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Note from Head CS3

Dear all,

We are happy to publish the second issue of the *Sinometer: The China Strategic Monitor*, a monthly magazine by the Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (CS3), United Service Institution of India, with you.

The presence of China as a prominent player in the evolving geo-politics and geo-economics, and its role in the global affairs pertaining to security, economy and political relations has been a focal point of discussion in recent years. The magazine, taking into consideration the above-mentioned developments, has aimed to lay out a comprehensive picture of the vital happenings in China's security, economic and political domains along with providing analyses on the implications for India and the world, at large.

The second issue in its first section includes commentary on China's take on the Taliban, analysing the opportunities and threats arising from greater engagement between China and the newly formed Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan. The second section examines the great power play in the South China Sea and scrutinises the developments to the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. It further analyses China's recent White Paper on Moderate prosperity as well as examines China's recently announced rules to protect 'critical information infrastructure and its greater underlying implications'. The issue then analyses the China – Russia military exercises conducted in the first half of August this year and its significance for the region and regional countries, along with scrutinising China's development fund to Myanmar Junta and opening of Tibet's biggest airport terminal. Lastly, it examines the recent decreasing water levels at Mekong River despite China's promises and tries to link it with possible efforts of weaponisation of water by China, having implications for India also, as well as examine the developments between China and Taliban, along with scrutinising China's disparaging reactions to the recently formed AUKUS.

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ANALYSIS

China's Calculative take on Taliban: Oscillating between Opportunities and Threats

- *Mrittika Guha Sarkar*

As the world witnesses a tumultuous Taliban victory in Afghanistan, a parallel discussion regarding China's increasing role in the region is also swiftly taking place. These discussions have particularly come to the forefront with the high-profile official meeting between the Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and the delegation of nine Afghan Taliban representatives, including the group's co-founder and deputy leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, on 28 July.¹ While this meeting was not the first between the Taliban members and China, the timing, publicity and seniority of the same signified² Beijing's implicit recognition of the Taliban as a legitimate political actor in the region, while conveying to the rest of the world, and particularly the West, of China's intentions to become an important player in Afghanistan's political affairs. However, China, even as it officially iterates its readiness in continuing to "develop good-neighbourliness and friendly cooperation with Afghanistan and play a constructive role in Afghanistan's peace and reconstruction", its actions have yet been restrained. How is Beijing approaching its relations with the new the Taliban government and to what extent will it likely involve itself in the affairs of Afghanistan?

Irrespective of the potential political, economic and strategic opportunities anticipated in China's growing involvement in the region, one must look at China's post-US Afghanistan policy as a balance between Beijing's core strategic interests and central security threats. Both of them act as primary factors in China's eager, yet cautious perspective towards the complex Afghanistan issue unfolding.

To this, the official discourse around a Taliban-led Afghanistan and the dominant narrative in China's scholarly community has been focussed on the mutual commitment to underscore "unimpeded and effective communication and consultation".³ From a Chinese perspective, the optimistic approach was elucidated by Zhou Bo, a retired senior officer in the People's Liberation Army, who in his article for *The New York Times* opined that while Beijing has yet to formally recognize the Taliban as Afghanistan's new government, "Beijing has few qualms about fostering a closer relationship with the Taliban and is ready to assert itself as the most influential outside player in an Afghanistan now all but abandoned by the United States."⁴ He further, correctly pointed out that China's engagement with the Taliban-led Afghanistan is one without any historical baggage. In fact, China had been providing millions of dollars in aid for medical

¹ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-07/28/c_1310092289.htm

² <https://warontherocks.com/2021/08/a-reluctant-embrace-chinas-new-relationship-with-the-taliban/>

³ <https://theprint.in/india/china-and-taliban-hold-their-first-dialogue-in-kabul/722070/>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/20/opinion/china-afghanistan-taliban.html>

assistance, hospitals, a solar power station and more to Afghanistan (China offered \$31 million in emergency aid to Afghanistan in September⁵), assisting China to eventually become one of the largest trading partners of the country and foster mutually amicable ties.⁶ This, thus, from a broader perspective, acted as a political, economic and strategic leverage, particularly vis-à-vis other regional and global players.

