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## CHINA AND EAST ASIA THIS YEAR

### **China in Africa: FOCAC celebrates two decades of mutually beneficial relationship**

*Avishka Ashok, 5 December 2021*

#### What happened?

On 29 and 30 November, the People's Republic of China and the African countries participated in the eighth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Dakar, Senegal. The forum's theme was 'Deepen China-Africa Partnership and Promote Sustainable Development to Build a China-Africa with a Shared Future in a New Era' and was attended by 53 African countries and the African Union. Eswatini, the only African country with diplomatic relations with Taiwan, did not participate in the forum.

Despite being a ministerial meet, the opening ceremony was attended by Chinese President Xi Jinping, who addressed the forum online and delivered a speech highlighting agricultural cooperation, Chinese investments in Africa and greater trade exchanges between China and the African continent. President Xi delivered his speech based on the White Paper published by the State Council Information Office on China's cooperation with Africa in the new era. It emphasized China's intentions of helping the African Union with achieving its goals of vaccinating 60 per cent of the African population by 2022, alleviating poverty, promoting agricultural development, encouraging investments worth USD 10 billion in Africa, providing means to digitization of the economy and green development, and advocating closer cultural ties and people-to-people exchanges

The forum also adopted four resolutions: the Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024), the China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035, the Sino-African Declaration on Climate Change and the Declaration of the Eighth Ministerial Conference of FOCAC.

#### What is the background?

First, FOCAC as a framework for China's programmes in Africa. China is instrumental in developing African road and transport infrastructure and building medical and other social facilities in the continent. China's investments in Africa are similar to its actions in Southeast Asia and South Asia. It is trying to build a connecting transport system under the flagship of the Belt and Road Initiative. The FOCAC acts as an institutional framework in the African continent and provides China with a solid base for implementing and initiating its influential infrastructural and financial development plans. The White Paper on China-Africa Cooperation said: "Over the past two decades, FOCAC has become an important platform for collective dialogue between China and Africa and an effective mechanism for pragmatic cooperation."

Second, China's economic interests in Africa. China's cooperation with Africa began soon after establishing China as a republic and gradually grew as African countries gained independence. However, the cooperation between China and the continent grew substantially after the 2000s. China invested over USD 125 billion in Africa between 2000 and 2006 and invested heavily in African infrastructure and other economic and social facilities. Trade between China and Africa has risen drastically from USD 20 billion in 2000 to USD 208 billion in 2019 (pre-pandemic).

Third, China's strategic interests in Africa. In the early 21st century, the Chinese economy had elevated itself from the status of a poor developing country and was now being recognized as the fastest-growing GDP. The economy was in constant need of raw material, mineral resources, fuel and petroleum, readily available in Africa. China is currently focused on securing its supplies of cobalt which is used in the production of batteries for electric vehicles. At the same time, the country pushes forward to becoming a green and zero-carbon economy by 2060.

China also seeks to secure the support of African countries in international organizations and

institutions where it has been pushing for multilateralism. A strong south-south cooperation, which President Xi projected heavily, is already underway. The cooperation between China and Africa showed its strength when more African leaders chose to attend the FOCAC Summit in 2018 than the UN General Assembly meeting, which took place later in the same month. As African countries receive enormous loans, economic benefits and profit from the infrastructural development equipped by China, they do not find themselves in a position to negate China's desires in international settings.

Fourth, African compliance with Chinese plans. There are two primary reasons behind African countries' blind trust in China. First, African countries may prefer to trust China, a country that did not exploit its resources and its people in the centuries-old colonial past. Second, Africa finds it more convenient to take loans from China who does not prod its borrowers to rectify its political-economic-social settings. Unlike the EU, the US, the IMF, and the World Bank, China focuses on acquiring good relations with the African countries to secure its interests and does not bother changing the existing anomalies.

#### What does it mean?

The cooperation between China and Africa will continue to grow in the coming decade as the country establishes itself as one of the foremost supporters of African development and economic sustainability. Africa's support for the country is bound to grow further in the coming decades as China pushes billions in investment and provides greater assistance than other countries. There is much criticism regarding China's lending to African countries and the status of their independence in the face of China's extreme support that at times leads them into a debt trap. However, African countries such as Rwanda and Guinea have rejected accusations of lack of freedom in their relationship and have deeply appreciated the assistance offered by China

## **China: Virtual meeting between Biden and Xi calls for greater cooperation**

*Avishka Ashok, 21 November 2021*

### What happened?

On 16 November, Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden held a 3.5 hour-long virtual meeting to address the issues of dissension between the two countries.

On 16 November, Xinhua Net reported that President Xi had called for steady relations with the US and said: "China and the United States should respect each other, coexist in peace, pursue win-win cooperation, and manage domestic affairs well while shouldering international responsibilities."

On 15 November, the White House released President Biden's statements which warmly welcomed the meet and said: "it seems to me our responsibility as leaders of China and the United States is to ensure that the competition between our countries does not veer into conflict, whether intended or unintended. Just simple, straightforward competition." During the meeting, President Xi also questioned the ideology of democracy and explained that "democracy is not "mass produced" with a uniform model." The statement made by Xi reprimanded Biden for claiming a patent on democracy.

### What is the background?

First, recent tensions between the US and China. The meeting between the two leaders took place in the backdrop of rising tension caused by Taiwan's independence movement. The US lawmakers visited Taiwan last month to discuss a military deal, a move that China strongly condemned. The relations between the US and China have remained bittersweet for decades. The US has maintained its status of being a universally powerful country ever since the end of the second world war. But the People's Republic of China has steadily reached its position of being the second most powerful and financially stable country. After shadowing the US for many long years, it now threatens to overthrow the US and take its place as the world's fastest and strongest GDP in the world.

A report by McKinsey & Company revealed that China had overtaken the US as the wealthiest country with two-thirds of global net worth accumulated in China.

Second, emerging economic competition between the countries. Given the economic rivalry and considering the global economic recovery after the advent of the coronavirus pandemic, another cold war or even a trade war would be detrimental to the recuperation of the economies that get stuck between the two greatest GDPs of the world. Such a development would also be disastrous for the US and China as well. Thus, the meeting aimed to bring an understanding between the two countries and create a strategy to sustain the growth and development of their economy.

Third, the temperament of the leaders. President Biden will soon finish his one year in office. In the past ten months, he has not caused any untoward crises or conflicts with any other nations. The Biden administration strives not to take inconvenient and unfavorable action, even in the case of North Korea. Thus, it is evident that the US under the Biden presidency does not aim to complicate matters with China. Instead, it is complying with conditions that will enable the expansion of its economy along with China. President Xi Jinping also promised to cooperate with the US as long as it did not interfere in its internal affairs.

#### What does it mean?

The meeting between the two leaders is aimed at greater cooperation to facilitate the two countries' continuous and uninterrupted economic progress. The US and China realize that stalling each other might, in turn, damage their interests and thus are willing to compromise and work individually without bothering each other. However, the US may find itself in a tight spot if it cannot voice its opinions on the territorial aggression of China since it has many stakes in the Indo-Pacific region. The priority for both the leaders is to prevent the world from entering into yet another cold war era.

## **China: President Xi secures his position in party history with the "historical resolution"**

*Avishka Ashok, 14 November 2021*

#### What happened?

On 8 November, the 19th Communist Party of China Central Committee initiated the four-day long plenary session in Beijing. On 11 November, the session released a communique during which President Xi Jinping made an important address that affixed his name in the country's history for the years to come.

The congregation focused on revisiting the country's history and its achievements and passing the new resolution on the basis of its findings. President Xi who is also the General Secretary of the CCP presented the work report to the 348 members of the 19th Central Committee. The communique put emphasis on five areas to reach the goal of national rejuvenation: "upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era; strengthening our consciousness of the need to maintain political integrity and keep in alignment with the central Party leadership; enhancing socialism with Chinese characteristics; resolutely upholding Xi leadership to ensure that all Party members act in unison; advancing the Party's and strengthen its capacity to respond to risks and challenges; uniting and leading the citizen Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation."

The third resolution is primarily focused on continuing with the current status of the country and on the path to development that the country has adopted in the last century.

#### What is the background?

First, the grand resolution. The communique passed a "historical resolution" on the last day of the session. In the 100-year history of the CCP, only two other such resolutions have been passed. The first resolution was passed by Mao Zedong which cemented his authority over the party and as the country's leader in 1945 and the second by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 which established China's economic reforms and reintroduced China on the world map. Although

the latest resolution did not introduce new dimensions in the CCP's politics or the country's economic sectors, it reinforced the major development and its position as a global financial and political powerhouse.

Second, the rise of Xi Jinping. With the passing of the rare resolution, Xi Jinping has entered himself in the league of CCP's most powerful and influential elites. Historically, the resolutions were passed to either remove other competition or to establish a leader's ideology in the party. However, President Xi does not face either of the challenges since he has the privilege of being the President endlessly and possesses the confidence of the party entirely. Thus the latest resolution reiterates his role as the leader of the "new, modernized and developed" China.

Third, Xi's philosophy taking roots. In the previous months, the CCP released a series of reports that showcased China's progress with respect to reducing emissions, achieving common prosperity, ameliorating the people's standard of living, protecting human rights in Xinjiang, amongst many others. The CCP has indirectly adopted Xi's ideology and acknowledged his efforts and policies since 2012 in building China to its current stature. The party and the Chinese ideologue now reflect Xi's ideology.

#### What does this mean?

The third resolution does not bring about massive changes within the country. However, it re-emphasizes the role of Xi Jinping in Chinese politics and provides him with a legitimate position of being a super leader in the country's history. From this point on, Xi's hold on power in China has tightened much more than it already was, and this will make the upcoming Presidential elections easier. With an assured and rare third term as the President, Xi has established himself and his ideology with practically no resistance.

## **China: The White Paper on Responding to climate change**

*Avishka Ashok, 31 October 2021*

#### What happened?

On 27 October, China's State Council Information Office published a white paper highlighting the country's new policies, the national strategy, and the shift in the state's response to the global climate crisis. The paper is titled "Responding to Climate Change: China's Policies and Actions." The 35-page report responds to the impending climate crisis in four parts. It seeks to prepare the Chinese people for drastic changes that the government will undertake.

China introduced five principles in its new plan. The paper explained the efforts undertaken by the government to improve the planning and coordination amongst smaller government bodies to execute its new policies. China has also included carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals in its five-year plans and the national economic and social development plans. The state will also actively control its greenhouse emissions, promote low-carbon development in infrastructure and transportation and enhance its carbon sink capacity. Lastly, the report showcased China's contributions towards preventing the fast degradation of the global ecology and emphasized Chinese President Xi Jinping's efforts to achieve global consensus to act unitedly on the issue of climate change.

#### What is the background?

First, the energy crisis. In recent weeks, China also faced an energy crisis caused due to the scarcity of coal in the country. Although China is now working on resolving the supply issue, the incident has been an eyeopener for the Chinese economists and politicians who faced a slowdown in the country's economic growth in the third quarter. In order to reduce its emissions, China will have to drastically suspend its dependence on coal-powered energy plants, which may cause yet another slowdown or an energy crisis in the country. The release of the White Paper comes at a time when the country prepares to deal with these inadequacies and creates targets for the coming decades.

Second, the global push for policy reforms. In the past few years, numerous countries have heightened their cooperation on climate change. Major changes in emission reduction goals were announced after US President Joe Biden returned to the Paris climate accord. In September 2020, China also announced its plans for carbon neutrality by 2060 and reducing emissions by huge margins. The White Paper sheds light on the targets set by the government on achieving carbon neutrality and emissions and the reforms that will be adopted in China to achieve these targets. On 18 December 2020, the UK also published its White Paper titled "Powering our net-zero future" to become the first country with a net-zero target. In October 2020, the Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga also projected that the country would be a net-zero economy. In 2017, the Australian government also acknowledged the dangers of climate change and released its document on dealing with the growing pressures on climate policy reforms. More countries are currently recreating their policies in order to fit the current needs and to resolve the critical climate risks.

#### What does this mean?

The White Paper attempts to explain that climate change cannot be dealt with unilaterally. Although China is eager to take the lead and attempts to showcase its leadership by setting an example through its policy reforms, the paper reiterated that global governance is essential to deal with the challenges of climate change. It repeatedly emphasizes multilateralism and calls for common but differentiated responsibility.

However, according to a China expert, it fails to provide details about the emissions. Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air in Helsinki said: "The document gives no answers on the major open questions about the country's emissions. At what level will emissions peak and how fast should they fall after the peak?"

The paper released by China shows that the country is prepared to take up major challenges to deal with the climate crisis, but it was adamant about following its own patterns and walking a path created by the Chinese people.

## **China: The hypersonics missile tests**

*Keerthana Nambiar, 24 October 2021*

### What happened?

On 17 October, the Financial Times published a report stating, "China tested a nuclear capable hypersonic missile in August that circled the globe before speeding towards its target." The report quoted five unnamed individuals familiar with the test stating, "the Chinese military launched a rocket that carried a hypersonic glide vehicle which flew through low-orbit space before cruising down towards its target."

According to the intelligence brief, three sources confirmed, "the missile missed its target by about two-dozen miles" the other two said, "the test showed that China had made astounding progress on hypersonic weapons and was far more advanced than US officials realized."

On 18 October, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian denied the report claiming it was a "routine test of space vehicle technology of spacecraft's reusability." On 19 October, Global Times reported, the Chinese launch as a missile launch is a "wild guess," and the US is exaggerating it to "accommodate its own domestic political and national strategic needs." "As long as Washington does not incite or create strategic confrontation between major powers, the world will be peaceful," concludes Global Times.

### What is the background?

First, recent reports on China's hypersonic portfolio. In recent times, there have been multiple reports on China developing hypersonic missiles and the DF-17 hypersonic weapon programme. Publications from the Jamestown Foundation, The New York Times, and Washington Post referred to the same. These reports hint towards the People's Republic of China (PRC) pursuing to augment its arsenal through various hypersonic delivery systems. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been heavily investing in hypersonic missiles and is now researching hypersonic cruise missiles (HCM) and hypersonic glide vehicles (HGV). From 2018 to 2020, Xinhua, South China Morning Post, and China Daily reported multiple deployments of weapons ranging from



medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM), HGVs, and intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with the capacity of reaching the US mainland.

Second, the investment in hypersonic technology. It started with the US in the 1980s. The hypersonic research waxed and waned over the period with the participation of countries hoping for superpower ambitions. The rush for hypersonic missiles is most visible in the US, Russia, and China possess most advanced hypersonic missile weapons. Australia, India, France, Germany, and Japan are still developing the weapon and plans to test it in the coming years. North Korea claims to have tested the hypersonic missiles in September, joining the small pool of countries with hypersonic missile capabilities. Currently, China aims to develop weapons that can reach distant targets, although their ballistic missiles are as fast as hypersonic systems. The objective is to attain unpredictable maneuverability that can change the course of direction with a speed of five times more than sound resulting in better penetration systems compared to the US Ballistic Missile Defense systems. The hypersonic missiles are the Chinese defensive mechanism from the US' growing aggression in the Indo-Pacific, ensuring stronger nuclear power and keeping the US out of China's internal matters.

Third, the US concerns about China's technological development. The geopolitical tensions between US and China have seemingly accelerated China's nuclear ambitions. The lack of transparency by China unsettles America making it apprehensive of taking any further actions. Washington has constantly been monitoring and tracking PLA's growing power due to the visible patterns. Even though this is not the first time the US has been wary of China's actions, the ongoing cross-Strait situation with Taiwan becomes a friction flashpoint increasing the concern.

#### What does this mean?

First, China's hypersonic program. The fast development of catastrophic weapons gives Beijing a greater incentive to strike first. This presents potential risks to regional stability and

understanding the Chinese strategic thinking on hypersonic technologies.

Second, the use of hypersonic as a counter system between the US and China. Hypersonic seems to be the latest inventory in which the big powers are trying to compete. The hypersonic technology's maneuverability and capacity to cover greater distances shrinking the shooter-to-target timeline, is the crown jewel.

