

# CHINA'S MILITARY STRATEGY: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE WHITE PAPERS ON NATIONAL DEFENCE

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*All men can see these tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved.*

— Sun Zi, *The Art of War*

Conceptualising national security strategies and thereby deriving the corresponding military strategies of countries easily qualify as the most intriguing themes in the academic discourse the world over. Of late, a related concept namely *strategic culture* has also received much enthusiasm among the political and security analysts. Strategic culture, as a discipline attempts to locate a country's strategic behaviour in its cultural roots.

According to Col Lykke, a strategy is governed by three factors: the decided objective/s, actions undertaken to accomplish the desired objective/s, and the resources which are either mobilised or developed to pursue the adopted course of action.<sup>1</sup> The US Army War College utilises the following formula to define strategy: *Strategy=Ends (Objectives) + Ways (Actions) + Means (Resources)*<sup>2</sup>.

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1. Colonel Lykke's, *Military Strategy: Theory and Application*, cited in David M. Finkelstein, "China's National Military Strategy," [http://www.rand.org/pubs/conf\\_proceedings/CF145/CF145.chap7.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF145/CF145.chap7.pdf), ch. 7, pp. 102-103.

2. Ibid.

**Amidst the changing contours of world politics, the strategic community is faced with two critical concerns: the nature of China's rise, and the nature of the emerging international order.**

As per David M. Finkelstein, all three components of a strategy—ends, ways and means—are interdependent. All the components must be “appropriate to the whole and in proper balance with the others”<sup>3</sup> if a strategy has to be successful.

Owing to the prevailing dynamism in international politics, studying and reflecting on Chinese strategic discourse assumes greater significance. Since the end of the Cold War, the world for the first time is witnessing the rise of another superpower. According to the realist school of thought, as a nation's international interests grow, it will expand beyond its geographical boundaries and build up its capabilities to defend its ever growing national interests.

Amidst the changing contours of world politics, the strategic community is faced with two critical concerns: the nature of China's rise, and the nature of the emerging international order. The first concern reflects on whether China's ascendancy in world politics would be a peaceful exercise or it would follow a revisionist path to claim its position in the international hierarchical order. Hence, it is important to ascertain the degree and quantum of the military component in China's overall national strategy. The nature of the emerging world order compels discussions in terms of its structure, bipolar or multipolar, with the foreign and military policies of the countries comprising the top of the hierarchy.

For the feasibility of our study, this paper shall focus only on the national security objectives of China, and the military dimension of these security objectives.

#### **WHITE PAPERS: DEFINITION**

A National Military Strategy (NMS) is the military component of a nation's overall National Security Strategy (NSS). Its objectives are derived from

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3. Finkelstein, n.1.

those within the overarching NSS. The NMS is the vehicle through which the national military leadership articulates, revalidates, and adjusts the ends, ways, and means of the armed forces to comport with changing NSS objectives, a changing security environment, or changes in the availability of national resources to be applied to the armed forces. Consequently, national military strategies are dynamic and require constant review, revision and updating.<sup>4</sup>As such, a Nation's Military Strategy can be deduced as National Military Strategy = Military Objectives + Military Strategic Concepts + Military Resources.<sup>5</sup>

**White Papers are the instruments as well as the explanations of a state's policy on any given issue.**

White Papers are the instruments as well as the explanations of a state's policy on any given issue. Study of White Papers on National Defence allows analysts to assess the congruence of strategic goals reflected in the military writings and the military means necessary for achieving them. In this way, progress toward (military) modernisation can be tracked and charted. It also provides a baseline with which to identify potential changes in the trajectory of a country's military reforms, either through a shift in goals or a change in the capabilities and forces being developed and deployed.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, in essence, White Papers on National Defence help us understand two critical issues: the *national security objectives* of a country, and the *national military strategy* being adopted to pursue these security objectives.

David Shambaugh highlights the importance of studying White Papers on National Defence by maintaining that all modern militaries operate according to their doctrinal dictates<sup>7</sup>. According to Shambaugh, crucial decisions relating to financial allocations, weapons procurement, and a broad range of other considerations are determined by the operative military

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4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. M. Taylor Frawell, "China's Search for Military Power," *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2008, pp. 125–141, The Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, [www.twq.com/08summer/docs/08summer\\_frawel.pdf](http://www.twq.com/08summer/docs/08summer_frawel.pdf) F. Taylor

doctrine of a country.<sup>8</sup>

## **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

This paper aims to understand China's Military Strategy by analysing the doctrinal shifts, the constant evolution of strategic concepts, and the development of operational capabilities as contained in China's National Defence White Papers.

