

# China's Rising Military Power & Its Implications

Jiao Liang

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## Introduction

China's rising military power and its implications are significant concerns that have been widely discussed in the international community and among political elites across the globe. Since 2000, the United States Department of Defense has submitted annual reports both in classified and unclassified forms on PRC military power to its Congress on China's security and military developments. Issuing these reports symbolizes the extraordinary attention given to this aspect of China's development. It reflects growing U.S. concerns over China's military rise and is reminiscent of U.S. Department of Defense reports on the Soviet Union's military power during the Cold War.

At the government level, international think tanks such as RAND, CNA, CSIS, SIPRI, ISDP and NIDS are also increasingly interested in China's burgeoning military power; their analysts have contributed a host of papers and reports, including *Entering the Dragon's Lair: Chinese Antiaccess Strategies and Their Implications for the United States* (RAND Corporation), *Uncertain Waters: Thinking About China's Emergence as a Maritime Power* (Center for Naval Analyses), *Chinese Military Modernization and Force Development*, *China's Expanding Role in Peacekeeping: Prospects and Implications* (SIPRI Policy Paper), *China's Growing International Role: Words, Deeds and Needs* (ISPI Studies), and *China Security Report* (The National Institute for Defense Studies). Most of these reports display in-depth evaluations of China's security policy and military trends. Abraham M. Denmark, a research fellow with the Center for a New American Security, has even argued that "the question of how China will use its newfound power – especially its military power – will determine the course of the twenty-first century."<sup>1</sup> The aim of this paper is to examine the driving forces behind China's military modernization efforts followed by an assessment of the goals and foci of China's military modernization at present and in the foreseeable future. The paper concludes with an analysis of the military's domestic and international implications.

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham M. Denmark, "The Uncertain Rise of China's Military," testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, March 10, 2011, [http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS\\_CongressionalTestimony\\_ChinasMilitary\\_Denmark.pdf](http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS_CongressionalTestimony_ChinasMilitary_Denmark.pdf) (accessed on December 9, 2011).

## Economic Power vs. Military Power

Military power and economic power are major components of comprehensive national strength and thus interdependent and inherently connected to a nation's security, dignity and prosperity. Nevertheless, military power and economic power have played different roles in specific historical phases in a nation's history. As a result, the top national authority is often faced with the dilemma of deciding which tasks take priority – the development of economic power, the development of military power, or both? Since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in October 1949, the government has been exploring desirable solutions according to the prevailing situation at home and abroad. In general, three different approaches have been taken.

Firstly, at the beginning of the 1960s when the Sino-Soviet ties were souring and the Vietnam War was escalating, China's security environment severely worsened and there was an imminent threat to its national security coming from a wide array of sources including the Soviet Union, the United States, and the Kuomintang government under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek. Under these circumstances, the development of military power became the top national concern. Thus, national economic resources were used to finance the development of China's military power as a preparation for responding to the unfavorable security environment. Defense expenditure significantly increased, reaching a peak of 26.1 percent of total national financial expenditure in 1968. From 1969 to 1972, the growth rate of defense expenditures exceeded that of the GDP by 7.5 percent.<sup>2</sup> The size of the armed forces in China increased 153 percent from 1958 to 1971.<sup>3</sup> Chairman Mao Zedong and his generals envisaged three lines of defense, implementing the massive construction of the "Third Fronts Program" in 1964.<sup>4</sup> The significant breakthroughs that China achieved subsequently, including the successful development of the atomic bomb, the hydrogen bomb, manmade

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<sup>2</sup> Wan Dongcheng, "Lun woguo xianjieduan guofang jianshe yujing jjian she xietiao fa zhan" [On the coordinated development of China's national defense and economic construction in the current stage], *China Military Science*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2005), 97.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Third Front Program refers to a large-scale program China started in 1964 in response to the volatile international situation. The aim was to build a range of industrial bases in China's remote yet strategically secured hinterland.

satellites, and nuclear-powered submarines, reinforced China's deterrent capabilities from potential armed invasions, and its international status was elevated accordingly. Nevertheless, economic development was adversely affected due to the excessive input of resources into the defense systems. While the practice to prioritize military power rather than economic power worked well for about three decades, it was doomed to failure; in the long run the declining economy could not support the Soviet military machine, let alone help enhance its national military power.

