

China's Foreign Policy: Throwing out the rule book

By Charles Clover and Luna Lin

For years, China has walked a fine line on Syria. It supported diplomatic efforts to end the conflict but refused to be drawn into the complex conflagration that threatens to consume the Middle East.

But on August 14 a visit by a senior official in the People's Liberation Army appeared to reverse China's careful attempts to steer clear of entanglements in Syria. It also raised broader questions about Beijing's longstanding aversion to military intervention in foreign conflicts.

Rear Admiral Guan Youfei, a senior official in the People's Liberation Army, met top Syrian officials in Damascus, where he promised increased military aid and training for government forces. Mr Guan also met a senior Russian general, affirming a budding partnership with Moscow in military affairs.

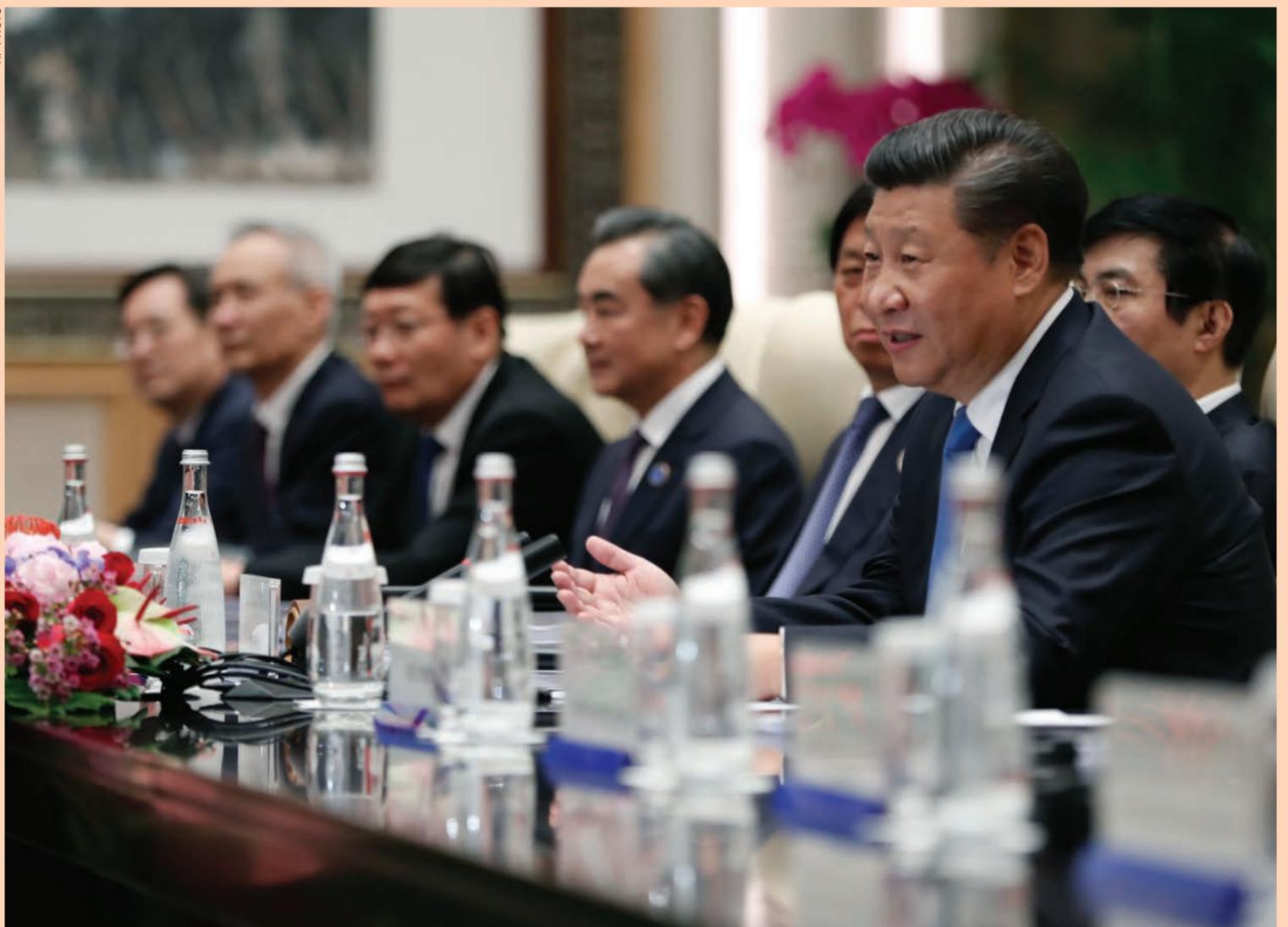
While it was kept low key, the visit was so unusual that it even caught Chinese experts by surprise.

