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# Have The Chinese Core Interests Increased?

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## About the Author



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## Have The Chinese Core Interests Increased?

The intense debate over China's core interests is a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon as prior to that there was no/limited reference of the same. It is only in the last decade or so that, discussions on "Chinese Core Interests" have gained momentum. While the specialists on the subject have still not come to an agreement as to what exactly are Chinese core interests, they are also debating the reason for China's enunciation of its Core interests and the strategy that it is employing for upholding of the same. In addition, what specifically should be of interest to India is, whether any of the Chinese core interests are in conflict with its own interests? This piece attempts to throw some light on these issues as well as tries to find some answer these questions.

Before delving any further on this piece though, it is imperative that an understanding of the term "core interests" needs to be developed. The same would be essential for an understanding of this piece in the right context.

### Understanding "Core Interests"

An attempt at defining "Core Interests" would hugely limit the scope of the term. Instead of the same, it would be better to develop an argument about what "Core Interests" really are and thereafter, build the remainder of the piece based on this argument. Most analysts feel that core interests are those interests which are integral to a nation's belief. They are so important to the nation that, they could at times, even affect the survival of the nation. Hence, to secure these core interests, a nation would use all the resources at its disposal including military, and thus, could enter into a skirmish, conflict or even war with another country which threatens or actually violates these core interests. Such an understanding is largely based on the presumption that core interests are largely associated with issues of sovereignty or

territorial integrity, for their violation is easy to understand and thus respond to. For e.g. ingress/transgress of a border constitutes violation of territorial integrity and thus violation of a country's core interest. Such core interests could be construed to be defensive in nature.

This understanding though, is simplistic in nature. For what happens in cases where the territory itself is contested and core interests of two countries are at cross purposes with each other. In such a scenario, core interests are determined by perception/interpretation. Meaning, if a country perceives/interprets a territory to be his/hers, it would treat it as a core interest and thus, contest the same. Further, what happens when core interests are defined across a large number of subjects such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, national security, social development and stability? In such an eventuality, core interests are difficult to decipher. As a consequence, these then have to be mostly inferred from official statements. Further, while core interests concerning territorial integrity are easy to interpret, those concerning issues like social stability are not so easy. Added to this are other intangibles like core interests are being associated with 'Loss of Face'? For e.g. Take China's case, post the humiliating loss to Japan, any concession on the Diaoyu Island would be construed as a "Loss of Face and thus, this alone, could result in it becoming a core interest?

The next aspect to consider is whether core interests are permanent or they vary with changing geopolitics and geostrategic realities. The moot point here being, if in real politics there are no permanent friends and enemies, could some core interests change as per the prevalent global strategic scenario? At this juncture it is important to understand that, some core issues concerning undisputed territorial integrity are permanent (unless borders are redrawn), but other core issues may or may not remain so over a period of time.

Another aspect to keep in mind is that, while it is fine to have core interests, the ability to uphold these depends on the power that a country wields and its global stature at that time. The point being, countries which become powerful enunciate core interests openly and go about upholding these, while others, who are not, don't enunciate them on the count that it is futile to enunciate core interests which cannot be upheld.

Enunciation of core interests also enables a country to draw red lines which indicate the amount of concession that it would make on a critical issue of interest. The interesting aspect herein being that, such an enunciation facilitates the achievement of one's core interest through deterrence. It goes without saying that deterrence is only possible when backed by capability.

While we have discussed the defensive core interests earlier in the piece, another interesting aspect are offensive core interests. As countries become powerful their core interests grow larger in number. This is on account of the fact that to support their growing strategic requirements their areas of interest grow wider and, thus, their core interest's shift off shore or grow offensive in nature. What is important to note is that, defining of a greater number of core interests gives countries greater elbow space on the global power table. Needless to say that all such core interests are covered under the garb of some basic defensive core interest like territorial integrity. Case in point being China's core interest of "territories of South China Sea". It goes without saying that such offensive core interests would be upheld by the use of force as, the increasing amount of force available in itself, was one of the premises on which such a core interest was enunciated in the first place.

Having developed this understanding of core interests let us now develop this piece further.

