

*Analysis based on our daily newsletter, Conversations in Chinese Media (CiCM)*

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# *CiCM* *INSIGHTS*

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*Issue 3: Tracking China's anti-Democracy campaign*

## Chinese response to the Summit for Democracy

- On December 9-10, 2021, President of the United States (US) Joseph Biden hosted the first of the two Summits for Democracy, which was attended by leaders from government, civil society and the private sector to address the global democratic deficit. The US president quoted the Freedom House 2021 report and the Global State of Democracy 2021 report to highlight the rise of authoritarianism and the global democratic deficit. 112 countries were invited to the virtual summit including India, and the most notable non-invitees were China, Russia, Bangladesh and Hungary.
- China and Russia expressed strong dissatisfaction and criticized the summit as a relic of the US' 'Cold War mentality', arguing that "democracy is not a prerogative of certain countries but a universal right of all peoples". China and Russia consider democracy as a common value of humanity and they rebuked the US for deciding 'who is a democratic country and who is not'. They suggested that there are multiple models of democracies and China and Russia have their own locally sustainable democratic models. They launched a scathing attack on the US and argued that "a truly democratic government will not foster hegemony and division abroad while building democracy and unity at home".
- China was infuriated after it was left out of the summit and responded by launching its own 'propaganda blitz'. The Chinese government and official media launched a two-pronged campaign by highlighting the strengths of China's political system while pointing out the shortcomings of liberal democracies. China's state-run media outlet Global Times ran a smear campaign stating that the US, which believes in an outdated definition of democracy conducted the Summit for Democracy solely as an 'anti-China ideological clique'.
- The State Council Information Office of China released a report titled 'China: Democracy That Works'. The report romanticized the Communist Party of China (CPC)-led Chinese governance model. It argues that democracy is deeply rooted in Chinese ethos: "five thousand years ago, ancient Chinese began to explore the concept that people are the foundation of a state". Later these ideas became what we call today as democracy. The report projects the CPC as an epitome of democracy. It suggests that the CPC has developed 'Whole-Process People's Democracy' in China which "integrates process-oriented democracy with results-oriented democracy, procedural democracy with substantive democracy, direct with indirect democracy, and people's democracy with the will of the state".

- State-sponsored Chinese media and think-tanks have developed a novel concept of 'Whole-Process Democracy'. This has been mentioned repeatedly in Chinese literature, both in the government as well as media, and with the help of this conception the CPC is trying to appropriate the idea of democracy. As covered in our CiCM newsletters of 14.12.21 and 20.12.21, Chinese newspapers consistently published 'anti-democracy' content after the US Summit, claiming China to be a democracy.
- After praising the Chinese system as a meritocracy, market democracy and technocracy, the second part of the campaign raises questions over liberal democracies. In an opinion piece to the China Global Television Network (CGTN), former British Member of Parliament, George Galloway notes that the political setup in the US is dominated by the elite capitalist class and cites the example of an electoral campaign funded by the rich corporates. He criticizes this overwhelming influence of a particular class in the US and labelled it as a 'Shamocracy'.
- Another scathing attack on liberal democracies is carried forward by a report titled 'Ten Questions for American Democracy'. The report selectively outlines the major flaws in American democracy. It mentions massive inequality, gun violence, racial discrimination and the global war on terror as the major fallouts of American democracy. The report describes the Summit for Democracy as "a new international charade" and argues that "American democracy has caused social disorder at home and created turmoil abroad". Further it claims that the US is falling into a "cold civil war" and it is a "global refugee maker". The report concludes that in the name of democracy, the US is ruled by six masters: 'Money-crazy', 'Gun-crazy', 'White-crazy', 'Media-crazy', 'Militia-crazy', and 'Drug-crazy'.
- A CGTN opinion article by a senior fellow at the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies in China reflected upon the issue of human rights in connection with democracy. As per his comparative analysis of women's status in China and India, "the life and real rights of a Chinese woman are far superior to those of an Indian woman".
- A pertinent feature of the CPC's response to the summit for democracy is its 'appropriation of democracy'. It is interesting to note that a single-party ruled authoritarian China is claiming to be a 'Whole-Process Democracy'. Hegemons share a closely knitted relationship with the process of knowledge production. In the Eurocentric system, the Europeans were quick to claim the popular non-European traditions of that time. Democracy is a defining value of the modern world and hence the CPC is laying claims over the concept of democracy.

- The CPC is projecting the Chinese model of 'Whole-Process Democracy' as an alternative to the liberal democratic world view. This approach asserts the findings of the recent Pentagon report on China which claims that the PRC aims to revise the international order on its own terms. The export of the so-called 'Whole-Process Democracy' is an inherent feature of Chinese strategy to amend the international order.
- As democratic ideals are attacked by Beijing, the importance of groupings and bilaterals that espouse shared ideals of 'democracy' and 'rule of law' become crucial. Groupings such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) comprising US, Australia, India and Japan as one of the most prominent and critical security dialogue forums in the Indo-Pacific and Asian region must ensure dedicated focus on furthering democracy. Such endeavours must be visible both as a group and in their individual bilateral outreaches.