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Party Watch Annual Report 2020:
Covid-19 and Chinese Communist
Party Resilience

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About the Center for Advanced China Research

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Implementing Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy During Covid-19

Drew Thompson

In 2020, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) foreign policy apparatus has navigated an unprecedented period of change by drawing on the Party's unique culture and history as well as two relatively new "tifa" or concepts that inform how the CCP interprets and categorizes the theoretical construction and practical application of China's foreign policy. In a period of "profound changes unseen in a century," the Covid-19 pandemic in particular, the static, ineffective approach taken by the CCP's foreign policy apparatus led to a steep decline in global public opinion and has stymied the government's goal to fulfil the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation. ¹⁴³

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) imposes an ideological framework on foreign policy work that informs how it perceives China's relations with the world and dictates how it conducts diplomacy. This process is steeped in the Party's unique culture and history which blends Marxist dogma, Leninist political structures, and the CCP's self-described exceptionalism of "Chinese characteristics."

Two relatively new concepts are central to China's foreign policy discourse in 2020. Both inform our understanding of how the CCP sees the important work of managing its own development, and how it should interact with the outside world. The first concept is "profound changes unseen in a century" (百年未有之大变局), which informs how China interprets and categorizes the nature of international relations, and the second is "Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy" (习近平外交思想), which informs the theoretical construction of China's foreign policy. Phrases such as these, along with other oft-used slogans such as, "shared future for mankind," are known as *tifa* (提法) or "formulations." While they can be easily dismissed by outsiders as enigmatic or empty slogans, they are a critical part of the Marxist process of analyzing and responding to global conditions. They are the foundation for Chinese foreign policy-making.

Reality, however, sometimes brutally collides with theory, assessments, and process. The Covid-19 pandemic has altered how the world sees China, how the CCP sees its place in the world, as well as how it interacts with it. This paper will review how China's foreign policy apparatus perceives the world situation in 2020 and how Covid-19 has affected the work of diplomacy.

Profound Changes Unseen in a Century “百年未有之大变局”

The starting point for China's foreign policy planning process today is that unprecedented changes are underway and that China has a window of opportunity to develop itself and achieve its development objectives. Technological advances and the forces of globalization are affecting the world but the most important factor is that China is rising and coming closer to the state of national

¹⁴³ The author is grateful to Jassie Cheng Hsi, Research Associate at the Centre for Asia and Globalisation at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy for assistance conducting research for this paper.

rejuvenation, gaining in economic, military, and political strength, all the while moving closer to the center of the world stage where it will command global respect and deference. This framework also asserts that as China rises, so does the rest of Asia on China's periphery, while the dominance of the US and European powers decline, either in relative or absolute terms. This trend is shaped by many factors including globalization, diffusion of advanced technologies, deepening global trade relations, the rise of Asian economies, the strategic importance of the Pacific, multipolarity, and changes in global governance, which Xi Jinping has stated China will seek to actively shape. Perhaps the most important trend is Beijing's discarding of the Jiang Zemin-era assessment after the fall of the Soviet Union that the United States would remain the dominant global power for the foreseeable future. Once US predominance is no longer postulated, intensified competition becomes both a result, as well as a requirement for Beijing to achieve Xi Jinping's objective of rejuvenation.

In his address to the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference in late-June 2018, Xi Jinping introduced his vision for "Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy" for the first time, stating, "At present, China is in the best period of development since modern times, and the world is *undergoing profound changes unseen in a century*. The two are simultaneously intertwined and turbulent."¹⁴⁴ In 2019, he subsequently repeated the phrase on an inspection tour of the CCP revolutionary base in Jiangxi, stating, "Leading cadres must have two overall considerations in mind, one is the strategic overall situation for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and the other is a *profound change in the world unseen in a century*. This is the basic starting point for our planning work."¹⁴⁵

The phrase, "profound changes unseen in a century" has been repeated by Xi Jinping in multiple speeches, including at the UN General Assembly in August 2020, subsequent foreign affairs work conferences, and has been the topic of much study and reflection by CCP cadres as part of their party-building work. Of course, repeating this *tifa* is now expected in foreign policy speeches given by any cadre.

Substantively, the emergence and delivery of this new *tifa* reflects the significance of growing US-China competition. It is probably also intended to reaffirm, as every Chinese leader since 1973 has, that the "dominant trends continue to be peace and development," which is also the basis for the CCP emphasis on economic growth and domestic stability, rather than full-scale military preparation for war with another power. The "profound changes" *tifa* also signals that Deng Xiaoping's 1978 "hide your capabilities and bide your time" *tifa* is under stress, as nationalist sentiments and the growing need to deter the United States necessitates stronger signaling than Deng Xiaoping Theory.

