

Climate Crisis in Tibet – Part IV

China's Militarization of Tibet: Strategic Ambitions and Ecological Fallout

Webinar Report

July 23, 2025



Institute for Security & Development Policy

Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs (SCSA-IPA)

ABOUT ISDP

The Institute for Security and Development Policy is a Stockholm-based independent and non-profit research and policy institute. The Institute is dedicated to expanding understanding of international affairs, particularly the interrelationship between the issue areas of conflict, security and development. The Institute's primary areas of geographic focus are Asia and Europe's neighborhood.

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LIST OF SPEAKERS



Dr. Shinji Yamaguchi is a Senior Research Fellow in the Regional Studies Department of the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), Ministry of Defense, Japan, located in Tokyo, and was a Visiting Scholar at the Sigur Center for Asian Studies of George Washington University. He specializes in Chinese politics, China's security policy, and contemporary Chinese history. He earned his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from Keio University. His publications include "Strategies of China's Maritime Actors in the South China Sea: A Coordinated Plan under the Leadership of Xi Jinping?" *China Perspective*, 2016 No.3, (October 2016), pp.23-31; *Mou Takuto no Kyokoku ka Senryaku* (Mao's Grand Strategy to Build Strong Country) (Keio University Press, 2021, winner of the 34th Mainichi Shimbun Asia Pacific Grand Prix Award). He is a co-author of the *NIDS China Security Report 2012, 2013, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2023*.



Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli is a Professor in Chinese Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. He was the former Dean of the School of International Studies, JNU from 2022-24. He was the Chairman of the Centre for East Asian Studies, SIS, JNU from 2008-10, 2012-14, 2016-18, 2018-20, and in 2022. He has been a Chair Professor under the Chair of Excellence of the Ministry of Defence since August 2022. He is educated in Chinese studies in India and China with a Ph.D. in Chinese Studies. He learnt the Chinese language at Beijing Language & Culture University and was a post-Doctoral Visiting Fellow at People's University, Beijing from 1996-98. He was a Visiting Professor at National Chengchi University, Taipei in 2004, a Visiting Fellow at China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, Beijing in May 2007, an Honorary Professor at Shandong University, Jinan in 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2019; at Jilin University, Changchun in 2014 and at Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, Kunming in 2016 and 2017, a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at People's University since 2014 and a Fellow at Salzburg Global Seminar in 2010.



Zuzana Koskova is a well-known sinologist with research interests in foreign Chinese influence, human rights violations, Chinese media, and propaganda. Since 2023, she has been leading an analytical program on China at Prague Prague-based think-tank, European Values Center for Security Policy. During the Czech presidency of the Council of the EU (2022), she served at the Czech MFA, where she also completed the Diplomatic Academy program.

Previously, she worked at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, in the management of science and innovation. She graduated from the MA program Modern China Studies at Freiburg University (Germany), the bachelor program Sinology and Humanities at Charles University in Prague.

Moderator



Dr. Jagannath Panda is the Head of the Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs (SCSA-IPA) at the Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP), Sweden. Dr. Panda is also a Professor at the Department of Regional and Global Studies at the University of Warsaw; and a Senior Fellow at The Hague Center for Strategic Studies in the Netherlands. As a senior expert on China, East Asia, and Indo-Pacific affairs, Prof.

Panda has testified to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission at the US Congress on 'China and South Asia'. He is the Series Editor for Routledge Studies on Think Asia.

