



**A clean political ecology is important for officials to do their jobs properly. However, being as fragile as natural ecology, political ecology can be easily tainted. Once problems occur, there will be a heavy price to pay to restore it."**

**Xi Jinping**, the top leader of China, said during the just-concluded two sessions.

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## Action needed to stop cross-border incursions

**M**yanmar on Sunday openly expressed regret for the first time for Friday's bombing incident across the Myanmar-China border, which left five Chinese citizens dead and eight others injured in Southwest China's Yunnan province.

The conflict between government forces and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army in Myanmar's northern Kokang region has resulted in increasing local displacements and financial losses, and even civilian casualties in its neighbors such as China.

Yet, given the highly sensitive nature of the clashes, none of the involved international or regional organizations, including the United Nations and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, has been

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able to make effective diplomatic interventions to end the conflict.

What is happening in northern Myanmar, as China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi reiterated last week, is the country's internal affair triggered by the interest disparities between Myanmar's central government and northern ethnic minorities. However, given the country's geopolitical significance and abundant natural resources, strategic competition between major powers within Myanmar's borders may also be playing a role.

Hence, it is foreseeable that more humanitarian crises may emerge in Myanmar, should the tensions in the north keep escalating. Worse still, the country is also likely to be added to the list of "failed states" due to its tarnished national image, despite all the efforts it has made to engage with the international community.

Myanmar's future needs to be in the hands of its people, otherwise it will only be a bargaining chip for outside forces in their selfish haggles. Negotiation is the best way to end the clashes, and the international community should provide constructive assistance to make talks happen.

Sharing a border of over 2,000 kilometers with Myanmar, China has suffered much from the military confrontation taking place in its southwestern neighbor. In response to the incursions into

China's airspace and the bombing of Lincang city, the Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force has stepped up its patrols along the China-Myanmar border, and it has stated it will send warnings and prevent Myanmar planes from approaching Chinese territory.

Undoubtedly, the ongoing unrest near the border area might deal a blow to bilateral trade exchanges between the two countries, and might even put the China-supported oil pipelines in Myanmar at risk. China's cooperative investments in Myanmar and the Bangladesh-China-Myanmar-India economic corridor the Chinese leaders have proposed are facing growing security threats, which may cause further damage to China-Myanmar relations.

Therefore, the Chinese government needs to make smart diplomatic decisions. In fact, China has

always been tolerant and restrained in its relations with Myanmar and other neighbors. However, such a friendly stance has sometimes failed to alleviate their concerns about a "China threat", and they have even intentionally ignored China's rightful interests as a developing regional power.

Such being the case, it is more than necessary that China act more assertively to defend its legitimate rights, and it should push for negotiations to end the conflict in Myanmar. More importantly, it should draw a clear red line regarding any cross-border intrusions and punish any deliberate crossing of the line.

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## Egypt's plan for new capital offers food for thought



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**E**gypt is determined to rise from devastation of the West-led "Arab Spring" by building a glitzy new capital between the existing one in Cairo and the Suez Canal. The move aimed at building a pollution-free and sustainable city has won the support of many oil-rich Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates, which have pledged to provide the bulk of the \$15 to 20 billion expenditure.

In these times of falling oil prices, this is a bold step to capture new development fronts, which could also check Cairo's population explosion and traffic congestion pressures.

Many Chinese may think Egypt's bold plan offers them the investment opportunity they desperately need to further the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiatives.

But more than that, Egypt's move has offered timely food for thought for China's top policymakers, especially with regard to the integration of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province. China has accelerated the pace of building an integrated economic belt with Beijing at the center. But an overarching strategy is still to take final shape.

Unlike Egypt's ambitious plan to build a new eco-friendly capital, China's focus on integral development is aimed more at reducing smog, air and water pollution, and traffic jams. Comparatively speaking, Beijing's expansion plan is not ambitious, bold or innovative enough.

Cairo has a population of more than 18 million, almost the same as that of Beijing and nearly double that of the capitals of several advanced European countries, such as Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, Greece and Denmark.

The planned new capital between Cairo and the Suez Canal will eventually house 7 million people, and have eco-friendly streets — thanks to fewer cars — 10,000 kilometers of roads and 200 km of railways. Also, more than 2,000 schools and 600 hospitals have been planned for the new capital, reflecting the boldness and ambition of the Egyptian government.

Beijing has been expanding for the past few decades, "encroaching" on some towns of Tianjin and Hebei. But every morning, people flock to the center of the city and many of them commute back to sleeping residential communities in the suburbs and some small cities in Hebei. Despite this, Beijing has not had the ambition or vision to build a sister city, let alone a new capital, some discussions on the subject notwithstanding. This is the right time to give shape to such a project.

The least Beijing should do is to build several university campus towns, learning from the experience of Cambridge and Oxford. Perhaps it should also consider moving at least its top five universities to fledgling towns nearby, in Hebei for example. Better still, Beijing can consider establishing another 10 universities in the new region and develop the town into a campus city.

If this can be given shape, high-tech parks and industrial zones could be built in such a city within a decade. This plan is highly feasible given the existing high-speed railway and highway links with Beijing.

By opening a new path of sustainable development, Cairo has offered a new development road for Beijing. And Beijing should take this opportunity to transform into an eco-friendly and innovative city, thus leaving a legacy for generations to follow.

JI NAILI

## Corruption a sickness that is being treated

**U**S scholars — not all, but surely a majority — tend to look at China from their own perspective: Why don't they have "one person, one vote"? Why do their citizens have no guns? Why do not the entrepreneurs unite and ask their government for more power? They do not necessarily think in a hegemonic way, but they choose to ignore the differences between China and the United States.

