addition to its recent criticism of NATO, Beijing also continues to strongly reproach regional security multilaterals in the Indo-Pacific that involve the U.S., particularly the QUAD and AUKUS, as well as some of the U.S. bilateral alliances in the region, particularly those with Japan, South Korea and Australia. For example, state media regularly charges that the U.S.-Japan alliance incubates Japanese militarism, and threatens the peace in Asia ([Global Times](#), March 10; [Huanqiu](#), May 17, 2021). Nevertheless, the PRC's criticisms of U.S. alliance relationships in Asia are selective. For example, both Thailand and Pakistan remain formal U.S. allies, but the PRC refrains from criticizing these relationships because Bangkok and Islamabad are each closer to Beijing than they are to Washington ([U.S. Department of State](#), January 20, 2021). This underscores that the PRC does not criticize its neighbors for being American allies per se, but rather chastises them for being active partners of the U.S.

Despite its oft-stated aversion to alliances, China has a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance with North Korea, a security pact that obligates the two countries to aid each other against attack by a foreign power ([38 North](#), June 30, 2021). The treaty, originally signed in 1961, is subject to renewal by both parties every twenty years. Last year, a Japanese journalist asked Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin whether the treaty would be extended, particularly given the profound global changes that have occurred since its inception. Wang responded that the treaty “remains in force unless agreement is reached

on its amendment or termination,” and continues to promote “peace, stability, development and prosperity in the region and beyond” ([FMPRC](#), July 7, 2021). It is tempting to view the China-North Korea defense treaty as a Cold War relic. However, the endurance of the treaty, despite China’s frustration with North Korea’s nuclear development, highlights that the alliance still retains immense strategic value to Beijing. As the treaty has been in effect for six decades, a decision not to renew it, would amount to a major downgrade in relations, which is an unacceptable risk for Beijing given North Korea’s salience as a buffer state separating China from Japan, South Korea, and the U.S. military presence in Northeast Asia.

## **Conclusion**

Over the past several decades, China’s behavior as an international security actor has often defied the predictions of experts. Long-standing presuppositions, for example- that China would never deploy combat forces abroad or establish military bases overseas, have not been borne out. Is the belief that the PRC will never seek official alliances, the next of the “China will never” assumptions to fall by the wayside?

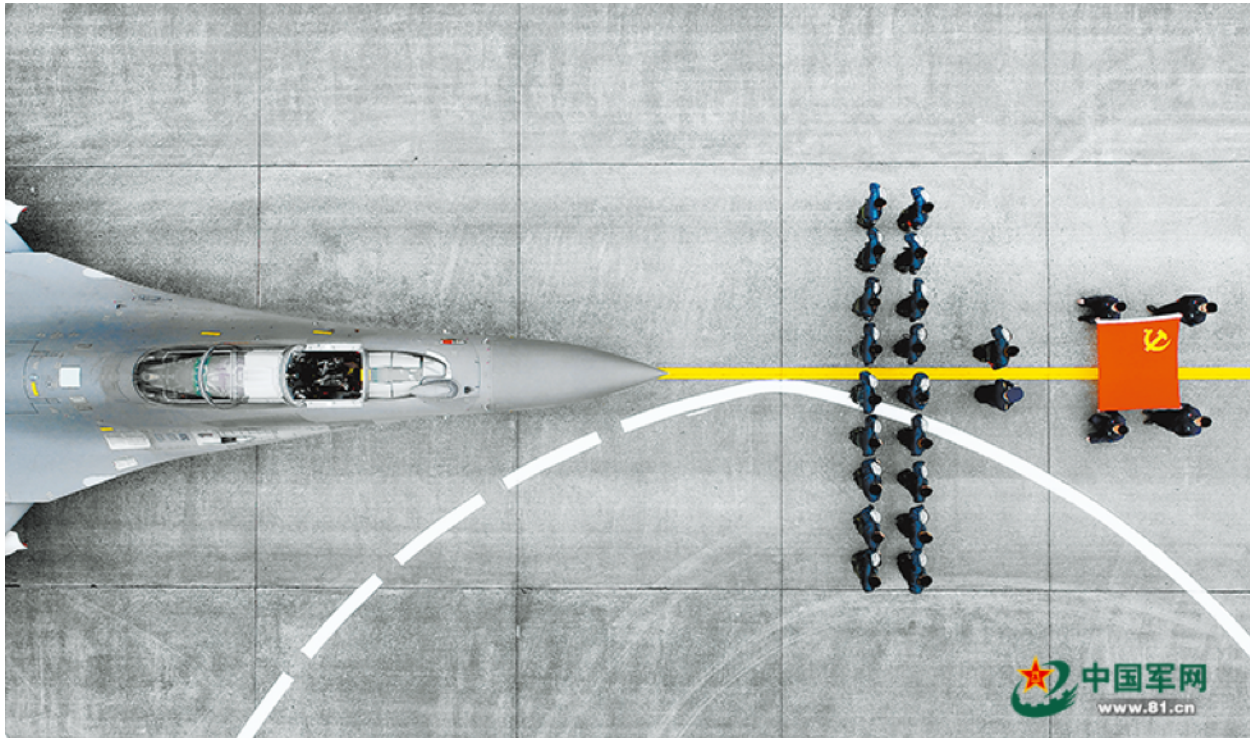
Time will tell, but at present the benefits to the PRC of designating a close partner like Pakistan or Russia an official ally do not outweigh the costs. For example, even as China and Russia have grown steadily closer, PRC officials have taken much greater pains than their counterparts in the Kremlin to stress that the relationship is not an alliance, but a close strategic partnership ([FMPRC](#), March 7). Furthermore, the PRC has little reason to upgrade ties with aligned states such as Russia or Pakistan because it already enjoys close relationships with Moscow and Islamabad that are tantamount to de facto alliances. However, the promise of official defense treaties or security guarantees could be useful for China’s efforts to reassure and potentially secure basing access in smaller neighboring countries in Asia and Africa.

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## PLA Air Force Remedies Self-Defeating Training Culture

*By Derek Solen*



**(Image:** *Pilots belonging to an aviation brigade of the Western Theater Air Force conduct an oath-swearing ceremony before an exercise, Source:* China Military Online)

### Introduction

It is a truism that organizational culture can be a decisive factor in determining a military's fate on the battlefield, but its intangibility and qualitative nature make analyzing a military's culture difficult, particularly from the outside. However, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) recently published several articles reporting instances of successful cultural change in the PLA Air Force (PLAAF). These articles reveal some of the cultural problems that units in the PLAAF had, problems that reduced their combat effectiveness and even defeated the purpose of their training. Nevertheless, given the nature of the medium in which the articles were published, it is likely that they were published to provide other units examples to emulate, so it is also likely that the same cultural problems that were reportedly remedied still exist throughout the PLAAF and the PLA as a whole.