### **China: Beijing's economic interests in Afghanistan outweighs likely threats from the Taliban**

*Dincy Adlakha, 22 August 2021*

#### What happened?

On 16 August 2021, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying held a regular press conference and stated: "China has maintained contact and communication with the Afghan Taliban and played a constructive role in promoting the political settlement of the Afghan issue." She demonstrated tacit support for the Taliban by adding: "We hope the Afghan Taliban can form solidarity with all factions and ethnic groups in Afghanistan, and build a broad-based and inclusive political structure suited to the national realities, to lay the foundation for achieving enduring peace in the country." The statement also read: "China respects the Afghan people's right to decide on their own future independently. We are ready to continue to develop good-neighbourliness and friendly cooperation with Afghanistan and play a constructive role in Afghanistan's peace and reconstruction." With this, she confirmed that the Chinese embassy in Afghanistan is operating smoothly with its staff despite many Chinese nationals being brought back to China.

#### What is the background?

First, China's recent engagements over Afghanistan. Over the years, China has gradually shifted its Afghanistan approach from non-interference to strategic engagement. Stable Afghanistan is crucial for China. Consequently, China has been active in international dialogue, stimulating the dialogue process in Afghanistan. It has maintained an essential position in the extended troika and troika plus in facilitating



intra-Afghan talks. Additionally, China has repeatedly attempted to bring the Taliban to the table with the US, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and itself through the Quadrilateral Cooperation Group. On 15 July, China also put forth a three-part roadmap at Shanghai Cooperation Organization to begin the peace talks in Afghanistan. Regionally, China has held multiple high-level ministerial talks with the Central Asian countries and Pakistan and China, monitoring the Afghanistan situation for a long time.

Second, China's recent engagements with the Taliban. China has not disguised its intentions. On 28 July, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with the Taliban co-founder and deputy leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in a nine-member delegation that visited the Tianjin port. Previously, a similar trip was organized in 2019. In 2015, secret talks with Taliban representatives were held in Urumqi, Xinjiang. These meetings hold great meaning for China.

Third, China's economic interests in Afghanistan, especially the minerals. Earlier, Afghanistan was not a part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. Yet, it has become a crucial connecting route for China for BRI and also the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China also has significant interests in Afghanistan's minerals; Mes Aynak is the world's second-largest copper mine. Apart from copper, Afghanistan also has huge amounts of iron ore, gold, and even rare-earth metals, lithium, worth approximately 4.4 billion US dollars. The provinces of Herat, Ghazni, and Nimroz offer substantial economic benefits for China.

Fourth, China's security concerns. China fears a spillover of instability in its territory through Afghanistan. There exist multiple militant groups in the region that lies in geographical proximity with Xinjiang. According to reports, the Taliban has promised not to allow Afghan soil to be used against Chinese interests.

#### What does it mean?

First, China was apprehensive of the American presence in Afghanistan. However, now the withdrawal, too, causes another apprehension.

The US will not have any liabilities in South Asia and would direct its resources towards China. Second, recognition from China would give legitimacy to the Taliban and open doors for integrated cooperation. There may be some distrust with the Taliban's promises, but Chinese economic interests in Afghanistan speak louder.

### **South China Sea: New tensions with Navy drills and foreign warships**

*Sukanya Bali, 8 August 2021*

#### What happened?

On 2 August, German Brandenburg-class frigate Bayern (Bavaria) the warship was deployed to the South China Sea from Wilhelmshaven on a six-month voyage. Germany has sent its warship for the first time in almost two decades; it is expected to cross the South China Sea in mid-December. German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said: "We want existing law to be respected, sea routes to be freely navigable, open societies to be protected and trade to follow fair rules."

On 6 August, China started a five-day-long naval drill in the South China Sea. On the same day, the Indian navy also deployed a naval task group of four warships for two months. China's foreign ministry spokesperson said: "China hopes that the warships of relevant countries will earnestly abide by international law, respect the sovereignty, rights, and interests of countries along the South China Sea and avoid harming regional peace and stability."

#### What is the background?

First, the geographical importance of the South China Sea. With a geographical extent of 3.6 million square kilometres, the region is also one of the busiest waterways for trade and merchant shipping. 20 to 30 per cent of global trade is carried through the South China Sea. The region is rich in fossil fuels and fisheries. According to the World Bank, the region has over seven billion barrels and an estimated 900 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Twelve per cent of the global fish catch is from the region.

Second, issues and claims in the South China Sea. It has overlapping territorial claims between

China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and Taiwan. Beijing has constructed numerous reefs into man-made artificial islands, and resettled finishing communities; it has also fortified islands with surface-to-air missile systems, equipped islands with runways and weapon systems. In 2016, the international tribunal in Hague ruled against China's claim, but China refused to accept the verdict. The US often deploys its navy warships in the region for freedom of navigation exercises aimed at challenging China's claims. These claims and actions have raised tensions in the region.

Third, recent developments in the region. Countries such as Germany, France, the UK, Australia, the US, and India dispatched their navies in the region. In July 2021, the British aircraft carrier strike group and an American surface action group passed through the South China Sea. These joint drills aim to ensure freedom of navigation operation (FONOPs) in the region to counter China expansionist claims.

Fourth, China's response to the navy builds up in the South China Sea. China has been cautious but also assertive in its response. Beijing has emphasized adherence to international law while passing through the South China Sea. Beijing claims to the sea both on the law of sea convention, and the nine-dash line extends for 20,000 kilometres from mainland China. In March, the Chinese Foreign Minister highlighted the South China Sea as a subject of international law, which other governments shouldn't "undermine the sovereignty and security of the littoral countries." State media accused Britain of "relive the glory days of the British empire" by allying with the US. China has, however, said, the movement of British warships through the South China sea is at the behest of the US.

#### What does it mean?

The South China Sea region has turned into the hotbed of contestation between countries. The presence of foreign naval forces in the region might aggravate tensions between Beijing and the West. As countries have started becoming proactive in the region this might embolden Southeast Asian countries to take a stance against China in the coming years.

## **COVID-19: China rejects the WHO investigation proposal**

*Sukanya Bali, 25 July 2021*

### What happened?

On 22 July, Chinese officials rejected the WHO's proposal for second phase research of Covid-19 origin. Zeng Yixin, Deputy head of China's National Health Commission said: "I feel disrespect for common sense and the arrogant attitude toward science revealed in this plan...we cannot accept this kind of plan for origin-tracing."

Liang Wannian, head of Chinese experts WHO-China team said: "to protect the privacy of the patient, we did not agree to provide original data, nor did we allow them to copy it." He also said, "international experts also fully understood this."

On 21 July, Zhao Lijian, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson called for an investigation at Fort Detrick, a US military-run laboratory for a biological defense program tracing the origin of Covid-19.

On 16 July, WHO director-general Dr Tedros Adhanom announced a five-part plan for research over the origin story which will look into the integrated studies as "One Health approach," prioritizing the geographic areas of circulation, study on Wuhan market, and animal track-back activities with epidemiologists and last, audit of laboratories and institution in Wuhan. He also called for "China to support this next phase of the scientific process by sharing all relevant data in a spirit of transparency."

### What is the background?

First, the politics behind the COVID origin probe, and the global demand. Soon after the outbreak of Covid-19, Australia called for an investigation into the origin. The then US President Donald Trump blamed China for the pandemic and referred to Covid as the "China virus" or the "Wuhan virus." The Trump administration also criticized WHO for being pro-China and pushed for withdrawing from the health agency. In retaliation, Beijing imposed trade barriers on Australian and US goods. In May 2021, after a media report emerged on an

accidental lab leak in China, Joe Biden ordered intelligence agencies to "redouble efforts to collect and analyze information that could bring a definitive conclusion and report in 90 days." Leaders from G7 countries in a summit called for a new study into the origins of Covid-19, including in China, as the joint report by WHO-China lacked a credible conclusion.

Second, China's response. Beijing has been consistently reluctant in permitting investigation on its soil. For months China delayed the international investigating team's visit. When the team was finally allowed, the investigation was strictly supervised by the scientists. China being dismissive about the lab leak theory and pushed for investigation beyond its borders or elsewhere. It alleged that the virus was manufactured in the US military laboratory or reached Wuhan via frozen food. The health authorities remained persistent over the possibility that the virus may have "jumped naturally from animal to human via an intermediate animal host." WIV, Yuan Zhiming also denied a report of the "three employees from the institute being sick" with Covid-19 symptoms before authorities disclosed the outbreak.

Third, the WHO's response. During the early months of the pandemic WHO struck a diplomatic tone with China and appreciated Beijing's efforts in curbing the spread. It refrained from blaming China for the origin of the virus. The US accused WHO of being "China-centric." But after the death of over 4 million, and no conclusion over the origin of the virus, WHO slightly toughened its stance. The joint investigation report was highly criticized by WHO for not being transparent. WHO Director-General also said, "I do not believe that this assessment was extensive enough" and demanded a "more robust conclusion" report. WHO has now laid down a proposal for the investigation in China and called for the "evaluation of the lab leak theory."

#### What does it mean?

Lack of transparency, inadequate access to raw data, and the politicized nature of the investigations may delay insights into the Covid-19 origin. Beijing's refusal to give access may

raise more speculation about China's role in the pandemic.

### **China: Didi, a ride-hailing company in regulatory crosshairs**

*Sukanya Bali, 11 July 2021*

#### What happened?

On 9 July, Beijing authorities ordered the removal of 25 more apps operated by Didi Global Inc, which provides ride-hailing and related online services.

On 7 July, China's antitrust authority-imposed fines on Didi and another tech for failing to report their merger deals in advance. The regulator also stopped Didi from adding new users.

On 6 July, China announced new rules on data security and cross-border data flows for Chinese companies, which seek to trade their shares abroad. On the same day, Didi's share value fell 4.6 per cent for the fifth day, which is 15 per cent below its debut price on the New York Stock Exchange, a week ago.

#### What is the background?

First, the rise of Didi Global. It is the biggest Chinese ride-hailing company with 20 million rides a day. It is an e-platform, which gathers real-time data of users every day, and is used to analyze traffic patterns. The app collects users' current location and trip route data for safety and data analysis. It also uses the car's camera to monitor road conditions for around 100 billion kilometres per year. The app operates in 16 other countries and has more than 377 million active users in China as of March 2021.

Second, the Government scrutiny over tech operations. Beijing has been revamping its policies towards privacy and data security. In April, the government issued a second version of a draft on Personal Information Protection Law, which imposes stricter measures to ensure safe storage. Last year, in September 2020, the government implemented the Data Security Law, for which companies were required to process their "critical data", to conduct risk assessments and submit reports to authorities. In May, the Cyberspace Administration of China

(CAC) accused 105 apps of collecting excessive amounts of users' personal information and illegally accessing it. Beijing seems to be wanting to keep its data-rich firms under control for security reasons.

Third, differences between the government and China's tech conglomerates. For years, China provided a conducive environment for the growth of tech companies. Alibaba, Tencent, JD.com, with state support, grew in size and emerged as dominant players in the marketplace. However, over the past few months, the scrutiny over these companies has increased. In the past few months, Beijing has fined Alibaba USD 2.8 billion for antimonopoly violation, Alibaba backed Nice Tuan USD 200,000 for unfair competition practices. In November 2020, Ant Group, came under the watchdog scanner a few days before its massive IPO. The move thwarted the company's listing in Shanghai and Hong Kong. Similarly, the CAC announced an investigation into Didi soon after its IPO on 30 June in order to protect "national security and the public interest" citing the Beijing Cybersecurity Law of 2017. CAC said: "After checks and verification, the Didi Chuxing app was found to be in serious violation of regulations in its collection and use of personal information."

#### What does it mean?

Beijing's action against the homegrown tech companies shows that politics and tech in China are intertwined. It also shows that the government discourages Chinese tech companies from listing in the US.

Second, this shows Beijing's interest in keeping essential data within its borders and help domestic players to grow in an environment without unfair practices. Also, it indicates the government's interest in tech giants to show their loyalty towards the CCP.

## **Backgrounder: Communist Party of China**

*Harini Madhusudan, 4 July 2021*

### Quick Factsheet

Founding Date: 1 July 1921

Headquarters: Zhongnanhai, Xicheng District, Beijing

First National Congress: 23 July 1921

Abbreviations: Official, CPC (Communist Party of China); Common, CCP (Communist China Party)

Founders: Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao... (and others)

General Secretary: Xi Jinping

Membership: 95,148,000

National Affiliation: United Front

International Affiliation: International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties.

Slogan: "Serve the People."

Labour Wing: All-China Federation of Trade Unions

Armed Wing: People's Liberation Army, People's Armed Police

Official Website: <http://cpc.people.com.cn>

### Introduction

On 1 July 2021, President Xi Jinping delivered a speech at Tiananmen Square, marking the centenary of the ruling Communist Party. The celebrations saw cannon salutes, patriotic songs played, and the fly-pasts of military jets. With an audience of 70,000 people, President Xi delivered his speech that was carefully scripted to send a stern message to his citizens as well as the global audience watching China, but did not explicitly cite any country/region. The centenary celebrations come at a time when China is at loggerheads with the US and the West, criticisms of Human Rights abuses, its security and legal crackdown in Hong Kong, and the increasing tensions with Taiwan. Incidentally, Hong Kong marks its handover anniversary on the same day.

China Communist Party's Centenary celebrations were about projecting the strength and communicating the narrative of the successes of the party in the country's history. According to the state media, there were 95.148 million members of the party, of which 13 per

cent were aged 30 or younger. Dr Yu Jie, in an article with Chatham House, describes the irony of the location of the house in Shanghai where the party was born, which is now said to be surrounded by designer boutiques, and chic wine bars in the town. President Xi, on taking office in 2012, outlined two centennial goals to define the future of the party. The first was to double China's 2010 per capita GDP to dollar 10,000 by the centenary celebration of the party's formation in 2021. The second is to have China grow as a "fully developed, rich, and powerful" nation. (Evelyn Chen, "Xi at Communist Party anniversary: China won't accept 'sanctimonious preaching' from others," 1 July 2021, CNBC) (Dr Yu Jie, "China's Communist Century: An ongoing balancing act," 4 June 2021, Chatham House) (Communist Party Centenary: key points from Xi Jinping's Tiananmen address, SCMP, 1 July 2021)

#### Major Milestones

##### *1921: Establishment of the Communist Party of China (CPC)*

With the objective demand to develop a modern Chinese society and take forward the revolution, the Communist Party of China (CPC) was founded with a combination of the Marxist theory and the workers' movement in China. By adopting a revolutionary program against Imperialism and Feudalism, it took up the method of relying on broad masses and pointed out the target struggle for the Chinese people. By August 1921, the CPC had set up the Secretariat of the Chinese Labour Organisation in Shanghai, through which the Party led its worker movements. (Eleanor Albert, Lindsay Maizland, Beina Xu, "Backgrounder: the Chinese Communist Party," CFR)

##### *1925: The Great Revolution*

Owing to the leadership of the CPC and the Kuomintang-Communist (KMT), in 1925, the 30 May movement, also known as the great revolution, marked the beginning of a nationwide revolution and laid the foundation for the war against the northern warlords. Though the movement rapidly grew and shook the imperialist and feudal forces, a big bourgeoisie group of people betrayed the movement at a crucial point of the struggle,

leading to its failure. Following the failure in 1927, the new KMT warlords began their rule in China.

The CPC then held the banner of revolution independently and adopting agrarian revolution with armed struggle. During this time, the communists moved their focus of the Party's work from the city to the countryside, represented by Mao Zedong, establishing base areas and mobilizing masses of peasants. People in these base areas overthrew landlords and established revolutionary armed forces and established workers' and peasants' governments, making these base areas scenes of vigorous revolutionary activity.

##### *1931: Armed Resistance against Japanese invasion*

The CPC held armed resistance against Japan in 1931 when the latter attempted to turn China into its colony. The party called upon the whole country to fight the Japanese, and as the revolution was gaining momentum, Wang Ming pursued 'left' dogmatism, bringing another serious loss to the party, forcing the red army to undertake the Long March. By 1934, the KMT under Chiang Kai-shek had taken control over large parts of China but was still clashing with the guerrilla forces of the CPC, after which the outmatched Party forces were forced to retreat from the southern base to northern China. Along the way, the old leadership of the CPC was ousted.