## Inferred Chinese Core Interests

Prior to the white paper on China's Peaceful Development published in September 2011 which clearly lists out China's core interests, Chinese core interests ("hexin liyi" in Mandarin) had to be inferred on the basis of an assessment of said/unsaid Chinese official statements. One such comprehensive interpretation of Chinese core interests has been done by Michael D. Swaine in his 2010 paper on the *ibid* subject.<sup>1</sup>In the *ibid* paper the author has brought out that in the last century, the Chinese used to refer to their "core interests" as "major national interests". The repeated and regular use of the term "core interest" was only done by the Chinese in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century around the year 2004. Before going any further, let us briefly have a look at the chronology of the development of Chinese core interests.

It is seen that, starting around 2004, Chinese officials, scholars and state-run news organizations increasingly began using the term "Core Interests" to refer to sovereignty issues. These references were initially attributed to Taiwan on account of the island's purported demand for independence made by the former Taiwanese President Chen Shuibian possibly with U.S. backing.

As concerns Tibet, Chinese officials have over the years been claiming Tibet to be a part of China. The same is evident from the initial 1992 white paper on Tibet which states that "there is no room for haggling" on the fundamental principle that "Tibet is an inalienable part of China".<sup>2</sup>However, the official use of the term "Core Interests" as concerns Tibet began in 2006, when the then PRC Vice President

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Swaine, "China's Assertive Behavior: Part One: On 'Core Interests,'" *China Leadership Monitor* No. 34 (22 February 2011), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/67966>.

<sup>2</sup> Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, "Tibet—Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation," government white paper, September 1992, Beijing, China, available in English at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/3711/t18996.htm#4>

Zeng Qinghong used it in his meeting with Mr. Wickremanayake the then prime minister of Sri Lanka.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Xinjiang was officially termed as a Core interest for the first time in 2006 during President Hu Jintao's speech in Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> Hence till 2006, Chinese use of the term "core interests" was primarily concerned with Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang only.

Then in July 2009, Mr. Dai Bingguo, a top Chinese foreign policy official at that time, advanced a much wider definition of Chinese core interests. Mr. Dai Bingguo during his closing remarks at a session of the annual United States-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue stated that Chinese core interests include three components: i) preserving China's basic state system and national security; ii) national sovereignty and territorial integrity; and iii) the continued stable development of China's economy and society.<sup>5</sup> Despite this, Michael Swaine had argued in his *ibid* 2010 paper that Chinese core interests were primarily concerned with issues of "sovereignty and territorial integrity" as Chinese officials had more often than not referred to core interests in reference to these issues only. Hence he had maintained in his *ibid* paper that, Chinese core interests were primarily related to Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang only.<sup>6</sup> He had thus in his analysis excluded other issues from the list of Chinese core interests, notable among them being, the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands and territories in the South China Sea.

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<sup>3</sup>Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 22 April 2006, available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/yzs/gjlb/2782/2784/t248856.htm>.

<sup>4</sup>President Hu Jintao's address at the Islamabad Convention Center, 24 November 2006, available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/yzs/gjlb/2757/2758/t285917.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> State Councilor Dai Bingguo, Closing Remarks at U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, Washington, DC, 28 July 2009, available at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/july/126599.htm>.

<sup>6</sup>Michael Swaine, "China's Assertive Behavior: Part One: On 'Core Interests,'" *China Leadership Monitor* No. 34 (22 February 2011), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/67966>.

## Core Interests enunciated by China

As already brought out, Chinese core interests prior to 2011 had to be inferred due to the lack of them being clearly enunciated in black and white. It was only in September 2011, that the Chinese Peaceful Development policy paper formally for the first time officially enunciated Chinese core interests. It states “*China is firm in upholding its core interests which include the following: state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development.*”<sup>7</sup>(Italics added for emphasis). The *ibid* definition builds on Dai Bingguo’s definition and has a fairly large scope. It goes beyond the basic issues of “sovereignty and territorial integrity” argued till date to include issues such as national security, China’s political system, social stability and ensuring of sustainable economic development.