Further, Bo argued something extremely important: “Afghanistan has long been considered a graveyard for conquerors — Alexander the Great, the British Empire, the Soviet Union and now the United States. Now China enters — armed not with bombs but construction blueprints, and a chance to prove the curse can be broken.” This puts China in a different light than other players; while others aimed to militarily ‘conquer’ Afghanistan, China has and would like to engage through impartial economic investment in infrastructure and industry building, strategically prioritising a domain which will not only aid to develop a war-ravaged Afghanistan, but also further its own national interests in the region.⁷ Interestingly, this has been argued by many Chinese scholars, who have highlighted China, Pakistan and Afghanistan’s mutual inclination “to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)... into Afghanistan”⁸ The projects could range from an advancement to the new transportation infrastructure into the Wakhan Corridor⁹, highway constructions, investing in energy infrastructure such as building power plants and water irrigation channels, and construction of processing areas and industry parks.¹⁰

More importantly, CPEC in Afghanistan could act as a leverage to China; the plans of the arm of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to be extended to Afghanistan had not seen much progress due differences between the previous Ashraf Ghani-led government in Kabul and Pakistan over Islamabad's support to the Taliban terrorists. Nonetheless, with Taliban’s eagerness to become a part of the initiative, CPEC extended to Afghanistan could certainly benefit China and its strategic goals. It could assist China to exploit Afghanistan's rich minerals and highly lucrative rare-earth minerals, a domain China is already dominating globally through its central position in the supply chain network. These minerals estimated were to be worth anywhere between one trillion to three trillion in Afghanistan in 2020.¹¹ China could also benefit from the military infrastructures left behind by the Americans, as well as make use of the strategically located and technically well-equipped Bagram airport. This issue has already been discussed by a former senior American diplomat, Nikki Haley, stating “there is a need to closely watch China as it is making a move to take over the Bagram air force base that was controlled by the United States for nearly two decades.”¹² These might also benefit China as being a leverage over other neighbouring powers, and particularly over India. Finally, these could enable Beijing a deeper penetration into Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asia.¹³

However, China’s possible engagement with the Taliban is not as seamless as primarily discussed. Beijing’s approach towards Afghanistan is also shaped by its central security concerns, and majorly, its threats from the “Three Evils”: Terrorism, religious extremism, and

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-58496867>

⁶ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/the-us-is-gone-the-taliban-are-back-and-china-is-ready-at-the-door/articleshow/85530282.cms?from=mdr>

⁷ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1235249.shtml>

⁸ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202107/1228518.shtml>

⁹ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/08/14/china-afghanistan-wakhan-corridor-imperial-ambitions/>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/science/science-news/rare-earth-afghanistan-sits-1-trillion-minerals-n196861>

¹² <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/china-trying-to-take-over-bagram-air-force-base-use-pakistan-against-india-nikki-haley/article36242202.ece>

¹³ <https://chellaney.net/2021/09/04/has-bidens-afghanistan-debacle-sown-the-seeds-of-another-9-11/>

separatism. Importantly, Afghanistan remains home to several hundred fighters from the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which seeks to establish a Uyghur state in Xinjiang. This has been a major cause of worry for China as it already has been reeling from the impacts of several terrorist activities, particularly undertaken by the ETIM, in its territory. This further worries Beijing because ETIM and other extremist organizations that threaten China may be able to thrive in a failed Afghan state. These concerns were expressed by several Chinese scholars, who were uncertain about the Taliban's commitment that the ETIM members have left Afghanistan,¹⁴ given the "complicated relations" between ETIM and Taliban.¹⁵ In fact, it was reiterated by Zhao Lijian in a press conference, where he stated China's hopes that the Taliban would "honour their words, make a clean break with the ETIM and other terrorist groups, and take effective measures to resolutely crack down on these terrorist organizations within its territory."

It is in this context, that one views an eager, yet restrained and calculative approach by China towards Afghanistan. Irrespective of the strategic gains in the region, China is only likely to invest in the region under the banner of the BRI if Afghanistan becomes sufficiently safe and secure. Besides, China has already been concerned with terrorist activities threatening the security of its citizens in Pakistan; the bombing of a hotel in Quetta by the Pakistan Taliban¹⁶ which resided the Chinese ambassador,¹⁷ bus explosion in Kohistan which killed nine Chinese engineers,¹⁸ and shooting in Karachi killing Chinese engineers,¹⁹ are a few instances which China would not like to see be repeated in Afghanistan. It is thus, that Wang Yi emphasised on pursuing a "friendly policy" towards Afghanistan and its people, while reiterating that the Taliban would need to adhere to its promises of tackling terrorism, as China will not compromise on its national security and territorial integrity.²⁰ Hence, China, in all likelihood, will engage in a budding relationship with the group. However, for that, the Taliban would need to establish a "positive image and pursue an inclusive policy"²¹ and undertake "more changes"²² in their governance to ensure China continues its current optimistic and friendly stance towards Taliban.²³

