

Is there a Contemporary Relevance of Deng's Foreign Policy

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Abstract

Deng Xiaoping's contribution to building of contemporary China is phenomenal. He was the "paramount leader" (Vogel, 2011) who through his experience accumulated a great depth of knowledge encompassing wide range of domestic and foreign policy issues. The study explains the changing dynamics of foreign policy under Xi Jinping. While several continues are evident yet there are profound shifts in Chinese foreign policy. They can be seen in terms of new power relations, creation of AIIB, OBOR to a more assertive and resolute foreign policy. Though a complete change is not visible, yet significant changes can be noticed.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, China, Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB), One Belt One Road (OBOR), assertive.

Review of Literature

In the context of China, the foreign policy continuity and leadership continues to play a significant role in understanding the role of political elites in foreign policy decision making. Most literature on China's foreign policy appreciates the dynamics of leadership in foreign policy approach. Age old tradition and history continue to shape Chinese foreign policy that remains embedded within the Chinese leadership. The core for the Chinese leadership has been to rebuild China that was shattered by centuries of struggle and humiliation imposed by western imperial powers. The foreign policy is characterized by the middle kingdom syndrome, century of humiliation, anti-western sentiments, pro-Marxist leanings, lean to one-side strategy, international isolation, peace and development, harmonious world, peaceful rise (Cottey, 2012) and a proactive type of international relations (Boon, 2017).

While China developed an array of policies to shape China's external environment. In most countries foreign policy is an logical extension of its domestic policies and China is no different from this. Since the time of the formation of People's Republic of China in 1949, China's foreign policy behavior is influenced by three important factors national rejuvenation, century of humiliation and defensive security outlook.

These factors have significantly reflected in its long term diplomatic priorities reflected in terms of "sovereignty and territorial integrity, economic development and international respect and status" (Medeiros, 2009). At the same time Chinese leaders have a historical task of modernizing China. To this each of the leadership followed a policy that according to them was the best suited.

The foreign policy therefore can be conceptualized and the ruling ideology of Chinese foreign policy under Mao was based on orthodox Marxist view of class struggle and international conflict and revolutionary leftism (Medeiros, 2009). While under Deng Xiaoping, China abandoned the confrontationist to a more cooperative approach (Medeiros, 2009). Irrespective of being revolutionary or reformers, Chinese leaders have consistently prioritized China's foreign and economic policy in terms of "national economic development" (Medeiros, 2009).

Deng bequeathed China with a foreign and economic policy of "peace and development" (Keith, 2018) and of "reform and open door" (Keith, 2018) facilitating both "domestic and international harmony" (Keith, 2018). Though the premise of China's foreign policy is "still derived from the substance of logical assumption of Deng's independent foreign policy based on peace and development" (Keith, 2018). The questions that need to be examined (a) Is Deng's foreign policy enduring in nature? (b) Is Deng's foreign policy relevant in contemporary times (c) Will the legacies of Deng Xiaoping be carried forward by the new leadership?.

The literature used in this study explains the following (a) thematic approach to China's foreign policy (b) foreign policy of Deng Xiaoping (c) Xi Jinping's foreign policy (d) continuity and shift in the foreign policy.

Continuity and Change in China's Foreign Policy

Leadership change in 2012 has created a greater interest and attention both among scholars and policy makers to examine the new Chinese foreign policy under President Xi Jinping. In the policy making structure the leaders have remained at the top of foreign policy making, and top echelons have been at the helm of decision making authority.

The predominant leaders have continued to gain relevance and Deng played a central role in the foreign policy decision making. While the study of individuals have not been a main stay in IR, yet classical thinkers such Thucydides, Hans Morgenthau, Machiavelli have acknowledged the contribution of individuals in international relations (Q. Zhang 2016). Study of individuals were dwarfed with the advent of structural realism during the cold war. However works of Margret Hermann, psychologist continued to encourage the study on the influence individuals leaders wield on foreign policy behaviour.

Styles of leadership play a very critical role in decision making. Unlike Mao and Deng, Xi does not exhibit a charismatic style of leadership but uses the institutional title to exercise power.

