



## NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY THREATS TO CHINA IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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### **Abstract**

*The concept of non-traditional security threat in international relations is new in the security domain. Technological advancement and globalization not only squeezed the world into a global village but also affect the security of nation-states. The dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brings several issues which forced the global community to unite for the collective interest rather than individual interest. The century proved to be consecrated for China due to rapid economic growth but the non-traditional threats hampered it extensively. Terrorism, climate change, infectious disease, and energy security became a major challenge for Beijing. Though China is the fastest-growing economy having the best defense system but the non-traditional security threats particularly infectious diseases challenged its security system. The outbreak of the COVID-19 from China not only halt daily routine in China but the whole world too. The study tries to analyze the effect of non-tradition security threats on China in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The analysis is performed on the base of the qualitative content analysis method.*



**Keywords:** Climate Change, Energy Security, infectious disease, terrorism, non-traditional security

## **Introduction**

Security is one of the major concerns of every nation-state and states are interacting with others to gain national interest but as the result of anarchy in the international system, survival of the state (security) is one of the primary interests. Though International Relations (IR) not only deals with the security we can say security is the soul of IR. Both realist and liberal have accepted the importance of security and no one deny its importance but there is a difference in the method from which they want to achieve the goal. IR scholars divide security into two major domains; traditional and non-traditional security. Although, the origin of the concept of security is too old the division of security into two wings is new. Non-traditional security threats are also called non-military threats. The concept of traditional security was based on military might but in the post-cold war era, the concept of non-traditional security emerged. Non-traditional security comprises human security concerns, like climate change, environmental degradation, food security, scarcity, terrorism, infectious disease, etc (Srikanth 2014).

China is the fastest-growing economy at the global level. Due to its rapid economic growth, Beijing became the World's second-largest economy, but four major non-traditional security threats are challenging its security. Those four primary security threats are terrorism, energy security, climate change, and infectious disease. The origin of the non-traditional security (NTS) concept emerged in China in the 1990s after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, and NTS was political (Ghiselli 2018). Before that incident, the only security concept was to strengthen the People's Liberation Army. The incident of 9/11 shook international politics; particularly, it questioned the state's security. The pattern of the 9/11 incident was different so, every state of the World jointly criticized the terrorist attack while, in that incident, two Chinese citizens died. China was among the first countries that show her grief on the incident and offer complete assistance to the U.S.

China is the largest energy deficit country, and energy security is its primary objective of China. Beijing is also the World's largest exporter, and its share in global trade is more than 15%. China's rapid economic growth is based on the industrial sector, and the industrial sector's energy consumption is not rocket science. Energy security and resources are directly proportional to industrial development, which is direct links to economic growth. One of the Belt and Road initiatives is energy security.

Though, China's contribution to global GHG emissions in 2019 was 27% of global emissions (Larsen, et al. 2021). Although climate change is a worldwide issue, major powers and major Carbon emitters are more responsible for taking solid initiatives to counter the issue of Climate change. Furthermore, the issue of infectious disease is not new, but currently, it has



become a severe security threat. Wuhan city of China was the epicenter of COVID-19, and it spread throughout the globe. The pandemic affected the Global economy and its lay down of massive human lives. It is impossible to estimate the total loss of pandemic COVID-19 due to its continuatively. Still, it can say that infectious diseases like COVID-19 lay down the whole country, and it is the worst security threat for every nation-state.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the absence of central command in the international system, anarchy creates mistrust and insecurity among states. Traditionally there was only one concept of security that was only external security. Such type of security was obtained through military might and armament. Though the traditional concept of security can't be challenged with the emergence of globalization, a new concept of security has emerged. International Relations scholars divide security into two different domains; traditional and non-traditional security. Traditional security threats are directly linked to the military. They are considered external security threats, but non-traditional security threats are those security threats that are directly affected by both military and civilians. According to Srikanth, "non-traditional security threats are challenges to the survival and benefit of people and states from non-military sources. These sources like climate change, energy security, infectious diseases, terrorism, natural disasters, irregular migration, food security, human trafficking, and drug trafficking"(Srikanth, Non-traditional security threats in the 21st century: A review 2014).