The Long March is pivotal in the history of the CPC because it created the grounds for Mao to grow into the undisputed leader of the Party. Mao guided the remaining troops across vast regions while they were constantly under attack by the Nationalist Army. During the march, they convened a meeting in Zunyi at which major corrections to the party's 'left' ideology was made and established the Marxist position represented by Mao as the leading vision. By the end of the Long March, 7,000 people reached safely in the city of Yan 'an, out of 100,000 soldiers and non-combatants. The party rebuilt itself from Yan' an. Meantime, the Party adopted the policy of establishing a united national front against Japan, which played an important role in paving the way for the nationwide War of

Resistance Against Japan, with the cooperation of the KMT. An eight-year War of Resistance Against Japan followed with the CPC at the fore of the struggle for national liberation. Shortly before the victory of this war, the party convened its Seventh National Congress with a vision to defeat aggressors and build a new China.

#### *1937: Sino-Japanese War*

In 1937, the forces of Mao and Chiang had put their clashes on hold to fight the Sino-Japanese War, but the invasion weakened the KMT's plans against the Communists, and with Tokyo's defeat in 1945, new challenges emerged. Mao's Communist forces drew advantage from the corruption and military incompetence of the Nationalist Government and steadily overcame the opposition to gain popular support with their promise of the land to the large peasant class in China. A civil war followed where Chiang and his remaining forces fled to Taiwan, with the CPC claiming the island of Taiwan as their territory.

#### *1949: The creation of the People's Republic of China*

On 1 October 1949, Mao is said to have stood on top of Tiananmen, "the Gate of Heavenly Peace" in Beijing and announced the creation of the People's Republic of China.

This collided with the post-World War II boom, which many countries faced during the years. Similarly, Mao prioritized economic growth with a plan to jump-start China from an agrarian economy into an industrial powerhouse. The execution of this plan involved making farmers leave their fields and engage in making steel while also forcing others into unproductive land communes which were aligned with the Communist ideology. This plan proved to be disastrous and caused the food production to plunge, following which a great famine swept the country leading to the deaths of an estimated 30 million people. The official history blames the failure of the "Great Leap Forward" on natural calamities. However, the failure weakened Mao's grip on power.

To reclaim control, Mao launched a campaign to ensure total loyalty within the party. He claimed that there were groups who opposed the

communist ideology that had infiltrated the party and needed to be cleansed. Mao called for a removal of the "counterrevolutionaries" and "rightists." This call quickly spiralled out of control, and mobs of students called the red guards began to attack anyone they believed to be harbouring bourgeois ideals or imperialist habits. The situation saw students across the country turn against their teachers while accusing them of being capitalists or traitors. Popularly called the Cultural Revolution, saw the mobs attack anyone who fell foul of them and were forced to publicly confess while the others were locked in makeshift camps, the situation escalated to a point where the different groups of Red Guards began to fight each other using weapons. The Cultural Revolution ended with the death of Mao in 1976, a catastrophe that led to the death of a lot of people. In 1981, the CPC passed a resolution saying the revolution was a severe setback since the founding of the nation.

#### *1979: Policy of Reform and Opening Up*

The policy of Reform and Opening-up in 1979 set the course for China's economic growth. It stands as one of the milestones that carved China's path to the second-largest economy. Hua Guofeng, Mao's second-in-command, took power as the Chairman and was then outranked by Deng Xiaoping. Deng initiated the Reform and Opening-up policy, as an experimental approach that maintains the one-party political system but loosens the government controls on the personal freedoms and certain aspects of the economy, moving China from a strictly planned economy closer to capitalism.

#### *1989: Tiananmen Square*

Economic freedom worsened the corruption within the party and small groups within the country began to demand greater freedoms. The liberalization made China richer, but had the CPC controlling elements of public life restricting international travel or free speech. In 1989, nationwide pro-democracy protests emerged following the death of a popular liberal Chinese Politician. The largest protests were held at Tiananmen Square and during the protests, the party is said to have had an internal debate on the response to protesters. The

meeting ended on 20 May 1989, when the leadership declared martial law and two weeks later, on 4 June, the military is said to have turned its guns on the citizens. The crackdown is a massive blip in the trajectory of the CCP, which led to global condemnation, and sanctions.

The incident from 1989 successfully silenced all calls for civil liberties and democracy, while retaining the pace of rapid economic growth. Its economic potential was restrained by the fact that it was not a member of the WTO. In the 1990s, despite its new policies, China was not seen as a market economy. In December 2001, China officially joined WTO with an agreement to further liberalize its economy. The GDP rate in 2000 was 8 per cent, and the rate almost doubled to 15 per cent by 2007, showing signs of economic boom.

#### *2012: Xi Jinping becomes the General Secretary of the CPC*

In 2012, Xi Jinping became the general secretary of the CPC, his rise to power was seen with much optimism by the world. Xi is known to hold more titles than anyone since Mao and has become one of China's most powerful leaders, taking the party leadership back to being personality-driven. With Xi, the CPC has gained more economic power and geopolitical clout; however, the party still controls major aspects of the citizens' lives, in private businesses, politics, the military, and the new-age technology. Xi Jinping is driven by his new centennial goals for 2021 and 2049, and the priority would be to ensure the strength of the party could sustain for several decades. ("Milestones in the History of US-China Relations," US Office of the Historian) (Ben Westcott, "100 years of the Chinese Communist Party," 1 July 2021, CNN) (Chun Han Wong, Keith Zhai, "China repackages its history in support of Xi's National Vision," The Wall Street Journal, 15 June 2021) (Brief History of the Communist Party of China, China Daily)

#### The party and its Leaders

The leader of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party is seen as the highest-ranking official and the head of the CPC. Initially, the position was titled Secretary of the

Central Bureau. Further, the position of the Chairman of the party was established at the eighth National Congress in 1945 and abolished by the twelfth National Congress in 1982 and was replaced by the role of General Secretary. In the 1980s, the CPC leadership desired to prevent a single leader from rising above the party like Mao had, hence the post of the Chairman was abolished, and the functions of this role were transferred to the revived post of General Secretary. In August 2020, it was reported that the CPC was setting the stage for Xi Jinping to become party chairman and hold power beyond his second term. Starting with Chen Duxiu, there have been eleven leaders to lead the CPC. Chen Duxiu was followed by Xiang Zhongfa, Bo Gu, Zhang Wentian, as the Secretary of the Central Bureau. The Chairmen between 1945 and 1982, were, Mao Zedong, Hua Guofeng, and Hu Yaobang. Following this, Zhao Ziyang, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping have served as General Secretary.

*Chen Duxiu* was known as a revolutionary socialist, author, philosopher, and educator. He is one of the co-founders of the CPC and served as the party's first Secretary between 1921 and 1927. He was the leading force that overthrew the Qing dynasty in the Xinhai Revolution, and the May Fourth Movement. He is said to have had an ideological clash with Mao in 1925 regarding the focus of the revolution. While Chen believed that the struggle should focus on the workers, Mao advocated for the primacy of the peasants. When the collaboration with the KMT fell apart, the Party blamed Chen, removed him from all positions, and expelled him from the party.

*Xiang Zhongfa* was elected as a member of the Central Committee when the CPC headquarters moved to Wuhan, for his contributions in mobilizing workers for strikes. His popularity grew within the party and became known for his outspoken nature and his oratory skills. He was part of a delegation that was sent to the Soviet Union for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, where he gave talks on Soviet radio. His experience in understanding the workers' movements in China and played a prominent role in handling the



party affairs in Eastern China. In the Sixth National Congress of the CPC, he was appointed the Chairman. At the Congress, he is said to have attacked the leftism of Qu Qiubai and the rightism of Zhang Guotao and claimed himself to be the only orthodox representative of the Chinese Revolution. Xiang moved to have an extravagant life and eventually became known to be the only General Secretary to defect from the CPC and be executed by the KMT.

*Bo Gu* was a senior leader in the CPC and a member of the 28 Bolsheviks. He joined the party after having been a part of the May 30<sup>th</sup> Movement. Bo Gu was promoted to the General Secretary of the party when one of the members had to leave for a medical emergency. Bo Gu was part of the military command team that launched a strategic diversion when the Red Army was suffering from Chiang's suppression against them during the Long March. After his role as the military team was replaced with a new one, his role as the Secretary was replaced and he remained a member of the Politburo. He is said to have supported a newspaper in an attempt to make it the mouthpiece of the party, and could not win favors with Mao and suffered great humiliation and criticism for leniency towards the paper.

*Zhang Wentian* was a high-ranking leader of the party and was also a member of the 28 Bolsheviks. He was a participant of the Long March and the First Vice Minister of the Foreign Affairs of the PRC. He also served as an ambassador to the Soviet Union. During the Cultural Revolution, he was attacked and was rehabilitated by Deng Xiaoping after Mao's death. Zhang too was against the idea of organizing all peasants into mutual aid teams. He is also known to have extensively studied international affairs and written academic articles as a researcher on socialist economic development theories.

*Mao Zedong* was the founding member of the People's Republic of China and he ruled the Party from the establishment of the state until his death. He drove the ideology behind the party both politically and militarily, and his Marxist-Leninist theories came to be known as

Maoism. He has played a major role in the milestone events of Chinese history and is a controversial yet popular figure of world history. His rule is seen as an autocratic and totalitarian regime and he was directly responsible for mass repression, destruction of religious and cultural sites and artifacts. He is credited with transforming China from a semi-colony to a sovereign state while increasing life expectancy and literacy.

*Hua Guofeng* was the designated successor of Mao and held the top offices and the military after the deaths of Mao and Zhou Enlai. He was however gradually forced out of power by a coalition of party leaders and subsequently retreated from the political limelight. He is known for reversing some of the Cultural Revolution-era policies, like the constant ideological campaigns but was devoted to a centrally planned economy and the continuation of the Maoist line. After his removal, he continued to promote the correctness of Maoist principles.

*Hu Yaobang* was a high-ranking official of the CPC, he was purged during the Cultural Revolution, recalled, and purged again by Mao. Hu was promoted to a series of high political powers with the rise of Deng. He pursued a series of economic and political reforms in the 1980s under the direction of Deng Xiaoping. His reforms made him the enemy of powerful party elders who was opposing the free-market reforms or the making of the Chinese government more transparent. When the student protests emerged in 1987, these leaders used the opportunity to blame Hu for his bourgeois liberalization and laxness. He was forced to resign as the General Secretary the same year and was allowed to retain a seat in the Politburo.

*Zhao Ziyang* was the third premier of the PRC and was in charge of the political reforms in China. He lost his power in connection with the reformative neo authoritarianism and his support of the Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989. He was critical of Maoist policies and has played an important role in implementing free-market reforms. He received support from Deng

Xiaoping after the Cultural Revolution and is an advocate of the privatization of state-owned enterprises and the separation of the party and the state. He also sought measures to streamline bureaucracy and fight corruption in his later years in the party. His support for the 1989 movement led to his political purge and was placed under house arrest for the rest of his life.

*Jiang Zemin* is a retired politician who served as General Secretary to the party and eventually went on to fill many roles. He came to power as an unexpected compromise candidate after the Tiananmen incident. This was around the time the involvement of the “Eight Elders” in politics had steadily declined, Jiang became the ‘paramount leader’ by consolidating his hold on the position. Under his leadership, China experienced substantial economic growth and market reforms. It saw the return of Hong Kong from the UK and Macau from Portugal and also saw China improve relations with the outside world. He is however noted for his contributions to the party doctrine known as “three represents,” and faced criticism over human rights abuses within the country.

*Hu Jintao* was the ‘paramount leader’ between 2004 and 2012, after having participated in the party for the most part of his career. During his term, he reintroduced state control in the sectors of the economy that were relaxed previously and was known to be conservative with political reforms. Hu has presided over a decade of China’s consistent economic growth, with an aim to improve socio-economic equality domestically. However, his leadership is also known for its crackdown on social disturbances, ethnic minority protests, and dissent figures, which led to the unrest in Tibet, the passing of the Anti-Secession law. Internationally, he advocated for a corporate approach to diplomacy, pursuing soft power in international relations and the ‘peaceful development of China.’ He won praise for his consensus-based leadership and also for voluntary retirement.

*Xi Jinping* currently heads the four most important political and state offices, as the general secretary of the Communist Party, general secretary of the Central Committee,

Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and President of the PRC. Xi is the son of a former CPC member who had been purged during the Cultural Revolution. He rose into the ranks within the party after having studied chemical engineering. He is known for his campaign against anti-corruption that led to the downfall of many prominent party officials. Xi has enacted or promoted a more assertive foreign policy and has sought to expand the economic and industrial influence through the grand BRI. Xi’s term has seen an increase in mass surveillance, increase in censorship, and return of personality politics. Many academic observers see his leadership as authoritarian, specifically after the removal of term limits for leadership under his tenure. He is the fifth generation of leadership in the PRC and has significantly centralized institutional power by holding control over security, economy military, as well as the internet.

## **China: CPC celebrates 100th founding anniversary**

*Mallika Devi, 4 July 2021*

### What happened?

On 1 July, the Communist Party of China (CPC) celebrated its hundredth founding anniversary. President Xi Jinping delivered a speech at Beijing's Tiananmen Square and highlighted China's first centenary goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects was achieved. China is now marching towards its second centenary goal of building the country into a modern socialist state in all respects. Under the CPC leadership, the second centenary goal will be achieved, and the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation will be realized.

In order to continue on the path of development, Xi announced that the leadership of the party must be respected and enhanced. The party must be trusted uninhibitedly, and the people must be aligned with the party's leadership. He opined that, under the leadership of the Party, the Chinese nation had stood up from the humiliation and became prosperous and is now on the path of becoming stronger.

President Xi also announced that China is seeking a new type of international relations wherein China wants to share its developmental achievements with other countries through the Belt and Road Initiative. As a strong nation, the Chinese citizens must have a great sense of pride and confidence in their identity. He issued a warning against foreign states and cautioned them against bullying, oppressing, or subjugating China.

#### What is the background?

First, the founding of the CPC. On 23 July 1921, 13 delegates, including Mao Tse Tung were scheduled to meet in a small room in Shanghai where the first session of the CPC National Congress was to be held. Fearing a police raid, the venue was later moved to a boat on Lake Nanhu in Jiaxing County, Zhejiang Province. It was in this meeting that CPC was formulated. In 1941, Chairman Mao was in Yan'an when the CPC marked twenty years of the party. Chairman Mao could only remember that it took place in July, and thus 1 July has since been celebrated as the foundation date of the party.

Second, the evolution of the CPC. According to the speech delivered by Xi Jinping, socialism with Chinese characteristics is the path to achieving national rejuvenation. The 180-year-old modern history of China, 100-year history of the CPC and 70 years of modern China indicates that the party is the lifeline of the Chinese nation. Xi reiterated that it was solely through the efforts of the CPC that the Chinese nation was able to achieve its independence and liberation for its people by overcoming imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism. China's achievements in the past 100 years are attributed to the Chinese communists and is the basis for the CPC's reforms that helped transform China into the world's second-largest economy.

Third, the CPC's future plans. President Xi Jinping further declared in the speech that China would not bow down to others who believed that they have the right to patronize the communist state. While referring to the military, Xi expressed that a strong country needs a strong military that will preserve its national dignity and maintain peace in the region. The aim is to

create an army that will attain world-class standards and enhance its capacity. These acquired qualities would act as a guarantee in safeguarding Chinese sovereignty, security and back development in the country.

Fourth, celebrations amidst hostility. The majestic celebrations took place amid growing global hostility towards China over the origin of the Covid-19 pandemic, China's assertive behaviour at the border with India in the Himalayas, allegations of human rights violations in Xinjiang, and the closing of Hong Kong's leading pro-democracy newspaper-Apple Daily.

#### What does it mean?

The Communist Party of China remains strong as ever and is here to stay. The CPC will continue its authoritarianism with no near possibility of adopting a liberal stance. Authoritarian capitalism would remain the chosen path for the Chinese economy.

Preserving its virtues and values, China will continue to disregard its criticism from the international community. These actions are justified in China's eyes and are deemed to be a necessary phase in becoming a stronger and greater economic power in the global arena.

### **China: Stern response to G7 and NATO summits**

*Dincy Adlakha, 20 June 2021*

#### What happened?

On 15 June, in a statement on the NATO summit, a spokesperson from the Chinese Mission to the EU said: "By claiming that China presents so called "systemic challenges", NATO is slandering China's peaceful development and misjudging the international situation and its own role. It represents a continuation of the Cold War mentality and bloc politics." The statement also read: "China urges NATO to view China's development in a rational manner, stop hyping up in any form the so-called "China threat", and stop taking China's legitimate interests and rights as an excuse to manipulate bloc politics,

create confrontation and fuel geopolitical cooperation".

