

China's Concept of Military Security

Distinctions and Priorities

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DOI: 10.31278/1810-6374-2020-18-2-188-216

Abstract

This article examines China's military concept of national security, its basic notions and main aspects of its implementation.

The study begins with a review of China's national interests, including the concept of 'core interest,' threats to its national security and the main goals of maintaining it. The analysis focuses on the basic concepts of warfare included in China's military planning: local and limited war, limited war under high-tech conditions, and informationized warfare. Other concepts of China's military strategy are also considered, such as "new historic missions" and "active strategic counterattack on external borders." It is noted that China's military thought in the late 20th and early 21st centuries has distinctively been focused on high technologies and professionalism of military personnel. Progress in this field has been largely triggered by the continuing worldwide "revolution in military affairs" and the events taking place in the international military-political arena, such as military operations by forward-deployed forces of the United States and its allies. The article also examines the main tendencies in the evolution of China's military doctrine under Xi Jinping: setting the protection of China's interests

abroad as the priority task of the People's Liberation Army, emphasizing the PLA's role in achieving the Chinese Dream, and China's unwillingness to engage in strategic rivalry that is being imposed on it by the United States. In this vein the article discusses two national defense strategies devised under Xi Jinping, as well as the current state of China's nuclear policy.

Keywords: China's national security, China's military policy, China's core interests, informationized warfare, revolution in military affairs, the Chinese Dream, local war, asymmetric potential

National security concepts are of great interest for international relations studies. While having some outstanding achievements in the economy and foreign policy to its credit, China remains vulnerable to external and internal threats. The former include a slowdown in economic growth, rising unemployment, problems with ethnic minorities, an aging population amid the absence of proper retirement benefits, etc. Also, China lives in a challenging security environment. Many of its neighbors share the historical experience of military clashes or unresolved territorial disputes with China. The United States—the dominant military power in the Asia-Pacific region—views rising China as a challenge to its security. The emerging security threats to China and the search for an adequate response to them are largely caused by the current globalization processes.

China's economic growth, which followed its integration into the global economy and international institutions, has created favorable conditions for a technological breakthrough in the military sphere. China's armed forces—the People's Liberation Army—are of key importance for ensuring national security. The growth of the country's economic and military power has significantly increased the role of its armed forces on the international scene and in domestic affairs alike: besides protecting China's territory the PLA is currently tasked to ensure the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (Shitov, 2019). Naturally, the growth of China's military capabilities makes the international community nervous, causing the feeling of uncertainty and mistrust.

The transformation and modernization of China's armed forces has a long history. In this regard, it is of interest to trace the evolution of the key concepts of the Chinese military security strategy and its connection with the general national security strategy and protection of the country's national interests in a broader sense. The present research is based on the study of doctrinal documents, that is, the official position of the Chinese leadership on world affairs with regard to national security, the key principles of modern warfare, and the priority objectives of China's military modernization.

TASKS OF MAINTAINING NATIONAL SECURITY

In their book, *China's Search for Security*, Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell present threats to China's national security in four concentric circles, or "Rings" (Nathan and Scobell, 2012, pp. 4-7). The First Ring of security concerns is the entire territory of China, where—the Chinese government believes—the people are subject to threats of internal instability and foreign influences, as well as maritime areas which Beijing claims but does not control. These are islands in the South China and East China seas, including Taiwan; and also Tibet and Xinjiang. The Second Ring of security concerns includes China's twenty immediately adjacent countries. With some of them China was occasionally at war in recent history (Russia, India, Pakistan, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam), some are politically and economically unstable, almost all of them had—and some still have—territorial disputes with China, and many have cultural and ideological disagreements with it. In addition, the Second Ring includes the United States as its mighty military and diplomatic presence in China's immediate neighborhood (military alliances and partnerships with China's neighbors, patrolling of the South China and East China seas, and the giant military base on Guam) poses threats to China's security. The United States' strong positions in the region allow it to exert direct military pressure on China, while Beijing lacks the capabilities to retaliate. The Third Ring consists of six regional systems, each comprising countries with overlapping foreign-policy interests. These are Northeast Asia, Oceania, continental Southeast

Asia, maritime Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia. The U.S. has significant presence in all of these regions and in all of them there are countries that find China's growing power very worrisome. Some have security problems directly affecting China, such as North Korea's nuclear program, Islamic fundamentalism, etc. The Fourth Ring embraces the rest of the world, including Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and North and South America. In this circle, China pursues such benefits as energy and other natural resources, markets for its products and investment opportunities, and diplomatic support in handling its internal problems (Taiwan, Tibet and, to a lesser extent, Xinjiang) and for its stance on international issues. "China's weight in this wider global arena is enhanced by its demographic and geographic size, its trajectory of economic growth, its independence of the U.S., and its status of a permanent member of the UN Security Council."

