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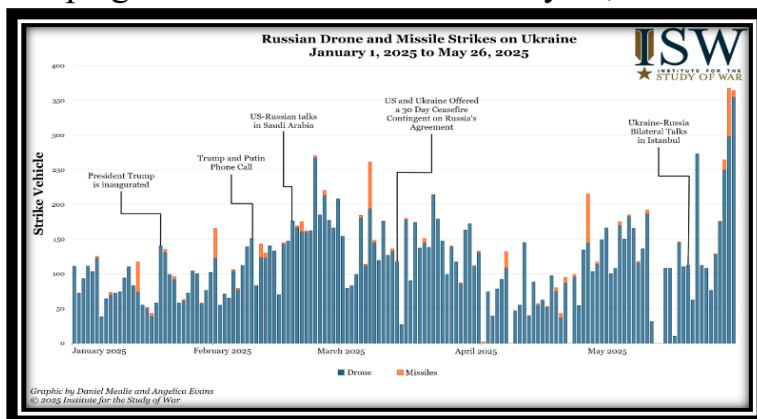
Russia- Ukraine War Intensifies amid Wavering Peace Talk

Over the past month, the Russia-Ukraine war has seen significant escalations, with both sides intensifying military operations while diplomatic efforts have shown limited progress.

In a bold move, Ukraine launched "Operation Spider's Web," a large-scale drone attack targeting Russian airbases deep within Siberia on June 1, 2025. This operation involved 117 drones and reportedly damaged or destroyed 41 aircraft, including nuclear-capable bombers like the TU-95 "Bear" and A-50 command-and-control jets. Executed without prior notice to the U.S., this strike marked Ukraine's longest-range operation to date, inflicting an estimated \$7 billion in damages on Russia.

Sources within Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) indicated that the SBU conducted a series of first-person view (FPV) drone strikes targeting four air bases in Russia: Belaya Air Base in Irkutsk Oblast, Olenya Air Base in Murmansk Oblast, Dyagilevo Air Base in Ryazan Oblast, and Ivanovo Air Base in Ivanovo Oblast. This operation against strategic Russian aircraft may temporarily constrain Russia's ability to conduct long-range drone and missile strikes into Ukraine.

Russia has been intensifying its aerial attacks on Ukraine. On the night of May 25 to 26, Russian forces launched one of their largest drone and missile strikes of the war, following three nights of record assaults. This strike is now the second largest combined attack of the conflict, after the largest strike occurred on the night of May 24 to 25. Just a year ago, a Russian attack on Ukraine would typically have included fewer than 30 drones in a single night. Now, however, Russia is overwhelming Ukraine's air defenses with hundreds of drones. The strike on the night of May 25 included a record 355 drones and nine missiles. The Russian air campaign escalated at the start of the year, marked by a significant shift in the types



of hardware being used. Ballistic missiles, many supplied by North Korea, have taken center stage, along with a new, more lethal generation of Shahed attack drones.

Russia has also intensified temp of ground operations in certain areas, Russian forces advanced in several regions, including Velyka Novosilka and Kurakhove, and initiated offensive operations in Sumy Oblast. On 31 May, Ukrainian officials issued evacuation orders on Saturday for 11 more villages in the northern Sumy region after continued Russian gains led to fears that Moscow could be gearing up for a fresh ground offensive. Russian State Duma Defense Committee Chairperson Andrei Kartapolov told Kremlin newswire TASS on May 31 that Ukraine risks losing Zaporizhzhia, Dnipro, Sumy, Kharkiv, Odesa, and Mykolaiv cities if

Ukraine refuses a peace settlement and claimed that every day that Ukraine delays a diplomatic solution to the war worsens the conditions for Ukraine.

Amid escalating hostilities, Ukraine and Russia engaged in peace talks in Istanbul scheduled to be held on June 2, 2025. For the talk, Ukraine has proposed a full and unconditional ceasefire, the return of deported Ukrainian children, a comprehensive prisoner exchange, and the release of civilian hostages. Ukraine also insisted on maintaining its sovereignty, including the right to join the EU and NATO.

Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzya claimed during a UN Security Council meeting on May 30 that Russia is prepared to fight Ukraine for as long as necessary and that Ukraine can either accept peace, presumably on Russia's terms or face inevitable battlefield defeat. Nebenzya stated that the United States recently "opened its eyes" to the "root causes" of the war in Ukraine and reiterated Russian President Vladimir Putin's demands that the West stop arming Ukraine and that Ukraine cease force generation efforts as preconditions to a ceasefire.