According to Buzan, "security is the pursuit of freedom from threats, and he expanded the concept of security from only military to political, economic, societal, and environmental threats"(Sulovic 2010). The dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century brings several new issues in international politics like the role of non-state actors, intra-state conflicts, and human trafficking as well as some climate change, energy security, terrorism and insurgency, demographic changes, aging, and shrinking population. Cyber security and cyber espionage became a security threat to China (Shambaugh 2018). The international system is anarchic and anarchy is responsible for security issues. Barry Buzan a well-known International Relations scholar divides security into three different levels; individual, state, and international levels. In his famous work 'People, State, and Fear' he gave a new concept of security i.e. political, economic, military, societal, and environmental security (Buzan 2007). Now China's Belt and Road Initiative connects several states via different routes and it is going to be a hegemon. As Beijing gains more and more sphere of influence in global politics it faces more security threats.

### **Research Questions**

Q.1 How are the non-traditional security threats affecting China's national security?

Q.2 Why China is more curious about non-traditional security threats particularly climate change, energy security, infectious disease, and terrorism?



### **Research Methodology**

The study is explanatory, to analyze the effects of non-traditional security threats to the People's Republic of China data were collected via different sources of secondary data like books, journal articles, reports, newspapers, websites, and other electronic sources. Both qualitative and quantitative data are used to conclude, and draw graphs and tables. The analyses are drawn on the bases of collected data by applying the qualitative content analysis method.

### **Terrorism: a Non-Traditional Security Threat for China**

The concept of non-traditional security threat emerged in China's security policy after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war. Owing to the breakdown of the Soviet Union, newly independent states emerged in Central Asia that shared a border with China. The East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), particularly in the Xinjiang region, is a severe threat to China (Small 2019). However, the initial non-traditional security threat was only political security. The evil of terrorism became the primary concern of Global politics after the tragic incident of September 11. Since that incident, terrorism has become the primary concern of China's security. Beijing supported US-led GWOT and introduced national policies to counter-terrorism and extremism. Terrorism gained priority in Chinese defense and security. According to the Defence White Paper 2002 published by China, terrorism was the major security threat for whole Chinese citizens throughout the globe. Only two Chinese citizens were losing their lives in the tragic incident of 9/11, but the most challenging security threat for China was the security of Chinese people and companies in the whole World. Before the emergence of terrorism as a security threat, Beijing only strengthens the military might of the PLA. In 2002, Beijing published a document referencing all terrorist activities in the Xinjiang region. Later in 2003, the "Ministry of Public Security issued a list of terrorist organizations; East Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO), World Uyghur Congress (WUC), and East Turkistan Information Center (ETIC), as well as claimed that all terrorist organizations were operating from outside" (Clarke 2019).

"The origin of terrorism in China can be traced to the 1990s when the separatist groups conducted more than 200 terrorist attacks from 1990 to 2000" (Evron 2007). Except for Xinjiang autonomous region, no record of a terrorist attack was found in any other part of China. First time in 2004, some Chinese workers and engineers were kidnapped in Afghanistan, Sudan, and Pakistan by terrorists. That was a massive setback for Hu Jintao's government. Then China introduced some major policies to counter the threat of terrorism. To assist Chinese workers abroad, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs introduced the department of External Security. Beijing also created some small groups to coordinate external emergencies under the MFA. "It also established a monitoring body with the help of MFA, ministry of commerce (MOFCOM), and States-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) to improve their risk assessment capabilities. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) also established the first Military Operation Other than War



(MOOTW) Teaching and Research Office within PLA, and the core objective of MOOTW was to prepare Chinese soldiers against non-traditional security threats”(Gaoyue and Char 2019). According to Michael Clarke, from 2011 to 2015, the following major terrorist attacks were recorded only from Xinjiang;

Major Terrorist Attacks were recorded only in Xinjiang

Date	Terrorist attack
June 29, 2012	(Xinjiang): six Uyghurs reportedly attempted to hijack a Tianjin Airlines flight from Hotan to Urumqi.
June 26, 2013	(Xinjiang): 35 people were reportedly killed in an altercation between Uyghurs and police in the town of Lukun. The Xinjiang regional government blamed the incident on a 17-member’ terrorist cell’.
October 28, 2013	(Beijing): an SUV ploughed into a group of tourists and burst into flames at Beijing’s historic Tiananmen Square, killing the three occupants as well as two pedestrians.
March 1, 2014	(Yunnan): eight individuals armed with knives attacked passengers at the Kunming train station, killing 31 and injuring 141.
April 30, 2014	(Xinjiang): two assailants attacked bystanders with knives and detonated explosives at Urumqi’s train station.
May 22, 2014	(Xinjiang): five assailants reportedly threw up to a dozen explosives into a crowded street market in Urumqi, killing 39 and wounding another 89.
July 28, 2014	(Xinjiang): 100 people were killed and over 200 arrested following a ‘premeditated terrorist attack’ on a police station in Shache County.
March 6, 2015	(Guangdong): two assailants armed with knives wounded ten individuals at Guangzhou’s central train station.
September 18, 2015	(Xinjiang): at least 50 people, most of them Han Chinese, were killed in an attack on a coal mine in Aksu County by knife-wielding

