

KIIPS EVENT BRIEF

 KALINGA INSTITUTE OF INDO-PACIFIC STUDIES

in collaboration with  臺灣安全研究中心
Taiwan Center for Security Studies

Virtual Panel Discussion

"China's New Imperialism: Issues and Challenges"

 NFX-OGSS-HZT **August 1, 2022 5 PM IST, 7:30 (GMT+8)**

Speakers-


Prof. Chintamani Mahapatra, Founder and Honorary Chairperson, KIIPS


Dr. Mignonne M.J. Chan, Senior Research Fellow, TCSS


Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli, Dean, School of International Studies, JNU


Dr. Mingshi Shen, Vice President, Institute of National Defense and Security Research

Chair-


Dr. Monish Touragbam, Faculty, AIIS, Amity University, Honorary Director, KIIPS

Welcome Remarks-


Prof. Fu-Kuo Liu, Director, TCSS

Vote of Thanks-


Dr. Mansi, Visiting Scholar, TCSS

On 1 August 2022, the Kalinga Institute of Indo-Pacific Studies (KIIPS) in collaboration with the Taiwan Center for Security Studies (TCSS) organised a virtual panel discussion on theme 'China's New Imperialism: Issues and Challenges'. China's rapid rise in the military and economic realms has provoked intense discussion and debates in policy and academic circles across the world. While China's military modernization and power projection is being largely felt in the Western Pacific Ocean, its politico-economic adventurism in the Indian Ocean and blatant military aggression along the India-China border has largely diminished its claim of being a peaceful power. China's ambitious yet controversial Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) traversing across the Indo-Pacific and beyond includes infrastructure building and financing, which are far from being consultative, transparent, and ethical.

In this context, the virtual panel discussion brought together experienced and expert voices from India and Taiwan to decipher the issues arising from China's aggression and unravel the implications of its actions for the stakeholders of a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

Key Takeaways from the Discussion:

Dr Mignonne M J Chan

- The relationship between the U.S. and China (also referred to as the G2) have been sailing through some choppy waters. Varying governance structures and differing value systems have accelerated the technology and currency wars between the two, and hence undermining the rules based international order.

- The imposition of retaliatory tariffs, decoupling from global supply chains and changing focus towards strengthening of regional blocs; China's defensive foreign policy approach has been unfairly condemned and linked to the aggressive Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy. China's actions must be analysed from a historical perspective rooted in its traumatic experiences with the West and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) must be understood to achieve "Common Prosperity" through strategic cooperation with like minded partners.
- In an era, where the expansion of groupings like the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS), USA-India-Japan-Australia (QUAD) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) seems like a looming possibility, there is a need to adopt a more constructive approach to problem solving to ensure a zero-sum game for G-2 and its allies.
- China seeks to accomplish its goals using a two-pronged approach aimed at intensifying economic and strategic co-operation at the regional and global level. With a bigger market size, competitive pricing and flexible loan delivery systems; China now offers a fertile ground for its like-minded partners to voluntarily pool-in their resources and achieve mutual prosperity. The implementation of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) amongst collaborators has furthered strengthened its partnerships and fostered greater inter-regional connectivity in its neighbourhood.

Prof. Chintamani Mahapatra

- In theory, a communist party should fight imperialism, but the character of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) has changed drastically over the years. They seem to be behaving like an imperialist power. One should never analyse things based on statement by the Chinese government or political leaders. If we go theoretically, we cannot arrive at any credible conclusion regarding the Chinese State and CPC. If we go with Chinese actions and not by what they say, it seems there are lot of contradictions. A newer kind of Imperialism is taking place where the Communist Party of China owns most of the banks wherein it has the control over loans to countries, earns profit and makes decisions just like any other international bank. China hosts one of the largest number of billionaires, has a market driven policy and follows the capitalist policies of the West. It would not be wrong to say that China is a Communist Totalitarian state running a Semi-capitalist enterprise.
- There has been extra attention and focus paid on analysing the parameters and indicators of China's rise but there is an urgent need to objectively assess the vulnerabilities that China has been facing across the spectrum. China is obsessed with spending dollars on foreign projects but is struggling acutely on the domestic level. It has got a huge banking, real estate, and energy crises, and given the nature of the political clampdown in the country, people cannot even air their protests properly. The Communist Party in China is harsh to its own billionaires, for instance the case of Jack Ma. It is these reasons that manifold of the billionaires are renouncing Chinese Citizenship. It is these domestic issues which restrains China from engaging in a peaceful and positive way with the world outside.