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¹⁴ http://news.cyol.com/gb/articles/2021-07/13/content_dYR58h0Jd.html

¹⁵ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1234477.shtml>

¹⁶ <https://warontherocks.com/2021/08/a-reluctant-embrace-chinas-new-relationship-with-the-taliban/>

¹⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56834937>

¹⁸ <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Belt-and-Road/China-pressures-Pakistan-after-losing-9-engineers-in-bus-attack>

¹⁹ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/gunman-in-pakistan-fires-on-car-carrying-chinese-engineers-11627477869>

²⁰ <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjzbzhd/t1895584.shtml>

²¹ Ibid.

²² <https://en.irna.ir/news/84400943/Taliban-needs-more-changes>

²³ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3146799/chinas-special-afghan-envoy-optimistic-about-future-relations>

NEWS DEVELOPMENTS

China and the South China Sea

Great Power Play at South China Sea

China kicked off a series of live ammunition training exercises²⁴ on August 24 near the southern province of Guangdong in the South China Sea, and off the northeast coast near Liaoning in the Yellow Sea and Bohai Strait, ahead of high-profile joint drill between the US and other members of the strategic Quad alliance off the coast of Guam.²⁵

These were likely to send a message to the US and its allies regarding its drills, which was particularly reflected in Yue Gang, a former People's Liberation Army colonel's statement: "the Chinese military is responding to US moves to team up with its allies – including when the UK and Germany carry out freedom of navigation operations in the region".

Beijing Trying to Rush the Code of Conduct?

The former foreign secretary of the Philippines, Albert del Rosario during a lecture to honour the late Rodolfo Severino Jnr, a former secretary general of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) claimed that Beijing is trying to rush through a code of conduct for the South China Sea (SCS) because it wants to undermine an international court's rejection of its territorial claims in the disputed waterway.²⁶

Albert del Rosario's claims could be seen as a significant assertion of the way China has been approaching the SCS issue in a diplomatic forum. Talks on a code of conduct for the sea, where China and various ASEAN member states had several overlapping territorial disputes, have been going on for years, but appeared to have moved forward this month when Beijing claimed all sides had agreed to part of the text. However, among the biggest obstacles, Del Rosario said, were suspicions that Beijing – which had previously delayed the talks for years on end – "appears to be rushing the conclusion". Arguably, this claim threw light on Beijing's grander intent – to incrementally take control over the disputed region while undermining the international court's rejection of its historical nine-dash line claims.²⁷

White Paper on Moderate Prosperity

China released a white paper titled "China's Epic Journey from Poverty to Prosperity," sharing its experience on the journey to moderate prosperity, or to say, building Xiaokang society in an all-round

²⁴ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3146192/china-holds-naval-drills-ahead-us-led-quad-exercise-coast-guam>

²⁵ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3146085/us-led-quad-plans-joint-naval-exercises-china-tensions-boil?module=inline&pgtype=article>

²⁶ <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3146535/south-china-sea-beijing-rushing-code-conduct-undermine-2016>

²⁷ Ibid.

way. Further, according to the paper, As the world's most populous and largest developing country, China has contributed to global peace and development by achieving moderate prosperity in all respects.²⁸

By reading the white paper, it is possible to better understand that the essence of China's efforts to achieve moderate prosperity is to blaze and follow a path to modernization different from that of the West. Through this, it is intending to walk independent and self-reliant path of pursuing reform and innovation, while showcasing the international community an alternative to the western model of modernization, of creatively combined socialism and the market economy.

China's New Rules to Protect 'critical information infrastructure'

China has set out special rules to put companies in the telecoms, energy, transport, finance and defence sectors under closer cybersecurity scrutiny as Beijing seeks to tighten its control of domestic data. The new regulations, released by the State Council on Tuesday, provide more clarity on Beijing's thinking around ensuring its critical information infrastructure, a term included in China's Cybersecurity Law but which lacks specific guidance.²⁹

The new articulation comes as Beijing seeks to build a data governance framework to ensure the security of what it deems as important data, putting limits on how businesses collect and use sensitive personal data, while encouraging the circulation of less sensitive data to unleash its economic value.³⁰ The new rules also come in the backdrop of the cybersecurity probe against the giant Didi Chuxing as accused of improper collection and usage of user information and arguably act as an operator of key infrastructure.³¹