On 14 June, a spokesperson from the Chinese embassy in the UK responded to the G7 summit by saying: "This wanton smearing of China and blatant interference in its internal affairs flagrantly violates the basic norms of international relations and further exposes the ulterior motive of a handful of countries, including the United States. We are gravely concerned and firmly opposed to this." The spokesperson continued: "We urge the United States and other G7 members to respect facts, see the actual situation in perspective, stop slandering China, cease interfering in our internal affairs, stop infringing upon our interests and do more to promote international cooperation instead of creating confrontation and friction."

#### What is the background?

First, China's rise. China has grown from an Asian giant to a global superpower. It has a massive economy of USD 14 trillion and is expected to overtake the US to become the largest economy of the world. China's GDP expanded by 2.3 per cent last year, making it speedily recover from the COVID-19 slump. China is also posing a technological challenge to the West by repeatedly harnessing its technological prowess through 5G communications, artificial intelligence, hypersonic weapons, and quantum computing. China's military expenditure is almost 70 per cent of the US' defence budget and it has showcased its military might in the South China sea. The country has used all these strengths to influence the ideological leadership debate as well. Chinese national authoritarianism is competing with the western liberal democracy.

Second, China's rise seen as a challenge by the US and Europe. The US has led the march against Chinese influence in both organizations. It is one of the issues on which President Joe Biden and ex-President Donald Trump have shown agreeability. Trump had even suggested the expansion of the G7 group to counter Chinese dominance. Biden has led the G7 closer in the pursuit against China in his maiden summit. NATO is used to deliberations on

Russia but is facing trouble due to the new opponent, China.

Third, China's response to G7 and NATO. China has maintained an aggressive opposition to the two groups. It has consistently criticized G7 and opposed NATO due to the Cold War mentality and alliance politics. China has actively focused on the rest of the world as a playground for its economic and political strategies, giving less importance to the global panels. Following a realpolitik approach, China has stayed true to its belief that small groups do not rule the world.

#### What does it mean?

First, although China does not pose a direct military threat to the NATO signatories, it has remained a major military force in East Asia. Hence, it becomes difficult to position the alliance against China. However, now that China is extensively discussed in NATO, it will have to reassess its own military standing in the western hemisphere.

Second, China has greatly invested in European countries, and G7 does not possess enough resources to replace Chinese investments. Therefore, any country has to be careful of the long-term implications of terming China as a "threat".

### **China: New legislation arms the government against sanctions**

*Dincy Adlakha, 13 June 2021*

#### What happened?

On 10 June, the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress passed strong self-defence legislation. President Xi Jinping signed a presidential order, promulgating the Anti-Foreign Sanctions law and brought it into immediate effect. Li Zhanshu, the chairman of the committee, said: "No one should expect China to accept any action that damages its own interests. The Chinese government and people resolutely oppose any sanctions and interference."

#### What is the background?

First, the rationale behind the new legislation. Earlier, China did not have a legal provision for

imposing sanctions or a unilateral sanctions program; rather, it adopted the United Nations sanctions-related resolutions. But, since the early 2010s, China's use of unilateral sanctions has increased. The growing economy and influence have also increased the ambitions of China. Over the past few years, the Chinese government has hinted at developing legal frameworks to provide long-arm jurisdictions. In May 2019, the "Unreliable Entry List" was announced by the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) which bore similar effects as that of sanctions. In January 2021, MOFCOM also issued Order No. 1 on the Chinese Blocking Statute. This allowed the Chinese government to term foreign sanctions as 'unjustified extraterritorial applications' and prohibited persons and entities to comply with these foreign sanctions. Chinese legal experts claimed that a legal provision for imposing sanctions is just as necessary. The significance of retaliation loomed large with the US-China trade war. Discussion over being offensive against those who threaten national security was the loudest in the past few years.

Second, the main features of the new legislation. It authorizes relevant departments of the State Council to impose sanctions on individuals or organizations that violate Chinese interests, attempt to suppress or restrict Chinese citizens or organizations or interfere in China's internal matters. The Chinese authorities can deny entry and visa issuance, freeze assets, and even deport the person out of the country in response.

Third, the intense sanctions by the West. The US has imposed multiple sanctions on China, beginning with the ban on Chinese technology giant Huawei and ZTE equipment, on cotton from Xinjiang, and investment in Chinese companies. Sanctions have been imposed due to the crackdown in Hong Kong, and the UK has even passed a resolution to term China's actions in Xinjiang as 'genocide'. China has retaliated with hefty sanctions on individuals, firms, and organizations from European countries. With this new hastily passed legislation, China will be able to have a stronger hold on foreign actions.

Fourth, the new legislation and China's opponents. China has, on multiple occasions,

countered those who oppose it. It has not allowed dissenters and opponents to reap benefits from Chinese sources. Big domestic firms such as Alibaba have faced the wrath of going against China, and external companies, as valuable as Apple Inc., are also following Chinese demands to survive. It has maintained a severe crackdown on the public dissent in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and other controversial parts of its territory. Many scholars and experts in China firmly believe that previously, China did not have the economic power or political will to use legal methods to retaliate against the US but now, it has both.

#### What does it mean?

The legislation will have significant consequences for all foreign entities connected with China. It gives clear signals that China is not afraid of a trade war. The law demands respect of and adherence to the Chinese standards. It is yet to be seen how the foreign firms and investors will respond to such hard scrutiny of their actions. But, for all practical purposes, China has placed itself at the center of geopolitical affairs.

### **China: Following the census, a new three-child policy**

*Dincy Adlakha, 6 June 2021*

#### What happened?

On 1 June, President Xi Jinping chaired a meeting with the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee. The meeting resulted in a major policy shift, marking an end to the two-child policy and raising the limit to three children per couple.

On 2 June, Xinhua, the official state-run media agency, conducted an online survey asking "#AreYouReady?" to which more than 90 per cent of the respondents replied they were "not ready to consider" having three children.

#### What is the background?

First, the latest census report. On 11 May, The National Bureau of Statistics in China released the Seventh National Population Census. It confirmed with numbers what many experts had

been warning for years. In 2020, China recorded the least population growth in more than six decades; and the lowest number of births since 1961. The fertility rate dropped to 1.3 children per woman, which is lower than the required 2.1 replacement rate. Low retirement ages have reduced the working population of China, and with the increased percentage of the elderly population, China is now a greying society. The census brought out the complications of an ageing population and a shrinking labour force.

Second, the impact of the earlier one-child policy. The one-child policy of 1979 has left deep marks on the Chinese demography. Stringent laws, sterilization, and abortions have led to highly coerced family planning. The one-child policy created a generation of overburdened individuals who have to support elderly parents, spend on education and child care for their offspring(s), and pay instalments of their costly housing mortgage debts. The two-child policy of 2016 did not improve the declining birth rate. In the few families with two children, parents are forced to leave one of their children in villages with their old grandparents due to the high cost of living in cities and harsh working hours. It is now a norm to have only one child.

Third, the socio-economic factors. When China witnessed its highest growth rate, it was an agrarian economy with low life expectancy and high infant mortality rate. The highest population growth was recorded between 1949 and 1957 when China was recovering from World War II and excessive poverty. More children in a family meant more hands to work in the field/factories. Over time, the medical facilities have improved which helps people to live longer and children to stay healthier. The average age when women get married has shifted from less than 20 during the 1950s to around 29 in 2020. An older average age of getting married means fewer children. A typical citizen is now more aware of their capabilities to raise. Parents now choose to provide a good life to one child rather than an average one to two children.

Fourth, the response to the policy. The three-child policy is facing severe apprehension from

young couples who do not wish to expand their family; they demand supporting mechanisms to lighten their burdens and uplift their living standards. Families that earlier paid fines for having two/three children are now agitated over the timing of this new policy. Amnesty International calls it a violation of sexual and reproductive rights, saying: "Governments have no business regulating how many children people have". Many experts have shown their distrust in the policy, calling it 'hollow'.

#### What does it mean?

This decision is two decades too late. The desired growth rate of the population seems a distant reality. But the policy may lead to a rural-urban divide in terms of birth rate, employment pressures, and poverty. The failure of the two-child policy makes the success of this new policy suspicious. However, the immediate question is, how far will the state go to make the policy appealing to young couples?

### **China: What does the Census 2020 say?**

*Mallika Devi, 16 May 2021*

#### What happened?

On 11 May, the Seventh National Population Census of the People's Republic of China (Chinese: 第七次全国人口普查 pinyin: Di Qi Ci Quanguo Renkou Pucha), better known as 2020 Chinese census was released. The census work began on 1 November 2020 and continued till 10 December 2020. The census covers all Chinese citizens living in mainland China, as well as those living abroad on temporary visas. Foreigners living in China for more than six months are also included. This release was originally planned for April but was delayed by a month.

The census data shows the population of mainland China as 1.41 billion. The data shows a fertility rate of 1.3 children per women for 2020 alone, which is at par with ageing societies like Japan. The data shows that the population in mainland China in the 2010-20 decade grew by 5.38 per cent to 1.41 billion. This increase in the population is the least since modern census-taking began in 1953.

In the earlier decade 2000-10 the rate of population growth was 5.70 per cent. China's working-age population (16-59) in the current census declined by 40 million when compared with the last census of 2010. In 2019 China had recorded 14.65 million births; in 2020, it recorded 12 million births, a decrease by 18 per cent, making 2020 births the lowest since 1961. In 2016 China had recorded 18 million births.

The elderly population, those above 65 years, comprises 13.5 per cent of the population, whereas in the last census in 2010, this segment of the population was 8.9 per cent. Census data also reveals an increase in the population movement to urban centres, with a decrease in the average household size to 2.62 persons. The UN had predicted the number of people living in the mainland would peak in 2030 before declining.

#### What is the background?

First, data collection accuracy. The census was conducted, for the first time, amidst a pandemic. The effect of the pandemic on data collection is not clearly known.

Second, the falling birth rate. It is firmly established that the birth rate is falling despite the one-child policy being replaced by the two-child policy in 2016. The policy did increase the number of births for 2016 and 2017, but the impact was short-lived, and birth rates fell from 2018. This trend is directly attributed to China's economic and social development wherein there is a rise in delayed marriages, postponement of childbearing and a rise in costs of childraising combined with low public child care funding. The cost of raising a child, according to a 2005 report by a state think-tank, is 4,90,000 Yuan for an ordinary family in China. By 2020 the local media reported that the cost had risen to as high as 1.99 million Yuan, four times the 2005 figure. The two-child policy did not provide sufficient incentives to couples and particularly would-be mothers to have more children. Childbearing puts higher costs on the bodies, careers and personal lives of women as compared to men. Thus, incentivizing would-be mothers is of prime importance.

Third, strained working population. The other fact which is categorically established is the decline in China's working-age population and simultaneous increase in the elderly population. In the same vein- at the two sessions meeting of China's essential government apparatus in March- premier Le Keqiang confirmed that China would raise the retirement age, which has remained the same for four decades at 60 for men and 55 for women.

#### What does it mean?

While it would be too early to say that China is in the midst of demographic crises, but surely it is beginning to lose its demographic dividend. The trend indicates that population growth will continue to slow in the future. An increase in the elderly population means increased demand for workers to support the elderly, plus increased demand for health and social care. The data may also indicate that China might be faced with an irreversible population decline.

### **China: Canceling the Strategic Economic Dialogue with Australia**

*Dincy Adlakha, 9 May 2021*

#### What happened?

On 6 May, the National Development and Reform Commission, state economic planner of China, announced that it is indefinitely suspending the Strategic Economic Dialogue with Australia, which was launched in 2014 to strengthen the bilateral economic and investment ties.

The statement on the NDRC website has accused Australia of disrupting "the normal exchanges and cooperation between China and Australia out of Cold War mindset and ideological discrimination." Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Wang Wenbin called it a "necessary and legitimate" response to Australia. He mentioned that Australia is "abusing" national security concept to pressure cooperation from China.

#### What is the background?

First, the Sino-Australian differences in recent



years. Sino-Australian relations are at their multi-decade low. Tensions began since Australia becoming the first country to ban telecom giant Huawei in 2018. In April 2020, when Australia demanded an international inquiry into the origins of the COVID-19 virus, China retaliated with a series of accusations of racism and human rights abuses. In July 2020, travel restrictions from Australia after the passing of Hong Kong National Security Law invited further trouble as China imposed sanctions and high tariffs on commodities from China. Although the housing industry and iron ore imports constituting majority of the trade between the two remained unaffected, wine was imposed with more than 200 per cent tariffs and other commodities like coal, barley, beef, and cotton were also highly affected. The scraping of the Victorian BRI project, in April 2021, by the federal government in Australia came as the final blow.

Second, the regional and international environment. Although the relationship between China and Australia has always faced challenges due to Australia's intimacy with the USA, the latest currents in the Sino-US trade war have made it difficult for allies like Australia to reconcile with China. Australia considers itself as an emerging power in the Indian Ocean, and is a partner in the Quad as well as the Supply Chains Resilience Initiative. However, China sees it as the weakest link in the chain of US allies. The attempts made by Australia to diversify its trade partners were not well received by the rising superpower of China. While China is pushing for a bigger goal of sending a message to its opponents in the West by giving Australia one of the hardest economic punishments, Australia is also stubborn to stand up to the bully.

Third, the domestic aspirations. President Xi's aggressive foreign policies have brought back the Chinese nationalism narrative to the front. A key function of his presidency is built exclusively on this nationalism cultured by the Communist Party. President Xi has hit back on any western power that recommends China a democratic system. In his 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,' he has built strong anti-

American and anti-foreign sentiments. Moreover, in this tussle of domestic aspirations, Australia is a soft target for China. Prime Minister Morrison has also shown his wariness towards foreign interference in his country and has been scrutinizing every foreign deal under the backdrop of Australian national interests. By not visiting China even once, he has signalled that he is ready for the diplomatic war without fear.

#### What does it mean?

First, the impact on economy. The co-dependence between China and Australia in numerous sectors will keep the effect on their economies within check but, Australia will lose more since China remains its largest trading partner despite tensions.

Second, Australia's alternative partners of economic cooperation are also dependent on China which leaves it with little scope to squirm its way out from the sanctioned existence.

### **The US and China: Biden's first dialogue with Beijing**

*Sukanya Bali, 21 March 2021*

#### What happened?

On 18 and 19 March, the US and China held their first in-person engagement in Anchorage, Alaska. Antony Blinken (Secretary of State) and Jake Sullivan (National Security Advisor) met Yang Jiechi (China's top diplomat) and Wang Yi (State Councilor and Foreign minister).

Following the discussion, Jake Sullivan said, "We do not seek conflict, but we welcome stiff competition, and we will always stand up for our principles, for our people, and for our friends." Yang Jiechi said, "China opposes US interference in its internal affairs. We express our staunch opposition to such interference...The United States uses its military force and financial hegemony to carry out long-arm jurisdiction and suppress other countries."

#### What is the background?

First, the resumption of the US-China dialogue. It was the first high-level, in-person talk since the Biden administration took over. A sharp

contrasting tone was seen between the two counterparts in their opening remarks. The talks concluded with a 'tough and direct' sense of disagreement and led to no diplomatic breakthrough. During Trump's presidency, the dialogue between the two nations primarily focused on unfair trade practices, technology, and intellectual theft. Trump's allegation of 'genocide' of Uighurs in Xinjiang and calling of the coronavirus a "Chinese virus" exacerbated the relation.

Second, a non-zero-sum meet. China showed a defensive posture to the US concerns over China's human rights abuses in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, aggression on its neighbours, and increasing cyber-attack. In response, China accused the US of making baseless allegations, pointed at US internal racial divisions and its military and financial supremacy to suppress countries. Nevertheless, the relation indicated a potential for cooperation in areas like Iran, North Korea, Afghanistan, climate change, and coronavirus pandemic.

Third, China and Biden's restructuring of its relationship with the Indo-Pacific. On 12 March, the Quad allies agreed for a free, open, inclusive, healthy Indo-Pacific, anchored with democratic values and unconstrained coercion. The core agenda highlighted a defensive posture of the grouping towards China's expansionist and belligerent approach. The US envoy also made its first visit to Japan and South Korea before the meet. The US reassured its support to defend and counter the "coercion and aggression" of China.

#### What does it mean?

The US and China differences remain on key issues; however, there are also areas that they are likely to cooperate. The Alaska dialogue should be a starting point between China and the Biden administration.

