

INTERPRETING CHINA'S NATIONAL DEFENCE POLICY

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The highest form of generalship is to baulk the enemy's plans; the next best is to prevent the junction of the enemy's forces; the next in order is to attack the enemy's army in the field; and, the worst policy of all is to besiege walled cities.

Sun Zi, *The Art of War*¹

Winston Churchill once famously described the Soviet Union as “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” In the last few decades of the 20th century, that phrase could be used to describe China as well. However, since Deng Xiaoping’s four modernisations and market reforms began in 1978, China has been gradually opening itself up to the world – even though the transformation is laborious and tightly controlled. With its near double digit growth rate, China is poised to overtake the United States (US) and assume pole position as the world’s leading economy between 2030 to 2040. Whether this rise will be entirely peaceful, as China professes, or one that may be marked by turbulence and chaos, as some analysts fear, is a vexing issue. History is witness to the fact that major power shifts have never occurred without large scale upheavels. Managing the rise of China successfully is the most important fundamental challenge confronting the international community in the 21st century. Michael D. Swaine and Ashley J. Tellis have written: “This process is significant not only because it promises the internal transformation of one of the

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1. James Clavell, ed., *The Art of War by Sun Tzu* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), Chapter III, “Attack by Stratagem,” p. 23.

world's oldest civilisations, but also because *if concluded successfully* it could result in a dramatic power transition within the international system."²

The aim of this paper is to analyse China's national defence policy with a view to understanding its national security strategy and its impact on stability on the Indian subcontinent.

CHINA'S STRATEGIC CULTURE

The Chinese civilisation has been sustained over three millennia by a rich military tradition and a well-established strategic culture, which has been documented with the disciplined elegance of meticulous Chinese calligraphy by several ancient thinkers. Sun Zi's *The Art of War* is an unsurpassed classic in its genre. It "stresses the relationship between war and factors of politics, economics, diplomacy, astronomy and geography... (and) defeating one's enemy by strategic considerations, not by force."³ Liddell-Hart described it as the "concentrated essence of wisdom on the conduct of war."⁴ That war always has a political purpose has been long recognised by ancient Chinese strategists. In Sun Zi's approach to statecraft,⁵ the armed forces enjoyed a central place in civil society. He advocated the principle of "limitation in warfare" as against protracted or "total" war,⁶ attacking the enemy's weakness and bypassing his strength, striking him in a place where surprise would be achieved, practising deception (ambiguity, *guidao*) and using spies to gain strategic advantage in a campaign. He wrote: "... for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army avoids strengths and strikes weakness."

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2. Michael D. Swaine and Ashley J. Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy: Past, Present and Future* (RAND: Santa Monica, CA, 2000), p. 1. (Emphasis in the original.)
 3. General Tao Hanzhang quoting Marshal Liu Bocheng in his commentary on *The Art of War*, cited by M. V. Rappai, "Sun Zi and the Chinese Revolution," in K. N. Ramachandran, M. V. Rappai, Swaran Singh and Srikanth Kondapalli, eds., *Sun Zi and China's Strategic Culture* (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 1999), p. 41.
 4. Sir Basil Liddell-Hart's foreword in Samuel B. Griffith, *Sun Zi: The Art of War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. v.
 5. Summarised from Swaran Singh, "Sun Zi's Eternal Relevance: Exploring *The Art of War* as a Tool for Understanding China's Contemporary National Security Doctrine," n. 3, pp. 1-14.
 6. Sun Zi emphasised quick victories, not prolonged operations. "Thus, if a campaign is protracted, the resources of the state will not be equal to the strain... There is no instance of a country having benefited from prolonged warfare." Sun Zi, n. 1, Chapter II, "Waging War," pp. 19-20.

It has always been a tradition in Chinese statecraft to countervail major adversaries through alliances so as to avoid direct confrontation. Among other ancient Chinese scholars, Sun Zi's writings influenced Mao Zedong to devise modern guerrilla tactics based on China's ancient strategic culture. Fighting pitched battles over long durations was never a Chinese tradition. Chinese

generals employed hit-and-run tactics to catch their opponent unprepared and relied on accurate intelligence to plan their strikes. They preferred to follow an indirect approach. For logistics sustenance during a campaign, the Chinese planned to take the enemy's territories intact and depend on them for provisions.

China's historical approach to security, driven by its ruling elite's perception of cultural superiority, has been to attach equal importance to diplomacy and the use of force as instruments to further the interests of the state. However, no Chinese ruler ever hesitated to use force when it was considered necessary. In the modern era, the Chinese government has preferred the use of force to the soft power of diplomacy whenever it thought it could get away with using force. This is reflected in its proclivity to teach lessons to states that refuse to do its bidding. This approach is at variance with the Confucian ideology and is driven by China's subsequent exposure to the totalitarian and coercive facets of the practices followed by nomadic invaders. In the modern era, post-1911, China's political leadership has followed a personalised style of governance. As a result of this, internal jockeying for political power often influences the formulation of major national policies.

Chinese scholars take pains to emphasise that China has always been cautious in war and in its choice of strategic means. They quote Sun Zi, Wu Zi and Lao Zi, among others, to point out that China believed not in winning "one hundred victories in one hundred battles" but in subduing the enemy without fighting. They insist that in modern history, China was by and large compelled to take part in war and even then sought to restrict it to within certain limits. They term

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border wars fought by China against several land neighbours as "self-defence counter-attacks" and maintain that the guiding principle was always of being on "just ground, to our advantage and with restraint... In terms of employment of fighting means China showed great sobriety, caution and restraint. This is a fundamental character of China's tradition of strategic culture."⁷ This appears to be the party line that is taught in China's military academies and, quite obviously, it is far from the truth. The border war with India in 1962 and that with Vietnam in 1979 were far from "counter-attacks in self-defence."