The notion of 'core interest' (*hexin liyi*) is at the heart of China's current concept of national security. In the Chinese media, this term has been consistently used since 2004 in reference to the protection of China's sovereignty (Jinghao Zhou, 2019, p. 33). In 2009, Dai Bingguo, State Councilor overseeing China's foreign affairs, described the concept as follows: "China's number one core interest is to maintain its fundamental system and state security; next is state sovereignty and territorial integrity; and third is the continued stable development of the economy and society" (Cheng, 2018, p. 25). Later this term began to be mentioned far more often (Xiaodi Ye, p. 79). The 2011 White Paper, entitled *China's Peaceful Development*, also mentioned the unification of the state, that is, the reunification of mainland China and Taiwan, among the country's core interests (Peaceful Development, 2011). However, the concept of core national interest has not been defined clearly enough yet. As many other doctrinal concepts, its content changes with the passage of time.

Of course, priority national interests had been mentioned in the Chinese political discourse before the term 'core interest' took root. For example, in the 1980s, then Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping reiterated in several important speeches that economic growth was the central task of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and government. In the

1990s, priority was given to openness and participation in international institutions, with a view to alleviating apprehensions from the rapid growth of the Chinese economy and preventing an escalation of the inherent ideological conflict between China and the U.S.-led liberal world. Recently, this approach was modified to the “striving for achievement” (*fenfa youwei*). Xiaodi Ye (2019) writes: “At this stage, China’s objective is more than material capability accumulation and sharing its increasing dividends. What China currently wants, in fact, is to be a widely recognized and respected great power with extensive prestige and influence.”

Tracing the transition of China’s national interests, he further notes that some scholars posit China’s core interest as a by-product of its rising power, above all in the power structure in the Asia-Pacific region. The growth of China’s economic, diplomatic and military power is a major factor for the redistribution of power in the region. This leads to the territorial expansion of China’s key interests, together with the desire to protect its interests abroad so that it could be able to influence foreign-policy environment, making it more favorable for itself. At the same time, the expansion of China’s national interests is limited by its interactions with other countries. Historical factors, too, influence the formation of China’s national interests. This is primarily “the humiliation and salvation of the 19th century” that “produced a strong sense of national insecurity” and became the main reason for the rise of Chinese nationalism. The surge of nationalist sentiment has had certain effects on China’s behavior on the international scene, but, as Xiaodi Ye rightfully notes, the role of nationalist sentiment should not be exaggerated.

In the current debate on this topic opinions are voiced that China’s core interests should include only internal issues, while territorially they should incorporate at least the “first chain of islands” and the Korean Peninsula (Jinghao Zhou, p. 33). It should be borne in mind that internal issues may include territories not universally recognized as China’s sovereign domains. However, experts and official documents agree that China should under no circumstances compromise on its core interests (Jinghan Zeng et al, p. 246).

For some experts, China's core interests also embrace such regions as the Middle East because it affects the economic well-being of the Chinese people (Jinghan Zeng et al, p. 260). According to another widespread view, the list of core interests should include "international strategic access" to regions, resources and communication lines that are most important for China, including land and water territories within the "first chain of islands" (Jinghan Zeng et al, p. 260). To protect its interests in these areas, the leadership is recommended to build up and upgrade the Navy.

The United States constitutes the main external threat to China's core interests, if only because its military assistance to Taiwan upsets China's efforts to secure one of its most important, officially recognized core interests.

In general, as follows from expert assessments and doctrinal documents, China has three critical tasks concerning its national security: 1) maintaining the territorial integrity and unity of the state; 2) preserving state power in the hands of the Communist Party and, consequently, providing conditions for the country's further economic development and stability; 3) ensuring a favorable international environment.