DISCUSSION

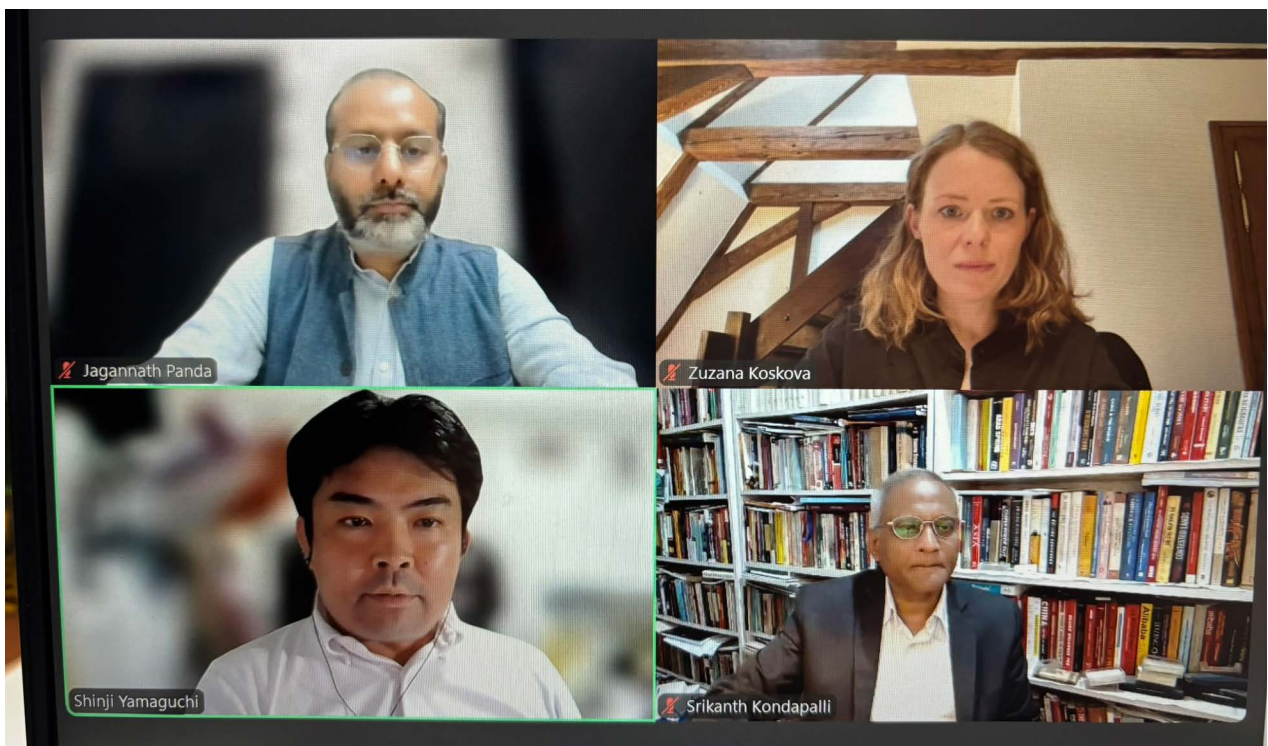
The webinar titled “China’s Militarization of Tibet: Strategic Ambitions and Ecological Fallout” is the fourth in a webinar series on the Climate Crisis in Tibet, organized by the SCSA-IPA at the Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP). It was held on July 23, 2025.

It focused on how China is actively pursuing a revisionist agenda to secure dominance in the Himalayas. Extensive infrastructure projects in the region, including roads, dams, and military installations, serve the “dual purpose” of military enhancement and creating economic dependencies. Also known to the world as the “Third Pole”, Tibet seems to be facing the brunt of militarization

at China’s hands with profound environmental consequences.

Beijing’s strategic emphasis on the Himalayan region demands a strong and resilient infrastructure capable of supporting sustained military operations in extremely challenging terrain.

In recent years, troop mobilization and upgradation of military infrastructure have been carried out in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). The Western Theatre Command has been quite active in enhancing its military facilities and operational strategies. Additionally, the Chinese government seems eager to push different types of infrastructural projects in Tibet, including the biggest hydro dam



and even the fastest railway line in Tibet.

All of these come at a grave cost, as Tibet is home to some of the rarest natural reserves. Environmental concerns are routinely sidelined, causing growing unrest among local communities.

A number of airports have been operationalized in recent years, many with dual-use potential that allows for both civilian and military functions. In 2022, it was reported that China is constructing three additional airbases in Xinjiang. This expansion of airbases allows the PLA Air Force to enhance its power projection capabilities across the region. This infrastructure supports not only the movement of troops and supplies but also the deployment of advanced aircraft, thereby ensuring that China can maintain air superiority in the region vis-à-vis India. Additionally, the presence of dual-use airports underscores the PLA's ability to integrate civilian infrastructure into its military strategy, thereby extending its operational reach and flexibility.