## **Units Profiled in the PLA's Paper of Record**

All of the articles were published in the *PLA Daily* (解放军报, *Jiefangjun Bao*), the mouthpiece of the PLA's Central Military Commission (CMC), which is roughly equivalent to the U.S. Department of Defense. The first three articles were published as a series concerning units that are subordinate to the same unspecified base in the PLAAF's Western Theater Air Force (WTAF); the fourth article concerns an aviation brigade of the WTAF whose subordination is unknown. The base could be one of three air defense bases under the WTAF. The PLAAF's air defense bases are commands, not installations, that are like the U.S. Air Force's numbered air forces, but that also command surface-to-air missile brigades. The fourth piece in this series concerned a flight group of an aviation brigade that also falls under the WTAF. The PLAAF's aviation brigades and flight groups are hierarchically equivalent to the U.S. Air Force's wings and squadrons, respectively, but possess fewer aircraft than their American counterparts.

## **Eliminating Pointless Precision**

The first article in the series concerns "precision that is removed from [the conditions of] real war" or just pointless precision ([PLA Daily](#), February 11). It begins by describing how an aircrew attacked a bridge in a recent drill. Instead of the "traditional" way of bombing the surface of the bridge with many bombs, the aircrew targeted a pillar supporting the bridge to efficiently destroy the bridge. This example illustrates how the aircrew's unit has changed the criteria by which it assesses its pilots' performance of air-to-surface strikes.

The change reflects the demands of war versus the impractical demands of past practice. In "the past," when an aircrew would practice dropping live ordnance, targets were all fixed targets of a single type ([PLA Daily](#), February 11). Moreover, the approach to the target, the altitude from which ordnance would be dropped, and even the time at which an aircrew would arrive over the target were all codified or predetermined. Aircrews were assessed based on how precisely they executed a strike according to these rules and plans. Needless to say, a pilot could only be expected to do so precisely flying unopposed and in good weather conditions. Assessing pilots in this way was essentially like assessing the skill of an infantryman by how well he fires his rifle on a range: it still requires skill, but does not reflect combat performance. However, now the unit assesses aircrews by criteria such as the appropriateness of the munition for the target and the duration of the effects that the strike would achieve, and aircrews are encouraged to execute strike missions flexibly.

## **Changing Attitudes towards Victory and Defeat**

The second and third articles in the *PLA Daily* series are closely related as they both concern attitudes towards victory and defeat. The second article focuses on after-action reviews. It starts by detailing an engagement between an air defense unit and aircraft from an aviation unit. The air defense unit's radars were suppressed by jamming and lost the engagement, but the unit calmly accepted its defeat and sought to learn from the loss ([PLA Daily](#), February 13). The aviation unit, on the other hand, sought to determine what aspects of its success could be attributed to luck. This example illustrates how the base's units now value the

lessons to be learned from defeats *and* victories in training exercises rather than just defeats themselves. However, the leaders of the aviation unit recalled that, in “the past,” problems identified in after-action reviews often went unresolved. In order to make sure that lessons are learned, the unit instituted a system by which personnel would be assigned to solve identified problems within a certain period of time.

The third article focuses on what is regarded as a victory in the first place. It begins with an account of another engagement between an aviation unit and an air defense unit. The aviation unit’s aircraft was an older-generation one, and the air defense unit operated an advanced weapon system ([PLA Daily](#), February 18). The pilot of the aircraft attempted to evade detection by flying at low altitude and behind natural features (a technique called terrain masking), but he was still detected and “shot down.” However, despite having been shot down, the pilot was praised for operating his inferior aircraft brilliantly. The article also recounts a story about two battalions that participated in an air defense brigade’s live-fire training. The brigade’s 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion hit their targets eleven of twelve times while the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion hit their targets three of five times, but did so under realistic combat conditions. Although the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion’s hit rate was lower, it was still awarded the title of “First-Class Military Training Unit” because it achieved its hit rate under more difficult conditions. Both stories illustrate how, when assessing performance, the base’s units now consider the conditions under which victories are achieved and defeats are suffered, instilling “battlefield thinking” in place of the “firing-range thinking” that was prevalent in the base before.

### **Beyond Competitions**

The fourth article under consideration here is not a part of the aforementioned series, but nevertheless relates due to its focus on the value of competitions. The piece features one flight group of an aviation brigade, whose current and former members have won many iterations of Golden Helmet, an annual dogfighting competition for the PLAAF’s best fighter pilots ([PLA Daily](#), May 27). Attaining victory in the contest is the “highest honor” for a PLAAF fighter pilot. However, this *PLA Daily* article juxtaposes the unit’s achievements in Golden Helmet with a vignette about the difficulty that its pilots had during one exercise because of their relative inability to fight as part of a team. The implication is that although a courageous pilot who “rides alone” can win the Golden Helmet, that pilot’s bravery and skill will not guarantee victory in a real battle because “the enemy [conducts] system-of-systems [joint and combined-arms] warfare.” [PLA Daily](#) The flight group has since reformed its training under a program called “Golden Helmet Plus” that regularizes training in subjects beyond the scope of Golden Helmet, such as training with special mission aircraft and naval vessels ([PLA Daily](#), May 27). The unit is also encouraging its pilots to shed the “old thinking” that prized individual courage and to fight smarter by employing the full range of their aircraft’s capabilities, such as their electronic warfare suites, as well as the capabilities of other elements of a joint and combined-arms team. The flight group’s political officer thus encapsulated one of the lessons of the article: “Winning a ‘Golden Helmet’ is good, to be sure, but if a unit always exerts itself with an eye on a prize, then it will fail the test.”

### **Conclusion**

Although the connections between each of the articles in the *PLA Daily* series is not immediately obvious, taken together the pieces focus on how the performance of individuals and units is assessed in the PLA. People tend to respond to rewards, so if an armed force rewards pointless precision or high win-loss ratios,



then it can expect its members to strive to achieve results that are ultimately meaningless for assessing combat capability. Moreover, an overemphasis on an individual's or a unit's aggregate number of victories can drive people to cut corners or to game the system in order to win, defeating the purpose of training.

This is particularly true when the training activity is a competition. Throughout the past decade the PLA has increasingly used competitions to incentivize individuals and units to improve their proficiency. These competitions do not represent the totality of the PLA's training, and because winning competitions requires real skills, it is likely that the PLA's effort has produced some positive effects. Nevertheless, the prevalence of competition in PLA training has had some negative effects with some units and individuals performing as sports teams and athletes, respectively. This was manifested in the behavior of pilots in past iterations of Golden Helmet: before 2017 pilots would sometimes "flee" an engagement to run down the clock and have it end in a tie rather than risk being shot down and scoring a loss ([The Diplomat](#), September 29, 2021). The same phenomenon was also manifested in one army unit's approach to training. In late 2019, a company of the 78<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Brigade that had swept a competition earlier in the year was censured for poor performance ([PLA Daily](#), May 18, 2020). Apparently, it did so well in the competition because its members had trained hard for their events, but these same soldiers "just went through the motions" in their regular training.

