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China's Defence

White Paper

An Analysis

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About the Author



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China's Defence White Paper – An Analysis

Preview

China published a white paper on July 24 this year Titled 'China's National Defence in the New Era'. It aims to help the international community understand China's national defence strategies under President Xi Jinping. This explains the practice, purposes and importance of China's attempts to build a fortified national defense and a strong military.

Some nation states publish their National Security Strategy and National Defence Strategy from time to time generally coinciding with the new governments taking over. In USA after a President takes over he clearly lays down his National Security and Defence strategies through these documents. National Defence Strategy of USA sometimes have been published as Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR). Trump administration has published the National Defence Strategy and National Defence Strategy in 2017 and 2018 respectively.

Though not always but mostly China publishes its National Defence Strategy in the form of a white paper once in two years. China does not publish in the open domain its National Security Strategy. The dates of publication of China's previous defence strategies are:-

- China's Military Strategy in 2015 - May 26, 2015.
- The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces - April 16, 2013.
- China's National Defense in 2010 - March 31, 2011.
- China's National Defense in 2008 - January 20, 2009.
- China's National Defense in 2004 - December 27, 2004.
- China's National Defense in 2002 - December 9, 2002.
- China's National Defense in 1998 - July 1998.

Most of the previous white papers were simply titled 'China's National Defence', only the last two strategies are theme based.

2017 National Security Strategy and in 2018 National Defense Strategy of USA signaled a major shift in U.S. strategy from a focus on counter-terrorism and extremism to competition and possible conflict with China and Russia. It labeled China along with Russia as revisionist powers. China already is an emerging super power that is stronger than Russia in virtually every respect other than its number of nuclear weapons.

The Chinese White Paper is a clear and detailed 51-page response to the latest U.S. strategy. China's National Defense in the New Era touches on every key point of these two U.S. documents. Also, the white paper is a direct response to the official U.S. reports on Chinese Military Power issued by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and by the Defense Intelligence Agency. The White Paper summarises the overall character of United States defense efforts by declaring that:-

- International strategic competition is on the rise.
- The U.S. has adjusted its national security and defense strategies and adopted unilateral policies.
- U.S. has provoked and intensified competition among major countries.
- U.S. significantly increased its defense expenditure.
- U.S. pushed for additional capacity in nuclear, outer space, cyber and missile defense and undermined global strategic stability.

The 27,000-word White Paper has six chapters:-

- The International Security Situation.
- China's Defensive National Defense Policy in the New Era.
- Fulfilling the Missions And Tasks of China's Armed Forces in the New Era.
- Reform in China's National Defense and Armed Forces.
- Reasonable and Appropriate Defense Expenditure.
- Actively Contributing to Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind.

Through these six broad themes, white paper highlights three important points:-

- Internal security issues are non-negotiable for China, and any external interference would not be tolerated.
- China is heading towards its stated goal of People's Liberation Army (PLA): Informationisation by 2020, modernisation by 2035 and a world class armed force by 2050.

- China views East and Southeast Asia as its own sphere of influence and aims to keep the U.S. out of it.

The White Paper notes that China will pursue a national defense policy that is defensive in nature. China's national defense aims are:-

- To deter and resist aggression.
- To safeguard national political security, the people's security and social stability.
- To oppose and contain "Taiwan independence".
- To crack down on proponents of separatist movements such as Tibet independence and the creation of East Turkistan.
- To safeguard national sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security.
- To safeguard China's maritime rights and interests.
- To safeguard China's security interests in outer space, electro-magnetic space and cyber space.
- To safeguard China's overseas interests.
- To support the sustainable development of the country.

Tenor of the White Paper

There is a marked difference between the tenor of the white papers of 2015 and 2019. The 2015 white paper called for more military exchanges and greater cooperation with other countries in a rapidly changing environment. The 2019 edition reflects intensification, implementation and justification. The South China Morning Post summarised it succinctly: Perhaps the biggest change is in tone - cooperation is out in favour of antagonism and complaint.

This White Paper shows China's willingness to use force in a variety of scenarios including projection of military power across much of the eastern hemisphere. The late Deng Xiaoping's dictum of an earlier era, "Hide your strength, bide your time and never take the lead", has given away to China's readiness to muscle flexing in order to secure its interests. It makes a case for a more outward orientation of its People's Liberation Army (PLA), which has been downsized in terms of soldiers, but is far better equipped with modern technology than it was some years ago.

