

Chapter 9

China's national defence: challenges and responses

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This chapter is organised into three parts, covering: the main bases and principles of China's national defence policy, the main challenges China's national defence is facing and the responses of China's national defence policy.

The main bases and principles of China's national defence policy

Since 1998, China has issued national defence white papers biannually to expound its national defence policy to the world. With the changing international security situation and environment, China's national defence policy in different historical periods has been adjusted accordingly, but the basics remain unchanged. These basics are: China's national laws (the *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* and the National Defense Law), international relations principles, international security situations, national security interests, big countries' responsibilities, China's national, historical and cultural traditions, and the basic patterns of warfare.

Analysing New China's national defence policy in different historical periods, we discover that China always adheres to the following basic principles: first, strategic defence—that is, it always sticks to the tenet 'if you don't attack me, I will not attack you; if you attack me, I will surely attack you'; second, self-reliance—that is, China does not seek alliances with any big country or bloc, nor does it participate in any military bloc, and it handles all national defence and security matters independently; third, self-defence by the whole population—that is, to combine a streamlined standing army with a powerful reserve force and bring the integrated power of 'people's war' into full play; fourth, coordinated development—that is, national defence construction must be subordinated to and serve economic construction; fifth, safeguarding peace—that is, to safeguard world peace and oppose aggression and expansion.

The main challenges facing China's national defence

The world is undergoing major changes and readjustments. Peace and development remain the dominant themes of our era. Multi-polarisation and

economic globalisation have accelerated and the serious imbalance in international strategic alignments is improving. Interdependence among countries is increasing. The duality of competition and cooperation among major powers becomes more obvious. At present, China does not face a realistic danger of being invaded by external enemies and its overall national strength and international influence are increasing. China's practical cooperation with major powers continues to grow, its friendly relations with its neighbouring countries and other developing countries have improved steadily. Although China enjoys a sound security environment, its national defence still faces the following challenges.

Challenge one

The international security environment has become more complicated. In 2006, the US Department of Defence (DoD) issued its Quadrennial Defence Review report, which observed that 'China has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional US military advantages absent US counter strategies'. In the same year, the United States began to adjust its global military deployments and to enhance its military presence in the Asia-Pacific area by enlarging its military base on Guam, augmenting its forces in the Western Pacific, increasing special operations forces in East Asia's coastal areas and moving the First Corps headquarters from its homeland to Japan, and striving to station its forces permanently in the Middle East and Central Asia. Considering the United States' promise to defend Taiwan, these adjustments to a certain extent constitute a realistic threat to China's security. The military alliances between the United States, Japan and South Korea have been enhanced. The American-Japanese cooperation on missile defence has made great progress and the balance of strategic force in the Asia-Pacific area began to tilt towards the American-Japanese side. The United States plans to build global missile defence systems by deploying intercept missiles on its western coast and in Europe, and it is developing and deploying theatre missile defence systems with its allies, which will further unsettle the strategic balance among the big powers.

Challenge two

The activities of internal separatist forces run rampant. In Taiwan, with the change of leaders on 20 May 2008, some relaxation of tensions has been brought about in relations across the Taiwan Strait. The separatists advocating 'independence' for Taiwan are, however, not reconciled with their setbacks and have continued making efforts to promote Taiwanese independence, which is a live volcano that could influence the stability of the region. In Tibet, the separatists advocating Tibetan 'independence' stirred up the '3.14 Riot' and created a tense atmosphere by beating, smashing, robbing, burning and killing. In Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, the Uygurs advocating independence

for 'Eastern Turkestan' plotted several terrorist attacks. On 4 August 2008, they openly attacked an armed police unit undertaking its morning drill, causing 16 dead and 16 wounded. How to prevent and control various sabotage activities by separatist forces and maintain social stability in China are arduous tasks for the Chinese armed forces.

Challenge three

Territorial disputes remain. China has more than 20 neighbouring countries, with a land border of 22 000 km and a coastal border of 18 000 km. China has already settled demarcation of its land boundaries with 10 neighbouring countries, including Russia, Nepal and Myanmar, but still has disputes over land borders with India and Bhutan. China also has disputes over territorial waters or islands with eight countries, including Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines. The disputes over land borders, territorial waters and islands have complicated historical causes and cannot be solved effectively within a short time. If not well handled, they could harm peace and stability in the region.

Challenge four

Military competition is intensifying. As military transformation develops in depth, each country has increased its military input, the quest to research and produce new high-tech weapons and equipment has accelerated and military competition characterised by 'informationisation' is intensifying. In 2008, the defence expenditure of the United States was US\$607.26 billion, while Russia's was 959.6 billion roubles, an increase of 9.9 per cent and 16.7 per cent, respectively from the previous year. In recent years, China's defence expenditure has kept increasing but, compared with the United States, Russia and some other countries, it is still at a relatively low level. The growth in China's defence expenditure is due primarily to the following factors: increasing salaries and allowances for military personnel and improvements in their living conditions; increasing investment in weaponry, equipment and infrastructure; supporting the training of military personnel; compensating for price rises; and increasing expenses for international cooperation in non-traditional security fields. At present, in comparison with the armies of developed countries, the Chinese military's informationisation of weapons and equipment lags far behind. As military transformation deepens in developed countries, the gaps between the Chinese armed forces and those of developed countries in weapons and equipment will not be narrowed, but, on the contrary, could widen.