It is likely that the PLA's promotion of competitions has had another negative effect: performance in competitions has come to be regarded as a standard by which to judge overall combat capability. The fourth article addresses this problem. The featured flight group may have trained conscientiously, but the unit discovered that the "old" combination of individual courage and skill that was enough in Golden Helmet was insufficient outside the competition's limited scope, implying that the real honor of victory in even the most highly regarded competition would not guarantee victory in actual battle. While the article never negates the value of competitions, it does repudiate the use of performance in competitions as a comprehensive measure of combat capability.

The four articles seem to indicate that units of the WTAF have made progress towards changing a self-defeating culture, a culture that is unlikely to be unique to the units featured in the articles. The medium in which the articles were published is intended to "educate" the troops, not merely to inform them of recent events, a fact that has two implications. First, the degree of actual change in the units' culture may be less than portrayed. Second, it can be concluded that the purpose of the series was to encourage other units throughout the PLAAF and the PLA to affect the same kind of cultural change. The corollary, then, is that the cultural problems that the units reportedly remedied are widespread enough in the PLA to require the propagation of their examples, as the report about the 78<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Brigade suggests. Hence, it is likely that "firing-range thinking" is still common in the PLAAF and in the PLA as a whole. Such an attitude towards training would naturally hinder PLAAF's and PLA efforts to improve their combat capability, making cultural change as imperative to both as the modernization of their weapons and equipment.

Changes to organizational culture are difficult to affect. This is illustrated by the fact that a different aviation brigade of the WTAF has already reportedly achieved the very same cultural change attributed to the flight group in the fourth article. In early 2020, *PLA Daily* reported that fighter pilots in that brigade had shed their exaggerated sense of importance and their tendency to "ride alone" in favor of fighting as part of a joint and combined-arms team ([PLA Daily](#), February 9, 2020). As with the articles that appeared recently, this piece was probably more aspirational than real. However, all the articles indicate that the PLAAF and the PLA are

aware of their cultural problems and are trying to remedy them. It will take years for them to change entrenched attitudes and to replace stubborn personnel, but their concerted efforts should eventually succeed, perhaps within this decade.

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## Beijing's Propaganda Support for Russian Biological Warfare Disinformation, Part 2: Historical Context and Contemporary Motivations

By John Dotson



Image: A screen shot from a September 2021 PRC state media news segment, which accused U.S. forces of employing germ warfare during the Korean War (source: [CCTV](#), September 18, 2021)

*Editor's Note:* This is the second part of a two-part article series that addresses both a prominent Russian Federation state disinformation campaign related to the war in Ukraine—namely, that the Russian invasion was justified due to the alleged presence of U.S.-sponsored biological warfare research facilities in Ukraine—as well as the ways in which this conspiracy theory has been supported and amplified by the state-controlled media system of the People's Republic of China. The first article in this series ([Part 1: Accusations Concerning the War in Ukraine](#)), which appeared in the June 17 issue, provided details of this disinformation campaign, as well as examples of how Beijing's diplomatic and media systems have backed up Russian narratives. This second article seeks to place this coordinated disinformation campaign in broader context—both by providing a historical case study of similar biological warfare disinformation dating back to the Korean War, as well as analyzing Beijing's contemporary motivations for providing informational support for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

### Historical Context for Beijing's Biological Warfare Accusations Against the United States

The Russian government's current disinformation campaign to assert the use of covert biological warfare by the U.S. and Ukrainian governments is not a new innovation. Rather, this effort accords with a long history of Soviet-era "active measures" in the field of political warfare, which have been continued by the Russian Federation through the successor agencies to the former Soviet KGB. [1] As detailed in the first part of this

series, these efforts have been amplified by the propaganda resources of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the context of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War. This ongoing cooperative disinformation campaign between the two governments is bringing the relationship between Moscow and Beijing full-circle, back to the early days of the Cold War—when another biological warfare disinformation effort played a prominent role in Communist propaganda in the latter stages of the Korean War.

*The “World Peace Council” and Accusations of U.S. Biological Warfare in the Korean War*

In 1952, the World Peace Council (WPC), a Soviet-controlled front organization created under the auspices of the Cominform in the late 1940s, became the vehicle for a combined Soviet-Chinese disinformation campaign intended to spread the narrative that U.S. forces had employed biological warfare in the Korean War against civilian populations in both North Korea and northeastern China. [2] This propaganda campaign was exemplified by the speech made by Guo Moruo (郭沫若), a prominent Chinese poet and the vice-president of the WPC, before a meeting of the organization in Oslo in March 1952. Guo charged that U.S. forces were indiscriminately spreading infectious agents throughout vast areas of Manchuria, and that the primary means used for this was the aerial bombardment of insects and other vermin:

*[T]he American aggressors have begun a constant dissemination of large quantities of germ-laden insects and other poisonous objects over key cities and important communication lines both at the front and in the rear in Korea [and] Northeast China... Of the more than 35 types of objects dropped by the American aggressors, the main types are flies, fleas, mosquitoes, lice, sandflies, crickets, springtails, locusts, rats, contaminated meat, [and] dead fish.... Results of scientific tests by bacteriologists and entomologists show that many of the insects carry lethal germs of highly infectious diseases: bubonic plague, cholera and typhoid. The enemy on occasion has spread germs at the front by firing specially designed shells. But generally the enemy has used aircraft to drop bacteriological bombs... and other objects carrying germs or infected with virus[es].” [3]*





*Images: Chinese Communist propaganda posters from the Korean War era (circa 1952), which accused U.S. forces of employing biological warfare against civilians in Korea and northern China.*

*Left Image: "Resolutely Cut Off the Bloody Criminal Hand of the American Aggressor Spreading Germs!" /*

*Right Image: "Everyone Must Prevent Epidemics, Smash the Germ Warfare of American Imperialism!"*

*(Images source: [ChinesePosters.net](http://ChinesePosters.net))*

This effort was bolstered by other communist front organizations including the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), which issued a report in March 1952 stating that "[we] must reach the conclusion that insects infected with epidemic diseases have been dropped over Korea by American airplanes." [4] The WPC-led disinformation campaign succeeded in drawing support from a limited number of international political figures, as well as sympathetic leftist intellectual fellow-travelers. Dr. John Burton, former Australian foreign minister, returned from a CCP-sponsored "peace conference" held in Beijing in spring 1952 claiming to possess "telling documents" pertaining to U.S. bacteriological warfare. [5] A second WPC-organized commission later that year, which was led by Dr. Joseph Needham—a renowned British biochemist and historian of science in China—concluded after a fact-finding trip to China hosted by CCP officials that "The peoples of Korea and China have indeed been the objective of bacteriological weapons. These have been employed by units of the U.S.A. armed forces, using a great variety of different methods for the purpose." [6]

These claims have been extensively debunked by historians in subsequent decades—to include research in the 1990s, using documentation from then-opened former Soviet archives, that revealed the evidence of biological warfare in Korea and China to have been fabricated by the Chinese Communists. [7] Despite the fraudulent nature of the claims, they achieved wide currency at the time—and have had a lingering influence since, primarily online among smaller, left-leaning publications. [8] This long-discredited story also resurfaces from time to time in more mainstream media: one prime example is a 2010 article in the U.K.'s *Telegraph*



newspaper that sympathetically cited accounts from North Korean villagers about disease-carrying insects dropped from American airplanes ([The Telegraph](#), June 10, 2010). The persistence of this geopolitical urban legend, long after it has been debunked, illustrates the lasting psychological impact that can be achieved by disinformation when these narratives encounter a receptive target audience eager to believe them.