The White Paper is scathing at the "separatists" in Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang, especially Taiwan. On Tibet and Xinjiang it says, "External separatist forces for Tibet independence and the creation of East Turkistan launch frequent actions, posing threats to China's national security and social stability." China's offensive tone is evident when it states, "China has the firm resolve and the ability to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and will never allow the secession of any part of its territory by anyone, any organisation or any political party by any means at any time. We make no

promise to renounce the use of force, and reserve the option of taking all necessary measures. This is by no means targeted at our compatriots in Taiwan, but at the interference of external forces and the very small number of ‘Taiwan independence’ separatists and their activities. The PLA will resolutely defeat anyone attempting to separate Taiwan from China and safeguard national unity at all costs.”

Red Lines

Key points of the White Paper are:-

- China’s Defence Ministry warns against seeking Taiwan independence.
- China’s national goal is to protect its interest and security.
- South China Sea and Diaoyu Islands are inseparable from China.

It claims that building infrastructure, deploying defensive capabilities on the islands and reefs and conducting patrols around the waters of the South China Sea is within its national sovereignty. This is opposite to Chinese President Xi Jinping’s 2015 commitment to not militarise these features.

South China Sea

China believes that the South China Sea islands and Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea are parts of the Chinese territory. China thus exercises its national sovereignty to build infrastructure and deploy necessary defensive capabilities on the islands and reefs in the South China Sea.

The White Paper deals with the South and East China Sea issues by stating that, China’s armed forces defend important waters, islands and reefs in the East China Sea, the South China Sea and the Yellow Sea, acquire full situation awareness of adjacent waters, conduct joint rights protection and law enforcement operations, properly handle maritime and air situations, and resolutely respond to security threats, infringements and provocations on the sea.



Beijing’s competing territory claims in the South China Sea (ABC News: Illustration/Jarrod Fankhauser).

The Chinese navy has been having issues with the U.S., Japan and Australia on the South China Sea. However, the White Paper noted that “steady progress” has been made in building a coordinated counter-terrorism mechanism among the militaries of the regional countries. It says that “the situation is generally stable and improving as regional countries are properly managing risks and differences.”

Japan

The major hurdle for improving relations between the two countries is the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands. These islands are also claimed by China, where they are known as the Diaoyu. The White Paper called the tiny islets in the East China Sea as “inalienable parts of the Chinese territory,” and vowed that Beijing would protect its “national sovereignty and territorial integrity” via “patrols in the waters” near the Senkakus.

The White Paper focused on Japan's unshackling of the Self-Defense Forces and evolution of a more independent and muscular security policy. The paper said, “In an attempt to circumvent the postwar mechanism, Japan has adjusted its military and security policies and increased input accordingly, thus becoming more outward-looking in its military endeavors”.

Asia Pacific

The White Paper observes that while the Asia-Pacific region is “generally stable”, there is increased “major country competition”. It argues that the U.S. “is strengthening its Asia-Pacific military alliances and reinforcing military deployment and intervention”. It identifies the key partners for Washington are South Korea, Japan and Australia and that “Australia continues to strengthen its military alliance with the U.S. and its military engagement in the Asia-Pacific, seeking a bigger role in security affairs.” It states that even as the world's “economic and strategic center continues to shift towards the Asia-Pacific, the region has become a focus of major country competition, bringing uncertainties to regional security ... Regional hotspots and disputes are yet to be resolved. Despite positive progress, the Korean Peninsula still faces uncertainty.”

The White Paper Asserts that the Asia-Pacific countries are increasingly aware that they are members of a community with shared destiny. Addressing differences and disputes through dialogue and consultation has become a preferred policy option for regional countries ... The situation of the South China Sea is generally stable and improving as regional countries are properly managing risks and differences ... A balanced, stable, open and inclusive Asian security architecture continues to develop.

Obviously, China is hinting at the rapid emergence of a China-led security architecture.

India

India gets 18 references in the White Paper. Whether due to Wuhan spirit or China's geopolitical compulsions the White Paper shows generally positive outlook towards India.