China Russia Military Exercise

A five-day joint military exercise between China and Russia, named ZAPAD/INTERACTION-2021, concluded on August 13, 2021, in northwest China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region.³² For the first time, the two militaries used a joint command and control system. The Russian troops were integrated into larger Chinese formations and carried out operations planned by the PLA, according to a statement by China's defence ministry.³³

It was also the first time Russian troops used armoured assault vehicles, Infantry Fighting Vehicles (IFVs) and other main battle equipment provided by the Chinese military, a common practice in NATO exercises. PLAAF had deployed J-20 stealth fighter jets and Y-20 large transport planes for the drill. The drill also saw deployment of howitzers, armoured vehicles, surface-to-air missiles, drones and rocket launchers.³⁴ The exercise was the first joint military operation hosted by China since the advent of the pandemic and has drawn attention over its implications for the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan as well as act as a signal to the US.³⁵

²⁸ http://www.news.cn/english/2021-09/28/c_1310214205.htm

²⁹ https://english.www.gov.cn/policies/latestreleases/202108/17/content_WS611b8062c6d0df57f98de907.html

³⁰ <https://www.scmp.com/tech/policy/article/3145368/china-sets-out-new-rules-protect-critical-information-infrastructure-it>

³¹ <https://www.scmp.com/tech/big-tech/article/3151968/chinas-probe-didi-aimed-addressing-national-security-risks-arising>

³² <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-08-14/China-Russia-conclude-joint-military-exercise-12I7Thrcze/index.html>

³³ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202108/1232623.shtml>

³⁴ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202108/1231004.shtml>

³⁵ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3145010/china-russia-military-drill-makes-room-combined-force-against>

China's US \$6 Million Funding to Myanmar

China is set to transfer over US\$6 million to Myanmar's government to fund 21 development projects, Myanmar's foreign ministry said, in a sign of cooperation resuming under the junta that overthrew an elected government on February 1. An agreement was signed on August 9, 2021, with China's ambassador to Myanmar.

Unlike Western countries that have condemned the junta for cutting short democracy and killing and imprisonment of its opponents, China has taken a softer line and said its priorities are stability and not interfering in its neighbour. From a broader perspective, while the fund has been a signal towards the growing cooperation between Beijing and the Junta, China's priority would first ensure the continuation of its developmental projects in Myanmar, irrespective of the worsening social conditions due to the coup. Further, China's aim would be to obtain a greater strategic foothold in the region through diplomatic relations with the junta, especially as the Western powers remain aloof to the region following the coup.³⁶

China Opens Tibet's Biggest Airport Terminal

The biggest terminal on the Tibetan Plateau – at the region's only international airport at Lhasa – went into operation over the first weekend of August, boosting hopes of improved economic connections with South Asia and the domestic market.³⁷ The new Terminal 3 at Lhasa Gonggar Airport completes the expansion and reconstruction of the region's largest aviation hub, a key project for China's 2016-2020 five-year plan, the country's social and economic development blueprint. Built at an elevation of 3,570 metres (11,712 feet), Lhasa Gonggar is one of the highest airports in the world and the only one in Tibet running international flights. Work started on US\$603 million Terminal 3 project in late 2017, and it is expected to enable the facility to handle around 9 million passengers and 80,000 tonnes of cargo annually by 2025.³⁸

In recent years, infrastructure construction in Tibet has accelerated with many civil aviation, railways, and highway projects. According to Liu Zongyi, secretary general of the Centre for China and South Asia Cooperation at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, "It can help the region to form economic connections to South Asia. For instance, it will be more convenient for South Asian tourists to visit Tibet." "This is expected to help build the region into an international logistics hub for South Asia."³⁹

Mekong River Water Levels Decrease Downstream Despite China's Pledge

Despite China's pledge⁴⁰ to not restrict water flows from its Jinghong hydropower dam on the Mekong River until the end of August, water levels in downstream Southeast Asian countries decreased over the August first week, according to the Mekong River Commission (MRC). The intergovernmental commission – which counts Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam as members – said the process of restricting water flows from the Jinghong dam, which lies on the upper part of the river in Yunnan province, appeared to have started a few days back.⁴¹

³⁶ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/myanmars-dependence-on-china-increases-even-as-a-new-report-slams-bri-related-abuses/articleshow/85266512.cms?from=mdr>

³⁷ <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-08-07/Tibet-s-largest-terminal-opens-at-Lhasa-Gonggar-Airport--12vEr5wfQ2c/index.html>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202108/1230901.shtml>

⁴⁰ <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3144718/china-denies-mekong-river-water-levels-fell-due-flow>.