### *The Contemporary Significance of the Korean War Biological Warfare Accusations*

This historical case study is more than simply academic: over the past year, the PRC state-controlled press—in both English and Chinese—has engaged in an ongoing and active effort to promulgate materials alleging U.S. germ warfare during the Korean War ([China Daily](#), May 12; [Shang Guan Xinwen](#), May 18). This revived propaganda campaign appears to date back to at least late summer 2021 ([Xinhua](#), August 27, 2021; see also *accompanying photo*). The promotion of such material to both domestic and international audiences represents a likely effort to “seed” the information environment—and raises the possibility that the ongoing Russian-Chinese disinformation campaign regarding biological warfare labs in Ukraine was planned well in advance of the actual invasion.

The Russian and Chinese governments have even expanded this story beyond Ukraine. In mid-April, PRC press outlets began to echo and amplify Russian state media claims that at least some of the alleged U.S.-sponsored weapon labs in Ukraine were being relocated to South Korea and Mongolia, and that “the specifics of the research being performed are unknown, but thinking about it makes one shiver” (想想都让人后背发凉, *xiangxiang dou rangren houbai fajing*) ([Hai-Lu-Kongtian Guanxing Shijie](#), April 17; [China Economic Net](#), June 26). In reporting on the story, the nationalist *Global Times* sympathetically cited former Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ordzhonikidze to indicate that the alleged labs were likely working on gene weapons targeting ethnic Chinese; and further cited unnamed “experts” who indicated that “America’s primary research domain could be researching the effect of dangerous viruses on Asians” (美方的主要研究领域可能是研究危险病毒对亚洲人种的影响, *Meifang de zhuyao yanjiu lingyu keneng shi yanjiu weixian bingdu dui Yazhouren de yingxiang*) ([Global Times](#), April 12). [9]

### **Beijing’s Motivations for Supporting Moscow’s Propaganda**

All of this raises the question as to why the CCP leadership is reviving these stories again, in the context of Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine. The leaders of the CCP have many motivations for supporting this disinformation campaign, but a few stand out above the others. The first is the need to justify sustaining the PRC’s close cooperative relationship with Russia, which was upgraded to a “comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era” in June 2019 during Xi Jinping’s visit to Russia ([Xinhuanet](#), June 6, 2019). The Sino-Russian partnership, which in many ways is a de facto alliance, was further codified this year with a joint statement issued during Vladimir Putin’s early February visit to Beijing to attend the opening ceremonies of the Winter Olympics—very likely not coincidentally, just prior to the invasion of Ukraine ([Xinhuanet](#), February 4). The joint statements made by the two governments on the occasion of these visits should not be viewed as throwaway diplomatic rhetoric: rather, the declaration of a “partnership without limits,”

and the accompanying bitter denunciations of American “hegemony” (霸權, *baquan*) and U.S.-led military alliances, should be taken at face value ([FMPRC](#), June 5, 2019; [Guangming Ribao](#), February 4).

The bio-weapons disinformation story is only one component of a broader Sino-Russian propaganda campaign that blames the United States and the NATO alliance for starting the Ukraine War in the first place, with much of this taking the form of “expert” commentaries that blame NATO expansion for bringing about the crisis ([Guangming Ribao](#), March 12; [Xinhua](#), April 24). Much of this material identifies the United States as the sinister motivating force lurking behind the Ukraine crisis, in ways that are never explained in any cogent fashion; rather, emotive imagery and language are employed to depict the United States as a rapacious power bent on pursuing dominance and sowing chaos around the globe (*see images below*). In this narrative, the people and government of Ukraine are offered no agency, being mere pawns manipulated by the hegemonic U.S. puppet master. The PRC leadership has not wished to explicitly endorse the Russian invasion, but it has embraced propaganda support as a low-cost means of signaling continuing support for Moscow, while further indoctrinating Chinese-speaking audiences with anti-American sentiment.



*Images: Still images from a PRC state media animated music video titled “Look, There Is an Eagle Flying to Ukraine!” (有只老鹰盯着乌克兰, You Zhi Laoying Dingzhe Wukelan). The video, which was disseminated on social media, blames America for starting the war in Ukraine.*

*(Image source: [China Daily/YouTube](#), April 22)*

Finally, for CCP officialdom, the biological warfare disinformation campaign may represent a further extension of efforts to engage in deflection regarding the origins of COVID-19. Since the outset of the pandemic, Beijing has displayed extreme sensitivity on this subject, and has reacted with particularly histrionic outrage to hitherto unverified foreign media speculation that the virus may have emerged from the Wuhan Institute of Virology. In spring 2020, both PRC state media and diplomatic spokespeople commenced a spaghetti-against-the-wall disinformation effort to insinuate that the SARS-CoV-2 virus had originated at the U.S. Army disease research center in Fort Detrick, Maryland (thereby echoing Soviet-era disinformation about the origins of the AIDS virus), and that it had been brought to Wuhan in October 2019 by U.S. military athletes competing in the Military World Games ([Global Times](#), March 25, 2020; [Twitter](#), May 8, 2020; [CGTN](#), June 24). In this light, the Ukraine bio labs story may represent in part a further propaganda smokescreen, as well as payback for the CCP’s self-perceived victimization regarding speculative accounts of COVID-19’s origins.

**Conclusion: How Effective Is This Disinformation?**

To most observers from open societies, who possess basic media literacy, the Russian accusations of U.S.-sponsored biological warfare in Ukraine—accusations actively buttressed and amplified by the PRC state media apparatus—will likely seem patently absurd. This may lead many observers to discount the impact of such disinformation. However, such disinformation is deployed for a reason: because it works, at least among certain targeted audiences for certain specific purposes, and generates resulting political impacts.