The border issue with India is explained in non-confrontationist few words and the tone is not offensive.

The White Paper says that Beijing's policy on the Sino-Indian border question is "to implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of China and India." It states, "The two militaries have exchanged high-level visits and pushed for a hotline for border defense cooperation and mechanisms for border management and border defense exchanges". However, the white paper explains that the PLA will "take effective measures to create favorable conditions for the peaceful resolution of the Donglang (Doklam) standoff." This suggests that the tussle over Doklam is far from over, despite a simultaneous disengagement by both sides on technical terms in that area in August 2017. India must remain wary of this statement.

China views South Asia also as "generally stable," although "conflicts between India and Pakistan flare up from time to time." This suggests that Beijing is confident about its ability to manage tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad.

India should be cautious about China's ambitions in the Indian Ocean Region. The Defence White Paper mentions the Chinese military outpost in Djibouti and its use for support functions in humanitarian operations. It states, "To address deficiencies in overseas operations and support, it builds far seas forces, develops overseas logistical facilities, and enhances capabilities in accomplishing diversified military tasks. The PLA conducts vessel protection operations, maintains the security of strategic Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOC), and carries out overseas evacuation and maritime rights protection operations." In August 2017, the PLA Djibouti Support Base entered service. The base has provided equipment for the maintenance of four escort task groups, offered medical services for over 100 officers and sailors on board, conducted joint medical exercises with foreign militaries, and donated over 600 teaching aids to local schools. When the security situation in Yemen deteriorated in March 2015, a PLAN escort task group sailed to the Gulf of Aden, berthed for the first time directly in an engagement area. This will have serious repercussions on India's role in the Indian Ocean Region. This might well imply more Chinese bases in the Indian Ocean Region.

India has been working on getting China to yield on its admission to the Nuclear Suppliers Group. The White Paper's assessment of the international non-proliferation regime as "compromised by pragmatism and double standards" is likely to be troubling for India.

USA

For the first time, America has a true competitor in China. China has immense industrial potential, growing wealth and prosperity, a driving national purpose and a growing series of alliances with re-emerging, resource rich Russia and supported by a growing network of economic hubs and indebted nations throughout the Indo-Pacific and Asia. Unlike the Soviet Union, China is a highly industrialised nation – with an industrial capacity comparable to that of the U.S., supported by a rapidly narrowing technological gap, growing military capability and territorial ambitions, thus bringing the rising power into direct competition with the U.S. M. Taylor Fravel, author of 'Active Defense: China's Military Strategy Since 1949' said that this year's White Paper "was the first to be much more explicit about Chinese concerns regarding the United States. The references to the U.S. reflect the deepening

tensions and rivalry between the two countries.”

The White Paper focuses its attention on regional allies of U.S, namely Japan, Korea and Australia. The paper accused the U.S. of adopting “unilateral policies”. It states that U.S. “has provoked and intensified competition among major countries, significantly increased its defence expenditure, pushed for additional capacity in nuclear, outer space, cyber and missile defence, and undermined global strategic stability”. The White Paper considers the following examples of U.S. policies as aggressive:-

- The U.S. arms sales to Taiwan is a threat to its stated policy of peaceful reunification. China has not renounced the possible use of force to reunify Taiwan with the mainland.
- Sending U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships into waters that China claims as part of its sovereign territory.
- The deployment of the U.S.-built Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) ballistic missile defense system to the Republic of Korea.
- An alliance with Australia that continues to strengthen and engage in Asia-Pacific security affairs.
- U.S. defense spending that is described as outpacing what China spends on defense.

China has disputes over the territorial sovereignty of some islands and reefs, as well as the maritime demarcation. The White Paper says, indirectly referring to the U.S., “Countries from outside the region conduct frequent close-in reconnaissance on China by air and sea, and illegally enter China’s territorial waters and the waters and airspace near China’s islands and reefs, undermining China’s national security.” However, at the end the White Paper describes Sino-U.S. military relations as “generally stable,” based on “the principles of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation.” China’s policy paper ‘National Defense in a New Era’ clearly identifies China as a major strategic competitor to the United States. The text is very careful, however, to limit the level of this competition, and its wording makes it clear that China understands the risks involved, stating that ‘The two militaries carry out institutionalised exchanges between the defense authorities, armies, navies and air forces, as well as practical cooperation in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), counter-piracy, and exchanges between academic institutions. However, in China-U.S. relations, the military-to-military relationship remains the generally stable one’.

