

Analysis

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China's rise and its implication on current world security

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Thoughts on 9th Xiangshang Forum "Maintaining International Order and Promoting Peace". The forum is a platform that invites participants from around 70 countries to come together and discuss world security issues. It also serves as platform to express China's views on regional and international issues. The inauguration

speech by the Chinese minister of defense presented an overview of China's defense white paper published in July 2019 titled "China's defense in the new era".

China has reformed and modernized its army in recent years. It has reduced the number of service personnel and has invested heavily in the modernization of the military structure, arms and equipment.

The panels of the forum addressed eight main topics: Innovation in security concepts; Strategic trust and confidence building measures; Asia-Pacific security structure; Maritime security situation; International counterterrorism cooperation; New security situation in the Middle East; Scientific and technology innovation; and AI and future warfare. All panels were taking place simultaneously, so I have tackled three main ones - maritime, Asia-Pacific and Middle East panels.

In short, I can conclude that China is aware that its economic rise is creating a regional competition with the US and it would rather work with its neighbors to maintain the security of the region. However, China believes that the integrity of Chinese territory is crucial to its national policy, meaning Taiwan and its unification with mainland China and any Western intervention there is a direct threat to its integrity. This includes China's claims in the South China Sea and Diaoyu islands.

Moreover, Brazil is considered another important partner to China within the BRICS and in UN peacekeeping missions. Brazil is an important player in the UN and its institutions. It respects international rules within its foreign policy. Brazil's interest is in strengthening cooperation with China in all fields of cooperation - political, economic, energy and military. Both countries are celebrating their 45th anniversary of bilateral relations. The Brazilian president will visit China in the coming days.

Nevertheless, topics such as the North Korean nuclear issue, the Korean-Japanese conflict and the US' Asia-Pacific policy played a key element in understanding the Asia-Pacific security structure. China will not replace any superpower's presence but rather cooperate with the existing mechanism to maintain peace and prosperity, like the ASEAN +1 mechanism and others that aim to protect the maritime security of the Indo-Pacific region. France is another nation that contributes to the protection and safety of the Indo-Pacific region and will have a role in the present and future of the Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN's security structure also plays a crucial role in territory and resource conflicts in Asia.

As for the Middle East, the main message is that China does not aim to take the US' role in defending and protecting this region. It rather promotes dialogue through the formation of a regional security dialogue that includes all regional countries with the superpowers that are currently present in the region to help solve the instabilities there. Terrorism and US trade war are other hot topics that were discussed in this forum. No one is winning in this war and soon positive progress will be reached. China's advancement in artificial intelligence and technology is important in the military field.

All regional security structures should be inclusive and try to find a win-win situation for all or at least a negotiable and suitable situation for all the regional countries to avoid wars and geopolitical instabilities. China's One Road One Belt is its only initiative that will bring prosperity and development to all mankind. China is a big contributor to the UN peacekeeping efforts both with around 2,500 personnel and with financial support. It's important that the UN peacekeeping force that China participated in was the UN peacekeeping force on the Kuwait-Iraq border in 1992.

Take away points: The Middle Eastern nations should exert more efforts to solve their issues. Egypt is a great example of resilience over terrorism and development of infrastructure. The Chinese interest in the region is mainly economic and energy related that is supported by political support. Yet China seems hesitant in intervening in the region after the Libyan crisis. China will always have a diplomatic role to play - however its interest to provide defense and protection to the region is still farfetched, although it has military cooperation with several countries in the region. China's main military partner today is Russia and there is a clear alliance in the process between these two superpowers.

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Olivier Laurent (left), researcher at the Laboratoire des Sciences du Climat et de l'Environnement (LSCE - Climate and Environment Science Lab) and Fouzi Benkhelifa, head of Origins.earth, install a new CO2 sensor on the platform Qualair on top of the Jussieu university in Paris on Oct 20, 2019. — AFP

CO2 monitors new weapon in Paris climate fight

Spurred on by growing social movements, cities across the world are getting serious with their climate action, vowing to slash pollution and implement greener laws. But until now efforts to make some of the largest urban areas on the planet compliant with the Paris climate goals have been hampered by an inability to measure their effect. The benchmark of a city's "carbon footprint" currently tracks estimated emissions of greenhouse gases based on voluntary disclosures from industry, traffic authorities, energy firms, among others.

Cities produce around 70 percent of all manmade greenhouse gases, yet estimates of each urban area's carbon footprint contain a huge margin for error - as much as 30 percent in some cases. "It requires lots of information to be assessed and generally that creates a lag of 2-3 years," said Thomas Lauvaux, a researcher at the Environment and Climate Sciences Laboratory (LSCE), told AFP. Take for example Paris, home of the landmark 2015 agreement that saw nations commit to limiting global temperature rises to "well below" two degrees Celsius.