It can be concluded that without modest military power for protection, national security would be vulnerable to disruption and predation even if a nation enjoys economic superiority, and furthermore, that military power is extraordinary hard to sustain without an economic power at a level corresponding to said military power.

Secondly, at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held in Beijing in December 1978 – commonly recognized as a starting point for the historical period of reform and “opening up” – economic development was officially identified as the central task for the party and the nation due in part to the relatively placid global security situation. In the following two decades or so, great efforts were applied on the economic front, while military modernization was took a backseat. At the enlarged meeting of the Central Military Commission of the CPC held from May 23 to June 4, 1985, China's leader at the time Deng Xiaoping put forward the famous statement that “the military shall have to wait and be patient.”<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, the principle that military buildup should be subordinate to and in service of economic growth was adopted. From 1985 to 1987, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) manpower decreased from about 4.23 million to 3.24 million, followed by a further cut to 3.2 million until 1990.<sup>6</sup> Many military academies, institutes and hospitals were brought under civilian control, and many combat units were relieved of duty. During the decade from 1985 to 1994, China's average annual defense input increased 6.22 percent, which represented a decline of

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<sup>5</sup> Editorial Committee on Party Literature of the Central Committee, *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* [Selected works of Deng Xiaoping], Vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2007), 128.

<sup>6</sup> “Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun baiwan da caijun” [A million personnel cut down in the PLA], <http://news.qq.com/a/20090721/001273.htm> (accessed July 21, 2009).

1.08 percent if inflation is taken into account.<sup>7</sup> China's defense expenditure in 1997 was US\$9.80 billion, which was 3.67 percent of that of the United States, 61.25 percent of that of Russia, 27.53 percent of that of Britain, 26.7 percent of that of France, 22.79 percent of that of Japan, and 56.98 percent of that of the Republic of Korea.<sup>8</sup> China lagged far behind world major powers in terms of military expenditure, so the alleged Chinese military threat did not exist that that time. On the other hand, China enjoyed a remarkable economic increase with an average annual growth rate of 9.8 percent during the two decades, exceeding the global average growth rate by 6.5 percent. By 1997, China's GDP reached US\$902 billion, ranking seventh in the world.<sup>9</sup> It is the economic resurgence that subsequently played a key role in the enhancement of China's military power, which in turn has gained international attention.

Historically, Japan has taken a similar path to facilitate military development, predicated on the large political and financial support from the United States in the postwar period. Japan's economic "miracle" allowed the State to rapidly increase its military power with a relatively smaller drain on its economy. On the contrary, it was not feasible for Japan to expand its military power on a large scale in order to carry out aggression hunting for international resources.

Third, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, China has been consistently committed to the development of economic and military power on an equal footing. In the report to the 16th Party's National Congress on November 8, 2002, CPC Secretary General Jiang Zemin pointed out: "We must uphold the principle of coordinated development of national defense and the economy and push forward the modernization of national defense and the army on the basis of economic growth."<sup>10</sup> It was the first time in the history of the Party's National Congress that this principle was formally

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<sup>7</sup> Wan, "Lun woguo xianjieduan guofang jianshe yujing jjian she xietiao fa zhan," 97.

<sup>8</sup> Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, "China's National Defense," <http://chineseculture.about.com/library/china/whitepaper/blsdefense.htm> (accessed March 19, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> "Zhongguo gaigekai fang ershianian chengguo" [Achievements made two decades after the adoption of the reforms and opening up policy in China], <http://www.scemi.com/jpkc/vb/Article/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=198> (accessed September 16, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Full text of Jiang Zemin's Report at 16th Party Congress, November 8, 2002, <http://202.200.82.45/englishonline/bjzs/whitepapers/16thCPCReport.htm> (accessed November 17, 2002).

identified as the basic guideline for national defense and military development. During the past decade, China's economy has experienced a rapid expansion, recording an annual growth rate of 10.5 percent. Its GDP and trade volume rose from the sixth and seventh place in the world respectively, to second.<sup>11</sup>

On the basis of the steady, stable, and rapid development of the economy as well as the sharp growth in financial revenues, the Chinese armed forces have enjoyed double-digit budget increases for most of the past decade. On March 4, 2011, Beijing announced a 12.7 percent increase in its military budget to approximately US\$91.5 billion.<sup>12</sup> Aircraft, ships, and various missiles have been added to the inventory. In the past year, it has been repeatedly stressed by Chinese authorities that economic power and military power should be developed in a balanced manner to achieve the unified goal in making the nation prosperous and the armed forces powerful. China has begun exploring a path of development featuring military and civilian integration.

