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IN THIS ISSUE:

The People's War on Drugs Rolls On

By John S. Van Oudenarenpp. 1-6

A Tale of Two Summits: G7 Displays Unity as China Courts Central Asia

By Willy Wo-Lap Lampp. 7-10

Will France's China Gamble Endanger Transatlantic Ties?

By Sine Ozkarasahinpp. 11-14

China's Role in the Modernization of Malawi's Agriculture Sector

By Raphael Mweninguwepp. 15-19

Missile Defense in South Korea: Will President Yoon Heed China's Concerns?

By Debalina Ghoshal.....pp. 20-23

The People's War on Drugs Rolls On

John S. Van Oudenaren

The role of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a major source of precursor chemicals for illicit drug manufacturing, particularly fentanyl and methamphetamine, is increasingly well documented ([China Brief](#), January 19). However, the actual level of illegal drug use within China itself remains murkier. A decade ago, anecdotal accounts, official statistics, academic studies and media reports all suggested that China confronted a worsening drug abuse issue. In a 2016 report, two leading criminologists focused on China, Sheldon Zhang

and Ko-Lin Chin, found that “China faces a growing problem of illicit drug use,” with the number of officially registered drug addicts hovering around 2.5 million, having increased yearly since the first government drug report in 1998. [1] However, as authorities have cracked down on crime across the board since 2018 and citizens’ movements have been more tightly restricted and tracked under the “zero-COVID” policy, the number of officially reported drug crimes and users has plummeted ([Shanghai Observer](#), June 26, 2022).



(Image: A police officer warns passengers about the dangers of drugs at Chongqing North Railway Station, source: gov.cn)

On June 26, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) will mark “International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking,” usually shorthanded as “International Anti-Drug Day” (国际禁毒日), with its annual wave of drug education materials and warnings to would-be narcotics users or traffickers. In advance of the day, various “anti-drug display boards” are posted online and demonstrated in schools and workplaces across the country ([Ztupic](#), May 10; [Gov.cn](#), June 24, 2022). State media also uses the occasion to emphasize General Secretary Xi Jinping’s contributions to “anti-drug work” (禁毒工作) and highlight the success of the political and legal affairs bureaucracy, including the public security organs, in counter-narcotics enforcement ([Cpcnews.cn](#), June 26, 2022). For example, in 2021, CCTV’s website stressed that Xi has “always paid close attention to anti-drug work,” including personally “overseeing operations” (督战) to eradicate the scourge of illegal drugs in China ([CCTV](#), June 26, 2021).

Falling Drug Arrests

In 2020, Xi stated that the current mix of domestic and foreign drug problems, “traditional and new illegal drug dangers” and the proliferation of drugs on and offline, pose serious threats to public safety, public health and social stability” ([Xinhuanet](#), June 23, 2020). However, on International Anti-Drug Day last year, public security organs and state media trumpeted China’s success in drastically reducing drug abuse. At a Ministry of Public Security press conference for the release of the annual “China Drug Situation Report,” Liang Yun, head of the Ministry of Public Security’s Narcotics Control Bureau, touted drug control departments’ progress in “carrying out in depth the ‘People’s War on Drugs’” (禁毒人民战争) since the 19th Party congress in 2017 ([China News](#), June 23, 2022). Liang said that in the previous five years, 588,000 criminals were arrested on drug crimes, but noted that drug cases had fallen successively each year, from 140,000 in 2017 to just 54,000 in 2021. He also stated that in 2021, authorities have registered around 1.49 million drug addicts, a fall of over 42 percent in a half-decade.

An article in the state-run *Shanghai Observer* chalks up the PRC’s success to cutting drug abuse through vigilant enforcement and strict drug prohibition ([Shanghai Observer](#), June 26, 2022). While official sources emphasize strict drug enforcement, overall controls on population movement and extended urban lockdowns under the dynamic clearance “zero-COVID” policy, likely made illegal drug purchases more difficult for both suppliers and users.

Targeting Underworld Forces

The fall in reported drug crime in China coincides with the Chinese Communist Party’s latest periodic crackdown on organized crime, the three-year “sweep away black and eliminate evil” (扫黑除恶) campaign launched in early 2018 ([Xinhuanet](#), February 5, 2018). These anti-crime campaigns, which have occurred at both the national and local levels throughout the Reform Era dating back to the “strike hard” (严打) campaign in 1983, seek to address what the CCP views as the negative externalities of opening up and allowing market forces a role in the economy: increased vice, criminality and organized crime. During these crackdowns, police are under increased pressure to capture criminals, which leads to spikes in arrests, but usually does not eliminate the top leadership of criminal organizations, or address the drivers of criminality (e.g., public demand for illicit services, particularly gambling and prostitution). However, the “sweep black” campaign went a step further than past crackdowns, not only targeting gangs themselves, but also going after “protective umbrellas” (保护伞)—corrupt officials that provide shelter to organized crime groups.

In their announcement launching the “sweep black” campaign, the Supreme People’s Court, the Supreme People’s Procuratorate, the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Justice declared that any staff of state agencies serving as “protective umbrellas” would be rooted out and severely punished ([Xinhuanet](#), February 5, 2018). Moreover, the statement stressed that relatives and friends of individuals involved in criminal enterprises should actively persuade them to surrender or risk punishment for “harboring underworld forces.” In his 2018 anti-drug day remarks, several months into the “sweep black” campaign, Xi identified the need to eliminate official protection of drug trafficking organizations as essential to eradicating the problem, stating: “we must resolutely destroy drug trafficking networks and dredge out drug-related underworld forces and their protective umbrellas” ([Xinhuanet](#), June 25, 2018). The combination of more aggressive law enforcement and

the constraints imposed by zero-COVID on criminal operations, many of which use legitimate businesses as fronts, undoubtedly suppressed but surely did not extinguish organized criminal activity in China, including drug trafficking.