"Amid all the chaos, the PLA is somehow venturing into Syria," says Zha Daojiong, an expert on the Middle East at Peking University, referring to Mr Guan's Syria trip. "I hope the PLA will go no further than photo-taking or other piecemeal forms of military diplomacy. The US and Russia face huge challenges in Syria. What makes us think we will have any more success?"

The visit - and the controversy it provoked - offers a stark demonstration of how a number of China's longstanding foreign policy taboos are being rethought under President Xi Jinping. For decades China has trumpeted its aversion to traditional realpolitik - including foreign military intervention, building foreign bases, developing spheres of influence, creating buffer zones and forging alliances - as outdated relics of colonialism.

"Hegemony or militarism is not in the genes of the Chinese," said Mr Xi in June 2014 when he, along with officials from Myanmar and India, celebrated the 60th anniversary of the "five principles of peaceful coexistence" signed in 1954. While Beijing's commitment to these principles has been at best uneven - India and China fought a border war eight years later - they went on to inspire

AP PHOTO



Chinese President Xi Jinping (right) speaks during a meeting at the G20 Leaders Summit in Hangzhou

“ Since Xi Jinping became president, [Chinese officials] no longer talk about keeping a low profile.

PAUL HAENLE
CARNEGIE-TSINGHUA CENTER

several decades of foreign policy. Deng Xiaoping, the former leader, referred to his foreign policy as "keeping a low profile" in international affairs in order to focus on economic growth.

But since Mr Xi assumed power in 2012, he has ushered in a new foreign policy. In October 2013 he championed *fenfa youwei*, or "striving for achievement" in foreign affairs, signalling a more assertive stance.

"Since Xi Jinping became president, they no longer talk about

keeping a low profile," says Paul Haenle, head of the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center in Beijing. "If you discuss it with the Chinese they will say they haven't abandoned that concept, but the truth in my view is that they have."

As for the principle of non-interference abroad, he says, "they insist they abide by it, but if you sat down for a few minutes you could think of 15 examples where they're not doing that any more."

One long-held taboo was recently broken when China opened a

naval base in Djibouti this year - its first foreign military base since withdrawing its forces from North Korea in 1958. A declared aversion to spheres of influence seems to be eroding, too, amid Beijing's assertive claims on territorial waters in the South China Sea and airspace over the East China Sea.

A new counter-terrorism law passed at the end of 2015 will, for the first time, legalise sending Chinese troops for combat missions abroad without a UN mandate. This is seen by many as a precursor to more foreign military operations.

Another cast-iron law - non-alignment - is now the subject of bitter polemics in China. It has forsworn alliances since the implosion of the Sino-Soviet alliance in the 1960s, which led to a brief border war between the two countries in 1969. A 1961 defence pact with North Korea is moribund after Bei-

jing publicly repudiated it in 2013.

But despite the mixed performance of China's past alliances, a number of prominent scholars have been arguing strenuously for China to revisit the idea.

"The subject of alliances is the subject of many misconceptions by the government and the public," says Xu Jin, a professor of international relations at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He says China is making a "colossal mistake" in not allying with countries such as Russia that chafe, as Beijing does, at the US-dominated world order.

"Looking around the world since 1648, there has never been another single great power that pursued a policy of rejecting alliances," Mr Xu wrote in a December 2015 article in *Chinese Foreign Policy*, a Chinese-language journal. "China needs to learn the art of managing alliances to seek an advantage and



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create a balance of power.”

The leader of the pro-alliance movement is widely regarded as Yan Xuetong, director of the Institute of Modern International Relations at Beijing's Tsinghua University.

Non-alignment, he argues, “suited our country during the cold war when it was weak. However, in the coming decade, China will no longer be the weak country it was. To stick to the nonaligned strategy would not only be unhelpful but also potentially harmful,” he wrote in a book published last year.

