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CHINA'S DEFENSE WHITE PAPER

2015

YANG YUJUN

Acknowledging the dangers of highlighting inclusions of single words or concepts and cutting through the repetition and stale language, Dennis Blasko provides an excellent overview of the DWP. Blasko puts previous editions in context and keys in on the impact of the PLA's ongoing shift to a maritime and aerospace power. Though China has long aspired to become a strong naval and air power, this year's edition of the DWP is even more explicit about China's intentions than before, stating that "The traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to... protecting maritime rights and interests." This emphasis on maritime and territorial issues forms the main theme of the paper, and points to the challenge of shifting gears from a overwhelmingly land-based force to one capable of long distance, offshore power protection.

The inclusion of the "holistic security concept" (*zongtian anquan guan*), first unveiled by President Xi in 2014, is the focus of Timothy Heath's article. Coming now three years into Xi's rule, this DWP incorporates more fully the policies and goals of the Xi administration, specifically detailing the "two centenary goals" and for the first time including them as a fifth mission under previous president Hu Jintao's "historic missions." This echoes Xi's goal to make the military support China's overall national development, and reflects Xi's merging of domestic and international security issues under the "holistic security concept" and new linkage of development as security. Another important shift is the elevation of "safeguarding rights" to the same status as "safeguarding stability," which Heath asserts has the potential to securitize any challenge to China's development goals and thus may lead Chinese leaders to favor increasingly coercive measures to accomplish their strategic goals. This perceived pressure means that although Beijing still does not desire conflict or war with the United States or its neighbors, China may resort to creating or exploiting military crises to further its goals—and this brinkmanship will be direct challenge to the stability of the Asia Pacific region.

Turning to network warfare, Joe McReynolds finds that the 2015 DWP remains largely consistent with, and indeed often directly repeats, previous sections from the 2011 and 2013 versions. The PLA's focus on developing the human capital side of its cyber capabilities, and its view of cyberspace as an important part of China's economic and social development, including for social

stability, is reflected in the DWP's discussion of the cyber domain. The continued growth of cyberspace in China's quest for information dominance to "win wars under informatized conditions" also follows larger trends in the PLA. Of note, the document furthers Beijing's public discussion of its cyber forces, which McReynolds believes should provide the U.S. government more opportunities to address cyber issues in bilateral meetings. This can be accomplished through clarifying the role of "active defense" in China's cyber strategy, the definition and translation of "*wangluo*" (as "cyber" vs. "cyberspace") and acknowledging the possible creation of a PLA cyber command. Yet McReynolds warns against analysts prescribing too much authority to this document on sensitive issues like network warfare.

In our final article, Senior Fellow Willy Lam argues that the DWP confirms the shift to the Xi Jinping era of CCP-PLA relations, which has been marked by greater integration of civilian and military elements and a more powerful influence on the PLA on everyday life. As argued by Dr. Lam in his new book, *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era*, Xi's policies are more directly a continuation of Deng Xiaoping's guidelines rather than those of Jiang Zemin or Hu Jintao. Concepts like *quānminjiēbìng* (all civilians should become soldiers in times of crisis) have been revived and given a special place in speeches than they were under Jiang and Hu. In the DWP, civil-military integration (CMI) receives a special section of its own, encouraging joint development of military and civilian infrastructure—a phrase commonly found in China's discussions of infrastructure in the South China Sea. Lam also notes that China's Reserve units have expanded, and that Xi's promotion of the units and civilian involvement in disaster and war preparations echoes Mao's People's Warfare ethos. Under Xi, civilian business leaders in defense industries have also gained in political power, with the heads of several key parts of China's military-industrial complex becoming political leaders of Chinese provinces and elsewhere in government. Lastly, Dr. Lam notes that the militarization of Chinese security policy and its impact on the civilian sector is having the worrying effect of militarizing civilian life, helping push China towards an aggressive foreign policy.

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The 2015 Chinese Defense White Paper on Strategy in Perspective:

Maritime Missions Require a Change in the PLA Mindset

By Dennis J. Blasko

Nearly 20 years ago in November 1995, the Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China issued the first defense-related white paper on "Arms Control and Disarmament." In 1998, the first "defense white paper" was issued, called simply "China's National Defense." Subsequently, roughly every two years a new defense-related white paper has been issued. On May 26, 2015, the tenth defense-related white paper was released called "China's Military Strategy." [1]

The series of white papers are official statements of Chinese government policy. They are written by a select group of individuals over many months' time and coordinated throughout the Chinese government. For the most part, they are explanatory documents providing additional detail to policies that have already been announced. The white papers are not the vehicle for releasing "new" policy, though "new" facts supporting existing policy may be revealed. No single white paper has contained "everything you need to know" about the Chinese armed forces; each one builds on information from previous white papers and official sources. What is "new" in any white paper generally depends on what the reader previously knew about the topic. The content of some white papers is better than others.

General Background on the White Papers

Each of the series of white papers usually has a description of the contemporary international situation as perceived from Beijing, including its assessment of the situation with Taiwan, and a recitation of the major elements of China's defense policy. Many readers dismiss the discussion of defense policy as "boilerplate" or "party line," until some specific phrase is repeated and then foreign wonks postulate such an omission indicates a major change in policy... until a Chinese official clarifies that no change has been made. [2]

To be sure, many official policy themes are repetitive, use stilted, Marxist language, and do not appear to reflect the realities of the latest crisis *du jour*, such as this passage from the 2015 report, "China will unwaveringly follow the path of peaceful development, pursue an independent foreign policy of peace and a national defense policy that is defensive in nature, oppose hegemonism and power politics in all forms, and will never seek hegemony or expansion." Despite the desire to discover major changes announced in the white papers, the series of documents reveals a consistent official, declared policy that many foreign analysts find incompatible with some of China's actions.

The white papers generally end with a discussion of the Chinese military's interactions with foreign countries. In between, usually a few specific topics are explored in some detail, often adding new information to what had been found in previous reports. These topics have included descriptions of China's force structure, organization, doctrine and national defense mobilization system. Except for the 2013 and 2015 white papers, varying levels of information about the defense budget was included; however, the budget has not been discussed in the last two iterations because of a "thematic" approach—the 2013 version focused on missions for the armed forces and 2015 on strategy. Sometimes the white papers contain a level of minutia about subjects only serious analysts will appreciate. However, those expecting descriptions of China's latest weapons and details of its force structure will generally be disappointed.

Excerpts From the 1998 to 2013 White Papers

The following excerpts provide some idea of the highlights of the white papers from 1995 on. The 1995 white paper on "Arms Control and Disarmament" laid out basic defense policies and provided general descriptions of the size of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and its budget before addressing the various aspects of arms control. The 1998 white paper established the format to be followed roughly for a decade: the international security situation, defense policy, defense construction including budget issues, international security cooperation and arms control. It noted peace and development are "major themes of the present era," a theme that continues to the present. However, it noted factors of instability remain, including "the enlargement of military

blocs and the strengthening of military alliances,” though the United States was not mentioned specifically in this regard. The concepts of active defense and people’s war were introduced and have been included consistently in subsequent white papers as the foundation of Chinese strategic military thought.

In 2000, some of the details from the 500,000-man force reduction beginning in 1997 were discussed. The national defense mobilization system was examined in detail in 2002 and in 2004. Furthermore, in 2004, the white paper described the “Revolution in Military Affairs [RMA] with Chinese Characteristics,” and noted that priority of development has been “given to the Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery Force, and [to] strengthen [the PLA’s] comprehensive deterrence and warfighting capabilities,” confirming trends foreign analysts had been following for five years or more. The 2006 white paper defined the PLA’s “historic missions,” provided considerable organizational and command structure information, and set a timeline for defense modernization stretching out to the mid-21st century, 2049.