As far as the first task is concerned, preventing the proclamation of Taiwan's independence is critically important for China. In terms of the military dimension of response to this threat, the main task is to ensure the possibility of taking over Taiwan by force, even though such a move is considered inappropriate from the foreign policy point of view. China makes consistent efforts to integrate the island economically while at the same time isolating it diplomatically. Although China enjoys an overwhelming military superiority in the Taiwan Strait, the United States' mighty military presence in the region plays—and apparently will continue to play—a key role in maintaining the status quo, provided the U.S. continues to support Taiwan diplomatically and militarily. So, the military risks of taking over Taiwan by force remain too great.

Protecting the state borders and ensuring the safety of the immediate environment is an equally important task. China shares its land borders with fourteen states. In the west, China enjoys the

benefits of convenient overland trade routes connecting it with the Middle East and Central Asia, both rich in natural resources. With regard to maritime borders, the main tasks facing China are the safety of shipping and prevention of an unfavorable international situation where China might find itself surrounded by unfriendly states.

As for the second task, the economic development has smoothed out potential disagreements within the country, thus ensuring the legitimacy of the ruling regime and the stability of the Communist Party's political power. To achieve this goal, since proclamation of the policy of "reform and openness," China has sought proactive engagement in world economic processes. Subsequently, this policy enabled China to increase its investment in other countries. Chinese private companies obtained the right to put their securities out to tender on world exchanges and to export capital. The world's largest companies began to relocate their production facilities to China, where labor costs are much lower. Beijing embarked on active scientific and technical cooperation with a number of countries, paving the way for labor and student migration from China.

However, the policy of "reform and openness" has yielded mixed results. On the one hand, globalization processes and China's inclusion in the world economy contributed to China's economic boom, thus ensuring the legitimacy of the Communist Party. On the other hand, the same processes led to increased demands and pressure on the authorities from various segments of Chinese society. It is worth mentioning the rise of protest movement in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and Tibet, where "openness" led to political activism and support for respective groups from abroad. Negative processes in the global economy also directly affect the Chinese economic system as was borne out by the 2008-2009 global financial and economic crisis and the current "trade war" between China and the United States. Also, China's accelerated economic development proceeded amid a very negligent attitude to the environment, causing air and water pollution and other ecological problems. This, in turn, may trigger popular discontent with the Communist Party's policies.

At present, the Chinese leadership is extensively using nationalist rhetoric to boost its prestige and legitimacy in the eyes of people. China positions itself as a country that is keen to correct the mistakes of the past that led to its “national humiliation.” Special emphasis is placed on achieving and maintaining the country’s sovereignty and independence, because disregard for both led to foreign invasions and the weakening of the country in general. A clear parallel is drawn between ensuring internal security and the strength of the ruling regime, on the one hand, and threats to external security, on the other (Jingdong Yuan, 2013, p. 148). The main theme here is the “century of humiliation” (from the beginning of the First Opium War in 1840 to the emergence of the People’s Republic of China in 1949). At the same time, China seeks to secure the greatest freedom of action, especially in military terms. It therefore refrains from participation in military alliances and other associations that impose stringent mutual obligations with regard to security issues. One of the consequences of this approach is reliance on its own production, including military equipment and machinery wherever appropriate. In addition, the country’s leadership traditionally adheres to a China-centric view of the international order in Asia.

As for ensuring the desirable international situation, China’s efforts changed depending on the lineup of forces in world politics. After the Soviet Union’s demise China had to be integrated into the U.S.-led unipolar system. This period saw rapid economic growth, which enabled China to fundamentally upgrade its military capabilities. China’s growing potential ran against U.S. policy of retaining world hegemony and preventing the emergence of a potential rival in the international arena. In the meantime, the Asia-Pacific countries were getting increasingly concerned about China’s growing capabilities. Beijing responded by demonstrating its wish to get integrated into the U.S.-led international system, commitment to peace, and willingness to cooperate with neighboring countries. As a result, China was promptly granted membership in the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO. At the regional level, China actively participated in the creation of the ASEAN+3 club of countries. In 2002, a project was launched to

establish the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area. However, most of the countries in the region still felt, albeit to different extents, a threat to their security coming from China's growth. This explains why they opted for a strategy of minimizing costs and maximizing opportunities to secure their interests. The situation is complicated by the fact that most of the large countries in the region practice formal or informal security cooperation with the United States.