The paper further endeavours to analyse the drivers behind China's current military posture, and outline a strategy for future warfare as manifest in the official Chinese military documents.

## **WHITE PAPERS ON CHINA'S NATIONAL DEFENCE: INTRODUCTION**

China published its first Defence White Paper in the year 1998. Since then, White Papers on National Defence have become a regular feature of the People's Republic of China (PRC). By now, China has published seven White Papers on its National Defence for the years 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010.

Publication of White Papers on National Defence was initially conceived by China to counter international criticism regarding the opacity of its military spending and thereby its military strategy. Consequently, these White Papers deal with a range of defence related themes such as international security situation as perceived by the Chinese, China's national defence policy, status of defence expenditure, etc.

China started publishing White Papers on National Defence at a crucial juncture of its contemporary political history. Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms and opening up policy of 1977-89 enabled China to abandon isolationism and pursue a more confident and active foreign policy by consolidating its economic position. A deeper engagement with world politics is both a requirement and a function of a country's growing international stature. Consequently, China opened itself to several multilateral institutions in the 1990s. It joined the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in

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8. David Shambaugh, "China's Military Modernization: Making Steady and Surprising Progress", in Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills ed., *Strategic Asia 2005-06-Military Modernization in Era of Uncertainty* (The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2005), pp. 67-103

the 1980s, and renewed its application to regain its seat as one of the founding members of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986. By the end of the 1990s, China became a member of numerous international affiliations, including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Conference on Disarmament (1980), and the Human Rights Commission (1982). The Communist nation also signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) during this phase in 1992. Further, China also deepened its regional engagements by becoming a member or observer at a number of regional institutions: China joined the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum in 1989, and participated in the first Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF) meeting in 1994. Publication of White Papers on National Defence during this period can also be seen as an attempt by the Chinese authorities towards a larger engagement with the international community, by coming clean on its military policies.

**China's rapid economic growth raised concerns in the West regarding the expansionist nature of its national interest, and the military component of this national interest.**

China's rapid economic growth raised concerns in the West regarding the expansionist nature of its national interest, and the military component of this national interest. This psychosis, coupled with China's isolationism in the international arena, generated the phenomenon of the 'China threat', whereby all Chinese actions were perceived as a function of its revisionist attitude. A prominent motive behind the publication of White Papers on National Defence was to quell this threat by projecting China as a responsible, status-quo power.

A study of the White Papers on National Defence demonstrates China's growing confidence in its capabilities to become a world leader. The National Defence White Papers till the year 2000 largely confined themselves to reaffirming China's defensive military posture, and selling its 'peaceful rise' theory to the world. Post 2002, the White Papers on National Defence have started adopting a more assertive tone, by clearly articulating China's core interests, and its views on future warfare.

**China's White Papers on National Defence serve as an effective tool for analysing the strategic concepts in Chinese military doctrine and trace their constant evolution.**

Of late, the Chinese have also started treating the White Papers on National Defence as policy statements. This fact was exhibited when China postponed the publication of its sixth Defence White Paper to January 2009, instead of the end of the year, i.e. December 2008, as had been the norm till then. It was no mere coincidence that the date of the publication of the Paper coincided with President Obama's oath ceremony.

Further, as a sign of China's growing confidence in its ability to play a more prominent role at the international arena, the 2008 White Paper on National Defence states that *"China has become an important member of the international system...China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world, nor can the world enjoy prosperity and stability without China."*

Despite dealing with various aspects of military strategy, Chinese White Papers on National Defence are often being dubbed by the Western military analysts as propaganda initiatives. Western military strategists accuse these publications of lacking in clarity and transparency, largely in terms of defence expenditure. In spite of these lacunae, China's White Papers on National Defence serve as an effective tool for analysing the strategic concepts in Chinese military doctrine and trace their constant evolution. Further, the White Papers on National Defence reflect on China's concepts of future warfare, and thereby aid in conceptualising its war-fighting doctrine for the future.