Those topics were updated in 2008 with additional information provided on the logistics and armament systems. Unfortunately, information in the 2010 white paper moved the ball forward only slightly because of considerable repetition from prior reports. The two-year cycle was delayed until the issuance of the thematic 2013 white paper on the “Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces,” which actually contained “new” facts on the composition of the PLA. It revealed for the first time the number of personnel in the Army’s “18 combined corps, plus additional independent combined operational divisions (brigades)” — 850,000. This number is not the total for the entire Army, however, which was not stated specifically. Also, the Navy was reported to have 235,000 personnel, considerably smaller than foreign estimates, while the Air Force was larger than expected at 398,000 officers and troops. Buried deep in the text was the statement, “China is a major maritime as well as land country.”

The brief excerpts cannot do justice to the entirety of information found in the cumulative hundreds of pages found in all ten white papers. They were included, however, to set the stage for what is “new” in the 2015 white paper.

The 2015 White Paper

Despite the increased tensions in the Pacific region, the 2015 white paper reiterates the peace and development theme and assesses “In the foreseeable future, a world war is unlikely, and the international situation is expected to remain generally peaceful,” but “the world still faces both immediate and potential threats of local wars.” Under these new circumstances, “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.” Therefore, without “a strong military, a country can be neither safe nor strong.” A strong military is the basis for China’s multi-dimensional strategic deterrence posture as well as necessary to carry out its warfighting and military operations other than war or non-traditional security tasks.

Complicating China’s security environment are separatist forces for “Taiwan independence,” “East Turkistan independence,” and “Tibet independence.” Competition is also found in the domain of space and cyberspace; specifically, “the first signs of weaponization of outer space have appeared” and “China will expedite the development of a cyber force.” None of this should come as a surprise (see *China Brief*, April 16).

However, the main theme for the 2015 white paper is the “long-standing task for China to safeguard its maritime rights and interests.” In particular, “the US carries on its ‘rebalancing’ strategy and enhances its military presence and its military alliances in this region. Japan is sparing no effort to dodge the post-war mechanism, overhauling its military and security policies.” Additionally, “some of its offshore neighbors take provocative actions and reinforce their military presence on China’s reefs and islands that they have illegally occupied. Some external countries are also busy meddling in South China Sea affairs; a tiny few maintain constant close-in air and sea surveillance and reconnaissance against China.” Thus as an example of the evolution in China military strategy, this year a new “strategic task” has been added: “To safeguard the security of China’s overseas interests.” Currently, most foreign analysts assess China’s overseas interests to include substantial maritime aspects, as previously inferred from the historic missions to safeguard China’s national development and national interests.

In order to address the maritime challenge, the white paper makes a “new” statement that turns the PLA’s traditional approach to operations and strategy on its head, or at least on its side: “The traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests.” As a result, the PLA Navy “will gradually shift its focus from ‘offshore waters defense’ to the combination of ‘offshore waters defense’ with ‘open seas protection,’ ” an evolutionary development from what was announced in the 2006 white paper, the “Navy aims at gradual extension of the strategic depth for offshore defensive operations.”

The white paper has thereby acknowledged the need to shift the balance in PLA thinking from ground operations to joint naval and aerospace operations—something that has been signaled for years (going back officially at least to 2004), but will require change in all aspects of future military modernization. The impact of this admission on the PLA as an institution cannot be understated. It will have effects on everything from force size, structure and composition to personnel policies, doctrine, training, logistics and equipment acquisition.

This development would appear to be directly related to the November 2013 announcement at the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Chinese Communist Party Central Committee “that joint operation command authority under the [Central Military Commission], and theater joint operation command system, will be improved” and that China decided to “optimize the size and structure of the army, adjust and improve the proportion between various troops, and reduce non-combat institutions and personnel.” [3] Though details of these changes have been announced publicly, we can expect them to be rolled out in the coming years and take several more years to implement and trouble shoot.

The rest of the 2015 white paper describes the various components of military modernization, all of which will be affected by these changes. The text provides a menu of items, each with a brief description of recent developments, that we should watch in the near future. These include topics such as

- Ideological and political work, including discipline and the fight against corruption
- Logistics modernization
- Advanced weaponry and equipment
- New-type military personnel
- Doctrine
- Strategic management, coordinated programming and planning
- Civil-military integration
- “Preparation for Military Struggle” and combat readiness
- Training
- Military operations other than war
- Security cooperation

Through an integrated program consisting of all these elements, the PLA seeks “to enhance [its] overall capabilities for deterrence and warfighting.” Results will not come overnight. Many changes will have major impact on long-standing “rice bowls” and institutional prerogatives. A careful reading of the white paper will see the word “gradual” is used multiple times. The changes envisioned, though still not revealed to the public, will take years and could result in the temporary loss of combat readiness as units and organization undergo transformation.

Conclusion

Those seeking to learn about the PLA should read it in conjunction with other reporting from official Chinese sources, which often provide more detail than the white papers. But readers must also be aware that some Chinese sources are more authoritative and reliable than others. [4] Many gaps in the white papers, especially about details of equipment and force structure, can be filled by the annual U.S. Department of Defense reports to Congress on the Chinese military and other U.S. government reports such as the recent Office of Naval Intelligence report on “The

PLA Navy.” [5]

This year’s white paper does not provide specifics about the impending changes the PLA is soon to undertake. It does, however, provide a general outline of topics to monitor as the force undergoes a complex modernization and transformation. Based on the call for a greater maritime orientation in the force, we can expect to see reductions in the number of Army personnel and Army units in coming years, which will automatically raise the percentage of the other services’ personnel in the total force (currently Army and Second Artillery personnel make up over 70 percent of the 2.3 million active duty PLA, while the Navy consists of about 10 percent and the Air Force about 17 percent). A major question is whether the other services will be expanded by receiving some of the personnel billets from the reductions in the Army. Will more Navy admirals and Air Force generals be elevated to the Central Military Commission? Will Navy admirals and Air Force generals be tasked to command operations away from China’s shores? Will logistics forces be created or expanded to support extended operations outside of China? How will the PLA education system be adjusted to prepare officers and noncommissioned officers for the new tasks and mental outlook ahead?

The shift to a more maritime-oriented mindset and force structure is an evolutionary step necessitated by growth in all aspects of China’s comprehensive national power. However, the transition will not be easy or rapid for an organization that has been dominated by men in green since 1927 and for a country with 14 land neighbors, four of them with nuclear weapons, that also faces the threat of terrorism and extremism on its borders.

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Notes

1. All white papers are available on the Internet. The 2015 version can be found on the [State Council’s website](#). [All others are available here](#). The Chinese officially do not consider the first white paper on “Arms Control and Disarmament” among

the nine defense white papers issued thereafter. A short summary of the nine defense white papers can be found at “[Overview of All China’s White Papers on National Defense](#),” May 27, 2015.

2. A good example of this is the exclusion of China’s “No First Use” nuclear policy from the 2013 defense white paper, which has caused considerable concern for U.S. nuclear analysts. But Chinese counterparts insist the exclusion does not indicate a change in official or unofficial policy.
3. “China to optimize army size, structure: CPC decision,” [PLA Daily](#), November 16, 2013.
4. Paul H. B. Godwin and Alice L. Miller, “China’s Forbearance Has Limits: Chinese Threat and Retaliation Signaling and Its Implications for a Sino-American Military Confrontation,” [Institute for National Strategic Studies](#) (INSS), 2013.
5. [Office of Naval Intelligence](#), 2015.

The “Holistic Security Concept”: The Securitization of Policy and Increasing Risk of Militarized Crisis

By Timothy R. Heath

Reflecting critical developments under the Xi administration, the recent “Military Strategy” white paper signals a turn toward a potentially more coercive phase of China’s rise ([State Council](#), May 26). Driven by the determination to overcome a formidable array of domestic and international obstacles to national development, China’s leaders have vastly expanded the reach of national security to include virtually all policy fields. Beijing has centralized decision-making and reinforced the subordination of the military to national strategic objectives to control the risk of unwanted conflict. Nevertheless, the rising importance placed on the protection of the nation’s expanding interests marks a profound shift in security policy. While continuing to prioritize peaceful means to strengthen control over its core interests and improve its strategic position, China is at the same time preparing for more coercive options short of war.