Xi comes from a family where his father Xi Zhongxun significantly influenced several key policy decisions. The Chinese culture had a great value for the family and "the role of family in China's political tradition is a key to understanding revolutionary leadership" (YU 2012) Therefore the family background played a pivotal role in Xi's political leadership. As a young adult Xi was the person in charge of the CCP organization and this provided him with great experience of managing the behaviour and ethics of the members of the Communist Party.

This considerably shaped Xi's ideas. The experience and greater involvement with economic management of China's coastal province remain vital in moulding his understanding of Chinese politics. Xi therefore was moulded by two critical words revolution and reform adapted both from Mao and Deng Xiaoping. Therefore Xi combines both these leadership with a unique style of his own.

Xi's elevation to the top leadership is a distinct style of centralisation of power and different from his predecessors. He adapts a populist style and Maoist approach in his personal beliefs and experiences. Xi's power consolidation remains under the concept of

single dominant leader. Similar to Mao, Xi is one leader who constantly remains in the news. Xi's foreign policy approach combines an assertive and populist approach.

A unique and distinct style of leadership influences most foreign policy decisions. There are some visible changes that are reflected in the foreign policy from what Deng Xiaoping had enunciated. It could be termed more of an adjustment rather than an complete overhauling of the policy. The changes initiated by Xi will continue to reverberate not only China's domestic needs but impact the international environment as well.

Since the time Xi Jinping has assumed office, China reflects a more assertive stand in its international engagement. The new phase of foreign policy is defined as "peaceful rise 2.0" (J. Zhang 2015). With the change in leadership there has been a significant shift in the foreign policy. Scholars claimed this as the most dynamic phase in China's foreign policy. Most substantial foreign policy outcome is the emergence of a proactive policy. China continues to call for a peaceful environment for its development but with a difference from what was seen in the past decades.

There is a fundamental departure from the previous dictum of keeping a low profile as enunciated by Deng Xiaoping. Given the international environment Xi faces stiff challenges in the international environment. The most important of all is the emergence of the rebalancing US strategy in Asia Pacific. China's foreign policy under the presidency of Xi Jinping has been debatable. The launch of Asian Investment Infrastructure Bank (AIIB), followed by the establishment of New Development Bank (NDB) among the BRICS state, the articulation of the ambitious project of One Belt One Road (OBOR), the major power relations, neighbourhood and peripheral diplomacy all of these exhibited China's foreign policy activism.

A decisive foreign policy outcome signalling the departure from the Deng Xiaoping's dictum of "hiding one's capacity and keeping a low profile (taoguang yanghui) (Y. Zhang 2016). In 2014 at the Work Conference Xi explained that Chinese diplomacy should be conducted with a "salient Chinese feature and Chinese vision in defending China's core national interest" (Y. Zhang 2016). There are contentious feature that predominate Chinese foreign policy. It is seen in China's unilateral decisions of an Air Defence Identification Zone (AIDZ) in the East China Sea in 2013, hardening stand on South China Sea has resulted in new assertive element in China's foreign policy. The above foreign policy features resonate Xi's leadership and this effect will be felt over a long period of time.

While the edifice of Deng's foreign policy has been built on the premises of independent foreign policy and the "style rests on the foundation of established concepts and themes" (R. Keith 2018). The themes of

"peace and development' and of reform and the open door were doubly entrenched as facilitating both domestic and international harmony" (R. Keith 2018).

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (FPCC) resonates in Chinese foreign policy, and at a speech delivered on 28th June 2014, XI Jinping "delivered a message of continuity of principle" (R. Keith 2018). Xi claimed that the Five Principle of Peaceful Coexistence as an "integrated concept, capture the essence of today's relations with countries". While, Xi upholds the concepts of 'peace and development' and emphasizes on socialism with Chinese characteristics. At the same time Xi resonated a foreign policy that will leave his imprint and thereafter has significantly expanded. Xi "re-created the Silk Road and Belt Road". Amidst several continuities, there is a discontinuity in Deng's foreign policy.

Domestic factors provide the context for any countries. Xi Jinping articulated the Chinese Dream. He called for the national rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Chinese dream was an antithesis for the century of humiliation China experienced and was committed not to repeat the past. The central tenet of Chinese foreign policy therefore has both continuity and new elements are reflected as below

Continuity in Terms of China's

Foreign Policy

1. Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence
2. Independent foreign policy
3. Continuous emphasis on peaceful development or peaceful rise
4. Peace and development continue to remain integral part of Chinese foreign policy
5. Chinese assertive continues to predate Xi Jinping and so of the examples mentioned is an illustration (a) Reacting to provocation such as US rebalancing strategy in Asia, deployment the oil rig over the Paracel Islands and expanded its claimant position.