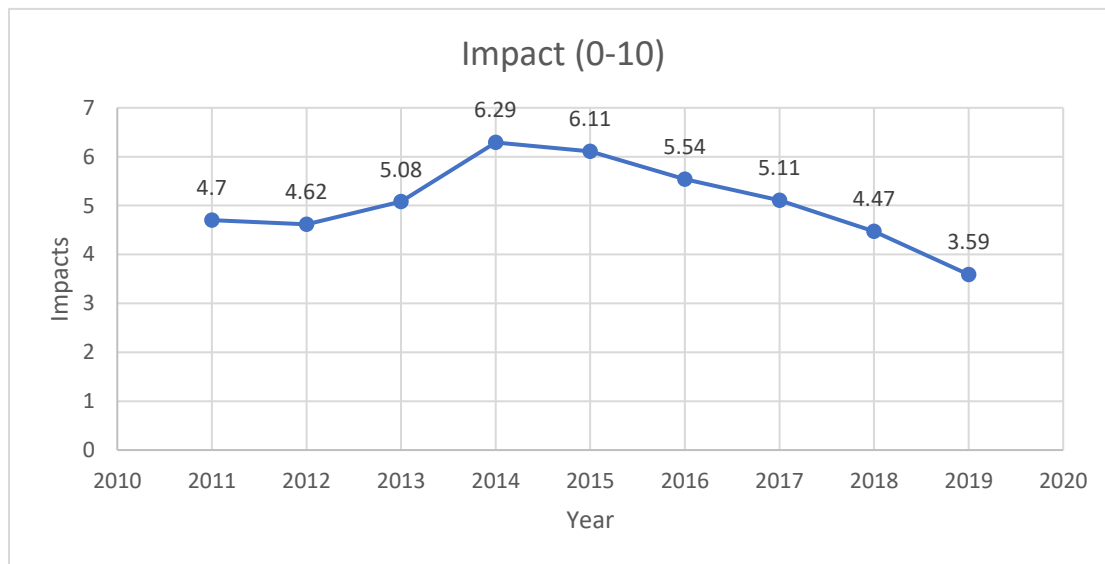
Source: (Clarke 2019)

Beijing’s adopted several initiatives to counter the threat of terrorism. One of the most prominent initiatives taken by the PRC was its support for GWOT and China sending her forces on different UN missions to counter-terrorism. Beijing also used the good offices and Shanghai Cooperation Organization to counter the evil of terrorism with the collaboration of regional countries. Beijing’s primary concerns were ETIM and other separatist organizations but strict policies. The introduction of MOOTW under PLA became more fruitful for her anti-terrorism policies. In 2015, China’s first comprehensive anti-terrorism bill was passed and enforced on January 1, 2016. The law consisted of 97 articles and ten chapters (Zhou 2016). The Xinjiang government arrested more than 1500 terrorist gangs after their massive terrorist attacks. Beijing also has several policies to provide security to her Diasporas and companies under the MFA. Beijing’s cooperation with ASEAN and CARs to counter-terrorism became more fruitful to counter terrorist outfits. The



China and Pakistan joint initiatives to counter terrorism declined activities of ETIM. Especially the operation Zarb-e-Azab played a massive role in the destruction of ETIM and other outfits (Small 2019).

According to (Defence White Paper of China 2019), terrorism is still a major and primary NTS threat for China. The current situation in Xinjiang and Uyghur issue and the reunification of Taiwan also creates mistrust and antagonism. The Tibet separatist movement run by Tibetan Diasporas is another primary concern of China (Paszak 2020). Currently, Beijing's most prominent concerns are its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the security of its related projects. Terrorists may create trouble for BRI projects and Chinese citizens throughout the World; that's why China is more curious to counter-terrorism collectively with the help of regional states (Ferguson 2020). China is following three patterns for counter-terrorism; first, Beijing adopted strict policies within her jurisdiction. Secondly, to counter the evil of terrorism, China cooperated with the West, and thirdly China is using regional organizations and assisting neighboring states in counter-terrorism. The China Terrorism Index shows that the Beijing index fell from 4.47 in 2018 to 3.59 in 2019. The following chart shows the impacts of terrorism from 2011 to 2019.



