

## WHITE PAPER - 'CHINA'S NATIONAL DEFENSE IN 2008': AN ANALYSIS

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A White Paper on '*China's National Defense in 2008*' was released by The Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China on January 20, 2009. This is China's sixth white paper on National Defense since the first one was issued in 1998. China commenced publication of this paper as part of its efforts to convince the world about the peaceful rise of its Armed Forces and to dispel the largely held world view that all its defence modernisation plans were quite opaque and shrouded in secrecy. The paper rebuts most of the issues raised by the US DOD report on 'The military power of the Peoples Republic of China', that was released on 03 Mar 2008. While China terms the US report as overstated, it systematically seeks to underplay the leapfrogging capabilities of its Armed Forces, better known as the Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA), by its own propaganda tool, viz. this White Paper.

The White Paper of 2008 does not differ significantly from the earlier papers, as all of them maintain the theme that China does not seek to threaten or destabilise any country or region. The development of the Chinese military capability should not be viewed as a threat by other countries. Some of the main highlights of the White Paper are as follows:-

- China advocates the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means. It opposes aggression, expansion and the enlargement of military alliances.
- The paper declares that China would stick to the road of peaceful development, pursue an opening-up strategy for mutual benefit, and promote the building of a harmonious world with enduring peace.
- China's overall national strength has increased substantially, and its capability for safeguarding national security has been further enhanced. The country's security situation has improved steadily.
- China is still confronted with long-term, complicated, and diverse security threats and challenges. The internal security threats include separatist movements that are working for the 'Tibetan independence', the 'Taiwanese independence', and the 'East Turkistan independence'.
- Global power play is undergoing profound realignment as major powers are stepping up their efforts to cooperate with each other and new groups of developing powers are emerging. As the common security interests of countries have increased, the chances of large scale wars appear low in medium to long term.
- The arms race in some regions is heating up and it is estimated that military might increasingly find its place in international diplomacy. This poses grave challenges to the international arms control and non-proliferation regimes.

- The US has increased the potential to destabilise the Asia-Pacific security situation by shifting its strategic attention, consolidating its military alliances and enhancing its military strength in the region.
- China takes informationisation<sup>1</sup> as a ‘strategic priority’ of its Armed Force's modernisation efforts, and endeavours to build integrated, technologically advanced and efficient armed forces.
- The PLA ground force (Army) has been moving away from of being a regionally static force to force that has trans-regional mobility. It is making its units smaller, modular and more multi-functional. At the same time, it is accelerating the development of aviation, light mechanised and information countermeasure forces. Priority is being accorded to the development of operational and tactical missiles, air defence and special operations forces.
- The PLA Navy too has been striving to comprehensively improve its capabilities of integrated offshore operations, strategic deterrence and counterattacks. It plans to gradually develop its capabilities for conducting operations in distant waters and countering non-traditional security threats. The Navy endeavours to build new types of submarines, destroyers, frigates and aircraft, upgrade weaponry and equipment and maintain its operational profile with second-generation equipment as the core and the third generation equipment as the mainstay.
- The PLA Air Force is speeding its transition from territorial air defense to both offensive and defensive operations, for which it aims to increase its capabilities for carrying out reconnaissance and early warning, air strikes, air and missile defense, and strategic projection. It plans to achieve this aim with a force consisting of third-generation aircraft and ground-to-air missiles as the mainstay, and modified second-generation aircraft and ground-to-air missiles as the supplement.
- China has again reiterated that it will not be the first to use nuclear weapons and will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or in the nuclear-weapon-free zones. However, if China faces a nuclear threat, the nuclear missile units of the Second Artillery Force will go into a state of alert, and prepare for a nuclear counterattack. In accordance with no-first use doctrine and to avoid unauthorised and accidental launches, it has kept the command authority of the Second Artillery Force as highly centralized.