In late May, China released its first defense white paper to prominently feature “military strategy” as its main theme. In contrast to the 2013 version, drafted just as Chinese Commander-in-Chief Xi Jinping ascended to power, the latest defense white paper more clearly reflects the political thought and policy work of the current administration ([State Council](#), April 16, 2013). It demonstrates a more focused explanation of the nation’s strategic objectives and tasks than is typical of previous white papers. For example, it explains that China’s “national strategic goal” is to “complete the building of a moderately prosperous society” in all respects by 2021 and a “modern, socialist country” by 2049, which represents the “Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people.” These goals are not new, but previous white papers only vaguely alluded to them.

The new paper similarly described, in a clear and logical manner, various threats to China and the resulting implications for security policy and the military. Reflecting the influence of the engineering-inspired approach to systematic, long term strategic planning—referred to

as “top level design” (*dingceng sheji*)—which has become characteristic of Xi-era policy, the paper explained how the military’s guiding principles, policies and efforts support the strategic objectives related to national rejuvenation (see [China Brief](#), November 30, 2012). Underscoring the importance of this point, the white paper is the first to expand the “historic missions” concept to include a fifth mission, which the paper explained requires the military to “strive to provide a strong guarantee for completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects and achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” [1] This “new mission” amounts to a redundant restatement of the entire historic missions idea, but its significance is political. The addendum reinforces the idea that all military activity must support, or at least not undermine, the pursuit of strategic objectives designed to realize China’s potential as a prosperous, stable, modern and powerful nation.

The presentation of a new security concept, the “overall” or “holistic” security concept (*zongti anquan guan*), also reflects the same trends under Xi toward the centralization of decision-making, a top-down design approach to strategy and policy, and a vision of policy that views all fields as interrelated and inseparable. According to the white paper, the new concept incorporates both domestic and international security; security for the homeland with security for overseas citizens, enterprises and other interests; and the interests related to the nation’s survival with those needed for its development. It also expands the definition of security to encompass 11 fields: political, territorial, military, economic, cultural, social, science and technological, information, ecological, financial and nuclear. According to commentators, the concept is designed to facilitate the implementation of security policy, in contrast to previous versions (i.e., the “new security concept” in the late 1990s and the “comprehensive security concept” in the 2000s) that served mostly as policy ideals and provided little concrete guidance for implementation. Xi Jinping introduced the holistic security concept at a Politburo study session 2014 ([Xinhua](#), April 15, 2014).

One of the major drivers for the formulation of the overall security concept is the desire to more closely align security policy with developmental policy objectives. Xi outlined this logic when he stated that “development depends on security” and that “security requires development”

([Xinhua](#), November 15, 2013). This desire reflects the realization that the “easy” part of the nation’s rise via export and investment-led growth, which China relied upon for the past three decades, has passed irrevocably. To sustain economic growth and realize the central leadership’s vision of national rejuvenation, Beijing will need to carry out extremely challenging policies, including a restructuring of its economy, an overhauling of its political operations to improve governance, shaping the regional and international trade and financial order to favor Chinese interests, restructuring the regional security order, as well as consolidating and exploiting the maritime domain. These and other policies are certain to encounter resistance from many powerful opponents, both domestic and international (see [China Brief](#), March 19).

The tension between the need for stability and the desire to see broad, steady progress in protecting the nation’s expanding array of interests is well captured in a revealing directive by Xi Jinping in 2013—and noted in the white paper—for Chinese authorities to both “safeguard stability and safeguard rights” (*weiwen yu weiquan*) ([Xinhua](#), July 31, 2013). The directive, absent in previous white papers, elevates the priority of defending the country’s expanding rights and interests to a level co-equal with the old focus on upholding stability. This formulation suggests that Chinese leaders view domestic and regional stability as predicated, to some extent, on control of the country’s expanding rights and interests.

The revision of China’s security policy along these lines carries several important implications. First, it opens the way to a growing military involvement in a broad array of policies beyond the traditional security domains. Adoption of the holistic security concept now means *anything* Chinese authorities deem an impediment to the realization of *any* of the country’s developmental objectives—regardless of whether it is economic, political or another category—may now be deemed a “security threat.” Once issues are designated security threats, military involvement may be legitimately considered. Second, the expanded meaning of security underscores the leadership’s determination to realize steady, secure progress toward strategic objectives for all policy topics. This means senior leaders will likely forgo risky policies—such as military conflict to seize an island feature—that could threaten eventual attainment of other policy objectives. As a rule, China’s leaders

will likely continue to prefer consistent, incremental progress toward all of the nation’s strategic objectives. The creation of the National Security Commission and issuance of a National Security Strategy Outline in 2013, and the formulation of the holistic security concept, among other measures, underscores the importance with which Chinese leaders regard the calibration of policy to control risk.

However, the desire to see steady progress toward all strategic objectives adds enormous pressure on China’s leaders to overcome impediments to any single objective. The elevation in importance of “securing rights” will encourage leaders to consider all options, including coercive ones, to overcome what is expected to be difficult and intractable resistance by domestic and international beneficiaries of the status quo. As a result, Chinese intransigence in major dispute issue—such as control over disputed areas of the East and South China Seas, and a desire to see greater progress toward Taiwan’s acceptance of a “one China policy”—will likely harden in the coming years. And should Beijing judge that a disputant is challenging the country’s “bottom line” on an issue, it will likely consider a broader array of options than it has followed in previous years when China placed a higher priority on upholding stability.

Options to Strengthen Protection For China’s Expanding Interests

Figuring out how to enhance the protection of the country’s expanding interests in the least destabilizing way possible has thus become a critical strategic challenge for China’s leaders. Beijing continues to prioritize peaceful methods, principally through bilateral and multilateral dialogue, negotiation and cooperation. In the words of the white paper, China seeks to merge its “own national interests with the common interests of other nations.” A recent editorial in the populist Chinese tabloid *Global Times* explained, “Rising powers all need strategic space.” It explained that China “differs from prior powers” in that it seeks to achieve its strategic space by “expanding ‘win-win’ cooperation” ([Global Times](#), May 27). The Xi administration has sought to increase the appeal of political and security cooperation through policies aimed at demonstrating China’s economic strength and its political credibility as a contributor at the global level. Where these fail to persuade, Beijing has also shown

a growing readiness to supplement “carrots” with punishing diplomatic and economic “sticks” to nations that impinge on China’s core interests. Examples of this include halting “rare earth” mineral shipments to Japan in 2010 in retaliation for the arrest of a Chinese fishing boat captain and ending the import of bananas from the Philippines in retaliation for the 2012 confrontation over the sovereignty of Scarborough Reef in the South China Sea.

But the intractable nature of many of the domestic and international obstacles to Beijing’s agenda suggests even stronger measures may be required. On the domestic front, the Xi administration has employed brutal crackdowns in the name of an anti-corruption campaign to crush opponents of key economic and political reforms. On the international front, Chinese authorities have similarly shown a growing willingness to risk antagonism with the United States and other nations when defending its interests in maritime, cyber and other domains. The most recent military strategy white paper suggests Beijing envisions the military playing an even larger role in the future. It states that central leaders expect to place “greater emphasis on the employment of military power” (*jiazhu zhong yunyong junshi liliang*) to achieve national objectives. The armed forces are expected to “work harder to create a favorable strategic posture” (*yingzao youli taishi*) for the country, the paper says.