Shifts in foreign policy have historically first been signalled by civilian experts. For example, five years before China opened its first foreign military base in Djibouti, Shen Dingli, the head of the Center for America Studies at Fudan University, wrote an article on China.org titled “Don't shun the idea of setting up overseas military bases” in July 2010.

“I thought our government's argument was absurd,” says Mr Shen. “To have a capability like an overseas base does not mean you are automatically being threatening.” He believes that the lack of international reaction to his article, which was published in English, might have been a factor in the Chinese decision to go ahead with a foreign base.

Now, as disputes grow with the US, Japan and other countries in China's backyard, the pressure on China to engage in more assertive realpolitik is coming again from the pages of journals and press interviews with experts.

The US has aggressively challenged China's claim to territorial waters in the South China Sea by sailing ships and flying planes close to a number of artificial islands claimed by Beijing.

The Philippines signed a deal this year to give Washington access to five military bases, marking a return by US forces to the country they left after 1992. The US is also seeking access to naval facilities in Cam Ranh Bay and Danang in Vietnam, which would mark its first military return to the country



U.S. President Barack Obama (left) and Chinese President Xi Jinping pose for photographers as they shake hands before their meeting at the West Lake State Guest House in Hangzhou

‘If confrontation between China and the US continues, international relations experts say Beijing could try to form an anti-US alliance

since Saigon fell in 1975. Seoul and Washington have agreed to base an anti-ballistic missile system in South Korea. Beijing argues that the system - known as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense - can penetrate deep into China and weakens its own nuclear deterrent.

The future of Japan's pacifist postwar constitution is also uncertain as Tokyo feels pressure from China's military build-up. Beijing has increased defence spending by double digits in nominal terms every year for almost a quarter of a century. “The return of geopolitics

is real in this region,” says Chisako Masuo, an associate professor at Kyushu University. “And the driving force is the rise of China.”

Asian geopolitics is having knock-on effects elsewhere in the world, including Syria. Dennis Wilder, former CIA deputy assistant director for East Asia, who teaches at Georgetown University, says Beijing's overture to the Assad regime is likely to be inspired as much by the game for influence in Asia as any genuine interest in the Middle East.

“I think this is a bit of Xi pay-back to the US” for interference in the South China Sea and THAAD, he says. “The Chinese often, when upset about our actions in their core interest, try to demonstrate that they have the power to make life difficult for us in an area outside their core interests but of great concern to us.”

If confrontation between China and the US continues, international relations experts say Beijing could try to form an anti-US alliance. “Historically any rising power, when they intend to balance a hegemon, or when an established power wants to balance a rising peer rival, the first thing they do is alliance formation,” says Sumantra Maitra, a doctoral researcher at the UK's University of Nottingham. “There is no reason to believe that China will act any differently.”

The question is whom to ally with. South Korea, Japan and the Philippines already have alliances

with the US, while Vietnam, Indonesia and other states with claims in the South China Sea have been alienated by what they see as Beijing's heavy-handed behaviour. “China's activities, especially in the South China Sea, are driving countries away from it, not toward it,” says Richard Bitzinger of the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore.

India is too estranged by border disputes and China's support of Pakistan. Central Asia, despite Beijing's “One Belt, One Road” economic initiative, is considered to be part of Russia's sphere of influence. This leaves Pakistan, North Korea and Russia, along with Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia, which receive military aid from China.

Of these, Russia is the only state that can offer an alliance with any deterrent power. Indeed, many US experts fear a new “axis” of Russia and China.

But the economic consequences of an anti-US alliance with Russia would be difficult to gauge: trade with the US in combined exports and imports was worth USD659 billion last year, according to the Office of the US Trade Representative, compared with just \$64 billion according to Chinese customs data for Russia.

“The economic relationship with the United States is fundamentally more important to China than the one with Russia. China doesn't forget that,” says Stapleton Roy, a former ambassador to China, in a panel discussion in July at the Brookings Institution in Washington.

Instead of an alliance, the two countries seem to be co-operating on an ad hoc basis. Mr Xi and President Vladimir Putin have met 17 times since early 2013. Last year, Mr Xi sent Li Zhanshu, the chief of the Communist party's General Office, to Moscow, putting the relationship with Mr Putin on the highest level of any foreign contact. Mr Li is effectively Mr Xi's chief of staff.

Experts have since noted a spike in mid- and high-level diplomatic contacts between China and Russia - and more joint military exercises. In June, the two nations conducted apparently co-ordinated ship manoeuvres near disputed islands in the East China Sea. The two countries plan joint naval exercises in the South China Sea later this month.