**CHINA'S STRATEGIC GOALS AND ITS THREAT PERCEPTIONS:**

In *Politics Among Nations*, Hans Morgenthau argues that as wars remain a deadly threat to the survival of states, the military element of national power is not only the *ultima ratio*, but indeed the first and constant one in international politics.<sup>9</sup>

To understand a country's military strategy, it is imperative to examine the context in which the strategy is being conceived. This context usually

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9. Ibid.

comprises the *national security objectives* and *threat perceptions* of countries. As identified in all its White Papers on National Defence, China seeks to develop military power as a tool of statecraft to achieve a set of strategic goals, which include: <sup>10</sup>

- To guard against, and resist, aggression and promote national reunification.
- To defend the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and maritime rights of China (*this includes territories, and waters allegedly claimed by China as its own*).
- To promote economic growth and thereby steadily increase the overall national strength of China.

As reflected in the White Papers on National Defence, threats to China's strategic goals, as perceived by the Chinese, emanate from:

- *US policies on Taiwan and its overall defence ties in Asia*. This aspect involves US support to the independence forces in Taiwan, and its deepening defence ties with major Asian countries such as Japan, and India.
- *Maritime security threats*. This involve safeguarding trade routes along the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs), and securing alleged claims in the South China Sea. SLOCs are vital for China as most of its foreign trade is conducted through the sea.
- *Growing military power and regional influence of neighbours* like India and Japan: integral to this aspect are the territorial and maritime disputes that China has with these two neighbours.

The White Papers on China's National Defence further classify these threats as "*struggles for strategic resources, strategic locations and strategic*

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10. Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*. Here quoted from Ka Po Ng, *Interpreting China's Military Power: Doctrine Makes Readiness* (London: Routledge, 2005), ch. 2, pp.15-37.

**China declares that the 'balance of power' among the "major international players" is changing, and the world is moving towards multipolarisation.**

*dominance.*"<sup>11</sup> China's National Defence White Papers, therefore, outline the military actions that China would be willing to undertake in order to safeguard its national objectives in the wake of a perceived or foreseeable threat/s. As such, the White Papers on National Defence also underline the strategic concepts, and military capabilities being developed by the Chinese to conduct defensive or offensive military actions.

### **ROLE OF MILITARY IN NATIONAL SECURITY**

#### **STRATEGY**

Sun Zi in his acclaimed work, *The Art of War* proclaims: "*War is a matter of vital importance to the State...It is mandatory that it be studied thoroughly...*" Consequently, China continues to attach immense importance to military strength for realising its national objectives and enhancing its international stature. The 2004 White Paper on China's National Defence further confirms this notion by asserting that the "military factor plays a great role in international configuration and national security". In the same Paper, China declares that the "balance of power" among the "major international players" is changing, and the world is moving towards multipolarisation. Therefore, it can be inferred that China treats military supremacy as a means towards achieving political ascendancy, while the international politics undergoes radical structural changes.

China needs to conceptualise a military strategy with regard to its future theatres of operations. As contained in all the White Papers on National

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11. *China's National Defense in 2000*, White Papers on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), December 2000; *China's National Defense in 2002*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), December 2002; *China's National Defense in 2004*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), December 2004; *China's National Defense in 2006*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), December 2006; *China's National Defense in 2008*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), January 2009.



Defence, maintaining the One China Policy remains primary to China's strategic objectives. The White Paper on National Defence for 2004 provides an insight into the Chinese psyche vis-à-vis Taiwan, when it declares that any attempt by the Taiwanese authorities towards declaring independence would be "resolutely and thoroughly crushed at any cost"<sup>12</sup> by the Chinese Army.

Further, the White Papers on National Defence are quite critical of the US defence ties with Taiwan. The 2008 National Defence White Paper even declares that any continued US intervention in Taiwan would lead to "jeopardizing Sino-US relations".<sup>13</sup> This assertive behaviour is a reflection of China's growing confidence in its rapidly advancing military capabilities, and moreover, its enhanced international stature. As such, it can be concluded, that China is prepared to resort to a military course in order to claim Taiwan.