China’s tolerance for tension with other countries, while growing, is likely to remain limited. There is no evidence that China seeks open military confrontation with the United States or war with any of its neighbors. It is difficult to envision a faster way to end China’s hopes for national rejuvenation, after all, than provoking a large-scale regional war. The white paper similarly emphasizes to foreign and domestic audiences that the military will continue to “adhere to the defensive security policy” and “persevere in close coordination with political, economic and diplomatic work.”

However, in light of deeply rooted, intractable disputes, militarized crises or clashes involving China and its neighbors are no longer implausible. The military strategy paper noted that officials have directed the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to “make serious preparations to cope with the most complex and difficult scenarios,” “uphold bottom-line thinking” (a reference

to the principle, announced by Xi, that China views control of its sovereignty, territory and any other core interest as a non-negotiable “bottom-line”) and “ensure proper responses to scenarios at any time and in any circumstance.” The paper described a broad range of military contingencies for which the military must plan, including war preparation and prevention, deterrence and warfighting, operations in war and in peace, and “farsighted planning and management” to “create a favorable posture” and “comprehensively handle crises.”

These cryptic references find amplification in writings by Chinese military leaders, thinkers and strategists. Sun Jianguo, PLA Deputy Chief of the General Staff, explained that “no conflict and no confrontation does not mean ‘no struggle’” (*Seeking Truth*, March 1). He stated, “without struggle, it will be impossible for the United States to respect our core interests.” Citing Xi Jinping, the deputy chief explained that in sovereignty and territorial disputes, China must “give tit for tat” and “fight for every inch of territory.” A prominent Party scholar explained that the “holistic security concept” called for authorities to “be good at taking advantage of disputes” and the “use the efforts of others against them” (*Outlook*, December 2, 2013). Zhang Tuosheng, a Chinese expert in crisis management, observed in 2011 that “crisis management has replaced military confrontation” to become the “main characteristic of Chinese crisis behavior” (*World Economics and Politics*, April 14, 2011). A growing body of literature among military writers advocates the exploitation of crises to further Chinese goals. “Handled properly,” observed a typical article, “a military crisis can provide a major opportunity to promote national interests and achieve peace.” [2] These writings have broadly praised precedents in the way China has exploited recent actions by its neighbors, including Beijing’s decision to lock up access to Scarborough Reef and reinforce the Chinese coast guard presence with naval combatants after the Philippine’s missteps to gain control. This also applies to the way China responded to Japan’s announcement of the purchase of the Senkaku Islands by strengthening de-facto control through the announcement of the Air Defense Identification Zone, increasing coast guard patrols and other measures.

Implications

As a powerful China outgrows the security environment that nurtured its rise, its leaders are reexamining

longstanding security policies. The elevation, centralization and expansion of security policy, embodied in Xi's "holistic security concept," reflects Beijing's conclusion that breaking through constraints on the country's rise will require new, potentially riskier approaches. China's leaders will continue to avoid war and prioritize peaceful methods, but their determination to overcome resistance and consolidate control of key national interests makes friction and even the eruption of militarized crises increasingly possible. Recognizing this reality, Beijing is exploring ideas and making preparations to exploit such situations and advance its strategic aims in a way that could involve more military assets, but avoids war. This line of thought, while understandable, nonetheless carries considerable risk for Beijing. Brinksmanship as a tactic has historically proven alluring to rising powers eager to expand their strategic space without incurring the debilitating costs of war. Ominously, past practitioners have frequently failed to calculate accurately and ended up in disastrous conflicts. [3] For the United States, the evolving situation underscores the importance of planning for crises involving China and its neighbors. It also highlights the importance of strengthening outreach and dialogue between China and the United States and its allies to ensure future incidents do not escalate into a tragic conflict that all parties are working so hard to avoid.

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Notes

1. The longstanding four elements of the "historic missions" idea, introduced by Hu Jintao in 2004, consist of the following: 1) safeguarding the status of the CCP as governing party; 2) safeguarding the important period of national development; 3) safeguarding national interests; and 4) play a role in promoting world peace and common development.

2. Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang, "on the Control and Management of Military Crises," *China Military Science*, July, 2013, pp. 62–71.

3. Richard Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crises*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press (1981).

Network Warfare in China's 2015 Defense White Paper

Joe McReynolds

The recent release of China's biannual defense white paper (DWP) has sparked a flurry of commentary by Western People's Liberation Army (PLA) analysts. One common theme in many of these analyses is that China is placing an increased "emphasis on cyber power" as the "newest element" of their military strategy. [1] Although it is indisputable that the PLA places a strong emphasis on information warfare and network-domain espionage, there is little basis for reading the 2015 DWP as representing a shift in Chinese policy, posture or practice on network warfare.

The Defense White Paper in Context

Before reading the tea leaves regarding the 2015 DWP's cyber content, it's first important to place the DWP into proper context. The DWP is a diplomatic document, not a command directive; it is best understood as a collection of ideas regarding China's military that the Party leadership wishes to convey to foreign audiences, rather than a primary venue for disseminating new instructions from China's political leadership into the PLA hierarchy. That does not necessarily mean these messages are deceptive; as Peter Mattis notes in his excellent new book *Analyzing the Chinese Military*, dismissing the DWP entirely as a mere exercise in propaganda would be a mistake, since it is often in Chinese interests to better inform and signal to outside observers their positions and intentions. However, we must be mindful, particularly when the DWP touches on sensitive matters, that its content was calculated primarily for its effect on foreign audiences rather than its accuracy

as a description of the PLA's actual activities.

As a corollary, Western PLA analysts must be incredibly careful about claiming that changes in content from one DWP to the next truly represent shifts in operational or developmental emphasis on the part of the PLA. China's defense bureaucracy is not a monolith, and the format of the DWP has shifted somewhat from one edition to the next. While explicit revisions of previously-articulated concepts and the introduction of new ideas can certainly be meaningful, an omission or the devotion of greater space to a particular concept than in previous editions does not inherently signal an underlying change. There was an uproar from many corners, for example, when China's no-first-use nuclear policy was omitted from the 2013 DWP, but in fact nothing had changed; a PLA Major General later clarified that it simply hadn't fit in with the issues under discussion in that edition. [2]

The Defense White Paper and Network Warfare

Viewed through this rubric, the 2015 DWP does not appear to signal any newly increased emphasis on network warfare, but rather reflects a consistent PLA prioritization of the network domain for at least the past half-decade. The 2015 DWP's description of outer space and cyber space as having "become new commanding heights in strategic competition" is nearly a direct word-for-word repetition of the 2011 DWP. The 2015 DWP's description of cyberspace as a "new domain of national security" is similarly a direct repetition of both the 2013 and 2011 DWPs. The main change from previous editions is that additional space has been given to discussion of network warfare forces alongside those of other operational domains. This is in line with China's slowly increasing comfort with publicly acknowledging the PLA's network warfare capabilities in public forums, which has been driven in part by the eroded diplomatic position of the United States on cyber-security issues after 2013's spate of espionage allegations.

There are several areas in which the 2015 DWP provides useful clarity on the Chinese approach to aspects of network warfare, even if the information presented is not new. First and foremost, recent DWPs reflect a consensus within the PLA—also found in the most recent edition of the Academy of Military Sciences' *Science of Military Strategy* and other informative sources—that the

cultivation of human capital is tremendously important for success in network warfare. The 2015 DWP calls for "expediting the development of China's cyber force" (加快网络空间力量建设) and makes numerous references to personnel development and training for information warfare, echoing and expanding upon similar themes in prior editions. This consensus has increasingly driven the PLA's preparations for network domain conflict, with significant investments the past several years in its network warfare-related human capital cultivation. [3]

Secondly, the 2015 DWP and its predecessors reflect the extent to which China's development of military power in cyberspace is intertwined with the country's civilian policy, industry and infrastructure development. The 2015 DWP references this civilian dimension by speaking of cyberspace not only as a domain of national security but also as a "pillar of economic and social development," and explains that Chinese cyber power is designed not only to safeguard national security but also to "maintain social stability." The 2011 DWP, similarly, speaks of information security as one of several dimensions of national security alongside political, economic, military and social security. This manner of thinking underlies China's top-level informatization and cyber-security policies, which aim to coordinate military and civilian national development efforts in these areas rather than deal with each sphere separately. [4]

Finally, the DWPs emphasize the extent to which control of cyberspace is central to the PLA's overarching goal of becoming a force that can "win wars under informatized conditions." PLA leaders and theoreticians argue in the DWPs and elsewhere that game-changing new military technologies such as precision-guided munitions and unmanned weapons platforms rely on a military's information dominance for their effectiveness. Achieving and maintaining overall information dominance, in turn, is a central military task that plays out in the outer-space, network, and electromagnetic domains.