A comparison of the Chinese White Paper vis-à-vis US DOD report on ‘The military power of the PRC – 2008’ brings out the differing positions of two countries. It shows a difference in understanding of the intentions of the Chinese in the eyes of the Americans. Some of the widest differences between the two reports are highlighted below:-

<b>Issue / Point</b>	<b>US DOD 2008 Report</b>	<b>Chinese White Paper</b>
PLA Modernisation	The PLA is pursuing comprehensive transformation from an army designed for protractive wars of attrition on its territory, to one capable of winning short duration, high intensity conflicts along its periphery against high-tech	China aims at a military strategy of active defense. It adheres to principle of defensive operations, but seeks to strike back only after the enemy has initiated an attack. Aims at winning local wars under conditions of

	adversaries.	informationisation.
Chinese Defence Budget	China's total military related expenditure for 2007 could be anywhere from \$ 97 to \$ 139 billions. The large portion of the budget is dedicated to hardware procurement and production, especially new generation of survivable nuclear missiles, SSNs and SSBNs, aircrafts and advanced weapon systems.	Defence Budget growth has remained lower than the GDP growth rate, and it remains well below 2% of GDP (\$ 45 billion in 2007). The major part of China's defense expenditure has been used to increase the salaries and benefits of servicemen and compensating for inflation.
Taiwan	China's near term focus is on preparing for contingency in Taiwan Strait. It had deployed 990-1070 SRBMs opposite Taiwan.	In peacetime, the Chinese missiles are not directed or targeted toward any specific country.
Employment Of PLA	In addition to focusing on the Taiwan contingency, China is also developing capabilities for use in other contingencies such as conflict over resources or disputed territories.	PLA seeks to carry out counter-terrorism activities, maintaining stability (within its territories and in the region surrounding it), emergency rescue and international peace keeping tasks. It takes military operations other than war as an important form of applying military force.

The following issues emerge from an analysis of the White Paper:-

- China has maintained opacity about its military capabilities by totally excluding the specific details about its Armed Forces. The sections covering the four arms of PLA maintain the common theme of 'Structure, Organization and general Force Building' to meet the requirement of informationised warfare and steps being taken to enable its forces to conduct 'offensive defense operations'.
- In the 2006 White Paper on National Defense, China had laid down a three step strategy for progressing the modernisation of PLA, according to which it would lay a solid foundation by 2010, make major progress by 2020, and basically reach the goal of building its Armed Forces, which would be capable of winning informationised wars by mid-21st century. The 2008 White Paper clearly lays down the focus of 'major progress by 2020 in second stage' towards 'mechanisation and informationisation'.
- The term 'Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW)' has been coined and used for the first time, as China feels assured of its increasing military strength and feels confident about operating at locations away from its territory. A case in

point is the deployment of PLA Navy ships in Indian Ocean off Somalia for anti-piracy duties.

- The dramatic increase in Chinese defense spending over the past 30 years is striking. The first decade saw an average 3.5 percent rise in the defense budget. In the second decade, the figure rose to an average increase of 14.5 percent, and to 15.9 percent in the last decade. China of course, maintains that its defense budget grew slower than its GDP growth rate and is only 1.38% of GDP. Though it justified its soaring military expenses on account of increase in military manpower costs as well as the runaway inflation, it is more realistic to assume, however, that the increase in China's defense budget in recent years is due to qualitative changes made under the country's shifting military strategy.
- The White Paper does not give any indication of its defence spending figures for the coming year. Though it is expected to follow the recent trend of double digit increase, the slowdown in Chinese economy, with consequential effect on its GDP, may yet hold some surprises in store. China had announced an increase of nearly 18 per cent in its military budget of \$ 57.2 billion in 2008. The fiscal support compulsions for ongoing modernization drive in PLA will not permit a drastic reduction in growth figures. It is likely that the defence budget for 2009 will grow by 10 - 12 percent.
- The transparency factor appears to have increased a little. However, there is nothing new in the paper that is not available in open realm. While the US DOD report emphasises that the international community has limited knowledge of Chinese motivations, decision-making and key capabilities of PLA, China has claimed that it will persist in taking the road of peaceful development, and that it will never seek hegemony or engage in military expansion now or in the future. But this does not amount to a rational explanation and does nothing to reassure the world at large and its neighbouring countries in particular.
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- The Chinese claim of providing disclosures in the 'UN instrument for reporting military expenditure' and 'UN Register of conventional arms' is mere eyewash. While the Chinese military expenditure disclosures for the year 2007 have not yet been release by UN, the 2006 disclosures just mention that the total defence expenditure of 297.238 billion RMB was distributed in the ratio of 33.99, 32.66 and 33.35 under the heads of Personnel, training & maintenance and equipment respectively, for its active and reserve forces. There is no reason to believe that the 2007 disclosure would be any different with regard to increase in transparency. The disclosures in the UN Register of conventional arms are also sketchy. The details for 1996 - 2005 have not been disclosed on the pretext of Chinese Government's protest against supply of arms to Taiwan by US (without naming US in the White Paper). Provision of such insufficient details thus serves no purpose whatsoever, and reinforces the global belief about lack of transparency on part of the Chinese.
- India, the largest neighbour of China, does not find any mention in the strategic calculus for a rethink of its military strategy and RMA with 'Chinese characteristics'. The paper does mention that Separatist forces working for 'Tibetan independence', amongst others, pose threats to China's unity and security. India, in fact, figures only in two places, wherein commencement of Strategic Dialogue and conduct of two joint military exercises has been mentioned in the section covering 'International Security Cooperation'.

