

Comments on China's Defense Paper 2002

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Context

China's Defense Paper 2002 was released in December 2002. It is the fourth such Paper since 1995. It clearly affirms that the top priority for China is to continue its modernisation. In particular, economic security is given more attention. The report also echoes the guidelines set at the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party for the future development of China. As stated in the White Paper, "The 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China... has drawn up a grand blueprint for China's development in the new century. A developing China needs a peaceful international environment and a favourable climate in its periphery. And its development will make even greater contributions to world peace and human progress."

Political Purpose of Releasing *China's Defense Paper 2002*

Firstly, China wanted to highlight the importance of its continuous military modernisation especially in the period of transition of power in the Chinese leadership. Secondly, it tried to make its armed forces transparent and has been emphasising military-to-military contacts with countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Thirdly, it tried to reduce apprehensions by countries in the region about the potential Chinese threat. Fourthly, China tried to portray separatist movements among its ethnic minorities as terrorist behaviour.

Major Goals of Modernisation of Chinese Armed Force

There appear to be three major goals:

- *Preparing for a new form of warfare in the future*

According to the Paper, "The PLA strives to adapt itself to the characteristics of modern warfare, takes enhancement of the capability of defensive operations under high-tech conditions as the main objective, and continuously strengthens and improves military training." After the Gulf War in 1991 and the American war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, China took

serious note of this new form of warfare in which advanced information technology plays a crucial role.

- *Securing a stable regional environment for China's continuing development*
The Paper particularly emphasises that the trend of economic globalisation and world multi-polarisation has gained more strength in development in the recent years. Regardless of competition among the major countries, China regards that a new world war is unlikely in the foreseeable future. And according to the Paper, "strengthening dialogue and cooperation, maintaining regional stability and promoting common development have become the mainstream policy of the Asian countries."
- *To engage in multilateral and regional institutions based on stronger economic and military strength*

For China's real benefits and its image as a responsible member in the international community, China would be more actively taking part in regional multilateral dialogues and fora in the coming years. According to the Paper, "Over the past two years, China has worked hard for the formation and development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and continued to support and participate in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Council on Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region (CSCAP), Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD) and other such programmes for multilateral security dialogue and cooperation, thus playing a positive role in deepening regional security cooperation with Asian characteristics."

Yet, China still very much resents the existing economic order whose norms, procedures and rules China regards as having been unfairly set up by developed countries. To deal with those kinds of issues, China realises that it needs to continue its economic development and modernise its armed forces to have a say in international affairs. However, to what extent China is able to change the rules of international economic and trade regimes remains to be seen, particularly when it has also become a member of the WTO.

Discrepancies and Shortcomings in the Paper

China thinks that the Asia-Pacific region, with so many unsettled issues, is full of uncertainty. With regard to the issue of Taiwan, in the Paper, China criticised Taiwan's incremental approach towards independence. And China resents countries, the US in particular, that sell arms to Taiwan. China vows that it would not forswear the use of force against Taiwan. Nonetheless, China's stand of not ruling out force against Taiwan is apparently contradictory to its goals of achieving a peaceful regional

environment because the stability of the Taiwan Straits would be a major concern of many countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Paper recognises the importance of information technology in the new forms of warfare. But the Chinese military would appear still to be very dogmatic. The Paper has stated that “Take Mao Zedong’s military thinking and Deng Ziaoping’s thinking on armed forces building in the new period as the guide to action, and fully implement the important thought of the ‘Three Represents’, enunciated by Jiang Zemin at the 16th Communist Party Congress.”

There are still many issues that are not transparent in the Paper such as Chinese military’s weapons acquisition process list, force deployment, and defence expenditures.

Security Concerns for Taiwan and India in the Long Run

What India and Taiwan should be concerned about China’s military development is that the Chinese military has been trained in a simulation environment like the one in the Taiwan Straits and in high mountain ranges. Even though the Paper has not mentioned any potential countries against which China may fight for its own interest, it has explicitly stated the importance of China preparing for new forms of warfare and the physical environment under which China would fight. As has been emphasised in the Paper, “In line with the new generation of operational doctrines, the PLA focuses on the studies and on training of joint operations... in the Spring and Summer of 2001, both Nanjing and Guangzhou military area commands organised field exercises with joint landing operations as the backdrop, focusing on the coordination of joint and combined arms landing operation, and drew useful lessons on how to organise, support and manage joint training, ground force, amphibious landing and rapid reserve mobilisation. In addition, the General Headquarters/Departments organised successive studies and exercises of communications and command at the joint operational level, training in landing and mountain operations, and research on methods of joint penetration operations, and explored the features and patterns of integrated network and electronic warfare.”

Assessment

Although the countries in the Asian region may not be satisfied with the contents of *China’s Defense Paper 2002*, they should welcome the fact that China has released the *Defense Paper* on a regular basis since 1995. Yet, they may ask China through a more coherent voice, to reveal the strength of its armed forces and its strategic intentions. Multilateral security fora such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) should be more active in this regard.