



# CLAWS

## Red Dragon Rising: China's White Paper Emphasises Offensive Defence

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### Military Strategy of Active Defence

China released its sixth White Paper on National Defence (2008) in January 2009. Though it is an improvement on previously published White Papers in terms of transparency, there is still considerable opacity in revealing key defence policies, and annual defence expenditure. More significantly, China's strategic outlook and its grand strategy remain shrouded in secrecy, even as the armed forces are modernising rapidly and preparing to extend China's area of influence well beyond the first and second island chain and into the Indian Ocean. Until China is more forthcoming on these issues, its iteration of a 'peaceful rise' will continue to be received with scepticism.

The Chinese leadership believes that "China's security situation has improved steadily," although China is still confronted with "long-term, complicated and diverse security threats and challenges." The White Paper cautions the Chinese people that China is facing "the superiority of the developed countries in economy, science and technology, as well as military affairs... and faces strategic manoeuvres and containment from the outside." Although, China continues to reiterate that it is pursuing a national defence policy which is purely defensive in nature, the White Paper reveals that it is working towards implementing a "military strategy of active defence," for which China has formulated strategic guidelines.

China is endeavouring to build a strong national defence through modern military forces owing to concerns regarding "the superiority of the developed countries in economy, science, technology and military affairs." While formulating its military strategy of active defence for the 21st century, Beijing is focussing on four crucial components: emphasising the prevention and deterrence of crises and wars; building hi-tech military capabilities to win local wars in conditions of 'informationisation'; enhancing the ability to counter various security threats; and, improving its military mobilisation and logistics mechanism. According to the November 2008 China Brief, the PLA is likely to accomplish the goal of mechanisation and make major progress in informationisation by 2020.

Beijing has estimated its defence expenditure for 2008 at about US \$61 billion. However, this figure is much lower than the estimate made by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). According to SIPRI, China is likely to spend a staggering \$140 billion on the People's Liberation Army (PLA), PLA Navy and PLA Air Force this year. In addition, according to the US Pentagon's 2007 estimates, China's likely defence expenditure will range between US \$97 and \$139 billion.

### Emphasis on Integrated Joint Operations

The latest White Paper selectively provides

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previously unreleased information. It indicates that the Chinese armed forces are training for integrated joint operations on future battlefields. In line with the strategic requirements of high mobility operations and three-dimensional assault, the PLA has been moving from regional defence to trans-regional mobility. It is gradually making its units small, modular and multi-functional in organisation through appropriate downsizing and structural reform. While accelerating the development of aviation, light mechanised and information counter-measure forces, it is giving priority to the development of tactical missiles, surface-to-air missiles and special operations forces, so as to increase its capabilities for land-air integrated operations, long-distance manoeuvres, rapid assault and special operations.

The PLA Navy is acquiring integrated sea-air capabilities for offshore defensive operations. While upgrading and optimising weaponry and equipment systems, the surface ship force has developed a striking force represented by new types of missile destroyers and frigates. It now possesses maritime reconnaissance, anti-ship, anti-submarine, air defence, mine-laying and other operational capabilities. The Marine Corps has developed an amphibious operational force based on armoured vehicles and is gradually enhancing its amphibious operational capabilities. In Peace Mission 2005, a joint exercise with Russia, China had practised amphibious landings. Since then, there have been concentrated efforts to optimise the logistics support system as well as improve maritime integrated support capabilities.

Laying added emphasis on the PLA Navy, the White Paper states, "In line with the off-shore defence strategy,

the navy takes informationisation as the orientation and strategic priority of its modernisation drive..." Increasingly larger numbers of Chinese naval vessels are plying in the Indian Ocean. China is developing a deep sea port for Pakistan at Gwadar and another port in Myanmar (Sittwe) that may be used for berthing facilities or upgraded to bases for the PLA Navy in future. China is also building a deep water sea port in Sri Lanka (Hambantota). The first stage of this port project is estimated to cost over \$360 million and expected to be completed by the end of 2010. Being strategically positioned, the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka would be crucial in providing Beijing with greater access to the sea lanes passing through the northern Indian Ocean and the critical Straits of Malacca.

In addition, the new Chinese naval base at Sanya, on Hainan Island, could house a large fleet of surface warships and also serve as an underwater naval base for submarines, including nuclear SSBNs. The completion of the Sanya base will allow China to extend its influence in the South China Sea and command superior naval presence closer to important sea lanes. Eventually, the PLA Navy will be able to operate and sustain itself in the northern Indian Ocean region by about 2015.

The PLA Air Force is developing integrated air-land capabilities for both offensive and defensive operations. It has opted for capital intensive air-to-air refuelling capabilities to extend the reach of its combat aircraft and strategic airlift for power projection. To meet the requirements of informationised warfare, the PLA Air Force appears to be accelerating its transition from territorial air defence to both offensive and defensive operations. In what could be termed as efforts to build itself into a modernised strategic air force, emphasis is being placed on increasing capability for carrying out reconnaissance and providing early warning, launching air strikes, and enhancing air and missile defence and strategic power projection. The PLA Air Force attaches importance to developing new types of fighters, air defence and anti-missile defence weapons and command and control automation systems. Besides, it has deployed relatively advanced computerised equipment, and air-to-air and air-to-ground precision-guided munitions (PGMs), while upgrading its electronic information systems for intelligence and early warning, command, control and communications.

