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RUSI VI

*To promote national defence and security issues
through discussion and engagement*

**Newsletter of the Royal United Services Institute
of Vancouver Island**

The Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island is a member of the Conference of Defence Associations. The CDA is the oldest and most influential advocacy group in Canada's defence community, consisting of associations from all parts of the country.

The CDA expresses its ideas and opinions with a view to influencing government security and defence policy. It is a non-partisan, independent, and non-profit organization.



September 2020 Issue

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President's Address

Welcome back!

It appears that we in Canada are becoming victims of that traditional curse, "May you live in interesting times." Although that pearl of wisdom is actually an old English expression only claiming to be a Chinese curse, that doesn't change the irony when describing our current troubles. The salient lesson from past pandemics is that they don't change societies, but instead accelerate existing trends- both good and bad. COVID-19 is accelerating social, health, economic, politics, national defence changes and even the global balance of power, which will affect the future of Canada and all Canadians.

Trends however, can be seen and by extension explored, critiqued and discussed. We have encouraged exploration of some of these in past newsletters as they address the increasing assertiveness and belligerence of the People's Republic of China. Although this issue is not exclusively devoted to China it contains four articles of interest. The first is on Australia's strategic update regarding China's new-found assertiveness, and the second looks at the logic, or lack thereof, of China's Wolf-Warrior approach to foreign relations. Two more articles look at the strategic impact of a proposed and Chinese financed super-canal on Thailand's Kra Peninsula and the implications of India's geo-political calculus towards the PRC and the USA.

This is a reminder that the annual RUSI-VI year starts this month and your dues, \$40.00 for single, or \$50.00 for a family membership, are now due. Prompt payment will be much appreciated! All dues will be paid this year exclusively by mail. Please send your cheques to the following address:

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Scott H. Osborne
President
Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island

Australia's Defence Strategic Update: It's All About China

Driven by deepening worries over China's growing assertiveness, Australia is rethinking its defence strategy, force structure and posture. This has implications for many others.

Peter-Layton

3 August 2020, RUSI

For Australians, it's been 12 months like no other. They've been seriously impacted by an intense drought, massive bushfires, floods, cyclones, a global pandemic and China's 'wolf warrior' foreign policies. Against this backdrop of 'unprecedented' (the word of the hour) events, the rather delayed Australian [Defence Strategic Update](#) has just been released. Its tone deepens the grim outlook.

For some 50 years, the lack of a plausible military threat to Australia has been a constant in public and [classified](#) strategic thinking, but no more. The new update now ominously declares 'a ten-year strategic warning time for a major conventional attack against Australia ... is no longer an appropriate basis for defence planning'. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) must now be prepared to meet short-notice crises that carry risks of major interstate war. The only country the update could conceivably be discussing is [China](#).

To meet the China challenge, a new strategy is being embraced that envisages significantly deepening engagement with states in Australia's immediate region, defined as running from the north-eastern Indian Ocean, across South East Asia and into the South West Pacific. Within this region, the ADF has been set three strategic objectives: to shape the strategic environment, to deter states from taking actions hostile to Australian interests by threatening to impose high costs for doing so, and to be ready to respond with credible military force.

In the near term, the ADF will markedly expand its regional defence diplomacy, cooperative defence activities and capacity building. The operational focus will switch to the region, away from the greater Middle East, and with a declared reduced enthusiasm for distant US-led coalition operations. Indeed, the Strategic Update says little about the US, with Australian agency stressed instead.

Importantly, the ADF will now become involved in countering [grey-zone activities](#), those antagonistic actions conducted below the threshold of armed conflict. Recent Australian naval operations in the South China Sea in support of Malaysia suggest this has [already begun](#), and has been [noticed by China](#). For this, the update foreshadows enhancements to special forces, cyber warfare, information operations, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities.

An assessed increased likelihood of near-term conflict means greater attention to force preparedness. Guided weapon and munition stockholdings will grow in type and size, local munitions manufacturing will be expanded, additional fuel storage will be built, and domestic industry boosted to improve supply chain security and ADF self-reliance.

The main near-term capability acquisition is [200 AGM-158C](#) long-range anti-ship missiles for the F-18F Super Hornet fleet. This new, highly sophisticated weapon entered USN service late last year and is planned to be operational in Australia from 2023.

The update also allocates funding to new projects that will begin in the longer term, from 2026 to 2030. There are some ‘traditional’ projects such as ballistic missile defence and imagery satellites, and more exotic ones such as directed energy weapons for land vehicles and warships. Importantly, there is also the commencement of a cross-ADF robot revolution. A new undersea surveillance system could include unmanned surface and subsurface vehicles. What’s more, unmanned air-to-air refuelling aircraft might be acquired, ‘[loyal wingman](#)’ unmanned combat aircraft are forecast and the acquisition of a brigade-size fleet of unmanned ground vehicles is projected. In this, the update raises some issues.

First, Australia is [having a middle power moment](#) in embracing an activist regional military strategy. Its success relies on others buying into this approach to managing the geostrategic challenges China presents. Implementing the engagement strategy means Australia will become a somewhat demanding state, seeking more from its allies, partners and friends. In this, the overlooking of economic imperatives may become important. For regional states, China is their largest export customer and important to maintaining economic growth. How Australia’s military engagement strategy fits with this reality is not explored.

There are alternative possible strategies, including becoming a sub-element of the US’s grand competition strategy, accommodating China diplomatically or adopting a ‘fortress Australia’ stance. A failure of the engagement strategy could see such options being further explored.

Second, entering the grey zone arena may be necessary but carries real risks including, as the update notes, possible military miscalculations. In this, the defence minister [notes](#) such operations may initially simply widely publicise aggressive actions others are undertaking. The prime minister’s [recent media announcement](#) of large-scale cyber attacks across Australian society by a large state actor, backgrounded as China, might be an example.

Third, there are some fundamental problems in the update’s approach. China’s growing assertiveness is not new and [arguably began being addressed](#) in the 2009 Defence White Paper. What is new is that crises are becoming concurrent. Australians are well practiced in handling serial disasters, but not ones in parallel.

The update sidesteps the impacts of concurrent crises. Addressing these will probably involve increasing ADF personnel numbers and taking a whole-of-society perspective. To be fair, the update does note humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, the Australia beyond the Defence Department, and that the size and shape of the ADF workforce need review. Such references are only cursory, however, and crucially not integrated into the regional engagement strategy.

The Strategic Update appears a necessary but insufficient answer to the emerging era's national security issues. Further thinking is needed.

Peter Layton is a visiting fellow at the Griffith Asia Institute, a RUSI Associate Fellow and author of *Grand Strategy*. The views expressed in this Commentary are the author's, and do not represent those of RUSI or any other institution.



Strykers and military support vehicles belonging to the U.S. Army's 3rd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment stage for departure from Sochazcew, Poland, for their return to Germany, June 18, 2018. Photo Credit: Army 1st Lt. Ellen Brabo

Pulling Out of Germany: Trump Adjusts the Military Furniture

Global Research.ca <https://www.globalresearch.ca/pulling-out-germany-trump-adjusts-military-furniture/5720004> By Binoy Kampmark 3 August 2020

One noisy theme in the Donald Trump Disruption Show in an otherwise chaotic assemblage of messages has remained fairly constant: winding back US troop commitments. The US has fought its complement of wars, bloodied and bloodying. Time to up stakes and head home. It was a message that sold in 2016 across the aisles of politics, and it is one that continues to resonate. But the practice of it has proven murkier. Nothing this president does can be

otherwise. The US military complex remains sprawling, overweight and defiant. As a result, the military footprint has been not so much dissipated as readjusted.

President Trump's recent decision to move troops out of Germany is a case in point. Those wishing for a trimmer, less militarist imperium will be disappointed. The shifting of 11,900 US personnel out of the country is seemingly a matter of rearrangement and fitting. The imperium is merely adjusting the furniture.

US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper [gave the decision](#) a tactical dress. The redeployment would, contrary to critics, strengthen NATO, deter Russia and ready the US military for "a new era of great power competition." This [realignment](#) of "our forces in Europe" would "support our partners and stand up to military adversary behaviour."

Of the designated number, 6,400 will return to the US. These are intended for future redeployment in Eastern Europe and elsewhere while 5,600 are destined for Belgium, Italy and other NATO countries. Instead of coating the decision in the carefully chosen doublespeak of strategy, Trump was reliably cranky in justification. As he [explained](#), the troops "are there to protect Germany, right? Germany's not paying for it. We don't want to be suckers any more. The United States has been taken advantage of for 25 years, both on trade and on the military. So, we're reducing the force because they are not paying their bills."