“China is facing growing tension in the East China Sea and the South China Sea and feeling external pressure,” says Li Xing, director of the Eurasian Studies Center at Beijing Normal University. “Russia, meanwhile, is facing pressure from the west on issues such as Ukraine. The two sympathise with each other.”

Additional reporting by Lucy Hornby

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China's pushback in the Middle East

Since the Syrian crisis began in 2011, China has taken a balanced approach to the conflict, manoeuvring between President Bashar al-Assad's regime and the opposition in a bid to hedge its bets.

That was a relatively new tack for China. Beijing has tended to build bridges exclusively with ruling regimes in troubled countries - with drastic consequences if they lost power.

In Libya, China learned the hard way not to back the wrong horse. China steadfastly backed Muammar Gaddafi during the civil war - and lost lucrative oil contracts after he was killed by insurgents in 2011.

“The Chinese felt they got burnt in Libya because they stuck with Gaddafi too long. When he fell, they got shut out,” says Jon Alterman, director of Middle East programmes at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

“They resolved to be much more balanced when a

country's future is uncertain.”

As Beijing makes overtures to the Assad regime, analysts say there are a number of factors at play. First, says Mr Alterman, “they feel the period of danger for the regime has passed.”

The overture to Assad may also reflect a growing convergence of Beijing and Moscow on geopolitical issues.

But the Global Times, the hawkish mouthpiece for the Communist party, alluded to another motivation: the desire to needle the US, which backs the Syrian opposition.

“Since the US has been interfering militarily in China's backyard in the South China Sea, this could be pushback from the Chinese military into an area, the Middle East, that is usually considered a US sphere of military influence,” the paper quoted an analyst as saying.

By Nicole Winfield, Vatican City

Pope declares Mother Teresa a saint and model of mercy

POPE Francis declared Mother Teresa a saint yesterday, praising the tiny nun for having taken in society's most unwanted and for having shamed world leaders for the "crimes of poverty they themselves created."

Francis held up Mother Teresa as the model for a Catholic Church that goes to the peripheries to find poor, wounded souls during a canonization Mass that drew an estimated 120,000 people — rich and poor, powerful and homeless — to a sun-filled St. Peter's Square.

"Let us carry her smile in our hearts and give it to those whom we meet along our journey, especially those who suffer," Francis said in his homily.

The canonization was the highlight of Francis' Holy Year of Mercy and may come to define his papacy, which has been dedicated to ministering to society's most marginal, from prisoners to prostitutes, the refugees and the homeless.

Applause erupted in St. Peter's Square even before Francis finished pronouncing the rite of canonization, evidence of the admiration Mother Teresa enjoyed from Christians and non-Christians alike during her life and after her 1997 death.

At the Mother House of the Missionaries of Charity group that she founded in Kolkata, hundreds of people watching the Mass on TV clapped with joy when Francis declared her a saint. They gathered around Mother's tomb which was decorated with flowers, a single candle and a photo of the tiny wrinkled saint.

"I am so proud to be from Kolkata," said Sanjay Sarkar, a high school student on hand for the celebration. "Mother Teresa belonged to Kolkata, and she has been declared a saint."

For Francis, Mother Teresa put into action his ideal of the church as a merciful "field hospital" for the poorest of the poor, those suffering both material and spiritual poverty. He admitted even he would find it hard to call her "St. Teresa" since her tenderness was so maternal.

In his homily, Francis praised her as the merciful saint who defended the lives of the unborn, sick and abandoned, recalling her strong anti-abortion stance which often put her at odds with progressives around the world.

"She bowed down before those who were spent, left to die on the side of the road, seeing in them their God-given dignity," he said. "She made her voice heard before the powers of the world, so that they mi-

AP PHOTO



Irma Escuero, of New York, holds a statue of Mother Teresa prior to the start of a mass celebrated by Pope Francis where she was canonized in St. Peter's Square yesterday

ght recognize their guilt for the crimes of poverty they themselves created."

As if to emphasize the point, which Francis himself has made repeatedly, he repeated: "The crimes of poverty they themselves created."

Hundreds of Missionaries of Charity sisters in their trademark blue-trimmed white saris had front-row seats at the Mass, alongside 1,500 ho-

meless people and 13 heads of state or government and even royalty: Queen Sofia of Spain.