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The Second Artillery Force, the Chinese equivalent of a nuclear command, is working towards building a missile system suited to informationised operations. It has acquired potent surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) for both nuclear and conventional missile strikes and is making steady headway in the construction of its battlefield system. The Second Artillery Force has created integrated data bases for field support and informationised management platforms for logistic materials and improved support systems for the survival of combatants in operational positions. It would be pertinent to mention that approximately 1,000 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) and cruise missiles are known to be deployed opposite Taiwan. Significantly, most of these SRBMs are mobile systems, which can be easily re-deployed at short notice in Tibet and other theatres.

According to the 2008 White Paper, China is also training its armed forces for military operations other than war (MOOTW), including UN peace-keeping and peace-support operations, anti-piracy missions, counter-terrorism, environmental disasters and societal unrest. In fact, Beijing regards MOOTW as an important tool for projecting national power and is scientifically devising plans for the development of MOOTW capabilities. The PLA is intensifying strategic and operational level command post training and troop training in conditions of informationisation, holding trans-regional evaluation exercises, conducting whole-unit night training and carrying out integrated exercises for logistical and equipment support. These efforts provide evidence of China's gradual move towards employing its armed forces as an instrument of statecraft, to achieve major national security objectives and to show the Chinese flag as well as mark Chinese presence around the world.

Notably, a conspicuous omission in the White Paper is the failure by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to comment on its anti-satellite (ASAT) test of January 2007—an aggressive demonstration of its technological prowess. This is in tune with a reality that for long has been an integral part of Chinese military doctrine—denial of information, strategic deception and the achievement of psychological surprise. The Chinese find information warfare (IW) extremely attractive as they view it as an asymmetric tool that will ultimately enable them to overcome their relative backwardness in military hardware.

In Chinese thinking, IW (*xinxi zhanzheng*) presents

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a level playing field for prevailing upon the adversary in future wars. In fact, during a US Senate Armed Services Committee testimony on 27 January 2009, Secretary of Defence Robert Gates, identified the threat of Chinese military build-up by stating, “The areas of greatest concern are Chinese investments and growing capabilities in cyber and anti-satellite warfare, anti-air and anti-ship weaponry, submarines and ballistic missiles.”

## Relations with Taiwan

The White Paper states that Beijing's threat perception in the Taiwan Straits has been “greatly reduced.” Notably, the Chinese national security strategy, including its concepts of warfare and capability upgradation, goes “well beyond” meeting challenges posed by the reunification of Taiwan and the integration of Tibet. In what should be read in correlation to the broader concept of Chinese national integration, the White Paper highlights confrontations specifically on three fronts: Taiwan, East Turkistan and Tibet. It further claims that the attempts of the separatist forces to seek “*de jure* Taiwan independence” have been thwarted and the situation across the Taiwan Straits has taken a “significantly positive turn.”

These developments could well be attributed to the events since the election of Ma Ying-jeou as president of Taiwan in 2008 as he has rejected the push for independence by Taiwan and seeks closer ties to Mainland China, even though he opposes unification with it. Beijing believes that cross-strait relations have improved because the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Kuomintang (KMT) have resumed negotiations on the basis of the 1992 Consensus. However, the \$6.5 billion arms sales package to Taiwan sanctioned by the Bush Administration in October 2008 came in as a spoiler and led

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Beijing to suspend its military exchange programme with the United States. China categorically condemns continuing US arms sales to Taiwan as violation of the principles established in the three Sino-US joint communiqués. Beijing has further cautioned the US that continuing arms sales to Taiwan would seriously harm Sino-US relations as well as peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits. Significantly, Taiwan's official response to the 2008 White Paper has been rather muted and the Taiwanese Defence Ministry has avoided making a public statement on it.

## Conclusion

As China prepares for its 60th anniversary as a republic in October 2009, the armed forces appear to be receiving enhanced political guidance regarding their responsibilities and missions. The PLA's modernisation drive is intended to contribute militarily to enhancing China's comprehensive national power. It is also expected to ensure that China can fight and hold its own against a Western Coalition with armed forces trained and equipped to revolution in military affairs (RMA) standards through the practice of 'paralysis' or 'acupuncture' warfare in the electronic or cyberspace domain.

Information warfare will be crucial in the opening phases of a war aimed at the reunification of Taiwan and in a future border conflict with India as it will be important to knock out the adversary's communications infrastructure by cyber as well as physical means. The Indian armed forces should also expect, and be prepared for, a rain of SRBMs as a prelude to a future Chinese offensive in the Himalayas. Land forces operations will be closely integrated with accurate air-to-ground

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strikes, with PGMs forming the bulk of the incoming ammunition. India should also be prepared for troops being transported by helicopters for operations in rear areas as China is emphasising air assault capabilities.

China's growing power and influence in Asia poses a strategic challenge to India. The Chinese armed forces are well ahead of their Indian counterparts in many areas of defence modernisation and the gap is slowly becoming unbridgeable. China's defence budget is growing annually between 16 and 18 per cent while India's defence budget is now less than 2.0 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is possible that 15 to 20 years from now, China may attempt to force a military solution to the territorial dispute with India after settling the Taiwan issue. In case the present trend of inadequate allocations for defence modernisation and delays in decision-making continues, India may be forced to accept an unequal settlement due to its military weakness.



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*Views expressed in this Issue Brief are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the Centre for Land Warfare Studies.*



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