This was something of a stretch – and a very elastic one at that. The gripe Trump and his circle have had since coming to office is that powers such as Germany simply do not spend enough on defence, while happy-go-lucky chauvinist states like Poland, do. In June last year, Trump [suggested](#) the possibility of moving US troops to Poland from Germany, while the Polish President Andrzej Duda felt "deeply justified to ensure that the US troops are left in Europe." US ambassador to Poland Georgette Mosbacher, forgetting her diplomatic posting, [added a dash of one-upmanship](#). "Poland meets its 2% of GDP spending obligation towards NATO. Germany does not. We would welcome American troops to in Germany to come to Poland."

In August 2019, then US ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell, very much the fly in the ointment of US-German relations, warned that some form of withdrawal, either total or partial, would take place unless an increase in defence spending took place. As he is [reported to have told](#) the DPA news agency, "It is actually offensive to assume that the US taxpayer must continue to pay to have 50,000 plus Americans in Germany, but the Germans get to spend their surplus on domestic programs."

The current percentage of German military spending as a share of GDP is 1.5%. Washington continues to press for the threshold of 2%. Ironically enough, US troop redeployments will take place largely to countries with [levels of expenditure](#) even lower than Germany. Italy comes in at 1.2%; Belgium, a pinch under 1%. The military spenders in Poland will be disappointed.

Whatever the substance of the decision, such reorientations struck the security establishment on both sides of the Atlantic as something nearing treachery. When the president floated the idea of reducing the troop numbers last month, there were protesting squeals and calls of warning. The Big Bully parent was abandoning its adoptees and advertising that fact. "President Donald J. Trump's order to withdraw nearly ten thousand troops from Germany betrays a close ally, undermines confidence in Washington, and makes Europe and the United States less

safe,” [suggested](#) Philip Gordon of the Council of Foreign Relations. “By questioning the sanctity of the US defence guarantee in Europe, treating NATO as a protection racket, and unilaterally diminishing America’s ability to uphold that guarantee,” Gordon continues to fuss that, “Trump is effectively signalling that an attack on a NATO ally would not necessarily be met with a US response.” An imaginative reading, if ever there was one.

Various German politicians, weaned on the narrative that a Germany with a US garrison is far better than a Germany without, were also shaken. Norbert Röttgen of the Bundestag and chair of the German parliament’s foreign policy committee [expressed](#) his views through the Funke Media Group. He could see no “factual reason for the withdrawal” and doing so was “very regrettable”. Johann Wadephul, deputy chairman of the parliamentary caucus of Chancellor Angela Merkel’s centre-right Union bloc, [was similarly unimpressed](#). The decision to remove such numbers of US troops from Germany without consulting NATO allies “shows once again that the Trump administration is neglecting basic leadership tasks.” Merkel’s transatlantic coordinator Peter Beyer [was similarly aggrieved](#). “This is completely unacceptable, especially since nobody in Washington thought about informing its NATO ally Germany in advance.”

Their shock suggested the sinking of an idea: that the hegemon, the superpower, is obligated to consult those whose territory it chooses to use, whose grounds it decided to occupy or leave for vague reasons of security. Daddy should listen.

Emily Haber, Germany’s ambassador to Washington, is keen that should happen, [sending out messages](#) of sweet reassurance that US troops had “become neighbours, friends, partners and friends while protecting transatlantic security and projecting American power and interests globally”.

Notwithstanding the inconsistencies in the move, the logic of garrisoning such a large number of troops in Germany has not struck some pundits as particularly sound. Being of the Cato Institute, which does, from time to time, evoke a sensible sentiment with regards imperial overstretch, Ted Galen Carpenter [assured](#) opponents of Trump’s decision that they “look at the calendar. It reads 2020, not 1950 or even 1989. There is no totalitarian threat, and the Red Army is not poised to pour through the Fulda Gap in Germany and try to sweep the Atlantic.”

Exaggerating the Russian threat, however, is a long-standing tradition that has made funding military budgets and keeping US troops in place over the globe a fundamental, if fictional necessity. Not even Trump has succeeded in dousing that paranoid passion.

Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne.

“For Our Enemies, We Have Shotguns”: Explaining China’s New Assertiveness

War on the Rocks



Image: Chinese Ministry of National Defense (Photo by Guo Peng)

China's ambassador to Sweden, Gui Congyou, has a colorful turn of phrase to describe his country's approach to foreign policy: "We treat our friends with fine wine, but for our enemies we have shotguns." The "enemies" he has attacked in the last two years encompass a bewilderingly expansive range of media and political targets, one of the contributory factors behind China's rapidly deteriorating reputation in Sweden, alongside the Chinese government's unwillingness to release a Swedish bookseller that it kidnapped. His belligerent behavior has been the subject of some bemusement in Stockholm: Why would Beijing choose so comprehensively to alienate a country that should, given its free-trading tradition, leading technology sector, and unusually successful investment ties with China, be one of its closest European partners?

In recent months, it has seemed like much of the world has been subjected to the same treatment, eliciting similar questions about why Beijing should engage in such self-defeating behavior. By any measure, China's recent foreign policy has displayed an astonishing level of assertiveness. That Beijing has shed its prior inhibitions in the midst of a devastating global health and economic crisis for which the Chinese leadership itself bears culpability, and a still-fragile economic situation in China itself makes it all the more remarkable.

For those who have observed this pattern of behavior, the reasons remain confounding. Four possible explanations suggest themselves, based on whether Beijing perceives this as a new era in its foreign policy or a temporary phase, and whether its actions are motivated by a sense of strength or vulnerability. Analyzing whether its new foreign policy reflects temporary opportunism, hubris, crisis management, or deeper insecurity is helpful in discerning whether Beijing will ultimately look to wind back its aggressive posture or if there is greater escalation to come. Yet in practice, the most effective policy responses will look very similar, regardless of China's intentions.

Intensifying Assertiveness on a Global Scale

The most dramatic developments in China's hardening attitude have been closest to home. On May 22, the National People's Congress approved a national security law for Hong Kong, which came into force on July 1, undermining Beijing's treaty commitment to "one country, two systems." Its breadth and extra-territorial scope surprised even the most pessimistic experts. A major mobilization by the People's Liberation Army along the disputed border with India in April and May led to clashes and a prolonged military stand-off. Further violence during a de-escalation process on June 15 resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese troops. One month later, Chinese officials and media also made claims to a sizeable tract of territory in Bhutan, an area that had not featured in previous border negotiations.

Treaty allies of the United States have not been spared. In June, the Australian government revealed a sustained cyber attack by China against government agencies, infrastructure, and businesses. This came after Canberra passed laws to increase oversight on foreign lobbying and protect its political system from external interference (moves driven by specific Chinese activity), and disqualified Chinese telecom companies from acting as suppliers for 5G contracts. Beijing also imposed trade curbs on Australia as explicit retaliation for its calls for an independent inquiry into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other fronts — including the South and East China Seas, and relations with Taiwan — have witnessed continued or worsening frictions, with the pandemic inducing not even a short period of restraint on China's part. In mid-April, a Chinese vessel tagged a Malaysian drill ship in disputed waters off of Borneo, resulting in a standoff that eventually involved five countries. One month later, another Chinese vessel sank a Vietnamese fishing boat off the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea. Military activity around islands disputed with Japan has picked up, despite the prior thaw in relations between Asia's two largest economies. Several airspace violations by Chinese aircraft were also reported over Taiwan, and the island experienced sustained Chinese disinformation campaigns throughout its recent elections. China also named a number of geographic features in the South China Sea in April and the East China Sea in June, as part of its expansive territorial claims.

Yet the sheer global sweep of China's diplomatic assertiveness and belligerent economic threats in the midst of a continuing pandemic has also been striking. The unprecedented scale of China's open criticism of American domestic affairs and conspiracy-theorizing about U.S. origins for the virus could be explained away in the context of worsening bilateral tensions. But virtually every other major power has been caught up in the attacks, too. In Brazil, Chinese diplomats have launched broadsides against elected officials, including the son of President Jair Bolsonaro.

The propaganda, disinformation, and written and verbal attacks from Chinese officials in Europe have led to the summoning of the Chinese ambassador in France, pushback against China's "aggressive" diplomacy from the E.U.'s top foreign policy official, and plummeting views of China among European publics. The United Kingdom has been warned that it will "bear the consequences" over its plans to curtail Huawei's role in its 5G networks, with barely veiled suggestions that this will involve economic repercussions for U.K. companies. China's relations with Canada were already strained following its arrest of prominent Chinese businesswoman Meng Wanzhou and Beijing's retaliatory detention of two Canadians, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. In June, they were formally charged with espionage, as Chinese officials openly tied the case to demands for Meng's release.

These developments occurred even as China began to face pushback for its actions. Recent moves on the part of the United States, such as its revocation of Hong Kong's special status, sanctions against Chinese officials responsible for human rights abuses in Xinjiang, and hardened South China Sea policy have been partly conditioned by Chinese actions and Sino-American dynamics during the pandemic. Yet it is the long list of China's deteriorating relationships elsewhere that arguably represents the greater setback. Six months ago, for example, China still had a chance to establish itself in pole position on its emerging technology ties with the United Kingdom and India. But subsequent measures concerning 5G telecommunications and China-based apps by London and New Delhi respectively make that far less likely today, reflecting a sea-change in the debates about China in both countries.