Challenge five

Diversified military tasks keep increasing. In the 1990s, the Chinese army began to take part in international peacekeeping operations led by the United Nations. At the same time, military operations other than war (MOOTW), such as relief

efforts after floods and earthquakes, have increased substantially. The range of MOOTW has been widened and the scale of forces employed has been enlarged. In 1998, when floods hit the Yangtze, Songhuajiang and Nenjiang Rivers, 300 000 officers and soldiers rushed to the disaster-hit areas. In early 2008, when an extraordinarily serious disaster of snow and freezing rain hit southern China, about 100 000 People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers and armed policemen were deployed to the affected area. On 12 May 2008, when a huge earthquake measuring 8.0 on the Richter scale hit Wenchuan County, Sichuan Province, about 150 000 PLA soldiers and armed policemen rushed to the area to rescue those buried and care for the injured. During these MOOTW, PLA soldiers and armed policemen, fearing neither death nor hardships and tiredness, fought day and night to save lives and properties and were highly praised, loved and respected by the people. Owing to the lack of MOOTW theory, however, related professional training and special equipment, the Chinese army cannot adapt itself to diversified military tasks very well. At the end of 2004, when a tsunami occurred in the Indian Ocean, China did not send military forces to provide assistance or carry out rescues on a large scale. When the earthquake struck Wenchuan in May, the disaster-relief forces did not have the necessary heavy machinery for rescue. How to raise its capabilities to execute diversified military tasks is therefore an urgent task for the Chinese military.

The responses of China's national defence policy

In response to the complicated international security situation and ever changing grave challenges, China has continuously adjusted its national defence policy. To sum up, the responses of China's national defence policy include four aspects.

Response one

Preventing separation and safeguarding state sovereignty and territorial integrity are designated as the primary missions of the PLA. In June 1996, during his visit to Cornell University in the United States, Taiwan's leader Li Denghui expressed his desire to separate Taiwan from China. In 1999, Li officially put forth the fallacy of 'two sides, two countries'. In March 2000, the Democratic Progressive Party, which advocated Taiwanese independence, won the so-called 'presidential election' and became the ruling party. After Chen Shuibian came into power, he broke his promise of 'four nos and one without', pursued a radical policy for Taiwanese independence and launched 'de jure Taiwanese independence' activities such as constitutional reform, a referendum on joining the United Nations, and so on. The separation of Taiwan thus became China's gravest and most imminent threat. China's national defence policy has therefore designated 'counter-separation' as the primary mission of the PLA, and construction of the PLA has also been carried out around this mission. The purpose of China's development of military power is not, however, to attack Taiwan, but to maintain

peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait because, only backed by powerful military strength can we deter the forces pushing for Taiwanese independence and avoid conflict. As Sun Zi in *The Art of War* says, 'To subdue the enemy without fighting is the supreme excellence.'

Response two

The second response emphasises the development of the navy, air force and second artillery capabilities. As the PLA originated from the army, the army is the 'elder brother' in the military and enjoys great advantages in scale and defence expenditure. With the advent of high-tech and 'informationised' warfare, the strategic status of the navy, air force and second artillery force began to rise and China's national defence policy began to show them more concern. In 1985, 1997 and 2003, China cut the size of the PLA by one million, 500 000 and 200 000 people respectively, with the army suffering the largest cut. The navy, air force and second artillery force suffered smaller cuts and some even had a small increase. Through restructuring, the proportions of the navy, air force and second artillery force in the PLA have been raised by 3.8 per cent, while that of the army has been lowered by 1.5 per cent. The input of defence expenditure for the navy, air force and second artillery force has also been increased.

Response three

The third response emphasises winning local wars under conditions of informationisation. With the rapid development of science and technology (information technology in particular) and their extensive application in the military field, the patterns of warfare have begun to change. Although China has always had a basically defensive military strategy, there have been changes of emphasis over time. During the 1980s, China's military strategy emphasised 'active defence and luring the enemy in deep' to win the 'people's war' under modern conditions. The 1990–91 Gulf War demonstrated in an all-round way the power, role and status of high-tech weapons and equipment and also predicted the trend of future warfare. China's national defence policy therefore shifted its emphasis from military preparation to winning local wars under the conditions of high technology. With the advent of the information era and large quantities of informationised weapons and equipment being used on the battlefield, the patterns of mechanised warfare of the industrial era began to evolve into those of informationised warfare.

Response four

The fourth response places stress on international cooperation. China's reform and open-door policy began in 1978, but its international security cooperation did not unfold until the 1990s. In April 1992, China formally organised its first 'blue helmet' troops and sent them to Cambodia to execute tasks. In May 1997,

China agreed to join the UN 'peacekeeping on-call arrangement'. By November 2007, China had sent a total of 9040 people to participate in 18 UN peacekeeping operations and became the largest contributor among the five permanent members of UN Security Council.

In addition, China has significantly expanded its involvement in international cooperation in non-traditional security fields such as counter-terrorism, cracking down on drug production and trafficking, non-proliferation, maritime search and rescue, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), avian influenza and so on. The 2004 edition of China's national defence white paper lists carrying 'out military exchanges and cooperation' as a formal component of its national defence policy.