Subsequently in July 2015, China further enhanced the scope of its Core interests by passing its National Security Law. Article 2 of the *ibid* law states “*National security* refers to the relative absence of international or domestic threats to the state's power to govern, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, the welfare of the people, sustainable economic and social development, and *other major national interests*, and the ability to ensure a continued state of security.”<sup>8</sup>(Italics added for emphasis). A linkage of the *ibid* National Security Law with Core Interests was given by Ms Zheng Shuna, deputy director of the legislative affairs

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<sup>7</sup>The State Council The people's republic of china, China's Peaceful Development, government white paper, September 2011, Beijing, China, available in English at [http://www.gov.cn/english/official/2011-09/06/content\\_1941354\\_2.htm](http://www.gov.cn/english/official/2011-09/06/content_1941354_2.htm)

<sup>8</sup> China Law Translate, National Security Law of the People's Republic of China, Passed on 01 July 2015 at the 15th meeting of the Standing Committee of the 12th National People's Congress, available in English at <http://chinalawtranslate.com/2015nsl/?lang=en>



commission of the National People's Congress while speaking at a news conference.<sup>9</sup> She said, "Our national security law is to maintain the core interests of the nation and other major interests. For safeguarding national core interests, China has repeatedly said that we adhere to a peaceful path of development but will never give up our righteous interests and sacrifice the core national interests."<sup>10</sup>Hence, though the *ibid* security law does not explicitly mention the term "Core Interests", if we take the *ibid* security law's interpretation of National Security along with the elaboration of the same given by the *ibid* deputy director and thereafter read these in conjunction with the white paper on China's Peaceful Development policy, it becomes clear that the scope of Chinese core interests has further broadened substantially. This is so on account of the fact that, while the policy paper on China's Peaceful Development terms "National Security" as a core interest, the National Security Law gives a wide definition of "National Security" which besides including a number of issues also includes the term "other major national interests". Such a broad sweeping term could practically include most things under the sun as and when required.

Hence while Chinese core interests have been enunciated in black and white they have been done so in broad and ambiguous statements. For e.g. what do we construe as Chinese core interests from the terms "national security", "social stability" and "the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development"? These are broad terms which cover a whole gamut of issues. These broad core interests are difficult to decipher and thus an attempt has to be made to infer specific Chinese core interests from these broad terms. This would be done at a later stage of the piece.

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<sup>9</sup>Edward Wong, "Security Law Suggests a Broadening of China's 'Core Interests'", New York Times, 02 Jul 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/03/world/asia/security-law-suggests-a-broadening-of-chinas-core-interests.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/03/world/asia/security-law-suggests-a-broadening-of-chinas-core-interests.html?_r=0)

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

## China's Strategy for upholding these Core Interests

Chinese strategy for upholding its core interests varies between that of taking an uncompromising and vocal stance, to that of maintaining an absolute stoic silence. For example, during 2004 when Taiwan was making noises towards achieving independence, the Chinese through high pitched rhetoric managed to convey an impression that the issue of Taiwan's independence was of paramount importance to them and it would be denied at all costs. Such an impression was created by Chinese officials using phrases such as China will "never yield" or "will not haggle or bargain".<sup>11</sup> Such a stance is also evident through Hu Jintao's "Four Never" on Taiwan – "Never Sway, "Never Give Up", "Never Change" and "Never Compromise"<sup>12</sup>. Another contemporary example of such a strategy are the Chinese media statements post the DPP's outright victory in the Taiwanese General Elections of 2016 which said "Taiwan should abandon its "hallucinations" about independence, as any push toward that outcome would be "poison" and "Tsai should keep in mind that if she revisits Chen's dangerous path to cross the red line of cross-Straits relations, she will meet a dead end".<sup>13</sup> Contrary to this right through the latter part of 2015, when the South China Sea dispute got heated up and there was a fear of the South East Asian countries aligning with the US on this issue, China backed off from its aggressive stance and started maintaining a stoic silence.

Interestingly, both these strategies present a significant pay off to China. An aggressive upholding of its Core interests sends a signal that it is a major world player who cannot be taken lightly and will not allow any dilution of its core

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<sup>11</sup>Michael Swaine, "China's Assertive Behavior: Part One: On 'Core Interests,'" China Leadership Monitor No. 34 (22 February 2011), pp 20, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/67966>.