A recent article "The Coming Chinese Crackup" of David Shambaugh, a professor of political science and international affairs at the George Washington University in Washington D.C., published by the Wall Street Journal that predicts the "collapse" of the ruling Communist Party of China, is a typical example of this myopia. According to Shambaugh, the ongoing campaign against corruption will lead to struggles among different political forces of China, thus threatening the nation's political stability. He also wrote that the call of the leadership does not appeal to ordinary people.

But Shambaugh has made a fatal error. Corruption is the cancer in China's political system that needs to be cut out. He mistakes temporary pain as long-term suffering. In fact, the temporary pain is for China to regain its health in the long run.

Some of his judgments are reasonable, such as the root of corruption lies in inefficient and ineffective supervision over power, and secret deals between pow-

er and money. However, he groundlessly accuses the Communist Party of China of breeding corruption, when the truth is the anti-corruption campaign's success would not be possible without the Party. It is the central leadership and the Party's discipline watchdog that have brought down some powerful corrupt officials.

Besides, the Party leadership is rendering efforts towards strengthening supervision over power, advancing the rule of law, and propelling officials to declare their property ownership, all of which are necessary to eliminate corruption. It is absurd to assert these efforts, which succeeded in the West, will fail in China. Without the Party's leadership, these efforts would not be possible.

Shambaugh fails to recognize that corruption can ruin people's trust in both the ruling party and the government. As a stable tendency in the long term, political trust mainly refers to the positive evaluation of the governing group. The anti-graft efforts will gain, instead of reducing, such trust for the leadership of China.

People judge the performance of the ruling party on whether it can punish the corrupt officials that cause unfairness in their daily lives. Research results from East Asia Barometer surveys show that corruption hurts public trust in politics. Corrupt offi-



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cial take up resources that could be used to boost the economy and raise ordinary people's incomes, this dents public confidence in the government. Shanxi is a province with abundant resources, but corruption has curbed its economic growth and upgrading.

Rampant corruption is also fatal to interpersonal relationships in the society, which is the basis of mutual social trust. In a healthy society, a citizen feels the goodwill of other people, as well as groups, thus gaining mutual trust in the interaction process.

In a corrupt society, the trust is replaced with idolization of power and officials that hold it. Hence the normal social order is distorted.

Shambaugh, who compares China with the collapsed Soviet Union, fails to see their fundamental differences. Corrupt officials in both countries formed unions to maintain their privileges; however, while the Soviet Union had a weak leadership that could hardly do anything to stop the corruption, China's leadership has successfully launched an effective anti-graft campaign, and it is drafting regulations to better place power in a cage. Only with corruption curbed can China enjoy more political stability.

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## Putin still in control after Nemtsov killing

**R**ussian President Vladimir Putin met his Kyrgyz counterpart on Monday, ending the speculation of the Western media that he had been forced to lie low following the assassination of Russia's opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, which is considered one of the most outrageous political assassinations in this country.

Although details remain sketchy, the West has used the incident to launch a fresh tirade against Putin. On the day Nemtsov was shot, US President Barack Obama condemned the "brutal murder" and praised Nemtsov for his "courageous dedication to the struggle against corruption in Russia".

Nemtsov's assassination seems to have given Ukraine a reason not to implement the Minsk Agreement, the deal agreed by Putin, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French Presi-

dent Francois Hollande to restore peace in Ukraine's restive eastern and southern regions. This will, of course, be in the interest of the US. In fact, pro-West opposition forces in Russia are already trying to reorganize their alliance and thus push the country toward political chaos.

Yet Russia has succeeded in avoiding such a chaos, because both the Kremlin and opposition parties have condemned Nemtsov's assassination. Besides, many Russian leaders and political observers have appealed to people to maintain calm by defeating internal and external forces' designs to create disturbance in the country.

The Russian opposition can be roughly divided into two factions: registered parties and non-registered groups. The former, including the Communist Party of Russia, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and A Just Russia, have some seats in the Duma,

lower house of the Russian parliament, and cooperate rather than oppose Kremlin on many issues.

The diversified and non-registered opposition alliance, on the other hand, is powerless. Despite claiming to be a member of the non-registered opposition, Nemtsov belonged to the registered opposition as a former deputy prime minister of Russia and the political and financial resources that came along with it.

The lack of an efficient political platform, a qualified leader and, most importantly, proper internal management, has made the opposition's attempt to take on Putin a rather futile attempt.

Worse, very few Russians believe the opposition leaders could improve their livelihoods or properly govern the country. Therefore, the political ecology in Russia is unlikely to change despite the West's rabid reaction to Nemtsov's assassination.

But Russia has to worry about more than just its sagging economy, because all the five suspects detained for Nemtsov's assassination are from Chechnya (or other parts of the restive North Caucasus). Their ethnicity raises a myriad of highly sensitive questions because of the intense clashes between Russian forces and separatist Islamist rebels in Chechnya.

Islamic extremism has become a major threat to Russia, which is home to more than 20 million Muslims, with 1 million of them now being residents of Moscow.

In particular, more than 1,000 Chechen Islamic militants have reportedly joined the *jihad* led by the Islamic State group, which has been wreaking havoc in Iraq and Syria.

Nemtsov's comments on the attack on the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in January, therefore, could have offend-

ed and motivated some Islamists in Russia to plot his assassination.

Given these facts, along with the Western sanctions, plummeting international oil prices and Russia's declining foreign exchange reserves, Putin has all the more reason to focus his efforts on stabilizing the situation and taking measures to boost the country's economy, since Putin seems determined to do exactly that — evident in his move to de-peg the Russian currency from the dollar.

Putin will not back down, just as he has not when dealing with Ukraine crisis. Hence the West should abandon the old anti-Putin card, or else it will only create more confrontations between the West and Russia.

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