Opportunities for Dialogue with the PLA

Although none of these points of emphasis should be particularly surprising to long-time Western observers of the PLA, there is value in having them laid out in an official document in this fashion. Western interlocutors often encounter substantial difficulties when attempting

to discuss sensitive topics such as network warfare and network-enabled industrial espionage with their Chinese counterparts, largely as a result of China's blanket refusal to acknowledge the existence of many of their programs. By issuing an official document that speaks, for example, of the "development of China's cyber force," the window of possible discussion may crack ever more slightly open and enable a more robust exchange of views. This expanded treatment of the topic, although not necessarily tied to any new policies, may offer an opportunity to explore several important cybersecurity and network warfare topics in bilateral discussions with the Chinese.

First and foremost, cyberspace is specifically referenced in the DWP's section on "active defense" as a relevant security domain. When Chinese political and military leaders frequently speak of their defensive rather than offensive posture in cyberspace, it would be helpful to gain some clarity as to whether they are using term "defensive" in the sense of the "active defense" doctrine, which, as detailed by Dennis Blasko and others, encompasses a number of aggressive and pre-emptive activities that are not traditionally thought of as "defensive" by Western militaries. [5] The Chinese face a difficult balancing act here; to acknowledge that their supposedly defensive cyberspace operations are governed by the active defense principle would in some sense diminish the strength of their protest, whereas asserting that Chinese network warfare forces are governed by a more restrictive notion of defense would undermine their claim that active defense is a universal guiding principle for PLA conduct.

Recent DWPs' repeated use of the term "cyber" in their English translations in place of the term "network" (网络) in the Chinese original also serves as an opportunity for mutual clarification. A number of Chinese authors have noted that the PLA's concept of the "network space" (网络空间) or "network domain" (网络领域) is only a partial match for the Western concept of cyberspace. [6] Although the DWPs are somewhat notorious for their loose approach to translations of PLA terms of art into English, this could be used as an opportunity to clarify through bilateral contacts how the PLA views Western concepts of cyberspace as aligning or conflicting with their own understandings of network warfare.

It will also be important to discuss with the Chinese whether the phrase "expediting the development of China's cyber force" encompasses the creation (or at least the public unveiling) of a PLA cyber command. Such an entity would serve an important role in the interactions of foreign militaries with the PLA, giving commands such as the United States military's CYBERCOM a clear counterpart with which to engage. The lack of such an entity has given rise to inaccurate reporting in the Western media at times, such as when the founding of the PLA's Information Assurance Base (信息保障基地) was inaccurately described as the launch of a "cyber command" organization.

Taken together, the Defense White Paper's cyber-related contents fit well with its intended purpose, communicating the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership's desired messages regarding their views of China's pressing national security concerns and providing a template for conversations with foreign interlocutors within the PLA's ongoing military-to-military relationships. However, the undue weight given by some Western analysts to the DWP as an accurate source of information on changes in Chinese policy and intent speaks to the need for greater engagement with Chinese-language original sources by the China analysis communities of Western countries, particularly when a topic that the PLA considers sensitive and secretive—such as network warfare—is being examined. At best, placing an unequal emphasis on English-language sources can lead to distortions in our understanding of where the center of gravity lies in ongoing intra-PLA debates; at worst, it can serve as mere stenography, amplifying the PLA's desired messaging without seriously interrogating whether the message accords with the PLA's realities. Context matters, and at their best Western PLA watchers can play an important role in shaping the debate by enabling the non-Chinese-speaking generalist audience of policymakers and war-fighters to assess the PLA's external messaging with greater nuance and understanding.

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Notes

1. See, for example, Greg Austin, "China's Military Dream," *The Diplomat*, June 2, 2015. <http://thediplomat.com/2015/06/chinas-military-dream/>.
2. Rachel Oswald, "China's New Defense Paper Causes Stir Over No-First-Use Nuke Policy," Global Security Newswire, April 24, 2013. <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/chinas-new-defense-white-paper-causes-stir-over-questions-no-first-use-policy/>.
3. For more information, see Joe McReynolds, LeighAnn Ragland, Amy Chang, "The Human Capital Ecosystem Underlying the PLA's Network Weapons Development," 2014.
4. See Joe McReynolds and James Mulvenon, "The Informatization of the PLA Under Hu Jintao," in *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era*, 2014, and Amy Chang, "Warring State: China's Cybersecurity Strategy", 2014.
5. Dennis Blasko, "The evolution of core concepts: people's war, active defense, offshore defense," *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao era*, Army War College Press, 2014.
6. See Joe McReynolds, "Chinese Thinking on Deterrence and Compellence in the Network Domain," CAPS-RAND PLA Conference, Taipei, 2013.

White Paper Expounds Civil-Military Relations in Xi Era

By Willy Lam

As the world observed the 26th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, the focus has remained on how this cataclysmic event has rolled back reforms and exacerbated the trend of major clans in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) monopolizing the nation's economic and political resources. Yet the June 4, 1989, crackdown also proved to be a watershed in military-civilian relations. Not only has the People's Liberation Army (PLA) become more powerful, there have been increasing signs of a significant militarization of national affairs and even everyday life.

While meeting troops responsible for crushing the "counter-revolutionary turmoil," then chairman of the policy-setting Central Military Commission (CMC) Deng Xiaoping praised the PLA for being "a steel Great Wall [that protects] the Party and country." Deng went on to eulogize Martial Law troops guarding Beijing as "the most beloved [*zui ke'ai*] people of them all" (*Xinhua*, July 31, 2005; *People's Daily*, June 9, 1989). Through the 1980s, Deng had demobilized one million soldiers, reined in military spending and demanded that military forces subserve the country's "core goal" of economic construction. While this reflected Deng's insistence on keeping a low profile in world affairs (thus reducing the PLA's role in China's power projection), the Great Architect of Reform was anxious to prevent the recurrence of massive military interference in Chinese politics that was evident during much of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) (*People's Daily Online*, May 26; *People's Daily*, November 4, 2014). After the 1989 massacre, however, Deng systematically raised the clout of the top brass. The annual budget increase for the PLA and the paramilitary People's Armed Police (PAP) was soon raised to double digits. For the first time since the Cultural Revolution, Deng in 1992 inducted a top general—Admiral Liu Huaqing—into the Politburo Standing Committee, China's supreme ruling council (*People's Daily Online*, December 20, 2013; *360doc.com* [Beijing], November 10, 2013). (This practice was stopped at the 15th Party Congress of 1997, which was convened several months after Deng's death).

Deng's partial revival of the Maoist tradition of militarizing national affairs was enhanced when Xi Jinping became CCP General Secretary and CMC Chairman at the 18th Party Congress in late 2012. More than predecessors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, Xi has since his days as Party secretary of Zhejiang Province from 2002 to 2007 resuscitated teachings of the Great Helmsman such as *quanminjiebing* (all civilians should become soldiers at times of crisis) and *pingzhenheyi* (the fusion of the peacetime and wartime [goals]). For example, Xi underscored in a speech to the top brass not long after becoming CMC chairman the importance of "coordinating economic construction and national defense construction" and "development under [the principle of] military-civilian integration." "We must ensure that concern and enthusiasm for national defense, [participating in] and protecting national defense construction will become an ideological consensus and self-conscious action throughout society" ([Xinhua](#), March 12, 2013; [China News Service](#), March 11, 2013). While the *pingzhenheyi* slogan was raised in a PLA White Paper as early as 2000, neither ex-president Jiang Zemin nor ex-president Hu Jintao devoted much in the way of national resources to realize this goal ([China.com](#), November 3, 2013; [CCTV](#), October 16, 2000).