Scrutiny concerning China's growing leadership role in multilateral organizations has intensified, as have countervailing coalitions in these bodies. Plans for closer cooperation among democracies on issues ranging from supply chains to advanced technologies have been given considerable new momentum. So have plans for formats ranging from the D-10 (a proposed group of ten democracies to cooperate on 5G technologies and other economic security issues) to the new E.U.-U.S. dialogue on dealing with the China challenge. While some of these dynamics were already underway even before the pandemic, China's recent behavior has accelerated them considerably.

Four Possible Explanations

Although there are proximate causes behind each of the cases, and Chinese foreign policy was already moving in a more adversarial direction, the speed and breadth of the shifts in recent months has gone beyond what even the wariest analysts had predicted. It represents a qualitative shift not just from the phase of Chinese assertiveness that we can date to the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, but the recent phase that we have seen under Xi Jinping's leadership.

There are a few potential theories as to what exactly has changed in China's foreign policy — they could be considered opportunistic assertiveness, imperious assertiveness, reactive assertiveness, and insecure assertiveness. The two principal questions are whether China's leadership perceives this to be a period of vulnerability or an opportunity to expand its power, and whether it is seen as temporary or a lasting strategic reality. For the rest of the world, all of the potential answers are concerning. If Beijing is now prone to lashing out in all directions as the result of political insecurity, this does not necessarily make China any easier to deal with than if

it results from a hubristic view of its power position. But it will have ramifications for whether Beijing subsequently seeks to stabilize its relations with other powers again, and how it is likely to respond to concerted collective attempts at pushback.

A first explanation could be considered “opportunistic assertiveness.” Simply put, Beijing is taking advantage of political and economic weaknesses and distractions in the rest of the world, and believes that the U.S.-Chinese relationship under the Trump administration cannot get much worse anyway. It sees the phase following China’s recovery from the pandemic, the struggles elsewhere, and the potential for a partial improvement of relations with the United States after the elections in November as representing a short window of opportunity. This period — when the world is reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic consequences — offers a moment to make as many gains as possible and get any contentious moves (such as the National Security Law) out of the way before the U.S. presidential election in November. If Chinese policymakers are making such a calculation, they appear willing to risk that the reputational damage that China suffers is not so deep or long-lasting that it cannot be reversed. The growing bipartisan consensus around China in the United States counts against this theory, and it does a weaker job of explaining cases of Chinese assertiveness where the United States does not have alliance commitments (such as with Brazil or India). But it could still reflect the U.S.-centric prism through which Beijing often sees its global position and the attribution of current tension levels to unique features of the Trump presidency.

A second possibility, implying a lasting change rather than a temporary burst of opportunism, might be considered “imperious assertiveness.” China’s leaders have internalized their own success to an inordinate degree. They genuinely believe that China now offers a viable alternative to the United States as a global power and that any criticism is unjustified or hypocritical. The lackluster response by the Western world — specifically the United States and parts of Europe — to COVID-19 stands in contrast to Asian technocratic superiority and the Chinese Communist Party’s capacity to lead the country’s bounce-back from the crisis, further reinforcing this belief. As much as hubris, this could be driven by a changed assessment of the new geopolitical context: There is a “new Cold War” with the United States and its allies, and Chinese officials believe it is not just prepared, but well-positioned to prevail, especially given current U.S. struggles with polarized politics, weakened economic growth, and continued failure to get the pandemic under control. Some critics in China have gently warned against the adverse consequences of this approach (“destroying yourself through excessive praise”), particularly when China’s own challenges — from demographics to debt — remain considerable. Additionally, if the United States and the West are China’s major strategic and ideological competitors, it would still make sense to undercut any moves towards counterbalancing rather than alienating so many U.S. partners and allies simultaneously. In contrast to prior years, there is scant evidence of this. But it may reflect both overconfidence and a belief that the inducements of China’s economic power and its heightened capacity for coercion are sufficient to prevent coalitions from forming.

A third theory implies “reactive assertiveness,” a term first coined by the International Crisis Group to describe China’s behavior in the South China Sea. In the present context, it suggests an escalatory response to the immediate economic, reputational, security, and political challenges China faces through the pandemic and its aftermath. Beijing hopes it can push back against criticism, deter others, achieve whatever advances are possible under the circumstances, and

ease up again when the global health and economic situation has somewhat normalized. As went the South China Sea, where China has sought to “use perceived provocations as a chance to change the status quo in its favor — all the while insisting the other party started the trouble” — so now goes almost every other issue. This is in part opportunistic. But the application of the same playbook across multiple policy areas and geographies during this phase reflects the sheer range of fronts that China sees opening up during this period.

A final possibility — implying concern that China and the Chinese Communist Party are entering an extended period of vulnerability — is “insecure assertiveness.” China’s actions arise not out of a sense of strength, but of weakness, and a belief that its threat environment has changed in a more fundamentally dangerous way. In this account, the internal and external pressures facing the Chinese Communist Party over its handling of the pandemic, and the worsening U.S.-Chinese relationship, have led it to lash out in multiple directions against what it perceives as attacks from all sides. Beijing is steeling itself for a long battle. It sees the pandemic as accelerating the competitive and confrontational dynamics that were already underway and has pessimistically decided to treat not just U.S. allies but partners such as India as being in the same camp. It may believe that coercive means are now the only way to deter new countervailing coalitions from forming. Given that views of China among international publics have become so critical, and Beijing’s unwillingness to make economic reforms means that it can no longer count on its traditional political support in the international business community, China may now just be resigned to dealing with a more hostile context. Beijing’s approach is also more openly ideological, seeing the need not just to defend its own system publicly but to unleash open criticism of “western democracy” through its officials and propaganda machinery rather than confining this language to internal Party documents and speeches.

In both latter theories — reactive and insecure assertiveness — Beijing believes it is responding to moves by others, such as: U.S. trade and technological restrictions, Australia’s criticism of political interference, the United Kingdom’s involvement in Hong Kong, Japan’s “remilitarization,” India’s border infrastructure development, Southeast Asia’s resource extraction in the South China Sea, Taiwan’s pro-independence tilt, or Canada’s detention of a Chinese citizen. Never mind that all of these countries see their own actions as legitimate responses to China’s authoritarian turn, unfair economic practices, or territorial revisionism. In some sense, this would be even more worrisome than hubris or a short-term push for advantage. If Beijing perceives itself as the aggrieved actor, it is even less likely to change course.

“No One Likes Us, We Don’t Care”

It is possible that some combination of the above is at play: China is displaying imperiousness, opportunism, reactivity, and insecurity all at once. Xi Jinping himself has certainly exhibited all of these traits. The declining quality of leadership under a system that has become ever-more centered around him may be partly responsible for the series of continuing missteps, a product of less deliberation, alternative viewpoints being shut down, and anticipation of leadership preferences by lower-level officials. When confronting resistance abroad, a rigid Chinese foreign policy hierarchy is no longer nimble enough to change tack, and has opted instead to double down on its aggressive approach, notwithstanding limited efforts by Chinese diplomats to place a floor under the rapidly deteriorating U.S.-Chinese relationship. None of these explanations are

particularly reassuring: Whatever the balance of factors, Beijing risks some combination of severe reputational damage, premature overreach, systematic overreaction, or self-fulfilling prophecy.

The ramifications for Beijing go well beyond any individual relationship. The collective economic, financial, military, diplomatic and technological resources that can be marshaled by the countries that China has decided to confront continue to dwarf those that Beijing can muster. While the informal process of coalition-building on China remains challenging, it has been made a great deal more straightforward by recent Chinese actions.

Many of the long-term measures that the like-minded democracies — the United States, Europe, Japan, India, Australia, and parts of Southeast Asia among many others — are considering or already pursuing are not contingent on which considerations are driving China's assertiveness. Putting in place the means to compete more effectively, ensure the resilience of their economies and democracies, reduce China's capacity for coercion, and establish new structures of mutual cooperation will make sense regardless of the deliberations in Zhongnanhai. These include new defensive economic instruments, measures to reduce excessive dependency on China, rebalancing the level of openness of their economies and societies to Chinese investments and influence activities, strengthening support to third countries in areas such as infrastructure finance, closer coordination in multilateral bodies, intensified security cooperation across multiple domains, and various ambitious plans for new trade, technology, data, standards, and industrial policy partnerships. In their most expansive forms, these would amount to a major reshaping of the strategic landscape in which China operates. In their more limited forms, they are already resulting in a less permissive environment for Beijing to pursue its economic, security, and political goals.