"Her heart, she gave it to the world," said Charlotte Samba, a 52-year-old mother of three who travelled with a church group from Gabon for the Mass. "Mercy, forgiveness, good works: It is the heart of a mother for the poor."

While big, the crowd wasn't even half of the 300,000

who turned out for Mother Teresa's 2003 beatification, thanks in part to security fears in the wake of Islamic extremist attacks in Europe. Those fears prompted a huge, 3,000-strong law enforcement presence to secure the area around the Vatican and close the airspace above.

While Francis is clearly keen to hold Mother Teresa up as a model for her joyful dedica-

tion to society's outcasts, he was also recognizing holiness in a nun who lived most of her adult life in spiritual agony sensing that God had abandoned her.

According to correspondence that came to light after she died in 1997, Mother Teresa experienced what the church calls a "dark night of the soul" — a period of spiritual doubt, despair and loneliness that many of the great mystics experienced. In Mother Teresa's case, it lasted for nearly 50 years — an almost unheard of trial.

For the Rev. Brian Kolodiejchuk, the Canadian priest who spearheaded Mother Teresa's saint-making campaign, the revelations were further confirmation of Mother Teresa's heroic saintliness. He said that by canonizing her, Francis is recognizing that Mother Teresa not only shared the material poverty of the poor but the spiritual poverty of those who feel "unloved, unwanted, uncared for."

"What she described as the greatest poverty in the world today [of feeling unloved] she herself was living in relationship with Jesus," he said in an interview on the eve of the canonization.

Francis has never publicly mentioned this "darkness," but he has in many ways modeled his papacy on Mother Teresa's simple lifestyle and selfless service to the poor: He eschewed the Apostolic Palace for a hotel room, made welcoming migrants and the poor a hallmark and has fiercely denounced today's "throwaway" culture that discards the unborn, the sick and the elderly with ease.

In keeping with her spirit, he was treating 1,500 homeless people bussed into Rome for the Mass to a pizza lunch in the Vatican auditorium afterward.

Born Agnes Gonxhe Bojaxhiu on Aug. 26, 1910, Mother Teresa came to India in 1929 as a sister of the Loreto order. In 1946, she received what she described as a "call within a call" to found a new order dedicated to caring for the most unloved and unwanted, the "poorest of the poor."

In 1950 she founded the Missionaries of Charity, which went on to become a global order of nuns, priests, brothers and lay co-workers.

She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.

She died in 1997 and was put on a fast-track for sainthood soon thereafter. **AP**

Decision imminent on fate of world's only wild red wolves

THE fate of the world's remaining wild population of red wolves will be decided soon. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plans to announce in September whether it will maintain, modify or abandon a 30-year effort to return the wolves to the wild in eastern North Carolina.

Meanwhile, conservationists say the wildlife service is already neglecting its duty and have asked a federal judge to step in. A Sept. 14 hearing is scheduled on their efforts to block what they say are harmful or lethal ways of removing wolves from private land.

Conservationists say the preliminary injunction is needed to halt population declines that have left between 45 and 60 animals roaming the wild. The wild population peaked at approximately 130 a decade ago and stayed above 100 for years, according to court documents.

"Our hope is that the agency will

AP PHOTO



recommit to the population as a whole and the program as a whole. This injunction is really just to stop the bleeding," Sierra Weaver, a lawyer for the Southern Environmental Law Center, said. "The idea is to make sure we still

have a red wolf population to recover by the time we get to the end of this litigation."

Once common around the Southeast, the red wolf had been considered extinct in the wild as of 1980 because of fac-

tors including hunting and habitat loss. Releases of red wolves bred in captivity started in 1987.

But in recent years, some North Carolina residents have complained that the wolves

are increasingly straying onto private land and causing problems. Opponents also cite an outside evaluation from 2014 that found flaws in the recovery program.

Tom MacKenzie, a spokesman for the wildlife service, said federal officials would make a decision on the fate of the program in September after a lengthy review, but he couldn't provide an exact date.

The conservation groups — which include the Red Wolf Coalition, Defenders of Wildlife and Animal Welfare Institute — note that the federal government has already halted practices that helped boost the population such as releasing captive-born pups into the wild and sterilizing coyotes that sometimes interbreed with the wolves.

Lawyers for the federal government, however, counter that they have maintained other efforts — such as tracking wolves with radio collars and providing veterinary care — while funding the program with more than \$1 million in 2016.