After the global financial and economic crisis of 2008-2009, China began to position itself as a strong and self-confident power which could cope with the negative consequences of the crisis. Between 2010 and 2017, China's GDP doubled. Its defense spending almost doubled, reaching one-third of U.S. defense spending in real terms (Xiaodi Ye, 2019, p. 97). Under the Obama administration, the policy of maintaining U.S. dominance continued through the "Pivot to Asia" strategy. Security cooperation between the United States and its allies and partners strengthened. China has its greatest concerns over bilateral U.S.-Japanese and U.S.-South Korean missile defense cooperation, as well as U.S.-Vietnamese cooperation which keeps growing notwithstanding the dialogue between the ruling Communist parties of China and Vietnam.

Today, China's foreign policy strategy combines cooperation with peripheral countries and efforts to make them certain about China's peaceful intentions, on the one hand, and with counteraction to U.S. pressure, on the other. This resulted in further rapprochement between Russia and China to a point of strategic partnership. The One Belt One Road initiative has become the most ambitious demonstration of cooperation with neighboring countries. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, created jointly with Russia, has contributed to broadening security and economic cooperation. China's relations with major neighbor are now built according to three models: avoidance of conflicts and confrontation (Japan), mutual respect (India), and quasi-allied relations (Russia) (Xiaodi Ye, 2019, p. 98).

Interaction with the United States and other major powers is based on several concepts, such as "New Type of Great Power Relations" and "A Human Community with Shared Destiny." China's vision of

the international agenda is promoted largely through participation in international organizations. This enables it to increase awareness of the current international situation; enhance the international recognition of the Chinese authorities; internationalize its internal problems (for example, Uyghur terrorism); make profitable deals and agreements; gain greater leverage in relations with unfriendly countries, including the United States; and skillfully employ diplomacy in handling controversies, its frequent argument being the need for taking collective action (Samson, 2012, p. 66). Therefore, in international organizations, China always acts from the standpoint of multipolarity and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. This seems to be the most difficult task for China to achieve, given the scale of U.S. military and economic power. This is particularly true of the Asia-Pacific region where the United States has worked hard to build a favorable international order (the so-called “hub-and-spoke system”) by concluding military alliances, deploying military contingents, providing nuclear guarantees, concluding trade agreements, and rendering military and humanitarian assistance. As a result, the post-war international order in the region grew and matured on the recognition of U.S. dominance over most of the countries, which enjoyed—to different degrees—both U.S. military protection and access to U.S. markets and technologies.

China seeks to change this state of affairs through general measures by building up its economic and military potential, concrete efforts to create alternative international institutions and limit the U.S. role in existing international organizations, and diplomatic maneuvers by enticing certain countries to take its side in economic and foreign policy matters. The fact that the U.S. key allies in the region are dependent on China economically plays into Beijing's hands, although they try to balance out their foreign economic and diplomatic ties. Indonesia and Malaysia have been most successful in this respect. Therefore, U.S. allies and partners are unlikely to sacrifice their security and internal stability, even if they find themselves embroiled in conflicts with China on the U.S. side, especially if the U.S. does not provide proper foreign policy support (Jingdong Yuan, 2013, p. 11). Open confrontation between

Beijing and Washington in the region began in the early 2010s, when the United States embarked on its “Pivot to Asia” strategy.

With Xi Jinping’s rise to power China has increasingly positioned itself as a global power with significant interests abroad and intention to consistently uphold them further on. Speaking at the 19th Communist Party Congress Xi stated: “China will continue to play its part as a major and responsible country, take an active part in reforming and developing the global governance system, and keep contributing Chinese wisdom and strength to global governance.” Also, he said: “China will never pursue development at the expense of others’ interests, but nor will China ever give up its legitimate rights and interests. No one should expect us to swallow anything that undermines our interests. China pursues a national defense policy that is in nature defensive. China’s development does not pose a threat to any other country. No matter what stage of development it reaches, China will never seek hegemony or engage in expansion” (Xi Jinping, 2017). Achieving the international community’s recognition of this status and building equal relations with other great powers on the principle of multipolarity has become one of the main topics on the Chinese international agenda. This foreign policy concept was termed ‘New Type of Great Power Relations.’ Now China is well aware that some countries will be looking at it with caution and seeking to ensure their own interests and uphold their own security, while minimizing risks as much as possible.