Russia

The White Paper observes a pronounced Russian emphasis on nuclear weapons, but ignores it for the sake of larger bilateral efforts. Russia and China share interests in opposing the United States and its allies to maintain their equities. There are Russian weapons technology and expertise from which China can benefit greatly. However, there is a scope of future discord stemming from Chinese strength and Russian weakness in the form of border, migration, ethnocultural and resource tensions; as well as economic asymmetries.

Hong Kong

While releasing the White Paper, the Ministry of National Defense’s chief spokesman pointed to a law that allows the PLA to intervene to maintain public order if requested by Hong Kong’s leaders. Senior Col. Wu Qian said, “The behavior of some radical protesters challenges the central government’s authority, touching on the bottom line principle of ‘one country, two systems. That absolutely cannot be tolerated.”

The PLA has for years maintained a garrison of 6,000 soldiers in bases around the former British colony, but China has never ordered them to intervene in its affairs.

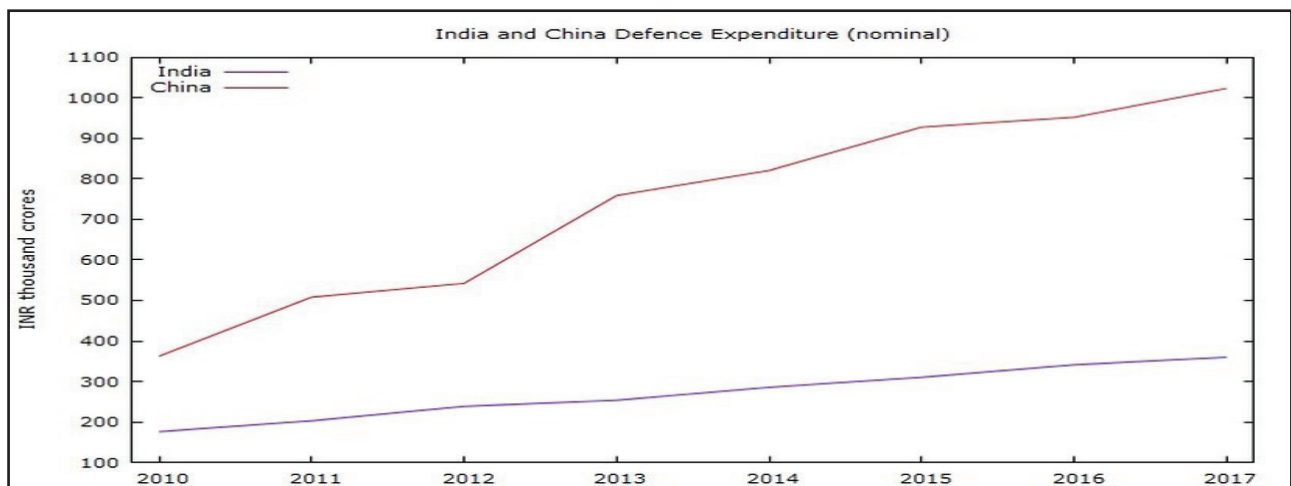
Defence Budget

The annual defence expenditure of China has always remained a mystery. No authentic figure was made available by China. Vastly different figures were quoted by different agencies. For the first time this White Paper has given out some figures.