The US, under Biden, seems to be pursuing a larger approach towards East Asia, which is different from Trump. The US officials' recent visits at the highest level to East Asia showcase the Biden administration's foreign policy pitch. Whether the latter is linked with the former remains to be seen.

## **China's Two Sessions: Emphasis on Science, Technology and Innovation**

*D Suba Chandran, 14 March 2021*

#### What happened?

On 11 March 2021, the "Two Sessions" of China - the annual meetings of two important institutions - the National People's Congress (NPC), and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) came to an end.

The two sessions of many things, endorsed a five-year blueprint for China's economic recovery, besides approving administrative changes to Hong Kong.

#### What is the background?

First, the political importance of the two sessions. Though these two annual meetings of the NPC and the CPPCC take place together in March every year, these are two separate events. The NPC acts as China's legislature, meets once a year, and is considered as the "highest organ of State power." The members of the NPC were elected for five years, and the present NPC (the 13th) was elected in March 2018. The NPC is perceived as an "endorsing" institution by the rest of the world. On the other hand, the CPPCC is an advisory body, comprising members of the Communist Party of China and others; according to an official source, the current National Committee of the CPPCC has 2158 members, with 859 from the Communist Party of China. The two sessions are considered as the most important development, as it highlights the government's thinking on contemporary issues, and also provide a roadmap for China's economic, political and international outlook.

Second, the focus of the 2021 session on the economy. With COVID-19's fallouts on the economy, there has been an extra focus on China's roadmap. Premier Li Keqiang, presented a five-year plan, aimed at a six per cent growth rate, with a focus on research and innovation. According to an analysis, science and technology "appeared about 86 times in the draft of the latest five-year plan, compared with 29 in the previous iteration." There has been a focus

on artificial intelligence, quantum computing and blockchain technology.

Third, the focus on Hong Kong. While the two sessions looked at multiple issues, there was an extra focus at the global level, on what did these two sessions discuss and decide on Hong Kong. In the two sessions, it was agreed to make structural changes to Hong Kong administration, that China considers would provide greater control to Beijing. On the other hand, the critics of Beijing in Hong Kong and elsewhere consider that the new changes would bring an end to the “one country, two systems” setup, and affect the democratic institutions in letter and spirit.

#### What does it mean?

First, China is likely to look inwards to take its economy forward. It is likely to invest more in Science, Technology and Innovation as a strategy to achieve economic self-reliance. Given the recent emphasis at the global level on technology, innovation and the politics over it, especially between the US and China, Beijing sees this as an essential component to drive its growth engine.

Second, the proposed five-year plan is not about economic recovery alone; it is about closing the technological divide as soon as possible and increase the divide between China and the rest of the world.

Third, despite international criticisms, Beijing is likely to go ahead with its plan to increase its effective control over Hong Kong. This is a foregone conclusion; the rest of the world should give more focus on the first two implications, than narrowly focusing only on the third.

### **The WHO mission in China: COVID-19 virus did not emerge from the Wuhan lab**

*Sukanya Bali, 14 February 2021*

#### What happened?

On 9 February, the WHO experts presented their preliminary finding stating that “the origin of COVID-19 is yet to identify, and it is unlikely to have leaked from a Chinese lab.” Peter Ben Embarek, head of WHO mission said, “Our initial findings suggest that the introduction

through an intermediary host species is the most likely a pathway, and require more studies, specific and targeted research.” The team also pointed at a further investigation into cold chain products, “referring to transport and trade of frozen products.”

On 12 February, a WHO independent investigator said, “Chinese scientists refused to share raw data that might bring the world closer to understanding the origins of the coronavirus pandemic.” Chinese scientists also disclosed 92 people being hospitalized with a symptom of fever and cough in Wuhan in October 2019.

#### What is the background?

First, the call for an independent investigation into the origin of COVID-19. The first cluster surfaced in Wuhan, in December 2019; it was linked to the Chinese seafood and poultry markets. The then US President Trump called it a Chinese virus. Among other countries, Australia also called for a WHO investigation into the origins of the virus. The US accused the WHO of being pro-China and pushed for withdrawing from the health agency. In response, Zhao Lijian, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson accused the US military of bringing coronavirus to China. China imposed trade barriers on Australian goods after Australia pushed for an investigation into the origins of the virus. In November, the New York Times reported that the Chinese ambassador lobbied WHO against the declaration of an international emergency in the early days of the pandemic. Second, the WHO mission to China. For several months China delayed the visit of WHO experts to Wuhan, where the first clusters were reported. Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the director-general of WHO said, he was “very disappointed” by the delays. In July, a small team of WHO experts entered China but was forced to carry out an investigation from a distance. They were also discouraged from questioning China’s response to the outbreak.

In October, as more countries started blaming China for the pandemic and called on China for transparency, the team of researchers from WHO and Chinese started over the discussions on the origin of coronavirus and how it is

transmitted to the human body. After months of negotiations, the Chinese government allowed a team of 15 scientists to visit. Among them, two scientists weren't allowed to China after they tested positive for coronavirus antibodies. The team faced hurdles like visa delays, quarantine restrictions, and political stonewalling in the country.

Third, the finding. In the joint press meeting on 09 February, the Chinese experts, and the WHO team, disclosed their key findings. First, no COVID-19 spread in Wuhan before 19 December 2020. Second, coronavirus most likely emerged in bats and spread to humans through another animal which is yet to be identified. Third, the Huanan seafood market may not be the first place of the outbreak. Fourth, it is extremely unlikely that the virus leaked from a lab in Wuhan. Fifth, it may be possible that the virus spread to humans through frozen food. Lastly, the virus may not be passed from the animal-to-human transmission.

#### What does it mean?

First, the mission is yet to identify the origins of the virus, transmission and spread. China used the WHO visit as a public relation exercise. The investigation remains politicized, and the blame game continues.

Second, the primary accusation on the leak of the virus on China's Virology lab stands dismissed after the WHO visit rendering allegations baseless.

### **China: New Redlines on Xinjiang, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, as US-China relations starts under Biden**

*Teshu Singh, 7 February 2021*

#### What happened?

On 1 February 2021, in a conversation with Jacob J. Lew, the Politburo Member and the Director of the office of the Central Committee for Foreign Affairs of the Politburo of the 19th CPC Central Committee, Yang Jiechi expounded on the state of US-China relations and prospects for the future of the bilateral

relations. In his address, he cautioned the US not to cross the "red lines".

#### What is the background?

First, the new redline as Beijing's signal to the larger US-China relations. China is anxious about its relations with the US under Joe Biden. The leadership of China believes that the US-China relations have reached "new crossroads" and "a new window of hope" is opening with the coming of Joe Biden. Thus, as an attempt to put forth the Chinese perspective on the evolving bilateral relation Yang Jiechi articulated his response.

Second, China would like to continue with what it has agreed with the Trump administration. There is an agreement reached in January 2020. As per the agreement, China agreed to purchase more of certain US goods and services worth USD 200 billion in 2020 and 2021 with the base year as 2017. On 13 January 2021, the US declassified "the US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific". It is rare to declassify a document before its scheduled date. The objective of declassifying the document was to put forth the official US stance in the public domain is to ensure that the administration does not retract. Perhaps, China also wants to push the same argument with force and new redlines.

Third, China's "Wolf Warrior Diplomacy" - a euphemism for its new approach. The Chinese diplomats have been more aggressive in defending their country's interests. Yang Yechi redline statement is perhaps a part of this aggressive strategy.

#### What does it mean?

Will the Biden administration go back on the Trump policies? The new administration has already reaffirmed Taiwan's enduring commitment and advised China "to cease its military, diplomatic and economic pressure." US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also said he agreed that China's actions in its western Xinjiang region should be designated as "genocide". He has also offered support to people fleeing Hong Kong, "the US should give haven to people fleeing political repression in Hong Kong. Consequently, Yang Yechi alluded to draw a "red line" on the core issues and

reiterated that the US should fulfil its commitment to abide by the One-China principle.

Yang Jiechi speech was the most high-profile appeal by China to the US ever since Joe Biden took office. Through this speech, he has put the onus on the US to mend the damage caused by the "misguided policies" under the Trump administration. Furthermore, after the speech, China Daily published an article titled, "US govt urged to focus on cooperation". The article highlighted that both China and the US task to take their relationship back to "a predictable and constructive track". It stated, the two largest economies should build a model of interaction that "focuses on peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation".

To conclude, redline speech is an indication that US-China relations are not expected to be smooth.

## **Hong Kong: China now targets media freedom**

*Sukanya Bali, 25 April 2021*

### What happened?

On 22 April, Bao Choy Yuk-ling, a freelance journalist with Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), was convicted of making false statements using license plate information from publicly accessible databases. She was fined USD 775 for violating the road traffic ordinance. Ivy Chui, West Kowloon Magistrate, said: "The regulations are not intended to allow the public to obtain vehicle particular without limitations." She highlighted that the public could obtain vehicle ownership records only for three stated purposes: legal matters, vehicle purchase or other transport or traffic-related matters. According to Reuters, Chris Yeung, Chief of Hong Kong Journalists Association, said: "it was a day of shame for the city." He also said: the criminalizing normal journalism is "recklessly destroying" press freedom

### What is the background?

First, Hong Kong as a bastion of free media.

Under constitutional guarantees of free speech, Hong Kong had engaged in independent journalism. From the Tiananmen massacre in 1989 to the Umbrella Movement in 2014, the press had far more freedom than the mainland in reporting the protests and regional politics. Social media has also played a prominent role in mobilizing support in the pro-democracy protest of 2019 in Hong Kong. Consequently, pro-Beijing officials blamed the negative coverage of China by the press as a reason for the rising anti-china sentiments in the territory. Second, Beijing's strategy to target the independent media in Hong Kong. After the imposition of the national security law, freedom of expression has deteriorated in the territory, marking a clear shift from the media-friendly environment of Hong Kong. On 16 April, Jimmy Lai, founder of Apple Daily, who has been arrested on several occasions, was sentenced to 14 months in prison. In February, RTHK, a government-funded network, replaced its head with a bureaucrat and called for stringent supervision. Many international newspapers like New York Times have also relocated their offices to Seoul after facing pressure from the government. Journalists have shown concerns over raids, search warrants, and arrests. According to New York Times, Reporters without Borders said: The National Security law used by the government is a "full-blown intimidation" of journalists. In September 2020, Hong Kong police announced that the designation of 'media representative' will be restricted to government-licensed organizations, effectively curbing reporting by freelance journalists.

### What does it mean?

Bao's conviction indicates the growing pressure on media in Hong Kong. The use of national security law against media freedom has narrowed the space for dissent.

China seems to be moving towards a "one country, one media" environment by replicating mainland media's features in Hong Kong, thereby effectively eroding the territory's civil liberties.

## **Hong Kong: Police arrests dozens of pro-democracy protestors**

*Sukanya Bali, 9 January 2021*

### What happened?

On 6 January 2021, 53 Hong Kong opposition politicians and activists were arrested in a police raid, on suspicion of violating the national security law. Those arrested include 13 former legislative councilors, academicians, district councilors, student activists, and organizers of last year's mass marches. Li Kwai-wah, a senior police superintendent, also said that they had frozen more than USD 200,000 in funds related to the effort.

On the same day, Hua Chunying, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, said that the arrest only impeded the "freedom of some external forces and individuals" in Hong Kong "to collude with each other to attempt to undermine China's stability and security". The Hong Kong democracy activists have called for the release of "political prisoners".

### What is the background?

First, China's imposition of National Security Law in June 2020. The law punishes secession, sedition, and collusion crimes with foreign forces with terms up to life imprisonment. Since then, the Hong Kong authorities have detained dozens of pro-democracy leaders, raided media offices, and ousted opposition lawmakers. China has been using the law to curtail freedom by systematically targeting protestors. Young protestors like Joshua Wong, Ivan Lam, and Agnes Chow Ting were convicted. Political leaders, lawmakers and media institutions have also been targeted. Soon after the law was passed, seven pro-democratic politicians were arrested on charges of "contempt" and "interfering" with the city's Legislative Council.

In November, China's National People's Congress Standing Committee passed a resolution disqualifying four pro-democracy lawmakers. Jimmy Lai, the founder of an independent media institution Apple Daily, was accused of colluding with foreign powers and was arrested under the new security law.

Second, the pro-democracy protests have largely died down in Hong Kong after Beijing began implementing the law. In June 2019, over a million people took to the streets, clashed with the police, and shut the airports against the law allowing extradition to China. Today, the protests and mass gatherings in public places have ceased.

Third, the international response. The arrest has drawn criticism from the international community. Countries have responded with sanctions and imposed a travel ban on Chinese officials. The US Congress approved a bill in July 2020, penalizing banks doing business with Chinese officials soon after Beijing enacted law in Hong Kong. In July 2020, the UK had offered citizenship to three million Hong Kongers. Citizens with British National (Overseas) or BNO status, will be able to apply from January 2021. In August 2020, the New York Times had announced moving parts of its Hong Kong office to the South Korean capital Seoul.

### What does it mean?

First, more than a year after protests started in Hong Kong, it is clear that the protestors have lost out. With these recent arrests, will there be another round of resistance by the young protestors is a question.

The recent arrest will weaken the opposition within the city's political institutions because many leaders could be in prison, or their arrests would officially lead to their disqualification.

## **Taiwan: President Tsai's address tries to resist increasing pressures from China**

*Dincy Adlakha, 17 October 2021*

### What happened?

On 10 October, the Taiwanese President, Tsai Ing-wen delivered an address marking the National Day of Taiwan. While stressing on the Taiwanese sovereignty, she said: "I want to reiterate the words' peace, parity, democracy, and dialogue'. We will not accept the Beijing authorities' use of 'one country, two systems' to downgrade Taiwan and undermine the cross-strait status quo. We stand fast by this principle."

On the next day, in response to the presidential address, China's Taiwan Affairs Office asserted that China will "not leave any space for Taiwan independence separatist activities."

#### What is the background?

First, China's growing pressure signals reunification. Lately, China has been extremely vocal about its intentions to reunify Taiwan with the mainland. Militarily, the largest ever incursions of military jets from the People's Liberation Army were observed in Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone on 2 October. The planes continued to breach Taiwanese territory for four days. Furthermore, reports are also surfacing regarding the construction of air bases near China that are close to the island. Politically, President Xi Jinping, and other dignitaries from the Communist Party of China, have made statements assuring the common public of reunification with Taiwan. In fact, while addressing a gathering of political elites in the Great Hall of the People, Xi called the Taiwanese attempt at secessionism the biggest obstacle to national rejuvenation. Chinese media, especially Global Times, have been publishing editorial articles warning Taiwan against separatism.

Second, the Taiwanese response. Taiwan has been opposing reunification with China for a long time. Especially after witnessing the 2019 crackdown in Hong Kong, Taiwan has made sure to project itself as an independent country. It has applied multiple times for separate representation in WHO and the recent application for membership in Trans-Pacific Partnership is reflective of Taiwan's identity, separate from China. More recently, the remarks made by the Taiwanese President and Defence Minister are clear from one perspective. Taiwan will not bow to Chinese pressure despite its asymmetrical military capabilities.

Third, the international involvement, especially the US. Taiwan is constantly attempting to balance its power against China. The biggest role in this endeavour is the US President Joe Biden has shown support for Taiwanese independence. The US even warned China of the disrupted "regional peace and stability" due to China's "provocative military activity". Taiwan

is more than just a symbol of independence and democracy for the US. It is an economic haven that might slide under the captivating hands of China if reunified. Taiwan has become a major issue of contention between China and the US. Additionally, connections with many western allies are also crucial for Taiwan. From Japan referring to Taiwan as an independent country to the former Australian Prime Minister visiting Taiwan as a show of support, the international community has largely fallen in line with the US weight.

#### What does it mean?

Many analysts see the judgment day as close. As tensions increase at the Taiwan strait, it may not be far when China attempts to overtake the Democratic Progressive Party. However, such a scenario will be disastrous for the little progress that the US and China have made in terms of trade relations. Although the Chinese actions in Taiwan are fairly important to the US, are they worth fighting a war with the dragon is something that the US has to reconsider. The upcoming few weeks are extremely crucial for all the parties involved.