<sup>12</sup>Hu Jintao, "Hu's Guideline on Mainland-Taiwan Relations Underlined", China.org.cn, 04 Mar 2005, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2007lh/201492.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Taipei Times, "China media call independence 'poison'", 18 Jan 2016, <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2016/01/18/2003637475>

interests. It also allows China to direct the spotlight on issues that matter to it and are in the danger of being compromised, like it did so with Taiwan in 2004. On the other hand, by keeping silent (neither providing a confirmation nor a denial) on an issue (South China Sea dispute) that it had earlier pursued aggressively, Beijing is able to i) maintain flexibility in its approach to the dispute; ii) prevent any domestic accusations that China is adopting a weaker stance; and iii) deny that it is taking unilateral actions or escalating tensions.<sup>14</sup>

While this applies to inferred Core Interests that are external, as regards internal “enunciated” and “inferred” Core interests, China upholds these extremely aggressively. This aggressive intent can be clearly seen from the passing of the much debated National Security Law<sup>15</sup> and controversial Counter Terrorism Law<sup>16</sup>. Both these laws have been passed to preserve national security as also neutralize the threat posed by the East Turkistan Independence Movement (ETIM) which is seen by China as a threat to its core interest of Xinjiang. Another example of such intent is the fast paced manner in which Xi Jinping is undertaking the modernizing of the PLA, which as we are all aware, is going to be essential for the upholding of Chinese core interests, both on and off its shores.

What also comes out from Chinese usage of the term “core interests” is that, from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Chinese officials have regularly used the term for achieving diplomatic leverage. The same is evident from the use of the term in the “Taiwanese” context. The principal intent of using this term was to pressure countries with a differing perception on Taiwan to accept China’s position on this

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<sup>14</sup>Caitlin Campbell, Ethan Meick, Kimberly Hsu and Craig Murray, “China’s “Core Interests” and the East China Sea”, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 10 May 2013

<sup>15</sup>National Security Law of the People's Republic of China, China Law Translate, 01 Jul 2015, <http://chinalawtranslate.com/2015nsl/?lang=en>

<sup>16</sup>Counter-Terrorism Law of the People's Republic of China, China Law Translate, 27 Dec 2015, <http://chinalawtranslate.com/%E5%8F%8D%E6%81%90%E6%80%96%E4%B8%BB%E4%B9%89%E6%B3%95-%EF%BC%882015%EF%BC%89/?lang=en>

important issue. Hence during the period post 2004, China continuously tried to include the term “Core Interests” in US China joint statements, so as to commit the US to accept in writing the Chinese position and sensitivities on Taiwan.<sup>17</sup> Success on the same was achieved during President Obama’s visit to China in 2009, when the US China joint statement said “The two sides agreed that respecting each other’s *core interests* is extremely important to ensure steady progress in U.S.-China relations.”<sup>18</sup>(Italics added for emphasis). Considering the fact that this statement was said in the context of respecting each other’s “sovereignty and territorial integrity”, as also, in the previous paragraph, China had stressed that “*the Taiwan issue concerns China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity*”<sup>19</sup> (Italics added for emphasis), the Chinese position on Taiwan was well driven home. Consequent to this, having understood the nuanced Chinese approach on this subject, US officials have been careful not to include the term “core interests” in any of the future joint declarations.

Having seen the enhanced scope and definition of Chinese Core Interests as well as the Chinese strategy of upholding them, let us now seek answers to two questions – “Have Chinese Core Interests Increased?” and “What exactly are the Chinese Core Interests?”

### **Have Chinese Core Interests Increased?**

While discussing the impact and effect of China’s national Security Law, Edward Wong in his New York Times article has pointed towards the fact that Chinese Core Interests have increased by stating “Under the new definition, as stated by

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<sup>17</sup>Michael Swaine, “China’s Assertive Behavior: Part One: On ‘Core Interests,’” China Leadership Monitor No. 34 (22 February 2011), pp 6, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/67966>.