Almost throughout its long history, China was the preeminent political and military power in the East Asian region. Though some regimes were overthrown by invading hordes, the new rulers failed to govern China effectively and faded into history. This led to the emergence of a Sino-centric worldview. According to

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Swaine and Tellis, "Such predominance created a belief in the geo-political centrality of China to the region."⁸ Apparently, China's self-image is still that of seeing itself as the "Middle Kingdom" and Chinese elites as well as ordinary citizens still have a very strong sense of China's preeminence

among its neighbours. However, China's experience of contact with the West has not been a happy one.⁹ China is still smarting from "defeat, subjugation and humiliation at the hands of the West and Japan"¹⁰ in its modern history. This has led to a "deep-seated 'victim mentality' among both the elite and the populace..."¹¹ Quite naturally, this has created a certain degree of paranoia about the intentions of the West, particularly the US and its East Asian allies, and intensified Chinese sensitivities to foreign threats.

7. Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, eds., *The Science of Military Strategy* (Beijing: Military Science Publishing House, 2005), p. 77.

8. Swaine and Tellis, n.2, p. 3.

9. "From the Opium War in 1840 to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China had been bullied and humiliated by Western powers for more than a century. Historical facts have taught the Chinese people that only an adequate national defence can guarantee the country's sovereignty, security, unification and territorial integrity." Gen. Xiong Guangkai, "China's Defense Policy Equals Peace," *People's Daily*, March 10, 2003.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

11. Swaine and Tellis, n. 2, p. 73.

Alastair Iain Johnston has written that China follows a *realpolitik*-based strategic culture that “in essence argues that the best way to deal with security threats is to eliminate them through the use of force. This preference is tempered by the explicit sensitivity to one’s relative capacity to do this. At the simplest, the operational strategic culture predisposes those socialised in it to act more creatively against the enemy as relative capabilities become more favourable.” The carefully constructed government policy is clearly to state that lofty principles (*Panchsheel* or non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries, war only in self-defence and “no first use” nuclear doctrine) guide China’s international interactions, but to follow pragmatic hard-nosed security policies. It would be fair to conclude that in recent times, certainly since it has been ruled by a Communist oligarchy in the second half of the 20th century, China’s strategic culture has become more robust and less tolerant of perceptions that are different from its own.

VARYING INTERPRETATIONS OF GRAND STRATEGY

The term “grand strategy” is understood differently in different parts of the world. The Indian armed forces and most Indian analysts tend to go by the Western interpretation of what constitutes grand strategy.¹² Liddell-Hart wrote that the role of grand strategy or “higher strategy” is to “coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or a band of nations, towards the attainment of the political objective of the war.”¹³ The Indian Army Doctrine describes strategy as the “art and science of developing and using elements of national power, including political, economic, psychological, technological capabilities and military forces, as necessary, during peace and war to achieve national objectives. Military strategy is derived from the overall national or ‘grand strategy’.”¹⁴

12. In warfare, coordinated application of all the forces of a nation to achieve a goal. In contrast to tactics, strategy’s components include a long-range view, the preparation of resources, and planning for the use of those resources before, during, and after an action. The term has expanded far beyond its original military meaning. As society and warfare have steadily grown more complex, military and non-military factors have become more and more inseparable in the conduct of war and in programmes designed to secure peace. In the 20th century, the term grand strategy, meaning the art of employing all the resources of a nation or coalition of nations to achieve the objects of war (and peace), steadily became more popular in the literature of warfare and statecraft. (<http://www.answers.com/topic/strategy>)

13. Sir Basil Liddell-Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Inc., 1962), pp. 335-336.

14. *Indian Army Doctrine* (Shimla: HQ Army Training Command, 2004), Chapter 1, Section 1, Para 1.4.

According to the British Defence Doctrine:¹⁵ "Grand strategy is the application of national resources to achieve policy objectives (including alliance or coalition objectives). Its purpose is to direct and provide coherence to all aspects of national policy... Grand strategy defines policy objectives, forges alliances and stipulates limits on enabling activities. It also makes available the appropriate resources and, where necessary, gives direction to the national effort." Winston Churchill had described the art of grand strategy as the ability to see the outlines of the future and to be prepared to deal with it. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) sees grand strategy as the politico-strategic level of war.

In the US, the terms used are national strategy and military strategy. Military strategy is defined as "the art and science of employing the armed forces of a nation to secure the objectives of national policy by application of force, or threat of force."¹⁶ Gen. Maxwell Taylor, former chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff held that strategy embraces three elements: aim, ways and means. He gave this formula for strategy: Strategy = Aim (goal pursued) + Ways (operational options) + Means (tools to achieve the goal).¹⁷ Marshal V. D. Sokolovski, former first deputy defence minister and concurrently chief of the Soviet General Staff, wrote that strategy "is a system of scientific knowledge dealing with the laws of war as an armed conflict in the name of definite class interests. Strategy – on the basis of military experience, military and political conditions, economic and moral potential of the country, new means of combat and the views and potential of the probable enemy – studies the conditions and the nature of future war, the methods for its preparation and conduct, the services of the armed forces and the foundations for their strategic utilisation, as well as the foundations for the material and technical support and leadership of the war and the armed forces."¹⁸

Mao Zedong called strategy "the study of the laws of a war situation as a whole." In *Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War* (1936), Mao wrote:

15. *British Defence Doctrine* (London: Ministry of Defence, 1996), Joint Warfare Publication 0-01, p.1.8

16. *A Dictionary of United States Military Terms Prepared for Joint Usage of the Armed Services by the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (Washington D.C.: Department of Defence, 1963), p. 205.

17. Guangqian and Youzhi, eds., n.7, p. 11.

18. Marshal V. D. Sokolovski, *Soviet Military Thinking* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1975), p. 11.