A Problem of Unspecified Magnitude

Throughout most of the reform era, the primary illicit drug of abuse in China was heroin, largely smuggled in from weak or fractured neighboring states, especially Myanmar ([U.S. Department of Justice](#), April 2007). However, in recent years, methamphetamine and ketamine have become the most widely abused drugs, mirroring shifts by drug trafficking organizations in Myanmar and elsewhere that have transitioned to producing synthetic drugs, particularly methamphetamine.

Due to the extreme social stigma surrounding drug use in China, harsh legal penalties and mandatory drug “treatment,” the number of officially registered drug addicts is likely a significant underestimate of the country’s total drug users. Nevertheless, the problem should also not be overestimated. Even at the ostensible peak of the methamphetamine problem in 2014, when the official number of addicts was around 2.95 million, the drug-using population in China largely comprised economically marginalized single males in urban areas, often times migrant laborers. A 2021 article in *Chinese Youth Social Sciences*, an academic journal sponsored by the China Youth University of Political Science, includes a survey of 2,400 young drug addicts after they underwent compulsory rehabilitation programs. [1] Of those surveyed, 84 percent were male, 88 percent were unmarried and a majority, 59 percent, lacked a high school education. As many as half of the drug abusers interviewed had experienced unemployment, with many reporting having also worked as waiters, factory workers, security guards, cooks and couriers.

Another group in which drug use became increasingly common in the 2000s and early 2010s, were wealthy young urbanites, including many celebrities. In August 2014, following a 72 percent city-wide spike in drug arrests, including many celebrities, the Beijing Trade Association for Performances published a declaration promising never to allow narcotics in the city’s entertainment industry ([China Daily](#), August 19, 2014). Those arrested included Jaycee Chan, the son of famous movie star Jackie Chan. Police confiscated about 3.5 ounces of cannabis from Chan’s home. Notably, many of the celebrities arrested on drug charges in 2013 and 2014 were charged with possession of cannabis, which is rarely used in China, although many were also caught with methamphetamine.

Last June, the Ministry of Public Security released its annual “China Drug Situation Report,” which reinforced a picture of overall declining drug use in Chinese society noting that in 2021 the number of drugs seized by authorities, 27 tons and the number of 326,000 identified active drug users declined by 51.4 percent and 23.7 percent respectively ([China Youth Online](#), June 23, 2022). However, the report also noted that due to interruptions in supply because of strict enforcement and likely also the zero-COVID controls on population movement, some users have been compelled to “search out alternative narcotics and psychotropic drugs or non-scheduled substances, or to become poly-drug users,” which led authorities to schedule fluoroketamine (an analogue of ketamine) and synthetic cannabinoids in 2021.

Conclusion

By North American or European standards, China's drug abuse issue is minor. Nevertheless, the problem of illegal drug use has attracted the attention of national leaders for decades. Part of this concern is likely motivated by the notorious legacy of the illegal drug trade's deleterious impact on China during the late Qing and Republican periods, now known as "the century of humiliation," when opium addiction was rampant. As the use of illicit drugs was almost entirely eradicated by rigid social controls imposed in the Mao-era, the return of illegal drug use during the reform and opening period must have gravely alarmed the CCP leadership. However, in recent years, as the strategic rivalry with the U.S. has intensified, the PRC has begun to juxtapose its relatively low-levels of drug use and strict prohibition with increasingly permissive drug laws in the West ([China Brief](#), February 2).

At the Anti-Drug Day press conference last year, Liang Yun, head of the PRC's narcotics control bureau, stated that amidst a "global drug epidemic" China's commitment to drug prohibition and order stands in stark contrast to the "drug chaos in the West" (西方毒品之乱形成) ([China News](#), June 23, 2022). Of course, Liang and other top PRC anti-drug officials do not acknowledge the role that the flow of fentanyl precursor chemicals out of China—including to production facilities operated by Mexican drug cartels—has played in fueling this "drug chaos." Moreover, while PRC officials and CCP propagandists take great pride in declaring that China does not currently experience fentanyl abuse and has not recorded any fentanyl-related deaths, examples are rare in history of drug producing or trafficking regions entirely avoiding the scourge of drug addiction ([Consulate General of the PRC in New York](#), September 1, 2022). Here, the experience of Southeast China's Yunnan province, which shares a long border with Myanmar and has long been a key node in international heroin and methamphetamine smuggling routes, may prove instructive. A 2018 peer-reviewed study by Chinese and international public health researchers found that while overall use of drugs (including cannabis) was lower in Yunnan than in Europe or the U.S., the rate of adult heroin usage was significantly higher than in most Western countries. [3]

The potential risk of fentanyl penetrating Chinese society suggests that for the PRC, cracking down on production and distribution of the drug and its chemical precursors serves a greater purpose than mollifying pressure from the U.S., Canada and other countries reeling from the opiate epidemic. Rather, as the PRC's recent experience dealing with the trafficking of heroin and methamphetamine from Myanmar underscores, preventing the proliferation of fentanyl is also very much in China's self-interest.

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Notes

[1] Sheldon Zhang and Ko-lin Chin, "[A People's War: China's Struggle to Contain its Illicit Drug Problem](#)," Brookings Institute, July 2016.

[2] Wang Ruiyuan, "[How Can Young Drug Addicts Make a 'Fresh Start'?](#)" (青年戒毒者如何“重新做人?"), *Journal of Chinese Youth Social Science* (中国青年社会科学), 2021, Issue 6.

[3] Guanbai Zhang et al, "[Estimating Prevalence of Illicit Drug Use in Yunnan, China, 2011–15.](#)" *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, June 14, 2018.

A Tale of Two Summits: G7 Displays Unity as China Courts Central Asia

Willy Wo-Lap Lam



(Image: C G7 leaders discussing economic cooperation at the Hiroshima Summit (source: White House Twitter),

Introduction

The U.S. appears to have succeeded in coaxing its European and Asian allies into adopting a united policy to counter China, even as the Xi Jinping administration flexed its muscle, demonstrating Beijing’s increasing power and influence in Central Asia. At their meeting in Hiroshima, Japan this past weekend, the G7 countries condemned “economic coercion” and the “weaponization of trade,” a clear dig at China even though the country was not named. The wealthy countries in the U.S.-led bloc also expressed opposition to unnamed nations using force to alter the status quo in the Indo-Pacific region, including in the Taiwan Strait ([The White House](#), May 20; [Radio Free Asia](#), May 20).