The rapid expansion of Chinese military power in TAR comes as no surprise given Beijing's – and Xi Jinping's – ambition to be the ultimate superpower. And there seems to be no end in sight. Under its 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), China has allocated about US\$30 billion on infrastructure projects in Tibet, including new expressways, upgrading existing highways and improving rural roads. Then in January 2025, according to reports, another US\$11.3 billion has been

allocated for infrastructure development in Tibet.

Dr. Jagannath Panda, Head of the South Asia and Indo-Pacific Center at ISDP, opened this fourth webinar on the climate crisis in Tibet by stating that a lot of civilian and military infrastructure has simultaneously been promoted in Tibet for a long time by the Chinese government and by the Chinese Communist Party. He said the focus of this webinar was on how the military modernization process is affecting climate conditions in Tibet. He requested the panel of experts to give their comments in the context of the following research questions.

- What is the extent and scope of the massive military modernization in the Tibetan Plateau? What is the ultimate cost of the upsurge in military infrastructure?
- To what extent are financial resources being allocated in Tibet to support military modernization efforts? What are the current and projected strategies of the CCP for consolidating control over Tibet through the PLA? What long-term environmental effects will it have on Tibet?
- How does the dual-use nature of China's infrastructure in Tibet (e.g., airports, railways, dams) blur the line between civilian development and military expansion? In what ways is China's infrastructure development in Tibet impacting the region's

fragile ecological systems, and what are the long-term environmental consequences?

- Can international diplomatic or environmental frameworks play a meaningful role in curbing the ecological and humanitarian fallout from China's strategic activities in Tibet?
- More specifically, how can the EU, India, and Japan, or the Indo-Pacific partners, contribute to checking Chinese military infrastructure activities and taking action against their negative environmental impact on the region? How does the Trump administration view the developments in Tibet?

Dr. Panda noted that China's large-scale infrastructure build-up via unbridled expansion of military bases, roads, helipads, hydro-power projects, and dual-use village settlements in the wider Himalayan region is not only endangering the fragile ecological landscape but also creating conditions for future geopolitical instability.

The Chinese government appears indifferent to the worsening environmental degradation, the resultant climate change, and the irreversible loss of natural reserves in its blind pursuit of militarization in Tibet. The local people of Tibet are definitely not happy with the whole scenario. Even His Holiness the Dalai Lama has often expressed concern over the environmental risk posed by the



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unrestrained infrastructure development. While the Chinese leadership likes to state that its projects aim to modernize and develop Tibet, the reality on the ground is somewhat different. These projects have done little to reduce poverty at present.

Dr. Panda invited the participants to focus on the reasons behind China's rampant militarization of Tibet, the ecological and social fallout, and the wider ramifications for the region.

Dr. Shinji Yamaguchi, Senior Research Fellow in the Regional Studies Department of the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), Ministry of Defense, Japan, started with an overview of the massive modernization of the Chinese armed forces following reforms in 2015. He pointed out that the PLA Ground Force has evolved from a territorial defense force into a more mobile and agile force. To do this, the organizational structure has changed making combined arms brigades the core operational unit.

Another critical aspect of China's security policy is their employment of gray zone tactics. China has focused on creating advantageous situations, especially in maritime Asia by employing not military forces but also a combination of paramilitary and non-military means. In the South China Sea, Dr Yamaguchi said we can see that China has systematically engaged in land reclamation and construction of islands, and the establishment of the new administrative units. They have built infrastructure and also stationed military garrisons on these islands. As a result, China has not only enhanced its power projection capabilities but also strengthened their physical presence.

What is happening on the Himalayan frontier is really a parallel of this, and especially in the Western Theater Command which oversees the Himalayan frontier. The PLA has significantly improved its force deployment capabilities especially



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of ZTQ 15 light tanks and helicopters thereby enhancing their power projection capabilities. They have also undertaken extensive infrastructure development since 2020 like new roads, bridges, tunnels, airports, helicopters, etc. All of them are either military specific or dual

purpose. A key element of this strategy is the construction of 628 Xiaokang or model villages in border areas. Termed as “civil-military co-construction”, this parallels island settlement strategies.