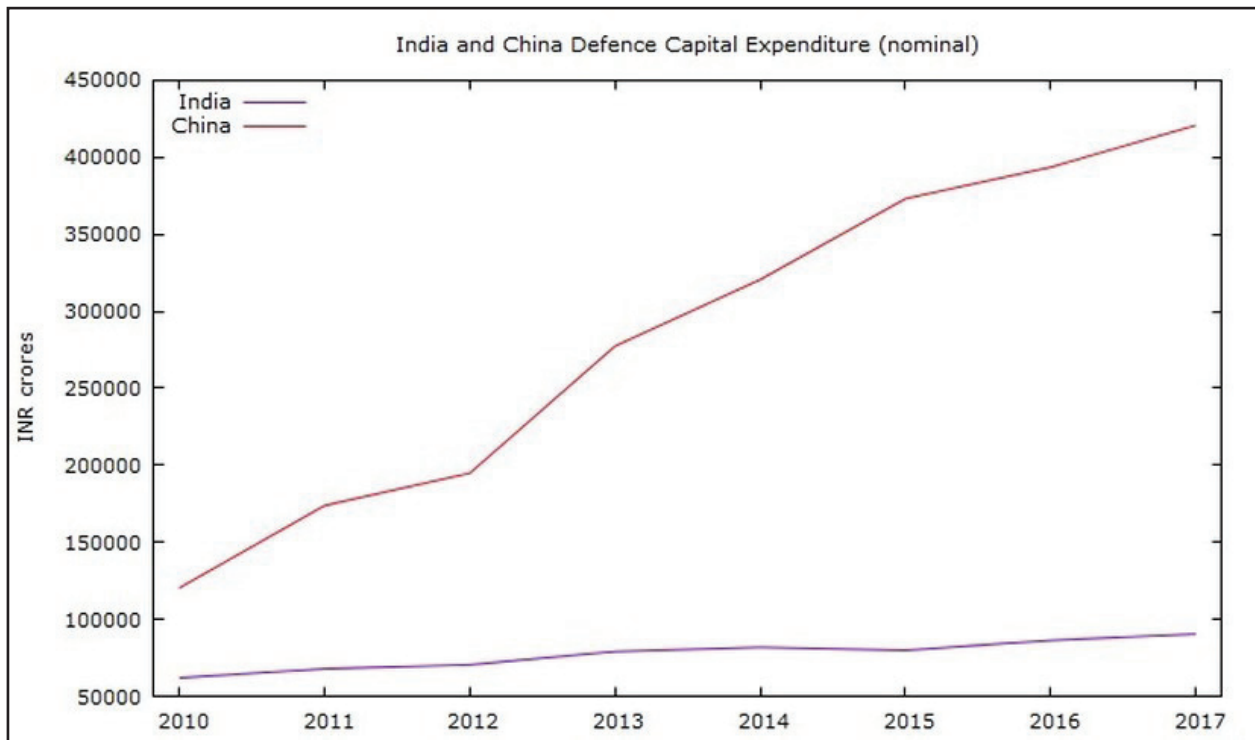
According to the White Paper, from 2012 to 2017, China’s defense expenditure increased from US\$98 billion to \$152 billion. Before 2017, its military spending accounted for 1.28 percent of its GDP. During the period, China’s GDP and government expenditures grew at an average rates of 9.04 percent and 10.43 percent respectively while its defense expenditures increased by an average of 9.42 percent. Meanwhile, China’s defense expenditures accounted for 5.26 percent of government expenditures on average and 1.28 percent of its GDP, the latter of which compared to Russia’s 4.4 percent, the U.S.’s 3.5 percent and India’s 2.5 percent

Some of China’s military spending are not reported accurately. The expenditure of Chinese state owned enterprises which engage in research and development or even products does not figure in the actual budget numbers. The White Paper lists the costs that are included in China’s defence spending calculation but does not provide breakdowns further than personnel, training, and sustainment and equipment expenses. The statistics do not match the figures provided by China’s Ministry of Finance, but instead are taken from the National Bureau of Statistics’ Statistical Yearbooks.

Comparison with India



The amount that China's spends on new defence equipment compared to India that is the source of the true alarm:



Abhijnan Rej, China's white paper on defence should worry India: As Beijing focuses on equipment, New Delhi's approach remains manpower-heavy, July 25, 2019, available at :<https://www.firstpost.com/india/chinas-white-paper-on-defence-should-worry-india-as-beijing-focuses-on-equipment-new-delhis-approach-remains-manpower-heavy-7057141.html>

Reforms in China's National Defense and Armed Forces

The 2015 white paper explained China's military strategy and outlined the direction that military reforms would take. The present White Paper documents where progress has been made in reform efforts and where they have fallen behind schedule. The paper has laid emphasis on numbers of training events, exercises and drills under 'realistic combat conditions'.