New Elements in Chinese Foreign Policy

1. China's assertive policy is the reflection of its stand on tough territorial and issues of sovereignty. In the past China outcome was reactive in nature while at present it is a combination of reactive and proactive assertiveness.
2. The 18th Party Congress in 2012 expressed China's intent of increasing its strength in terms of an expand both its maritime and military capability. The Chinese foreign policy will follow a proactive strategy and actively engage in the international environment
3. At the Secretariat of the Conference of Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in 2014 China affirmed that it will follow "foreign policy of peace". XI Jinping lauded a new Asian approach of common, comprehensive,

cooperative and sustainable security and promote and contribute to international and regional security.

4. China was committed to extend its influence and therefore was convinced for a greater commitment to military and maritime growth and effective strategic planning
5. China will continue to exhibit its commitment to its neighbours and called for greater economic, military and diplomatic engagement. At the same time China continues to be assertive and that is seen in its policy in the region especially with the claimant states of South China Sea.
6. At the Peripheral diplomacy conference held on 30th October 2013, Xi Jinping elaborated China's commitment to peripheral diplomacy and called for friendly cooperation with neighbours(2013 n.d.). The objective of the peripheral diplomacy was to realize the great rejuvenation of Chinese nation (2013 n.d.).
7. Economic success to benefit neighbourhood countries was the key to China's neighbourhood policy under XiJinping
8. Economic growth of China remains one of the key imperative to China's international status.

With Xi Jinping at the helm of affairs, Chinese foreign policy reflects new elements amidst continuity. It can be termed that there are several continuities amidst elements of change that cannot be ignored.

Limitations

The study of contemporary Chinese foreign policy continues to attract great interest and attention. While retaining important aspects of Chinese foreign policy from the period of Deng Xiaoping, there are certain shifts.

These shifts continue to attract great interest among scholars to understand China better. Yet there is a need to continuously scrutinize Chinese foreign policy. One challenge or

limitation is the understanding of Chinese language hence most of the material used in this study pertain only to English.

The study of Chinese foreign policy is an ongoing exercise with Xi Jinping at the helm of affairs hence continuous scholarship is required in this field. The puzzle is intriguing as there are no enough answers to several questions.

Conclusion

Xi's leadership style is that of the "populist and Maoist style". The Maoist "elements may reflect in his personal experience and behavior". His tough stand on territorial disputes and American domination in the Asia-Pacific region stand testimony to his assertive behavior as compared to his predecessors.

While Deng departed from the Maoist system, Xi seems to have endured it. While Xi's predecessor have used "verbal protest over disputed territorial disputes, Xi has been building artificial islands that may dock military airstrip and harbors in the South China Sea". In fact Deng's famous dictum of "whether a cat is black or white as long as it can catch mice" seems to be out of circulation. In no time after assuming office Xi remains the only Chinese leader who have establish a "distinct leadership which may have a profound impact on China's development" (Wei, 2016).

For decades China's diplomacy was shaped with the dictum of Deng Xiaoping, no longer defines the foreign policy of China. The policy was adopted three decades ago when China was recovering from economic difficulties. China used to avoid taking the lead in regional affairs, but today it has put forth proposal to create new Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Route as well as the Asian infrastructure Bank and is actively engaging in regional and international fora. The "long-shaped thinking" that diplomacy should serve "economic development" was functional when China was economically developing, might no longer

be applicable (Zheyuan, 2014). The reality of Chinese foreign policy in the immediate circle of Asian region is more challenging and intensified than the past. Several challenges persist one factor ins China's Asia position is still not secure.

Relationship with leading regional powers including Japan, India and important middle powers South Korea and Australia are not too conducive and North Korea continue to be a "festering problem for China". Xi's foreign policy therefore is based on striving for achievement, but the success depends on "meeting the challenges ahead". Xi's new authority to Chinese foreign policy is clear with Xi's announcement for national rejuvenation and therefore the foreign policy is striving for China's great power status as opposed to Mao and Deng's dictum. This has resulted in a significant shift from the past proposing a new foreign policy.

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