<sup>18</sup>U.S.-China Joint Statement, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 17 Nov 2009, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/us-china-joint-statement>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

Mr. Dai and reiterated by Ms. Zheng, the term does encompass the South China Sea and any other sovereignty issues of importance to China (think Arunachal Pradesh in India, and the islands in the East China Sea that Japan calls the Senkaku and China calls the Diaoyu).<sup>20</sup>

One also has to keep in mind that prior to this in 2014, Chinese authorities had unveiled a new map which showed the totality of Beijing's territorial claims.



(Source: Hunan Map Press/Xinhua)

On that occasion, giving elaborations about the map, the People's Daily had stated that "citizens can fully, directly know the full map of China", while the editor of the map press that published it had said, "Readers won't ever think again that China's territory has primary and secondary claims".<sup>21</sup>In the above quoted Washington Post piece, Ishaan Tharoor had brought out that the ibid China map

<sup>20</sup> ibid

<sup>21</sup>Ishaan Tharoor, "Could this map of China start a war?", Washington Post, 27 Jun 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/06/27/could-this-map-of-china-start-a-war/>

included Taiwan, Spratlys and Paracels (the two main archipelagos of the South China Sea), a 10-dash line (as opposed to China's earlier nine-dash line) which encircled most of the South China Sea and Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh which China claims as part of "Southern Tibet."<sup>22</sup> While Arunachal Pradesh would be examined later in the piece, at this juncture let us examine the disputes of the Diaoyu islands and the territories in the South China Sea slightly more.

Since 2010, Chinese claims to the territories in South China Sea have seen periods of vociferous claims of sovereignty followed by periods of silence. However it is also seen that, since 1948, at different points of time, China, by issuing South China Sea maps containing 11 dash, 9 dash and 10 dash lines has also not given up its claims on the sovereignty of territories in the South China Sea. This fact is also kept alive by high ranking Chinese officials claiming at various points of time that, the territories in the South China Sea have been an integral part of China. The same is evident from President Xi Jinping's speech in Singapore in November 2015 in which he said "...islands in the South China Sea have been China's territory since ancient times". A similar analogy applies to the Diaoyu islands. Following a period of silence, these islands have again been referred to as a part of Chinese territory by the Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei who in a regular press briefing on 12 January 2016 said "The Diaoyu Island and its adjacent islets have been an inherent part of Chinese territory since ancient times. China's determination to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity is unswerving."<sup>23</sup>

In view of all that has been discussed above, it strongly appears that Chinese core interests have increased and are not limited to the three core interests (namely

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Huaxia, "China determined to safeguard sovereignty over Diaoyu Islands", Xinhua net, 12 Jan 2016, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-01/12/c\\_135002515.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-01/12/c_135002515.htm)

Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang) only which have been generally referred to till date. If that be the case, what then can be said to be the Chinese Core Interests?

## Chinese Core Interests

On the basis of an examination of existing literature on the subject, Chinese official statements and writings, and enunciated Chinese Core Interests (China's Peaceful Development policy and National Security Law) the author of this piece has attempted to infer the likely Chinese core interests. The same are listed in the following paragraph along with a brief explanation of the reasons for selection of each of these as core interests.

Chinese Core Interests could be said to include:- (1) **Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of China** - which refers to **present territory of China to include the core interests of Tibet and Xinjiang**. The same is inferred on account of the enunciated Chinese core interest of “territorial integrity”, as also, the fact that as far as Tibet and Xinjiang are concerned it is now an undisputable fact that they are considered by most to be an integral part of China and China would do whatever it takes for them to remain so. (2) **Taiwan** - the *ibid* core interest can be inferred from the enunciated Chinese core interests of “reunification” and “territorial integrity”. In addition, Chinese officials have repeatedly referred to Taiwan as being a part of the Chinese Mainland as well as spoken of the unfinished agenda of its reunification with the Mainland. It is also a well-known fact that China has threatened to invade Taiwan if Taiwan declares Independence. (3) **Maintaining the Primacy of the CPC** - The *ibid* core interest can be inferred from the enunciated Chinese core interest of upholding “China's political system established by the Constitution”. (4) **Diaoyu Island and Territories of the South China Sea** - The inclusion of these disputed territories as core interests has been hotly debated for some while now. However it is felt that both these disputed territories are