Whenever there is a war, there is a war situation as a whole. The war situation as a whole may cover the entire world, may cover an entire country, or may cover an independent guerrilla war zone or an independent major operational front. Any war situation which requires comprehensive consideration of its various aspects and stages forms a war situation as a whole... The task of the science of strategy is to study those laws for directing a war that govern a war situation as a whole. The task of the science of campaigns and the science of tactics is to study those laws for directing a war that govern a partial situation.¹⁹

Explaining the implications of Mao Zedong's explanation of strategy, Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi have written:²⁰

Mao Zedong not only inserted a concept of 'campaign' layer (operational level) in between strategy and tactics, but also in a clear cut manner, stressed strategy as a whole and its regularity. He first underscored that there were intrinsically objective laws of strategy itself instead of the outcome of subjective will. Strategy took a 'situation as a whole' to make an overall planning instead of making a particular response to some local question (*sic*). Thereby he scientifically defined 'strategy' at a philosophical level; peeled all the outside additive elements from 'strategy'; and cracked open the nucleus of the most essential quality of 'strategy'. As a result, his definition was an embodiment of dialectic thinking of the tradition of strategic culture in the East. The *Military Terms of Chinese People's Liberation Army* issued in September 1997, insisted on Mao's scientific definition of strategy.

Based on Mao Zedong's definition, Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi summarised China's military strategy:²¹

Strategy (or military strategy) in China's new periods is taking the national comprehensive power as its foundation, the thought of active defence as its guidance, and winning local war under hi-tech conditions as its basic point to construct and exercise military strength and carrying out the overall and whole-course operation and guidance of war preparations and war for the purpose of protecting national sovereignty and security.

19. Cited by Guangqian and Youzhi, n.7, p. 9.

20. Guangqian and Youzhi, *Ibid.*, p. 10.

21. Guangqian and Youzhi, *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

This strategy is derived from China's military doctrine that emphasises coercive strategies during peace and surprise, deception, and shock effect in the opening phase of a campaign.

CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY

Chinese military analysts define grand strategy as the "overall strategy of a nation or an alliance of nations in which they use overall national strength" to achieve national political goals, especially those related to national security and development.²² China's ruling elite believes that sovereignty, national unity and stability must be ensured for China's survival as a nation-state and future well-being. While the foremost strategic objective is overall national development, China lays emphasis on maintaining a favourable domestic and international "strategic configuration of power." Among its national interests, China counts "a stable international order, an equal footing in foreign affairs, expansion of export markets and (access to) overseas resources."²³ Quite naturally, Marxist ideology and Mao's thoughts and teachings, as well as the lessons of the Sino-Japanese War and China's civil war, influence the scope and reach of China's grand strategy.

Great Power Ambitions

China, without doubt a revisionist power, is moving steadily forward on its long march to acquire world power status and has formulated a meticulously

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crafted, though not formally stated, grand strategy to chart its course towards that goal. China's aim is clearly to become the dominant economic and military power in the Asia-Pacific region by 2010-15 and a major power internationally by about 2030-40. Its strategy of "four modernisations", formally adopted in 1978, is bearing fruit and is leading to fairly rapid, though

22. "Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China" (United States Secretary of Defence: Report to Congress, 2002), July 28, 2003.

23. Ka Po Ng, *Interpreting China's Military Power: Doctrine Makes Readiness* (New York: Frank Cass, 2005), p. 26.

regionally skewed, development and modernisation, including modernisation of the armed forces. China's grand strategy is aimed at "firmly preserving China's core interests, strengthening its relations with neighbouring countries, consolidating friendships with the broad majority of developing countries and improving relations with developed countries."²⁴ In order to emphasise the benign nature of its grand strategy, China points out that its major themes are "peace and development," the non-use of force in settling international disputes, non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries, the defensive nature of China's military strategy, its "no-first-use of nuclear weapons" declaration, its support for nuclear weapons-free zones, and claims that China would never deploy its military forces on foreign soil. However, Deng Xiaoping's 24-character strategy "keep cool-headed to observe, be composed to make reactions, stand firmly, hide our capabilities and bide our time, never try to take the lead, and be able to accomplish something" suggests a desire to downplay China's ambitions.

Development of Comprehensive National Power

China's grand strategy seeks to preserve national independence and increase national power through the balancing of two competing objectives: the development of comprehensive national power (CNP) and the exploitation of existing "strategic configuration of power" or "*shi*".²⁵ China's grand strategy affirms that national unity, sovereignty and stability guarantee, first, the survival of the state, and, second, the development of a national strategy with China at the centre of Asia. Incorporated in this strategy is Chinese patience or willingness to live with ambiguity before considering the employment of force such that advantage is obtained, moral high ground is occupied and supporters or non-supporters are identified. China's national security policy objectives, "dynamic stability" and economic growth, are directly linked to the

24. Yang Jiemian, "International Environment and Sino-US Interaction: Strategic Thinking and Policy Planning," *China International Studies*, Winter 2005, p. 61.

25. "Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China" (United States Secretary of Defence: Report to Congress, 2002). The report explains "*shi*" as the "alignment of forces," the "propensity of things," or the "potential born of disposition," that only a skilled strategist can exploit to ensure victory over a superior force. Similarly, only a sophisticated assessment by an adversary can recognise the potential exploitation of "*shi*."

maintenance of unity through preservation of the regime, domestic order and territorial integrity. In a RAND study, Swaine and Tellis have written that China's grand strategy seeks to achieve the following three interrelated objectives:²⁶

- The preservation of domestic order and well-being in the face of different forms of social strife.
- Defence against persistent external threats to national sovereignty and territory.
- The attainment and maintenance of geo-political influence as a major and, perhaps, primary state.

Calming, Enriching and Befriending Neighbours

In order to balance its rise and the increase in its influence, China claims to follow the policy of "calming, enriching and befriending" (*anlin, fulin, mulin*) its neighbours. Its attempts at reassurance have so far been only partially successful as most of its neighbours in Asia are uncomfortable with its growing power and influence. While continuing to engage China and enhance their trade relationship with it, China's neighbours are simultaneously seeking to enter into strategic partnerships to hedge against China's perceived hegemony. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was originally formed as a display of solidarity against creeping Communist expansionism. This dual

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policy of accommodation plus insurance has so far paid good dividends.

