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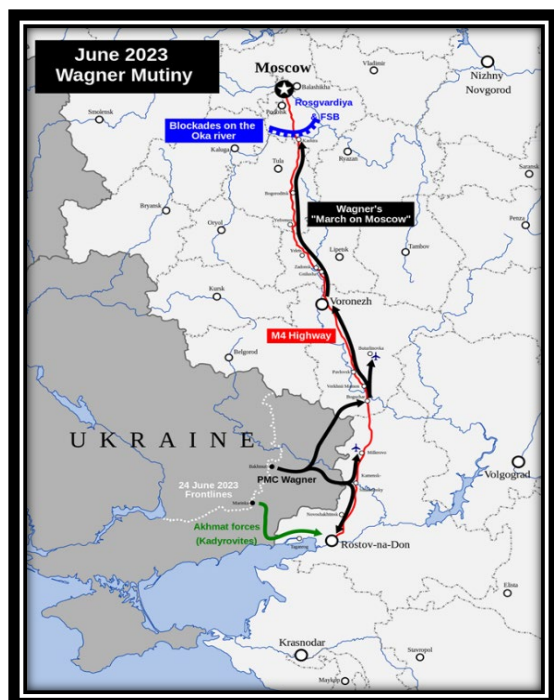
Germany's Maiden National Security Strategy

Ukraine War Update, 16-30 Jun 2023

On Jun 30, Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Maliar said that Ukrainian troops are advancing in all directions in their counteroffensive against occupying Russian forces. Maliar said Ukrainian troops were moving "confidently" on the flanks around the devastated eastern city of Bakhmut, which is held by Russian forces, and the main fighting was going on around the city. In the south, Kyiv's forces were moving with mixed success and mainly levelling the frontline, she said. However, at the same time, she noted that the effectiveness of the counteroffensive should be evaluated by "a lot of different military tasks" and not just by advances and the liberation of settlements.

Ukrainian officials have said the counteroffensive is going as planned, even though it's clear, through open source accounts, that Ukrainian vehicles — including recently supplied western tanks and armoured personnel carriers — are being damaged and destroyed. Kyiv's formations have managed to take several small villages, but Ukrainian casualties are mounting. While its gains appear modest for the moment, Ukrainian authorities have argued that the current manoeuvres are just "a glimpse" of a much bigger push to come.

On 30 Jun, the US general and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley said Ukraine's counteroffensive will be very difficult and achieving gains will take a long time. "This is going to take six, eight, 10 weeks. It's going to be very long, and it's going to be very, very bloody. And no one should have any illusions about any of that," he said.



Commentators have noted that Russian troops have shown competency in fighting defensively, and Moscow's formations have improved their tactics since earlier in the war. The short-lived rebellion by the Wagner group on Saturday hasn't had an immediate effect on the front line in southern Ukraine. No Russian soldiers left their positions to come to Russia's defence. But the Ukrainian military may be able to capitalize on the chaos and weakening morale to try to make some gains, according to analysts.

The long-running feud between Mr Prigozhin and the Russian military burst into an open revolt on 23 Jun 2023, with Wagner mercenaries taking control of a military base in the south-western city of Rostov-on-Don, close to the border with Ukraine, and fighting the regular army in the Voronezh region to the north. As Wagner consolidated control of Rostov-on-Don, its forces pushed north toward Moscow on 24 Jun 2023. One column of armoured and personnel vehicles

appeared to depart from Rostov. Another column crossed from occupied Ukraine into Russia's Voronezh region further north. They met little resistance and appeared to have shot down several Russian military aircraft along the way. Russian President Vladimir Putin termed an armed mutiny by Wagner mercenaries a "stab in the back" and that the group's chief Yevgeny Prigozhin had betrayed the country, as he vowed to punish the dissidents.

The rebellion was called off by 1930h on 24 Jun 2023. Mr Prigozhin went into exile in Belarus under a deal brokered by the Belarusian dictator, Alexander Lukashenko. The Kremlin claims that the Wagner leader will be given safe passage to Belarus; troops involved in the mutiny given immunity from prosecution; and others permitted to sign formal contracts with the Russian defence ministry.

As per the Russian Foreign Minister, Wagner's rebellion was merely "a minor trouble." Dismissing the short-lived putsch as insignificant, Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov asserted that Russia would emerge "stronger and more resilient". He also warned the West not to think that President Vladimir V. Putin's grip on power had weakened.

More than a week after the short-lived Wagner rebellion, it's unclear what comes next for Russia and how will it impact the war in Ukraine. While the short-lived Wagner mutiny has also exposed deep divides within Russia's military and security establishment, there has not been any significant change in Russia's military posture in Ukraine.