CHINA’S STRATEGY OF MAINTAINING MILITARY SECURITY

Speaking at a meeting of the National Security Commission in 2014, Xi Jinping said that security was a prerequisite for development, and that only a rich country could afford to have strong armed forces capable of ensuring the security of its development (Raik et al., 2018, p. 28). The 2015 National Defense Strategy states that “without a strong military, a country can be neither safe nor strong” (Military Strategy, 2015).

The main official sources of China’s military doctrine are defense strategies, or “white papers” published every two years. In addition, more information on this subject can be found in reports of the

Communist Party's National Congress and the National People's Congress.

After Deng Xiaoping came to power, China's military doctrine began to evolve rapidly. The doctrine of local and limited war heralded the first serious departure from the doctrinal views espoused by Mao Zedong. The "active defense" concept was preserved only in very general terms. The new doctrine postulated low probability of a new world war, while stressing the possibility of limited armed conflicts. The main factor contributing to such conflicts was the technological gap between major powers and those lagging behind (Singh, 2016, p. 93). The main types of limited conflicts were border clashes, conflicts over disputed marine areas, and actions by separatists and extremists. For the first time, considerable attention was paid to the need for developing the Navy.

Under Jiang Zemin, the doctrine of local and limited warfare was further transformed into a "strategy of limited war under high-tech conditions" (Kamennov, 2007). It was assumed that such limited military clashes would be fleeting, and their outcome would be determined shortly. Therefore, instead of enticing the enemy deep into the territory of China, it is more preferable to employ a selective deep strike (*zongshen daji*). In military planning, the key role was assigned to science and high technology. The "war zone campaign" (*zhanqu zhanyi*) concept was described as the basic one. Great importance was attached to joint operations by various armed forces, with ground forces not necessarily playing the leading role. The main task of the armed forces in defending China's territory was concentration of forward forces and weapons in key areas for suppressing the enemy. PLA units were to be highly mobile and ready for redeployment within the territory of China. "Deep strikes" were supposed to be delivered using ballistic and cruise missiles, long-range artillery and aviation (primarily for airlifting manpower). In practice, such combat operations required automated command and control systems, streamlined logistics and support systems, an electronic warfare potential, etc. By and large, the main provisions of this doctrine remain relevant today. During this time, the PLA saw the largest-ever reduction in personnel.

At the beginning of the 21st century, with the advent of high technologies, the limited war concept was replaced by the concept of informationized warfare. According to some experts, this doctrine is only an improvement and addition to the previous one, and not a fundamentally new strategy in its own right (Singh, 2016, p.100). It emerged partly due to the discourse on the revolution in military affairs, as well as the analysis of U.S. and NATO military operations at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. The doctrine was based on the postulate that the digitization of control systems entails both advantages and risks, for it allows less developed countries to asymmetrically exploit enemy weaknesses. In addition, it was assumed that China could afford to develop information technology in order to prevent more developed countries from gaining advantages in this regard. So, this doctrine for the first time, albeit not directly, presented the United States and its allies as an enemy. As in the previous strategy, it was assumed that the potential threat would most likely come from the Western Pacific and the eastern coast of China. The doctrine emphasized, in particular, the need for further modernization of the command and control system, as well as the importance of military exercises for practical interaction between different arms and services. According to this doctrine, the most important role in potential conflicts would belong to operations in cyberspace. Experts identify, and the doctrine stipulates, six main types of hostilities: propaganda war; destruction of enemy manpower and materiel with high-accuracy long-range weapons; disinformation of the enemy; electronic warfare; combat operations involving computer networks; and hacker attacks aimed at penetrating the enemy's cyberspace (Yoshihara, 2001, pp.15-18). One of the most effective types of military operations was the physical destruction of enemy command and control centers, because such a decapitating strike would be the quickest way to end the war. In addition, much attention was paid to the development of space and anti-space capabilities and operations not only in the military, but also in civilian computer networks. Apart from command and control systems, considerable attention was paid to the ability to monitor enemy actions.

In China's doctrinal documents, the concept of informationized warfare has been mentioned since 2004, alongside the concept of informationization, which implies the development of information, electronic, digital and computer technologies. The 2004 defense strategy states that the key change in world military theory and practice that improves the armed forces' combat readiness is the transition from mechanization to informationization (White Paper, 2004). Asymmetric operations, isolated from each other, and non-linear operations become an important part of modern warfare. The document also names the informationization of the armed forces as the main task of the PLA's modernization. The 2008 defense strategy set deadlines for the corresponding modernization: "2010—creation of the basis for reform; 2020—achievement of general progress along the main modernization guidelines; 2050—achievement of the strategic goal of creating informationized armed forces capable of successfully operating in informationized wars" (Kamenov, 2010, pp. 7-8). The 2010 White Paper summed up the first results of the modernization (White Paper, 2010).