Aspirations in Asia

A key element of China's grand strategy is to oppose and, if possible, prevent, the rise of other Asian powers so as to maintain its

hegemony. China does this through a complex web of economic and military inducements as well as by holding out subtle diplomatic and even military threats. Brahma Chellaney is of the view, "A major cause of strategic friction in Asia is that China brooks no peer competition from any other Asian power..."

26. Swaine and Tellis, n. 2, p. x.

China's long-standing strategy has been to neutralise or deter the rise of peer competition, including from Japan (which it sees as having the advantage of enjoying US military support) and India (whose 1998 nuclear weapons tests jolted Beijing out of its smug complacency and belief that it could keep India confined south of the Himalayas through Pakistan-aided, low-level deterrence).²⁷ The reorientation of China's land-based defence strategy to "one which holds maritime security as its key priority"²⁸ is a new concern in Asia as China has already begun to acquire capabilities that will allow it to dominate the sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.

Strategic Encirclement of India

Another principle component of China's grand strategy is to preserve and enhance its political supremacy and influence in Asia "without provoking the emergence of a countervailing coalition of states."²⁹ India's objective is to build a strong economic base that will be capable of supporting its aspirations as a regional power with the same primacy as China in Asia. Burdened by the baggage of history and plagued as it still is by the "Middle Kingdom" syndrome, China has always had immense difficulty in accommodating India's aspirations as the second Asian power. Despite improving trade relations with India, with the balance of trade now in China's favour, and relative tranquillity on the border, even though the territorial dispute is still far from being resolved, China is engaged in implementing a diabolical policy aimed at the strategic encirclement of India with a view to confining India to the backwaters of the Indian Ocean and stunting India's overall growth so that it is prevented from acquiring sufficient comprehensive national power to challenge China's hegemony in Asia.

- China seeks to contain India through a nuclear weapons and missiles nexus and an extremely strong strategic partnership based on extensive military

27. Brahma Chellaney, *Asian Juggernaut: The Rise of China, India and Japan* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2006), p. 255.

28. Nimmi Kurian, *Emerging China and India's Policy Options* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 2001), p. 191.

29. Alex Liebman, "China's Asia Policy: Strategy and Tactics," cited with the author's permission from a paper presented at the RAND-CEIP-CAPS (Taipei) conference "The PLA in the Asia-Pacific Region: Implications for the Evolving Regional Security Order," December 8-10, 2006, Taipei, Taiwan.

cooperation with its "all-weather" ally and friend, Pakistan, whose territorial integrity it has guaranteed. It has built the strategic Karakoram Highway linking Xingjian with Pakistan through the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir in the north. It has built a major sea port with the potential for establishing a naval base at Gwadar on the Makran coast.

- China is also engaged in serious attempts to make inroads into India's neighbourhood through Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. China offers military aid, military training and subsidised arms to these countries, makes strategic infrastructure investments in them, such as the development of ports, and absorbs limited quantities of uneconomical imports from them.
- This is unlikely to change in the near future. In Dr. Varun Sahni's view, China's strategy in Southern Asia is "to create alternate incentive structures in India's neighbourhood to prevent the pacification and consolidation of the region."³⁰
- While this view is widely held by members of the Indian strategic community, many perceptive analysts in the West also share it. Quoting a variety of sources, Edward Timperlake and William C. Triplett II have carefully documented how China is engaged in surrounding India and "arming India's enemy."³¹

Internal Security Concerns

In terms of internal security, China has three separatist issues to contend with: Taiwan, Tibet and the Uighur Autonomous Region (Xingjian province). The three are distinctly different in terms of the threat they pose to national unity and the manner in which they have been dealt with by the Chinese authorities. The leadership has consistently been uncompromising on the matter of independence of Taiwan and views it as the most serious threat to China's territorial integrity. Diplomatically, the United States, perhaps grudgingly, supports the principle of "One China." However, the US connotation of "One

30. Personal interview on February 3, 2007.

31. Edward Timperlake and William C. Triplett II, *Red Dragon Rising: Communist China's Military Threat to America* (Washington D.C.: Regency Publishing, Inc., 1999), pp. 185-196.

China" leans towards the day-to-day reality of a Taiwan that functions as an independent nation despite its non-recognition by the UN and China's ongoing efforts for peaceful reunification. Taiwan's strategic importance to the US in Asia is no secret to the Chinese.

Strategy Towards Tibet and Xingjian

Unlike the dangerous brinkmanship between Beijing and Taipei, the separatist and terrorist issues in Tibet and Xingjian province have been suppressed by a combination of heavy-handed oppression, economic aid and development and gradual ethnic displacement of indigenous residents by migrant Han Chinese. Systematic assimilation policies that had been introduced earlier were terminated as a result of resentment and conflict between the Han and affected minority groups. A softer approach intended to win the hearts and minds of Tibetans and other minorities was crafted in the 1980s, but was never really pursued with conviction by the Han administrators in Tibet. China's "affirmative policy" is designed to give the minority nationalities enough power, education, or economic success to keep them from making independent demands and is not based on any philosophy of equality or any desire to celebrate differences.

Energy Security Strategy

The Chinese leadership is acutely conscious of the fact that further growth in China's comprehensive national power will depend on continued and robust economic growth and a stable security environment. China can continue to grow at about seven to eight per cent or better only on the back of massive increases in energy supplies. Securing adequate supplies of oil and gas is now a key concern for China and it will continue to seek energy security by diversifying its sources for oil imports, by acquiring equity stakes in new oil and gas fields and by enhancing the capacity of its oil reserves. China is also concerned about the security of the sea lanes through which its oil and gas supplies pass and is building up the PLA Navy for a proactive approach to safeguarding its oil trade. Simultaneously, China is pursuing a vigorous oil exploration strategy and is prepared to act aggressively to

stake its claim to disputed island territories, like the Spratlys and the Paracels, around which there are prospects of oil discoveries.