¹⁴⁴ "当前,我国处于近代以来最好的发展时期,世界处于百年未有之大变局,两者同步交织、相互激荡。" Dong Zhenrui (董振瑞), "A Review of Domestic Academic Research on 'Profound Changes Unseen in a Century' in Recent Years" [近年来国内学术界关于“百年未有之大变局”研究述评], *Party Documents* 《党的文献》, 2020 (3), http://www.cssn.cn/ddzg/2013xsdt/202008/t20200805_5165972.shtml.

¹⁴⁵ "领导干部要胸怀两个大局,一个是中华民族伟大复兴的战略全局,一个是世界百年未有之大变局,这是我们谋划工作的基本出发点。" Yan Xiaofeng (颜晓峰), "High-Level Strategic Thinking with 'Two Overall Situations' in Mind" (胸怀'两个大局'的高远战略思维), *Guangming Daily* 《光明日报》, July 29, 2019, http://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2019-07/29/nw.D110000gmrb_20190729_1-05.htm.

Functionally, the “profound changes” *tifa* reflects the continued importance to Beijing policy-makers of the Marxist penchant to use historical materialism to analyze global and domestic development trends to characterize how China relates to the international system. The use of this *tifa* in Jiangxi explicitly linked it to the CCP’s dialectical process of evaluation, planning and implementation, emphasizing for cadres that understanding and correctly interpreting global trends as well as changes in China’s relationship with the world is central to the overall objective of achieving China’s great rejuvenation.

The “profound changes” formulation neatly encapsulates many aspects of the Marxist world outlook, making it well suited for use by China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Marx’s innovation was categorizing the origins and function of the nature of relationships within and between economies and societies at the height of the 19th century industrial revolution in the still young Westphalian system of states—a period of profound change. Using concepts such as “the base” to describe the productive economic forces of society, and “the superstructure” to describe the elites, governments and policies that ride above it, he espoused a process of evaluating these forces, both within societies and between them in the international space, then taking measures to realign forces and affect change for the greater good of global society. CCP cadres continue to use this technique to make assessments, then ensure all CCP cadres and the government workers they supervise all study that assessment and conform to it in a process that prevents internal dissent and opposing views.

Xi Jinping’s “profound changes” concept summarizes many of the same trends that Marx observed: the global nature of societal change; its impact on history; and the effect of rapid technological change and innovation on societies and economies. If one is to take Xi Jinping’s use of a century as a literal measurement (there are ample reasons not to), then the construct explicitly evokes the political tumult of the 1914-1919 period, including the fall of the Romanov dynasty and emergence of the Soviet Union, the rise of Japan as a major regional power, and the realignment of colonial systems in the aftermath of World War I, causing tremendous geostrategic change that quickly resulted in the founding of the CCP, and another great war twenty years later.

Such systemic change today presents the opportunity to harness it for what Xi Jinping Thought refers to as “the construction of a community of shared destiny for mankind”—another *tifa*—just as Marx felt that ideal political systems should work for the betterment of people around the world. Importantly, Marx noted that previous philosophers had only analyzed the world but the point of his philosophy was to use historical analysis and action to actually change the world, giving rise to Engel’s elaboration of historical materialism. Xi Jinping Thought literally changes the interpretation of history to reorder not only the past but more importantly the future. These concepts endure today in Beijing, and actively inform the process and structure of foreign policy debate, where academics and practitioners alike call for responding to risks and challenges, taking advantage of trends and opportunities, and making efforts to shape those trends, which take the form of various diplomatic activities from Belt and Road investments to so-called “mask diplomacy” in the Covid-19 era.

This is the paradigm that Xi Jinping urges his followers to grasp so they have a correct view of history, the international system, and China’s role in it. By understanding and accepting the leadership’s framework for these profound changes—“correctly grasping” in cadre-speak—they

can then plan their work accordingly, and in the case of China's foreign affairs cadres, implement China's foreign policy guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy.

The political dialectical cycle of analysis-framework-implementation was applied to China's Covid-19 response, with top leaders providing cadres top-level guidance for both domestic and international responses at the height of the pandemic. At a February meeting of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC), Xi Jinping instructed party committees and governments at all levels to assess the societal and economic impact of Covid-19, calling on cadres to enact a "People's War for epidemic prevention and control" (疫情防控人民战争), emphasizing the pandemic's economic correlation by exhorting cadres to "strive to achieve decisive victory in building a well-off society in an all-round way, and win a decisive battle against poverty." Recognizing the diplomatic implications of Covid-19, party propagandists observed:

The meeting pointed out that strengthening international cooperation in epidemic prevention and control is an important manifestation of China's role as a responsible major country and essential to promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. It is necessary to continue to work closely with the World Health Organization, communicate closely with relevant countries, share epidemic prevention experience, coordinate prevention and control measures, strengthen publicity and public diplomacy, and jointly maintain regional and global public health security.¹⁴⁶

Unstated in the public readout of the PSC's February deliberations was the recognition that China's global reputation was taking a beating as the virus spread around the world at the same time that China's strict lockdowns and epidemic control efforts were bearing fruit at the pandemic's epicentre in Wuhan, necessitating a stepped-up diplomatic effort.

Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy

Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era (Xi Jinping Thought for short) was written into the Communist Party Constitution in October 2017 at the 19th Party Congress, and subsequently added to the state constitution in March 2018 at the same 13th National People's Congress at which term limits for the President were abolished.¹⁴⁷ Leveraging the political support he secured at the two meetings, on 23 June, 2018, Xi Jinping addressed the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference, and articulated his vision of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, making 10 points setting out his goals for China's diplomacy, including four which clearly underscored China's diplomatic engagement objectives: the need to advance major country diplomacy to fulfil the mission of realizing national rejuvenation; developing global partnerships;

¹⁴⁶ "Politburo Standing Committee Meets to Analyze the Situation of the Novel Coronavirus Epidemic and to Study the Key Tasks of Prevention and Control; General Secretary Xi Jinping Chairs the Meeting" [中共中央政治局常务委员会召开会议 分析新冠肺炎疫情形势研究近期防控重点工作 中共中央总书记习近平主持会议], Xinhua, February 26, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-02/26/c_1125630270.htm.

¹⁴⁷ Chris Buckley, "China Enshrines 'Xi Jinping Thought,' Elevating Leader to Mao-Like Status," *New York Times*, October 24, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/world/asia/china-xi-jinping-communist-party.html>.

achieving shared growth through the Belt and Road; and leading the reform of the global governance system with what he described as, “the concept of fairness and justice.”¹⁴⁸

In July 2020, China’s Foreign Ministry established the Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Studies Center where Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) gave a lengthy and detailed speech that provides unique insights into the conceptual underpinnings of China’s diplomacy.¹⁴⁹ He opened his remarks by summarizing the situation that China faced:

China has never been so close to fulfilling the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation and never been so close to the center of the world stage. At the same time, the world is going through complex and profound changes unseen in a century. With the foresight of a great strategic thinker and a keen appreciation of the laws of human society, General Secretary Xi Jinping has made a comprehensive assessment of the trajectory of the international situation and the historical juncture in which China finds itself, and put forward a series of new ideas, new propositions and new initiatives with distinctive Chinese features, which reflect the call of our times and lead the trend of human progress.

Wang invoked Engels when he observed that, “...[Marx’s] way of viewing things is not a doctrine but a method,” helpfully pointing out that Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy is an “achievement of Marxism on the diplomatic front.” Wang reminded his listeners that,

...historical and dialectical materialism, Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy applies the Marxist stand, viewpoint and method in a scientific manner.... Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy bases itself on a keen understanding of global developments and a thorough review of China's interactions with the rest of the world. It grasped the workings of globalization and global governance by following the Marxist tradition of analyzing the dynamics between the productive forces and the relations of production, and between the economic base and the superstructure.

Wang’s speech provided tremendous insight into the intellectual underpinnings that inform China’s approach to foreign policy and diplomacy, and how China seeks to differentiate its engagement with the world to meet its overarching objective of the great rejuvenation of China. He did so by demonstrating his mastery of Xi’s dialectic. He affirmed that Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy is an integral part of Xi Jinping Thought because of two key *tifa*, “building a community with a shared future for mankind” and “forging a new type of international relations,” which are integral to Xi Jinping Thought and are both incorporated into the CCP constitution. He went on to reveal two other very insightful concepts that help explain how and why China conducts its foreign policy differently when it deals with major powers and all foreign countries.

¹⁴⁸ “Xi urges breaking new ground in major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics,” Xinhua, June 24, 2018, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-06/24/c137276269.htm>; Yang Jiechi, “Following the Guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy to Advance Diplomatic Work in the New Era (Excerpt),” *Qiushi Journal*, October-December 2018|Vol.10, No.4, Issue No.37, December 21, 2018, http://english.qstheory.cn/2018-12/21/c_1123801028.htm.

¹⁴⁹ Wang Yi, “Study and Implement Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Conscientiously and Break New Ground in Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics,” July 20, 2020, Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China, available at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1799305.shtml.

Wang clearly stated that “Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy has applied the basic tenets of Marxism to the practice of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics...”. He also observed that “Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy carries forward and elevates the fine tradition of the Chinese culture,” which is incorporated into developing “neighborhood diplomacy.”

Beijing’s engagement with the United States and Russia is approached through a Marxist framework, where the nature of China’s relationship is measured much as Marx would analyze the interplay between the economic foundation and the political elite making up the superstructure. Likewise, Marx and his Soviet and CCP devotees also saw those relationships between capital and the working classes as one of struggle and competition to control the means of production and the subsequent benefits that come from controlling capital and industry. It is therefore unsurprising that the CCP, which no longer views its own society through the lens of class struggle, now sees its external relations with other major powers as part of a global competition for resources, capital, technology and influence. It is therefore also logical that China’s foreign policy strategists see China’s major-power engagement efforts as central to attaining the political and economic benefits that will enable China to achieve its goal of rejuvenation.