Surprisingly, none of the White Papers on National Defence issued by China mentions India as a security concern for the PRC. But, in an indirect reference to the US foreign and military policies in the Asian region, and the growing influence of India and Japan in the international arena, the 2006 White Paper on National Defence asserts that "hegemonism, and power politics remain the key factors undermining international security". Further, the National Defence White Papers repeatedly make note of US defence ties with Japan and its missile build-up in Asia-Pacific. These developments are criticised as undermining the security situation in the region.<sup>14</sup>

US naval deployments along the SLOCs and the presence of a robust Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean are perceived by the Chinese as potential threats to their economic interests. China fears that in case of a Taiwan contingency, a

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12. *China's National Defence in 2004*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), December 2004.

13. *China's National Defence in 2008*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), January 2009.

14. *China's National Defence in 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008* White Papers on national defence published by the Government of People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org)

US blockade of the SLOCs could effectively jeopardise its economic security. Therefore, securing the SLOCs is of vital concern to China.

Though all the White Papers on National Defence reaffirm China's adherence to a defensive military strategy, Alastair Johnston argues that China has a conflict-prone strategic culture, which is similar to the Western concept of *realpolitik*. Consequently, China prefers to take offensive military actions to safeguard its national objectives.<sup>15</sup>

Under the prevailing security concerns, China seeks to develop a military strategy that will allow it to deter or foil US intervention in Taiwan, prepare for a conflict over maritime and territorial disputes with India or Japan, and enable it to secure the SLOCs.

## STRATEGIC CONCEPTS

According to David Shambaugh, understanding the military strategy of a country requires an analysis of the strategy, doctrine, politics, perceptions, contingencies, technologies, manpower, training, logistics, and other 'software' factors that shape the use of force.<sup>16</sup>

Modern Chinese strategic thought reflects an amalgamation of traditional Chinese strategic thinking, and modern approaches to warfare like the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), and an ever increasing reliance on information technology.

Chinese military doctrine continues to draw from the people's war concept, and the strategy of active defence. **People's war** remains primary to China's military doctrine. As a strategy of war, people's war takes advantage of China's inherent strengths, while employing traditional Chinese stratagems of *speed*, *surprise*, and *deception*. People's war is often referred to as China's "secret weapon".<sup>17</sup>

Over the years, China has greatly modified its doctrine on people's war. At the operational level, people's war now involves combining a lean standing force with a powerful reserve force and exploring new approaches

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15. n.11.

16. Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (U.K: Princeton University Press, 1998)

17. Shambaugh, n.8, pp. 67-103.

for the people to participate in warfare and generate support for the front.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the new doctrine gives primacy to building a lean but effective force, as opposed to Mao's idea of large conventional armies. Consequently, almost all the Defence White Papers issued by the Chinese government post 2002 stress on downsizing the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and building "informationized" armed forces.

Further, the strategy of "*luring the enemy in deep*," an integral component of the people's war doctrine, has been replaced by the strategy of active defence, and thereby maintaining a forward defence posture.

The "offensive defence" doctrine is the lynchpin of China's active defence strategy. **Active defence** asserts that China will attack only after the enemy has struck. However, the line between accepting the enemy's first strike and the use of preemption to defend China from an immediate attack is blurred.<sup>19</sup> The 2008 White Paper on China's National Defence further complicates the issue of preemption in active defence by declaring that active defence involves taking the initiative to prevent and defuse crises, and deter conflicts and wars.

Taking offensive actions during favourable conditions is embedded in Chinese strategic thought. Sun Zi, in the *Art of War*, writes, "*....Those who excel at offense move from above the greatest heights of Heaven. Thus, they are able to preserve themselves and attain complete victory.*" Further, he stresses, "*...Invincibility lies in the defence; the possibility of victory in the attack.*"

At the strategic level, active defence gives priority to flexible application of strategies and tactics. It seeks to avoid disadvantages and build on advantages, and makes the best use of one's strong points to attack the enemy's weak points.<sup>20</sup> As such, active defence calls for developing such offensive capabilities that focus on *forward defence*, and enable *peripheral denial* by allowing *limited force projection* beyond China's borders.

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18. Dennis J. Blasko, "How Will the PLA Fight," in *The Chinese and Army Today: Traditions Transformations for the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2006), ch. 5, pp. 91-120.

19. *China's National Defense in 2006*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), December 2006.