NATIONAL DEFENCE POLICY

Comprehensive National Power

In recent years, the Chinese have stressed the importance of "comprehensive national power" in determining the country's role in international affairs. Comprehensive national power is a comparative yardstick "by which China's

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strategic planners evaluate and measure national standing in relation to other nations."³² Though this is a good tool, it is not clear whether and how the Chinese allocate weightages to the various elements of national strength, viz. economic strength, military power, soft power, physical size, natural resources, demographics, state of

internal security, socio-political cohesion, et al. Above all else, a strong political will to take hard decisions in the national interest and then to resolutely implement those decisions, should necessarily be an important ingredient of comprehensive national power.

Strategic Outreach

China's concept of national defence is no longer limited merely to the defence of territory but has been expanded to include the seaboard and outer space. In maritime security, the erstwhile strategy of "Coastal Defence" has been converted to a strategy of "Oceanic Offensive". The recent emphasis on bolstering naval and air forces stems from a desire to project power well away from China's shores. Consequently, China has redefined its "strategic frontiers."³³ The Chinese now think in terms of their strategic frontiers

32. *Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China* (Washington D.C.: Department of Defence, 2002), p. 6.

33. "Strategic frontiers" is a fairly common term in the West, but one that has been adopted in China only over the last decade or so.

encompassing "defence of air, space and sea frontiers." China defines strategic frontier as the living space of a state and a nation that contracts with the ebb and flow of comprehensive national strength.³⁴

National Interests

China defines its national interests as:³⁵ "Safeguarding state sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security; upholding economic development as the central task and unremittingly enhancing the overall national strength; adhering to and improving the socialist system; maintaining and promoting social stability and harmony; and striving for an international environment of lasting peace and a favourable climate in China's periphery." The salient aspects of China's proclaimed national security strategy in the mid-1990s were as under:³⁶

- The primary objective of China's security strategy (for the future) will be to safeguard a security environment favourable to the country's economic construction.
- Peaceful reunification of the Motherland is one of the strategic objectives set by the Chinese government. (*Note: The merger of Taiwan with China is implicit in this*).
- To safeguard the country's territorial integrity has always been one of China's objectives for national security.
- China will continue to persist in the principle of no-first-use of force in settling boundary differences.
- China's modern security strategy pays great attention to establishing friendly and good-neighbourly relations with surrounding countries.
- China's geographical location dictates that the priority of its security strategy should be based on developing bilateral security cooperation with its neighbouring countries.
- While paying much attention to bilateral security cooperation, China will also be more and more active and energetic in its attitude toward multilateral cooperative security mechanisms.

34. Colonel Narendra Singh, "Chinese Armed Forces," *USI Journal* (New Delhi), October-December 1998, pp. 587-608.

35. *China's National Defence in 2002*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China.

36. Yan Xuetong, "Orientation of China's Security Strategy," *Contemporary International Relations* (Beijing: China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, vol. 6, no. 2, 1996), pp. 2-5.

- As the post-Cold War weapons proliferation is evidently harmful to China's security, China claims to have been actively aiding international efforts to prevent arms proliferation.
- The guideline for China's defence construction in the next 15 years is to build a smaller but better army to reinforce the country's defence strength.
- China's earlier military strategy of "luring the enemy in deep" and the present strategy of "positive defence" adhere to the principle of self-defence.

National Defence Goals and Tasks

Over the last decade since China began to publish White Papers on national defence, the perceptions of its leadership have been evolving with the changing times and with changes in China's circumstances. The 1998 White Paper, the first in the series, described China's defence policy in these words:³⁷ "Guided by its aspiration for peace and development, China unwaveringly pursues a national defence policy that is defensive in nature, keeps national defence construction in a position subordinate to, and in the service of, the nation's economic construction, strengthens international and regional security cooperation and actively participates in the international arms control and disarmament process." The 2000 White Paper mentions the following "main aspects" of China's defence policy:³⁸

- Consolidating national defense, resisting aggression, curbing armed subversion, and defending state sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security...
- Building and consolidating national defense independently and through self-reliance... China does not seek alliance with any country or bloc of countries, nor does it participate in any military bloc.
- Implementing the military strategy of active defense. Strategically, China pursues a principle featuring defensive operations, self-defence and gaining mastery by striking only after the enemy has struck. Such defense combines efforts to deter war with preparations to win self-defence wars in time of peace, and strategic defense with operational and tactical offensive operations in time of war.

37. *China's National Defence in 1998*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China.

38. *China's National Defence in 2000*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China.

Similarly, the 2002 White Paper spelt out the following main “goals and tasks” for China’s armed forces:³⁹

- To consolidate national defense, prevent and resist aggression.
- To stop separation and realize complete unification of the Motherland.
- To stop armed subversion and safeguard social stability.
- To accelerate national defense development and achieve national defense and military modernization.
- To safeguard world peace and oppose aggression and expansion.

China’s National Defence in 2004, the 2004 White Paper issued by the Government of the People’s Republic of China, lists six “troubling” security trends: the failure to establish a fair and equitable world order; continuing competition for resources and geo-strategic position; increasing global economic disparities; the increasing importance of the military element of national power; new threats posed by traditional and non-traditional (transnational) security issues; and, that hegemonism and unilateralism have gained new ground. Flowing from these national security concerns, the 2004 Defence White Paper, explains China’s basic national security goals and tasks for the PLA as under:⁴⁰

- To stop separation and promote reunification, guard against and resist aggression and defend national sovereignty, territorial integrity and maritime rights and interests.
- To safeguard the interests of national development, promote economic and social development in an all-round, coordinated and sustainable way and steadily increase the overall national strength.
- To modernize China’s national defense in line with both the national conditions of China and the trend of military development in the world by adhering to the policy of coordinating military and economic development, and improve the operational capabilities of self-defense under the conditions of informationalization.
- To safeguard the political, economic and cultural rights and interests of the Chinese people,

39. *China’s National Defence in 2002*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People’s Republic of China.