For example, in the disputed mountainous zone between Bhutan and China, China has established the Pangda village. In 2018, there was nothing there but now there are roads and new residents. Similar developments are seen in the eastern sector in the border area between India and China. The western sector is less populated but there also we see numerous Chinese military posts and new roads and bridges.

As for Japan’s role, it is not a direct participant or player in this region but Japan-India cooperation on, for example, infrastructure development is very important. Already there are some projects on constructing roads or bridges that are important to keep the power balance in this region.

Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli, Professor in Chinese Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, India, informed that in the Tibet area, there are 6.3 million Tibetans but 7.5 million Han Chinese. So Han Chinese dominate and this is important to note because much of the infrastructure projects and tourism investments are catering to the Han Chinese rather than to the Tibetans. Tibet is the poorest region in China. The per capita income is about \$1,300 or even less.

The total investments that China has made is about \$250 billion till about 2020. After that the 14th five-year plan calls for another \$94 billion. 95% of the entire Tibet budget is borne by the central government, indicating their keen interest and focus. The PLA in Tibet is estimated to be around 120,000 to 200,000 troops after the demobilization process. The first was in 1987 when a million troops were reduced. I want to emphasize on this because most of those demobilized troops went into state-owned enterprises and also to PAPF, that is, the People’s Armed Police Force. Much of the construction and mining work is done by SOEs. The PAF is said to number about 50,000. The militia is now being organized into five teams—snow eagle air patrol, snow dove polar communication team, snow wolf extreme climbing team, snow fox alpine express team, and snow mastiff plateau resistance team. They are going to be a big force in the near future.

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the construction work and infrastructure projects and there is no direct role. When I read the western press, I come across the climate change related problems extensively. I also see this dichotomy in scientific works from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and others who have published surveys. We do not know the veracity of these. We do not know because there is no transparency in China. But what is important is that the PLA is behind this and also contributes to a lot of construction activity in Tibet. The PLA was involved, for example, in creation of small dams after the Galwan incident in 2020.

Then, recently, Premier Li Qiang went to the construction site of the super dam on the Yarlong Tsangpo. There is a PLA role in that too.

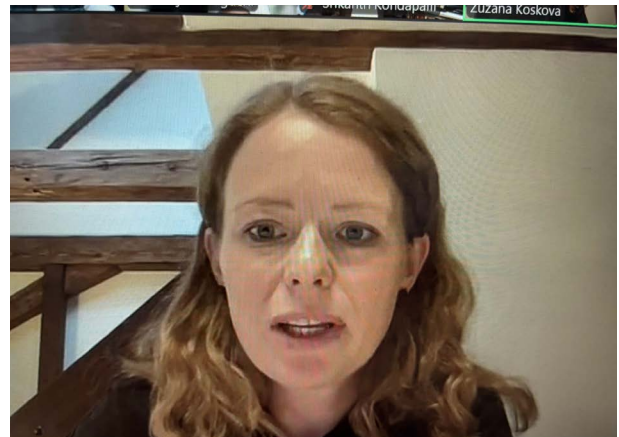
The negative lies in the destruction of the environment itself, whether it is glacier related or mining or others. China introduced nuclear weapons into Tibet in 1971. There are vast underground facilities, 17 radar stations, eight launch sites at Da Zaidam, Xiaozaidam and Delingha. They have deployed DF-21 medium-range missile systems and today they are modernizing the Yumi base in Xinjiang and also another for ICBM silos. All this requires construction activity. There is a British report about the use of nuclear detonation for changing the course of rivers in Tibet. This also created a lot of environmental related issues.

There is also the issue related to deforestation, and 50% of alpine grasslands have been degraded according to one estimate by the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The Tibetan Plateau's desert area has grown by 15% since the 1970s according to this report. So the Chinese themselves are mentioning this. But policy wise they're saying that the government's development plan includes environmental protection aspects. So there is actually a problem in both these assessments. One which looks mainly at the climate change but the other which says PLA, PAPF are actually protecting the environment of Tibet. The truth is somewhere in between. We need to do further research on this.