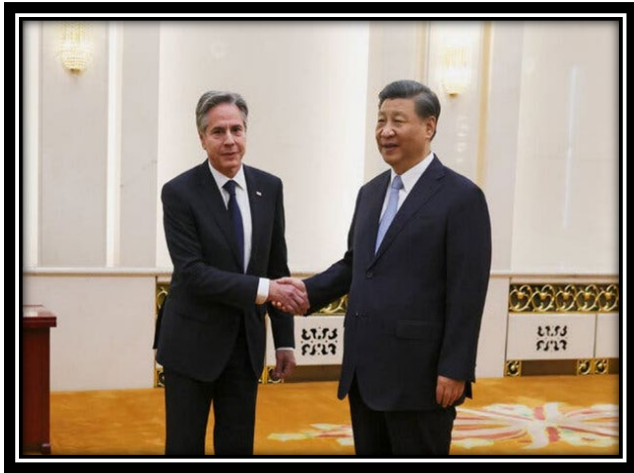
Antony Blinken's Visit to China

The United States (US) Secretary of State Antony Blinken made a two-day stop at Beijing from 18-19 June 2023. During his stay, Blinken held meetings with Chinese President Xi Jinping, the Director of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Foreign Affairs Office Wang Yi and State Councillor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang.

The visit was originally scheduled in February 2023 but was cancelled at the last moment when diplomatic tensions heightened after the US shot down a suspected Chinese surveillance balloon. Thereafter, antagonism between the two countries continued to intensify over Washington's military aid to Taiwan, US control of high-end technology transfer to China, PLA's military provocations against Taiwan and competing military drills by the US and China in the South China Sea.

Reportedly, Blinken's visit was aimed to find ways to stabilise Sino-US relations. The US State Department's top diplomat Daniel Kritenbrink clarified in a press briefing that the US was reaching out to China "with a realistic, confident approach and a sincere desire to manage our competition in the most responsible way possible."

Considering the importance China appears to accord to Sino-US relations, the Chinese media remained muted in its press coverage before the commencement of the visit. Moreover, during the Chinese Foreign Ministry's press briefings, the spokesperson avoided commenting on the visit and no grand welcome was given to the State Secretary on his arrival. This was interpreted by observers as China "cold-shouldering" the US and a lack of optimism within the Chinese leadership about a positive shift in bilateral ties.



The two sides issued press statements separately following the meetings and discussions. Some of the important issues which were discussed were strengthening high-level communication between the two sides, Taiwan, US sanctions on China and tech controls to China and the Russia -Ukraine war. As it appeared the two sides agreed that bilateral ties are at their lowest point and that the deterioration impinges on the interests of both countries. Also, there is a need to sustain high-level communication between the two countries and act on the consensus reached by the highest leadership during the Bali Summit. However, the two sides diverged on some of the most contentious issues that impact bilateral ties.

State-run CGTN quoted President Xi as saying, "The two sides also made progress and reached an agreement on some specific issues" including some follow-through steps, without providing specific details. However, Blinken fell short of getting one of his top objectives i.e. reopening military-to-military communications that China shut down in protest at then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022.

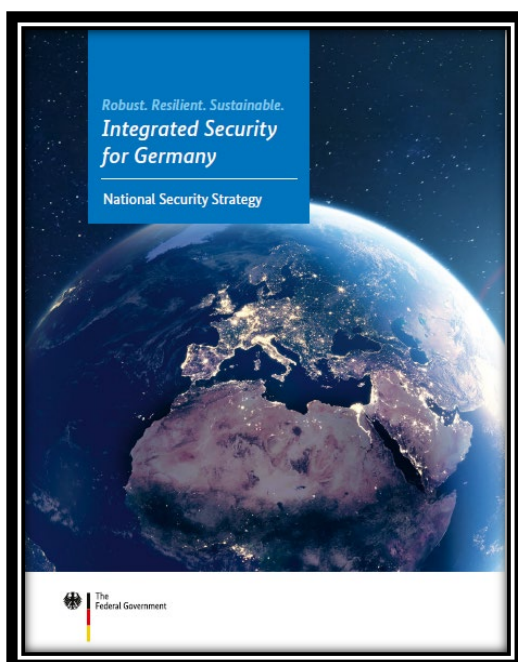
The Chinese side expressed that the current downward spiral in Sino-US relations is due to US containment policies against China. Further, the US should steer away from hurting China's core interests like Taiwan and suppression of Chinese technological development. More importantly, China rejected Blinken's suggestion of restarting military-to-military cooperation between the two countries. The US on its part asserted that it is opposed to unilateral change of status quo and will defend the interests of its allies. Blinken also expressed concern about China's coercive diplomacy against Taiwan and Chinese private companies' supply of dual-use materials to Russia.