40. *China’s National Defence in 2004*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People’s Republic of China.

crack down on criminal activities of all sorts and maintain public order and social stability.

- To pursue an independent foreign policy of peace and adhere to the new security concept featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination with a view to securing a long-term and favorable international and surrounding environment.

China's National Defence in 2006, the 2006 White Paper issued by the Government of China, expresses satisfaction with the overall security environment and lists it as "sound". It describes China's defence policy in these words:⁴¹ "China will not

China will not engage in any arms race or pose a military threat to any other country.

engage in any arms race or pose a military threat to any other country. At the new stage in the new century, we will take the scientific development outlook as an important guiding principle for the building of national

defense and military affairs, vigorously advance the revolution in military affairs with Chinese features, and strive to realize an all-round, coordinated and sustainable development in our country's national defense and military capabilities." According to the 2006 Defence White Paper, "China's national defense policy for the new stage in the new century is defined as follows":⁴²

- *Upholding national security and unity and ensuring the interests of national development:* This includes guarding against and resisting aggression, defending against violation of China's territorial sea and air space, and borders; opposing and containing the separatist forces for "Taiwan independence" and their activities, taking precautions against and cracking down on terrorism, separatism and extremism in all forms...
- *Achieving the all-round, coordinated and sustainable development of China's national defense and armed forces:* China pursues a policy of coordinated development of national defense and economy... so as to ensure that the modernization of its national defense and armed forces advances in step with the national modernization drive. China works in a comprehensive way to ensure that its armed forces are revolutionary in nature, modernized and regularised. It strives to ensure coordination between the revolution in military affairs with Chinese features and preparations for military struggle, mechanization and informationization...

41. *China's National Defence in 2006*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China on December 30, 2006.

42. *Ibid.*

- *Enhancing the performance of the armed forces with informationization as the major measuring criterion:* The PLA, taking mechanization as the foundation and informationization as the driving force, promotes the composite development of informationization and mechanization to achieve overall capability improvement in the fields of firepower, assault, mobility, protection and information... It is stepping up its efforts to build a joint operational command system, training system and support system for fighting informationized wars and enhance the building of systems integration of services and arms...
- *Implementing the military strategy of active defense:* The PLA will upgrade and develop the strategic concept of people's war, and work for close coordination between military struggle and political, economic, diplomatic, cultural and legal endeavors, uses strategies and tactics in a comprehensive way, and takes the initiative to prevent and defuse crises and deter conflicts and wars. The PLA will establish step by step a modern national defense mobilization system that is centralized and unified, well structured, rapid in reaction, and authoritative and efficient. Taking joint operations as the basic form, the PLA aims to bring the operational strengths of different services and arms into full play...
- *Pursuing a self-defensive nuclear strategy:* (China's) fundamental goal is to deter other countries from using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against China. China remains firmly committed to the policy of no first use of nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances... China upholds the principles of counterattack in self-defense and limited development of nuclear weapons, and aims at building a lean and effective nuclear force capable of meeting national security needs...
- *Fostering a security environment conducive to China's peaceful development:* China maintains military contacts with other countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and develops cooperative military relations that are non-aligned, non-confrontational and not directed against any third party. China takes part in international security cooperation... It plays an active part in maintaining global and regional peace and stability...

ANALYSIS OF CHINA'S DEFENCE POLICY

China's White Papers on Defence

As part of its efforts to appear transparent about its intentions and to dispel its image of a reclusive regime shrouded in secrecy, the Chinese government has been issuing White Papers on national defence every two years since 1998.

While the initial efforts were rather tentative and mainly rhetorical, the 2004 and 2006 White Papers are more sophisticated and succeed in conveying a clear sense of direction. The 2002 White Paper was significantly more moderate in tone than the 2000 White Paper and this trend has been continued. China appears to have decided that its interests lie in projecting a positive, **(China's) fundamental goal is to deter other countries from using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against China.** cooperative image to the international community. Though the White Papers do not follow a rigid format, the issues covered are by and large the same. These include the security environment, the national defence policy, defence expenditure, leadership and the military service system, details of the structure of the PLA and the process of its modernisation through a "revolution in military affairs with Chinese characteristics," details of China's armed police forces, border and coastal defence, science, technology and industry for national defence, international security cooperation, and arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation.

"Defensive" National Defence Policy

In all its White Papers, China has continued to stress that its national defence policy is essentially defensive in nature and that it is subordinate to the higher goal of building a prosperous China. The language used to describe the formally-stated defence policy has been invariably carefully chosen so as not to alarm the international community and, in fact, to convince it of China's efforts to integrate peacefully with the rest of the world:⁴³

China pursues a national defense policy which is purely defensive in nature. China's national defense provides the guarantee for maintaining China's security and unity, and realizing the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way. To build a powerful and fortified national defense is a strategic task of China's modernization drive.

China pursues a three-step development strategy in modernizing its national

43. Ibid.

defense and armed forces, in accordance with the state's overall plan to realise modernization. The first step is to lay a solid foundation by 2010, the second is to make major progress around 2020, and the third is to basically reach the strategic goal of building informationized armed forces and being capable of winning informationized wars by the mid-21st century.