Civil-Military Integration Under Xi

Xi's ambitions for "civil-military integration" (CMI) was fleshed out in the just-published State Council *White Paper on China's Military Strategy* ([State Council](#), May 26). The landmark document calls for the first time for "an all-element, multi-domain and cost-efficient pattern of CMI." *China's Military Strategy* indicated that authorities would promote "uniform military and civilian standards for infrastructure, key technological areas and major industries, explore ways and means for training military personnel in civilian educational institutions... and outsourcing [military] logistics support to civilian support systems." Long-term economic policies should take into consideration "overall military-civilian planning and coordinated development" as well as "the abutment of military and civilian needs, and resource sharing" ([People's Daily](#), May 27; [Global Times](#), May 26). Take for example, the design and construction of ports, airports, shipyards, railways and highways. Given that most heavyweight firms in the infrastructure sector are government-owned, it is relatively easy for Party-state authorities to ensure

that specifications dovetail with requirements of civilian-military compatibility. In fact, provinces and major cities have, since last year, been asked to organize substantial infrastructure projects with both military and civilian participation ([Liberation Army Daily](#), March 30; [Phoenix TV Net](#), November 13, 2014).

The concept of country-wide mobilization is not new: it is the rationale for maintaining a system of military and para-military reservists estimated at 4.6 million. However, *China's Military Strategy* indicates for the first time that the PLA should "boost the proportion [of reservists] in the Navy, Air Force as well as Second Artillery Forces."

The reserves corps, which was set up in May 1983, has expanded to include divisions of infantry, artillery, armored units as well as engineering, communications, and anti-chemical warfare departments ([People's Daily](#), July 6, 2014). While the authorities have yet to release the numerical strength of the reservists, the White Paper suggests that they would be vastly expanded. "China aims to build a national defense mobilization system that can meet the requirements of winning informationized wars and responding to both emergencies and wars," it notes. The White Paper also highlights ordinary folks' involvement in "preparation for military struggles," which is a key aspect of Chairman Mao's "People's Warfare" ethos. It points out that the nation will "give full play to the overall power of the concept of people's war, [and] persist in employing it as an ace weapon to triumph over the enemy." The document also underscores the need for "building closer relations between the government and the military as well as between the people and the military."

President Xi is the first Chinese leader to have elevated and expanded education about defense mobilization to cover mid- to senior-ranked party and government officials. The National Defense Education Program (NDEP) was launched in 2013 by the CCP Organization Department and the PLA's General Political Department. So far, 21 cadres from central units and 287 local officials have taken part in training regarding state security and development, as well as border and coastal defense. Recently, even the CEOs of selected state-owned enterprises have attended these defense-related pep talks. The state media quoted NDEP alumn Zhou Jian, a senior official at the Policy

Planning Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as saying that the course had deepened his resolve to “use practical action to enthusiastically support national defense and the construction of military forces” ([Xinhua](#), May 26; [Xinhua Daily](#) [Nanjing], March 29).

Another measure adopted by Xi to promote the influence of the military in civilian life is the transfer of CEOs of defense and space industries to party and government posts. Since the 18th Party Congress, which inducted a record number of PLA generals as well as the CEOs of defense and space industries into the CCP Central Committee, Xi has named a bevy of former senior executives in the military-industrial complex to top regional slots (see [China Brief](#), September 25, 2014). Take, for instance, the mammoth maker of rockets and spaceships, the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC). Alumni of CASC who have won senior party and government appointments include Governor of Hebei Province Zhang Qingwei; Executive Vice-Governor of Zhejiang Yuan Jiajun; and Party Secretary of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone Ma Xingrui. Zhang Guoqing, a former chairman of Norinco, China’s best-known weapons manufacturer, was made Deputy Party Secretary of Chongqing metropolis in 2013, while Hao Peng, a former executive of Aviation Industry Corporation of China, was promoted Governor of western Qinghai Province the same year ([Hong Kong Economic Journal](#), June 4; [Duowei News](#), March 29). While most of these senior executives of defense and aerospace firms are not professional soldiers, they owe their meteoric rise to the PLA’s fortunes—and they are attuned to policy-making that would benefit the military establishment.

Military Influence Over Security Policy

The military influence in foreign and national-security policies is even more pronounced. This is despite the fact that Defense Minister General Chang Wanquan is the only military member sitting on the CCP Central Leading Group on Foreign Affairs (FLASG), the nation’s highest-level decision-making organ on diplomacy which groups together representatives from ministerial-level units including commerce, propaganda, foreign affairs, state security as well as Taiwan and Hong Kong affairs. Xi, who chairs the FLASG, relies on a day-to-day basis on a select group of “princeling generals”—a reference

to senior officers who are the offspring of party elders—to advise him on diplomatic issues ([Shanghai Observer](#) [Shanghai], September 24, 2014; [People’s Daily](#), June 23, 2014). They include the Political Commissar of the General Logistics Department General Liu Yuan (son of late state president Liu Shaoqi); Director of the General Armaments Department General Zhang Youxia (son of the late General Zhang Zongxun); and Political Commissar of the Academy of Military Sciences Liu Yazhou (son-in-law of former state president Li Xiannian) (see [China Brief](#), April 3).

China’s Military Strategy has also lent credence to the view that the generals are spearheading Chinese foreign policy, especially in the Asia-Pacific Region. Citing one of the most famous proverbs of Mao Zedong—“We will not attack unless we are attacked; If we are attacked, we will certainly counterattack”—the White Paper claims that Beijing has adopted an “active defense” strategy that is not aimed at any particular country. It reiterates that “China will never become an imperialist [power] and will never engage in military expansionism” ([Phoenix TV Net](#), June 4). However, the bulk of *China’s Military Strategy* focuses on aggressive global hard-power projection, particularly efforts to substantiate China’s claims as a “maritime power.” For example, the duties of the PLA Navy have been expanded from “offshore waters defense” to “open seas protection.” The Air Force will shift its focus from “territorial air defense” to “both defense and offense.” Moreover, the whole nation would participate in “preparations for military struggle [regarding] winning informationized local wars, [while] highlighting maritime military struggle and maritime preparations for military struggle” ([Ming Pao](#) [Hong Kong], May 27; [China News Service](#), May 26).

Rising Militarization of Chinese Security Policy

Major controversial initiatives in the Asia-Pacific Region in the past two years—the declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea, stationing an oilrig in waters within Vietnam’s Exclusive Economic Zone and massive reclamation works around several islets in the Spratly Islands chain—seem to reflect the views of military hawks. Indeed, *China’s Military Strategy* has broadened the key concept of China’s “core national interests” to include *haiwailiyi youguanqu* (literally “overseas zones affecting [national] interests”), which

the English version of the White Paper translates as “the security of overseas interests concerning energy and resources [and] strategic sea lines of communication” (*Jinghua Daily*, May 27; *New Beijing Post*, May 27). That so many new concepts and initiatives about China’s national security and foreign policies are coming from the defense—instead of the diplomatic—establishment is one of the hallmarks of the Xi administration.