The White Paper highlights the need to strengthen the use of innovative technologies and promote science and technology development, keeping up with the 'Revolution in Military Affairs with Chinese Characteristics'. Innovation refers to the ways the PLA is now governed and managed, with regards to the progress made in reforming leadership and new command systems, improving joint operations command systems, strengthening party building and reforming military institutions. However, the Chinese doctrine continues to acknowledge "the overall power of the people's war." The white paper also describes the modernisation and expansion of Chinese military forces as being almost totally defensive.

It can be safely concluded that in the past three years, the PLA has slowly but surely become a more professional war fighting machine, having let go of the personnel and peripheral functions that have been a hindrance to this goal. The PLA still had work to do to achieve its modernisation goals,

and appealed for more reforms and greater investment. The Paper added that China would aim to complete the modernisation of its military by 2035, “fully transforming the people’s armed forces into world-class forces by the mid-21st century.”

China’s Deficiencies

The White Paper notes the PLA is yet to complete the task of mechanisation. It states, “A balanced, stable, open and inclusive Asian security architecture continues to develop. The PLA has yet to complete the task of mechanisation and is in urgent need of improving its informationisation. China’s military security is confronted by risks from technology surprise and growing technological generation gap. Greater efforts have to be invested in military modernisation to meet national security demands. The PLA still lags far behind the world’s leading militaries.

There are five areas that merit attention which the PLA has been emphasising over the past four years:-

- Changes to the security environment, including accelerated worldwide use of “long-range, precise, smart, stealthy and unmanned weapons.” For the nature of the local wars that the PLA must prepare to fight and win, the need to prepare for “maritime military struggle.”
- Comprehensive full-spectrum operations - peacetime probing and pressure, as well as combat readiness. A “holistic view of national security” encompassing both traditional and nontraditional security is articulated. Related tasks included “comprehensively managing crises, enriching the strategic concept of active defense and establishing an integrated joint operational system in which all elements are seamlessly linked and various operational platforms perform independently and in coordination.”
- The need to safeguard Beijing’s increasingly complex, far-ranging overseas interests. It stressed that “the national security issues facing China encompass far more subjects, extend over a greater range, and cover a longer time span than at any time in the country’s history.”
- Unprecedented maritime emphasis. It stated, “the traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned... great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests.” It called for China to perform “strategic management of the sea” and to “build a combined, multi-functional and efficient marine combat force structure.”
- Growing power projection capabilities. It stated, “The PLAN will continue to organise and perform regular combat readiness patrols and maintain a military presence in relevant sea areas,” This entailed moving from “near seas defense” to “the combination of ‘near seas defense’ and ‘far seas protection’.” This suggested the need to develop a limited blue water navy.

Nuclear Issues

China indirectly criticise the lack of U.S. support for nuclear arms control and the U.S. nuclear modernisation program. It states that China is always committed to a nuclear policy of no first use of nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances, and not using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or nuclear-weapon-free zones unconditionally. China advocates the ultimate complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons. China does not engage in any nuclear arms race with any other country and keeps its nuclear capabilities at the minimum level required for national security. China pursues a nuclear strategy of self-defense, the goal of which is to maintain national strategic security by deterring other countries from using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against China.

Cyber Issues

PLA seeks to leverage information age innovation and prepare for new ways of war. The White Paper states, “China’s armed forces accelerate the building of their cyberspace capabilities, develop cyber security and defense means, and build cyber defense capabilities consistent with China’s international standing and its status as a major cyber country. They reinforce national cyber border defense and promptly detect and counter network intrusions. They safeguard information and cyber security and resolutely maintain national cyber sovereignty, information security and social stability.”

PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF)

The white paper describes the PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF) as a new type of combat force for safeguarding national security and an important driver for the growth of new combat capabilities. It comprises supporting forces for battlefield environment, information, communications, information security and new technology testing. This entails such complex activities as system of systems integration and military civil fusion.

The PLASSF is seeking to achieve big development strides in key areas and accelerate the integrated development of new type combat forces, so as to build a strong and modernised strategic support force.