### **Japan: LDP secures a comfortable win in the 2021 elections**

*Keerthana Nambiar, 7 November 2021*

#### What happened?

On 31 October, Japan conducted its 49th general election. The new Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's coalition secured a safe and comfortable majority in the Parliament. Kishida's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) claimed 261 seats in the 465-member lower house. The LDP's junior coalition partner Komeito won 32 seats, together with sharing 291 seats in the lower house. The center-left Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP), the biggest opposition group saw its fall by 13 seats to 96.

On 1 November, Fumio Kishida said, "It was a very tough election, but the people's will — that they want us to create this country's future under the stable LDP- Komeito government and the Kishida administration — was shown." He



further added "We received a precious 261 seats for the LDP. As a responsible party ... we will meet the public mandate."

#### What is the background?

First, the LDP continues to hold the reins of Japanese politics. Since the 1950s, the LDP has governed Japan without interruption and only lost a lower house election in 2009. The general expectations of the 2021 elections were that the LDP would lose a considerable number of seats. Earlier, during the Shinzo Abe regime, the ruling coalition of LDP and Komeito party had a two-thirds of a supermajority in the lower house, creating a strong foundation. Despite two changes of prime minister and the widespread dissatisfaction over how the LDP-led government handled the COVID-19 pandemic, they barely affected the election results. This proves LDP's staunch voter base.

Second, the slipping of power from the LDP. Among the Japanese political faces, Shinzo Abe is the premier. The recent growing aversion from Abe's policies due to the many scandals in 2020 brought in Fumio Kishida as the new party leader and Prime Minister. This generational shift within the LDP has altered the internal dynamics within the factions. The rise of young leaders across all the parties has drastically changed the political diet of Japan.

Third, the lack of stronger opposition. The Japanese voters have always been clear advocates of stability in the face of a worsening regional security environment and ongoing economic hurdles. Even though the public often signaled their dissatisfaction with the Abe government, the lack of a better alternative pulls them back to LDP. On the other hand, the opposition faces challenges in terms of organizing itself, gathering funds, and most importantly winning the elections.

#### What does it mean?

First, Kishida's first public test. This is the first test for Kishida who took over as the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party in October and became the party leader and prime minister. The new government will face the task of steering the world's third-largest economy battered by the coronavirus, tackling a very fast-aging and

slumping population and major security challenges from China and North Korea.

Second, the question of stability or the return to a revolving door. A weakened LDP majority in the elections could possibly mean further losses in the upcoming upper house elections. While the LDP has been in power almost continuously, only five politicians in the course of eight decades have hung on to the prime minister's post for more than five years or longer. A poor showing of the LDP power in the electorate could encourage and embolden Fumio Kishida's rivals within the party. Thus, threatening Japan to once again return to an era of short-lived government administrations.

### **Japan: Fumio Kishida wins the leadership race to become the next Japanese PM**

*Keerthana Nambiar, 3 October 2021*

#### What happened?

On 29 September, former Japanese foreign minister Fumio Kishida was voted to become the next prime minister of Japan in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. Kishida narrowly beat his main rival Taro Kono, the vaccine minister, by 256-255 in the first round of voting by party members. The second round of voting dominated by LDP's members in Diet (Japan's parliament) concreted Kishida's position and secured his win.

After the vote, Kishida told LDP lawmakers: "We remain under a national crisis. We must strive and continue our coronavirus response and forge an economic package in the size of dozens of trillions of yen by the end of the year." He called for unity among party members as he leads the LDP for the general election slated for November and next year's election of the House of Councillors, the upper chamber of parliament.

#### What is the background?

First, the post-Abe political compass in Japan. Shinzo Abe's unexpected resignation, citing health reasons, set off a frenzy among the LDP leaders, replacing him with Abe's right hand Yoshihide Suga. 'Abenomics' for managing the Japanese economy was the highlight of his

regime. The transition was a significant turning point in Japanese politics and foreign affairs. Abe's legacy is the most critical variable for a positive alliance with the United States and assertive foreign policies. His reorientation in Tokyo's stand towards rising China, with the Quad grouping and lead in Trans-pacific Partnership, diversified Japanese foreign policies.

Second, a quick analysis of Suga's performance. The challenges for the Suga government included a wide spectrum of geopolitical tensions and regional security regarding Taiwan and East and the South China Sea. With the slow vaccination rollout and unpopular opinion of going ahead with the Tokyo Olympics, public support for Suga declined.

Third, the divide within the LDP. Factional politics is an essential element in the Japanese political system. According to reports, LDP has seven factions; five are significant, and two are considered minor. The LDP leadership election outcome is dependent on the political footings and equations within the inner factions. In the case of Tokyo Olympics 2020, the power struggle inside LDP has been visible between leaders who support and the ones against the Olympics. The factional divide became evident with the leadership elections between Fumio Kishida and Taro Kono wherein Kishida won by a small margin.

Fourth, the rise of Kishida. Fumio Kishida will be Japan's 100th prime minister. Assuming that the LDP retains the power in the upcoming elections, Kishida will have to face challenges of navigating Japan's pandemic response and jump-starting its stagnant economic recovery. His stand on major issues, starting from bridging the economic inequities and orienting foreign policies to climate change and gender equality, will determine his support.

#### What does this mean?

First, the changing dynamics. With robust leadership and a capable team, Kishida may focus on strategically maintaining a stable equilibrium without compromising Japanese interests. Second, the choice. The leadership election is for debate whether LDP moved out of

Abe's shadow. Kishida as a choice could work against Japan's 'revolving-door' leadership.

## **Japan: Remembering Hiroshima bombing, "Little Boy" and 80,000 people, 76 years later**

*Avishka Ashok, 8 August 2021*

### What happened?

On 6 August, Japan marked 76 years of the first atomic bombing on Hiroshima. On this occasion, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga attended the memorial conference and pledged to support states towards the aim of nuclear disarmament. The annual ceremony was also attended by the Mayor of Hiroshima who pushed for the ratification of the UN treaty which seeks to ban nuclear weapons. He said: "Nuclear weapons are the ultimate human violence. If civil society decides to live without them, the door to a nuclear-weapon-free world will open wide."

### What is the background?

First, the devastation caused by the "Little Boy." In an instant, the bomb immediately killed 80,000 people in Hiroshima and another 40,000 in Nagasaki. By the end of the year, over 1,40,000 lost their lives due to radiation-related complications. More than 30 per cent of Japan's population vanished due to the atomic bombings. Other than the massive human loss, the infrastructural loss devastated the city. Hiroshima was reduced to a flat plain with no hospitals to treat the living, no fire services to help with fires or administrative structures to rebuild the city. The long term effects of the bombing started showing within a decade when hospitals started recording a steep increase in tumors and different cancers in the living population. The Little Boy and the Fat Man completely altered the demography of Japan, creating a sick populace in the two cities and forever slowing the population growth of the country.

Second, the continuous expansion of the nuclear arsenal, despite their devastating efforts. In spite of witnessing the destruction caused by the atomic bombs in 1945, the world has continued

the race to build and store more powerful weapons of mass destruction. Countries take pride in announcing advanced missiles that are capable of travelling long distances with no pilot, launching from the seas or land and claiming multiple lives in one hit. Instead of reprimanding the use of nuclear weapons by the only capable country in 1945, we now have nine countries with nuclear capacities.

Third, the failing disarmament narrative. During the cold war, the world witnessed a steep rise in the production of nuclear weapons. As of today, this figure has been brought down exponentially due to the arms control treaty between the US and Russia. However, the aim of "Global Zero" which aims to completely abolish the production and storage of nuclear weapons, is far from being achieved. At the moment, there are approximately 15,000 nuclear weapons globally. This accounts for an 80 per cent drop in the total number of nuclear warheads; from 70,000 weapons in 1986 to 15,000 in 2021. However, in the 76 years since the use of the first atomic bomb, the world is nowhere close to complete disarmament. There is an incessant struggle amongst states like North Korea and Iran who expand their nuclear programmes while states like the US and Russia express no plans of complete eradication of these weapons. In recent years, the focus of the international community has also shifted from nuclear deterrence to currently pressing issues such as the pandemic and climate change.

Fourth, the "realist" narrative supporting nuclear greed. Today, the states compete and fight for the right to produce nuclear weapons to securitize their national interests. States are constantly under the impression that they may be attacked by a rival state. These weapons are used as a security against foreign interventions and attacks. Hence, countries are willing to spend millions on nuclear programmes even when these funds can be used for more pressing issues that require immediate attention.

#### What does it mean?

The increasingly destructive capacities of the defence arms and ammunition prove that the human race is completely immune to the suffering endured by humankind 76 years ago.

The rise in the number of nuclear states in the past seven decades showcases the seriousness of the world towards the aim of nuclear disarmament.

### **Japan: The Olympics continue in Tokyo, amidst controversies**

*Keerthana Nambiar, 1 August 2021*

#### What happened?

On 1 August, it will be the tenth day of the Tokyo Olympics 2020. The games were inaugurated by Japan's Emperor Naruhito with the theme of "Moving forward" to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach quoted "We can only go faster, we can only aim higher, we can only become stronger if we stand together – in solidarity. This is why, the IOC has adopted the Olympic motto to our times: faster, higher, stronger – together. This feeling of togetherness – this is the light at the end of the dark tunnel."

#### What is the background?

First, a brief background to the Olympic games in Tokyo. This would be the 120th Olympic games. It is the fourth time Japan is hosting the Olympics. With 11,000 athletes from 206 nations across the world where 49 per cent are women, the IOC hereby marks the first "gender-balanced" games in its history. The 2020 games view the introduction of new disciplines like 3x3 basketball, freestyle BMX, surfing, skateboarding, mixed-gender events in existing sports, and many more.

Second, the intense political determination. The Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's vision was to contain the virus outbreak, host a successful Games and call a general election. That has been subdued after the recent surge in Tokyo turning the games into a damaging scandal. This determination is the underlying political agenda for Suga to survive as party leader as the general elections are coming up in October. Furthermore, Japan's vaccine rollout has substantially lagged considering other developed nations. This has led to a greater public dissatisfaction pressurizing Suga ahead of the elections.

Third, the divided opinions and the controversies. There has been strong public opposition against the games because of the spike it may cause in the Covid-19 cases. In a survey released in May, 83 per cent of the people did not want Japan to conduct the Olympics. The Japanese doctors union were highly against conducting the games and backed out from offering medical support. Therefore, the IOC stepped up to offer medical help for the Olympics. It also downplayed the opposition in Japan and went ahead with the international support it could garner. Covid-19 being the giant elephant in the room, anti-Olympic protests are widely increasing as new coronavirus cases broke the country's records. The protesters gathered near the stadium holding banners reading "Cancel the Olympics! Save lives!" and "No Olympics". This Olympics has been shadowed by controversies starting with the logo plagiarism to athletes testing positive with Covid-19, the first-ever transgender weightlifter from New Zealand, the long spectre of doping tests, and the unprecedented heatwave in Tokyo.

Fourth, the economic riddle. In March 2021, the organizers decided to ban foreign spectators, thus diminishing any revenue from the Olympics as overseas visitors tend to spend more than domestic spectators. The economic losses from cancelling the Games are estimated to be less than the losses from a single state emergency. Japan has by far had four emergency situations during the pandemic. On the other hand, the IOC has seemingly cornered Japan and will accordingly make a full income from its broadcast rights and direct sponsors.

#### What does it mean?

Every Olympic Games has produced a festive story. Even though the Tokyo Olympic games have been mired in controversy, it is meant to revitalize the public spirit during the pandemic. It allows talents across the world to a single platform. Also, the Games are exceptional occasions for diplomacy, wherein Japan will weather the controversies and deliver a 'safe and secure' Olympics amidst the pandemic.

## **Japan: The US fortifies alliance in the Indo-Pacific**

*Avishka Ashok, 18 April 2021*

### What happened?

On 16 April, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and American President Joe Biden met for the first time in Washington, where the two leaders discussed their bilateral issues and matters of mutual interest. China topped the meeting agenda as the two leaders explored policy options and a suitable course of action to handle the challenges created by China's aggressiveness in the Indo-Pacific region. Human rights abuse in Hong Kong and Xinjiang and aggression in the South China Sea, East China Sea and Taiwan were the main focus of the meeting. President Biden said: "We committed to working together to take on the challenges from China and on issues like the East China Sea, the South China Sea, as well as North Korea, to ensure a future of a free and open Indo Pacific."

### What is the background?

First, the Taiwan issue. The meeting between Suga and Biden comes soon after 25 Chinese aircrafts, including fighter jets and nuclear-capable bombers, trespassed into Taiwan's air defence identification zone (AIDZ) on 12 April. This incursion is the largest in 2021 and occurred a day after US Secretary of State expressed concerns regarding China's aggression towards Taiwan. In 2021, China entered Taiwan's seas and air space multiple times, pushing the country and other foreign powers to condemn its actions strongly. China has also been intermittently patrolling the water around the Senkaku islands, which Japan, China and Taiwan claim. China's increased interference in Taiwan is also partly due to Taipei's fast approach towards a formal declaration of independence from China.

Second, counter-balancing China. In the past decade, Japan has witnessed an increasing presence of China in the Indo-Pacific region. Other than its claim of the nine-dash-line, China has invested heavily in the countries in the region. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) also played an essential role in establishing China as

a dependable superpower in the region. Thus, in the past few years, Japan's foreign policy has focused on countering China's unprecedented rise. Japan has conducted multiple meetings with European and Western countries such as Germany, France, UK, and the US, aiming to strengthen its relationship with its allies to present a fortified defence against China and ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Third, the significance of the Indo-Pacific in the US foreign policy. The meeting also took place a month after Biden convened a meeting with the Quad members where the main agenda was countering China's unparalleled rise. The first cabinet-level foreign visit of the US also took place in Japan and South Korea. In the 100 days after taking office, there is a visible shift in the US foreign policy from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific.

#### What does this mean?

China does not welcome a heightened interest of the US in the Indo-Pacific. However, the US has a duty towards Japan in protecting it from foreign aggression. It is also in US interests to slow down China's progress in the global economy to ensure America's status as a superpower. However, the interference of the US may instigate China to further antagonize its neighbours by showcasing its military prowess. The probability of China fastening its hold over Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Taiwan remains high in the coming years.

### **Japan and South Korea: The US returns to East Asia**

*Avishka Ashok, 21 March 2021*

#### What happened?

On 16 March, the US Defence Secretary (Lloyd Austin), and US Secretary of State (Antony Blinken), joined their Japanese counterparts for the two-plus-two security conference in Tokyo. They discussed China's aggression and the challenges to human rights in the region. The joint statement released after the meeting revealed the two countries concern over "unlawful maritime claims and activities in the

South China Sea and unilateral action that seeks to change the status quo" of the Senkaku islands.

On 18 March, the US delegation made an official visit to South Korea where they reconfirmed the US' allegiance to defend Seoul against North Korean and Chinese threats. Lloyd Austin stated, "Given the unprecedented challenges posed by both the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and China, the US-ROK alliance has never been more important." The two countries also agreed to cooperate on the denuclearization of the peninsula.

#### What is the background?

First, the change in the US approach towards East Asia. The latest visit to Japan is the first-ever cabinet-level foreign visit made by the Biden Administration after the change in leadership in America. Antony Blinken also reiterated the importance of expanding relations with Japan by stating, "it is no accident that we chose Japan for the first Cabinet-level overseas travel." The US did not make an official visit to South Korea since 2016, after which there a lack of political activity during the Trump period. The visit to East Asia reveals the new administration's interest in the Indo-Pacific.

Second, a greater push to contain China. During the meeting, the US made numerous statements that expressed the US sentiment towards China. Blinken said, "We will push back if necessary, when China uses coercion or aggression to get its way." He also expressed discontent and concern regarding China's policies in Xinjiang, illegal actions in the South China Sea and emphasized the importance of peace and stability.

Third, addressing the North Korean threat. During the one-day visit to South Korea, the US stressed the necessity of denuclearization to maintain peace in the region. The US diplomats said that the US and its allies would "strategize together on how to confront shared threats such as North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs." The statements were made soon after Kim Yo-jong, North Korean Leader's sister, threatened the US to refrain from hostile behaviour towards North Korea to ensure a peaceful tenure.

### What does it mean?

The visits to Japan and South Korea signify the importance of the Indo-Pacific in American foreign policy. The Biden administration seems to be pursuing a more cautious approach towards North Korea while taking a harsh stance on China. The US involvement in dealing with denuclearization and China's rising aggression and influence will continue during the Biden era.