Zuzana Koskova, a well-known sinologist with European Values Center for Security Policy in Prague, started by referring to the launch of the Medok mega dam on the Yarlung Tsampo river. Chinese Premier Liang visited the site and announced officially in the media that the construction has begun. This dam should be the biggest dam in the world providing 300 billion kilowatt hours of electricity each year which equals the amount consumed by the United Kingdom last year for example. It should be also bigger than the Three Gorges Dam in China.

The Tibetan Plateau is one of the most important ecological regions in the world. It is the largest glacial region in the world after the Arctic. All major Asian rivers originate in Tibet and that is why Tibet is also known as Asia's water tower. The melting glaciers is clearly a big issue and the loss of snow is causing changes in the river regimes and it affects water supplies for more than the billion people who live downstream. According to the World Meteorological Organization, Tibet is warming two to three times faster than the global average. Not only are the glaciers melting but as already mentioned permafrost is degrading and the vegetation zones are shifting.

I would like to talk a little bit about why Tibet is important for China or basically for CCP. For China, Tibet is strategic from a geopolitical point of view because its borders India, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar. So it is important for



The concept of civil-military integration is repeated often in the Chinese media, highlighting that the infrastructure serves for both economic and social development and also for defense needs. Facilities such as border villages and roads and communications networks are reported as improving the quality of life for locals and the PLA's operational capacity.

– Zuzana Koskova

Chinese national security and for China's military deployment. Second, it's very important for economic development and resource potential. This has already been referred to so I won't spend too much time describing the rich natural resources. Just to highlight, Tibet is believed to have the world's largest lithium reserves. According to recent discoveries in Tibet, there are significant deposits of rare earth

minerals, which are used for advanced technology and military applications. So that illustrates the economic and strategic importance of Tibet for China.

In preparation for this event, I looked at how the Chinese official media describes Tibet; what are the recent narratives particularly focusing on infrastructure. So I looked at how Renmin Ribao (人民日报), the Chinese official newspaper, (also known as People's Daily) refers to Tibet on its pages. It describes Tibet as an integral part of China highlighting national unity and harmony. The region is described as "southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region". The main topics are social economic development, ethnic and religious harmony; some articles highlight historical narratives and legitimacy of CCP ruling the backward Tibet. Another topic which is increasingly present is environmental initiatives such as green projects, sustainable tourism and waste free cities.

When I looked more into infrastructure projects and mentions of military as this is related to our topic today, the key themes were dual use infrastructure and regional prosperity. There were many articles reporting the building of airports, railways, expressways and how they improve the civilian life. The articles also promote tourism and logistics as well as emergency response because Tibet has experienced many natural disasters. Renmin Ribao often refers to the infrastructure as essential for national defense and border

stability but without emphasizing on the military buildup. They talk about building these projects, these villages, but the military is always somewhere hidden between the lines. The concept of civil-military integration (军民融合 *jun-min ronghe*) is repeated often in the media, highlighting that the infrastructure serves for both economic and social development and also for defense needs.

So facilities such as border villages and roads and communications networks are reported as improving the quality of life for locals and operational capacity of the PLA. And all these articles are in a very positive and nationalistic tone. These infrastructure projects, they say, are proving China's technology abilities and the capacity of the CCP to modernize these remote regions.



Q&A

An engaging Q&A session followed the main presentations.

The first question was on how effective are regional frameworks like ICIMOD, IPCC and UNFCCC? **Dr. Panda** noted that all three are climate related multilateral institutions or multilateral frameworks working at integrating Tibetan voices and concerns without being constrained by Chinese political influence. As such, can Indo-Pacific partners such as EU, India, Japan, and the U.S. form diplomatic or environmental coalitions to check the ecological and strategic fallout of China's militarization and debate, if they have not done so already?

He posed the question to all the participants, starting with Dr. Yamaguchi. From Japan's point of view, do you think these institutions are really not influenced

by China because during the pandemic we saw China influencing the World Health Organization, so do you think such multilateral forums are not really influenced? How should we collaborate among the Indo-Pacific partners?