Importantly, Chinese culture, rather than Marxism, is the framework for assessing China’s approach to engagement with countries on its periphery, characterized by the formulation “community with a shared future for mankind.” Wang Yi’s July speech is explicit that Chinese culture is the framework for neighborhood diplomacy, which also encompasses initiatives such as the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. This is not the first time that Chinese culture has been invoked as context for conducting Chinese foreign policy. Notable scholars, such as Yan Xuetong (阎学通) at Tsinghua University and the President of the China Foreign Affairs University Qin Yaqing (秦亚青), have long argued that Chinese foreign policy-making should be informed by Chinese culture.¹⁵⁰ Xi Jinping also referred to the importance of Chinese culture in the reform of the global governance system in remarks he made to a Politburo study session in 2015, stating, “...actively explore positive ways contemporary Chinese culture can shape global governance...”¹⁵¹ Xi Jinping and Wang Yi’s formulations indicate the attractiveness of applying Chinese culture as the framework for dealing with smaller countries on its periphery, as well as regional groupings such as ASEAN and global mechanisms such as the WTO. In this context, Wang in his Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy speech affirmed China’s intention to “spearhead” the reform of the global governance system to make the international system “fairer and more equitable,” principles that are enmeshed in the “community of shared destiny for mankind.” Despite a stated preference for multilateralism in many high-level remarks, China’s approach remains predominantly bilateral in nature as Beijing seeks to actively build a global network of bilateral partnerships, supported by inherently bilateral platforms such as the Belt and Road to put China’s development in what it calls a “global context.”

¹⁵⁰ Qin Yaqing, “Chinese Culture and Its Implications for Foreign Policy-making,” *International Studies*, September 2011, <http://en.cnki.com.cn/Articleen/CJFDTOTAL-GJWY201105005.htm>; Mark W. Lai, “Chinese Foreign Policy Making 2010-2011: Using the Cultural Approach to Explain Complexity,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 2012(17): 187-205.

¹⁵¹ “Xi Jinping: Promote a Fairer and More Reasonable Global Governance System, Create Favorable Conditions for China’s Development and World Peace” [习近平：推动全球治理体制更加公正更加合理 为我国发展和世界和平创造有利条件], *People’s Daily*, October 14, 2015, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2015/1014/c64094-27694665.html>.

With Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy now firmly established, complete with its own study center housed at the Foreign Ministry's China Institute for International Studies, China's foreign policy implementers were well positioned to firmly grasp the importance of the Covid-19 outbreak and demonstrate that they would be able to quickly adapt to the changing situation to press forward their effort to further China's great rejuvenation through diplomacy.

High-level Diplomacy in the Covid-19 Era

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic is unquestionably a profound change unseen in a century, one that has directly and significantly impacted the work of China's high-level diplomacy. While it has caused a dramatic impact in the conduct of diplomacy, it has not fundamentally changed China's approach to foreign policy, which remains grounded in Xi Jinping's assessments of China's relationships with the rest of the world. China's rapid containment of the virus through stringent lockdowns, coupled with a vigorous censorship effort, and a propaganda campaign trumpeting China's success while raising doubts about the origins of the virus enabled authorities to communicate to the Chinese population that the CCP was victorious and correct in its handling of the epidemic. Translating this domestic victory into diplomatic success proved more challenging, despite efforts to adapt to the new normal created by the pandemic.

Covid-19 posed a significant challenge to China's international reputation necessitating a diplomatic response as it became increasingly clear that China made little effort to prevent the virus from spreading globally, even while it locked down internal travel and established a protective bubble around Beijing. Tightening censorship, the detention of independent bloggers reporting on developments in Wuhan, and lengthy delays allowing foreign medical experts to enter Wuhan further harmed China's image and unintentionally gave credence to global conspiracy theories about the virus' origins. Coronaviruses had escaped from laboratories twice before in China, implying weak containment protocols, which, when combined with aggressive censorship and presence of similar viruses studied and stored at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, created a toxic brew of innuendo and name-calling that tarnished China's reputation, contradicting China's assertions and rhetoric about seeking a "shared future for mankind." Countering and deterring these harmful narratives became a key aspect of China's Covid-19 diplomacy, encompassing an aggressive diplomatic strategy of engagement, foreign assistance in the form of "mask diplomacy," and a sustained propaganda campaign championing China's success and the superiority of China's political system, which contrasted with the shortcomings of democratic countries' pandemic response. A persistent campaign was also rolled out to call into question the origins of the virus. Facing opposition, China's diplomacy turned to coercion as Australia discovered when it called for an independent investigation of the origin of the Wuhan epidemic.

