

RAJA MANDALA: XI'S SECURITY DIPLOMACY

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President Xi Jinping's brief but significant visit to Kathmandu was defined by the determination to accelerate the development of an ambitious trans-Himalayan corridor between China's Tibet and Nepal. While Delhi will debate the issues generated by China Nepal Economic Corridor for some time to come, it also needs to pay attention to an equally important dimension of China-Nepal relationship — the deepening of bilateral security cooperation. We are not referring to military and defence exchanges but to the expanding engagement between the police forces, intelligence agencies, border management organisations and law-enforcement authorities of the two nations. China's interest in "security diplomacy" as separate from "defence diplomacy" is not limited to Nepal.

Security diplomacy has emerged as a major element of China's international relations in all geographies. The globalisation and digitalisation of the Chinese economy, the growing movement of people across Chinese borders and expanding capital and human assets beyond borders have made law enforcement cooperation with the rest of the world a major priority for China. The range of issues involved in security diplomacy include tracking down fugitives from Beijing's anti-corruption campaign, criminals seeking safe haven in other countries, countering terrorism, preventing drug trafficking, assisting Chinese citizens and tourists abroad, and reining in political dissidents active in other countries. In the case of neighbours, security diplomacy takes on an added dimension, given the dynamic interaction between internal political stability and the situation across the frontiers.

The importance China attaches to security diplomacy is reflected in the fact that four of the 20 documents signed in Kathmandu relate to law enforcement. These agreements touched on border management, supply of border security equipment, mutual legal assistance, and collaboration between Nepal's Attorney General and China's "Supreme People's Procurator" (or the prosecutor general).

Xi's emphasis on internal security was evident in his remarks to Prime Minister [K P Sharma Oli](#): "Anyone attempting to split China in any part of the country will end in crushed bodies and shattered bones," Xi said, according to official Chinese media. He also warned other countries against interfering in the internal affairs of China. The context of the remarks is easy to see. The protests in Hong Kong that have taken a violent turn in recent days are testing Beijing's patience. The Chinese Communist Party is angry with attempts in the US to link trade negotiations with the situation in Hong Kong. But there might be a more specific reason, Tibet, for Xi to choose Kathmandu for making the harsh remarks.

Nepal's northern border with China is entirely with Tibet, and Beijing sees security cooperation with Kathmandu as critical in controlling the movement of people across this frontier. Nepal, which was once hospitable to Tibetan refugees fleeing China, now extends full support to Beijing's law enforcement agencies in tracking and deporting them. Nepal's security cooperation has become intense ever since trouble broke out in Tibet in the early years of this century.

Growing bonhomie between China and Nepal's political leaders has provided a more permissive environment for this cooperation on Tibet. In recent years, Chinese security agencies have apparently gained effective access to border areas on the Nepali side in dealing with Tibetan exiles and have every reason to be pleased with Kathmandu's support.

As the joint statement issued after Xi's talks in Kathmandu put it, the two sides agreed to "respect and accommodate each other's concerns and core interests". Nepal "reiterated its firm commitment to One-China policy" and acknowledged that Tibetan matters "are China's internal affairs". Kathmandu also promised not to allow "any anti-China activities on its soil". China, in turn, declared, its firm support to Nepal in upholding the country's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and its firm support and respect to Nepal's social system and development path, independently chosen in the light of Nepal's national conditions. The statement also signalled satisfaction at the signing of the "Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and expressed hope for an early conclusion of the Treaty on Extradition." China, in turn, has promised to enhance the capacities of Nepal's law enforcement agencies.

Strengthening internal security in China's far flung provinces with significant religious and ethnic minorities has always been a major political priority for the People's Republic of China in dealing with its neighbouring countries. Trouble within or across the borders of Xinjiang, Tibet and Yunnan has meant greater cooperation with the neighbouring states. In the case of Xinjiang, the focus is on the three Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) as well as Pakistan and Afghanistan that share a border with the province. Securing the Tibetan frontier has been an integral part of China's difficult political engagement with India and an increasingly productive cooperation with Nepal. Collaboration with Myanmar is central to China's security management of the Yunnan province.

Massive modernisation of its internal administrative structures, significant investments in new technologies, and an effective integration of law enforcement into China's foreign policy have transformed China's pursuit of security diplomacy. It is by no means limited to neighbours and is now spread across all geographies — from developed countries in North America and Europe to the developing world in Asia and Africa. China is also participating in the development of new international rules on law enforcement, shaping the discourse on issues at hand, and seeking leadership positions in multilateral organisations dealing with law enforcement. Like the other great powers that preceded it, China sees security diplomacy and law enforcement cooperation as important tools of statecraft.

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