⁴¹ <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3143917/mekong-river-group-says-water-levels-have-decreased>

This development comes about six months after activists called for more timely warnings from China if it wanted to hold back or release water from the hydropower dams situated along the upper Mekong, which is known as the Lancang. China has 11 dams along the upper reaches of the 4,909km waterway, on which about 60 million people in downstream countries depend. This puts to question the possibility of China using water as a weapon; an instance took place in 2019 when the Mekong began to grow dry. While China's foreign minister Wang Yi, on a visit to Laos in February, admitted that China was also suffering from arid conditions and shared the pain of farmers in the country, the statement flew in the face of a satellite imagery, which showed that China was not experiencing drought like conditions which it otherwise claimed to be. Instead, China was using the dams constructed on the Mekong to control the upstream portion to parch the lower basin countries.⁴²

This, however, does not just have implications for the Southeast Asian countries, but also comes as a warning for India which has experienced weaponization of water in 2017 at the height of the Doklam crisis when China refused to share hydrological data, resulting in unusual flooding in the Brahmaputra River in Assam.⁴³

China – Taliban Developments

Taliban to 'Actively Support' Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Afghanistan is likely to continue its participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative, the Taliban said, expressing hopes to rely on Beijing's investment and support to rebuild the war-ravaged country while promising to protect Chinese interests there. The pledge from Abdul Salam Hanafi, deputy director of the Taliban's office in Doha, Qatar, came as China aimed to consolidate relations with the Afghan regime led by the Islamic militant group, despite many uncertainties.⁴⁴ Hanafi also praised the belt and road scheme, Beijing's top foreign policy and overseas investment strategy. "[It] is conducive to the development and prosperity of Afghanistan and the region. Afghanistan hopes to continue to actively support and participate in it."⁴⁵ In a phone conversation with Chinese assistant foreign minister Wu Jianguo on Thursday, Hanafi said the Islamic group would "take effective measures" to protect Chinese institutions and personnel in Afghanistan.⁴⁶

For China, Afghanistan is strategically located and rich in natural resources. While Beijing has long hoped to expand the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into Afghanistan, it has made little progress over the years due to the volatile situation in the country and China's fear of the spill over effect of Afghanistan's instability. While China would be eager to expand its BRI into Afghanistan, it would continue to utilise a cautious approach to deal with the Taliban, considering its relations with the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which seeks to establish a Uyghur state in Xinjiang.

China offers US\$31 million in aid to Afghanistan

China announced on September 8, 2021, that it would donate 200-million-yuan (US\$31 million) worth of aid, including food and coronavirus vaccines, to Afghanistan. The commitment came on the same day that Beijing said it was ready to maintain communication with Kabul after the Taliban took "a

⁴² <https://www.stimson.org/2020/new-evidence-how-china-turned-off-the-mekong-tap/>

⁴³ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/chinas-weaponisation-of-water/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3136112/china-seeks-expand-belt-and-road-afghanistan-name-security-us?module=inline&pgtype=article>

⁴⁵ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3147520/taliban-actively-support-belt-and-road-plan-trustworthy-friend>

⁴⁶ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1904432.shtml

necessary step” by naming an interim government. Foreign Minister Wang Yi announced the donation in a meeting with counterparts from Pakistan, Iran and Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Wang said China would work with countries in the region to help Afghanistan rebuild its economy and society, as well as fight terrorist groups and the illegal drug trade.⁴⁷

But Beijing has yet to offer its formal recognition to the Taliban-led regime despite widespread speculation that it could step into the void left by the US in Afghanistan. China’s foreign-policy makers and observers have said that Beijing is likely to monitor developments cautiously and not rush to offer official endorsement. According to Zhang Jiadong, an international relations professor at Fudan University in Shanghai, “We don’t see any former Afghan government officials or representatives of other groups in the major posts. The international community, including China, would like to see that the Afghan government is inclusive and can represent different factions and ethnic groups in the country, not just a Taliban government.”⁴⁸ This reiterates that while China might be interested to invest and engage with the Taliban on a greater level, it might still want to take a slow and calculative move taking into consideration its national security concerns.