## **Ten years after Fukushima: A disaster that changed the nuclear trajectory**

*Lokendra Sharma, 14 March 2021*

### What happened?

On 11 March 2021, Japan observed the 10th anniversary of the earthquake (and tsunami) and the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Silent prayers were held across the country to mourn the victims. Japanese Emperor Naruhito and PM Suga took part in a commemorative ceremony in Tokyo where they held a moment of silence at 1446 hrs (JST), the exact time at which the earthquake struck 10 years ago.

On the same day, anti-nuclear protestors held a rally in front of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco), the operator of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

### What is the background?

First, the disaster. On 11 March 2011, a massive earthquake off the east coast of Japan, generating a tsunami killed 18000 people. It slammed into the Fukushima nuclear power plant making it the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986.

Second, the multi-faceted fallouts in Japan. The accident struck a blow to Japan's large nuclear power industry, which supplied one-third of electricity. Post-disaster, most of the reactors were shut down; today electricity contribution of nuclear is less than ten per cent. The post-disaster cleaning up of the nuclear power plant has been a challenge. Even after a decade, the cleaning operations are not over and estimates range from 30 years to a century. The costs, meanwhile, have spiralled up; one estimate puts

it around USD 200 billion. The human and environmental fallout has been significant. Over the years, a huge amount of radiation has been released into the atmosphere and to the ocean. Although no death has been associated with the Fukushima disaster so far, close to 40000 people are still displaced after a decade.

Third, global fallouts. Not just in Japan, but the nuclear industry faced a downturn globally. Many countries in Europe like Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain and Switzerland, abandoned their nuclear energy plans. According to IAEA, between 2011 and 2020, 65 reactors were either shut down or their operational life was not extended, making it a loss of 48 GWe of nuclear capacity globally.

Fourth, nuclear energy in the climate change debate. Nuclear energy fares better than renewable energy sources like solar and wind because the latter suffer from the problem of intermittency, grid integration, large area requirement and low plant load factor. Nuclear energy is, therefore, best suited to replace coal as a baseload energy supplier. However, in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster, and with improving renewable technology, the global consensus has shifted towards renewable sources, which continue to get cheaper and efficient. While nuclear is clean energy, renewables are both clean and safe energy sources.

### What does it mean?

Even though nuclear power generating countries and the IAEA worked together to augment the safety of nuclear power plants post-Fukushima, the nuclear risk perception globally remains at an all-time high. And, with rapid innovations happening in the renewable sector (including higher efficiency of solar cells and wind turbines, better battery storage technology), the world will likely rely increasingly on renewable sources as it phases out coal-based power plants to meet climate change obligations (including net-zero emissions by 2050).

The future of nuclear energy looks bleak, barring a few countries like India and China, which continue to have ambitious nuclear power programmes. And it is unlikely that Japan,

where it all started, will be able to revive its nuclear programme despite the government's willingness as the domestic public opinion remains strongly anti-nuclear.

## **North Korea: New missile tests to challenge the US, Japan and South Korea**

*Keerthana Nambiar, 19 September 2021*

### What happened?

On 12 September, North Korea successfully fired a new long-range cruise missile described as "a strategic weapon of great significance". According to the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the missile hit targets 932 miles away, flying along with different patterns, before falling into the North Korean territorial waters.

On 15 September, North Korea launched two ballistic missiles from a train to test the new weapons. The missiles flew 497 miles (800km) before striking a target in the sea off North Korea's east coast. Pak Jong Chon, a North Korean marshal and a member of the Presidium of the Politburo of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea, who oversaw the test said: "The railway-borne missile system serves as an efficient counter-strike means capable of dealing a harsh multi-concurrent blow to the threat-posing forces."

### What is the background?

First, North Korea's missile programmes. Though the latest tests would be the first known testing since March 2021, North Korea has been orienting towards qualitatively refining and quantitatively expanding its missile and nuclear capabilities. The missile programs over the past five years have transformed subsequently. During 2016-17, North Korea tested a series of missile nuclear weapons and missiles which led the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to place new sanctions. While during this period, most missile tests were short-range, medium-range, intermediate-range, it also started testing intercontinental ballistic missiles in 2017. After a break in 2018, it resumed missile testing in 2019 - short-range ballistic missiles, intermediate-range ballistic missiles, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. The latest

ones, tested in September 2021 are reported to be long-range cruise missiles.

Second, the arms race in the Korean peninsula. The tit-for-tat missile tests on the Korean peninsula have scaled up tensions in the region. South Korea tested a new submarine-launched ballistic missile the same day North Korea launched two short-range ballistic missiles, making it one of only seven countries with this technology. The arms race has accelerated under the leadership of Moon Jae-in, including his push for more foreign policy autonomy. Therefore, South Korea plans to develop all other capabilities to deter North Korea and show who the strongest Korea is.

Third, the regional responses. Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga condemned the missile launch as "simply outrageous" and said it was a "threat to the peace and security" of the region. He declared that the testing was a violation of the UN Security Council resolution, expressing his strong protest and condemnation and further added that the Japanese government will continue to monitor the area. In contrast, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Seoul said: "By choosing cruise missiles, North Korea is trying not to provoke the US and China too much."

Fourth, the extra-regional responses. The United States condemned North Korea's launch, pointing it violated UN Security Council resolutions and posed a threat to Pyongyang's neighbours. The United States claims to remain open to diplomacy and dialogue with North Korea but, on the other hand, holds a tight reign on the sanctions. France's ambassador to the UN, Nicolas de Riviere specified the need for a 'political dialogue, a political solution, but the precondition is compliance' is a requirement with North Korea alongside the UN Security Council resolutions.

### What does this mean?

First, the recent activities highlight the continuing instability in the Korean peninsula. North Korea's push towards nuclear and missile tests threatens its neighbours and the international community. Second, the tests underline North Korea's strategy in using



missiles and nuclear weapons as a tool and a leverage at the regional and global levels, however, without much success.

## **North Korea: Pyongyang considers Biden's new approach as hostile**

*Avishka Ashok, 9 May 2021*

### What happened?

On 2 May, the Korea Central News Agency, mouthpiece of the North Korean government, released three statements in response to Biden's new policy on North Korea, which was disclosed after months of review. The statements called the policy "a big blunder" and "intolerable."

On 3 May, the US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan explained that the policy aims to reduce tensions between the two countries and completely denuclearize the Korean peninsula. Sullivan said: "Our policy towards North Korea is not aimed at hostility. It's aimed at solutions. It's aimed at ultimately achieving the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

On 5 May, the G7 members appealed to North Korea to restart negotiations on ending its policy on nuclear arms and resuming the inter-Korean dialogue. The group also extended their support for the US policy on denuclearizing the peninsula.

### What is the background?

First, Biden's approach towards North Korea. The US President Joe Biden firmly believes that the US policy towards North Korea was due for a comprehensive review as the previous administrations were unable to yield any positive outcomes in the issue of nuclear diplomacy. Even though former President Donald Trump succeeded in conducting multiple summits with Kim Jong-un, the meetings did not result in any significant developments. The previous attempts to engage with North Korea have made it certain for Biden that sanctions and coercion will not produce any positive results.

Second, North Korea's resilience towards sustenance and protecting its interests. North Korea has managed to withstand sanctions and

trade embargoes from the West and continues to pour huge amounts of money into its nuclear programs. The capital to support the nuclear ambitions of Kim Jong-un may have illegal sources, but the fact remains that the country has sustained itself and its nuclear goals even during the pandemic. However, the cost was paid heavily by the common man. The continuity of the nuclear goals over the decades is evidence that the previous policies of the West have failed to contain North Korea. Denuclearization will not be on the agenda for Kim Jong-un.

Third, the quest for a suitable approach towards North Korea. The issue of North Korean threat due to its nuclear capabilities is not a recently evolved crisis. The US Presidents from George W Bush to Joe Biden have been compelled to deal with Kim's nuclear ambitions during their presidency. However, Joe Biden faces a pressing challenge as he needs to formulate a policy that would ultimately appease South Koreans, Japanese, and North Koreans. The challenge primarily lies in pushing North Korea towards a future without nuclear ammunition. Joe Biden's new policy tries to learn from his predecessors' mistakes and attempts to combine sanctions with diplomatic negotiations.

### What does it mean?

The new policy, announced on 30 April, seems to be a combination of the Trump and Obama approach; wherein the US will attempt to engage with North Korea, primarily through diplomacy but will rationally resort to sanctions if it fails to produce the expected results. Despite convincing efforts to resolve the issue of denuclearization, it is unlikely that the new approach of Joe Biden will lead to much success. A moderate approach, combining sanctions and negotiations may still not be enough to solve the problem of denuclearization in the coming decade.

## **Three years after inter-Korean talks**

*Avishka Ashok, 2 May 2021*

### What happened?

On 27 April, South Korea and North Korea marked three years of the inter-Korean summit between Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un. For the

first time in three years, the South Korean government did not hold an official event to celebrate the anniversary of the first summit. The Unification Ministry cited COVID-19 as the reason for not allowing an official ceremony.

On 29 April, the Unification Minister emphasized the significance of the South Korea-US summit to revive talks with North Korea on the stalled peace process.

#### What is the background?

First, failed promises of the 2018 summit. The Panmunjom Declaration was the first document signed by the two leaders and the first meeting held in 11 years. Both countries pledged to the efforts of complete denuclearization, work towards reunification and officially bringing an end to the Korean war of 1950-53. However, it has been three years since the first meeting, and the delegations have met thrice, but the objectives of the summit are far from being achieved.

Second, reasons for the failure of talks. The obstacles in achieving the goals of the Panmunjom Declaration is directly related to the deadlock in nuclear diplomacy. Even though North Korea agreed to denuclearization three years ago, the country continued developing and maintaining its nuclear facilities after the failure of talks with the US in Hanoi in 2019. Kim Jong-un revealed in the 8th Party Congress that denuclearization would not be an agenda for discussion in any talks with the US or any other country.

Another issue is the differential idea of denuclearization. When the US pushes for complete denuclearization, it refers to a complete dismantling of nuclear facilities, regular inspections of nuclear sites and re-entering the Non-Proliferation Treaty. While this was being considered initially, the term for North Korea meant that the US would remove all nuclear warheads and protection from South Korea and Japan. This continues to be an area of contention as the US cannot withdraw its policy of protection from the Korean Peninsula.

Third, the threat posed by North Korea. North Korea's nuclear plans pose a threat to countries like South Korea, Japan and the US. The

atmosphere of mistrust is created partly due to North Korea's incessant missile tests that land miles away from these territories and the country's lack of flexibility in matters of diplomacy. Despite multiple civil society initiatives undertaken by the South Korean government and the people, the relationship between the two countries has become substantially colder. The Moon Jae-in government adopted a softer approach towards North Korea and even introduced an Anti-Pyongyang leaflet ban. Nevertheless, North Korea's stance on inter-Korean relations remains unchanged.

#### What does this mean?

The major issue that keeps the countries from cooperating with each other is trust. Yet, when the problem involves nuclear missiles, one cannot help but be suspicious of all players in the game.

The Korean war has failed to come to an end due to the lack of a ceasefire which means that the two countries are essentially at war. The goals of reunification seem unrealistic as neither country portrays actions that speak of such a goal. Moreover, the only kind of reunification that is feasible in the country is the peaceful co-existence of the two Koreas, separate from each other's values and cultures which have drifted apart in the past decades.

### **North Korea: New missile tests make a statement to the US**

*Avishka Ashok, 28 March 2021*

#### What happened?

On 26 March, North Korea announced that it test-fired two ballistic missiles on 25 March after almost a year of passivity. The Korean Central News Agency of North Korea said: "The newly developed new-type tactical guided projectile is a weapon system whose warhead weight has been improved to be 2.5 tons with the use of the core technology of tactical guided projectile that was already developed."

On 26 March, South Korean President Moon Jae-in expressed concerns and disappointment

with North Korea testing the missiles despite their continuous efforts for restarting dialogues with North Korea. He said: "Now is the time for South and North Korea and the US to ramp up efforts to continue talks. Any action that hampers the efforts is undesirable."

On the same day, US President Joe Biden said the US would respond appropriately if North Korea continues to escalate tensions, but it would still push for diplomacy. He said: "We are consulting with our allies and partners, and there will be responses if they choose to escalate." The Vice-chairman of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party in North Korea criticized Biden's comments, calling it an exercise of self-defence while warning the US of unpleasant reactions if such remarks continued.

#### What is the background?

First, the timing of the tests, amidst a US re-entry in East Asia. North Korea's missile tests come soon after the US officials visit Japan and South Korea. The Defense Secretary and Secretary of State of the United States chose Japan as their first cabinet-level foreign visit and visited South Korea for the first time since 2016. The Defense Secretary also visited India, who is a member of the QUAD. On 12 March, the US President reinforced the idea of free and open Indo-Pacific and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. These actions signify a definite return of the US in East Asia, which is substantially affected by North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

Second, Kim Jong-un's relations with the US Democrats. When Kim Jong-un became the Supreme Leader of North Korea in 2011, Democrats were in power in the United States under Barack Obama, who chose an aggressive North Korea approach. The Obama administration, unsuccessfully, tried to bring Kim to the negotiation table by imposing sanctions. When Donald Trump came to power, he succeeded in appeasing the North Korean regime; however, the talks could not continue. North Korea never had good relations with the Democrats. Now with the recent tests, the relation may worsen.

Third, North Korea's missile technology trajectory. North Korea has tested over 147

ballistic missile and six nuclear missiles since 1984. The last ICBM test took place in 2019. The missile technology has gradually improved to include nuclear payloads and short-range solid-fuel warheads. These tests pose a direct threat to South Korea, Japan and the US.

#### What does it mean?

How would North Korea respond to the Biden administration has been a critical question. Should the missile tests be seen as Pyongyang making a statement? North Korea's actions signify that denuclearization, which the US has been pushing for, is non-negotiable.

North Korea will continue to develop nuclear and missile technology despite UN and US sanctions. The tests will also determine US' approach towards North Korea under the Biden administration.

### **North Korea's Party Congress: Kim Jong-un's next steps amidst economic crisis and change of leadership in the US**

*Avishka Ashok, 16 January 2021*

#### What happened?

On 12 January 2021, North Korea ended its week-long 8th Party Congress. At the political gathering, Kim Jong-un addressed members of the Workers' Party and spoke about the current economic conditions of the country, future economic development goals, Inter-Korean relations, North Korean perception of the US and nuclear and defence policies. Kim called for greater nuclear war deterrence and maximum military power. His closing address, as cited by the country's official news agency KCNA states: "While strengthening our nuclear war deterrent, we need to do everything in order to build the most powerful military".

On 9 January, Kim commented on relations with the US and said: "Our external political activities must focus on our arch-enemy and the fundamental obstacle to our revolutionary development, the United States". On the Inter-Korean relations, he said: "the relations have now returned to the pre-Panmunjom Declaration

(2018) state, and the dream of unification is now even further away".

#### What is the background?

First, the Party Congress. It is a rare political event that takes place every five years and is attended by over 7000 party members. The last Party Congress took place in May 2016, after 35 years and continued for four days. The Party Congress is considered one of North Korea's most important political events; domestic policies, foreign affairs and defence strategy for the next five years are determined during this gathering.

Second, North Korea's Eighth Party Congress held last week has another significance as it is the first political gathering after the pandemic. The country claims to have zero cases of the coronavirus; members who attended the Congress did not take any precautions such as wearing masks or maintaining social distance. The timing is notable considering the change in American politics and the return of the Democrats. This is also the first meeting after the Hanoi Summit failed in 2019 when President Trump and Kim Jong-un broke off all engagements and future denuclearization plans.

Third, the Party Congress emphasized on the US, inter-Korea relations and nuclear deterrence. While proclaiming the US as its biggest enemy, Kim has stated that any progress with it will be possible only when Washington decides to withdraw its hostile North Korea policy. Until such change, North Korea will adopt an "eye for an eye" strategy against the US. Also, there is less urgency on the Inter-Korean relations, as Kim asserted during the Conference that South Korea relations have returned to square one. He accused Seoul of overlooking the warnings against bringing powerful military equipment and stopping the military exercises with the US. He also called for stronger nuclear deterrence and increasing the military prowess, besides giving a detailed portfolio of nuclear weapons to acquire in the coming years. He said North Korea is willing to hold talks with the US but will not negotiate denuclearization. In the closing remarks, Kim has specified that they will

strengthen their nuclear deterrence and build the strongest military at the same time.