It is also necessary to mention "the historic missions of the armed forces in the new century and the new phase," which added some non-traditional aspects of security to the Chinese military strategy. Hu Jintao formulated them in 2004 as follows: "The army should provide important force guarantee for the party in consolidating its ruling status, provide strong security guarantee for safeguarding the important strategic opportunity period in national development, and provide effective strategic backing for safeguarding national interests, and play an important role in preserving world peace and promoting common development" (cited by Mulvenon, 2009, p.3). The 2012 defense strategy emphasized the use of the armed forces in peacetime and formulated the concept of military operations other than war. In particular, it was stated that the Chinese armed forces are actively involved in and contribute to the economic and social development of China and carry out tasks related to emergency rescue operations, response to natural disasters, and the fight against terrorism. Also, it was said that the PLA would "strengthen overseas operational capabilities, such as emergency

response and rescue, merchant vessel protection at sea and evacuation of Chinese nationals, and provide reliable security support for China's interests overseas" (White Paper, 2012). This can also include China's participation in UN-sponsored peacekeeping missions and operations to protect the freedom of shipping in the Gulf of Aden.

China's allegedly existing concept of blocking access to and sealing off a certain zone (anti-access/area denial, or A2/AD) deserves special mention. It should be noted that the term A2/AD is used primarily in the United States to assess the ability of U.S. forces to overcome the corresponding capabilities of the enemy. In China, the closest term is 'active strategic counterattack at the external frontiers,' which is rarely found in literature. It is one of the derivatives of the active defense strategy. The key scenario for applying this tactic is a conflict in the Taiwan Strait in which the PLA's task is to delay the arrival of the main contingent of U.S. forces in the conflict area as much as possible until the Chinese forces arrive there and get ready for defense. Proactive actions are important for preventing the creation of a foothold for U.S. military intervention. According to experts, this is one of the main lessons that China learned from Operation Desert Storm (Singh, 2016, p. 118). As regards the technical component, the concept is based primarily on advanced means of monitoring the enemy, including electronic and satellite surveillance systems, as well as on modern missile weapons, including anti-ship ballistic missiles and submarines (Singh, 2016, p. 118).

In general, it should be noted that Chinese military thought in the late 20th and early 21st centuries placed emphasis on high technology and professionalism of the armed forces. Further "world revolution in military affairs" and events taking place on the international military-political scene, such as military operations by forward-deployed armed forces of the United States and its allies, were the main engines of progress in this field. A thorough analysis of these military operations allows one to make several conclusions. Firstly, they have shown high efficiency of information technologies and high-accuracy long-range weapons and other means that help avoid direct contact with the enemy. High-accuracy weapons include unmanned

aerial vehicles (UAV), which were used for various purposes, including reconnaissance. Secondly, command posts and communication lines have proved vulnerable to modern means of warfare. The devastating effects of the destruction of such infrastructures were more than obvious. Thirdly, these military operations have demonstrated the capabilities of joint actions by the armed forces, coordinated with the help of information technologies, including the space component, for example, reconnaissance and navigation satellites. In particular, air support played a major role in U.S. military operations on the ground.

The main innovations introduced in the military strategy under Xi Jinping were, first, enhancing the protection of China's interests abroad, understood as the security of "energy and resources, strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs), as well as institutions, personnel and assets abroad," and, second, ensuring the interests of China in "new domains," which primarily means outer space and cyberspace (Military Strategy, 2015). Foreign interests are economic by and large. Their expansion naturally results from growing trade, greater dependence on oil supplies from abroad and soaring foreign investment, and the number of Chinese citizens abroad.

Control of the country's armed forces has also undergone reform. In 1983, China established the RPC Central Military Commission which, together with the Central Military Commission of the Communist Party's Central Committee, functions as the supreme state body governing the country's armed forces. The Communist Party and the state perform parallel functions in controlling the armed forces. A number of new structures have been created within the framework of the RPC Central Military Commission. Of key importance to the modernization of the PLA's armaments are the Equipment Development Department and the Science and Technology Commission. The latter largely borrows the experience of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency of the U.S. Department of Defense (DARPA), especially with regard to interaction with civilian companies and universities.