China’s Response to AUKUS

China-US strategic sparring over trade, defence and technology issues continued during the month. The announcement of AUKUS, a new defence pact between the UK, US, and Australia, was met with sharp criticism from China. Chinese state media commentaries contended: (i) AUKUS will weaken the broader Western alliance,⁴⁹ notably after US failed to consult with close allies over the bungled withdrawal from Afghanistan;⁵⁰ and (ii) AUKUS has accelerated threat to regional peace and stability. Further, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in talks with his European Commission counterpart, conveyed that the new AUKUS partnership shows “Cold War mentality” of the western countries.⁵¹ Further hyperventilating against QUAD and AUKUS, Chinese state media called them sinister gangs aimed at containing China. An editorial in the China Daily pointed out three reasons why the security groupings will destabilise the Asia Pacific: (i) cooperation, rather than strategic competition, is the only way countries can meet everyday challenges in a globalised world; (ii) security groupings tend to prompt “rivals” to engage in an arms race, which would eventually jeopardise regional stability; and (iii) the Indo-Pacific will be free and open if free trade is promoted; exclusive groupings are not conducive to free navigation and maritime communication.⁵²

China’s response to Aukus has explained that initially, it initially viewed Aukus with a strong but measured approach.⁵³ But gradually, the approach became that of contempt, and disparagement, which reflected in its statements which included its official news outlets devolving into insults, threats.⁵⁴ It has consistently lashed out at what it calls a “Cold War mentality,” denouncing such partnerships as anti-China cliques. Chinese officials argued that Aukus will stoke an arms race in the Asia-Pacific region.⁵⁵ In their view, its members are trying not just to compete, but to contain China’s rise — to throw a military net around it in vital waterways like the South China Sea and undermine the country’s economic development.

⁴⁷ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1233754.shtml>

⁴⁸ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3148007/china-keep-contact-talibans-interim-regime-asks-it-listen>

⁴⁹ <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202109/24/WS614d28bfa310cdd39bc6b341.html>

⁵⁰ <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-09-23/AUKUS-A-threat-to-regional-peace-13NecVMnZVm/index.html>

⁵¹ <https://newseu.cgtn.com/news/2021-09-29/AUKUS-partnership-shows-Cold-War-mentality-says-China-s-Wang-Yi--13VYjF8GLjq/index.html>

⁵² <http://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202109/24/WS614d0cc2a310cdd39bc6b249.html>

⁵³ <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/chinas-aukus-response-highlights-beijings-bunker-mentality/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-09-23/why-the-aukus-quad-and-five-eyes-pacts-anger-china-quicktake>

⁵⁵ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-09-16/nuclear-subs-boost-australia-u-k-role-in-u-s-s-china-strategy>

US Military Training Taiwan Forces

A small force of US Marines and special operators have been secretly training troops in Taiwan on a rotational basis for at least a year amid concerns about China. The force reportedly includes about two dozen special operators and support troops and an unspecified number of Marines working with Taiwan's maritime units on small-boat operations. The US Department of Defense neither confirmed nor denied the report, declining to comment on specific operations, engagements, or training.

China reacted angrily to the report, with the foreign ministry warning that the US should recognise the “high sensitivity” of the Taiwan situation and “serious harm” of its actions. “The US should ... stop arms sales to Taiwan and US-Taiwan military ties, so as not to seriously damage China-US relations and peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait,” foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said at a briefing⁵⁶.

Jaishankar-Wang Yi Meet on the Side-lines of SCO Summit

The External Affairs Minister (EAM) met State Councillor and Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi on 16th September 2021 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on the side-lines of the SCO Summit⁵⁷. The Ministers exchanged views on the current situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh as well as on global developments. Dr. Jaishankar reiterated that maintenance of the disengagement process in Eastern Ladakh was essential for restoration of peace and tranquillity and formed the basis for the development of overall ties. EAM noted that since their last meeting on 14th July the two sides had made some progress in the resolution of the remaining issues along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh and had completed the disengagement in Gogra area. However, there were still some outstanding issues that needed to be resolved. In this regard, the Ministers agreed that military and diplomatic officials of the two sides should meet again and continue their discussions to resolve the remaining issues at the earliest.

⁵⁶ <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2021/10/08/us-special-forces-quietly-training-taiwanese-official-says/>

⁵⁷ <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/jaishankar-wang-yi-dushanbe-sco-summit-india-china-border-dispute>

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