The closing of global borders as part of the effort to contain Covid-19's spread presented a significant challenge to China's diplomats. In 2019, Xi Jinping made seven overseas trips, visiting 12 countries, and four trips visiting 13 countries in 2018.¹⁵² In 2020 until the end of November, he was only able to visit Myanmar on his sole foreign trip of the year. China's top diplomats, Wang

¹⁵² China Vitae database, available at <https://www.chinavitae.com/vip/index.php?mode=events&type=cv&id=303;>

Yi and Central Foreign Affairs Commission Director Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪), were able to engage global counterparts through travel and online meetings.

It is notable that Chinese senior leaders and diplomats were quick to embrace the use of video engagements when it became a necessity, despite previous reluctance. While Xi Jinping joined virtual multilateral summits via video link, there were no public reports that he used video for bilateral calls with counterparts, only traditional telephone connections. Premier Li Keqiang and Wang Yi, however, did use video conferencing to engage bilaterally with counterparts.¹⁵³ The reluctance to embrace virtual bilateral engagements prior to and during the pandemic could have been due to concerns about the ability to protect privileged conversations on widely-used web platforms, such as Zoom, Skype and Webex that are not controlled by China, with data traversing servers outside their borders. The possibility exists that China's top diplomats missed an opportunity to further bilateral relations through the use of online platforms but that reluctance to use video may change in the future if a vetted, Chinese-owned video platform emerges and Chinese authorities are able to insist that engagements take place on their preferred software, creating a dilemma for foreign governments concerned about installing Chinese Government-backed software on government networks. In August 2020, Yang Jiechi and Wang Yi resumed their travel schedules, making bilateral visits to Europe and neighboring countries in Asia.

Conclusion

Despite China's vigorous diplomatic and propaganda efforts, global public opinion of China declined precipitously during the Covid-19 outbreak. The Pew Research Center noted, "Today, a majority in each of the [14] surveyed countries has an unfavorable opinion of China. And in Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United States, South Korea, Spain and Canada, negative views have reached their highest points since the Center began polling on this topic more than a decade ago."

Furthermore, 61 percent of those surveyed felt that China had done a bad job dealing with the outbreak, indicating the ineffectiveness of China's self-congratulatory propaganda efforts, and the failure of China's "mask diplomacy" efforts, which was marred by widespread reports of China's shipments of over-priced, shoddy medical supplies, mixed with threats that China would embargo critical medical equipment to countries that opposed it.¹⁵⁴ China's propaganda machine also trumpeted the dispatch of medical teams to assist other countries, receiving mixed reviews from receiving countries. One government expert in the Philippines observed, "The [Philippines] Department of Health experts saw them as an additional burden as they had to facilitate and take them around hospital facilities and meet health specialists. The DOH experts did not feel that the Chinese medical team provided any additional value and expertise considering that the Philippines had been doing everything according to WHO standards. They were mostly here for a photo opportunity and were really brought to the country because Wang Yi kept pushing [Foreign Minister] Locsin...."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ See Annex 1.

¹⁵⁴ Laura Silver, et al, "Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries," Pew Research Center, October 6, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries>.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Manila-based expert.

Yang Jiechi and Wang Yi were deployed to Europe and Asia for face-to-face meetings with counterparts starting in August but made little progress furthering China's interests. Italy, China's only European Belt and Road partner, reportedly rejected Huawei as a 5G provider to its Telecoms in October not long after Wang's visit.¹⁵⁶ Wang's stop in Norway was overshadowed by his bickering during a press conference, threatening the Nobel Prize committee (a non-governmental, independent body) with retaliation should they confer an award on Hong Kong democracy activists.¹⁵⁷

China's relations with big powers, with the exception of Russia, show little sign of improvement. Tensions with India reached new highs in May and June when weeks of border skirmishes resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese soldiers, resulting in public outrage, boycotts of Chinese goods, and a ban on Chinese apps. India has also instituted an undeclared ban on Chinese tech infrastructure in its telecom networks.¹⁵⁸ The United States and Japan continue to treat China warily, building their military capabilities and strengthening cross-strait deterrence, encouraging diversification of their supply chains through incentives and tariffs. The United States and European Union both continue to press China to open its economy and provide reciprocal access—with little success—while blocking Chinese tech companies from penetrating core networks. During the Covid-19 outbreak, Chinese vessels sank or harassed ships from Vietnam, Malaysia, and Japan in disputed exclusive economic zones, earning rebukes and public endorsements of the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal ruling, generally undermining its own rhetoric about a community of common destiny for mankind that underpins its neighborhood diplomacy strategy.¹⁵⁹

China's policy-making enterprise remains deeply committed to applying a Marxist methodology to build internal consensus and acquiescence to Xi Jinping's assessment and prescription for conducting diplomacy. However, this policy-making process can cause perverse diplomatic outcomes, including ossification, obnoxiousness, and the inability to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances that might challenge assessments formulated endorsed at the very top of China's leadership. The global shock of the Covid-19 pandemic and China's static approach to diplomacy in 2020 have not visibly improved China's global standing or measurably furthered its objectives of rejuvenation.