Space

On space warfare, the Paper states that threats to space “loom large” and as a result space security is now among eight vital Chinese strategic interests, “Outer space is a critical domain in international strategic competition.” The goal of PLA space warfare is “destroying, damaging, and interfering with the enemy’s reconnaissance ... and communications satellites” along with navigation and early warning satellites. The objective is to “blind and deafen the enemy.”

While insisting that China favours the peaceful use of space, the White Paper states that China is developing “relevant technologies and capabilities” for safeguarding satellites while maintaining the

ability to safely enter, exit and openly use space. It made no mention of China's space weapons or anti-satellite (ASAT) missiles, like the ground-fired missile used to destroy a Chinese weather satellite in a 2007 test.

Science and Technology (S&T)

The PLA is “striving to transform from a quantity and scale model to that of quality and efficiency, as well as from being personnel-intensive to one that is S&T intensive.” It has downsized 300,000 personnel and taken initiatives to improve recruitment of top tier talent, including to support military research. The importance on science and technology is described as a bid to maintain and enhance the strength of the areas where U.S. lead and intensify innovation in emerging domains. This White Paper heralds “great progress in independent innovation in some strategic, cutting edge and disruptive technologies,” highlighting the Tianhe-2 supercomputer as a prime example.

Military Theory

PLA's quest for innovation involves not only technology but also theoretical innovation. The White Paper states that China has “innovated in military theories and delivered outcomes in military strategy, joint operations and informationisation...” PLA had earlier failed to complete the revision and release of a new generation of its doctrine or “operational regulations”. The Academy of Military Science, responsible for developing the PLA's strategy and doctrine, has pioneered a new approach of “theory-technology integration” that looks to leverage synergies between strategic and technical understanding.

Miscellaneous

Shifting Balance of Power

The White Paper gives out an assessment of the changes in the international security environment. It argues that the world is increasingly heading towards multi polarity. The strategic competition on the rise and the pace is not tranquil. It states that “the configuration of strategic power is becoming more balanced,” with the strength of emerging markets and developing countries growing. The American policy is undergoing a change in “growing hegemonism, power politics, unilateralism”. It clarifies “Global and regional security issues are on the increase. International arms control and disarmament efforts have suffered setbacks, with growing signs of arms races ... Extremism and terrorism keep spreading. Non-traditional security threats involving cyber security, bio-security and piracy are becoming more pronounced.” The Paper notes, “The Iranian nuclear issue has taken an unexpected turn, and there is no easy political solution to the Syrian issue. The security of individual countries is becoming increasingly intertwined, interlinked and interactive. No country can respond alone or stand aloof.” It calls for a reinforcement of the UN's role in global security, strengthening new regional security arrangements, establishing security partnerships (for example with Russia), investments in better weapons and technological upgrades, and bolstering arms control and non-proliferation regimes.

As per the White Paper, China remains at least for now a regional military actor and not a global power. The United States is seen as the source of regional and global instability through its military alliances, deployment and intervention, hegemony and 'significantly increased' defence expenditure. Looking well beyond China's military role in the Pacific, the White Paper observes that the PLA actively promotes international security and military cooperation and refines relevant mechanisms for protecting China's overseas interests.

The Chinese White Paper, in the last five pages of its text, describes Chinese efforts to improve regional cooperation. But the Paper also indicates that China will not shy away from employing its military to defend its national interests.

Internal Security

The 2015 Chinese Defence White Paper had argued that "China faces a formidable task to maintain political security and social stability", while discussing Taiwan, Xinjiang and Tibet. In this latest White Paper there is a mention of "external separatist forces" with regard to Tibet and Xinjiang. The use of force has not been ruled out. China has long called the exiled Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader Dalai Lama a dangerous separatist, though the Dalai Lama maintains that he only wants a greater degree of autonomy for the region.

China's para-military police have helped Xinjiang authorities "take out 1,588 violent terrorist gangs and capture 12,995 terrorists." The U.S analysts and human rights groups have estimated that around 1 million Muslims have been detained in internment camps as part of Chinese counter-terrorism campaign. Members of their predominantly Muslim ethnic groups have been arbitrarily detained and subject to political indoctrination.