Also last week, President Xi hosted the first-ever China-Central Asia Summit in Xi’an, which showcased the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) growing clout in the international arena ([CCTV](#), May 19). The five Central Asian states, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan pledged to cooperate with China to achieve the goal of building a just global order based on “a community of a common destiny,” while also ensuring the PRC’s supply of oil and other key commodities ([Newscentralasia.net](#), May 20; [Ming Pao](#), May 19).

“De-risk and Diversify”

In an apparent attempt to blunt Beijing’s efforts to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its European allies, the May 20 G7 communique noted that the U.S. and EU, in addition to American allies in Asia, fully agreed to strengthening “economic resilience and economic security” by means including limiting Beijing’s exploitation and manipulation of foreign investments and supply chains. While stressing that they did not favor economic “decoupling,” President Joe Biden and his G7 allies stated that “a growing China that plays by international rules would be of global interest” ([Straits Times](#), May 20; [CSIS](#), May 18).

In his press conference in Hiroshima, Biden reaffirmed that the U.S. and its allies had adopted a “united [approach]... and shared principles” in dealing with China, which he summarized as a coordinated effort “to de-risk and diversify.” In an apparent attempt to counter PRC efforts to build dual-use infrastructure projects in several Pacific Island countries, Biden stated that senior U.S. officials would pay more visits to the region. Moreover, the G7 countries have confirmed their pledge to invest \$600 billion by the year 2027 in the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), which is seen as a counterweight to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Of critical importance to recent efforts to limit China’s access to advanced computer chips and other high-tech components was the meeting between Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and the leadership of top chipmakers including Taiwan’s TSMC, the U.S.’s Intel and South Korea’s Samsung. Kishida doubled down on actions taken by the U.S. and its partners to persuade these chipmakers to relocate their production bases out of China to America and to curtail the supply of advanced technology components to the PRC ([India Times](#), May 17; [Nikkei Asia](#), May 12). Earlier this year, the U.S., Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and the Netherlands reached an agreement to restrict such high-end exports to the PRC ([China Brief](#), April 4; [South China Morning Post \[SCMP\]](#), February 23).

While the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs blasted the G7 meeting for “interfering with China’s internal affairs,” there are indications that the two adversaries could re-open direct lines of communication and resume high-level meetings. Biden said in Hiroshima that he expected some kind of a “thaw” with China “very shortly.” ([Kyodo News](#), May 22; [RFI](#), May 22). The U.S. leader was hinting at the possible resumption of direct contact with senior Chinese leaders. While Beijing has been lukewarm about rescheduling U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s visit, which was postponed during the February “spy balloon” crisis and holding a proposed meeting between Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and his counterpart General Li Shangfu, Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao is due to visit Washington this week ([VOAChinese](#), May 19; [China Brief](#), February 13). Talks between Wang and U.S. officials, including Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen and Trade Representative Katherine Tai, are being arranged ([Mainichi.jp](#), May 21).

A Changing of the Guard in Central Asia?

Even as high-level official communication with the U.S. resumes, Beijing is broadening an array of “anti-Western” coalitions that draw heavily from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (which incorporates the five Central Asian states) and its burgeoning membership, as well as the BRICS ([China Brief](#), April 25). During the China-Central Asia summit, Xi announced several China-backed infrastructure projects in addition to numerous accords to nurture closer economic cooperation in a region that was once Russia’s privileged sphere of

influence. “This summit has added new impetus to the development and revitalization of the six counties, and injected strong positive energy into regional peace and stability,” Xi said at the conclusion of the three-day event in Xi’an, the terminus of the old Silk Road. “We will jointly foster a new paradigm of deeply complementary and high-level win-win cooperation.” Foreign Minister Qin Gang added that enhanced China-Central Asian ties would “create a cooperation model that is profoundly complementary and highly win-win” ([Xinhua](#), May 19; [FMPRC](#), April 27).



(Image: PRC President Xi Jinping and the heads of state of the participating Central Asian countries attend the welcome ceremony and banquet for the China-Central Asia Summit on May 18, source: Xinhua)

Chinese social media, however, was replete with criticism that Xi’s extension of 26 billion yuan (\$3.7 billion) in financial aid to its five Central Asian “strategic partners” was improper given the reduction of social benefits to members of China’s working classes ([RFI](#), May 20). Beijing’s investments in BRI-related schemes in Asia, Europe and Africa have also declined dramatically due to the financial difficulties besetting the Chinese government and state-owned enterprises heavily involved in overseas projects ([CFR](#), April 6; [VOAChinese](#), February 3).

Irrespective of the extent to which the Xi leadership succeeds in building up a kind of “axis of autocracies,” many Western governments are eager to enlist Beijing’s assistance in compelling the Kremlin to wind down the war on Ukraine. If anything, the China-Central Asia Summit is an indication of waning Russian power. Russian leaders were not invited to the event, despite the fact that all five Central Asian countries represented in Xi’an were under Soviet control. The apparent eagerness of Beijing to further erode Moscow’s international influence may be an indication that the Xi government has reservations about unreserved support of the Russian war effort.

A Growing Divide

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who traveled to Hiroshima to attend the G7 conclave, has indicated that Kyiv is receptive to Chinese efforts to broker a peace agreement between Ukraine and Russia ([FMPRC](#), February 24; [Al Jazeera](#), February 24). This openness to dialogue comes despite signs of escalation in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, with Biden's announcement that the U.S. will participate in a joint international training program for Ukrainian fighter pilots, including for F-16 fighter jets. This step, which could open the way for Ukraine to receive advanced fighter jets from NATO countries, is seen as a warning to Putin's Russia and its supporters, including the PRC.

