

China Briefs

Wang Yi Conducts Whirlwind Diplomacy in South Asia

Following the successful conclusion of the National People's Congress and the call between President Xi and President Biden, in which the Chinese President reasserted China's role as a peacemaker in the world, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi set off on March 22 for a tour of South Asia to address some of the most important issues facing the region and the world.

Pakistan

Wang Yi was a guest of honor at the meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held this year in Islamabad, Pakistan. This was the first time a Chinese Foreign Minister attended this gathering, an important signal for the new role that China is playing in the Muslim world. In addition to addressing the assembled leaders of the OIC, Wang Yi also viewed the parade of honor on Pakistan Day.

In his speech, Wang called for building a partnership of solidarity and coordination between China and the Islamic countries, a partnership of development and rejuvenation, a partnership of security and stability, and a partnership of mutual learning among nations.

Wang Yi underlined the importance of supporting the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty, with each country preserving its own path of development and honoring the diversity of civilizations. He noted that China has signed Belt and Road Initiative agreements with 54 Islamic coun-

tries, encompassing 600 projects. He emphasized that China and the Islamic countries should cooperate in fighting the danger of terrorism and implement the high-quality goals of China's Global Development Initiative.

Afghanistan

From Islamabad, Wang Yi went to Afghanistan, one of the first foreign ministers from a major country to visit that nation after the U.S. withdrawal. He met with Acting Deputy Prime Minister of the Afghan Interim Government, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar and Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi. The Afghan ministers said that Afghanistan cherishes its friendship with China, and appreciates the assistance from China when the Afghan people were in their most difficult period, especially the anti-epidemic support and the humanitarian assistance that Afghanistan desperately needs. They said that they hoped to strengthen cooperation in various fields such as economy and trade, energy and mining, agriculture, personnel training, and to expand the export of Afghan advantageous products to China. They welcome Chinese enterprises to invest in Afghanistan. The Afghan leaders said that it was anxious to give full play to its unique geographical advantages, to more fully participate in the joint construction of the Belt and Road, to become a bridge for regional connectivity.

Wang Yi said that China-Afghan friendship has a long history. China does not interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs, nor does it seek self-interest or spheres of influence in Afghanistan. Here Wang Yi introduced

the notion of "three respects" and "three nevers" in its relationship with Afghanistan, that is, China respects the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, respects the independent choices made by the Afghan people, and respects the religious beliefs and national customs of Afghanistan. Likewise, China never interferes in Afghanistan's internal affairs, and will never seek self-interest or so-called spheres of influence in Afghanistan.

Wang Yi said that China is willing to carry out mutually beneficial cooperation with Afghanistan aimed at improving people's livelihood, so as to help see to it that Afghanistan's advantages in resources are transformed into advantages in development. China appreciates and welcomes Afghanistan's active participation in the joint construction of the "Belt and Road," and is willing to promote the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into Afghanistan.

India

From Afghanistan, Wang Yi traveled to Delhi where he met with India's National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. In the three-hour discussion with Jaishankar a major topic was the China-India border crisis, which is the biggest point of conflict between the two countries and remains unsettled. Wang made clear that strengthening the bilateral relationship is a priority for China, so the two can work together to safeguard peace and stability in the region and the world.

There was also concern in India about comments Wang Yi had made at

the OIC meeting with regard to Kashmir. Kashmir, with its Muslim majority, remains a contested area between India and Pakistan. The two also discussed regional issues. Foreign Minister Wang reported on his talks in Kabul, Afghanistan, which is an important issue for India. The two sides also confirmed their joint commitment to attaining peace in Ukraine. Both India and China have refused to go along with sanctions on Russia as they feel this will only add fuel to the conflict and cause chaos in the world economy.

During a separate meeting with Doval, Wang told Doval that China never contemplated the idea of a “unipolar Asia,” but respects India’s role in the region, and looked forward to a “China-India Plus” model in South Asia, through which to achieve “win-win results.”

U.S. Continues Provocative Deployments in South China Sea

The U.S. is not only continuing its provocative “freedom of navigation” deployments in the South China Sea, but has also deployed the *USS Miguel Keith*, an expeditionary mobile base—a type of large logistics support, command and control vehicle—which could potentially enable U.S. forces to act more extensively in the region. Second in size only to an aircraft carrier, the ship can carry out several different tasks including hosting the landing and takeoffs of heavy helicopters, according to the South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative, a Beijing-based think tank. While the *Miguel Keith* deployed to the western Pacific in October for joint maneuvers held there, this was the first time that the ship entered the South China Sea.

Space as Common Future for Mankind, or More Geopolitics?

Chinese astronauts held their second “space lecture” from the *Tianhe* module of the *Tiangong II* space station on March 23, with teacher astronaut Wang Yaping giving the lecture, her third from space, assisted by her two colleagues. The lecture was viewed by millions of people with a live audience of students in Beijing at the Science and Technology Museum as well as an audience of students in Urumqi, Xinjiang and in Lhasa, Tibet. The lectures are part of an ongoing effort by the Chinese government to enhance interest in space and in science among the younger generation, and it is having that effect—as was seen in the United States in the 1960s when the Kennedy space program made space exploration a primary topic of interest for school children.

The lectures also underline the way that China views space, as an area of cooperation rather than confrontation, the same way the U.S. saw space exploration during the early years of the U.S. space programs. This spirit still exists within the U.S. space program itself, as shown by NASA’s refusal to follow the anti-Russia hysteria in the Biden Administration by cutting off ties with their Russian collaborators. Nonetheless, much of the “geopolitics” now characterizing U.S. policy has also affected the space program, as seen in the launch by the Trump Administration of the U.S. Space Force within the Department of Defense. This more assertive and jingoistic policy has been followed by the Biden Administration, which has taken an even more hostile attitude toward China and Russia, in space as in other areas. The Australians have now jumped on board by creating their own

Space Force, even though Australians don’t have anything resembling their own independent space program, offering their country as a base for facilities in the effort to counter China in space, and maintaining their role as a junior partner in the Anglo-American sphere.

Sanctions Could Cause the Death of a Billion People, Scholar Says

In a variety of interviews over the last week, Liu Zhiqun, a Senior Fellow at the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, who has had a long history working in finance and business in both China and Europe, warned that the net effect of the sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States and the European countries could lead to conditions of starvation for as many as a billion people. Speaking to CGTN on March 22, Liu said that this represents the worst crisis since the Second World War. “We know that all the reports say that the world will have at least 200 million people who will suffer starvation due to the effects of the COVID pandemic. But now this number will increase to one billion people because every country will have to face the issue of food shortages. And food shortages are even much more serious than the energy shortages, because this is people’s lifeline.”

He noted in particular the effect in Africa where 60% of food imports come from Russia and Ukraine. “This will cause tremendous social unrest,” he said. He also noted that the reason the West is putting such serious sanctions on Russia is that they want to cause social unrest there in order to overthrow the Putin government. He underlined the fact that the death and destruction which will result from these sanctions represent the greatest violations of human rights in history.