As Russian officials continue to signal the Kremlin's firm stance ahead of proposed talks in Istanbul, Ukraine's President Zelensky accused Moscow on May 31, 2025, of actively trying to sabotage the peace negotiations. He stated that "for over a week now, the Russians have been unable to present the so-called memorandum" outlining their peace terms before the scheduled talks with Ukraine on June 2, 2025. Given the escalating tensions and the inflexible positions of both sides, it seems unlikely that the Istanbul meeting will produce substantial results toward achieving a lasting peace in Ukraine.

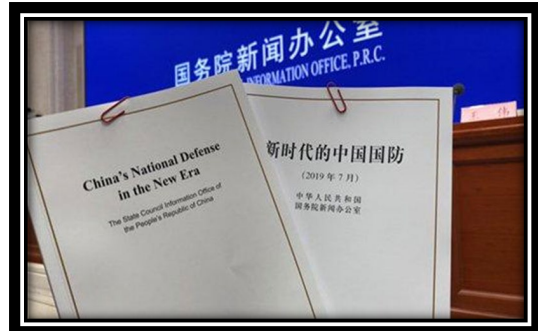
China's New White Paper on National Security in the New Era

China's State Council Information Office on 12 May released a White Paper titled "China's National Security in the New Era". Elaborating on different aspects of China's national security objectives and domestic and international concerns, the document is organised into six sections and has estimated 22,000 Chinese characters. The release of the White Paper is significant largely due to its timing in relations to several key developments. First, the publication of the document closely follows the conclusion of the 'Two Sessions' held in March 2025 where Chinese Premier Li Qiang presented the Government Work Report encompassing a wide array economic, political, social, military and environmental issues. Second, China is also preparing to convene a conclave later this year to discuss the formulation of the 15th Five Year Plan. Finally, further underscoring the strategic context of the document, the White Paper has been released amidst intensifying trade and tech war between China and the US, continuing Russia-Ukraine war, and the crisis in Gaza.

While the original White Paper has been published only in Chinese language, an extended abstract uploaded on the website of the State Council Information Office

provides a sanitized summary of the document. Besides delineating China's pursuit of national rejuvenation in the face of "changes in the external environment and increasing internal risks and challenges", the White Paper notes that China's national security in the New Era intends to make "people's security as its ultimate goal, political security as the fundamental task, economic security as the foundation, military, technological, cultural, and social security as the guarantee, and promoting international security as the support.". Further, China "remains unwavering in advancing high-quality development as its "primary task" while prioritizing the safeguarding of national security as its "paramount mission." Finally, the abstract notes that the Global Security Initiative (GSI) proposed by China will "uphold world peace and prevent conflicts" and that by 2035 China "aims to fully strengthen the system and capacity, creating a robust security shield for the basic realization of socialist modernization".

An unofficial English translation of the White Paper available online offers a detailed account of the document's key themes and policy direction. One of the prominent themes that emerged is that US led West constitutes a significant security threat for China. The White Paper notes that "external security pressure is increasing" and "Western anti-China forces" are trying to "contain", "suppress", "implement westernization", "differentiation strategies" against China and execute "infiltration" and "sabotage activities". Correspondingly, maintaining "political security" (equated with "regime security") appears as another important theme of China's national security in the new era. The White Paper notes that "political security" is the "lifeline of China's national security in the new era" and "regime security" and "system security" (socialist system) is at the core of the "political security". Therefore, China "plans to maintain political security in the first place" and promote "security in other areas from the perspective of maintaining political security".



Another important theme visible was promoting China's GSI. The document argued that the Global Security Initiative is "not only China's answer to global security governance," but also reflects the common international security concerns. Therefore, as part of its endeavours to promote GSI, China would support the United Nations becoming the primary platform to manage international security concerns, promote building of universal security, participate in global security governance and international mediation of international and regional issues and finally promote security cooperation in emerging areas. Here, it is noteworthy, that while advocating universal security, multilateralism and settlement of disputes through dialogue, the White Paper also notes that "China will never promise to give up the use of force" and "reserves the option of taking all necessary measures" vis-à-vis Taiwan.

Besides these elements, the White Paper (according to the unofficial translation) also underscores the importance of maintaining social cohesion, guarding against

“street politics”, carrying out national security education for the public, ensuring high-quality development, achievement of high-quality development, energy and food security and technological self-reliance for ensuring China’s national security.