For the Russian and Chinese governments, such propaganda is primarily directed at domestic audiences in order to shore up popular opinion in support of state policy, and to reinforce the demonization of the United States (and by further extension, Western countries and the NATO alliance). Even for persons inclined to be skeptical of such state-sponsored conspiracy theories, the strident and pervasive flooding of the information space serves the purpose of encouraging silence, and hence, fostering tacit concurrence. The reach of this material is pervasive: social media analysis by a *Voice of America* journalist indicated that, as of mid-March, the Ukraine bio labs story had received over 260 million views in hosting by the official *People's Daily*, and that at one point, variations of the story held both the number one and number seven trending spots on *Weibo* ([Twitter](#), March 10).

Even among developed democracies, such disinformation will find a certain purchase in the more sensationalist and conspiracy-minded corners of the media and internet. In past decades such Communist-generated, anti-American propaganda might have found greatest purchase on the political left, but in recent years audiences on the political right have also become increasingly receptive to such disinformation. This spring, Fox News talk show host Tucker Carlson highlighted the Ukraine biological warfare labs conspiracy theory, introducing the story to his millions of prime-time viewers ([Fox News](#), March 9). Whether done so wittingly or not, such coverage serves to amplify Russian and Chinese state propaganda, and facilitate one of its goals, which is to erode political will and foster divisions within and among rival states in the West.

Although difficult to quantify, the greatest international impact of such disinformation will likely be found in the developing world, where the PRC has invested vast resources in establishing both a presence for its own media outlets and influence over native media organizations ([IFJ](#), June 27, 2020; [Deutsche Welle](#), January 29, 2021). In many countries of the Global South, both the receptivity to sinister conspiracy theories about former colonial powers, as well as the influence of PRC state agencies—to include the widespread direct insertion of Xinhua material into indigenous publications—ensures a loud megaphone for Chinese state-supported disinformation.

Those who have not been exposed to PRC state propaganda material on a regular basis might be taken aback to see how systematically and virulently anti-American (and by wider extension, anti-Western) it truly is. Now working in cooperation with the propaganda apparatus of the Russian Federation, it has become even more so. Expect to see more such conspiracy theories jointly promoted in the future—and expect as well to see the Ukrainian biological warfare labs story reappearing in circulation for many years to come.

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**Notes**

[1] For a fuller discussion of the historical legacy of Communist Bloc “active measures,” see: *Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda, 1986-87* (U.S. Department of State, August 1987). <https://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/library/reports/1987/soviet-influence-activities-1987.pdf>.

[2] For background on the WPC, see: *The World Peace Council: A Soviet-Sponsored International Front* (Central Intelligence Agency, Dec. 1971) (declassified Aug. 1999). <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-02646R000600220001-7.pdf>.

[3] Speech by Guo Moruo before the executive bureau meeting of the World Peace Council in Oslo, Norway, March 29, 1952. <http://southmovement.alphalink.com.au/southnews/KUO-1952.htm>.

[4] International Association of Democratic Lawyers, *Report on U.S. Crimes in Korea* (March 31, 1952), p. 28-10. For background on the IADL as a Soviet front organization, see: *Under False Colours: A Report on the Character of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers* (International Commission of Jurists, 1955).

[5] “Burton to Gov’t, ‘Investigate Germ Warfare Claim,’” *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 2, 1952, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/18267211?searchTerm=john%20burton%20germ%20warfare%20korea>.

[6] *Report of the International Scientific Commission for the Investigation of Bacterial Warfare in Korea and China*, supplement to *People’s China* (Sep. 17, 1952). <https://massline.org/PeoplesChina/PC1952/PC1952-18-Sup.pdf>.

[7] Extensive research on this subject was performed in the late 1990s by scholars at the Woodrow Wilson Center’s Cold War International History Project, employing original documents from Soviet archives. See: Kathryn Weathersby, “Deceiving the Deceivers: Moscow, Beijing, Pyongyang, and the Allegations of Bacteriological Weapons Use in Korea;” and Milton Leitenberg, “New Russian Evidence on the Korean War Biological Warfare Allegations: Background and Analysis;” both in *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 11, 1998 (pp. 176-199). <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/bulletin-no-11-winter-1998>.

[8] For two examples, see: Peter Schwartz, “German Documentary Charges US Used Biological Weapons in Korean War,” *World Socialist Web Site* (website of the International Committee of the Fourth International), Nov. 13, 2002, <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/nov2002/arti-n13.shtml>; and Jeffrey Kaye, “New Revelations on Germ Warfare: It’s Time for a Reckoning with Our History from the Korean War,” *Counterpunch* (April 9, 2021), <https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/04/09/new-revelations-on-germ-warfare-its-time-for-a-reckoning-with-our-history-from-the-korean-war/>.

[9] The Mongolian government, for its part, has firmly denied that any such laboratories exist in the country ([Montsame](#), April 18).



## Will the China-Pakistan Corridor Get a Boost with a New Government in Islamabad?

By Syed Fazl-e-Haider



(Image: Chinese and Pakistani workers at a coal power plant in Sindh Province, source: Pakistan Today)

### Introduction

On June 10, the Foreign Office in Islamabad received a diplomatic communication from the Pakistani ambassador in Beijing ([The News](#), June 13). China assured Prime Minister (PM) Shehbaz Sharif, who replaced former PM Imran Khan in April, that it is eager to work with the present government ([PRC Foreign Ministry \[FMPRC\]](#), June 17). China also confirmed the rollover of a \$2.3 billion loan to Pakistan at a reduced rate, which is a great help to the cash-strapped nation ([The Express Tribune](#), June 22). Furthermore, China agreed to extend additional financial assistance between \$2.5 to \$2.8 billion, and pledged to support Pakistan's fragile economy through the multi-billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) ([Business Standard](#), June 29). Chinese leadership also urged the present government to reinvigorate CPEC projects, which were neglected under Imran Khan's government ([The News](#), June 13; [Business Recorder](#), June 15). However, PM Sharif's government has inherited a plethora of problems and issues plaguing progress and causing delays in the execution of projects that fall under the umbrella of CPEC.



### **CPEC under the PTI government**

The previous Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government led by Imran Khan, which came to power in 2018, provided minimal support to CPEC in the first two years of its tenure. From the outset, Khan criticized CPEC deals signed by the PML-N government alleging that the agreements compromised Pakistani interests and unduly favored China. The Khan administration even went so far as to accuse then Chief Minister of Punjab Shehbaz Sharif of taking kickbacks from Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) working on CPEC projects in the province ([South China Morning Post](#), April 20).

In Baluchistan province, Gwadar port, an essential part of CPEC, was also not properly maintained by the PTI government. This negligence led to a reduction in the depth of the deep-sea port to only 11 meters due to silting. At its current depth, the port is unable to handle larger ships ([ProPakistani](#), May 11). Under Khan's administration, only three CPEC projects worth \$300 million were completed in Gwadar. On the other hand, nearly a dozen projects in the port city worth almost \$2 billion remained unfinished ([Express Tribune](#), May 8). Under PM Khan, overall implementation of CPEC slowed, and many projects were put on hold. Khan was even a member of a nine-person committee that reviewed all BRI contracts. As a result, the new government led by PM Sharif has carried out forensic audits of projects and has lambasted his predecessor's approach for harming CPEC and angering China ([Express Tribune](#), May 8).

