

AN ANALYSIS OF CHINESE DEFENCE WHITE PAPER 2019

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On the occasion of this 70th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, the Chinese government published its White Paper to respond to the world's questions about China, and to help the international community better understand China's development. This is the first White Paper that focusses on a specific aspect of national security unlike the previous ones that were about objectives, force levels, training and economy.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DOCUMENT

- The White Paper states that China's National Defense Policy is purely "defensive" and not offensive.
- As stated by China many times, the document highlights that China will never seek domination, never expand and never seek any sphere of influence.
- Its defense expenditures are reasonable and appropriate and above all its defense expenditures are less than that of the United States.
- China has made remarkable progress in the domains of military technology, cyberspace, artificial intelligence. There has been a shift in China's strategy from information warfare to intelligence warfare.
- Chinese army – the People's Liberation Army (PLA(A)), People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA(N)), and the People's Liberation Air Force (PLA(FF)) are undergoing intensive modernization.
- A close evaluation of the defense White Paper does confirm the advances made by the Chinese military in the commissioning and deployment of key weapon platforms.

ANALYSIS

The document states that China does not believe in using force against other nations but also mentions it will not withhold itself from using force in issues pertaining to Taiwan's independence. China also believes in preemptive strikes and warfare, which leaves enough room for offensive attacks.

President Xi Jinping has the compulsion to assure his people and the Party that he is fulfilling the Chinese Dream. Accordingly, references to China as a "great power" have multiplied in the White Paper.

The document tried to justify Chinese behavior on various issues like the South China Sea, defense expenditure etc. It says that the situation around the South China Sea is peaceful and stable and that China is trying to establish a community of shared human destiny.

China blamed India, US and other countries that their military expenditures, given that their GDP is considerably high compared to its own. As per average ratio of the defense expenditure between 2012

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and 2017, USA spends 3.5% and India spends 2.5% of their respective GDP on defense while China spends only 1.3% of its GDP on defense. However, the paper ignores the actual rates of spending by each country, or the fact that China only reports a limited part of its true military expenditures.

The word “Asia-Pacific” was used rather than 'Indo-Pacific', which excluded the mentioning of the 'Indian Ocean'. China seems to be anxious with regards to India's growing strategic partnership with the US, Japan and the European powers, and may seek to draw it away from these powers.

Anxiety about US-China relations is very clear in the document. China accuses USA of unilateral policies, US attempts to assert its hegemony, increase in defense spending, increased competition among major countries, pushed for additional capacity in nuclear, outer space, cyber and missile defense and undermined global strategic stability.

It stated that the deployment of THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) in South Korea by the US undermined regional strategic balance and security of the region. On the other hand, it promoted itself as a country attempting to bring Asian countries together, a believer in multilateral organization and multilateralism. The document mentions the successes of Shanghai Cooperation Council (SCO), the China-ASEAN Defence Ministers' Informal Meeting, and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) etc for this purpose.

There are no direct references to India in the document. The document mentioned the Doklam crisis in a softer tone. The document mentions “Chinese forces strive to promote stability and security along the border with India, and take effective measures to create favourable conditions for the peaceful resolution of the Donglang (Doklam) standoff”. It can be inferred that Indo-China relations are on good terms.

KEY TAKEAWAY'S FROM THE DOCUMENT COUNTRIES NEED TO BE WARY OF:

Military advance of China:

Since 2012, China's armed forces have carried out extensive mission-oriented training and upgrading of their military capabilities. In the White Paper, only one example is given for each service branch - the Type-15 tank for the Army, Type-052D destroyer for the Navy, J-20 fighter for the Air Force and DF-26 for the Rocket Force.

AIR FORCE: J-20 is the most advanced jet in the PLAAF. It is China's answer to the United States Air Force (USAF) F-22 Raptor.

NAVY – PLAN has extended training to the far seas and deployed the aircraft carrier task group for its first far seas combat exercise in the West Pacific. It has organized naval parades in the South China Sea and conducted a series of live force-on-force exercises. As per the recent advancements, Type 052D Luyang Class Destroyers as well as its marginally older variant the Type 052C vessels will form the backbone of China's surface fleet.

ARMY – Type 15 light weight tank has been commissioned. This is commissioned for the purpose of mountain warfare due to its light weight and maneuverability. This is likely being deployed on the Sino-Indian border.

Djibouti Military Base:

China acquired the Djibouti port at the Horn of Africa and it has developed this port into a military base. In August 2017, the PLA Djibouti Support Base entered service. The base has provided equipment

for the maintenance of four escort task groups and conducted joint medical exercises with foreign militaries. This military base is capable of supporting a wide range of PLA operations and serves a strategic position to China in the western Indian ocean and Africa.

China's goals for 2030 to 2050:

China aims to complete full modernization of its military by 2035 by, “fully transforming the people’s armed forces into world-class forces by the mid-21st century.” China aims to build world class military by 2050 that is capable of winning any war on the planet. China also aims to become the world leader of Artificial Intelligence (AI) by 2030.

Strategy of Active defense:

The document states that “active defense” continues to be the strategy of China. Apart from the principles of defense, self-defense and post-strike response, China also goes by active defense. Active defense is like a preemptive attack which is done to outmaneuver an adversary so that the attacker or enemy cannot advance or complete an attack, increasing the probability of enemy losing thereby protecting the Chinese national security. This leaves enough room for China to make the first move or attack in the name of active defense.

CONCLUSION

This White Paper identifies the United States as the single most precarious threat to China’s national security. It strikes an increasingly aggressive tone towards Taiwan, asserting its ‘one China policy’.

The paper had a softer tone on most issues except the United States, defence expenditure, the Taiwan issue and the South China Sea. However, an aggressive and expansionist tone is underlying in the document. China aims to build an army that is capable of winning any war on the planet and Its military advancements assert its power.

Its firm tone on US activities and unilateralism explain that China now considers itself powerful enough to compete with the US. Its assertion on multilateralism explains its effort to garner support and challenge US hegemony. This White Paper did not give away any strategies to achieve China’s goals nor talked about any defence strategies targeted towards any particular country, however, it gave away a strong political message with respect to China-US relations.