In his reply, **Dr. Yamaguchi** said that China basically sees such regional or multilateral forums as fields of struggle to win over, in terms of superiority, narratives or interpretations. China would try to say that it is part of the West's or India's plot to discredit China's legitimate approaches or something like that. It is kind of difficult to directly approach China through such multilateral forums.

It is also very important to keep a close look and have transparency about what China is doing in the Tibetan region. China's narrative building, on say

infrastructure construction, is sometimes effective in hiding the strategic meaning of the effort and making us believe it is just for economic development and beneficial to the local people. So transparency is very important and for maintaining that transparency, Japan, India, EU or other countries can cooperate more.

Dr. Panda highlighted a follow up question—Are any of these issues concerning Tibet ever discussed within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation or SCO? How neutral are ICIMOD, IPCC, UNFCCC or are they really influenced by the Chinese and do you think that these organizations have ever discussed the issues we are speaking about here?

The simple answer, according to **Prof. Kondapalli** is that such issues were never discussed in the SCO because with the exception of a few states, all members are authoritarian states. They have no concern about civil society or human rights issues or NGOs. So they cannot address the civil society concerns of the Tibetans. But the larger issue is about ICIMOD, IPCC, and UNFCCC. The ICIMOD is focused on the Hindu Kush Mountains so there is hardly any dividend voice there. The IPCC and UNFCCC could have raised the issue and Tibetans actually took some space in these forums to raise the issues of climate change, especially glacial meltdown. Nevertheless it was not very effective. The problem was that they raised the issue by demonstrating outside the meetings. I know many Tibetans have gone to these

climate forums but what I heard was they were demonstrating outside and people were deciding everything inside the room. So there was not much traction for their demands.

The question on can the Indo-Pacific partners take it up. The Indo-Pacific partners are constrained by the fact that so far they have discussed only 3-4 subjects, which do not include continental issues. Of course, they are now discussing climate change, but nobody is touching the Himalayas. To give an analogy, they are like the old Chinese women with bound feet. Many of these countries have tied their own feet; they fear one country and do not raise any issues that may be frowned upon.

Dr. Panda pointed out that within the Quad, there is a climate change group where they are discussing different aspects of climate issues, including marine ecology and environmental issues in the Indian Ocean but they are overlooking climate issues in Tibet and in the Himalayan regions. We need to really raise it at the Indo-Pacific level, and at the wider international level. Boundary disputes are different as those are national security issues particularly disputes between the involved, claimant countries in the South China Sea or the China-India boundary dispute which has to be resolved bilaterally by China and India. But there are greater issues in the Himalayan region, in the Tibetan regions, including climate issues, which need greater attention at the Indo-

Pacific level.

Koskova responded by saying she was very pessimistic about any of these international organizations and how effective they could be in pushing for any changes by the Chinese government. There are many Tibetan voices already trying to do this job for so many years and the situation in Tibet is still worsening. I'm not talking only about the environment but also on human rights. What might be the gamechanger, I think, is the Chinese militarization of the region which attracts the attention of other players such as the United States or India, who are for pragmatic and security reasons looking more into this issue.

Regarding transparency, China does not allow any foreign researchers to go to Tibet. Therefore, we are dependent on tools like satellite images or media or reports but it's almost very difficult for any independent researcher to get accurate data.

Another participant asked Prof. Kondapalli in particular about the recently inaugurated Yarlong Tsangpo dam. Despite India's expressed concern, its position seems more restrained and amid improving India-China relations. Nevertheless, China remains firm insisting this is a matter within China's sovereign territory. The question is to what extent has the dam issue sparked debate within the Indian elite or political circles? How seriously does the Indian government actually regard this dam as an issue?

Could this dam project become a new plus point in bilateral relations that might hinder progress towards a permanent broader agreement as discussed by the Indian defense minister with his Chinese counterpart in late June?