Despite this, generally, the domestic security environment is assessed to have improved considerably. The White Paper says, "China continues to enjoy political stability, ethnic unity and social stability. There has been a notable increase in China's overall national strength, global influence, and resilience to risks,"

Nuclear Issue

The strategy outlined in 2015 still holds today, with specific attention paid to China's No First Use nuclear policy. The White Paper states, "China is always committed to a nuclear policy of no first use of nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances, and not using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or nuclear-weapon-free zones unconditionally."

Anti Corruption Measures

The White Paper hails Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign as a victory, specifically highlighting for their "grave violations of CPC discipline and state laws" of Generals Guo Boxiong, Xu Caihou, Fang Fenghui, and Zhang Yang. However, it is difficult to judge whether these generals were purged for corruption or for difference of opinion with President. It pronounces, "The anti-corruption struggle

has won an overwhelming victory, basically establishing a positive environment of political and moral correctness.” Xi’s purges are not yet over.

What is left out of the White Paper

The document said a distinctive feature of China’s strategy is that the country would not seek a sphere of influence or regional hegemony because “since the beginning of modern times, the Chinese people have suffered from aggressions and wars.”

There are reports on China’s development of advanced equipment and platforms. In the White Paper, only one example is given for each service branch - the Type-15 tank for the Army, Type-052D destroyer for the Navy, J-20 fighter for the Air Force and DF-26 for the Rocket Force. Developments relating to hypersonic cruise missiles or glide vehicles, uninhabited aerial vehicles or the air-launched or sea-launch nuclear-capable missiles have not been mentioned at all. Similarly, nuanced discussions on the organisation of the Strategic Support Force and Rocket Force are missing.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is not mentioned in the document. References have been made about using the People’s Armed Police, governed now by the Central Military Commission of the Chinese Communist Party, in its role to combat terrorism, and using the PLA to protect China’s overseas interests through international security cooperation, development of Djibouti bases etc. Though it can be safely presumed that China has future plans to militarise the Belt and Road Initiative.

Conclusion

The last China’s Military Strategy published in 2015 was China’s first ever Defense white paper on strategy. It showed how the PLA was embracing new concepts and missions that represented significant innovations in safeguarding China’s national security. It explained the PLA’s transition to an unprecedented joint naval and aerospace orientation. “winning informationised local wars”.

Beijing’s latest Defence White Paper reads more as a report card on the status of PLA reforms than a strategic policy document. This White Paper identifies the United States as the single most precarious threat to China’s national security and strikes an increasingly assertive tone towards Taiwan.

China’s pursuit of peace gets pride of place in the White Paper. It points to China’s growing security integration through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and other joint cooperative military events around the world, as well as its commitment to UN peacekeeping efforts. The white paper insists that:-

- “New China [the PRC] has never provoked a single battle or conflict.”
- China upholds its nuclear ‘No First Use Policy’.
- China’s vision for a “Community of Shared Human Destiny” as a defense goal.

China seeks to mollify the United States and its allies with its emphasis on peaceful intentions. President Xi Jinping has the compulsion to assure his domestic audiences, including the Party itself, that he is fulfilling his grand vision of the China Dream. Thus references to China as a “great power” have multiplied in the White Paper. Xinhua’s announcement of the document lauded it as the “first broad exposition of the historic success achieved by the current deepening of Chinese national defense and military reform.”

Andrew Erickson, an expert on the Chinese military at the U.S. Naval War College, said the new White Paper did not outline qualitatively different strategies but sent a political message. He said, “It reflects Xi’s self-dictated era, strategy, goals, reforms and rhetoric. The report contains strong rhetoric doubling down on domestic stability imperatives and sovereignty claims vis-a-vis Taiwan and the East and South China Seas.” Adam Ni, a researcher on Chinese foreign and security policy at the Australian National University, said, “China is bound to be assertive as it becomes powerful and able to do what it could not in the past, both militarily, diplomatically and otherwise. And this might result in a hawkish stance in Beijing’s policy making, leading China into more friction with the U.S. in the future.” Washington Post too said that the new White Paper has not outlined any new strategies, but sent a strong political message on the importance of domestic stability, as well as Chinese sovereignty concerns relating to Taiwan and the South China Sea.

However, it must be noted that the Chinese White Paper is more moderate in its treatment of the U.S. than U.S. strategy papers have been in discussing military developments in China,

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