Yet many of the decisions facing these countries also involve calculations about immediate issues with China — border incursions, threats of economic punishment, Hong Kong's status — that hinge more directly on the nature of the Chinese leadership's current outlook. If Beijing is in an insecure, defensive mode, one argument would be that the best course of action is to find ways to ease tensions. But this would evidently be the worst path to pursue if other explanations of its behavior hold true, either confirming for China the most hubristic assessment of its own position or encouraging even bolder acts of adventurism. It would also do little good if Beijing's insecurity has already led it to conclude that it is now in an all-out struggle.

The alternative hypothesis — that carefully trading around the Chinese government's sensitivities during a period in which it faces intense pressure will elicit a cooler-headed approach — has also been tested out to bruising effect. Indeed, previous governments in the United States, India, and Japan attempted to play down differences to no avail. More recently, the shock in Europe over China's behavior resulted not just from Beijing's actions, but from the fact that they followed precisely such an effort on the part of European leaders to provide discreet support to China at the peak of its internal crisis. This was met, in Gui's words, with shotguns.

Demonstrating to China's leadership that a wider de-escalation is preferable will instead require others to raise the costs of adverse Chinese behavior and signal further repercussions if Beijing continues down its current path. Initially this could range from symbolic moves, such as suspensions of high-level meetings with China and the launch of new processes among democracies openly focused on China policy coordination, to targeted measures against Chinese

Communist Party officials, and a significant tightening of dual-use equipment sales. There is no guarantee that tougher measures will moderate Beijing's approach — it is entirely possible that China is simply set on its new trajectory, thinking either that it will pay off in the end or that there is no alternative option. But the Chinese Communist Party has repeatedly shown the pragmatic capacity to correct course when absolutely necessary. This is the moment for collective efforts to sharpen that choice.

Andrew Small is a senior transatlantic fellow with the Asia program at the German Marshall Fund of the United States and an associate senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. He previously worked as the director of the Foreign Policy Centre's Beijing office and was a visiting fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Dhruva Jaishankar is director of the U.S. Initiative at the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and a non-resident fellow at the Lowy Institute in Australia. He previously worked at Brookings India, the German Marshall Fund, and the Brookings Institution.

Hot Issue – The Houthi Art of War: Why They Keep Winning in Yemen

By: [Michael Horton](#)

June 29, 2020 The Jamestown Foundation



(source: middle-east-online.com)

Executive Summary: After five years of war against the Saudi-led coalition and its allies, Yemen's Houthi rebels remain defiant and are once again on the offensive. The Houthis' keen understanding and consistent application of the algebra of insurgency are fundamental to their martial success in Yemen. Ironically, the greatest threat to the Houthi leadership may be peace. Peace will bring internal tensions within the Houthi leadership and growing discontent among the Yemeni people to the fore.

Introduction

Underestimating or having contempt for an enemy, argues Lao Tzu, is among the costliest mistakes a commander can make. [1] This alone has led to more defeats than any other miscalculation. Conversely, underestimating the enemy is a great asset to those who are underestimated. The military and political capabilities of Yemen's Houthi rebels have been underrated for nearly two decades. First, by the government of former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh, and then by Saudi Arabia and its supporters, including the United States.

From 2004-2010, the government of Ali Abdulla Saleh fought and lost six wars against the Houthis. The Houthi takeover of the Yemeni capital of Sana'a in September 2014 and their subsequent move southward toward Aden partly prompted Saudi Arabia and the UAE to launch their ill-fated intervention in Yemen in March 2015. The Saudis and Emiratis bet on a quick victory over the Houthis. Now, more than five years on, it is clear they have lost their bet. The Houthis and those allied with them have proved themselves to be resilient, capable, and strategically and tactically creative.

The Houthis and their allies have withstood five years of aerial bombardment, blockades, and attacks on multiple fronts by forces backed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Throughout the last five years, the Houthis have been outgunned, outspent, and subject to persistent aerial and satellite surveillance. Yet the intervention has not materially weakened them, and now, the Houthis are once again on the offensive across multiple fronts ([al-Monitor](#), March 12).

The resiliency of the Houthis stems from their leadership's understanding and consistent application of the algebra of insurgency. T.E. Lawrence used the term, or a version of it, in an article he wrote for *Army Quarterly* in 1920. The article, "Evolution of a Revolt," argues that insurgents would be victorious if they applied certain "algebraical factors." [2] These include force mobility and security as well as time and respect for the populace. [3] The Houthis broadly apply these and multiply them with superior human intelligence and an intimate knowledge of northwest Yemen's daunting mountainous terrain. The Houthis, partly due to technical support from Iran, have also added drone and missile technology to the equation. These factors combine to make the Houthis a formidable force.

Move or Die

Force mobility has been—and remains—fundamental to the Houthis' success in battling elements of the Saudi and Emirati militaries as well as those forces they support. These forces include Yemen's internationally recognized government-in-exile, led by President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, which is allied with Saudi Arabia, and a panoply of militias and armed groups supported by the UAE. The Houthis understand and readily apply what Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley explained in 2016, "on the future battlefield, if you stay in one place longer than two or three hours, you will be dead." [4] General Milley made his comments in light of the widespread use of drones and other rapidly developing battlefield technologies.

The UAE's and Saudi Arabia's ability to field unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) has increased over the last three years. Both countries use Chinese manufactured UAVs in Yemen, most of which are operated by Chinese contractors as Riyadh and Abu Dhabi suffer from a lack of well-trained

personnel. Saudi Arabia and the UAE also enjoy drone and satellite surveillance provided by the United States, which flies its own UAVs over Yemen on a daily basis.

In response to what, at times, has been persistent aerial surveillance, the Houthis make extensive use of highly mobile small combat units. These units are critical to the Houthis' ability to defend territory, harass enemy forces, and plan and launch offensives. The combat units most often consist of no more than 20 men—roughly equivalent to a squad or specialized platoon—who rely on two or three light trucks and/or technicals. These trucks and/or technicals are easy to disguise and traverse Yemen's worst roads and tracks.

Even smaller groups of men—equivalent to a fire team—are tasked with harassing enemy forces and collecting intelligence. The smaller teams may operate for weeks with all but minimal resupply. Most importantly, many of these units are not dependent on ranking commanders for daily or even weekly orders. The fire teams, or forward operating squads, are given a broad remit that remains in place until cancelled or amended. The Houthis are well aware that all electronic communications are monitored and consequently keep them to a minimum or use alternative means. These small, highly mobile units, especially the ones deployed along the edges of—and in enemy-held territory operate on their individual commanders' initiatives and seize on any vulnerabilities or opportunities they come across. [5]

Intense competition for spots in these combat teams takes place among those who aspire to rise up the ranks of the Houthi-led forces. Command within these units, from the lowest level to the equivalent of captains, is largely a meritocracy. Those who are most capable and successful are rewarded with rank, favors, and/or cash bonuses. On a deeper and more consequential level, the best fighters and commanders are the ones who survive by adapting to—and exploiting—the dynamic conditions in which they operate. Many, if not most, of the senior members of the Houthi leadership have firsthand experience in battle and are themselves the product of combat Darwinism. Only those who were capable and fortunate survived the years of fighting with the Saleh-led Yemeni government.

The Houthi leadership—at least parts of it—places a high value on bottom-up learning. While senior members of the Houthi family dominate the core leadership, the broader organization is open to those who possess the skills and talent that the group and their allies require.

The combination of what is largely a meritocracy with battlefield selection means that the Houthis and those allied with them benefit from motivated and creative officers and NCOs or their equivalents. [6] This contrasts with the forces arrayed against the Houthis and their allies. The armies of Saudi Arabia and, to a lesser degree, the UAE suffer from a pronounced lack of experienced and capable officers and NCOs. The UAE partly makes up for these deficiencies by employing mercenaries. The re-constituted “Yemeni Army” that is now fighting on behalf of Yemen's government-in-exile also contends with poorly trained and ineffective officers and NCOs. Field grade and general officers in the re-constituted Yemeni Army most often achieve their ranks via personal connections to the Saudi Arabia-based government-in-exile. Furthermore, many of these senior officers are more interested in preserving their resources and thus sustaining their power and influence than engaging the enemy in protracted and costly battles.

Security and Intelligence

To a large degree, the mobility of Houthi forces ensures their security. The combat units that rove around their assigned sectors are indistinguishable from civilians since a significant percentage of Yemeni men in northwest Yemen carry weapons. Long before the start of the current war, bearing arms was a part of the culture. Additionally, the Toyota trucks used by the Houthis are as ubiquitous as the Kalashnikovs and G3 rifles carried by many across large swaths of Yemen.