Despite the initial difficulties, during the last year of his government, Khan altered his approach, and vowed to complete the CPEC at all costs calling it "a manifestation of [the] Pakistan-China friendship ([SAV](#), January 13, 2021). However, CPEC only made substantial progress in the last year of the Khan government, following the appointment of Khalid Mansoor as special assistant to the prime minister on CPEC affairs. As a result of these policy changes and personnel shuffles, progress on CPEC accelerated again, and several projects in different sectors were completed.

Five months before Khan's ouster, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), China's top economic planning body, declared that CPEC has entered a new phase of high-quality development ([Global Times](#), October 20, 2021). The NDRC stated that China-funded expressways, vocational schools and power plants are all now operational. The NDRC spokesperson Meng Wei declared that the two countries would continue to focus on development of Gwadar port and energy and infrastructure projects to ensure the high-quality development of CPEC

### **The New Government's Approach to CPEC**

The present coalition government led by PM Shehbaz Sharif consists of a dozen political parties. The two largest and most mainstream parties are the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP). While CPEC was conceptualized under the PPP government (2008-2013), it was the PML-N government (2013-2018), which concluded and signed the final deal with China. There are expectations that the CPEC will get a stimulus and boost under the current government, as both the PML-N and PPP want to strengthen ties with China. CPEC is currently in its second phase, which includes promoting industrialization involving the private sector. China has shown willingness to synergize this development strategy with Pakistan to help the country achieve economic stability ([Express Tribune](#), May 13).

The present government took power in April as a result of a no-confidence motion in the parliament against former PM Imran Khan ([China Brief](#), April 8; [Dawn](#), April 9). In a scant two months, PM Sharif has revitalized CPEC projects and expedited progress toward incorporating Turkey into the initiative. In May, during the launch ceremony for the third Turkish Milgem corvette built by the Karachi Shipyard and Engineering works, Sharif proposed that the CPEC should be converted into “a trilateral agreement between China, Pakistan and Turkey and let us benefit from its wonderful potential to benefit our nations” ([Dawn](#), May 21).

The present government is also addressing the serious liquidity issues and grievances of Chinese companies operating under the CPEC in various sectors, particularly in the energy sector. More than two dozen Chinese independent power producers (IPPs) have threatened to shut down their power plants unless upfront payments were made. The IPPs complained about their over Rs300 billion (roughly \$1.42 billion) in delayed dues ([Dawn](#), May 10).

Moreover, Sharif’s government has decided to abolish the CPEC Authority, which was established in May 2021 by the former government through the CPEC Authority Act. The decision made by Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal after it was revealed that Chinese power companies had shut down 1,980 megawatts of production capacity owing to non-clearance of dues. Iqbal stated that the CPEC Authority , “... is a redundant organization with a huge waste of resources which has thwarted speedy implementation of the CPEC” ([Express Tribune](#), April 21, 2022).

There are also talks of promoting the sustainability CPEC projects through green initiatives. In June, at a workshop on “Green CPEC Alliance” in Islamabad, the Chinese Embassy Chargé d’Affaires in Pakistan Pang Chunxue said that “CPEC is steadily moving towards high-quality development; the energy sector is one of the fastest and the most fruitful areas of cooperation under the framework of CPEC; green energy projects such as hydropower and solar power have always been the focus of cooperation between China and Pakistan.” In addition, Zhang Jun, Chairman of China Three Gorges Corporation said, “We aim to provide clean and green energy to Pakistan under CPEC, which is a green initiative.” “Stable, clean and cheaper electricity is the most important three features of our investment in Pakistan,” he added ([Islamabad Post](#), June 2).

### **China's High Comfort Level with PM Shehbaz Sharif**

In a recent telephone conversation with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, Sharif assured his Chinese counterpart of Pakistan’s intention to expedite work on CPEC and stressed the importance of bilateral cooperation to fully operationalize special economic zones (SEZs) ([Dawn](#), May 16). In the power sector, after Shehbaz Sharif’s tenure as Punjab chief minister ended, CPEC energy projects added 10,400 megawatts of power in three years beginning in 2013, with more capacity well on the way by 2018. The country’s first-ever mass transit systems were commissioned in Punjab’s major cities: Islamabad, Lahore, and Multan. In recognition of Sharif’s crucial role in advancing CPEC’s progress, Mustafa Hyder Sayed, executive director of the Islamabad-based think tank Pakistan-China Centre, said: “his work ethic and delivery of projects ahead of deadline became so famous that the Chinese leadership often used to refer to it as ‘Punjab speed’” ([South China Morning Post](#), April 20). Beijing is more comfortable working with PM Shehbaz Sharif because of its prior relationship with him, when he was the chief minister of Punjab during his brother Nawaz Sharif’s third and final tenure as PM. As a result,

as PM Sharif is able to bank on his reputation for working closely with Chinese entities to realized mega projects in the transportation and energy sectors ([The News](#), June 13).