20. Blasko, n.18.

**“Forward defence”** means that the PLA prefers to fight a military conflict far from China’s borders and coastline<sup>21</sup>. As such, it calls for developing military capabilities that deter an enemy from violating China’s territorial air, waters or land, or dominate the Chinese littoral and the adjacent seas. As China at present lacks force projection capabilities and has no overseas naval bases, Chinese military doctrine lays emphasis on the creation of *Rapid Reaction Forces*.<sup>22</sup> These Rapid Reaction Forces are based in military “hot-spots” along China’s borders to engage an enemy as soon as possible, and resolve conflicts on China’s terms.

The 2004 White Paper on National Defence asserts that the PLA accords priority to strengthening the navy, air force and second artillery forces to be able to *win both command of the sea and command of the air*. The army meanwhile is being streamlined. These developments are a clear pronouncement of how China plans to operate in future warfare scenarios: the design to win command of the sea and command of the air reflects that the Chinese armed forces are moving beyond mere territorial defence to one capable of conducting long range strikes with the help of a superior navy and air force. Further, in future conflicts, China would rely heavily on ballistic missiles, equipped with conventional warheads. These would serve as “strategic forces” for the Chinese. Therefore, it can be concluded that in future wars, power projection from the Chinese side would come from the air force and navy, and not the army.

The phrase also serves as a classic reference to the area denial and force projection capabilities being developed by the Chinese.

**Area denial** is the “ability of a state to hinder an adversary’s use of space or facilities.”<sup>23</sup> Through the development of area denial capabilities, China hopes to create a buffer around its continental and maritime periphery that will increase the cost for other states to conduct military operations against

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21. *China’s National Defense in 2008*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People’s Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), January 2009.

22. Finkelstein, n.1.

23. Ibid.

targets on the mainland.<sup>24</sup>

Force projection is the ability of a state to project military forces beyond the limited bounds of its territory. Force projection enables a state to practise coercive diplomacy by intimidating other states and influencing their decision-making process. As such, force projection is as much a political tool of statecraft as it is a military one. China at present lacks force projection beyond its region due to the lack of a blue water navy, and an aircraft carrier.

**Regional force projection** serves several strategic purposes for China: it is required to achieve national unification, enable deployment of troops abroad to secure maritime interests (struggle for *strategic resources* and *strategic locations*) and deter conflicts from arising at China's borders (struggle for *strategic dominance*), and play a more active role in international humanitarian operations and, thus, enhance its global reputation.

The *Annual Report to the Congress: The Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2005* notes that "...current trends in China's military modernization could provide China with a force capable of prosecuting a range of military operations in Asia—well beyond Taiwan—potentially posing a credible threat to modern militaries operating in the region."<sup>25</sup>

Consequently, the White Papers on National Defence since 2004 lay an increased focus on developing the offshore and offensive capabilities of its navy and the air force. As per the 2004 National Defence White Paper, the Chinese Navy has intensified its preparations for a maritime battlefield. Hence, the PLA Navy (PLAN) is developing capabilities to operate in distant waters, and is focussing on enhancing its nuclear counter-attacks capability.<sup>26</sup>

**The air force too is preparing to enhance its operational capabilities from territorial defence to become capable of conducting offensive operations like air strikes, and maintain strategic projection.**

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24. Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, Joint Publication 1-02, August 2006, p. 154

25. Frawell, n.7.

26. Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress: The Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2005, pp. 12-13, cited in Richard D. Fisher Jr., *China's Military Modernization: Building for Regional and Global Reach* (US: Praeger Security International, 2006) ch. 7, pp.169-212.

The air force too is preparing to enhance its operational capabilities from territorial defence to become capable of conducting offensive operations like air strikes, and maintain strategic projection.<sup>27</sup> The PLA is also working towards moving from regional defence to trans-regional mobility, and improving its capabilities in air-ground integrated operations, long-distance manoeuvres, and special operations.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, China has accelerated the development of aviation, operational and tactical missiles, ground-to-air missiles, and special operations forces<sup>29</sup>.

Further, White Papers on National Defence stress on taking integrated joint operations as the basic approach to warfare. Consequently, the armed forces have intensified training for joint operations.<sup>30</sup> These developments reflect China's perceptions of future warfare, wherein China would assume a forward defence posture to deter an enemy from compromising Chinese security and economic interests by conducting preemptive air and naval strikes.