Chinese core interests on account of the fact that China has repeatedly and vociferously claimed these disputed territories to be an inherent and integral part of Chinese territory right through ancient times. Further, due to China seeing these disputed territories as a part of its own territory, on account of the fact that it has enunciated “territorial integrity” as a core interest, it is therefore implied by China that, these disputed territories are also its core interest. Besides this, the enunciated Chinese core interest of “National Security” has an extremely large scope and could be used at an appropriate time to further justify the inclusion of these two as a core interest. For example, it could be justified that, the loss of these disputed territories (i.e. Diaoyu and territories of South China Sea) is detrimental to “Chinese National Security interests” and hence on this count too, they could be considered to be a Chinese Core Interest. (5) **Maintenance of Economic Growth** - This is inferred to be a core interest on account of the fact that to secure the enunciated Chinese core interests of “overall social stability” and “sustainable economic and social development” it would be imperative to “maintain economic growth”. Also, lack of economic growth could lead to social instability which in turn would threaten the other core interest of the “primacy of the Party”. Hence it is seen that maintenance of economic growth is crucial for upholding of three of the enunciated core interests. Further, after seeing the benefits of maintaining an astounding economic growth for three decades, the Chinese have understood the inescapable need for the same. Another indicator that the ibid interest is a core interest comes from the fact that, to uphold it, the Chinese state is controlling the economy as well as launching strategic initiatives like One Belt One Road (OBOR) in support of the same. It is therefore inferred that “maintenance of economic growth” is a core interest and it has to be upheld at any cost.



The above list of Chinese Core Interests is the author's inference and can by no means said to be decisive or conclusive.

## Chinese Core Interests and India

Having seen the likely Chinese Core Interests, we are faced with another obvious question, "Is there a conflict between Chinese core interests and Indian interests?"

The obvious first point to deliberate upon would be Arunachal Pradesh as it is inextricably linked with the Chinese core interest of Tibet. As concerns Arunachal Pradesh, China's blow hot and cold policy towards it is nothing new. While there have been periods of silence on this contentious issue, these have been harshly broken by China calling Arunachal Pradesh as "Southern Tibet" and also undertaking other related objectionable incidents all of which, have concerned India no end. A prime example of such related objectionable incidents has already been brought out earlier in this piece wherein, it was pointed out that, a Chinese map in 2014 had shown Arunachal Pradesh to be a part of China. Whatever had been the justification of the same, it cannot be denied that by the printing of the *ibid* Map, China had staked a claim to Arunachal Pradesh on the premise that it was a part of Tibet and thus a part of China. Other examples of related objectionable Chinese actions are its representation against Prime Minister Modi's visit to Arunachal in February 2015<sup>24</sup>, blocking aid meant for Arunachal Pradesh development projects<sup>25</sup> and issuing stapled visa to two Indian athletes from Arunachal Pradesh<sup>26</sup>. What is also not a coincidence is that, on some occasions, Beijing has referred to the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as a "Disputed Zone".

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<sup>24</sup> Tang Danlu, Xinhua net, "China lodges strong representation on Modi's visit to disputed border zone", 20 Feb 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-02/20/c\\_134008862.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-02/20/c_134008862.htm)

<sup>25</sup> David Blair, The Telegraph, "China blocks £2 billion in aid to India", 19 May 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/5350573/China-blocks-2-billion-in-aid-to-India.html>

<sup>26</sup> South Asian News Agency, "China issues stapled visa to two Arunachal Pradesh athletes", 2013, <http://www.sananews.net/english/china-issues-stapled-visa-to-two-arunachal-pradesh-athletes/>

This Chinese position on Arunachal Pradesh largely stems from the fact that, the India-China border as of date remains unsettled and hence is open to interpretation. If this be the case, then should Arunachal Pradesh also be included in the list of Chinese Core Interests?

While Chinese actions related to Arunachal Pradesh are disturbing, the present assertions by Chinese authorities on Arunachal Pradesh are not so vociferous and forceful as they are in the case of the Diaoyu island/Territories of South China Sea. Terms like “Non Negotiable”, “No room for maneuver” or “No room for compromise” have not generally been used in the Arunachal Pradesh context. Thus, as of now, it would be fair to infer that, Arunachal Pradesh may not be inferred to be a Chinese core interest. This notwithstanding, the Chinese sensibilities on Tibet are well known. In addition, what stops the Chinese from changing their posture on Arunachal Pradesh in the future and construing it as a core interest? Therefore, until the India China border is permanently settled, Chinese posture on Arunachal Pradesh needs regular and careful monitoring.