Security Environment

The Chinese leadership is of the view that China enjoys basic stability in its security situation. China's White Papers on national defence have generally been relying on four salient factors to assess China's security environment: the primary military threat that China faces, the impact of emerging changes in the nature of warfare, the major challenges and opportunities emanating from the regional security situation and the global power balance. According to the 2004 White Paper:⁴⁴ "China's national security environment in this pluralistic, diversified and interdependent world has on the whole improved, but new challenges keep cropping up. The vicious rise of the 'Taiwan independence' forces, the technological gap resulting from the revolution in military affairs (RMA), the risks and challenges caused by the development of the trends toward economic globalization, and the prolonged existence of unipolarity vis-à-vis multipolarity – all these will have a major impact on China's security." This could be termed as an explicit statement of China's security concerns. The 2006 White Paper takes a less shrill approach, with the exception of misgivings about Taiwan's quest for independence:⁴⁵ "China's security still faces challenges that must not be neglected. The growing interconnections between domestic and international factors and interconnected traditional and non-traditional factors have made maintaining national security a more challenging task. The struggle to oppose and contain the separatist forces for 'Taiwan independence' and their activities remains a hard one... thus, still posing a grave threat to China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as to peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits and in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole... A small number of

44. China's National Defence in 2004, n.40.

45. China's National Defence in 2006, n.41.

countries have stirred up a racket about a 'China threat,' and intensified their preventive strategy against China and strove to hold its progress in check. Complex and sensitive historical and current issues in China's surrounding areas still affect its security environment." China is apparently learning to come to terms with the prevailing security environment without getting too startled.

PLA's "Generation-Leap" Strategy

A common thread that can be clearly discerned to be running through all the White Papers is that the PLA is increasingly focussed on what Yu Ji, a Chinese scholar teaching at the University of New South Wales, calls a "generation-leap" strategy: mechanisation simultaneously with informationisation by plugging information technology (IT) assets into legacy weapons systems, followed by platform integration through networks and, finally, transformation into truly informationised armed forces through the introduction of specially designed weapons systems, platforms and information warfare units that are completely integrated into seamless networks.⁴⁶ This simultaneous effort, which the PLA calls "double construction", runs the risk of falling between two stools as China's information technology is still rudimentary and the PLA may be unable to find sufficient funds for hardware modernisation, especially for the mechanisation of the over two million-strong land forces.

Military Diplomacy

China has a well-structured military diplomacy programme. Though the stated goals of this programme vary somewhat from one White Paper to another, there is a fair amount of consistency. Kenneth Allen has identified the following general goals of China's military diplomacy programme:⁴⁷

- Shape the international security environment to support key national security objectives.
- Improve political and military relations with foreign countries.

46. You Ji, "Learning and Catching Up: China's Revolution in Military Affairs Initiative," in Emily O. Goldman and Thomas G. Mahnken, eds., *The Information Revolution in Military Affairs in Asia* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), pp. 97-123.

47. Kenneth Allen, "PLA Diplomacy in Asia: Content and Consequences," cited with the author's permission from a paper presented at the RAND-CEIP-CAPS (Taipei) conference "The PLA in the Asia-Pacific Region: Implications for the Evolving Regional Security Order," December 8-10, 2006, Taipei, Taiwan.

- Provide military assistance to developing countries.
- Enhance China's military and defence industry modernization by acquiring technology and advancing key research and development programmes through foreign assistance.
- Help China's military leaders, younger officers and civilian cadre acquire modern military knowledge, especially from the developed world, in doctrine, operations, training, military medicine, administration and a host of non-combat related areas.

A significant recent development is China's proactive regional posture in the diplomatic, strategic, economic and cultural spheres in parallel with China's increasingly global posture. This is contrary to China's claim that it "plays an active part in maintaining global and regional peace and stability." While some of the countries on China's periphery have reciprocated with a desire for Beijing to assume regional leadership, others are still suspicious of its motives and have adopted a wait-and-watch attitude.

Military Modernisation

The PLA is still largely rooted in the People's War mindset and is at least 10 to 15 years away from achieving what may be termed RMA-ready capabilities at par with the Western armed forces of today. Its military modernisation drive gives greater priority to the PLA Navy, the PLA Air Force and the Second Artillery. It is aimed at acquiring a blue water capability for the PLA Navy (advanced surface warships and non-nuclear attack submarines) to enable it to operate away from its bases for long durations. It is aimed at achieving greater strategic reach for the PLA Air Force by way of modern fighter aircraft (SU-27s, SU-30s) and precision guided munitions (PGMs), airborne warning and control system (AWACS) for command and control and air-to-air refuellers. The PLA Army, that is being given the lowest share of the defence budget earmarked for modernisation, is working towards upgrading at least one infantry division in each Military Region to a rapid reaction division. It is also engaged in improving early warning capability through better reconnaissance, surveillance and target acquisition assets and better air defence, mobility and logistics support capabilities. The paramilitary forces are being increasingly downsized, though personnel are being laterally transferred to the

Immense effort is being put in to acquire information warfare capabilities. The PLA believes that "informationization" will enable the PLA to wage asymmetric warfare and that this is one field in which it can hope to play catch up.

People's Armed Police. Immense effort is being put in to acquire information warfare capabilities. The PLA believes that "informationization" will enable the PLA to wage asymmetric warfare and that this is one field in which it can hope to play catch up. A modern command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (C4ISR) system is being built virtually from scratch. At the same time, the PLA is upgrading its war-fighting doctrine and tactics, techniques and procedures and investing in the education of its officers.

Emphasis is also being laid on acquiring capabilities for exploiting outer space for military purposes as well dominating it through kinetic energy-based and directed energy weapons. The development of strategic land-attack cruise and ballistic missiles is also being accorded high priority. Capabilities for airborne and amphibious operations are also being steadily enhanced.