Further, in the wake of a Taiwan contingency, and the possibility of US intervention in the same, China seeks to develop a range of **asymmetrical capabilities**. The 2004 White Paper on National Defence notes that "asymmetrical, non-contiguous, and non-linear operations" have become important patterns of operations in the battlefield.

Development of favorable asymmetrical capabilities is crucial at all levels of warfare. The potential for creating asymmetry in a war is achieved

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27. *China's National Defense in 2004*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), December 2004.

28. *China's National Defense in 2004*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), December 2004.

29. *China's National Defense in 2006*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), December 2006.

30. *China's National Defense in 2008*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), January 2009.

through two factors: maneuver, and superior firepower....<sup>31</sup> the creation of favorable asymmetry depends upon the factor of surprise, which is often achieved by following an offensive strategy rather than a defensive strategy...<sup>32</sup>

**Use of deception as a strategic tool is deeply embedded in Chinese strategic thought.**

Traditional Chinese stratagems focus on employing the tactics of *information denial, practising deception, and waging psychological warfare* to create favourable asymmetries during a conflict. Another concept, namely *assassin's mace*, further reflects the Chinese conceptualisation of asymmetric warfare. Assassin's mace is a term used to describe a decisive weapon or a tactic "that is aimed at incapacitating an enemy, suddenly and totally."<sup>33</sup> Thus, any form of asymmetrical warfare by China will include all these elements.

Use of deception as a strategic tool is deeply embedded in Chinese strategic thought. Sun Zi in the *Art of War* proclaims, "*All warfare is based on deception*". Deception refers to creating an "alternative reality" for the adversary in order to confuse them and make them react in ways that serve the deceiver's interests.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, deception is aimed at inflicting surprise blows at the enemy by concealing own intentions and capabilities. Sun Zi professes practising deception by constantly creating false appearances, spreading disinformation, and employing trickery and deceit<sup>35</sup>, "*....When committed to employing your forces, feign inactivity. When your objective is*

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31. *China's National Defense in 2004*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), December 2004; *China's National Defense in 2006*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), December 2006; *China's National Defense in 2008*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org), January 2009.

32. Air Cmde. Jasjit Singh, "*Evolution of politico-military doctrines.*"

33. Ibid.

34. Navrozov, "Chinese Geostrategy: The Assassin's Mace," cited in Jason Fritz BS (St. Cloud), MIR (Bond), "How China will use Cyber Warfare to Leapfrog in Military Competitiveness," *Culture Mandala*, vol. 8, no.1, October 2008, pp. 28-80, [www.international-relations.com/CM8-1/Cyberwar.pdf](http://www.international-relations.com/CM8-1/Cyberwar.pdf)

35. Roy Godson and James J. Wirtz, eds., *Strategic Denial and Deception: The Twenty- First Century Challenge* (U.S: Transaction Publishers Rutgers, seventh edition, 2009), ch. 1, pp. 1-14



*“....what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy’s strategy....”*

*nearby, make it appear as if distant: when far away, create the illusion of being nearby.”* China’s continued affirmation of its defensive military posture in the White Papers on National Defence, while simultaneously building capabilities for offensive purposes, can be judged as a deception tactic.

It is believed that China is developing asymmetric capabilities to be able to conduct military operations in space. Space has been chosen as a battlefield by China as that is where the US vulnerability lies. The Chinese aim to disrupt the US command and control system by destroying its satellite networks. Though the White Papers on National Defence stress on China’s policy against militarisation of space, experts believe that China is developing capabilities that will enable it to conduct cyber warfare operations in future.

As mentioned earlier, study of wars is central to China’s strategic military planning. This study of warfare relies heavily on observations made and lessons learnt from the wars between other nations. The Gulf War of 1991 taught China the importance of high-end technology and information warfare. Consequently, in 2002, China revised its defence strategy of fighting “local wars under high-tech conditions” to **“local wars under conditions of informationization.”** Under this strategy, the Chinese believe that information dominance will be a crucial factor in deciding the outcomes of future conflicts.