Instead of seven military districts, five theater commands were created: Northern, Southern, Western, Eastern, and Central.

Under Xi Jinping, two new armed services were created. In February 2016, the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force was formed on the basis of the Second Artillery Corps, and in December 2015 the Strategic Support Force was established. The latter has incorporated departments which were subordinated to the General Staff and engaged in intelligence, network operations and operations in cyberspace. Also, this force is in charge of China's military space activities and electronic warfare equipment. They also protect critical information infrastructure.

In recent years, great importance has been attached to the Communist Party's work in the ranks of the armed forces and to increasing the CPC's control over the PLA.

Even though it has achieved significant progress in reforming the armed forces, the PLA continues to lag behind the leading armies of the world in terms of information, hardware and the mobility of troops, as well as the level of personnel training.

The change of military reform priorities entailed personnel reduction in the armed forces, especially the ground forces, conversion of military enterprises, and reorganization of military infrastructure, especially in the central regions of the country, to meet civilian needs. By 1991, the strength of the People's Liberation Army had been reduced from 4.5 million to 3 million. In 2012, there were 2.2 million officers and men on active duty. In 2015, the task was set to reduce PLA strength by another 300,000. Changing personnel proportions in various types of armed services and branches was one of the aims. It is supposed to increase the share of Air Force and Navy personnel and to bring the share of ground troops to less than 50 percent of the PLA's overall strength.

CHINA'S DEFENSE STRATEGY UNDER XI JINPING

To understand China's current defense policies, it makes sense to dwell in more detail on the 2015 and 2019 national defense strategies.

Section I of the 2015 Military Strategy, devoted to national security mentions "historic changes in the balance of power, global governance structure, Asia-Pacific geo-strategic landscape, and international competition in the economic, scientific, technological, and military

fields.” One of the key features of the Chinese military strategy is a generally positive description of the security situation in the modern world and its key features, such as peace, development and striving for mutually beneficial cooperation. This document was no exception. The main threats are hegemonism, power politics, and neo-interventionism. The doctrine also mentions terrorist activities and ethnic, religious, border and territorial disputes; an immediate and potential risk of local wars remains. As for threats from individual countries, the doctrine points to the strengthening of U.S. military presence, Japan's attempts to revise the security system that emerged after World War II, and “provocative actions” by adjacent countries to militarize illegally occupied reefs and islands. Referring to Taiwan, the same section says that the unification of China is an inevitable component of “national rejuvenation.”

Section II of the 2015 Strategy, which describes the PLA's missions and strategic tasks, says that building strong military forces is an integral part of the Chinese Dream. It states that China's armed forces will “unswervingly adhere to the principle of the CPC's absolute leadership” and “work to build themselves into a people's military that follows the CPC's commands.”

Section V, devoted to “preparation for military struggle,” focuses on preparing for operations using information systems. It was planned to pay special attention to the creation of “an integrated joint operational system in which all elements are seamlessly linked and various operational platforms perform independently and in coordination.” In addition, it was planned to “strengthen the building of the systems of reconnaissance, early-warning and command and control, develop medium- and long-range precision strike capabilities.” Much attention is paid to “maintaining constant combat readiness” and the “strategic importance of combat training in realistic conditions,” and intensifying “training in complex electro-magnetic environments.”

Section VI, devoted to military and security cooperation, proclaims the intention to raise the level of military relations with European counterparts, and continue the traditional friendly military ties with their African, Latin American, and South Pacific counterparts. Among

the priority international organizations are the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD), Jakarta International Defense Dialogue (JIDD), and the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS).

“China’s National Defense in the New Era” (2019) is a kind of response to a number of U.S. official documents issued in 2018-2019. First of all, the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy, as well as the Defense Intelligence Agency report on the military power of China in 2019 and the annual report to Congress on the military power of China in 2019. Technology surprise and the growing technological generation gap are mentioned among the key risks.

The document says that in the current international situation, China has a unique strategic opportunity for development. At the same time, it is argued that the modern world is undergoing profound transformation, which is seen, in particular, in the movement of the world system towards multilateralism (“a human community with shared destiny”), the strengthening of the developing countries, economic globalization, and information society. The authors of the strategy note that the PLA’s greater potential makes a direct contribution to global stability. Along with positive factors, some negative factors are mentioned, such as increased rivalry between major powers, the collapse of the arms control system, greater non-traditional security threats, and the spread of terrorism and extremism.