Relations between the two countries are not expected to dramatically improve. However, Blinken's visit to China assumed significance as it happened against the backdrop of increasing antagonism between the two countries. The visit and his meeting with Xi Jinping sent a wider message to the international community

about the willingness of both countries to manage the downturn in bilateral ties and prevent uncontrollable escalation. Second, it also signalled the possibility of China and the US eventually arriving at an understanding about managing their differences and converging on issues of mutual concern like climate, food and health security.

Reportedly, US Secretary of Treasury Janet Yellen is expected to visit China in July to hold high-level economic talks with her Chinese counterpart Liu Kun and China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang has also accepted Antony Blinken's invitation to visit the US in the coming months.

Germany's Maiden National Security Strategy



In the immediate aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz, during his speech on February 27, 2022, announced Germany's awakening to "Zeitenwende" (an epochal change) heralding a complete overhaul of Germany's diplomatic and security policy. Ever since the mainstreaming of the Zeitenwende, the Bundestag has attempted to respond to it with a series of decisions to complement that shift. At the same time, myriad challenges have erupted in the way of devising long-term strategies of securitisation and strategic transformation.

The latest to emerge from this debate is Germany's maiden National Security Strategy (NSS) which was unveiled on 14 Jun 2023. The NSS places security policy issues on a more comprehensive and interdepartmental footing. This comprehensive approach shows that national security issues have been politically upgraded in Germany. The NSS also alludes to the national focus shifting to securitisation from the hitherto economy-first approach of the German state. However, closer scrutiny reveals that it is easier said than done.

The Scholz government unveiled its flagship NSS on 14 June 2023. It mentions several steps to be taken along three overarching objectives — robustness, resilience, and sustainability. The document has called Russia "the most significant threat" to European peace and China a "systemic rival". On a positive note, it adopts a relatively more integrated approach to national security that goes beyond military preparedness.

Drawing from a rather synergistic motto "robust, resilient, sustainable", the document outlines three guiding principles of Germany's integrated security strategy. 'Robust' entails preparedness to protect against attacks, including

emerging domains such as cyberattacks and hybrid warfare and meeting Germany's commitments to NATO. 'Resilient' signifies Berlin's commitment to upholding a liberal, rules-based domestic and international order. 'Sustainable' represents the urgency to ensure that Germany has the natural, economic, and social resources it needs to prosper.

However, the wonderfully expressed vision raises more questions than answers. For instance, there is no mention of institutional mechanisms, rules, regulations and budgetary resources that are needed to implement this integrated security strategy.

The document's major weakness is its failure to address these questions as it falls short of making a National Security Council (NSC) to oversee the implementation required. The document does not propose any allocation of funding for its proposals, nor does it explain which agencies or bodies will be responsible for coordinating and overseeing implementation in the absence of an NSC. Perhaps it assumes that the existing inter-ministerial mechanisms will suffice. This is clearly not the case because even before the NSS came out, Germany had already pledged €100 billion to modernise the Bundeswehr and promised to spend 2 per cent of the country's GDP on defence in line with NATO demands. However, a lack of concrete steps from existing inter-ministerial mechanisms has contributed to little difference on the ground.

While the NSS discusses pathways to revitalise Germany's traditional security capabilities, it will be some time till Berlin's strategic thought matures. The NSS, at best, represents a rather feeble German strategic approach to the very European security it wishes to bolster. It is not clear, how does Germany plan to address the European management of Russia's threat without acknowledging the role of actors like the United Kingdom, Poland, or even Italy? Beyond the semantics of "going together with partners and allies", their potential roles and contributions to the European security order have not been specified. For all its focus on the Indo-Pacific, the NSS doesn't make a single mention of India either.

Further, hidden under the incipient securitisation ambition are some of the dysfunctions of the German State amid trying economic times. There is still no blueprint towards resource mobilisation of the staggering €100 billion committed to its security modernization given the economic headwinds of subdued economic growth.

Perhaps the most important question in the German quest for securitisation will remain unanswered until Berlin outlines its strategic approach to address critical dependencies on China which is slated to release next month in July 2023. It will contain some clarity on Germany's stand on the situation in the Taiwan Straits as well. Not only that, Scholz's government's approach and implementation of its upcoming China strategy will not only shape the EU's larger de-risking from Beijing, if at all, and shape the bloc's economic future.