They also note that another 200 or so red wolves live in captivity, justifying the designation of the wild wolves as "not essential to the continued existence of the species." **MDT/AP**

ASK THE VET

By Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester



CAT-PROOFING YOUR HOME FOR NEWBORN KITTENS

NEWBORN kittens are totally dependent on the mother cat until about 6 weeks of age. After 12 to 15 weeks of age, kittens are ready to separate from their mothers. At this time, you, as their owner, must keep them safe and secure. Part of that responsibility involves carefully "cat-proofing" your entire home, even after your kitten grows up. Remember: A home can contain a myriad of hazards for the inquisitive kitten or cat. Here is a partial list of common household hazards, and what to do about them:

KEEP POISONS OUT OF REACH

Research which plants are poisonous to kittens and cats, and get rid of them.

Store medicines, cleaning supplies, auto fluids, glues, adhesives, insecticides and paint supplies in containers or cabinets with "child-proof" latches.

Don't leave "Pools" of Water Unattended

Do not leave the toilet lid up. Kittens and cats may drown if they fall in.

Do not leave a bathtub, sink or pail filled with water unattended. Kittens and cats can drown in very shallow water.

STORE AWAY SMALL OR SHARP OBJECTS

Store small or sharp objects—for instance, coins, needles, rubber bands, tacks, paper clips, and more—in a locked container, to prevent choking and intestinal damage.

Store fishing supplies in a locked tackle box. Veterinarians often have to remove hooks from a feline's mouth or paws; moreover, fishing lines can sever the intestines.

KITTENS CAN CHOKE ON OR STRANGLE THEMSELVES WITH STRING AND CORDS

Cut the loops of dangling window treatment cords or bundle them out of reach; they can cause strangulation.

Put away toys with strings when you are not supervising your kitten's playtime.

Store craft supplies—like ribbons, yarn, and string—in a locked crafts box. If ingested, they can cause intestinal obstruction, which can be fatal. (For this reason, putting ribbons in your kitty's hair can be dangerous.)

Discard strings from cooked meat immediately; if ingested, they can damage the intestines.

DON'T LEAVE OPEN FLAMES UNATTENDED

Do not place candles within reach, and do not open fires unattended.

Separate wood stoves and fireplaces from the rest of the room with sturdy screens.

BE CAREFUL AND AWARE OF THE DANGERS OF APPLIANCES

Close washers and dryers immediately; always check to see if a napping cat is inside before you turn either on.

Close refrigerator and freezer doors immediately.

Seal an unused refrigerator or freezer shut.

Never leave hot burners or open ovens unattended.

Close microwave doors immediately.

Install child proof latches on cupboards in all rooms of the house and garage.

Tie up and remove from reach electrical cords; kittens and cats chewing on them may be electrocuted. Or, purchase protective plastic electrical runners at a hardware store.

DANGERS OF FURNITURE AND WINDOWS

Check for kittens hiding in folding furniture, like beds and sofas. Left there, kittens may be crushed.

Keep window and door screens in good repair to prevent injury and escape.

FOODS THAT CAN HARM KITTENS

Keep adult treats—like chocolate, coffee, and tea—out of reach. They contain xanthines, which can cause seizures and death.

Keep hard candy out of reach. It can cause choking.

Keep grapes and raisins out of reach. They can cause kidney damage.

Never allow kittens or cats to eat uncooked meat, which may contain disease-causing bacteria and parasites.

Discard bones from fish, meat and poultry. They can lacerate the digestive and intestinal tracts.

Store uncooked yeast dough out of reach. It can expand and rupture the stomach and intestines.

ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO

Never give kittens or cats alcoholic beverages, and always rinse glasses immediately. Intoxication can be fatal to kittens and cats.

Keep tobacco products and ash trays out of reach. Tobacco poisoning (signaled by excitation, salivation, vomiting and diarrhea) requires immediate medical attention and can be fatal.



DISEASED FOOD AND DANGEROUS FOOD ITEMS

Do not leave scraps of food on counters or in open trash cans; discarded food can harbor disease-causing germs.

Place used plastic wrap and aluminum foil in a tightly covered trash can to prevent choking or intestinal obstruction.

Cut the plastic rings of beverage holders to prevent strangulation.

Hope this info helps
Till next week
Dr Ruan

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