It is safe to say that China will continue to strengthen its military power so that the country attains a reasonable and appropriate level of sustainable economic growth, which in return may exert a positive rather than a negative impact on its own economy.

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<sup>11</sup> "Speech by Wen Jiabao Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting of New Champions 2011," [http://contest.i21st.cn/article/speaking/1516\\_1.html](http://contest.i21st.cn/article/speaking/1516_1.html) (accessed September 27, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Li Zhaoxing, "2011 nian guofangfei yusuan yue wei 6011yi zeng 12.7%" [2011 military budget increased around 12.7%, 601,100 million], [sohu.com](http://news.sohu.com/20110304/n279651164.shtml), March 4, 2011, <http://news.sohu.com/20110304/n279651164.shtml> (accessed March 11, 2012).

## Complex Security Environment

Exactly one hundred years ago, the epoch-making event known as the Xinhai Revolution in China broke out, overthrowing more than 2,000 years of feudal autocratic monarchy and bringing the imperial Qing dynasty to an end. In fact, as early as the mid-nineteenth century, Western powers repeatedly launched wars of aggression and plundering against China, including the First Opium War (1840-42) by the British colonial army, the Second Opium War (1856-60) by the joint forces of Britain and France, the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) by the Japanese military, the aggressive war by the Eight-Power Allied Forces (1900), and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) fought on Chinese soil by two imperialist countries battling for supremacy. These wars resulted in large-scale economic devastation and caused the demise of the corrupt Qing dynasty. History has taught the Chinese that a nation like China can hardly survive as an independent State if it fails to defend itself from foreign invasion even if it has the highest GDP in the world.<sup>13</sup>

Nowadays, China believes that although the world is peaceful and generally stable, the international security situation is currently undergoing profound changes; international strategic competition and contradictions are intensifying, and security threats from home and abroad are becoming increasingly integrated, complex and volatile. In addition to the hot-spot issues and uncertainties prevailing in China's periphery, there are three major challenges that, if handled improperly, may pose as a severe threat to China's security and stability.

First, the "Taiwan independence" secessionist forces have been endangering the cross-strait relations and China's territorial integrity. Ever since the end of the twentieth century, China's military buildup has, to a large extent, aimed at neutralizing the "Taiwan independence" secessionist forces headed by Lee Teng-hui and his successor Chen Shui-bian, both of whom desperately pursued Taiwanese independence. Faced with the possibility of

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<sup>13</sup> Dai Yi, "Shisashiji zhongye yilai Zhongguo yu shijie geda guo guoli de bijiao" [A comparison of the comprehensive national strength of China and global major powers since the mid-nineteenth century], *Development of the Communist Party of China*, No. 8 (2008).

Taiwan separating from the mainland, the Chinese authorities decided to speed up military preparations.

The tense situation across the Taiwan Strait has, to an extent, given way to a period of relaxation following the defeat of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party in Taiwan's general election in early 2008. Nevertheless, it is easy for relations to oscillate over a long period since the political system is in a constant state of flux. This is evidenced by the fact that cross-Strait relations remained stable in 1992 once the two sides reached consensus on the One China principle. However, soon after Lee Teng-hui's statement on "special state to state relationship," the cross-Strait relations drastically shifted toward a highly dangerous situation.

The Chinese government will do its utmost to achieve peaceful reunification. At the same time, it will make sound military preparations to stop Taiwan's separation from the mainland. According to the Anti-Secession Law adopted at the National People's Congress on March 14, 2005, the state shall take non-peaceful and necessary measures to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity under three circumstances, if the "Taiwan independence" secessionist forces should act under any name or by any means to cause Taiwan's secession from China; if major incidents entailing Taiwan's secession from China should occur; or if the possibilities for a peaceful reunification should be completely exhausted.<sup>14</sup>

Second, since the end of the Cold War the United States has adhered to a dual security strategy towards China. On the one hand it seeks cooperation, and on the other it is committed to prudent hedges. In the meantime, however, there are growing concerns about China's expanding military power in the U.S., especially among the military circles. The rise of China is seen as the most notably practical and potential threat. The Quadrennial Defense Review, submitted in February 2006 by the U.S. Department of Defense, listed China as a country at a strategic crossroads and pointed out that "of the major and emerging powers, China has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional U.S. military advantages absent U.S. counter strategies."<sup>15</sup> During his first visit to Japan on October 24, 2011, U.S.