Power Projection

While China stresses the "purely defensive" nature of its defence policy, perceptive observers have noted the power projection capabilities that are inherent in China's growing strategic reach and the increasing role that military power is playing in enhancing China's comprehensive national power. Roy Kamphausen has argued that the PLA is "currently projecting military power throughout Asia by *responding to crises, contributing to deterrence and enhancing regional stability* using current capabilities. These efforts derive from, and contribute to, the building of comprehensive Chinese national power, which, in turn, serves to increase China's stature in Asia, advance China's foreign policy goals and even check US influence."⁴⁸

48. Roy Kamphausen, "PLA Power Projection: Current Realities and Emerging Trends," cited with the author's permission from a paper presented at the RAND-CEIP-CAPS (Taipei) conference "The PLA in the Asia-Pacific Region: Implications for the Evolving Regional Security Order", December 8-10, 2006, Taipei, Taiwan. (Emphasis in the original.)

“Since 1990, China has sent 5,915 military personnel to participate in 16 UN peace-keeping operations.”⁴⁹ In recent years, China has participated in UN peace-keeping operations in Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia and Darfur. The PLA gains considerable experience from these efforts by “mobilising, organising and deploying” composite military task forces overseas. The PLA contributes to deterrence by vigorous aerial surveillance, including regularly crossing the centre-line over the Taiwan Straits, submarine patrols,⁵⁰ large-scale show of presence through the deployment of surface ships,⁵¹ amphibious training exercises and accelerated development and deployment of missile forces, particularly opposite Taiwan.⁵²

Nuclear Policy: Second Thoughts

While China continues to proclaim that it follows a “no-first use” nuclear doctrine, the improvements in the quality of its nuclear-tipped missiles and the progressive increase in their quantity are conferring new options and spurring new thoughts among China’s national security analysts about the efficacy of its nuclear doctrine. Several of them have expressed the view that “under certain circumstances – such as an all-out attack against the country by conventional forces – China should use nuclear weapons.”⁵³ A Chinese general had stated in July 2005 that if the Americans launched their missiles and PGMs on to targets on China’s territory, “I think we will have to respond with nuclear weapons.”⁵⁴ As more sophisticated intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) like the DF-31A and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) like the JL-2 enter service in larger numbers, China may be emboldened to review its no-first-use policy. It will certainly do so internally even if it continues to publicly proclaim that it will never be the first one to use nuclear weapons. Any Chinese move to

49. China’s National Defence in 2006, n.41.

50. In November 2004, a Han-class submarine was reported to have illegally entered Japanese territorial waters. A Chinese Song-class submarine crossed within five nautical miles of the USS Kitty Hawk carrier battle group near Guam in October 2006 and reportedly surfaced deliberately to show its presence.

51. In September 2005, five PLA Navy warships deployed near the Chunxiao oilfield in the East China Sea where Japan and China have overlapping claims.

52. Kamphausen, n. 48.

53. Ann Scott Tyson, “Pentagon Finds China Fortifying its Long-Range Military Arsenal,” *The Washington Post*, May 24, 2006.

54. Charles R. Smith, “China Wants War,” Newsmax.com, July 18, 2005, <http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2005/7/17/170416.shtml>

discard the no-first-use policy will be inherently destabilising. Hence, for defence policy and military planners among China's adversaries, it will be prudent to assume that China may backtrack from its no-first-use policy during a time of crisis.

US-INDIA EQUATION AND CHINA'S SECURITY

With its large military footprint, alliances and trade relationships in Asia, the US too is an important Asian neighbour and its security relationship with China impinges in a major way on the security framework in Asia. The US policy towards China is often described as "hedged engagement." Some elements in the Indian government and analysts in India's strategic community would like India to join the US in this hedging strategy. In fact, in the eyes of this group, the growing India-US strategic partnership has only one agenda and that is to join hands against China if that country's rise is not peaceful, as its leaders proclaim it will be. Though both governments have repeatedly denied any such intentions, clearly, both recognise that China's growing military muscle and strategic influence in Asia need to be balanced lest these reach hegemonistic proportions.

There is no consensus among Indian analysts on whether India should team up with the US to counter-balance China's growing power and influence. Nor is there such a consensus in the US. David Shambaugh approvingly quotes Joseph Nye: "If you try to make China an enemy, it will become one" and concurs with former Secretary of Defence William Perry and Assistant Secretary Ash Carter who warn against "attempting to create an encircling anti-China alliance."⁵⁵ It is in India's interest to follow an independent foreign policy that is reflective of its own vital interests rather than team up with the US to counter-balance China in Asia. However, in the eventuality that China flies in the face of conventional wisdom and implodes or disintegrates, the repercussions will be extremely dangerous for India and India needs to hedge against such an outcome. Meanwhile, China is vectoring in the possibility of the US-India balancing act into its security calculus.

55. David Shambaugh, Paper entitled "The Evolving Security Order in Asia: Implications for US-India Relations" presented at the conference "Power Re-alignments in Asia: China, India and the United States", co-sponsored by the Centre for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania, and the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, December 14-17, 2006, New Delhi.

DEDUCTIONS AND CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

National Security Goals

From the formally-stated policy and arguments given above, China's national security goals may be assessed to be the following:

- To prevent separatist tendencies and promote reunification, guard against and resist aggression and defend national sovereignty, territorial integrity and maritime rights and interests.
- To promote economic and social development in a coordinated and sustainable manner and steadily increase comprehensive national strength.
- To pursue an independent foreign policy with a view to securing a favourable international and regional environment.
- To modernise China's armed forces in line with the trend in international military developments, particularly technological development.
- To improve operational capabilities for active defence under informationised conditions.
- To safeguard the political, economic and cultural rights and interests of the Chinese people and maintain public order and social stability.

National Security Strategy

For meeting its national security goals, China's national security strategy may be assessed to be the following:

- The primary objective is to create a security environment favourable to the country's economic development.
- Peaceful reunification of the Motherland is one of the strategic objectives set by the Chinese government.
- Safeguarding the country's territorial integrity is the foremost responsibility entrusted to the PLA.
- China will continue to claim that it will persist in the principle of non-use of force in settling boundary differences. However, it may be expected to follow a more robust policy with preemptive strategies, particularly in relation to Taiwan.
- Towards its regional neighbours, China will continue to follow a stick and