Source: (China Terrorism Index n.d.)

### **Energy Security as a Non-Traditional Security Threat for China**

Energy security means keeping energy supplies and energy resources safe. The origin of the concept of energy security can be traced to Great Britain when Winston Churchill decided to convert the energy sources of Britain from coal to oil after the First World War Britain imported



oil from Persia; that's why he emphasized more and more its energy security. Energy security is limited to states' economies and deals with politics. If a state imports oil or gas from other states, it must secure energy routes, pipelines, and diplomatic relations with energy-providing states. So, energy security is not only limited to the domestic level, but it involves politics, policies, and geopolitics on the national as well as the international level (Azzuni and Breyer 2018). China is the largest energy deficit country, and energy security is its primary objective of China. "It is the World's largest exporter, and its share in global trade is more than 15%. Energy security and resources are directly proportional to industrial development and directly linked with economic growth. One of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is energy security" (Ferguson 2020).

Energy is the backbone of the development of any state. The more secure energy means the more certain outcome. In simple words, secure energy means a secure economy, leading to development. Energy security is as much crucial as state military security. Owing to the anarchic nature of the internal system, nobody can assure the security of a state at any cost. One of the most important security aspects of those security measures is energy security (Songa, Zhanga and Suna 2019). According to the International Energy Agency (IAEA), the oil demand will increase by more than 0.5 million barrels per day, increasing inflation and slowing down economic growth. PRC is the largest energy consumer and facing an energy crisis. The major electricity generation sector of the PRC is based on thermal power plants. The rise in coal and fossil oil and gas price created energy shortages and inflation in China.

According to World Energy Report, China is the World's number one oil importer, and for energy security, Beijing is cooperating with other states like the USA, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. The main reason for collaborating with other states is to minimize the risk of possible conflict on energy resources. "Beijing's energy security is based on three E's: economic growth, energy security, and environmental protection. In 2020 China imported 13-million-barrel oil per day" (Sönnichsen 2021).

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### **Climate Change as a Non-Traditional Security Threat for China**

Climate change is another most important threat for China and the whole World. As in the words of former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, climate change did not need a visa. Though climate change is a global issue, China is the major Corban and greenhouse gas emitter. China surpassed the USA in GHG emissions in 2005. China is the number one oil importer, and thermal power plants are China's major power production units. The thermal power plants continuously emit CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. The annual GHG emission of China is a quarter of the World's GHG emission. Thermal power plants are the main culprits of China's GHG emission because thermal power plants produce 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of electricity in China. Chinese annual coal consumption is more than half of global coal consumption.

“The government banned the construction of new coal power plants in 2016 under the Paris climate conference. But when the banned expired in 2018, the construction of new coal power plants dramatically increased. Only in 2020 did China build more coal plants than the rest of the



World”(Myllyvirta 2021). Another reason for China’s massive GHG emission is its automobile that increased dramatically in recent years.

According to the Yale School of Environment Report, China’s BRI will increase by 2.7 degrees Celsius in global temperature owing to several coal-fired projects. The report further says that more than 60% of BRI funding is for nonrenewable energy sources, and coal projects are the most prominent (Yale School of the Environment 2019). Climate change will affect China badly by rising temperature and sea level and changes in weather patterns and heatwaves. Climate change may increase the ratio of natural disasters. Several coastal cities of China will submerge if the temperature continuously rises. “The residential area of more than 43 million people in China could be underwater by the end of this century if the global temperature is constantly increasing”(Kulp and Strauss 2019). Furthermore, according to a Reuters report, Beijing will suffer harsher weather events, like heavy rainfall, thunderstorm, and cloud burst. The natural disaster will destroy millions of acres of crops and several million lives. The rate of melting glaciers will increase, which will lead to devastating floods. Drought and heatwaves will also target China (Pollard 2020).

Chinese president Xi Jinping introduced several initiatives to deal with the issue of climate change more significantly after the Paris Conference on Climate change. According to President Jinping’s policies, China will be Carbon neutral country till 2060. China will generate 35% of its energy needs through low carbon emission projects to achieve the Carbon neutral status. More interestingly, during the lockdown due to low carbon emissions, the air quality of many countries became cleaner. China is investing massively in renewable energy projects, and before 2030, more than 1.2 billion kilowatts of electricity will generate through Solar and Wind power projects (Maizland 2021).