With U.S.-China relations increasingly defined by fierce contention on both the geopolitical and ideological fronts, it is doubtful as to whether the resumption of high-level visits will succeed in lessening tension between the two giants. Secretary of Treasury Janet Yellen, who is seen in Beijing as a relative moderate on China, has previously called for "constructive" trade relations ([France 24](#), May 19). The state-run *Global Times* cited Chinese experts as saying that while "trade cooperation is still the ballast of China-U.S. relations," whether the forthcoming talks between Wang and senior American officials would be productive "depends on the sincerity of the U.S." ([Global Times](#), May 22).

Moreover, interactions between the two countries will, at least in the short term, be clouded by the just-announced U.S.-Taiwan Trade Initiative ([Focus Taiwan](#), May 19; [USTR](#), May 18). China's overall relations with G7 members such as the U.S., Canada, the U.K. and Germany have also been dented by widespread reports of Beijing's United Front efforts aimed influencing these nations' domestic politics. Several countries, including Canada and Germany, have claimed that "police stations" operated by Chinese agents are still active, despite Beijing's apparent promises to close them down ([Global News](#), May 15; [CBC Television](#), May 1).

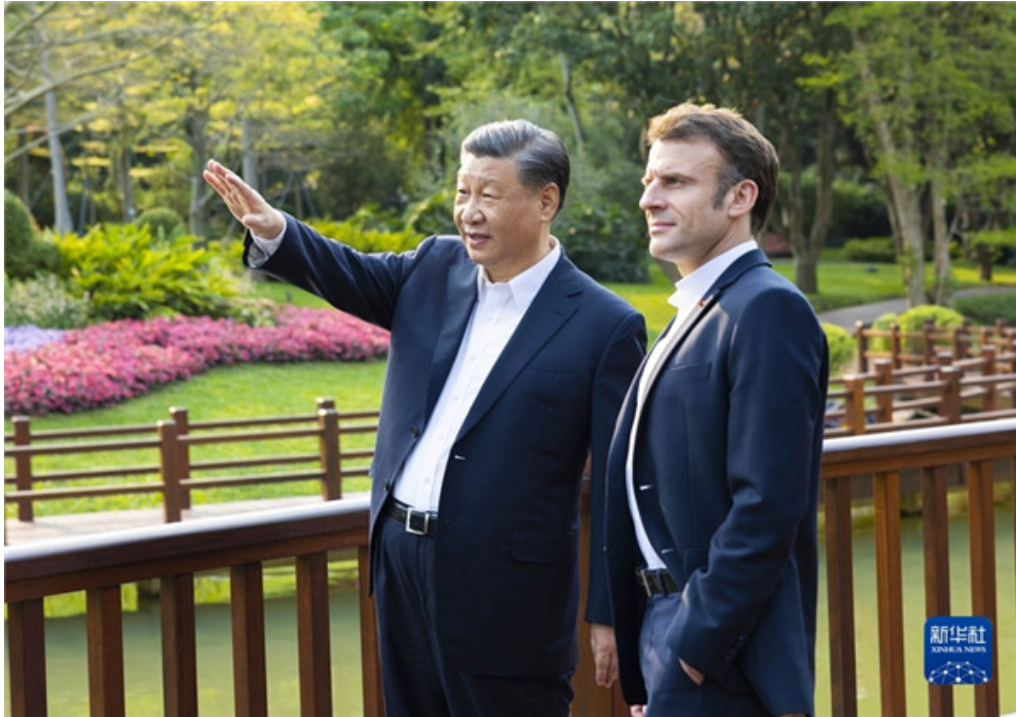
Conclusion

The PRC's increasing isolation from mainstream international politics is also evidenced by its exclusion from a May 13 meeting in Stockholm that was attended by 60 foreign ministers from the EU and Indo-Pacific Region. A major theme of the EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum was addressing growing tensions in hot spots in Asia, including the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea ([SCMP](#), May 12; [Politico.eu](#), March 9). In spite of the PRC's "smile diplomacy" since the 20th Party Congress last October, Beijing continues to demonstrate insufficient commitment to international laws and norms, such as those contained in the various United Nations conventions. Moreover, if the Xi administration's determination to assume a more active role in global affairs is intended to divert domestic attention away from its mismanagement of the Chinese economy, rapidly dwindling financial resources—a result of the country's poor economic performance—could become a major impediment to Beijing's long-standing policy of buying favors and support from developing countries.

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Will France's China Gamble Endanger Transatlantic Ties?

Sine Ozkarasahin



(Image: Xi and Macron speak with one another during their visit to Guangzhou on April 7, source: Xinhua)

Introduction

In April, French President Emmanuel Macron made a state visit to China. During Macron's visit, the two sides signed a Sino-French joint statement that identified 51 priority areas for deepening cooperation, both bilaterally and through the EU ([PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs \[FMPRC\]](#), April 7). Following this trip to China, Macron sought to frame Paris's diplomatic outreach to Beijing as advancing European strategic autonomy. However, his assertions that the EU should not become involved in conflicts that are not its own and should not take cues from either a U.S. or Chinese overreaction on Taiwan generated considerable skepticism across the West ([Le Monde](#), April 11). Nevertheless, Macron's comments underscore deep French distrust and skepticism with regards to allied solidarity, in terms of both the EU and NATO. As France seeks to carve out a place for itself in the multipolar international world order, Paris is making things increasingly complicated for the West by promoting European strategic autonomy under EU auspices as an alternative to NATO.

Strategic Autonomy and Western Cohesion

Long promoted by French leaders, the concept of strategic autonomy is hardly new. Moreover, Paris has had some recent success in promoting the concept as an operating principle of European foreign policy. At the EU

level, the idea was first referenced by the European Commission in 2020 ([European Commission](#), May 13, 2020) and the European Council in 2013 ([European Council](#), December 20, 2013). Proponents of strategic autonomy argue that the EU should “be able to decide and to act without depending on the capabilities of third parties, and ensure its security of supply, access to critical technologies and operational sovereignty” ([ARES](#), November 2016).