¹⁵⁶ "Italy vetoes 5G deal between Fastweb and China's Huawei: sources," Reuters, October 23, 2020, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/huawei-italy-5g-idCNL8N2HE6BR>.

¹⁵⁷ "China Warns Norway Against Peace Prize for Hong Kong Protesters," Bloomberg News, August 28, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-08-28/china-warns-norway-against-peace-prize-for-hong-kong-protesters>.

¹⁵⁸ Antoine Levesques, "India-China tensions: what next for India?" IISS, July 30, 2020, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/07/sasia-india-china-tensions>; Amy Kazmin and Stephanie Findlay, "India moves to cut Huawei gear from telecoms network," August 25, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/55642551-f6e8-4f9d-b5ba-a12d2fc26ef9>.

¹⁵⁹ Ian Storey, "The South China Sea Dispute in 2020-2021," ISEAS, September 3, 2020, available at https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ISEAS_Perspective_2020_97.pdf.

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Annex: High-Level Travel, Virtual Summits, Virtual Bilateral and Mini-lateral Meetings by Phone and Video from January to the end of September 2020¹⁶⁰

High-Level Travel From January to September 31, 2020			
	Xi Jinping	Yang Jiechi	Wang Yi
January	Myanmar	Libya Conference in Berlin	Egypt; Djibouti; Eritrea; Burundi; Zimbabwe
February		Japan; Tajikistan; Uzbekistan; and Kazakhstan	Munich Security Conference, Germany; Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting on COVID in Vientiane; Laos
March – July	<i>No travel</i>		
August		Singapore; Korea	Vietnam; Italy; Netherlands; Norway; France; Germany
September		Myanmar; Spain; Greece	

Virtual Summits From January to September 31, 2020			
	Xi Jinping	Yang Jiechi	Wang Yi
January	<i>No virtual meetings</i>		
February	<i>No virtual meetings</i>		
March	G20 Leaders Summit on COVID		
April			BRICS meeting on COVID
May	World Health Assembly		
June	China-Africa Summit; EU-China Summit		China-EU High Level Strategic Dialogue
July	AIIB Annual Summit		China-Arab States Cooperation Forum; China-Vietnam Steering Committee; China-Latin America/Caribbean Conference; Afghanistan-Pakistan-Nepal Foreign Ministers' Conference
August			
September	Germany; EU Leaders; United Nations anniversary		Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA); UN Security Council Meeting;

¹⁶⁰ All data in Annex 1 retrieved from the PRC Foreign Ministry website at www.fmprc.gov.cn.

	meetings; UNGA		
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Virtual Bilateral and Mini-Lateral Meetings From January to September 31, 2020				
	Xi Jinping	Li Keqiang	Yang Jiechi	Wang Yi
January	<p>Telephone Talks with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany</p> <p>Telephone Talks with President Emmanuel Macron of France</p>		<p>Phone Call with US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo</p>	<p>Phone Call with Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi</p> <p>Phone Call with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian</p> <p>Phone Call with South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha</p> <p>Phone Call with UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab</p> <p>Phone Call with Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne</p>
February	<p>Phone Call with King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia</p> <p>Phone Call with US President Donald Trump</p> <p>Phone Call with Indonesian President Joko Widodo</p> <p>Phone Call with Amir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani of Qatar</p> <p>Phone Call with French President Emmanuel Macron</p> <p>Phone Call with UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson</p> <p>Phone Call with ROK President Moon Jae-in</p> <p>Phone Call with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan</p> <p>Phone Call with Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan of Abu Dhabi of the UAE</p> <p>Phone Call with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali</p>	<p>Telephone Talks with President of European Commission Ursula von der Leyen</p> <p>Phone Call with German Chancellor Angela Merkel</p>	<p>Phone Call with UK Cabinet Secretary and National Security Adviser</p>	<p>Phone Call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov</p> <p>Phone Call with Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah</p> <p>Phone Call with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu</p> <p>Phone Call with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas</p> <p>Phone Call with Sudanese Foreign Minister Asma Mohamed Abdalla</p> <p>Phone Call with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif</p> <p>Phone Call with Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud</p> <p>Phone Call with Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai</p> <p>Phone Call with Tanzanian Foreign Minister Palamagamba Kabudi</p> <p>Phone Call with Syrian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Walid Al-Moualem</p> <p>Phone Call with Indonesian Government's Coordinator for Cooperation with China and Coordinating Minister Luhut</p>