### **Conclusion**

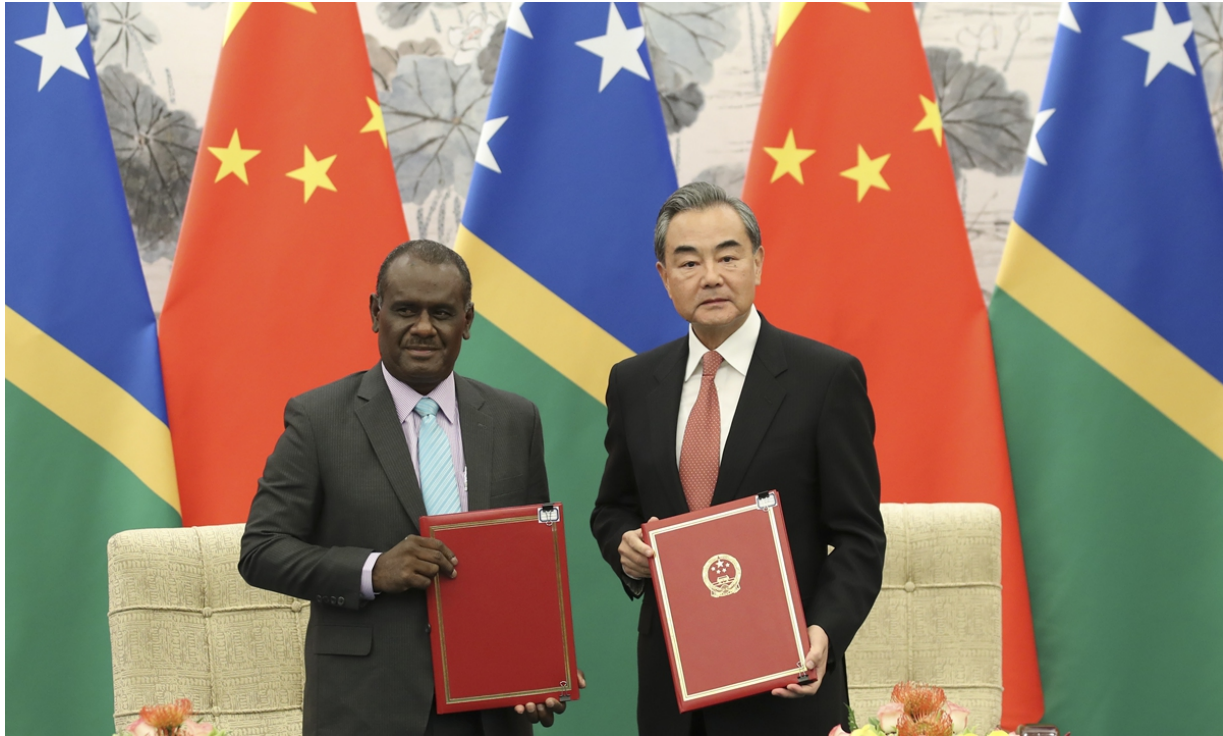
China has been appreciative of Shehbaz Sharif for his past performance in the rapid implementation of CPEC projects. Despite Beijing's acknowledgment of Sharif's efficiency, CPEC projects will ultimately face harder challenges in phase two versus phase one. In the first phase, projects were executed on the basis of government deals. However, with phase two's involvement of private sector industrialization, bureaucratic snags, legal formalities and involvement of various ministries and departments will slow progress on CPEC projects.

In addition, the new government in Islamabad must deal with another challenge it has inherited from its predecessor, which is the need to provide far better security to the Chinese engineers and Pakistani working on projects, particularly in Baluchistan, where attacks by Baluch separatists have recently taken place ([Terrorism Monitor](#), May 20). Second, resolution of the liquidity issues of the Chinese companies operating in Pakistan's various sectors through CPEC must be a priority. Finally, the procedural and bureaucratic bottlenecks impeding industrialization in the second phase of the CPEC need to be removed through constitutional amendments in the parliament.

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**Twin Soliloquies in the South Pacific: China and the West Pursue Pacific Island Nations**

*By Martin Purbrick*



*(Image: PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi and the Solomon Islands' Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade Jeremiah Manele following the reestablishment of official relations in September 2019 (Source: Global Times)*

## **Introduction**

In recent years, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has significantly increased its engagement with the Pacific Island Countries, which has resulted in growing Chinese influence across the region. In response, Australia, the U.S. and allied countries have made efforts to counter these growing inroads. The expanding PRC links to the Pacific Islands have occurred in parallel to declining recognition of the Republic of China (Taiwan) with many countries seduced in to switching diplomatic ties from Taipei to Beijing. In September 2019, the Solomon Islands ended 36 years of recognition of Taiwan and established diplomatic relations with the PRC, a move which was followed days later by Kiribati ([Xinhuanet](#), September 23, 2019; [People.cn](#), September 28, 2019). The Pacific Islands are a key target of the PRC's 'One China' policy as Taiwan retains diplomatic relations with Tuvalu, Nauru, Palau and the Marshall Islands, all of which Beijing is pursuing with offers of economic and security related assistance.

Efforts by the PRC to develop relations in the region are not new and hence, should not come as a surprise. In a recent document, "China's Position Paper on Mutual Respect and Common Development with Pacific

Island Countries”, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that “China has signed Belt and Road cooperation MoUs with all the 10 Pacific Island Countries having diplomatic relations with China. From 1992 to 2021, total trade volume between China and Pacific Island Countries having diplomatic relations with China registered an average annual increase of 13 percent and expanded by over 30 times” ([FMPRC](#), May 30). The long list of initiatives in the position paper include tangible actions that are likely to strengthen long term ties, but also unconvincing rhetoric such as the paper’s first point, which states that China will “advocate for peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom, which are the common values of humanity.”

The recent controversy regarding growing links between the PRC and the Pacific Island countries presents another area for competition between China, and the U.S. and its allies. In this context, the PRC government has repeatedly proffered police and security assistance to the Pacific Island nations, which may be a cover for the gradual introduction of Chinese armed forces to the region.

### **The Diplomatic Police**

In April, the PRC and the Solomon Islands finalized a security agreement that was leaked on social media, when Dr. Anna Powles of the University of New Zealand posted a copy of the purported draft agreement. In Article 1- Scope of Cooperation, the agreement includes provisions for “China to send police, armed police, military personnel and other law enforcement to the Solomon Islands to assist in maintaining social order, protecting people’s lives and property, providing humanitarian assistance, carrying out disaster response, or providing assistance on other tasks agreed upon by the Parties; China may, according to its own needs and with the consent of Solomon Islands, make ship visits to, carry out logistical replenishment in, and have stopover and transition in Solomon Islands, and the relevant forces of China can be used to protect the safety of Chinese personnel and major projects in the Solomons” ([Dr. Anna Powles, Twitter](#), March 24).

The Solomon Islands Government announced that the agreement on security cooperation with China had recently been signed and was necessary due to the internal instability, which the country experienced in 2006, 2019, and 2021, when the capital Honiara suffered rioting and looting. The Solomon Islands Government stated that “Against the ongoing internal security threats, the Government intend to beef up and strengthen the Police capability and capacity to deal with any future instability, by properly equipping the Police to take full responsibility of the countries security responsibilities in the hope that the country will never be required to invoke any of our bilateral Security Arrangements” ([Solomon Islands Government](#), April 20).

In late May and early June, PRC State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi made a ten day trip to the Pacific Island countries. While in the Solomon Islands, he stated that the security cooperation agreement “aims to assist Solomon Islands in improving its policing and law enforcement capabilities and support Solomon Islands to better safeguard its social security while also protecting the safety of Chinese citizens and institutions in Solomon Islands, which is reasonable and legitimate with everything being operated in an open and transparent manner” ([FMPRC](#), May 26).

Both governments have insisted that the agreement only seeks to promote safety and security in the Solomon Islands through police assistance and developing the capabilities of local law enforcement. However, Western governments remain unconvinced and have evinced growing concern that the police related language is



intended to mask the pact's real intent, which is to establish the Solomon Islands as a future base for the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The leaked draft agreement did not specify which Chinese units may be deployed to the Solomon Islands, only referring to them as "police, armed police, military personnel and other law enforcement."

Since the disorder in Honiara in 2019, PRC Ministry of Public Security (MPS) officers have been stationed in the capital as a part of the China Police Liaison Team, which is led by an officer of the rank of Commissioner third class ([China Brief](#), May 13). Public Security officers seem to be at the forefront of PRC overseas deployments for security and police support.