Although reasonable in theory, Macron’s push for European strategic autonomy glosses over the delicate balance in the current international order that is increasingly challenged by the intensifying rivalry between the U.S. and China. This new world order also calls for enhanced solidarity in the Western bloc as well as a common agenda in order to address the challenges facing democracies from the other end of the political spectrum. The signing of the 2021 Franco-Greek defense agreement is one particular example of a foreign policy decision driven by Paris’s quest for strategic autonomy. The agreement includes a pledge to interfere if one of the two countries faces aggression from a “third party” and as a result introduces a parallel, alternative security arrangement to NATO’s Article V. This is problematic in the Eastern Mediterranean, a contest region where a long-running dispute between fellow NATO members exists ([Institut Montaigne](#), November 17, 2021). The same trend is visible in Macron’s opposition to the inclusion of non-EU NATO nations, such as the UK, in the joint procurement agreement for ammunition to aid Ukraine ([Euractiv](#), May 3). By pushing for an EU-only supplier system to restock the bloc’s rapidly depleting stocks, Macron is leaving allied countries and Ukraine, out in the cold, in a time of crisis.

Debate is sure to persist over what constitutes an appropriate level of European strategic autonomy, but it will be far more difficult for the West to maintain its credibility vis-à-vis its strategic rivals, China and Russia, if the EU takes actions that are at odds with NATO. The contrary can lead to the deterioration of the transatlantic ties and present Beijing with what it wants to see the most: a divided Alliance.

The Spillover Effect of Sino-French Ties

While some argue that cordial Sino-French ties are founded primarily on commercial linkages, statements from both sides attach broader importance to the role of their relationship in international politics ([China Daily](#), October 27, 2017). Official documents, such as the April 2023 bilateral joint statement, stress that the bilateral relationship encompasses broader strategic elements pertaining to international relations, such as jointly promoting world security and stability ([FMPRC](#), April 7). Another important aspect in this regard is maintaining close communication and cooperation on the Korean Peninsula issue ([Xinhuanet](#), April 7).

Over the past few years, the two countries have signed multiple agreements pertaining to various strategic-commercial affairs, including cooperation in the (renewable) energy segment and aviation. In 2024, France will be a guest of honor at a Chinese trade conference ([Global Times](#), April 6). These close commercial relations have also led French administrations to take a critical view of the post-Tiananmen EU embargoes and recent sanctions on Beijing, causing tensions within the Western bloc ([SIPRI](#), November 20, 2012).

China also factors into France’s aspirations in the Mediterranean. Cooperation with France, a leading European country and economy, can help the PRC in its efforts to make inroads in the region. The Eastern Mediterranean, in particular, is viewed by Beijing as a key link in the efforts of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to develop

infrastructure linking China and European markets ([State Council Information Office \[SCIO\]](#), March 30, 2015). Beijing has also floated the idea of cooperating with France and Germany to develop infrastructure in Africa, a proposal which Paris has not taken up ([South China Morning Post](#), October 22, 2021).

China has sought to exploit the potential fissures in the Western alliance created by Macron's attachment to strategic autonomy, rolling out the red carpet for France and other European countries ([LeMonde](#), April 13). Moreover, establishing strategic partnerships with leading European countries such as France could provide China with access to the European defense technological industrial base, technological know-how and intellectual property. The risk, then, is that the PRC could leverage this know-how to exploit NATO vulnerabilities and accelerate its own military modernization program, thereby eroding the Western bloc's military edge.

The 'French Touch' in the People's Liberation Army

The PRC wants its military to be world-class by mid-century, which entails incorporating state-of-the-art technology into its arsenal, including high-end European weapon systems. Currently, China's military equipment relies heavily on systems sourced from France. Most of Beijing's helicopters are either French manufactured, such as the Airbus H160, or licensed variants of French models, like the Harbin Z-9 ([Le Monde](#), April 7). Several of Beijing's submarines and frigates, a vital component of its rapid naval buildup aimed at consolidating control over the South China Sea and subduing Taiwan, use engines based on German and French designs ([DW](#), November 6, 2021). Similarly, Chinese destroyers are equipped with Thales sonars and Exocet sub-launched anti-ship missiles ([Asia Times](#), February 4, 2022). Transferred as part of the dual use deals between the EU and China, European components, particularly the German and French systems, find a lucrative market and avoid the EU embargo. But more importantly, through incentivized imports of foreign technology, European technologies are providing the Chinese defense technological industrial base (DTIB) with an indispensable asset. In the context of growing overall trade between China and France, which grew by 16.4 percent between the first quarters of 2022 and 2023 with China's exports to France hitting a record high of \$19.3 billion, trade in dual-use items such as aircraft has also risen. For example, Chinese imports of French aircraft have increased immensely, rising 183 percent for the first quarter of 2023, on a year-on-year basis ([Global Times](#), April 13).

The robust trade in defense and dual-use technology between France and China can mainly be attributed to the EU's patchwork defense export controls. For China, France's categorization of banned items is quite flexible and generous, as it only covers lethal items or complete weapon systems, and exclude dual-use technologies, which can be repurposed to serve as critical military assets ([European Institute for Security Studies](#), October 2009). Although the recent Russian aggression in Ukraine led to the sanctioning of Chinese companies supplying the Kremlin with dual-use technologies, most of the trade linkages between the EU and China, including the traffic of dual-use technology, remain up and running ([State Council of China](#), May 6).

Conclusion

Different perspectives on China are inevitable within the Western bloc. However, by seeking to use dialogue with Beijing as a platform for strategic autonomy, France risks undermining collective security by damaging the legitimacy and cohesiveness of the trans-Atlantic alliance. Moving forward, Macron will need to understand that a strong EU does not necessarily mean negligence and resistance towards NATO. Moving forward, France's relations with China will become a true litmus test as to whether Macron can carry off this balancing act.