	<p>Phone Call with Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel</p> <p>Phone Call with Chilean President Sebastián Piñera</p>			<p>Pandjaitan</p> <p>Phone Call with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry</p> <p>Phone Call with French President's Foreign Policy Advisor Emmanuel Bonne</p> <p>Phone Call with Senegalese Foreign Minister Amadou Ba</p> <p>Phone Call With ROK Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha</p> <p>Phone Call with Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi</p> <p>Extends Sympathies to Italian Foreign Minister in a Phone Call</p> <p>Phone Call with Iranian Foreign Minister to Express Support</p> <p>Phone Call with Iranian Foreign Minister to Express Support</p>
March	<p>Phone Call with UN Secretary General</p> <p>Phone Call with Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte</p> <p>Phone Call with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez</p> <p>Phone Call with Russian President Vladimir Putin</p> <p>Phone Call with Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro</p> <p>Phone Call with UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson</p> <p>Phone Call with French President Emmanuel Macron</p> <p>Phone Call with Egyptian President Abdul Fatah Al-Sisi</p> <p>Phone Call with Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart</p>	<p>Phone Call with Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov</p> <p>Phone Call with EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen</p> <p>Phone Call with Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković</p> <p>Phone Call with Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz</p> <p>Phone Call</p>	<p>Phone Call with US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo</p>	<p>Phone Call with Nepali Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali</p> <p>Phone Call with UK First Secretary of State and Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab</p> <p>Phone Call with Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamad A. Alhakim</p> <p>Phone Call with Malaysia's New Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Hussein</p> <p>Phone Call with Indonesian Government's Coordinator for Cooperation with China and Coordinating Minister Luhut Pandjaitan</p> <p>Phone Call with Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan</p> <p>Phone Call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov</p> <p>Phone Call with Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok</p> <p>Phone Call with French Foreign</p>

	<p>Tokayev</p> <p>Phone Call with Polish President Andrzej Duda</p> <p>Phone Call with German Chancellor Angela Merkel</p> <p>Phone Call with US President Donald Trump</p> <p>Phone Call with the King of Saudi Arabia</p>	<p>with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar</p> <p>Phone Call with Algerian Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerrad</p>		<p>Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian</p> <p>Phone Call with UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Dominic Raab</p> <p>Phone Calls with Foreign Ministers of Hungary, Greece and Morocco</p> <p>Phone Call with Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar</p> <p>Phone Call with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian</p> <p>Phone Call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the Phone</p> <p>Phone Call with Portuguese and Luxembourg Foreign Ministers</p>
April	<p>Phone Call with King Philippe of Belgium</p> <p>Phone Call with Indonesian President Joko Widodo</p> <p>Phone Call with General Secretary and Lao President Bounnhang Vorachit</p> <p>Phone Call with Namibian President Hage Geingob</p> <p>Phone Call with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa</p> <p>Phone Call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan</p> <p>Phone Call with Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro</p> <p>Phone Call with Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador</p> <p>Phone Call with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic</p> <p>Phone Call with Kyrgyz President Sooronbay</p>	<p>Phone Call with Prime Minister of Viet Nam Nguyen Xuan Phuc</p> <p>Phone Call with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte</p> <p>Phone Call with Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki of Poland</p> <p>Phone Call with Sudanese Transitional Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok</p> <p>Phone Call with European Commission President</p>	<p>Phone Call with with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo</p>	<p>Phone Call with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba Dmytro on the Phone</p> <p>Phone Call with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani of Qatar</p> <p>Phone Call with Canadian Foreign Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne on the Phone</p> <p>Phone Call with Colombian Foreign Minister Claudia Blum</p> <p>Phone Call with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas</p> <p>Phone Call with Foreign Minister A. K. Abdul Momen of Bangladesh</p> <p>Phone Call with Foreign Minister of Maldives Abdulla Shahid</p> <p>Phone Call with Mauritanian Foreign Minister Ismael Ould Cheikh Ahmed</p> <p>Phone Call with Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi</p>

	<p>Sharipovich Jeenbekov</p> <p>Phone Call with Finnish President Sauli Niinistö</p> <p>Phone Call with Russian President Vladimir Putin</p> <p>Phone Call with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani</p> <p>Phone Call with Nepalese President Bidhya Devi Bhandari</p> <p>Phone Call with Czech President Miloš Zeman</p> <p>Phone Call with President Martín Vizcarra of Peru</p>	<p>Ursula von der Leyen</p>		<p>Phone Call with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif</p> <p>Phone Call with Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard</p> <p>Phone Call with Senegalese Foreign Minister Amadou Ba</p> <p>Phone Call with with Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides of Cyprus</p> <p>Phone Call with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu</p> <p>Phone Call with Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi</p> <p>Phone Call with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian</p> <p>Phone Call with Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena of Sri Lanka</p> <p>Phone Call with with ASEAN Secretary General Lim Jock Hoi</p> <p>Phone Call with with Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn</p> <p>Phone Call with Afghan Acting Foreign Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar</p> <p>Phone Call with Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg</p> <p>Phone Call with Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan</p>
May	<p>Phone Call with Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev</p> <p>Phone Call with Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa</p> <p>Phone Call with Russian President Vladimir Putin</p> <p>Phone Call with ROK President Moon Jae-in</p> <p>Phone Call with Sri Lankan</p>			<p>Phone Call with Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov</p> <p>Phone Call with Tajik Foreign Minister Sirojiddin Muhriddin</p> <p>Phone Call with Mongolian Foreign Minister Damdin Tsogtbaatar</p> <p>Phone Call with Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Ivan Korčok of Slovakia</p> <p>Phone Call with Ethiopian Foreign</p>