Fourth, the unanimous election of Kim to the post of General Secretary of the Workers' Party. The only individuals to hold this title before him were Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung. Kim's appointment as the General Secretary has solidified his power and authority. In the 2016 Party Congress, Kim was awarded the title of Party Chairman, elevating him from the post of First Secretary. There were also expectations about Kim's sister, who has also been steadily rising to power, but she was not promoted during the Congress.

Fifth, Kim's acceptance of domestic failures. During the Party Congress's opening address, Kim acknowledged that the previous economic development plans were unsuccessful and have underachieved in almost all sectors. At the seventh Party Congress, he identified three sectors that would be key to the country's development and aimed to make the country self-sufficient in food, energy and consumer goods.

#### What does it mean?

Kim's acceptance of the regime's economic failures can be seen as an attempt to prepare North Korea for the tough and trying times ahead. The country may face another severe famine due to crop failures after the 2020 floods. North Korea may have to depend immensely on international organizations to feed its population.

Following Kim's statements, the South Korean government has reaffirmed that they are ready to hold talks with North Korea anytime, anywhere and are even prepared to hold virtual meets. The establishment of peace and reunification of the Korean Peninsula is a complicated issue as it involves the two Koreas and the confrontation between the US and North Korea.

The future of the Korean Peninsula depends heavily on the next steps of the incoming Biden Administration. The US will have to deal with challenges on restarting dialogue with North Korea and promoting peace in the region.

## **Australia: New Media law on social media and its global implications**

*Avishka Ashok, 28 February 2021*

### What happened?

On 26 February, Facebook resumed its services in Australia, after an eight-day black-out that disabled its users from sharing and viewing content created by Australian media companies. Australian users can now return to using the platform as they did previously.

On 25 February, after rounds of negotiations with Facebook, the Australian government agreed to amend parts of the proposed law and passed the 'News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code.' The law will force tech firms like Google and Facebook to pay for the news content created indigenously. The treasurer and communications minister made a joint statement referring to the law and said, "The code will ensure news media businesses are fairly remunerated for the content they generate, helping to sustain public interest journalism."

### What is the background?

First, the global call for regulation of search engines and social media platforms. Australia may be the first country to legally bind Google and Facebook to a deal that compensates digital media but the fight against these firms had begun a few years ago. In 2018, the European Union reformed its copyright laws, enabling them to request a fee whenever its content was displayed on their websites. Countries like the UK, Canada, United States, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Thailand and New Zealand, to name a few, have all proposed similar bills in their parliament. The issue remains to be a grey area with governments unable to decide what parts need to be regulated.

Second, the need for the law. In the 21st century, where the information is available at record speed and bare minimum costs, media companies have to depend extensively on ad-revenues and subscriptions which fluctuate according to behavioural algorithms. Australia's News Media Bargaining Code dictates big tech firms compensate Australian news agencies for

using their content on popular social media platforms. The code seeks to address the imbalance of revenue suffered by media companies due to the upsurge in usage of digital platforms in recent decades. The new law will ensure appropriate compensation to media firms that will help them sustain in a world where news and information are freely and easily available.

Third, the privacy issue. National governments, while ensuring copyrights and neighbouring rights of media firms, will also be able to keep control of the content that reaches the internet. This would essentially change the existence of the free press, which Google and Facebook have been opposing. Both companies threatened to stop all services in the country. However, on 15 February, Seven West Media Ltd announced the signing of a \$ 30 million deal with Google. On 18 February, Facebook unfriended the country over the government's insistence on the bargaining code; it emphasized the difference in functioning from Google which is innately entangled with media agencies for sharing content. Facebook, however, is used by the same agencies to share their content voluntarily, to increase their subscription and ad revenue.

### What does it mean?

First, a precedent for the rest of the world. Countries that have been looking forward to introducing similar laws in their country will now have an example to learn from. Other tech firms, along with Facebook and Google, have already started securing their interests in other countries. The new code will change the nature of all internet service providers.

Second, along with a regulated income for media firms, the content on the internet will also be regulated as only the paid articles can be made available on these websites. The issue will now extend to how much freedom media firms will be given to publishing news in its purest and unadulterated form.

## **SOUTHEAST ASIA THIS YEAR**

### **The US and Southeast Asia: Vice President Kamala Harris visits Singapore and Vietnam**

*Vibha Venugopal, 29 August 2021*

#### What happened?

On 23 August, Kamala Harris, during her visit to Southeast Asia said: "In our meeting, I underlined the United States' commitment to working with our allies and partners across the Indo-Pacific to preserve the rules-based international order and freedom of navigation, including in the South China Sea."

On the same day, the Singaporean Ministry of Foreign Affairs said: "Prime Minister Lee and Vice President Harris reaffirmed Singapore's and the United States' long-standing and multifaceted partnership. As they commemorate the 55th anniversary of Singapore-US ties, they also welcomed the announcement of new areas of cooperation."

#### What is the background?

First, a brief background to Kamala Harris' visit to Southeast Asia. Her visit to Singapore and Vietnam is aimed at improving ties and increasing economic cooperation with the US' two most important Indo-Pacific allies. The meeting with leaders from both countries discussed matters of shared concern, such as regional security, the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and cooperative efforts to establish a rules-based international order. Harris also confirmed and celebrated the US and these countries' strong cultural and people-to-people links.

Second, the growing US concerns in Southeast Asia. The region claims to have a long history of critical security and economic relations with the US and is strategically important. Despite this, the United States has been oblivious to the region's needs and economic potential for nearly two decades. President Biden and Vice President Harris have made it a priority to strengthen their global connections and keep the country safe. This trip will help them deepen their engagement in Southeast Asia.

Third, the China factor. Vice President Harris accused Beijing of undermining the rules-based order and spoke out against its claims to control a significant part of the South China Sea, a statement she repeated in Vietnam.

Fourth, the US efforts to strengthen its ties with the ASEAN. As a regional economic bloc, ASEAN plays a vital role in the Indo-Pacific plans of the US. Kamala Harris reaffirmed that the US believes that ASEAN should lead efforts to resolve the crisis in the country. ASEAN's diplomacy on Myanmar has moved at a glacial pace thus far. This acceptance of ASEAN's central role is vital to governments in the region, which are concerned about the intensifying rivalry between the US and China, as well as the dominance of the so-called 'Quad,' the new strategic partnership between the United States, Australia, Japan, and India, in the US diplomacy.

#### What does it mean?

The high profile visit underlines the importance of Southeast Asia as a region, and ASEAN as an economic bloc, to American interests. While the region has always played an important role in the US calculations, the new Indo-Pacific push makes it even more significant. As could be derived from the statements of Kamala Harris, China assumes large for the US in the region.

### **Southeast Asia: Finally, ASEAN appoints a Special Envoy to Myanmar**

*Vibha Venugopal, 8 August 2021*

#### What happened?

On 4 August, the 28th ASEAN Regional Forum ministers appointed Brunei's Second Minister of Foreign Affairs, Erywan Yusof, as the Special Envoy to Myanmar. Reuters, on 7 August, referred to a statement by the envoy saying: "The planned travel to Myanmar is in the works, and we need to make sure we're fully prepared, unlike the visit I had in June. He even stated that during his next ASEAN visit to Myanmar, he will seek a more substantial dialogue, while emphasizing the importance of allowing him full access to all sides." Earlier, on 1 August, Myanmar's military ruler Min Aung Hlaing

expressed his "willingness to engage with ASEAN."

On 6 August, the US State Department released a statement by Secretary of the State expressing grave concern about the military coup in Myanmar and calling on the ASEAN "to unite in urging the military to cease the violence, release all those who have been wrongfully jailed, and resume Myanmar's democratic path."

#### What is the background?

First, the ASEAN response to Myanmar. Given its shared border with Myanmar, Thailand has the greatest stakes. Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have been the most active and vocal in criticizing the Tatmadaw's control. The Philippines government's reactions have been chaotic. On the other hand, Brunei, the current chair of ASEAN, has been quiet as it seeks to convene discussions amongst other ASEAN members. Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos have registered muted responses. As a regional organization, the reactions of the ASEAN to the coup reflect the region's diverse national systems and outlook. It ranged from attempts to mediate an internal deal in Myanmar to near-total silence.

Second, ASEAN's five-point consensus on Myanmar. The five-point consensus arrived in April 2021 aimed at addressing Myanmar's deteriorating socio-political crisis and find a peaceful solution. It called for the cessation of violence, facilitation of constructive dialogue with the National Unity Government and other parties, the deployment of an ASEAN Special Envoy, the facilitation of humanitarian aid, and a visit by an ASEAN Special Envoy. Despite the repeated failed attempts for a consensus, it is hailed as a step towards a political solution to the situation at the time.

Third, the ineffectiveness of ASEAN in dealing with Myanmar. While many perceive ASEAN as the obvious political entity to lead efforts to find a political solution to the problem, it has a long history of refusing to do so. Especially in terms of international relations, the General seizing power leaves ASEAN with a reduced role as well as the ability to contain an increasingly

assertive China, which seems to leave them hanging over the bridge.

Fourth, Myanmar's response. As part of the five-point consensus that the military government has agreed to, the Tatmadaw has helped in narrowing down the final ASEAN communique through negotiations. They have even requested the ASEAN members to provide them with the freedom to deliver aid to the humanitarian workers. Whereas the Myanmar civil society organizations express great displeasure with ASEAN for their lack of inclusive decision-making and passivity in the face of some of the region's most heinous atrocities.

#### What does it mean?

First, the crisis in Myanmar is too hot for the ASEAN to handle, causing reputational costs. Second, ASEAN is no stronger than its weakest link since members stay aloof, not allowing them to act decisively. Third, Myanmar's military administration will approach the five-point consensus and the ASEAN-led diplomatic process a la carte, delaying and complying with the envoy as needed to buy time and consolidate power.

## **Myanmar: Six months of the military rule**

*Vibha Venugopal, 1 August 2021*

#### What happened?

On 1 August, Myanmar will complete six months of military rule and deposition of the NLD led government. Reuters, on 1 August, referred to Myanmar's military ruler Min Aung Hlaing promising new multi-party elections. It also quoted him announcing: "Myanmar is ready to work on ASEAN cooperation within the ASEAN framework, including the dialogue with the ASEAN special envoy in Myanmar."

On 30 July, the UN News referred to a statement issued by UN's top aid official in Myanmar, Acting Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator Ramanathan Balakrishnan saying: "The situation to be characterized by instability and a deteriorating socio-economic and security situation...The UN will continue to call out human rights violations and is committed to stay

and deliver lifesaving humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar."

On 31 July, a report released by the Human Rights Watch quoted Brad Adams, its Asia Director saying: "Myanmar's junta has responded to massive popular opposition to the coup with killings, torture, and arbitrary detention of people who merely want last year's election results to be respected and a government that reflects the popular will...These attacks on the population amount to crimes against humanity for which those responsible should be brought to account."

#### What is the background?

First, the consolidation of military rule during the last six months. The coup began on 1 February, when the military junta led by Gen Min Aung Hlaing nullified the November 2020 elections. Ever since, the regime started detaining hundreds of lawmakers, activists, and civil officials. It also started blocking access to various social media, intensifying surveillance, and imposing night blackouts. The regime refused to heed to international requests and warnings.

Second, the political trial. The detention of Suu Kyi and her top allies brings to a closure the experiment with democracy in Myanmar, which followed a half-century military rule earlier. After the four months of detention, Aung Sang Suu Kyi is under trial by a junta court. She faces a mix of charges that include the following: illegally possessing walkie talkies, flouting of the COVID-19 restrictions during the elections in 2020, causing fear and alarm, unspecified breaches of the 'Official Secrets Act' and accepting USD 600,000 cash and 11 kilograms of gold from a former political ally.

Third, internal protests and regime repression. Since the coup began, resistance by people began in many forms. Thousands started protesting over the weeks in the cities and villages around Myanmar. This includes blockade and intense confrontations by the journalists, students and the pro-democracy medical staff and public on strike, avoiding the hospitals run by the junta. The regime came down heavily, which led to the casualties being

over 900 protestors and several thousand being arbitrarily arrested and detained.

Fourth, the regional response, or the lack of it. In April 2021, the ASEAN, as a part of their Leaders Meeting in Jakarta, announced an ambitious five-point consensus calling for the following: an immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar; a constructive dialogue among all parties concerned; a special envoy to facilitate mediation; provide humanitarian assistance; and a special envoy and delegation to meet with all parties concerned. Three months later this meeting, ASEAN's role remains limited. In July, Singapore's foreign minister, in his response to a Parliamentary question, stated: "We recognise that implementation of the Five-Point Consensus has been slow and a little disappointing." The ASEAN is yet to appoint a special envoy.

Fifth, the international responses. The US has led the international effort to persuade the military administration to reverse course, desist from additional violence, restore the country's democratic route, release all those who have been wrongfully jailed, and hold those responsible for the coup and brutality against the people accountable. But the impact of international response and sanctions remain limited. The UNSC remains divided, with Russia and China backing the military regime in Myanmar.

#### What does it mean?

First, the regime response so far does not provide a level playing field to those who demand the restoration of democracy. Second, the international response remains ineffective, with limited impact over the sanctions, and also due to the support provided by Russia and China to the regime. Internal developments within Myanmar and the divided and ineffective external responses means the military regime will continue to consolidate its rule.



## **Myanmar: 100 days of military rule is marked by instability, with use of force and public protests**

*Aparupa Bhattacharjee, 16 May 2021*

### What happened?

On 11 May, several protests, strikes, and rallies were organized across Myanmar to condemn the 100 days of military rule. Following an organized coup to establish the military government, on 1 February 2021, public protests and civil disobedience movement are common.

On 8 May, the government denounced the newly formed National Unity Government (NUG), a parallel government, as a 'terrorist' group. On 7 May, the government transferred the control of the General Administrative Department (GAD) back to the Home Affairs ministry to revive the neighbourhood surveillance networks. On 5 May, NUG declared to have formed peoples' defense force which comprises of common citizens who are given defense training by some of the ethnic armed groups.

This week witnessed several bomb attacks targeting the security forces and military-owned institutions and infrastructures. The skirmishes between Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups, especially KIA, KNU, and KNLA escalated, forcing citizens to escape to the neighbouring countries.

### What is the background?

First, 100 days of consolidation by the military. The military took over, stating fraud in the 2020 election and to 'uphold democracy.' None of the claims by the military regarding the fraudulent nature of the last election had any proof. The detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, former President, with several members of the National League of Democracy has not helped the government gain the required legitimacy. Further, this government has concentrated on repressing anti-government voices through atrocities, violence, detentions, and suppressing media rather than development. The government has no clarity about the COVID-19 impact on the country or the dissemination of vaccines (received 5,00,000 vaccines on 4 May from the People's Liberation Army). As per a UNDP

report, by 2022, nearly half of the population in Myanmar will be in poverty due to the ongoing conflict and pandemic.

Second, 100 days of popular resistance. Immediately after the coup, several public servants and health facilitators have called for a civil disobedience movement. Within a week, full-fledged protests erupted across the country, demanding the release of detained leaders and restoring the elected government. Although the protest was primarily youth-led, it received support from all walks of life. The response from the security forces seemed cautious in the beginning but they quickly resorted to vehement repressions. More than 700 have been killed and 4,000 have been detained to date. In response to the growing atrocities, several groups of protestors have used homemade bombs, guns made of cycle tyres, and Molotov cocktails since mid-March. These groups are actively supported by several ethnic armed groups. Most of the ethnic armed groups, including those who had signed the National Ceasefire Agreement, have not recognized this government.

Third, 100 days of international apathy and weak regional response. Australia, the US, New Zealand, the UK, and several other countries have criticized the coup, de-recognized, and levied sanctions on the military government. But the sanctions are ineffective, as stated by a government spokesperson to CNN because they are habituated to dealing with severe sanctions in the past. The UNSC has failed to officially condemn the government owing to the support of Tatmadaw's two allies, China and Russia. In the region, the efforts from ASEAN have also proved lousy and without impact.

### What does it mean?

First, although the government has assured an election by 2022 it is evident it will be a sham and will be a repeat of history from 2010. Second, the conflict within the country is likely to escalate and may also head towards a civil war. This will derail the little hopes of development that the country had during the previous partial-democratic government