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China's Role in the Modernization of Malawi's Agriculture Sector

Raphael Mweninguwe



(Image: Donia Mkolongo, a rice farmer in Karonga, Malawi , source: Raphael Mweninguwe)

Introduction

China has assumed a key role in the modernization of Malawi's agriculture sector, which has made recent progress in enabling smallholder farmers to produce higher crop yields. The introduction of agricultural technologies used in vegetable, fruit, maize and rice production through the China Aid Project for Agricultural Technical Cooperation has not only created employment opportunities for the local population, but has also strengthened the economic situation of small farmers in Malawi. In February, at the opening of a training for senior agricultural workers, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Malawi pledged increased support for the development of the country's agricultural sector "under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and the Global Development Initiative" ([Xinhua](#), February 17).

The creation of the FOCAC coincided with the new strategy of the Chinese government in the 2000s, when Beijing sought to utilize development assistance, particularly in the agricultural sector, in order to strengthen overall Sino-African relations. At that time, many African countries were desperately looking for technical

assistance in order to achieve a high level of agricultural growth and to solve their persistent food insecurity problems. [1] Malawi is one of the countries on the continent that has suffered longtime food insecurity, where PRC agricultural aid and training has benefited many smallholder farmers, who have expressed their appreciation for the assistance rendered.

While some farmers and extension workers express satisfaction with China's support for Malawi's agricultural modernization efforts, others are worried about the impacts of climate change, which threaten the full adoption of the technologies offered by the PRC. Already an estimated 3.8 million people, about 20 percent of the country's population, are facing a food crisis due to drought and floods that hit the country during the last growing season ([World Bank](#), April 7). But China's technologies aim to mitigate climate change impacts through simple, low-cost, and innovative farming technologies, such as furrow and bucket irrigation.

The Impact of PRC-led Agricultural Development and Training Programs in Malawi

China and Malawi have two agricultural cooperation projects: the China-Malawi Agricultural Technological Farm, located in Lilongwe, Malawi's capital, at the University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (Luanar) and the China-Malawi Agricultural Technology Demonstration Center, located in Salima district in the country's central region ([China Daily](#), January 26, 2018). The farm and the demonstration centers are run by Chinese companies such as China Gansu Limited in Lilongwe and China Qingdao Ruichang Technology Company in Salima.

"The support that smallholder farmers get from the Chinese is improving food security both at [the] national and household levels. Several farmers are growing hybrid crops such as rice and fruits, which are fast maturing and can withstand droughts," said Augustus Chimwala, an agricultural extension worker in the area. [2] Chimwala, who works with the Ministry of Agriculture and is based in the Salima district, explained that yield production has improved with the new technologies that the Chinese experts have brought to the country.

Other new farming activities introduced through cooperation programs with PRC, include the construction of canals for irrigation, greenhouses, soil testing with its equipment, construction of new laboratories for soil testing, among others, and tractors to be used in the farms. They have also brought in new varieties of mangoes, paw paws, cassava, beans, sweet potatoes and soy beans, among other crops.

Salima farmers and agriculture staff are also using the Chinese-built Agricultural Demonstration Center to train smallholder farmers. "They are also training extension workers at the Center. A number of farmers and agriculture staff have been trained from the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centre," explained Chimwala, adding that the skills and knowledge gained have been imparted to other farmers and staff that have not had the chance to be trained.

Chimwala also noted that the Center has now been handed over to the Government of Malawi, "and the Chinese are currently concentrating on cotton farming." China is running a cotton ginnery in Salima where cotton farmers sell their cotton after harvest. In the Balaka district in the southern region of the country the Chinese are running another cotton company.

China has also been training Malawians at Chinese universities where they graduate with Master's and PhD degrees. They are also training Malawians locally. "The capacity building that China has been providing to Malawi's agricultural personnel in a number of areas shows the kind of commitment China has to help modernize the agriculture sector and improve Malawi's food security," said Tamani Nkhono, an agriculture expert. [3]

Nkhono observed that China has constructed several irrigation projects in the country, which have boosted food security. "They have also brought in tractors and have made an improvement in different agriculture value chains. You can see that the agriculture sector in Malawi has been modernized. All this is because of the China-Malawi cooperation," he contended. Nkhono further added that China has also improved the production of cash crops such as cotton, where they are helping farmers "earn a lot of income through cotton sales." "China has not only helped Malawi in agriculture sector but in other areas as well such as health," he said.

John Snopa from Traditional Authority Ndindi in Salima district stated that he was happy with the training he received from the Chinese. [4] "I was one of the farmers from Salima district who was trained in irrigation and rice growing. With the training and demonstrations that we were having from the Center I am now able to produce over 70 bags of maize of 50 kilograms from one hectare of land. This was not possible before the coming in of the Chinese here," he said.

Sophiya Msowoya is a rice farmer based in Karonga in the northern region of the country. She noted that hybrid rice is fast maturing and is "good for a district like Karonga, which experiences drought most of the time." [5] Msowoya added that "We work with a number of extension workers. The knowledge and skills they impart on us have helped a lot in the production of our rice yields."

Under the China Aid Agricultural Technical Farm Project, China has furnished \$3 million in 2019 to facilitate the expansion of the use of modern farming and agricultural technology in order to improve productivity among smallholder farmers in the country ([Nyasa Times](#), October 1, 2019). Enock Mthepheya, former farm manager at the state-run Malawi-China Agricultural Technical Cooperation Farm, said the cooperation between China and Malawi is bearing fruit. He noted that a number of Malawians had been trained in Chinese universities and colleges, which he said has significantly improved agricultural production. [6]

At the farm, China has renovated the existing irrigation facility with the installation of new pumps and pipes, among other equipment. The 500-square-meter farm has 48 plots and three greenhouses. The Chinese have also constructed a hostel and classrooms at the farm. All these are meant for training purposes. "Smallholder farmers, agriculture staff, and students from the university are trained at the farm," said Mthepheya, who 2016 went to China for an agricultural training program. He said the Chinese assistance in the agriculture sector is enormous and has benefited hundreds, "if not thousands, of Malawians."