The importance accorded to information superiority in China’s strategic thinking is best exemplified through the following views expressed by the military analysts at the Navy Research Institute, Beijing:

...information deterrence is a new concept of victory without fighting wars....  
The side controlling information will be able to manipulate the beginning, middle, and end of the war, attack the enemy with advanced information weapons to paralyze enemy aircraft, vessels and various command systems, and destroy important targets with precise firepower...<sup>36</sup>

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36. Ralph D. Sawyer, *The Complete Art of War: Sun Tzu and Sun Pin* (U.S: Westview Press, 1996), Introduction, pp. 1-38



Incidentally, this design to paralyse the enemy without any physical engagement, finds resonance in Sun Zi's *Art of War*, "*For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of all skills.*" To attain this victory, Sun Zi professes attacking the enemy's strategy: "*....what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy....*"

The Chinese hope to attack enemy strategy by launching information Warfare (IW). According to Toshi Yoshihara,<sup>37</sup> Chinese IW seeks to disrupt the enemy's decision-making process by interfering with the adversary's ability to obtain, process, transmit, and use information, while protecting their own systems to achieve information superiority. A key component of this IW would be an attack on the enemy's command and control systems in order to confuse or blind enemy forces.<sup>38</sup> Further, Chinese information warfare lays emphasis on achieving dominance of the electromagnetic spectrum; launching computer network warfare; and psychological manipulation.<sup>39</sup>

Consequently, the 2008 White Paper on National Defence lays down that the PLA is learning and mastering the basic theories of information warfare, particularly electronic warfare. It is enhancing training on how to operate and use informationised weaponry and equipment, and command information systems. Further, the PLA is also conducting exercises in complex electromagnetic environments.

As a corollary to IW, China has ushered in a RMA, with informationisation at its core. The objective of **RMA with Chinese characteristics** is to build *informationised forces* that can win *informationised wars* of the future.<sup>40</sup> Apart from this stated goal, none of the White Papers issued by the Chinese government gives a clear view of the Chinese conceptualisation of

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37. Naval Captain Shen Zhongchang, Naval Lieutenant Zhou Xinsheng and Naval Lieutenant Commander Zhang Haiying, Navy Research Institute, Beijing, "The Military Revolution in Naval Warfare", *China Military Science* (1996). The paper here has been taken from Michael Pillsbury, *Chinese View of Future Warfare* (Institute of National Strategic Studies).

38. Toshi Yoshihara is a Research Fellow and the resident expert on security issues in the Asia-Pacific region at the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis.

39. Toshi Yoshihara, "Chinese Information Warfare: A Phantom Menace or Emerging Threat?" Strategic Studies Institute, November 2001, [www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ssi/chininfo.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ssi/chininfo.pdf).

40. Ibid.

information warfare, and the capabilities being developed for the same.

A simultaneous progress towards *mechanisation* and *informationisation* is integral to China's march towards RMA with Chinese characteristics. Further, RMA with Chinese characteristics calls for the development of coordinated operational systems. 'Mechanisation' implies changing from an army based on manpower and manual labour to one that uses vehicles and machines to improve its combat effectiveness, whereas 'information technology application' means integrating modern communications, computers, software, training simulators, and command and control techniques into all levels of the force to make it more efficient, flexible, and responsive.<sup>41</sup>

The White Papers on National Defence for the years 2006 and 2008 lay down the strategic framework for China's drive towards achieving informationisation:

- Laying a solid foundation and accomplishing mechanisation by 2010.
- Making major progress towards informationisation by 2020.
- Reaching the strategic goal of building informationised armed forces capable of winning informationised wars by the mid-21st century.

Therefore, the Defence White Papers stress on stepping up the development of new and high-tech weaponry and equipment while accelerating the modification of old and outmoded weaponry. At the same time, weaponry is increasingly being informationalised and long-range precision strike capability raised<sup>42</sup>.

According to Michael Pillsbury, China's interest in pursuing an RMA lies in the country's self-proclaimed goal of becoming a "comprehensive national power", with the capacity to project power beyond its borders.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, the RMA with Chinese characteristics calls for a renewed

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41. *China's National Defense in 2004*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, www.china.org, December 2004.

42. Jagannath P. Panda, "Debating China's 'RMA-Driven Military Modernization': Implications for India", *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 33, no.2, March 2009, pp. 287-299.