- Though China voices its unequivocal commitment to consolidating and strengthening the existing international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation mechanisms, advocates peaceful use of space, opposes the introduction of weapons and an arms race in outer space, it is seen to be doing exactly opposite of what it preaches. China, has successfully conducted manned spacecraft missions, has developed the missile technology necessary to shoot down satellites in orbit, and has continued launching its own navigation satellites, which are crucial to guiding these and other ballistic and cruise missiles. China's aspirations are thus transparent by sheer implication.
- Even though China has reiterated its 'NFU of nuclear weapons' doctrine, the mere mention of its nuclear missile forces' intention to "go into a state of alert, and get ready for a nuclear counterattack to deter the enemy from using nuclear weapons against China", creates room for ambiguities and renders the issue open to various interpretations. Further, the co-location of nuclear and conventional missile launch units in Second Artillery Force, creates doubts and uncertainties in the minds of the adversary.
- The above issue becomes all the more complicated in case of India, as India possesses nuclear weapons, but remains non-signatory to NPT, thus leaving its status 'unclear' in Chinese viewpoint.
- Currently China sources major portion of its oil, necessary to support its economic growth, from Africa and the Middle East. Its tankers loaded with oil virtually form a chain right from Indian Ocean to South China Sea, across the Malacca straits. The economic interests of the country have expanded on a worldwide scale. PLA Navy's deployment of missile destroyers in the waters off the Somalian coast is not a mere short-term measure for dealing with pirates, but a way to establish the foundations to develop its capabilities for defense of its sea lines communication in Indian Ocean Region by maintaining permanent presence, much to our discomfort.
- The White Paper clearly insinuates that China now thinks much beyond Taiwan. This is manifest in increased PLA Navy activities in east and south China seas, increasing number of forays in mid Pacific till the second island chain, sailing its warships right across Tsugaru Straits between the two Japanese islands, conducting bilateral /multilateral maritime exercises and anti piracy patrols in Indian Ocean, to name a few. The increased confidence level of PLA ships while interacting with US warships at sea in Pacific Ocean tells a lot about the changed 'Force projection' mindset of the Chinese.

To summarize, it would not be wrong to say that China's goal no longer appears to be merely the preservation of its land, territorial waters and airspace, but the safeguarding of its national interests, now spread across the globe. The acknowledgement of its plans to operate at a great distance from its shores further confirms its focus. The oft reported 'program for constructing Aircraft Carriers', though not yet officially acknowledged by China, would naturally form an important tool in the 'Force projection' endeavour of PLA.

If military expansion indeed appears to be the purpose of the above shift, China has a hard task in convincing the World as to how it differs from its pursuit of 'Peaceful Rise', that it vehemently claims to pursue?

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<sup>1</sup> The term informationsation refers to the integration of all communication, radar, nuclear, C4ISR, space & satellite systems with strategic & tactical command platforms to achieve net centric joint warfare capability.

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