The combat teams maintain their security by only massing when a target emerges that requires the combined firepower of multiple units. More often than not, a target such as a convoy (the Houthis' largest source of weapons and material is coalition-backed forces) is first flagged by human intelligence. The Houthis maintain an informal but extensive human intelligence network that extends across Yemen and well into southern Saudi Arabia where they carry out hit and run raids on Saudi forces ([al-Jazeera](#), September 29, 2019). Informants, who act out of loyalty and for material gain, pass along intelligence about enemy movements, proposed routes, and details about armaments and cargo to their handlers. The handlers then notify Houthi commanders charged with tasking. Combat units in the area through which the convoy or some other target will pass use a combination of human intelligence and hand launched drones to monitor the progress of a target. When the target approaches a predetermined area that is favorable to attack, combat units swarm the target by approaching from multiple directions. Once the attack is complete the units disperse.

Many of the combat teams that operate deep within enemy territory are semi-autonomous. The commanders of these units work their own human intelligence sources in their assigned areas, decide when to attack, and deploy hand launched drones to monitor and identify threats and opportunities. The autonomy helps ensure security by reducing electronic communication and nimbleness. Once an opportunity for engaging an enemy is identified, little or no chain of command exists to obtain permission to strike.

Human intelligence, like their small mobile combat units, is critical to the Houthis' success on the battlefield. Via their extensive network of informants, the Houthis often know more about the location and capabilities of enemy forces than the general officers charged with commanding them. [7] Despite their enemies' superior weapons, air support, and persistent overhead surveillance, the Houthis routinely anticipate and thwart offensives and counter-offensives. This is primarily due to the human intelligence that they receive from informants across Yemen. The Houthis' use of numerous types of modified and indigenously produced UAVs allows them to confirm and augment the intelligence generated via informants. The pairing of human and UAV generated intelligence combined with the Houthis and their allies' intimate knowledge of Yemen's rugged mountains and canyons, acts as an effective force multiplier. The Houthis often anticipate the moves made by their foes and respond with deadly force. The accuracy of their responses means they are often able to "arrange the minds of their enemies" by eroding morale and undermining trust in the officers and commanders who lead the opposing forces. [8]

Anatomy of Failure

In contrast to the Houthis, the military forces opposing them suffer from slow and ineffective chains of command, dated and politically influenced intelligence, and poorly motivated men and officers. Decision making within the re-constituted Yemeni Army supporting the Hadi government is slow, top-heavy, and frequently compromised by in-fighting between rival

politicians and military commanders. When orders are issued, they are often received by ranking commanders in frontline areas like Marib as suggestions rather than orders. This might be because the commanders have a better understanding of the situation or it may be the case that a particular officer and his backers think it advantageous to preserve their men and supplies.

The hoarding of supplies and the taking of a percentage of salaries by ranking officers was a problem in the Yemeni Army before the current conflict. These practices have continued and grown worse in the re-constituted Yemeni Army. The timely payment of salaries and distribution of supplies has a material impact on the willingness of many of the soldiers who have signed up to fight for the Hadi government. Most of these men, who are primarily from the south, only joined the Hadi-allied forces to collect a salary. Many of them have families who depend on the promised income. When these salaries are not paid or are reduced due to graft among ranking officers, many soldiers desert. In addition to low morale, a significant percentage of the soldiers listed on rosters are 'ghost soldiers.' They either do not exist, or, if they do, they are not actively involved in the fighting and are only on the roster to collect a percentage of a salary.

Saudi Arabia's 'blank check' approach to the war in Yemen has exacerbated these problems. While indications that Saudi Arabia is cutting its expenditures in Yemen have emerged, the culture of corruption will persist. In fact, reduced aid from Saudi Arabia may mean that ranking officers and political figures are more inclined to preserve their resources to assure themselves a place in whatever political order follows.

As Saudi Arabia reduces its financial and military support for the Hadi government, the already limited effectiveness of its military will be further reduced. This is evident in the Yemeni governorate of Marib, where the Hadi government is struggling to hold the capital, Marib City. Despite air support from Saudi Arabia for Hadi's military forces, the Houthis continue to gain ground. If Marib City falls to the Houthis and their allies, desertion rates among the opposing forces will soar and brittle chains of command will break.

Conclusion

The defeat of the Houthis has, according to many analysts and think tanks, been imminent for much of the past five years. The better equipped militaries of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and their various proxy forces were supposed to rapidly defeat the Houthis and their allies. Great emphasis was placed on the technical superiority of the Western-equipped militaries of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Yet despite the expenditure of vast sums on weapons and materiel by Riyadh and the Abu Dhabi, the Houthis have consolidated their control of northwest Yemen and are poised to capture the governorate of Marib.

The Houthis' ability to defy and defeat technologically superior forces is a reminder that, as the military strategist and fighter pilot Colonel John Boyd argued, "machines don't fight wars, terrain doesn't fight wars. Humans fight wars. You must get into the minds of humans. That's where the battles are won." [9] The Houthis excel on the battlefield and this is unlikely to change, no matter how much Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and their backers spend on the war in Yemen. However, despite their military success, the Houthis may lose the core battle for the hearts and minds of Yemenis. Ironically, it is the end or reduction of hostilities that will most weaken the Houthis' hold on power.

The war and their martial abilities are the Houthis' greatest sources of legitimacy and support. Many of those who back the Houthis do so only for pragmatic reasons. For example, many Yemenis want to stop what they see as a foreign invasion by the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Yemenis of various political persuasions calculate that only the Houthis are capable of preventing outside powers from carving up Yemen. Others support the Houthis because they provide a measure of security and predictability, especially when compared with southern Yemen. Members of the Yemeni elite most often align themselves with the Houthis for financial and political gain rather than any shared ideology. The Houthis' have, so far, stitched together impressive and durable networks of political and tribal support. However, alienation among a significant percentage of the population of northwest Yemen is growing due to Houthi abuses and their exclusivist policies. [10]

The Houthi leadership recently introduced a bylaw that stipulates that a percentage of the *zakat*—an obligatory tax and one of the five pillars of Islam—be paid to Hashemite families ([al-Monitor](#), June 21). The Hashemites are those families who trace descent from the Prophet Muhammad's great-grandfather. As Hashemites, this will benefit the Houthi family and the organization's leadership. This bylaw, as well as what many view as the increasing influence of Iranian Jafari Shi'a religious practices, is drawing the ire of Yemenis—including Zaydis, a sect of Shi'a Islam followed by the Houthis.

While the Houthis will remain a martial and political force in northwest Yemen for the foreseeable future, resistance to the Houthi family itself will grow if the war winds down. Without the threat posed by the coalition and coalition-backed forces, the dominance of the Houthi family in the political arena of northwest Yemen will be more difficult to justify and sustain. Tensions within the core leadership will also threaten this dominance. The immediacy of war provides most of the cohesiveness that the Houthi leadership has enjoyed. Without the war, tensions within the core leadership will become more pronounced. As rival leaders attempt to broaden and reinforce power bases, there will be more space for old and emergent elites to reassert their authority. Over time this will lead to the dilution of the power held by the Houthis' core leadership.

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Notes:

[1] See: Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* (Shambala Edition, 2007).

[2] Thomas Edward Lawrence, "Evolution of a Revolt," *Army Quarterly* 1:1 (1920).

[3] The Houthis are guilty, as all sides in the war are, of numerous and continuing human rights abuses. However, they do offer relatively high-levels of predictability and security for those living in the areas that they and their allies control.

[4] See: <https://www.ausa.org/articles/radical-change-coming-gen-mark-milley>

[5] Author interviews with Yemen based analysts and former government officials (June 2020).

[6] Many of the most capable officers and NCOs from the Yemeni Army and Air Force allied themselves with the Houthis following the Saudi led intervention. The Houthis continue to benefit from the expertise of these men, many of whom received training in the West as well as in former Soviet bloc countries.

[7] Author interview, Yemen based security analyst (June 2020).

[8] See: Liddell Hart, *Colonel Lawrence: The Man Behind the Legend* (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1934).

[9] See: Robert Coram, *Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War* (Back Bay Books, 2002).

[10] See: Human Rights Watch, "[Yemen: Houthi-Hostage Taking](#)" (September 2018); Human Rights Watch, "[Yemen Events of 2019.](#)"

China-India Skirmish: Part of Maritime Versus Land Power Struggle

Inderjeet Parmar and Atul Bhardwaj, DEFENSE POST JULY 2, 2020

Despite shared economic opportunities, border disputes continue to haunt India and China's relationship. After 60 years, the two countries are once again engaged in a bloody mini-war in the Himalayas.

During [recent clashes in the Galwan Valley](#), both have killed each other's soldiers, yet there is a greater sense of loss in India. In the battle of perceptions, the Chinese seem to be ahead in this current round. Uncertain calm prevails on the India-China borders. However, those seeking a quick solution are likely to be disappointed.

China-India tensions will persist because they are tethered to the ensuing US-China Cold War, which itself is a titanic battle over who will dominate the world – sea-power or land power. America rules the waves and sets the terms and conditions for the vast majority of global commerce. China, on the other hand, is busy building a land bridge across Eurasia, which would undermine US maritime dominance.