Therefore, it can be argued that in the foreseeable future, China is likely to adopt a more assertive position vis-à-vis the West, especially on trade and strategic issues, framing its actions as counter to perceived Western pressure. Additionally, China is likely to further strengthen domestic security legislation concerning international interactions and continue crackdown on government officials and citizens considered endangering political stability. Finally, as China is trying to posit itself as a mediator at the international level, Beijing could not only push for creation of alternative institutions for international governance but also shape norms managing inter-state relations.

China-Cambodia 7th “Golden Dragon” Military Exercise

The Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and the Chinese People’s Liberation Army on 14th May launched the “Golden Dragon 2025” joint military. The joint military exercise was conducted from 14-28 May 2025 at two locations in Cambodia. This included the Military Police Training Centre (Phnom Chum Sen Rikreay) in



Kampong Chhnang province and in Preah Sihanouk province. The land and air exercises was conducted at the Royal Cambodian Military Police Training Centre (Phnom Chum Sen Rikreay) in Kampong Chhnang province, while sea and air exercises was held in waters and airspace in Preah Sihanouk province. General Vong Pisen, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed

Forces, and Lyu Guangkun, Deputy Chief of Staff of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Southern Theatre Command and head of the Chinese delegation; during the opening ceremony jointly stated that the “Golden Dragon” joint military exercise has become a symbol of the inseparable military cooperation between both nations.

The seventh edition of the joint exercise on the theme of "peace, friendship and cooperation," focused on joint counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations. The 15-days iteration witnessed the participation of 2,176 troops – 1,331 from Cambodia and 845 from China. This year’s exercise, involved the army, navy, and air force and was aimed at expanding cooperation, exchange experiences, and enhance the practical combat capabilities of both nations’ armed forces. The exercise was conducted in three phases: adaptive training, command drills and live-force exercises, aimed at gradually deepening the joint operational capabilities between the two militaries.

The exercise covered both land-air and sea-air operations, in which counter-terrorism drills were conducted on land and at sea, including humanitarian rescue

exercises. Notably, this joint exercise was the first to rely on the Cambodia-China Joint Support and Training Center at Port Ream, inaugurated on April 5, 2025. This will help improve the operational level of the joint support and training center. The exercise involved a wide range of equipment, including three warships and an amphibious assault craft, two new Chinese C20 helicopters, various artillery systems, a new type of armored vehicle, 20 drones (reconnaissance and combat), unmanned ground vehicles, robotic dogs, combat units, and a C5 command vehicle capable of countering various technologies.

According to General Chhum Suceat, spokesman for the Cambodian Ministry of National Defence, the joint exercise intended to strengthen mutual security, exchange operational experience, and improve practical combat abilities—particularly in counter-terrorism—while reinforcing the comprehensive cooperation and shared destiny agreed upon by both countries in the new era. He added that this year's exercise involved the use of modern weapons, artillery, mortars, armoured and rescue vehicles, warships, helicopters, and other advanced military assets. The latest iteration of the military exercise also witnessed both sides deploying unmanned aerial vehicles, surgical robots, robotic dogs, land-based vessels, reconnaissance and attack drones, light weapons, intelligence equipment, medical tools, explosives, ammunition, and other modern gear. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was also being incorporated to reflect the modernisation efforts of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces in line with current global developments.

The recent edition of the “Golden Dragon” reflects on the broadening of the comprehensive strategic relationship between Cambodia and China.

The annual “Golden Dragon” exercises began in December 2016, shortly after Cambodia canceled similar exercises with the United States called Angkor Sentinel. Cambodia is China's closest partner in Southeast Asia, with Beijing describing its friendship as “ironclad”. Through its close partnership, Cambodia has been a benefactor through numerous Chinese-funded projects particularly in infrastructure development.

The growing bilateral partnership in which China plays a major role is helping to modernize Cambodia's defense capabilities through the upgrade of its naval base and the provision of military equipment, training, and technical support. The expanding scale and scope of their security cooperation, which includes China assisting in the upgrade of military facilities like the Ream Naval Base, has also raised serious concerns. The naval base, located on the coast of southwestern Cambodia, has had two Chinese warships docked since December 7, 2024. This could serve as a strategic outpost for Beijing to exert influence over the waters off Vietnam's southern coast and the Gulf of Thailand. Cambodia has dismissed these concerns, with its defense ministry stating that the five-month presence of the ships does not indicate the permanent deployment of Chinese forces.

Despite the geopolitical shifts and emerging security realignments in the region, the security partnership between Cambodia and China remains robust and is likely to continue growing.