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<sup>14</sup> "Full text of Anti-Secession Law," *People's Daily Online*, March 14, 2005, [http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200503/14/eng20050314\\_176746.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200503/14/eng20050314_176746.html) (accessed March 8, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in "Pentagon plans new arms to meet rivals," Reuters, February 2, 2006, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2006-02/05/content\\_517179.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2006-02/05/content_517179.htm) (accessed

Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta was quoted as saying that “the winding down of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan marks a pivot point for the U.S. military, which must now focus on looming threats such as the rising military might of China.”<sup>16</sup>

In reality, the U.S. is expanding its military presence and strategic footprint in the Asia Pacific region. About half of U.S. marine forces have been deployed in this area; six out of its 11 aircraft carriers are permanently based in the Pacific, several attack submarines have been reassigned from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and U.S. Air Force’s most powerful tactical warplanes F-22 Raptors were deployed to Kadena Air Force Base in Japan to conduct joint training. Since 2009, the U.S. military has initiated an Air-Sea Battle Concept that envisions a conflict involving the U.S. and a major power in the Western Pacific region in the next 10 to 15 years, just as it had conceived winning a large-scale conflict against the Soviet Union under the guidance of the Air-Land Battle Theory. It is reported that a number of programs are being carried out by USPACOM, USN and USAF to enhance its joint operational abilities.

The U.S. has adopted the “Balance of Power” theory in the Asia Pacific region to hold China in check through regional partners to guarantee its dominant position in the region. For years, it emphasized reinforcement of its military alliances with Japan and other Asian nations. Even worse, in defiance of the three Sino-U.S. joint communiqués, the U.S. continues to sell weapons to Taiwan in an attempt to maintain the status quo of “no unification, no independence” that serves U.S. interests.

Third, three evil forces are posing a grave threat to China’s national security and regional stability. On June 15, 2001, when the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member States signed the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism shortly after the SCO’s founding, they officially presented a clear definition of the three evil forces: terrorism, separatism and extremism. Although seemingly different in approaches and activities, these forces have been interconnected since the very beginning, with the common goal to sabotage social stability and seek territorial separation.

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March 8, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> “U.S. military will focus on Asia, Panetta says,” Associated Press, October 24, 2011, <http://www.newsday.com/news/nation/u-s-military-will-focus-on-asia-panetta-says-1.3269659> (accessed march 8, 2012).

In terms of their ultimate objectives, the three evil forces scheme to overthrow the rule of the central government and seize power as a final political aspiration. A major part of these evil forces, the East Turkistan terrorist forces—which include the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, the Eastern Turkistan Liberation Organization, the World Uyghur Youth Congress, and the Eastern Turkistan Information Center—have made the independence of “Eastern Turkistan” their ultimate goal to separate Xinjiang from China, thereby seriously threatening China’s core national interests.

With regard to strategy, the three evil forces attempt to ignite national separatism and religious extremism by politicizing and internationalizing ethnic and religious problems. These strategies include carrying out protests in the name of human rights abuses to mislead international public opinion, as well as attending academic conferences to gain support from external forces.

As for their means of activities, the three evil forces often resort to acts of violence and terrorism. According to statistics from the Ministry of Public Security of the PRC, from 1995 to 2005 the “East Turkistan Islamic Movement” in Xinjiang instigated over 270 terrorist activities inside and outside Chinese territory, resulting in the death of more than 160 people of all ethnic groups and injuring more than 440.<sup>17</sup> The major crimes they committed have included bombings, assassinations, arsons, poisonings and assaults. The two most violent terrorist attacks in China, the March 14, 2008 riot in Tibet and the July 5, 2009 riot in Xinjiang, seriously jeopardized social stability and ethnic harmony. The former resulted in the death of 13 innocent people and an economic loss greater than RMB 300 million, while the latter led to 197 casualties.<sup>18</sup>

With the above-mentioned facts in mind, it is wholly legitimate for China to strengthen and modernize its national defense systems since it is of vital significance to its long-term development and destiny.