	<p>President Gotabaya Rajapaksa</p> <p>Phone Call with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa</p> <p>Phone Call with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán</p> <p>Phone Call with President U Win Myint of Myanmar</p> <p>Phone Call with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh</p>			<p>Minister Gedu Andargachew</p> <p>Phone Call with Angolan Foreign Minister Tête António</p> <p>Phone Call with Spanish Foreign Minister Arancha González Laya</p> <p>Phone Call with Foreign Minister Miguel Vargas Maldonado of the Dominican Republic</p> <p>Phone Call with Foreign Ministers of Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Estonia</p> <p>Phone Call with Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Chingiz Aidaibekov</p> <p>Phone Call with French President's Foreign Policy Advisor Emmanuel Bonne</p>
June	<p>Phone Call with German Chancellor Angela Merkel</p> <p>Speaks with French President Emmanuel Macron</p> <p>Phone Call with Costa Rican President Carlos Alvarado</p> <p>Phone Call with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte</p> <p>Phone Call with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko</p> <p>Phone Call with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon</p> <p>Phone Call with Ecuadorian President Lenín Moreno</p>	<p>Met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel via Video Link</p>		<p>Phone Call with Indonesian Government's Coordinator for Cooperation with China and Coordinating Minister Luhut Pandjaitan</p> <p>Phone Call with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry</p> <p>Phone Call with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla</p> <p>Phone Call with Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar of India</p> <p>Russia-India-China trilateral virtual conference (video call)</p> <p>Met with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif via Video Link (video call)</p> <p>Phone Call with Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok</p> <p>Phone Call with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov</p> <p>Phone Call with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry</p> <p>Phone Call with Ethiopian Foreign</p>

				Minister Gedu Andargachew
July	<p>Phone Call with Russian President Vladimir Putin</p> <p>Phone Call with Zambian President Edgar Lungu</p> <p>Phone Call with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas</p>	<p>Met with Lao Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith via Video Link</p>		<p>Phone Call with Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi</p> <p>Phone Call with Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud</p> <p>Phone Call with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Jordan Ayman Safadi</p> <p>Phone Call with and Reaches Positive Agreement on Easing Border Situation with Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval</p> <p>Phone Call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov</p> <p>Phone Call with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry on the Libyan Issue</p> <p>Meets with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas via Video Link (video call)</p> <p>Phone Call with Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud</p> <p>Phone Call with First Secretary of State and Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Dominic Raab of the United Kingdom (UK)</p> <p>Phone Call with with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian</p> <p>Phone Call with Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi</p> <p>Meets with Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi via Video Link (video call)</p> <p>Phone Call with Algerian Foreign Minister Sabri Boukadoum</p> <p>Phone Call with Sierra Leonean Foreign Minister Nabeela Farida</p>

				Tunis
August				<p>Phone Call with Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs Raychelle Omamo</p> <p>Phone Call with Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita</p> <p>Phone Call with Afghan Acting Foreign Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar</p> <p>Phone Call with Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Chingiz Aidarbekov</p> <p>Phone Call with Nigerian Foreign Minister Geoffrey Onyeama</p> <p>Phone Call with Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte</p>
September	<p>Phone Call with President Luis Lacalle Pou of Uruguay</p> <p>Phone Call with King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia</p> <p>Phone Call with Angolan President Joao Lourenco</p> <p>Phone Call with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga</p> <p>Phone Call with Argentine President Alberto Fernández</p> <p>Phone Call with General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and President Nguyen Phu Trong</p>		<p>Attends the 10th Meeting of the BRICS High Representatives for Security Issues via Video Link (video call)</p>	<p>Meets with Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza via Video Link (video call)</p> <p>Phone Call with Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud of Saudi Arabia</p> <p>Phone Call with Adaljiza Albertina Xavier Reis Magno, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Timor-Leste</p> <p>Phone Call with with President of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Volkan Bozkir</p> <p>Received a farewell call made by US Ambassador to China Terry Branstad.</p>

Medical Expert Teams Deployed Abroad January-September 2020						
March	April	May	June	July	August	September
Italy; Serbia; Cambodia; Pakistan	Philippines; Kazakhstan; Russia; Ethiopia;	Djibouti; Cote d'Ivoire; Congo; Equatorial				

	Burkina Faso; Kuwait	Guinea; Sudan; Sao Tome and Principe;				
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