### **Infectious Disease as a Non-Traditional Security Threat for China**

According to World Health Organization (WHO), “infectious diseases are disorders caused by microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses, and fungi or parasites”(World Health Organization 2022). The use of different bacteria and viruses as a weapon is the oldest concept but did not consider a serious security threat till the theory of Barry Buzan. After the Cold war, global power politics was transformed and created more dimensions in international politics like insecurity dynamics, and the traditional security concept was limited. Still, the emergence of non-traditional security threats like infectious diseases became one of the major security threats for every state. Infectious diseases create massive fears among the Chinese and her health care policies were robust, but globalization and cross-border movement of people affected its health policies badly. Viruses, bacteria, and other germs did not need any permission or visa to cross the border; that’s why the issue of infectious disease gained much importance from the Chinese security perspective. In the decade 2000, like other non-traditional security threats, infectious diseases gained



challenged the health policies of China. HIV/AIDS, SARS, and Avian flu targeted numbers of people. “At the end of 2005, 0.65 million people were affected by HIV/AIDS”(Lee and Chan 2007).

One aim of China’s BRI is to provide health assistance to the states, particularly in Southeast Asia and South Asia, to contain the threat of infectious disease. BRI targeted to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) under UN resolution 2344 by 2030. One of the prominent SDGs deals with infectious diseases of 69 BRI connecting states (Chen, et al. 2019). The pandemic Corona Virus affected the whole World. The epicenter of Covid-19 was Wuhan city China. Initially, it affected the Wuhan city; later, it covered other parts of China. The disease is still at its boom with its sophisticated effects, and the World faces four different waves of Covid-19. Coronavirus not only hit China but also captured the whole World. Statistics show how fast the pandemic spread throughout the globe.

Coronavirus has been one of the most violent infectious diseases on its boom since December 2019. China is a densely populated country; that’s why the spread of infectious diseases is much more than in other states. After the separation of Covid-19, China introduced a lockdown policy. She introduced a series of measures later followed by the whole world, such as lockdown, virtual classes, social distance, 14-day quarantine, and face masks(Liu 2021). Though the rest of the World, especially the USA and other Western states, criticized China’s policy, the whole followed the same pattern to prevent the pandemic (HY and GC 2020). Recently, China is also trying to overcome the Omicron new coronavirus variant through a massive vaccination drive.

## **Conclusion**

The concept of security in IR is not new but the division of security threats into traditional and non-traditional security threats is new in the discipline of IR. Traditional security threats belong to the military while non-traditional security threats are related to other issues relating to human security. Though, the nation-states facing security issues from the beginning, and the concept of human security is centuries old. Now in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century states are more curious about non-traditional security threats because of their destructiveness. China is the world's fastest-growing economy and its BRI is the game-changer in global politics. Since the incident of 9/11 the whole world facing terrorism and China is among those states who faced terrorist attacks but due to its strict policies, it successfully controlled it. But the threat of terrorism is continuing and the challenging issue is the separatist movement and the activities of ETIM.

Global warming and climate change have also had huge impacts on the global community. In the domain of security studies, climate change is counted as a non-traditional security threat. As China is one of the major carbon emitters and it has a major contribution to greenhouse gas emissions which caused climate change. Despite being the signatory to the Paris Conference China is



installing new coal-fired power plants which is a violation of the Paris conference and carbon zero mission. The BRI may contribute 2 degrees Celsius to the global temperature which may increase the flood and environmental degradation. Furthermore, China's economy is more dependent on the industrial sector and its exports so, energy security may be called the backbone of the industrial sector. Beijing is more curious about energy security and the changing dynamics of global politics and alliances further creating trouble for China. The Indo-Pacific region and anti-China alliances like Quad create insecurity for China. Moreover, infectious disease is another major non-traditional security threat for China because as the movement of people increases the chances to spread infectious disease increase. COVID-19 shaken the whole World and its laydown of the global GDP. As China's one of the biggest cities Wuhan is counted as the epi-center of the COVID-19 which not only laydown the Chinese GDP but grounded the economy of the whole world. Infectious disease is the most crucial non-traditional security threat for China as it proved fertile for COVID-19.



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