There is little doubt that India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has fostered the nation's strategic embrace of the US. Both have been deliberating on their collaborative military posture in the [Indo-Pacific to contain China](#) and a more conscious collective effort by like-minded (democratic) countries to curtail Chinese president Xi Jinping's aggressive foreign policy. Hence, the current India-China dispute must be viewed in a broader Indo-Pacific perspective.

To influential American observers such as Michele Flournoy, former under-secretary of defense for planning, the [Sino-Indian border confrontation should](#) "serve as a wake-up call to accelerate and deepen security co-operation among like-minded states." Flournoy claims that while the region's geopolitics is often portrayed as a US-China contest, in reality, there is a group of democracies with increasingly converging interests.

Many in India and the US see the current tense situation between India and China as an opportunity [to push for India's overt alignment](#) with the US-led security intuitive in the Indo-Pacific.

US maritime power is asserting its reach and range to let its allies know that the “maximum pressure” game on China is underway. Offensive realism, consisting of assertive containment and deterrence, is America’s new theoretical and political mantra against China.

here is a bipartisan resolve in the US that a continental power like China cannot be allowed to change the international political order designed by the maritime world. But how is a conflict between Indian and Chinese armies 14,000 feet above sea-level related to US naval dominance?

The aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75) transits the Arabian Sea March 4, 2020. Image: US Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Maxwell Higgins)

“The Army is a projectile to be fired by the navy,” argued Admiral Jackie Fisher, British First Sea Lord (1904-1910) summing up naval historian and geo-strategist Julian Corbett’s view that it was critical for a sea power to influence operations on land.

For maximum international trade to flow on the oceans, land borders must remain sealed. The army helps the [sea power](#) ensure that borders stay tense through conflicts while trade continues to seek the smooth sea lines of communication under the watchful eyes of the superior naval forces and marine service industry. This is exactly how British and American sea power ensured that 90 percent of global trade continues to use oceanic routes.

China, the great disruptor of the 21st-century, is challenging this 200-year-old maritime order by building alternative supply lines across Eurasia, many of which will make the existing sea lines of communication redundant. Besides the loss of dollars and technological hegemony, a world map that shows a connected Eurasia and an isolated America through the systemic undermining of sea power haunts American strategists.

The Americans were aware of this geographic imperative when they took over the reins of the maritime domain from Britain after World War II. America’s Eurasian dilemma got heightened with the communists coming to power in China in 1949.

The specter of socialist supply lines running from China to Poland via the Soviet Union led to the “China Lobby”, directed by Henry Luce (founder of *Time* magazine and advocate of “American Exceptionalism” and the “American Century”), which lamented the “loss of China” to Mao Zedong.

However, another strategic stream in the US saw Mao’s arrival in Beijing as an opportunity to contain the Soviet Union by causing a schism in the communist bloc. The Yugoslavian communist leader Joseph Tito, a staunch anti-Stalin activist, was America’s trump card in eastern Europe.

Mao was expected to shape up as the “Chinese Tito,” who would raise the banner of protest against Soviet domination of the communist bloc. Breaking the ideological affinity between China and the Soviet Union was one aspect of America’s grand strategy, but more important was to keep the two continental powers apart and to prevent them from building a Eurasian land bridge on which socialist trade would be plied free from the constraints on the flow of international trade imposed by maritime powers.

The Indian elite got drawn into the geopolitical game of initiating the Sino-Soviet split. In the late 1950s, India-China relations nosedived. India got involved in US-driven covert operations inside

Tibet. The border settlement issue suddenly sprang up as a core issue between China and the Soviet Union.

The Aksai Chin road connecting Xinjiang with Tibet became a bone of contention. India started [claiming Aksai Chin](#) as a part of its territory, and China retaliated by asking for Tawang. Before this, India had never raised the issue of Aksai Chin, and China had not objected to India hoisting its flag in Tawang in 1951.

This was also when the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was impressing the West with his de-Stalinization drive and had started building bridges with the West by visiting Washington in 1959.

The US, however, was more interested in seeing New Delhi distancing from Beijing than in controlling India veering towards Moscow. Washington saw Moscow's interest in the non-communist "swing states" such as India, Indonesia, and Egypt as a welcome development. This is exactly what was needed to convince the Chinese that the Soviets' commitment to building a strong socialist bloc was a farce: they were more interested in expanding their imperial reach.

In the late 1950s, the US nudged India towards the Soviet Union. India started inching towards the Soviet Union and seeking its military hardware when Indo-US ties had hit a purple patch. India collaborated with America on the Tibet issue, and the US organized a massive economic aid package for it.

The 1962 India-China war offered a perfect setting to accentuate the differences between the two communist giants. China was irked by Moscow's neutral stance on the India-China border skirmishes, which began in 1959 and culminated in a war in 1962. According to the assessment of Indian Intelligence Bureau Chief Bhola Nath Mullik, China went all out attacking the Soviet Union because the latter had not backed China in the Sino-Indian conflict.

In a post-war discussion with his intelligence personnel, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru [mentioned some articles in the media](#) that reflected Chinese fury against India and the Soviet Union. A [1963 CIA document](#) titled *Implications of Sino-Soviet Rupture for the US* stated that, "for most practical purposes there was now an open split in Sino-Soviet relations. The virulence of the present confrontation, the directness of the most recent insults and accusations at Moscow, and the theological certainty of both disputants reflect new dimensions of antagonism too extensive to be bridged."

The alignment of the Indian elite with their counterparts in America to push their class goals then became one of the most critical factors for the causes of the India-China war of 1962.

The dominant elite in India showed great eagerness to confront the Chinese and settle the border dispute through the forward deployment of the military in disputed areas because it helped them achieve their domestic political goals.

One such goal was to defeat and demonize Indian communists for opposing the war and, secondly, to ensure the rise of conservatives within the ruling Congress party by projecting left-liberals like Krishna Menon, then defense minister, as the chief culprit for India's defeat at the hand of Chinese. The war also helped Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Hindu cultural-political outfit, to parade itself as a nationalist force. This was essential for the RSS because its role in the national freedom struggle was negligible.

A similar class-alignment is visible today when Donald Trump's administration launched a virulent hate campaign and [trade war](#) against the Communist Party of China to browbeat it into halting all its endeavors to alter the global power matrix by building alternative global supply lines running through Eurasia.

The current India-China conflict is connected to Anglo-American geopolitical plans to halt the Chinese from reaching the Arabian Sea through a much shorter route via Pakistan. The maritime powers see the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a direct assault on their sea power strategy that aims to [choke Chinese merchant shipping](#) in the Strait of Malacca between the Indonesian island of Sumatra and Malaysia.

India is opposed to the CPEC, a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative launched by Xi in 2013, because it passes through Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), a Pakistani province in the north, to reach the Chinese-operated Gwadar port in the south.

India considers GB, a critical hub that connects South and Central Asia, to be under the illegal Pakistani occupation. India has become more vocal about GB only after the CPEC project picked up momentum in 2014. India's Minister of Home Affairs, Amit Shah, [recently asserted that](#), "The boundaries of Jammu and Kashmir decided in our Constitution, and also in the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir, includes PoK (Pakistan Occupied Kashmir) and Aksai Chin."

Last year, after the bifurcation of Jammu and [Kashmir](#), India issued a fresh set of maps that showed Aksai Chin and GB as parts of the Union territory of Ladakh. The Chinese objected and said India was unilaterally changing the status quo.

Galwan Valley – the flashpoint of the recent clashes between the Indian army and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China is close to Aksai Chin – is the same area that became a bone of contention between the two Asian nations during the 1962 war.

The current Indian government brought the area back into the discourse, making it contentious once again. With the Indian establishment's renewed resolve to reclaim regions in China and Pakistan, the security in the area became tense and has finally resulted in the brutal killings of soldiers.

As long as the subcontinent remains caught in the "territorial trap" and refuses to see its borders as opportunities, both Indian and Pakistani armies will continue to be used as projectiles fired by maritime America to achieve its broader goal of keeping the borders shut, the Eurasian landmass divided, and maximum trade flowing on US-controlled sea routes.

If continental China wants the land bridges to be secured, it will have to devise a different strategy that relies less on the use of force, and to befriend India.

It Only Took Days for a Fire to Hinder the US Navy's Pacific Fleet for Years to Come

Analysis by Brad Lendon, CNN
July 20, 2020



A fire burns aboard the USS Bonhomme Richard in San Diego on July 12, 2020.

A massive blaze aboard a billion-dollar US Navy warship has been extinguished after raging for four days -- but its effect might be felt across America's Pacific Fleet for years.

Navy officials said the fire aboard the USS Bonhomme Richard, an amphibious assault ship undergoing maintenance and upgrades at a port in San Diego, was put out last Thursday. Reaching temperatures up to 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit (about 650 degrees Celsius), it melted aluminum and incinerated wiring, plastics and combustibles like drywall, bedding and office supplies, while filling the 850-foot (260-meter) vessel with thick smoke.