Perhaps the most lasting impact of the preponderance of the military sector is that this could predispose the spread of a kind of “war culture” especially among young Chinese. It is not coincidental that General Liu Yuan is a keen proponent of the quasi-militarization of everyday life. Liu noted in a controversial 2010 article that war culture “has crystallized the most time-honored and most critical intelligence of mankind” (*Seeking Truth*, September 1, 2010; *People's Daily*, August 3, 2010). More recently, Major-General Xu Aishui, a much-published author, has argued that “in terms of military thought, superior traditions and institutional design, the unique culture of the people’s army has breached the front ranks of world civilization.” The veteran political commissar and military strategist urged the leadership to build up a “space culture, maritime culture and Internet culture that are compatible with a strong army, so that soldiers can demonstrate their charismatic culture in [different] arenas” (*Guangming Daily*, May 28). The relentless militarization of national life could have lasting consequences for China’s socio-political development as well as its relations with the world.

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China’s New Military Strategy: “Winning Informationized Local Wars”

By M. Taylor Fravel

In November 2013, the report of the Third Plenum of the 18th Party Congress hinted that China might adjust its national military strategy. The Plenum’s *Decision* outlined the need to “strengthen military strategic guidance, and enrich and improve the military strategic guideline for the new period.” [1] In May 2015, the new Defense White Paper, *China’s Military Strategy* (中国的军事战略), reveals that China has now officially adjusted its military strategy. [2] This follows previous practice, such as when the 2004 strategic guideline was publicly confirmed in China’s defense white paper published in December 2004.

In China’s approach to military affairs, the military strategic guideline represents China’s national military strategy. It provides authoritative guidance from the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for all aspects of the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) combat-related activities. Since the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949, China has issued eight strategic guidelines (军事战略方针). The 2015 Defense White Paper reveals that a ninth change has occurred (*Xinhua*, May 26). The new guidelines shift the goal of China’s military strategy from “winning local wars under the conditions of informationization” to “winning informationized local wars.” The change in the strategic guidelines reflects an evolution of the existing strategy, not a dramatic departure.

Two key assessments serve as the basis for the change in strategy. First, what the Chinese military calls the “form of war” or conduct of warfare in a given period of time, has changed. The application of information technology in all aspects of military operations is even more prominent. Second, China faces increased threats and challenges in the maritime domain, including over disputed islands and maritime jurisdiction in waters close to China as well as through the growth of interests overseas in waters far from China.

This article reviews how the language of the white paper indicates that China has officially changed its military strategy. The first section introduces briefly China’s concept of the strategic guideline. The second section reviews the language in the 2015 white paper to demonstrate that a change in the strategic guideline has occurred. The third section considers the timing of the adoption of the new strategy. It speculates that the

change occurred sometime during the summer of 2014, as the Plenum's *Decision* was being implemented.

A Brief Primer on the Military Strategic Guidelines

In China, the military strategic guidelines serve as the basis for China's national military strategy. As Marshall Peng Dehuai stated in 1957, "the strategic guidelines affect army building, troop training and war preparations." [3] The PLA's glossary of military terms defines the military strategic guideline as the "core and collected embodiment of military strategy." [4] In particular, it contains "the program and principles for planning and guiding the overall situation of war in a given period." The scope of the guidelines includes both general principles about the whole process of military operations and specific principles for certain types of operations. [5] In short, the guidelines outline how China plans to wage its next war. [6]

Generally speaking, a strategic guideline has several components. The first is the identification of the strategic opponent (战略对手), based on an assessment of China's international environment and the perceived threats to China's national interests. The specific military threat posed by the strategic opponent determines the operational target (作战对象). The second component is the identification of the main strategic direction (主要战略方向), which refers to the geographic focal point for a potential conflict and provides the basis for prioritizing the allocation of resources and effort. The third component is the basis of preparations for military struggle (军事斗争准备的基点), which describes the characteristics of wars that China will need to fight in the future. This usually is based on an assessment of the form of war (战争形态) or the conduct of warfare at any point in time and the "pattern of operations" (作战样式) that should be conducted. The fourth component is the basic guiding thought (基本指导思想) for campaigns and operations, which refers to general operational principles for the PLA to use in future wars it might fight. [7]

The CMC changes the strategic guideline when it concludes that one or more of these components have changed. When a strategic guideline changes, the change can be major, representing a dramatic departure from China's past strategy, or minor, representing an adjustment (调整) to an existing strategy. Since 1949, China has had

eight unique military strategies or strategic guidelines. Those adopted in 1956, 1980 and 1993 represent major changes in China's military strategy, while the others have constituted minor changes. [8]

The two most likely sources of change are whether the CMC identifies new threats to China's national security or when it concludes that the form of war, and thus the basis of preparations for military struggle, has undergone an important shift. The 1993 guideline, the last major change in China's military strategy, was adopted based on the assessment that the Gulf War had demonstrated a fundamental change in the conduct of warfare. As former leader Jiang Zemin stated when introducing the guideline in January 1993, the PLA "must place the basis of preparations for military struggle on winning local wars that might occur under modern especially high-technology conditions." [9] The premise of this change was the conclusion that "as soon as a war breaks out, it is likely to be a high-technology confrontation." [10] In June 2004, China's military strategic guideline was "enriched and improved" (充实完善) based on a similar assessment of change in the basis of preparations for military struggle. As Jiang stated once again, "We must clearly place the basis of preparations for military struggle on winning local wars under the conditions of informationization." The key change was replacing "under modern especially high technology conditions" in the 1993 guideline with "under the conditions of informationization." [11] This change reflected the assessment that "the basic characteristic of high-technology warfare is informationized warfare. Informationized warfare will become the basic form of warfare in the 21st century." [12]

"Winning Informationized Local Wars"

A close analysis of the language in the 2015 Defense White Paper indicates that China's strategic guideline has been changed. The adjustment was based on two assessments summarized in the white paper: that the form of war has shifted to give even greater prominence to the application of information technology in all aspects of military operations and that China's national security environment presents new challenges, especially in the maritime domain. As the white paper states, the guideline is adjusted "according to the evolution of the form of war and the national security situation."

The first assessment is that the evolution in the form of war requires a change in the basis of preparations for military struggle. As the white paper notes, “the basis of preparations for military struggle will be placed on winning informationized local wars.” This adjustment consisted of dropping only four characters from the 2004 guideline, changing from “winning local wars under the conditions of informatization” (打贏信息化条件下的局部战争) to “winning informationized local wars” (打贏信息化局部战争). As described by one researcher from the Academy of Military Science (AMS), the removal of the four characters indicates that “a qualitative change has occurred” (*Global Times*, May 26).

The white paper’s section on China’s national security situation summarizes the assessment that the form of war has changed. According to the white paper, “The development of the world revolution in military affairs is deepening” while “the form of war is accelerating its transformation to informationization.” These changes included “clear trends” toward the development and use of long-range, precision, smart and unmanned weapons and equipment. Space and cyber domains are described as becoming the “commanding heights of strategic competition.” From China’s perspective, these trends, which have been occurring over the past decade, require a shift in the basis of preparations for military struggle that forms the key part of any strategic guideline. As one researcher from AMS explained, “information is no longer an important condition [in warfare] but now plays a dominant role, presenting new changes in the mechanisms for winning wars” (*Global Times*, May 26).

The white paper suggests that the basic guiding thought for operations, which is based on the assessment of the form of war, has also changed. In particular, the 2015 white paper states that “to implement the strategic guideline of active defense under the new situation, China’s armed forces will create new basic operational thought” (创新基本作战思想). In the 2004 guideline, the basic guiding thought was “integrated operations, precision strikes to subdue the enemy” (整体作战, 精打制敌). [13] The 2015 white paper appears to indicate that this has been changed to “information dominance, precision strikes on strategic points, joint operations to gain victory” (信息主导, 精打要害, 联合制胜).

The second assessment is that China faces more pressing national security threats, especially in the maritime domain. As part of winning informationized local wars, the white paper stresses the role of “maritime military struggle” and “preparations for maritime military struggle” in such conflicts. In previous strategic guidelines, no domain was highlighted for particular emphasis, though the implication usually was the primacy of China’s land-based conflicts and operations. In the new guideline, the emphasis on the maritime domain stems from two factors. The first is the intensification of disputes over territorial sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction in waters near China. The white paper concludes that the “maritime rights defense struggle will exist for a long time.” The second is “the continuous expansion of China’s national interests,” in which overseas interests from energy and sea lines of communication to personnel and assets abroad “have become prominent.” Although these are not new concerns for China, they have become more prominent in Chinese assessments when compared with the 2013 white paper.

