

China setting itself as enemy No. 1

Written by Chang Kuo-tsai 張國燾

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Throughout history, people have discovered that anyone who uses arms to conquer, expand their territory and try to rule the world is an enemy to the world. They might dominate for a while, but they will not be able to rule the world permanently.

This was as true of Rome and Mongolia in ancient times, as it was of Germany and Japan during World War II.

People with military ambition never seem to learn from history. Today, yet another country is trying to use its military might to conquer, expand its territory and rule the world — China.

Sports know no borders. In the sporting arena, it does not matter if the contestants are black, white or yellow, if they come from a huge country with more than 1 billion citizens or a small nation of a few hundred thousand, a wealthy country or a poor region, a democracy or a communist state: They are all brothers and sisters standing together on the starting line, comparing their skills, power, speed and — more importantly — the spirit of sports.

Today, this tradition of sports for sports' sake is being attacked by China as it sticks its dirty hands in and tries to manipulate it.

Last year, Taipei hosted the Universiade and Chinese athletes did not attend the team competition. On Tuesday last week, China manipulated the East Asian Olympic Committee at an extraordinary meeting in Beijing to revoke Taichung's right to host the first East Asian Youth Games.

By bringing politics into the world of sports, China is becoming the enemy of the sporting world.

If China can politicize even sports, of course it can politicize border disputes. In the South China Sea, Beijing is blatantly building islands by reclaiming land, although at the outset it said the work was not to militarize the region and the features would only be used for peaceful purposes, such as tourism, fishing, meteorology and rescue operations.

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Today, aerial photography of Fiery Cross Reef (Yongshu Reef, 永暑礁) shows runways, radar units, military equipment, hospitals and military deployments.

From the perspective of the Philippines and Vietnam, is this large-scale construction by China the action of a peaceful neighbor or that of a troublemaker?

Beijing claims that its military expansionism is peaceful, yet its actions are clearly in defiance of world opinion. Otherwise, why do US warships have to repeatedly conduct freedom of navigation exercises in the South China Sea to demonstrate that it is international waters? Even distant countries, such as the UK, France and Australia, have said that they intend to dispatch warships for freedom of navigation exercises in the South China Sea when appropriate.

Chinese coast guard vessels have long encroached on the territorial waters surrounding the disputed Diaoyutai Islands (釣台) — called the Senkakus in Japan — and have even flown drones into the territorial airspace of the Japanese-administered islands. Japan's coast guard is kept on constant high alert, scrambling coastal patrol vessels and the army in response to Chinese incursions.

From Beijing's perspective, "previous possession" or "previous temporary possession" of a territory — even if it was ceded to another nation in perpetuity — and even a historical record showing that someone from China has visited a location, are all grounds for a Chinese claim to sovereignty.

According to this logic, the US should still be considered the exclusive sovereign territory of its former colonial master, the UK.

Furthermore, if China's rapacious ideology is allowed to go unchallenged, modern-day Turkey, Afghanistan, India, the two Koreas, Syria, Hungary, Vietnam and other nations, which in former times submitted to the iron hoof of the marauding Mongolian armies could — should China's leaders take it into their heads to do so — be claimed as "sacred and inalienable parts of Chinese sovereign territory."

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Although this might seem fanciful right now, Beijing always makes a show of being utterly earnest in its pronouncements on territorial issues and it is still unclear what China's intentions are. Is its military expansionism an omen of crazed hegemonic ambitions, or is it simply motivated by a desire to sow chaos to destabilize the global order?

More than 100 years ago, China was forced to endure the ignominy of signing multiple unequal treaties, cede territory and be generally trampled on by former powers.

Unfortunately, China's resurgence in the 21st century does not appear to be taking a leaf out of Confucius' teaching: "Do not do to others that which you would not have done to yourself (己所不欲,勿施於人)."

Instead, Beijing seems unflinching in its desire to transform itself from a victim into an aggressor.

Under the cover of its Belt and Road Initiative, China sugar-coated the purchase of an 80 percent share in Sri Lanka's Port of Colombo by China Merchants Port Holdings Co (CMPort), one of its state-owned enterprises. CMPort has also invested US\$1.1 billion to lease Hambantota Port and 60km² of adjoining land for 99 years.

In Africa, China is constructing its first overseas military base in Djibouti and its share of debt in Djibouti is forecast to rise to 91 percent of that nation's GDP.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan, China is jointly financing the construction of Gwadar Port, which involved the relocation of fishing villages. As part of the deal, Chinese corporations enjoy tax breaks, while engineering materials for the port must be purchased from China.

In addition, 91 percent of the port's operating profits are to go to China, with only the remaining 9 percent to go to Pakistan.

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At a time when the plundering of natural resources is viewed as a serious crime, Beijing's unconcealed use of its Belt and Road Initiative to engage in a neo-colonial resource grab is clear for all to see. Is it any wonder that French President Emmanuel Macron has openly issued a warning that the Chinese initiative must not be used to create a new type of global hegemony that creates vassal states out of other countries.

Countries such as the US, Japan, France, the UK and Australia are now fully cognizant of Beijing's ambitions. Nations around the world ought to think more carefully before making decisions that could mean they become fatally ensnared in China's Belt and Road ambush.

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Translated by Perry Svensson and Edward Jones

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