The true extent of the damage, however, remains unknown. Engineers will need to get into the ship to assess the destruction once the spaces inside cool down, officials said.

The Navy's top officer, Adm. Mike Gilday, said Friday there would be a thorough investigation of the fire's cause.

"We will fully investigate what happened here so that we learn all that we can from this terrible tragedy," said Gilday, the chief of naval operations.

"It is too early to make any predictions or promises of what the future of the ship will be," said Rear Adm. Philip Sobeck, commander of the Navy's Expeditionary Strike Group Three. "Whether or not it will be repaired will be determined."

Either way, the long-term impacts are significant. The Bonhomme Richard, which [resembles a baby aircraft carrier](#), was being upgraded to accommodate some of the newest and most sophisticated warplanes in the US arsenal, [Marine Corps F-35Bs](#).

It was to be one of only four ships in the US fleet with the ability to handle the F-35Bs -- meaning its absence will be felt.

"As tensions mount with China in the South China Sea, as well as with North Korea, the loss of this ship and her capabilities will make it more difficult for the Navy to meet all its war-fighting requirements," said John Kirby, a CNN military analyst and former US Navy admiral.

Timothy Heath, senior international defense researcher at the Rand Corp., said deploying F-35s continuously in the Indo-Pacific region would have served as a visible reminder of the US military's technological edge over rivals such as China.

"The advanced capabilities of the F-35 outclass those of any Chinese fighter, providing an edge in air-to-air combat," he said. "The US Navy's effort to operate expeditionary task forces with F-35s on a continuous basis in the Indo-Pacific will be dealt a serious blow."

The long-term consequences

For now, the USS America -- a newer version of the amphibious assault ship capable of deploying F-35s -- is filling in for the Bonhomme Richard, operating out of the US Navy base in Sasebo, Japan.

And naval commanders pointed out that the USS Tripoli, the Navy's newest amphibious assault ship, was commissioned Wednesday, joining the fleet as the 22-year-old Bonhomme Richard burned.

But the absence of any ship can take a toll.

"There are always follow-on effects when a ship is unexpectedly removed from service," said Carl Schuster, a former director of operations at the US Pacific Command's Joint Intelligence Center.

"The Bonhomme Richard was supposed to return to the fleet this fall, freeing up another to receive needed maintenance and upgrade. Now, that is not going to happen. So, another ship's maintenance and upgrade needs will be delayed and a capability gap opened."

This is likely to cause a snowball effect, Heath said.

"The US military will have to cut back on the missions it takes on, or it will need to stress the remaining crews to meet its obligations. Both carry risks," he said.

"Cutting back on operations by US expeditionary task forces may leave gaps in the US Navy's operational presence, which could embolden countries like China to step up coercive measures.

"However, stressing crews by cutting back on maintenance, rest etc. raises the risk of further mishaps and disasters. Both could further injure US credibility in the region."

Although the Navy has not yet been able to determine the cause of the blaze on the Bonhomme Richard, losing a major war-fighting platform to a pier-side fire raises questions about whether procedures were properly followed.

Heath said the Navy has been grappling with credibility concerns in the Pacific for years -- including the 2017 collisions that left the destroyers [USS Fitzgerald](#) and [USS John McCain](#) out of commission for more than two years each. Crew fatigue, training deficiencies and failure to follow procedures played a part in those accidents, which left a combined 17 US sailors dead, [according to Navy investigations](#).

More recently, the Navy had one of its Pacific aircraft carriers, the USS Theodore Roosevelt, out of action for weeks at its base in Guam after an outbreak of Covid-19 infected more than 1,000 crew, killing one sailor. Its commander was later [relieved of duty for not following protocols](#) to prevent the virus from spreading on his ship.

"By itself, the (Bonhomme Richard) disaster may have been merely unfortunate, but it occurred after a series of mishaps with the US Navy in the Indo-Pacific," Heath said. "With US national level messaging about alliances inconsistent and erratic, these setbacks in the US Navy become even more damaging to US credibility in the region."

Indeed, in the days before the fire in San Diego, the Navy was [touting how it had overcome Covid-19 to stage South China Sea exercises](#) involving two aircraft carriers and more than 12,000 troops for the first time in six years.

"We've taken extraordinary measures to protect our sailors from COVID," said Rear Adm. George Wikoff, commander of Carrier Strike Group 5, led by the USS Ronald Reagan.

Messages and perceptions

Schuster said the dual-carrier exercise in the South China Sea was designed to send a message to Beijing: "The US Navy is back following the Covid-19-driven reduced activity."

The Navy said the exercises showed its commitment to allies in the region, too. Yet the loss of one of its baby carriers could lead allies to question whether Washington can sustain its commitment.

"What exercises and other plans do we reduce or cancel outright? Those decisions will impact perceptions of our commitment and capability," Schuster said.

Back in Washington, there will also be financial concerns. The Bonhomme Richard cost about \$750 million to build, and was undergoing a few hundred-million-dollar improvements to ready it for F-35s.

Schuster said repairs would likely cost at least \$150 million. By comparison, the Navy spent more than \$500 million to repair and update the smaller destroyer Fitzgerald after its collision with a cargo ship off Japan in 2017, [the US Naval Institute reported](#).

A new amphibious assault ship, like the Tripoli, costs about \$3.4 billion, according to the US Government Accountability Office.

Despite all the problems the fire on the Bonhomme Richard has created, Kirby said they can be overcome.

"My goodness, if our strategy in any given part of the world hinges on the availability of one particular ship, well, we've got much bigger fish to fry," Kirby said.

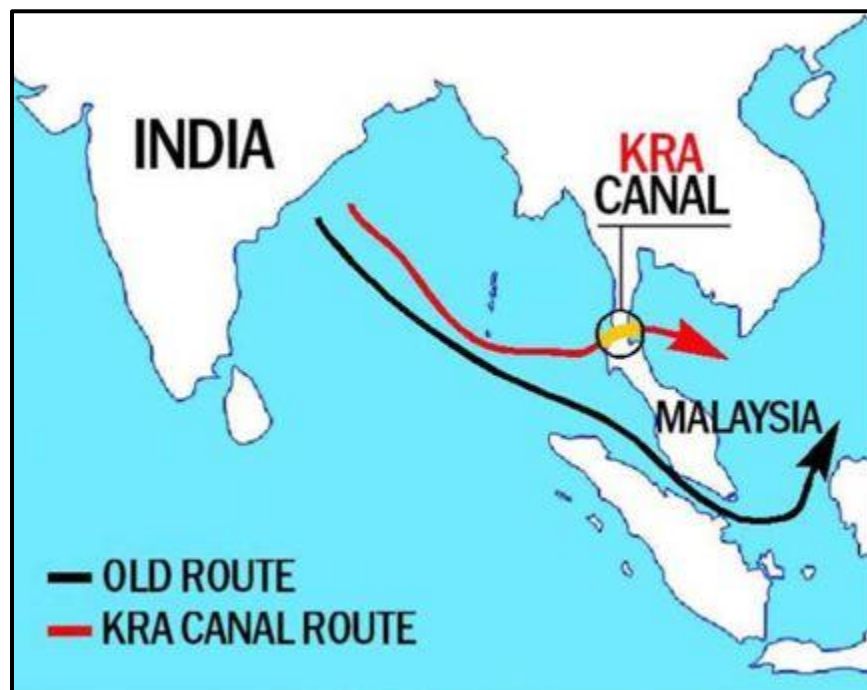
Kra Canal: China is Creating Another Naval Route to Escape a Blockade by India and Only Thailand Can Stop It

by **Akshay Narang**

8 July 2020 TFIPOST.Com

A new geopolitical challenge might be knocking at the doors of democratic countries like India, Vietnam and Australia in the Indo-Pacific Region. These countries want to contain Chinese influence in the region and thwart its blue-water Navy ambitions. But China is trying to find a Suez Canal of its own.

China has been looking to construct a 120-kilometre mega canal cutting through the isthmus of Kra in Thailand, which would help it solve the “Malacca Dilemma,” as it will open the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean, bypassing the Strait of Malacca. What China is eyeing is a canal project in Thailand called the Kra Canal, and the Thai leadership seems to be on board.



Through this canal, China is trying to reduce dependence on the Strait of Malacca. Currently, [80 per cent](#) of China’s oil imports pass through the South China Sea via the Strait of Malacca.

A key reason why China has not been able to grow too powerful is the looming threat that democratic and fair powers like India and Australia and other Southeast Asian nations are [well-positioned](#) to [cut-off](#) Chinese supply lines in event of a major military confrontation by creating a blockade around the Strait of Malacca.

China wants to ensure that its commercial and naval vessels find an alternate route that altogether avoids the Malacca chokepoint while travelling between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This is an overhang of the maritime portion of Xi Jinping's flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that seeks to connect Southeast Asia with the Middle East and Europe.

