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Security Nexus Perspectives

WHY IS CHINA ON A HYPER-AGGRESSIVE STREAK DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC?

By Dr. Srinivasa Sitaraman *

As the tensions surrounding China's accountability in the cause and origins of the COVID-19 continue to mount, China has instigated a global campaign of aggressive rhetoric termed—[Wolf Warrior Diplomacy](#) and increased its assertiveness in taking advantage of countries distracted by the global pandemic. Beijing has commenced a [violent political crackdown in Hong Kong](#) completely [overturning the One-Country, Two-Systems Model](#) to crush all forms of democracy in Hong Kong. China's adventurism hasn't stopped with squashing public assembly in Hong Kong; it has [demonstrated that it has readied plans for an amphibious assault on Taiwan](#). Additionally, it has turned on the heat in the [South China Sea with aggressive patrols, island reinforcements](#), and started picking up [fights with the neighboring ASEAN states](#). Beijing has been continuously engaging in disruptive and aggressive behavior with regards to territorial disputes with all of its neighbors. It has relied on [grey zone coercion tactics](#) to create uncertainty and destabilize its negotiating partners.

In April, the Chinese Coast Guard [sank a Vietnamese fishing vessel by ramming](#) it. Trade restrictions against Australian agriculture commodities were announced by China to [punish Australia for its call to support an international inquiry](#) into the origins of COVID-19. Similarly, Beijing has issued a direct warning to the United Kingdom saying that it "[will pay the price if it carries out decision to exclude Huawei](#)" as UK begins to disentangle from the Huawei 5G telecommunication network. In December 2019, China threatened Germany that "[there will be consequences](#)" if Huawei was excluded from the 5G market in Germany. More recently, European Union was [compelled to soften and revise its language](#) on a report that identified China as a prime suspect in the COVID-19 disinformation campaign. Earlier this year, Beijing forced the [Czech Republic to withdraw an official visit to Taiwan](#) by the Senate Speaker Jaroslav Kubera by threatening action against Czech companies operating in China. Mr. Kubera died before he could make the

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trip to Taiwan. Later Mr. Kubera's family "[accused the Chinese embassy in Prague](#)" for "provoking his death."

On 5th May 2020, the [Indian border forces and Chinese PLA clashed](#) along the highly contentious Indo-Tibetan border using sticks, iron rods, and they even pelted stones against each other, and causing injuries on both sides. Also some [members of the Indo-Tibetan Border Force \(ITBF\) were briefly detained](#) by the PLA before being released. As the tensions along the border continue to increase, the [ground-level talks are not yielding any results](#). Reports suggest that [10,000 strong Chinese PLA have crossed into the Indian claimed area across the Line of Actual Control \(LAC\)](#) and have [setup camps accompanied by heavy artillery and supply routes](#). Meanwhile, [India has asserted that it will reinforce its troop presence along the LAC](#) and that it [will not back down against Chinese threats](#), and that it has decided to "[dig in](#)" and conduct "[mirror deployment](#)" in areas where it has been challenged by the Chinese PLA. There is no doubt that Beijing is picking fights with rest of the world with its bullying, blunt threats, and assertive military actions.

This brings us back to the question—why is China engaged in such hyper-aggressive behavior during a global pandemic? What purpose does it serve for China to pick up fights with almost every country in the world during the COVID-19 pandemic? Does it have the bandwidth to engage in so many conflicts simultaneously?

Three broad explanations could potentially throw some light on China's hyper-aggressive actions in multiple arenas:

- a) Xi Jinping is trying to demonstrate to the Chinese people and to the world that the pandemic [has not hurt China in anyway](#) and it is pursuing its national objectives on all fronts without any interruption
- b) [Wolf-Warrior](#) China is not going to be cowed into submission and apologize; instead, it is going to go on a rampage, bullying, and coercing rest of the world into submission and finally,
- c) [China is using the cover of COVID-19 crisis to strengthen its global status](#) and position.

It is not entirely clear as to which argument one can attribute all of the explanatory power at this present juncture. But, what is clear is that Beijing is not going to allow the global crisis caused by the Wuhan Coronavirus to prevent it from working towards the "[Chinese Dream](#)." Strong global level collective action and forceful counter diplomacy is required to confront [Beijing's disinformation campaign](#) and [bullying](#) tactics. It should not be allowed to [weaponize interdependence](#) and rely on [digital authoritarianism](#) to pursue its national security and territorial objectives.

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