Prof. Kondapalli pointed out that China may insist that this is a matter within China's sovereign territory. But water issues are not sovereign. Lower riparian states have some rights. Upper riparian states have some responsibilities. One cannot simply say I'm occupying this territory so the water flowing in this territory is mine. You cannot control or contain the water flow. Of course, many countries did so but lower riparian states also have some rights. Apart from the Harmon Doctrine, we also have the Madrid resolution, the Salsburg resolution, the Helsinki rules. Then in 1966, there were bilateral agreements monitored by several mechanisms. For example, there is the World Water Council which had actually resolved problems with many Middle Eastern countries on the water issues on Nile and other rivers. So it was quite useful in terms of the CBMs between those countries. China itself says that it abides by UN laws and international law. So what is the problem in abiding by this law? Why is it selective?

Second, what do the Indian elites think about it. So China has begun this dam on the Yarlong Tsangpo which is known as Brahmaputra when it enters into India at Namcha Barwa. The water that flows

at this juncture is about 62 billion cubic meters. When Brahmaputra goes into Bangladesh from Mizoram state, it swells into 220 billion cubic meters of water. So basically within India there is about 150 billion cubic meters of water. So Dr. Manmohan Singh, the previous prime minister mentioned in parliament that we may not be really affected by China's river diversion efforts or even the current dam construction announced by Premier Li Qiang.

But I think the dam construction would be problematic from the point of view of triggering earthquakes. So it is not about water per se but about the disasters that may trigger because of these tectonic plates being disturbed. This is a major concern and China itself witnessed the earthquake of a magnitude of 8.2 on the Richter scale only a few months ago in Shigatse Prefecture. So I do not know why China is going ahead with this. It is very attractive in terms of clean energy and so on but it is coming at a cost for the lower riparian states.

Dr. Panda said this issue also has been mentioned and highlighted in the European media. How is Europe looking at China's announcement about this mega dam project? Where do you think that the EU could collaborate with Himalayan countries, particularly India. Do you think we could raise these issues in the EU parliament through some channels or has it already been discussed?

Koskova said the building of the dam

has been broadly covered in European media for several reasons. First, because it's a big infrastructure green energy project, which always attracts the attention of European media. Second, because it's perceived also as a threat for all the reasons mentioned. The whole area will be basically flooded; people will have to relocate; and it will have a big effect on the environment, etc. The main reason is security because China will be basically able to control the water that flows to other countries.

Shifting to Dr. Yamaguchi, **Dr. Panda** said Japan has been very busy, for the last couple of weeks, dealing with the upper house election. But I did see that the Japanese media also covering this issue. So how do you really see the latest dam construction announcement by China? How closely is the Japanese government, the elite and strategic communities monitoring these issues? What are Japan's concerns given the fact that Japan is the largest investor in India, particularly in northeastern part of India? India has allowed Japan to invest across all the eight northeastern states across all sectors, be it irrigation, agriculture, forests, infrastructure development, road development or railway construction.

What do the mainstream strategic communities in Japan think about the new dam construction activities of China and how is it really linked with the securitization process? What role could the PLA have played?

Dr. Yamaguchi informed that it has been reported in Japanese media but not extensively. The Japanese media also focus on the regional reactions especially India's or Bangladesh concerns. From Japan's point of view, the issue itself is a little bit remote. Japan is watching carefully but we are still not well aware about the impact of huge scale dam construction in the region.

Dr. Panda invited last comments from the panelists on the technological aspects of the militarization process in Tibet. Not only is there the militarization effort but they are also trying to have a lot of technical and military technological equipment in Tibet to monitor activities across the border, and manage resources be it mining or water.

Dr. Kondapalli said that given China's launch of PTO series of satellites,¹ 5G and now 6G preparations in telecom, as also drones launched extensively for various purposes, they are really monitoring the region as a whole. I think this is a very stark situation but I want to highlight one aspect which is how it is going to influence the coming generations. This is regarding to the CRISPR-Cas technology. It allows scientists to precisely target and modify DNA sequences within living organisms. Some chromosomes have evolved over thousands of years and the Tibetans

¹ China recently launched the first 12 satellites of its "Three-Body Computing Constellation," also known as the PTO (Peta-scale Three-Body Orbit) project, with the goal of creating a space-based supercomputer network. This network is designed to process data in orbit using AI-powered systems and high-speed inter-satellite communication, potentially revolutionizing in-orbit data processing.

have oxygen content retention in their red blood cells. China wants to develop the same genetic capability in the Han Chinese, especially soldiers. Such genetic modification over a long period of time has dangerous potential.