The latest official figures were published in 2016 but actually date from 2014: 25.6 million tons of CO2 equivalent that year. While that's down 9.2 percent compared with

2004, it is hardly the most accurate way of comparing carbon cuts. "Carbon footprints every five years isn't good enough, we need to have more reactive data," said Celia Blauel, Paris' deputy in charge of ecological transition.

Tuesday saw the unveiling of a pilot project aimed at changing how cities monitor their climate action: a network of 20 carbon dioxide monitors on rooftops across the greater Paris area providing constantly updated CO2 level data. "No one at the moment has the ability to know what emissions levels are in real time," said Fouzi Benkhelifa, head of Origin.earth, a startup piloting the monitoring project, which received funding from energy giant Suez and the EU. "There's a huge gap between the need to act against global warming and the tools we have at our disposal. "Cities need to act on a daily basis but they only have a five-year-old snapshot (of emissions levels), it's really a problem," said Benkhelifa.

'More dynamic'

The monitoring stations, currently used only for research purposes, will eventually allow the city and surrounding region to act more rapidly to fluctuating emissions levels. Voters will also be better able to judge the cli-

mate action taken by the office of mayor Anne Hidalgo, and see whether it's living up to its green pledges ahead of elections next year. Greater transparency brings greater scrutiny for policymakers, but Blauel insists Paris lawmakers aren't worried. "This will allow us to be more dynamic," she said. The mayor's office isn't anticipating any huge surprises in emissions levels since it has already targeted several areas of reduction - such as retrofitting buildings, reducing waste and greening transport links - leading up to carbon neutrality by 2050. "But to measure our action in a more detailed manner... that will allow us to refine those policies," said Blauel. The constant feedback will also allow Paris' 2.5 million inhabitants to track their own contribution to the climate fight, according to Lauvaux.

Thanks to an index to be published monthly next year, citizens "will become aware of the natural cycle of emissions, in summer and winter, and see the impact of them putting on the heating has for example," he said. While several cities in North America, including Los Angeles and Mexico City, have launched projects to measure CO2 levels, Lauvaux said Paris was the first to use the data for constant monitoring. "No one can lie about (the data)," he said. — AFP

Diapers: Conquering a \$9bn market no one wants to talk about

The time may not be far off when more adults need diapers than babies as the population grows older, potentially a huge opportunity for manufacturers of incontinence products - if they can lift the stigma that has long constrained sales. The market for adult diapers, disposable underwear and absorbent pads is growing fast, up 9 percent last year to \$9 billion, having doubled in the last decade, according to Euromonitor.

But manufacturers like market leaders Essity and Kimberly-Clark Corp reckon only half of the more than 400 million adults likely to be affected by weak bladders, are buying the right products, because they are too embarrassed. Companies are trying various methods to change attitudes, including making products more discreet, avoiding terms like diapers or nappies, and placing items in the personal care aisle, next to deodorants and menstrual pads, rather than in the baby products section.

They are also trying to normalize discussions around the subject through advertising. In Japan, where adult incontinence products have outsold baby diaper sales since around 2013 due to a rapidly ageing population, market leader Unicharm Corp has adopted the phrase "choi more" in its advertising, which translates as "lil' dribble", to make light of the problem. "What we are

doing is trying to let people know that incontinence, even among young people, is normal," said Unicharm spokesman Hitoshi Watanabe.

The company is focusing particularly on people with mild bladder issues where it sees the biggest growth as people lead more active lives. Unicharm's sales of absorbent pads and liners that target this market were up 8 percent last year. In the US, market leader Kimberly-Clark has this year given its 35-year-old Depend brand a makeover, introducing thinner, softer and more fitted products that can be worn discreetly, in an effort to make them more acceptable. The changes are just the latest in a decade-long attempt to win over consumers, which started with manufacturers dropping the "diaper" label, to loosen the association older customers might have with a loss of control in their life. Yet it is still difficult for companies to persuade people they should buy specially made incontinence products. "People keep the fact that they have incontinence secret from their loved ones, from their husbands, brothers and sisters - this is a deep secret for many consumers and yet it's just a fact of life, it's a physiological reality," said Fiona Tomlin, who leads Kimberly-Clark's adult and feminine care division.

Manufacturers have been particularly keen to win over women, who are more than twice as likely as men to experience bladder weakness, due to childbirth. Kimberly-Clark has reached out to them directly over the years in light-hearted ad campaigns featuring actresses Whoopi Goldberg and Kirstie Alley.

Secret's out

Kimberly-Clark's Poise brand is aimed at younger women like Ellie Foster, a 31-year-old from Maine, who

has struggled with leaks since having her first child a year-and-a-half ago but is too embarrassed to buy products that might help her. "At first I did, but it was definitely weird picking out adult diapers to wear," said Foster. "You feel like you're in the old lady section." Sweden's Essity, the global industry leader, is also trying to reach a younger audience with its TENA brand and a new line of black, low-rise disposable underwear called Silhouette Noir. The advert's tagline reads: "secret's out: 1 in 3 women have incontinence".