- When it comes to other countries, there has been reducing dependence on China as they neither feel secure nor comfortable in doing business with Chinese entities with New York Stock Exchange aiming to delist a sizeable number of Chinese Companies which would be a major blow to Chinese economy. Many foreign companies are even planning to relocate outside China. As the case in point owing to India-China clashes at the Line of Actual Control (LAC), numerous Chinese apps have been banned in India raising “national security” concerns.
- China’s belligerent activities are now being scrutinised by world at large such that Nepal didn’t allow the Belt and Road Initiative work to take off from its soil, Wolf Warrior diplomacy is no longer tolerated. The BRI projects and the characteristics of Chinese involvement are facing a backlash even in countries like Pakistan. In such a scenario, a new Cold War is emerging which only calls for a disturbing time ahead. And in such a case, Taiwan and India will suffer the most. Thus, the contemporary situation only calls for careful and deeper analysis. It is imperative to revisit the role of perception and how narratives could be changed regarding China’s role in the South Asian region, that are detrimental to individual countries and for regional growth itself.

Dr. Mingshi Shen

- In China’s march towards a new imperialism, enhancement of its military capability is being seen as an important tool to achieve political ends. There is no doubt that China’s President Xi Jinping’s proclamation of the Chinese Dream, rejuvenation of the Chinese people, and revival of old glory are showing intentions of China becoming a global hegemon to rise beyond the United States. In this aspect, along with the controversial BRI, increasing military capability is an important pre-requisite.
- Three Strategic Intent of Chinese imperialism could be discerned which include: increasing the size and capability of Chinese military equal to the U.S. and then surpassing it; to use enhanced military capability to resolve territorial sovereignty in China’s favour; and to show military strength as a socialist power projecting the strength and image of the country.
- China intends to enhance its nuclear capability, by first increasing its number of nuclear warheads which at present number around 300 to about 1000 by 2035, to close the gap compared to what the U.S. and Russia possess. Also associated strategy is to increase and enhance the delivery platforms, which would include nuclear submarines, strategic bombers, and supersonic missiles. Increasing strategic cooperation with Russia is also seen as an important step, towards building joint deterrence against the U.S. China intends to enhance its nuclear capability to prevent the U.S., Japan and other countries from intervening in regional conflicts.
- China will also increase its traditional naval and air-based assets, including aircraft carriers, destroyers, heavy stealth bombers, heavy transport aircraft and fifth generation stealth fighters. It intends to develop military capabilities to perform offensive combat missions beyond its region towards long range power projection. The transition of the Chinese military to an offensive force, along with advances in outer space and cyber capabilities, means that China’s coercive actions will pose threats to democracies, particularly in scenarios where the American ability to counteract decreases. Moreover, there are

growing concerns of a nuclear and conventional arms race given the geopolitical circumstances, with increasing risks, making it imperative for Taiwan and India to develop strategic cooperation.

Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli

- The ability of China's military to project power has increased substantially in the recent times. From a mere aim of modernisation, it has moved towards power projection and in this, the aircraft carrier programme holds vital importance. China's military prowess is transcending from mechanization to Informatization, based on cognitive technologies, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. The contours of China's new imperialism in the context of earlier notions of occupying territories and controlling resources.
- China's aggressive behaviour needs to be assessed in lieu of cases like that of the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, and its intent at the borders with India. China has been sending Naval Contingencies to Indian Ocean and some of these have used amphibious and air defence systems which are not needed in general case of combating piracies, thus raising questions over the real intent. China's actions speak of an expansionist design and a desire to occupy the centre stage.
- China has militarized the India-China borders and tried to capture their claimed areas which resulted in the tragic loss of 20 Indian soldiers. Therefore, the peaceful intention of China as mentioned in their document does not tally with their actions in Galwan valley or when the Vietnamese ships were drowned during the deployment in South China Sea. China is looking at resources and sea-lanes of communication taking neo-imperialist posturing, such as in Africa and other areas. So, there are indicators for the Chinese assertiveness across the spectrum and India is concerned. Chinese White Papers talk about overseas interests as well as those in space, cyberspace, and electro-magnetic spectrum as well.
- China's coercive diplomacy, that has begun to be discussed as 'Wolf Warrior Diplomacy' instead of sobering down, might be institutionalised in the future, due to high nationalism in China. China perceives a relative decline of the United States which has accentuated in the context of withdrawal from Afghanistan, during the Ukraine war and the Taiwan flashpoint. Xi's China Dream and the great rejuvenation of Chinese people show intention of claiming the global stage. China is taking its time and looking for gaps in the international strategic situation and taking advantage of any power vacuum.

Rapporteurs: Moksha Pillai, Shriya Mishra, Ritika Suneja, Swati Sulagna (Research Interns, KIIPS)