Koskova said there was no discussion on the building of mobile towers and internet, that is the expansion of the digital infrastructure, in Tibet. When I was in Tibet last time, I remember it was July and it was the Dalai Lama's birthday. The whole month the internet was shut in Tibet because they were afraid of Tibetans exchanging messages and gatherings. So technology is also used in Tibet to control people. The COVID-19 pandemic and previous developments in Tibet also brought in a lot of CCTV cameras. Coming back to the militarization topic, the official documents of the CCP and Xi Jinping himself really stress in their official language on the technological aspect of development. So there's big investment in modernization of PLA, and research and development and we can see it all across the military in China.

Dr. Yamaguchi agreed that information security is very important for China. He raised the issue of unmanned aerial vehicles or UAVs. The PLA uses many UAVs for logistical support, information gathering or reconnaissance. So they already employed such capabilities but we can easily expect more and especially advanced UAVs.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Chinese government seems eager to push different types of infrastructural projects in Tibet, including the biggest hydro dam and even the fastest railway line in Tibet. All of these come at a grave cost, as Tibet is home to some of the rarest natural reserves. Environmental concerns are routinely sidelined, causing growing unrest among local communities.
- The Chinese government appears indifferent to the worsening environmental degradation, the resultant climate change, and the irreversible loss of natural reserves in its blind pursuit of militarization in Tibet.
- The PLA Ground Force has evolved from a territorial defense force into a more mobile and agile force. To do this, the organizational structure has changed making combined arms brigades the core operational unit. Another critical aspect of China's security policy is their employment of gray zone tactics.
- In the South China Sea, China has systematically engaged in land reclamation and construction of islands, and the establishment of the new administrative units. They have built infrastructure and also stationed military garrisons on these islands. As a result, China has not only enhanced its power projection capabilities but also strengthened their physical presence. What is happening on the Himalayan frontier is really a parallel of this, and especially in the Western Theater Command which oversees the Himalayan frontier.
- Extensive infrastructure development has been undertaken since 2020 like new roads, bridges, tunnels, airports, helicopters, etc. All of them are either military specific or dual purpose. A key element of this strategy is the construction of 628 Xiaokang or model villages in border areas. Termed as "civil-military co-construction", this parallels island settlement strategies.
- In the Tibet area, there are 6.3 million Tibetans but 7.5 million Han Chinese. So Han Chinese dominate and this is important to note because much of the infrastructure projects and tourism investments are catering to the Han Chinese rather than to the Tibetans. Tibet is the poorest region in China. The per capita income is about \$1,300 or even less.

- China introduced nuclear weapons into Tibet in 1971. There are vast underground facilities, 17 radar stations, eight launch sites at Da Zaidam, Xiaozaidam and Delingha. They have deployed DF-21 medium-range missile systems and today they are modernizing the Yumi base in Xinjiang and also another for ICBM silos. All this requires construction activity.
- The Tibetan Plateau is the largest glacial region in the world after the Arctic. All major Asian rivers originate in Tibet and that is why Tibet is also known as Asia's water tower. According to the World Meteorological Organization, Tibet is warming two to three times faster than the global average. Not only are the glaciers melting but the permafrost is degrading and the vegetation zones are shifting.
- For China, Tibet is strategic from a geopolitical point of view because its borders India, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar. Therefore, it is very important for Chinese national security as well as China's military deployment.
- Tibet is very important for its resource potential and China's economic development. Tibet is believed to have the world's largest lithium reserves. According to recent discoveries in Tibet, there are significant deposits of rare earth minerals, which are used for advanced technology and military applications.
- The Chinese media refers to the infrastructure as essential for national defense and border stability but without emphasizing on the military buildup. The concept of civil-military integration is repeated often in the media, highlighting that the infrastructure serves for both economic and social development and also for defense needs.



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