For several decades, the MPS has been developing its international capability to support security for overseas PRC nationals and companies, as well as its ability to deny safe havens to pro-independence Tibetan and Uyghur activists. [1] A corresponding increase has also taken place in the number of MPS attaches posted to PRC embassies, which is similar to the deployment of police personnel at consular liaison officers in other countries by many other nations. Currently, 97 police liaison officers are stationed in 55 PRC embassies and consulates in 48 countries ([PRC MPS](#), May 24). In addition to routine police liaison posts, in the past 22 years, the PRC has deployed more than 2,600 police officers to peacekeeping missions in the United Nations headquarters and eleven mission areas including Liberia, South Sudan, and Cyprus. These prolonged overseas deployments help MPS officers attain valuable experience and skills.

MPS assistance to Pacific Island governments is also expanding. For example, the MPS recently deployed a team of eight Chinese forensic pathologists to Samoa to conduct post mortem examinations to help relieve a backlog of cases due to COVID-19 related deaths, and also to conduct forensic technical training for local police ([PRC MPS](#), July 21 2021). In Fiji, the MPS appointed a police liaison officer and signed an MOU with the Fiji Police Force to facilitate Chinese training of local officers ([The Fiji Times](#), September 13, 2021). China's involvement in training and building the capacity of local police forces looks set to further deepen. The PRC's Ambassador to Kiribati has stated that the host country needs to work with China to improve its police and law enforcement capabilities ([Global Times](#), June 1).

In the Pacific Island countries, the PRC has also begun to shift beyond just security training and assistance programs to include direct operational actions, often targeting overseas Chinese nationals. In 2019, Chinese police officers escorted six PRC nationals in Vanuatu onto a flight back to the PRC due to accusations of Internet fraud. However, no local judicial process occurred in what was essentially a government ordered deportation. Similarly, in 2017, 77 Chinese nationals in Fiji were deported back to the PRC ([South China Morning Post](#), 10 July 2019). In Tonga, the PRC has provided customs inspection equipment and a fingerprint laboratory to help the national police combat illicit drug activities ([Maitangi Tonga Online](#), May 30). Such assistance to the Pacific Island countries, which includes the provision of equipment, training, and direct support for local law enforcement agencies, is significant. It also indicates that the PRC is using the MPS as a major part of its diplomatic engagement in the region.

### **Policing the Mineral Silk Road**

The expansion of PRC police and law enforcement assistance to the Pacific Islands should not be seen as altruistic aid, but rather ought to be viewed in the context of the protection of Chinese economic interests and nationals in the region. The expanded global footprint of Chinese economic activity has brought greater risk to the companies and people involved. The major PRC oil companies Sinopec, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) have been active in volatile countries such as Sudan, Syria, Libya, Myanmar and Iran for years. PRC mineral companies such as China Minmetals Corporation, the Metallurgical Corporation of China and Tianjin Minerals & Equipment Group, have been active in countries including Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Zambia, Swaziland, Mozambique, and Afghanistan. [2] Resource extraction from countries with fragile political systems and high-risk operating environments is not new for Western companies, but Chinese companies have been dealing with the same kinds of challenges that require professional security and government support for some time now.

PRC police deployment in the Pacific Island countries is likely to increase as China's economic links with region grow through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI has created a platform for PRC commercial interests to develop the procurement of resources that the country needs as part of its development plan, and the Pacific Islands are a part of this strategy. The PRC imports seafood, wood and minerals from the Pacific, which is reflective of Chinese interests in the region's fishing, logging and mining industries.

Deep sea exploration for minerals including high-value strategic metals such as copper, gold, manganese, zinc, cobalt and nickel is the next energy resource frontier. The PRC is actively engaged in commercial projects in the Pacific. The Beijing Pioneer Hi-Tech Development Corporation, a state owned enterprise, and the International Seabed Authority (ISA) have signed a 15-year contract for the exploration of polymetallic nodules, which contain nickel, copper, cobalt and manganese, and are needed for battery technologies ([International Seabed Authority](#), 24 October 2019).

At the recent China-Pacific Islands Foreign Ministers' meeting, Wang Yi stated that "China will continue to provide the island countries with economic development assistance within its capacity, strengthen the connection between the joint construction of the Belt and Road, the regional cooperation initiative of the Pacific island countries and the development strategies of the island countries, and deepen the infrastructure, agriculture, forestry and fishery, energy and minerals, information and communication, e-commerce, etc. Mutually beneficial cooperation in the field, and support the expansion of exports of high-quality and characteristic products such as agricultural products from island countries to China" ([FMPRC](#), May 30). This statement includes clear references to firstly fishery, energy and minerals, and secondly to the expansion of exports from the region to China.

Clearly, the primary exports the PRC seeks from the Pacific Islands are natural resources. This is exemplified in Wang Yi's active diplomatic engagement with the region, wherein he has prioritized guaranteeing the long term supply of natural resources. Assuring the security and safety of the growing number of Chinese enterprises engaged in exploration, mining, logging, fishing, commerce, and diplomacy in the Pacific Islands requires increased deployment by PRC police and sustained engagement with local law enforcement.

## **Conclusion**

The recent tour of the Pacific Island countries by Foreign Minister Wang Yi was hailed by Chinese media as a success. In the context of Wang's whirlwind eight-nation trip, state media put forth several narratives for the expanding scope of PRC activity in the Pacific. The first theme emphasizes the PRC as a "reliable development partner," stressing its extensive development assistance to the Pacific Island countries, including 100 aid projects, more than 200 batches of in-kind assistance, training around 10,000 people, and dispatching 600 medical staff. Such wide ranging assistance also includes security, and the PRC media makes frequent references points of relevance in the 'Position Paper on Mutual Respect and Common Development with Pacific Island Countries', which includes jointly promoting regional peace and security and cracking down on transnational crimes, such as cyber-crimes ([Xinhua](#), June 2).

The second point of emphasis is to characterize the PRC's relationship with the Pacific Island countries as one of "equality, mutual support, and development," in implicit contrast to the U.S., which is projected as a hegemonic power that lacks such virtues ([People's Daily](#), June 4). PRC news media consistently portrays the U.S. as focused on security rather than economics in the Pacific Islands, but China has not shied away from taking assertive measures to ensure the security of its own nationals and interests. One state-run outlet even exclaimed that "With China's overseas interests expanding, it's only natural that it wants to send police and military personnel, if requested, to not only safeguard China's economic and human interests but also help maintain social order in the host country" ([China Daily](#), May 31). With these narratives being more loudly promoted we can expect to see more Chinese police uniforms in the Pacific Islands in the near future.

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### **Notes**

[1] Jonas Parello-Plesner and Mathieu Duchatel, *China's Strong Arm: Protecting Citizens and Assets Abroad* (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Routledge, 2015), 48-50.

[2] *Ibid*, 21-22.