Consistent with the increasing focus on the maritime domain, the white paper stated publicly for the first time that the Chinese navy’s strategic concept “will gradually shift from ‘near seas defense’ (近岸防御) to the combination of ‘near seas defense’ and ‘far seas protection’ (远海护卫)”. [14] Near seas defense emphasizes defending China’s immediate maritime interests, especially in territorial and jurisdictional disputes in the seas directly adjacent to the Chinese mainland. Open seas protection emphasizes safeguarding China’s expanding interests overseas, such as the protection of sea lines of communication and Chinese businesses abroad. [15]

One component of the guidelines that the white paper does not address explicitly is the primary strategic direction that defines the geographic focus of strategy. Typically, the primary strategic direction is not stated explicitly in openly published sources. In the 1993 and 2004 guidelines, the southeast or Taiwan was the primary strategic direction. In the latest guidelines, the primary strategic direction appears to be the same, but has been expanded to include the Western Pacific or what retired Lieutenant General Wang Hongguang has described as the “Taiwan Strait-Western Pacific” direction. [16]

Whether the South China Sea has become part of primary strategic direction remains unclear. Although Wang notes such a link, he still writes that “Taiwan Strait is the primary strategic campaign direction” and the “nose of the ox.” [17]

The Decision to Adjust the Strategy

Although the white paper confirms that the strategic guideline has been adjusted, it does not state exactly when the decision was made. Historically, the establishment or adjustment of a strategic guideline usually occurs during an enlarged meeting of the CMC. Such meetings are attended by heads of all leading departments on the general staff and under the CMC as well as the services and military regions. The new guideline is presented in a speech, which serves as the primary reference document for the strategy. These meetings, however, are rarely publicized, which makes it difficult to determine exactly when the decision to change the strategy was made. In 2004, for example, the change in strategy was introduced during an enlarged meeting of the CMC that was held in June. [18] Yet the first public reference to the strategy did not occur until the publication of the 2004 Defense White Paper six months later. Likewise, the speech about a new strategic guideline is not openly published when the guideline is introduced and sometimes never openly published at all. Jiang Zemin’s speech introducing the 1993 guideline, for example, was not openly published until 2006.

Despite such uncertainty, it is likely that the CMC decided to adjust the strategic guideline in the summer of 2014. The phrase “winning informationized local wars” has appeared in the pages of the PLA’s newspaper, the *Liberation Army Daily*, only fifty times. But thirty eight, or 75 percent, of these references have occurred since mid-August 2014. The term first appeared on August 21, 2014 in an article announcing a new document published by the General Staff Department on improving the level of realistic training. [19] During the same period, the formula for the 2004 strategy was used only thirteen times and never in connection with any official announcements or decisions taken by the CMC or the General Staff Department.

It is plausible that the guideline was adjusted in September 2014 for several reasons. As noted in the introduction, the

Third Plenum in November 2013 announced the need to “strengthen military guidance, and enrich and improve the military strategic guideline.” Shortly thereafter, a high-level leading group was likely established by the Central Military Commission to determine how to achieve this goal. In 1992, for example, a leading group to draft the 1993 strategic guideline was created and completed its work about two months before Jiang introduced the new guideline. [20]

Conclusion

In the past, the adoption or adjustment of a new strategic guideline represents the start, not the end, of strategic change for the PLA. Over the next few years, elements of the new strategy will be fleshed out. These will likely include the development of new operational doctrine, new criteria for training as well as new joint command structures at both the level of the CMC and in the military regions. Following earlier reforms, a further downsizing of the force will likely be used as the vehicle for the organizational change necessary to improve the ability to conduct joint operations. As Chinese Commander-in-Chief Xi Jinping stated in December 2013, “we have already explored the command system for joint operations, but problems have not been fundamentally resolved” ([People’s Daily Online](#), August 15, 2014.)

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Notes

1. Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu quanmian shenhua gaige ruogan zhongda wenti de jueding [Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform],” November 12, 2013.
2. Zhongguo de junshi zhanlue [China’s Military Strategy] (Beijing: Zhonghua renmin gongheguo xinwen

- bangongshi, 2015), http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-05/26/c_1115408217.htm. All citations in this article are from the Chinese version. For the official English translation, see http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content_20820628.htm.
3. Peng Dehuai, *Peng Dehuai junshi wenxuan* [Peng Dehuai's Selected Work on Military Affairs] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1988), p. 587.
 4. Junshi kexue yuan, ed., *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junyu* [Military Terminology of the Chinese People's Liberation Army] (Beijing: Junshikexue chubanshe, 2011), p. 51.
 5. Junshi kexue yuan, ed., *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junyu*, p. 51.
 6. On the strategic guidelines, see David M. Finkelstein, "China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines,'" in Andrew Scobell and Roy Kamphausen, eds., *Right Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military*, (Carlisle: Army War College, 2007), pp. 69-140; M. Taylor Fravel, "The Evolution of China's Military Strategy: Comparing the 1987 and 1999 Editions of *Zhanlue Xue*," in David M. Finkelstein and James Mulvenon, eds., *The Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People's Liberation Army*, (Alexandria, Va.: Center for Naval Analyses, 2005), pp. 79-100.
 7. Wang Wenrong, ed., *Zhanlue xue* [The Science of Military Strategy]
 - (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe, 1999), pp. 136-139. For other authoritative descriptions of the concept of the strategic guideline, see Gao Rui, ed., *Zhanlue xue* [The Study of Military Strategy] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1987), pp. 81-85; Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, eds., *Zhanlue xue* [The Science of Military Strategy] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2001), pp. 182-186; Fan Zhenjiang and Ma Baoan, eds., *Junshi zhanlue lun* [On Military Strategy] (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe, 2007), pp. 149-150.
 8. M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Military Strategies: An Overview of the 1956, 1980 and 1993 Military Strategic Guidelines," paper prepared for the CAPS-RAND-NDU conference on the PLA, November 2013, Taipei, Taiwan. Updated April 2015.
 9. Jiang Zemin, *Jiang Zemin wenxuan* [Jiang Zemin's Selected Works], Vol. 1, (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), p. 285.
 10. Jiang Zemin, *Jiang Zemin wenxuan*, Vol. 1, p. 286.
 11. Jiang Zemin, *Jiang Zemin wenxuan* [Jiang Zemin's Selected Works], Vol. 3, (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), p. 608.
 12. Ibid.
 13. Zhang Yuliang, *Zhanyi xue* [The Science of Campaigns] (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe, 2006), p. 81.
 14. The official English translation of the white paper uses "offshore waters defense" and "open seas protection," respectively.

15. Within the PLA, each service has its own strategic concept in addition to the strategic guideline for China's armed forces.
16. Wang Hongguang, "Cong lishi kan jinri Zhongguo de zhanlue fangxiang [Looking at China's Strategic Direction Today From a Historical Perspective]," *Tongzhibou gongjin*, March 2015, pp. 48. General Wang is the former deputy commander of the Nanjing Military Region and current member of the Tenth National People's Congress.
17. Wang Hongguang, "Cong lishi kan jinri Zhongguo de zhanlue fangxiang," p. 50, 49.
18. Jiang Zemin, *Jiang Zemin wenxuan*, Vol. 3, p. 608.
19. *Jiefangjun bao*, August 21, 2014, p. 1.
20. Fravel, "China's Military Strategies."

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Editor's Note: We have chosen to include M. Taylor Fravel's article, which will officially be published in issue 13. We have chosen to include it in this special issue due to its relevance to the other articles.