Around 12 percent of all women and 5 percent of men experience some form of urinary incontinence, although conditions vary from mild and temporary to serious and chronic, according to the Global Forum on Incontinence, which is backed by Essity. Essity said it tries to package and market its products in a way that avoids associations with ageing. "Designing products and packaging it as feminine and discreet as possible for females and as masculine and discreet as possible for men helps," said Ulrika Kolsrud, president of Essity's health and medical solutions.

Getting the message across to potential customers can sometimes be a tricky path to tread. A few years ago, SCA - from which Essity was spun off in 2017 - mailed samples of its products to Swedish men above 55, only to receive a barrage of complaints. But efforts are starting to pay off. Five years ago, adult incontinence products were used by around 13 percent of the target adult female audience in France and the UK and that is now closer to 20 percent, according to research firm Kantar. That does, of course, leave huge potential for further sales growth. As Kolsrud puts it: "If incontinence was a country, it would be the third largest country in the world." — Reuters

Fall of a royal consort and king's assertive reign

The very public downfall of the Thai king's 34-year-old consort - stripped of all royal titles and military ranks by a late-night command - left the country open-mouthed yesterday at the latest abrupt act from its mercurial monarch. Former royal bodyguard and army nurse Sineenat Wongvajirapakdi was dismissed from the rank of Chao Khun Phra, or noble consort, and accused of "disloyalty to the king". Her whereabouts are unknown but the announcement has set social media alight with speculation and intrigue sparked by the rare glimpse behind cloistered palace walls. But it wasn't the first time King Maha Vajiralongkorn has made his powerful presence felt since ascending the throne in 2016. Here are five ways royal power has been displayed under Thailand's new king so far, from beefing up his security to taking direct control of a fortune.

'Disloyalty' in palace

The palace said Sineenat had not obeyed the king, had created conflict in the palace by going above her authority, and had acted "against the appointment of the Queen (Suthida)... for her own ambitions". Her actions had also undermined the monarchy, it said. Known as Koi, Sineenat is a qualified pilot and was the first woman to receive the consort title in nearly a century. After she obtained it, the

palace released images of a short-haired Sineenat in combat fatigues shooting weapons, flying a jet and preparing to parachute from a plane, as well as holding the king's hand. It was a vivid contrast to the swift dismissal, which has gripped Thai Twitter users. #SaveKoi was one of the trending hashtags, while one user said they felt "sorry" for Sineenat. Thailand has a harsh royal defamation law that means media must self-censor when reporting on the palace.

Sineenat's rapid fall from favor is not the only time the Thai public has been given a glimpse into the king's dramatic personal life. Several relatives of his third wife Srirasmi were arrested as part of a police corruption probe and charged with lese majeste. Vajiralongkorn divorced her and she lost her royal titles, and pictures later circulated of her with a shaven head.

Army units

The palace has also stepped up royal security under Vajiralongkorn, adding 1,600 police officers. Two new army units were later put under the monarch's direct control in October by royal decree, only a few months after the May coronation. It is unclear how many soldiers are in each regiment, but experts say a single division holds up to 5,000 troops. The troop transfer saw pushback from the youth-propelled Future Forward Party in parliament who questioned the "urgency" of such a move - an unprecedented political objection to a royal command. But the decree still passed with an overwhelming majority.

Banking billions

King Vajiralongkorn inherited one of the world's richest monarchies from his beloved father Bhumibol Adulyadej, who died in Oct 2016. Among his successor's earliest

moves was to assert full, personal control over the Crown Property Bureau (CPB), which has billions in assets in banks, companies and prime real estate. The CPB committee was previously headed by the finance minister in an arrangement that gave a sheen of public oversight of a trust some experts estimate to be worth \$30-\$60 billion. The CPB's full assets are privately held and remain a closely guarded secret.

Haircuts and salutes

Discipline, protocol and loyalty are virtues state officials say the king insists upon, especially among royal guards. Vajiralongkorn reminded members of his beefed-up detail in April that their duty was to "preserve the nation, country, and monarchy". The army introduced a new salute under Vajiralongkorn in which soldiers must puff out their chests and jerk their heads to the side. And the country's police force has adopted a uniform crew-cut said to be at the king's request.

Charter changes

Any major legal changes in Thailand require the king's signature. But King Vajiralongkorn ordered rewrites to part of the country's new constitution, including a vaguely worded clause that says any unforeseen issues should be handled based on "tradition". They also scrap the need for the king, who spends much of his time in Germany, to appoint a regent when abroad. While Thailand's constitutional monarchy is nominally above politics, Vajiralongkorn has taken actions that many see as smudging the line. Before the March 24 election he torpedoed a bid by his older sister to become prime minister at the head of an anti-junta party, calling it "highly inappropriate". — AFP