Looking to the Future

Mthepheya said the Chinese government is committed to helping Malawi in the agriculture sector for years to come. He said the aim is to help modernize the sector by providing modern agricultural technologies that increase yields, create jobs and empower farmers economically.

The Chinese Embassy in Lilongwe recently committed to providing further, future assistance to Malawi in its efforts to modernize the agricultural and other sectors. A Counsellor with the PRC Embassy, Zhang Chunfa, pledged that Chinese experts will train agricultural extension workers in rice production ([Xinhua](#), February 17).

Rice and maize are key food crops in Malawi that are cultivated by many farmers. The training of extension workers in rice production technologies occurs as Malawi is battling the impact of climate change and such technologies are seen as a stepping stone in dealing with the problem. Alfred Mwenifumbo, Controller of Agricultural Extension and Technical Services in Malawi, described Chinese expertise as “crucial” to addressing these challenges ([Xinhua](#), February 17).

Continuing Challenges

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges that Malawian smallholder farmers are facing as it poses a significant threat to their food security. However, effective irrigation can help mitigate some of the negative impacts of climate change on farmers. Donia Mkolonga, a Karonga district rice farmer, said drought affects rice production. She said many smallholder farmers have failed to harvest enough crops because of extreme weather conditions. [7] Mkolonga explained that “what we do when it is dry is we use water pumps to irrigate our crops. But sometimes, when the heat is severe, we also lack even the water to irrigate our crops. Drought is a serious threat to our rice farming,” she said.

Mthepheya said the other challenge China-Malawi Agricultural Technical Cooperation faces is that China sends to Malawi technical expertise already available in the country. “It sometimes happens that China sends experts in an area that we already have experts in here. This is a problem because we already have the expertise in the area, and we may not need the Chinese expertise,” he said. He also explained that some of the varieties China brought into the country, such as cereal, were incompatible with the local soils.

The other challenge is that these irrigation schemes use electric pumps to pump water into tanks. This is expensive, and Malawi has an erratic power supply that affects farming. “The use of solar or wind power to pump water would be an ideal solution to the problem,” said Mthepheya. The agriculture sector in Malawi needs this sort of innovation with the growing threats from climate change and the increasing use of manual methods of farming, the country’s food security is under threat.

Conclusion

Over 80 percent of Malawi’s population lives in rural areas, with three-quarters of people employed in farming. For the country to move out of poverty, it requires knowledge and skills, which China can provide. If such assistance can be adequately put into practice, Malawi should remain one of Africa’s bread baskets.

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Notes

[1] See Ndoricimpa Siméon, et al, “China's agricultural assistance efficiency to Africa: Two decades of Forum for China-Africa Cooperation creation,” *Journal of Agriculture and Food Research*, Volume 9, September 2022,

[2] Author's interview with Augustus Chimwala in Salima, Malawi, May 2.

[3] Author's interview with Tamani Nkhono, Lilongwe, Malawi, May 3.

[4] Author's interview with John Snopa, Salima, April 29

[5] Author's interview with Sophiya Msowoya, Karonga, Malawi, April 30.

[6] Author's interview with Enock Mthepheya, Lilongwe, May 1.

[7] Author's interview with Donia Mkolongo, Karonga, April 30

Missile Defense in South Korea: Will President Yoon Heed China's Concerns?

Debalina Ghoshal



(Image: A THAAD launcher in operation, source: U.S. Army)

Introduction

Earlier this week, some residents of Seoul, South Korea, received an emergency alert to prepare for a potential evacuation following military reports that North Korea had fired a projectile southward ([Yonhap](#), May 31). The alerts, which stemmed from an errant North Korean satellite launch that sparked grave but fleeting alarm, underscore the Republic of Korea's (ROK) growing apprehensions regarding the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) ballistic and cruise missile development and testing, coupled with its expanding nuclear arsenal ([NK News](#), January 1). In addition, North Korea's long-range artillery systems remain a persistent threat, which not only endanger counter-force targets in South Korea, but also threaten counter-value targets, in particular Seoul, the nation's capital and largest metropolis.

Countering a Diverse Threat

In order to counter threats from short and long range North Korean strikes, the ROK has sought to develop a layered missile defense system. However, the threat from artillery also remains a significant concern for South Korea. Efforts to field a defensive capability that could counter artillery threats have led the ROK to focus on developing an indigenous missile defense capability. Given its strategic and geo-economic considerations, the ROK has also fielded the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) capability. However, the decision to field the THAAD has adversely impacted South Korea's economic relations with China.

Under President Moon Jae-in, the ROK deployed the THAAD in 2017. The THAAD is a transportable missile defense system capable of intercepting missiles at high altitudes. The system is able to defend targets within a range of 150 to 200 kilometers and according to reports, can undertake both endo-atmospheric and exo-atmospheric interception. The THAAD system utilizes the Army Navy/Transportable Radar Surveillance (AN/TPY-2) radar to detect and track enemy missiles at ranges of 870 to 3,000 kilometers. [1]

Presently, the ROK possesses the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3). In 2020, the ROK Air Force received upgraded PAC-3 versions that are capable of directly hitting incoming missiles, strengthening its capability to better neutralize missile systems and reducing the chances of potential damage on the ground ([Yonhap News Agency](#), December 12, 2020). (2) An advantage of the THAAD is that it offers area defense, as opposed to the Patriot systems that only provide point defense ([Defense Industry Daily](#), January 15, 2016). The THAAD is also an interoperable system, which can work together the Patriots and also accept signals from the Aegis system ([Army Recognition](#)). Thus South Korea perceives many advantages attached with the fielding of the THAAD system.