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<sup>17</sup> Wei Wu, Fan Xi, “Gonganbu fankongju: Dongtu shi woguo zhuyao kongbuzhuyi weixie” [Counterterrorist Bureau: East Turkistan forces is the major terrorist threat], *Beijing Youth Daily* (accessed September 12, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> “Press Conference of Xinjiang Legal Experts on July 5 Riot,” ifeng.com, [http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/special/wulumuqisaoluan/zuixbaodao/200910/1012\\_7229\\_1384851.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/special/wulumuqisaoluan/zuixbaodao/200910/1012_7229_1384851.shtml) (accessed October 12, 2009).

## Prospects for the PLA Modernization Drive

In the current information age, the PLA modernization drive remains, and will continue to be, focused on informationization with military terminology remaining popular in military articles, journal, books and seminars since years. Before proceeding further, it is necessary to define this term. According to China's Informationization Development Strategy 2006–2020 issued by the General Office of the Central Commission of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council in 2006, informationization is defined as a historical process in which information technology is used to exploit and utilize information resources, to promote exchanges of information sharing and knowledge, improve economic growth quality, and facilitate economic and social transformation.<sup>19</sup> However, this process still lacks standards and a specific definition of the term in a military context. Based on the aforementioned interpretation, I assume that military informationization can be defined as a long-term process where advanced military information technology is put to its full use to exploit and utilize military information resources, as well as to achieve exchanges of information and knowledge of the battlefield, improve combat abilities in the local wars under high-technology conditions, and facilitate the military modernization drive of the PLA.

It is commonly believed that China's interest in informationization dates back to the U.S-led victory in the first Gulf War. Some PLA experts argued that one of the key factors behind America's success in this war was due to information technologies and their total dominance within the war zone. PLA authors have published several studies on information warfare since Operation Desert Storm. It was not until September 2003 that the strategic objective of building informationized armed forces and winning an informationized war was officially put forward by the PLA.<sup>20</sup> In June 2004, the military strategy guideline shifted from "winning local wars under the conditions of modern technology, especially high technology" to "winning

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<sup>19</sup> 2006-2020 China's National Informationization Development Strategy.

<sup>20</sup> Zhang Yining et al., "Innovation and Evolvement of China's Military Strategy since the Adoption of the Opening up and Reform Policy," *Studies Times*, December 8, 2008.

local wars under conditions of informationization,"<sup>21</sup> shedding some light on the essence of high technology and the characteristics of the modern armed forces. As the most prominent keyword appearing in China's National Defense in 2004, informationization is mentioned 41 times in the white paper. More importantly, China's National Defense in 2010 and China's 12th Five Year Plan, published in March 2011, clearly states that the primary goal of accomplishing mechanization and attaining major progress in informationization by 2020 will be achieved. In the next five to ten years the PLA will develop a comprehensive strategy to reach this objective, using mechanization as the foundation and informationization as the focus.

First, profound readjustments in military structure will be given top priority. There is a tendency for many nations that seek to build informationized armed forces to set up a leading institution exclusively working on the planning, steering and coordination of informationization in a top-down manner. On June 30, 2011, the General Staff Headquarters of the PLA established an Information Technology Department by regrouping its communications department. The IT Department is directly subordinate to the General Staff Headquarters and will be in charge of the management, supervision, and integration of the information systems and resources within the PLA. At the same time, several military institutions, including the Defense Information Institute and the Air Force Early Warning Academy, will be asked to train military personnel geared for informationization.

Second, new combat units and organizations will be added to accommodate the requirements of the informationized warfare. China has already taken steps in this direction. On July 19, 2010, the PLA's first strategic information support base was established. On May 25, 2011, China's Defense Ministry confirmed the existence of a highly trained elite cyber wing of the PLA, entrusted with the tasks of defending the country from cyber attacks and firing off its own online barrages if necessary. In the coming years, as the battlefield extends to new frontiers, it is quite possible that the PLA will continue to create new types of combat units such as aerospace forces and digital forces.