Writing for *The Tribune* in 2018, Vivek Katju, Ex-Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs has encapsulated this geopolitical situation accurately. Katju [said](#), "The Malacca choke makes China uneasy, for it is not only dependent on West Asian oil which passes through the straits, but also its general trade uses these waters. Hence, the canal alternative is strategically valid."

According to *Firstpost*, the Indian government sources have said that Longhao, a Chinese company that is infamous for involvement in the Chinese government's artificial island-building spree in the South China Sea will be given the responsibility for building the Kra Canal.

Private Chinese investors have already committed an investment of 30 billion US dollars for the construction of the Kra Canal. Presently, Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has ordered feasibility studies to examine the economic viability of the 120-kilometre long mega canal.

At the outset, however, it seems that investments on the Canal would not offer rich returns. The Suez Canal and the Panama Canal were successful projects because they bypassed entire continents and thus charged hefty fees from large ships- \$250,000 dollars and \$125,000 dollars respectively.

But the returns with the Kra Canal will not be that lucrative. Additional fuel costs for alternate routes through the Malacca, Sunda or Lombok Straits go up to \$40,000 dollars to \$120,000 dollars. This is not enough to justify the costs of an upcoming Kra Canal.

Chinese investments are hard loans that impose exorbitant, commercial interest rates. As we have seen with Laos, the [Maldives](#) and the [Hambantota port project](#) in Sri Lanka, BRI infrastructure projects are rarely viable.

Countries end up paying with their territorial sovereignty when they cannot pay in terms of money. This is how Beijing has been targeting ports and other strategic infrastructure. A mega canal in Thailand could be its next big target.

Scholar Ivica Kinder further states, "The history of the Panama and Suez canals shows that despite the unquestionable economic advantages of a canal, one country's funding of its construction on the territory of another country usually leads to the spread of significant influence by the first country."

If Thailand's Prime Minister decides to go ahead with the Kra Canal project and that too with the present arrangement of heavy Chinese investment, then the project might get ready by the end of the next decade.

Consequently, the Strait of Malacca would stand bypassed and China will end up controlling a Canal that flows into the Andaman Sea. This would be a massive setback for the free world.

Not only will it pose a direct naval threat to India from the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), but it will also deprive fair players like Australia and India of a strategic advantage over Beijing.

India, in particular, will have to make a military re-posturing in order to meet the Chinese threat.

Thailand must re-think its ambitions to build the Kra Canal. It is well-understood in the entire Indo-Pacific Region that China cannot be a friend. Thailand itself doesn't stand to gain anything by letting China overwhelm its territorial sovereignty.

A decision against Chinese investment in the Kra Canal has to come from Thailand because only Thailand can make a decision about its own territorial interests, no matter how badly other countries might be getting affected.

Secondly, Thailand must understand that it is a part of the ASEAN bloc and it must realise how Beijing has been bullying Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia in the South China Sea. Thailand cannot let Beijing use its territory for hurting Thailand's ASEAN friends.

Within New Delhi, there should be an attempt to engage Thailand before its too late. Bangkok must be told that if it really wants to build the Canal, it must do so with help of fair players like India and the US instead of relying upon a belligerent China.

The Canal might be built in Thailand, but many countries are bound to be affected. A solution must be found to this geopolitical threat as overwhelming investment from Chinese companies would ensure that China usurps sovereignty over the canal, using it for its own advantage, furthering its naval and economic ambitions. Vivek Katju suggested:

"One way to do so would be to ensure that except Thailand, no other country is allowed to use it for the passage of its naval vessels. That will assuage strategic apprehensions of the region and beyond."

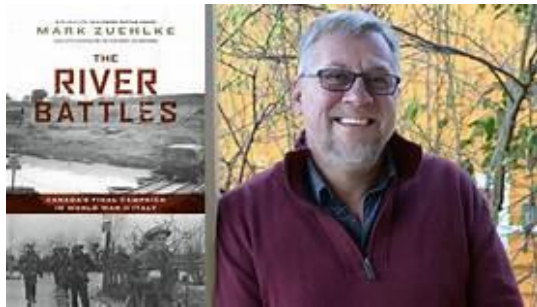
A belligerent China is trying to clear the only hurdle in its expansionist tendencies, viz. the Malacca Strait, and the world must grow aware of this nefarious attempt before it is too late.

Book Review- RIVER BATTLES by Mark Zuehlke

Douglas & McIntyre 2019 470 pages, \$37.95

ISBN 9781771622356 (hardcover)

Reviewed by Major (Ret'd) Scott H. Osborne



River Battles is Mark's fifth and final volume of his Canadian Battle Series covering 1st Canadian Corps' battles in northern Italy during the fall and winter of 1944-45. As the inside-cover of the book says, *River Battles* is the story of a gruelling fight across a "land... criss-crossed by rivers, canals and drainage ditches over which all bridges had been demolished." I can think of nothing more onerous than endless river crossings... or more taxing to morale.

The combat is almost First World War in style as the story of the fighting is at the section, platoon, company, and battalion level. Each advance is a tedious and painful close-quarter battle with small arms, PIATs, mortars, machine guns and tanks in close support. The importance of one weapon that surprised me was the obsolescent 2-pounder anti-tank gun, replaced by the 6-pounder in 1942. However, a squeeze-bore adaptation called a 'Littlejohn', gave the 2-pounder new life. With less weight and size, the Littlejohn anti-tank gun was better suited to man-handle across rivers, and canals. The Littlejohn is mentioned in the official history, *The Canadians in Italy*, but only once, as a footnote. *River Battles* however, emphasizes the regular use of this important weapon.

Mark also introduces an interesting discussion on leadership style where lack of the right touch with subordinates can negatively affect a commander's ability to command. In the Italian campaign it was the failure of Lieutenant-General Tommy Burns to come to grips with this issue, which eventually led to his replacement.

This is the second Canadian Battle Series book I have read, the other being *The Cinderella Campaign*. Reading only, does not give these stories their due however. The best way to understand the tactical flow is to follow events with the eight maps provided. Their use is critical to an appreciation of the situation, the relationship to flanking units, and even the distance to the next inevitable water obstacle. By closely following the maps, I found reading *River Battles* to be much more productive. One more map for the end chapters would have also been helpful.

There are some minor typos throughout, such as an incorrectly named Waffen SS unit and the .50 calibre bow machine gun of the Sherman tank(!), but these are typos, not errors and not enough to truly distract. The blending of war diaries, memoirs, books, articles and the official history into a coherent whole is impressive.

I came away with great admiration for our Canadian soldiers. You cannot but be impressed with their grit, bravery, and constant use of innovative solutions to tactical, engineering and logistical problems. In spite of exhaustion, high casualties, and a skillful enemy our soldiers exhibited great mental toughness, refusing to be beaten. All during depressing months of mud and foul weather. Incredible. I highly recommend *River Battles*.

Something Else – Links to Thought Provoking Articles

The Unraveling of America: how COVID-19 Signals the End of the American Era

(Wade Davis, Rolling Stone – 6 Aug 20) (Davis lives in Vancouver.)

<https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/political-commentary/covid-19-end-of-american-era-wade-davis-1038206/>

What Role Does Marine Trade Play in the Arctic?

"In the Arctic, community resupply via ships is crucial."

As the Arctic opens up and state and non-state maritime activity increases, development of marine infrastructure, sea-lanes and regulation of the Northern waters becomes even more important. Interference in the movement of ships in the North cannot be accepted. Support and protection of ships, whether resupply or not, is an important function of multiple federal departments and other parties. There needs to be robust planning and exercising (escort) by the Royal Canadian Navy and others. Good role for the Navy's new Arctic and Offshore Patrol Vessels.

Interesting link in the article: "The Value of Commercial Marine Shipping to Canada"

https://clearseas.org/en/research_project/the-value-of-canadian-commercial-shipping/

Canadian Urban Search and Rescue teams for Foreign Assistance

United Nations @UN 8 Sug tweeted: Urban search and rescue teams supported by @UNOCHA are in #Beirut following the devastating explosion that hit the city on Tuesday. Learn about how these teams help countries like Lebanon respond to & recover from disasters.

<https://unocha.exposure.co/insarag> (INSARAG - 30 years of urban search and rescue)

RUSI(NS) retweeted: Light urban search & rescue is a capability of @CanadianArmy Reserve. Might #Ares #LUSAR teams someday deploy overseas in response disaster? "Light Urban Search and Rescue capability a perfect fit for Army Reserve" <https://www.army-armee.forces.gc.ca/en/news-publications/national-news-details-no-menu.page?doc=light-urban-search-and-rescue-capability-a-perfect-fit-for-army-reserve/jt0eb5kx>

See also: CAF Urban Search and Rescue Capability. The aim of this service paper is to highlight the requirement for a more robust urban search and rescue (USAR) capability and propose how this should be developed. <https://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/259/290/318/192/lake.pdf>