Another Chinese core interest likely to affect India is the “territories in the South China Sea”. Though India has steered itself clear of the South China Sea dispute as it believes that the affected parties should resolve the dispute amongst themselves, it strongly believes in upholding freedom of navigation and over flight in the South China Sea. This it feels is extremely essential and vital to its interests. However, in light of the recent deployment of Chinese fourth-generation HQ-9 surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) on Woody Island in the Paracels, as also, the fact that this spring, an international tribunal in The Hague will rule for the first time on the validity of China’s territorial claims in the South China Sea, future Chinese actions in the South China Sea are hard to predict for most. As a consequence, in the eventuality of any restrictions being imposed to freedom of navigation and over flight in the

South China Sea, Indian trade and other interests in the South China Sea would stand to be greatly affected. Hence designation of “territories in the South China Sea” as a Chinese core interest does affect Indian interests and India should be rightly concerned on account of the same.

For upholding the Chinese core interest of “maintenance of economic growth” energy security has to be ensured. Despite China launching a number of projects in order to reduce its energy dependency on the Malacca Straits, the same is unlikely to happen in the near future. In view of the same, to uphold this core interest, the Indian Ocean Region will remain an area of strategic interest to China and it would aim to secure the same by the addition of new pearls (such as Djibouti) to its already heavily laden string of pearls. The obvious implications of the same on India need no further reinforcing.

However besides the above implications, the most important area of concern for not only India but the whole world goes beyond a simple analysis of Chinese core interests. For the past few years, the Chinese have been constantly talking about a new kind of “Major Power relationship” and striving for recognition as a global power next only to the US. In view of such Chinese aspirations, the Chinese action of enhancement of the scope of core interests, inherent to which is the consequential increase in the number of Chinese core interests, should in itself, be seen as a case of “testing of the waters”. As the world accommodates a greater number of Chinese core interests, it is no secret that the Chinese strategic space and influence keeps increasing. The question therefore facing us is: by how much more would the Chinese enhance the scope of their core interests, and thus consequently, how many more Chinese core interests would the world accommodate? The answers to these questions are difficult to predict. As of now though, there is an inescapable necessity of questioning the wide scope of the

enunciated Chinese core interests, as well as of constantly reading, interpreting and inferring future enunciations of Chinese core interests, so as to be able to join the dots and draw a picture of future Chinese strategic outlook and behavior.

## **Conclusion**

"We judge ourselves by our intentions. And others by their actions." This unfortunately is the bitter truth. At times leave aside intentions, even actions are misleading. While, some of the Chinese core interests inferred/interpreted by the author in this piece could be argued against, what can't be argued against is that, over the last few years there has been a continuous enhancement of the scope of Chinese core interests. The question which therefore confronts us is "What is the reason for the Chinese to continuously enhance the scope of their core interests?" The answer to this question would give us an indication of the real Chinese strategic intent for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, which I am afraid as of now, is unknown to most!

## **About the VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION**

The Vivekananda International Foundation is an independent non- partisan institution that conducts research and analysis on domestic and international issues, and offers a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. Some of India's leading practitioners from the fields of security, military, diplomacy, government, academia and media fields have come together to generate ideas and stimulate action on national security issues.

The defining feature of VIF lies in its provision of core institutional support which enables the organization to be flexible in its approach and proactive in changing circumstances, with a long-term focus on India's strategic, developmental and civilisational interests. The VIF aims to channelize fresh insights and decades of experience harnessed from its faculty into fostering actionable ideas for the nation's stakeholders.

Since its establishment, VIF has successfully embarked on quality research and scholarship in an effort to highlight issues in governance and strengthen national security. This is being actualized through numerous activities like seminars, round tables, interactive-dialogues, Vimarsh (public discourse), conferences and briefings. The publications of the VIF form the lasting deliverables of the organisation's aspiration to impact on the prevailing discourse on issues concerning India's national interest.



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