Despite reassurance from Washington and Seoul that the system was solely intended to defend against the threat from North Korea and not configured to surveil and counter China's missile forces, the PRC undertook coordinated economic retaliation against South Korean business interests in response to its deployment ([China Brief](#), March 31, 2017). Following China's economic retaliation, then President Moon, softened his stance and refrained from fielding any more THAAD batteries on South Korean territory. By the end of 2017, Moon was even calling for "a new era" of China-South Korea economic cooperation during his visit to China ([Xinhua](#), December 13, 2017). A key element of Moon's policy was to seek inter-Korean rapprochement, working towards a normalized relationship with North Korea. In order to achieve progress toward this aim, Moon was well aware that he would need China's support in this endeavor. Consequently, for Moon the difficult challenge was maintaining and strengthening the ROK's ties with its primary ally, the United States, while at the same time, seeking to improve relations with China that had worsened as a result of the disagreement between Beijing and Seoul over the THAAD system. After 2017, Moon suspended any further deployment of the THAAD system but did not withdraw the existing two launchers that were already deployed ([Indian Express](#), June 7, 2017).

These assurances to Beijing were possible because of ROK's efforts to put in place the indigenous low altitude defense system, Korean Air and Missile Defense (KAMD) system. KAMD forms integral component of ROK's layered missile defense. The system consists of an early warning system, command and control system, as well as an interception mechanism. The medium range surface to air missile (M-SAM) system, called Cheongung II, is a core element of South Korea's multi-layered anti-missile program employing "hit-to-kill" technology and having the capability to intercept adversaries' missiles coming in at altitudes below 40

kilometers ([Business Standard](#), January 16, 2022) . The long range surface-to-air missile (L-SAM) system is designed to shoot down incoming missiles at altitudes of around 50-60 kilometers ([Korea Herald](#), April 10, 2022). In addition, the low altitude missile defense (LAMD) is a system guiding projectile launch pads that have been installed at multiple sites to “create an air-defense network in the shape of a dome and intercept long-range artillery shells” ([Janes](#), March 3, 2022). For tracking and detection purposes, the ROK fields the TPS-77 and the ELM-2080 Green Pine Radar. However, in 2021, ROK sought to procure a Long Range Radar system featuring gallium nitride cells and terrain capabilities for efficiency in mountainous region.

In its quest for a survivable missile defense capability, the ROK has also concentrated on developing sea-based missile defense systems. Its sea-based missile ‘defense by denial’ capabilities exist in the form of Aegis Ashore systems. In 2019, there were reports that South Korea would develop three more destroyers that would be equipped with Aegis combat systems and ballistic missile defense capabilities. These ships will carry SM-3 interceptors as opposed to the older ships that carry SM-2 interceptors for missile defense capability ([AIN Online](#), February 9, 2021).

In April 2022, there were also reports that South Korea has approved a project to acquire SM-6 interceptors for the future KDX-III destroyers ([Defense News](#), May 2, 2019). It must be noted that the ROK’s at-sea naval assets are as much at threat as South Korean territory and hence, an upper tier missile defense capability would strengthen the ROK’s sea-based conventional deterrence capability. The SM-6 interceptors have a range of 460 kilometers, which would allow ROK destroyers to operate further from the coast and increase their survivability ([Yonhap](#), April 16, 2022).

A New Presidency Revives THAAD

As soon as Yoon Suk-yeol assumed the ROK presidency in mid-2022, he informed the U.S. that South Korea would move to full capacity operation of the military base hosting THAAD. Hence, in the future, the new government may not only rely on its indigenous missile defense capability, but also seek to deploy additional THAAD batteries, depending on its assessment of South Korea’s security situation and strategic needs. During his run for the presidency, Yoon already expressed his willingness to acquire more THAAD systems from the United States in order to protect as many ROK citizens as possible from the North Korean threat ([Yonhap](#), April 26, 2022). However, in May 2022, when the incoming Yoon administration released a list of one hundred and ten key national tasks, the deployment of additional THAAD launchers was not listed as a priority. Kim Tae-hyo, a transition committee member who was nominated as first deputy director of the National Security Office, justified this stance as a measure taken to maintain the “current circumspect approach” ([The Korea Times](#), May 5, 2022).

In May 2022, soon after Yoon entered office, U.S. President Joe Biden visited South Korea and stressed the U.S.’s commitment to providing extended nuclear deterrence to the ROK ([Hankyoreh](#), May 4, 2022). However, during the visit, Yoon hardly mentioned missile defense and instead stressed the importance of missiles, strategic bombers and submarines from the United States as key components of extended nuclear deterrence rather than just extending a nuclear umbrella. In October 2022, the United States Forces Korea (USFK) reported it was deploying new equipment to modernize the THAAD system ([USFK](#), October 7, 2022). The

USFK is also working on Joint Emergent Operational Need (JEON) that would improve interoperability between the PAC-3 and THAAD.

Yoon has focused on pursuing peace with North Korea as his main agenda, but has made a hard shift from Moon in his policy, which seeks “peace through strength” ([NDTV](#), June 10, 2022). Focusing on strengthening military capabilities among which missile defense is one, would be a major step for the ROK to successfully implement Yoon’s policy. However, Yoon may not be willing to frustrate China in order to advance THAAD, particularly given the PRC’s past record of harsh economic retaliation against South Korea.

Conclusion

Little doubt exists that under Yoon, South Korea has become more focused on strengthening its deterrence with U.S. help. This is critical, as the ROK faces nuclear threats from North Korea but does not possess nuclear weapons of its own. Its nuclear security comprises the nuclear protection under the extended deterrence of the United States. However, missile defense is also a crucial element in the US extended deterrence strategy. [2]

Improved defensive capabilities would provide the ROK with a strengthened conventional deterrence that could limit North Korea’s ability to threaten the country. However, the degree to which THAAD will play a role in the defense architecture depends in part on Seoul’s ability to weigh its geostrategic and geopolitical limitations or benefits vis-à-vis the U.S. and China.

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Notes

[1] See “[Terminal High Altitude Area Defense](#),” CSIS *Missile Threat*, June 30, 2021,

[2] See “Joint Statement on the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group Meeting, U.S. Department of Defense, September 16, 2022, Joint Statement on the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group Meeting > U.S. Department of Defense > Release