Third, dramatic improvements in weaponry and equipment will be made towards a composite development of mechanization and informationization. Regarding land operations, the Army plans on developing

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

digital main battle tanks and integrated battlefield networks. Similarly, the Navy intends to construct a weapons system with new types of surface vessels, submarines, and surface attack aircraft. The Air Force will look to achieve breakthroughs in unmanned, stealthy and airborne early warning technologies. The Second Artillery Force will improve the modernization of its intercontinental ballistic missiles, which will enhance its mobility, survivability and strike capabilities. Ultimately, different platforms from different services and branches will be connected and integrated to achieve intercommunication and interoperability.

Apart from these material improvements, more efforts will be made in the innovation of theory and doctrine, in the refinement of training and education, and in the advancement of planning and management to facilitate a comprehensive transformation to an IT-based military power.

## Implications for China and the Rest of World

With the rapid rise of China's economic and military power, some western politicians and media are concerned with China's military development, and subsequently, its rising military clout that allegedly poses a threat to regional stability. An article entitled "Chinese Warship May Be Nearly Ready," published in the *New York Times* on April 7, 2011, claimed that China's military modernization efforts "have raised fears among foreign governments that China will use a more robust military for expansionist purposes or to press for regional dominance."<sup>22</sup> This observation is not uncommon; some commentators deliberately distort the truth due to specific political motivations, while others simply fail to grasp the legitimate needs and real intentions of China to increase its military power, mistakenly viewing it as a potential threat.

To explore the implications of China's rising military power, its national defense policy, and the actions taken by the PLA at home and abroad are two key factors that must to be taken into account.

In terms of defense policy, China has declared on many occasions that it has committed itself to a path of peaceful development and is dedicated to upholding world peace and common development. On March 31, 2011, the Chinese government issued a white paper on national defense, the seventh of its kind since 1998. The paper carefully explains China's defense policy, which consists of three major parts. The first is safeguarding national sovereignty and security while resisting aggression; China adopts the military strategy of active defense, featuring defense at the strategic level along with offense at the operational and tactical level, without any preemptive strike factor in nature. The second is maintaining social harmony and stability; the Chinese armed forces are engaged in and support national civilian work, as well as maintaining social stability in accordance with the law. The third is enhancing world peace and stability.

These aspects demonstrate that China harbors no evil intentions against foreign States, nor does it seek global hegemony even if it becomes stronger

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<sup>22</sup> "Chinese Warship May Be Nearly Ready," *The New York Times*, April 7, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/08/world/asia/08carrier.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/08/world/asia/08carrier.html?_r=1) (accessed March 8, 2012).

in the future. The modernization drive of its armed forces serves nothing more than maintaining national stability and international peace.

China has made it clear that its own deeds and practices are in line with an appropriate national defense policy. Domestically, the armed forces shoulder an important task to participate in and support national civilian work, including the development of the western regions of the country. The armed forces of China also act as a shock force in emergency rescue and disaster relief. On May 12, 2008, when a powerful earthquake struck China's Sichuan Province, PLA troops arrived at the affected areas within 14 minutes of the final tremors.

Internationally, China has consistently committed itself to making positive contributions to world peace by taking part in military actions under the framework of the UN. As of December 2010, China has dispatched 17,390 military personnel to 19 UN peacekeeping missions. Since December 26, 2008, when China dispatched naval vessels to participate in anti-piracy operations, there have been ten escort fleets from the PLA Navy engaged in the mission to provide protection for ships sailing in the affected region. This has been viewed by many as an indication of China's apparent willingness to take on a larger military role on the global stage.

Through policy and practice, China has demonstrated to the outside world that it will bring about peace and stability to the nation, the region, and the world. Amid all the concerns, suspicions and apprehension, it appears that China aims to take bigger steps towards a more open and transparent PLA. With this backdrop, China intends to take increasing responsibility in demonstrating what it sees as a peaceful rise, focusing on confidence and security building mechanisms to prevent current and future tensions.





## **About the Author**

Jiao Liang is an Assistant Research Fellow, World Military Studies Department, Academy of Military Science, People's Liberation Army, People's Republic of China. He was a guest researcher at ISDP from September 15 to December 12, 2012.