43. *China's National Defense in 2004*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, www.china.org, December 2004.

focus on strengthening the offshore and offensive capabilities of the navy, air force, and second artillery, while simultaneously streamlining the army. Further, the RMA with Chinese characteristics focusses on improving the joint operational capabilities of the armed forces to enhance their defensive as well as offensive capabilities.<sup>44</sup>

#### **INSIGHTS INTO DEFENCE EXPENDITURE:**

Though, China is often criticised for the opacity of its defence spending, the White Papers on National Defence provide some useful insights into the nature of China's defence expenditure. As contained in the 2008 White Paper on National Defence, during the period between 1988-97, the average annual increase in China's defence expenditure was 14.5 percent. Between 1998-2007, the average annual increase in defence expenditure has been a whopping 15.9 percent.

The figures become more glaring when computed on a yearly basis. Table 1 below gives a clear view of the increase in China's defence expenditure since 2002:

**Table 1**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Defence Expenditure (unit: RMB billion Yuan)</b>	<b>Percentage Increase</b>
2002	170.778	-
2003	190.787	10.48
2004	220.001	15.31
2005	247.496	12.5
2006	297.938	20.4
2007	355.491	19.3
2008	417.769	17.5

Source: *China's National Defence*, White Paper on National Defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing, [www.china.org](http://www.china.org)

This shows that apart from 2003 and 2005, China's defence expenditure has been increasing at more than 14 percent annually.

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44. Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, p. 59, cited in n.42, pp. 287-299.

Further, the National Defence White Papers try to nullify the increase in China's defence spending by keeping the percentage of annual defence expenditure in the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at a constant level. This tactic becomes irrelevant when one factors in the fact that China's GDP has been growing at a rapid scale since 1990s. Therefore, even a mere increase in the percentage of China's defence expenditure to its GDP becomes large when calculated in absolute terms.

### **Conclusion**

As the world politics undergoes structural changes, China is preparing itself to play a more decisive and dominant role at the international arena. Several security and political analysts believe that the Chinese concept of Comprehensive National Power (CNP) involves a substantial military component. Studying China's White Papers on National Defence provides a useful insight into the Chinese military psyche, to thereby chart the military strategy being pursued by the Communist nation.

A study of the Defence White Papers reveals that China's military strategy is in a process of constant evolution, whereby the Chinese continue to draw from their ancient military concepts, while simultaneously adopting new approaches to warfare. Hence, the White Papers on National Defence pledge a continued adherence to the strategies of active defence, and people's war in the operative military doctrine of China. At the same time, the White Papers lay an increased emphasis on modern warfare concepts such as RMA and information warfare.

Further, the White Papers on National Defence reflect that China prefers to fight future wars away from its borders—a concept referred to as forward defence. Consequently, China is developing capabilities that allow it to deter other nations from violating its territorial air, waters and land. A key component of this strategy is the deployment of rapid reaction forces in militarily sensitive areas along China's borders.

The Defence White Papers also provide a glimpse into the emerging offensive nature of China's military strategy. Consequently, China is developing anti-access and area denial capabilities, and building its capacity

for regional force projection. A crucial component of this strategy is to harness the offensive and offshore capabilities of the Chinese Navy and Air Force. The PLA too is working towards achieving trans-regional mobility. Further, a great deal of attention is being paid to developing the joint-operation capabilities of the armed forces.

As contained in the White Papers on National Defence, China recognises asymmetrical operations as a vital component of future warfare scenarios. Though none of the White Papers on National Defence lays down the capabilities being developed by the Chinese to conduct asymmetrical operations, it is believed that China's theatre of asymmetric warfare is located in space. Consequently, China is building its capacity to conduct cyber warfare operations.

China treats informationisation as the basic approach to 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare. As a key component of this approach, China has ushered in an RMA with informationisation at its core. A simultaneous progress towards mechanisation and informationisation is the underlining factor of the RMA with Chinese characteristics.

In the light of these developments, it can be concluded that China is developing capabilities that will enable it to carry out offensive operations at the operational and tactical levels, while maintaining the garb of defensive posture at the strategic level. In the areas of military expenditure, and weapon acquisition, China's White Papers on National Defence remain largely opaque.

**A key component of this strategy is the deployment of rapid reaction forces in militarily sensitive areas along China's borders.**