In addition, the paper stresses the growing international military rivalry which is evolving towards informationized warfare hand in hand with the development of high-tech weapons, such as long-range precision, intelligent, stealthy or unmanned weaponry and equipment.

The 2019 Strategy for the first time emphasizes the idea that the U.S. is in pursuit of absolute military superiority, which is most destructive for the international order and strategic stability.

Excerpts from the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy published by the Trump administration are cited as an illustration.

As for the situation in the Asia-Pacific region, Chinese military strategies also describe it in a positive way. They reiterate that the so-

called disputed territories in the South China and East China seas are “inalienable parts of the Chinese territory.” The 2019 document assesses the situation in the South China Sea more positively than the previous military strategy did. For the first time, it is openly stated that “China exercises its national sovereignty to build infrastructure and deploy necessary defensive capabilities on the islands and reefs in the South China Sea.” The Asia-Pacific region section also stresses the need to maintain and strengthen China’s naval potential.

Japan is traditionally accused of illegally expanding its military capabilities and attempts to revise the international order that took shape in the region after World War II. Despite concerns over the deployment of the THAAD anti-ballistic missile system in South Korea, the 2019 document assesses the situation on the peninsula more positively than the previous strategy. “The fight against separatists is becoming more acute. The Taiwan authorities, led by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), stubbornly stick to ‘Taiwan independence’ and refuse to recognize the 1992 Consensus, which embodies the one-China principle,” the paper says.

There is a traditional reference to Chinese-Russian strategic partnership and its importance of maintaining strategic stability in the world: “Russia is strengthening its nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities for strategic containment, and striving to safeguard its strategic security space and interests.”

As for the development priorities of the Chinese military potential, it is based on the principle of “active defense,” which is described in the 2019 document in these words: “It keeps to the stance that ‘we will not attack unless we are attacked, but we will surely counterattack if attacked’, places emphasis on both containing and winning wars, and underscores the unity of strategic defense and offense at operational and tactical levels” (National Defense, 2019, p.8).

A confirmation of the commitment to the policy of no first use of nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances is a mandatory attribute of the Chinese military strategy.

It is proclaimed that “great progress has been made in the Revolution in Military Affairs” (RMA) with Chinese characteristics.

However, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has yet to complete the task of mechanization, and is in urgent need of improving its informationization.... The PLA still lags far behind the world's leading militaries (3, p.6). In general, at the current stage, it is planned "to comprehensively advance the modernization of military theory, organizational structure, military personnel, and weaponry and equipment in step with the modernization of the country and basically complete the modernization of national defense and the military by 2035" (National Defense, 2019, p.10). In addition to the traditional tasks of the armed forces, the 2019 Strategy emphasizes that of safeguarding "national political security, the people's security and social stability" (3, p.6). Unlike the 2015 document, the current strategy says that the Chinese armed forces are expected to "oppose and contain Taiwan independence and to crack down on the proponents of separatist movements for the independence of Tibet and the creation of East Turkistan."

Compared to previous documents, the strategy has become more ideological and pays more attention to the personality of the Chinese leader. In particular, the 2019 document says: "To strengthen China's national defense and military in the new era, it is imperative to comprehensively implement Xi Jinping's thinking on strengthening the military, thoroughly deliver on Xi Jinping's thinking on military strategy, continue to enhance the political loyalty of the armed forces..." (National Defense, 2019, p. 9).

China will never seek hegemony or spheres of influence (National Defense, 2019, p.7).

Much attention in the Chinese military strategies is paid to the development of the country's naval potential. The 2019 document says: "In line with the strategic requirements of near seas defense (within the "first chain of islands") and far seas protection ("the second chain of islands" and beyond), the PLAN is speeding up the transition of its tasks from defense on the near seas to protection missions on the far seas... (National Defense, 2019, p.21).

In general, it should be noted that the nature of threats described in the Chinese military strategy contradicts the description of the

international situation as conducive to peace and development. Apparently, the Chinese leadership's message to the world community is that it is committed to pursuing an open and benevolent foreign policy and does not intend to intentionally enter into "strategic rivalry" mentioned in U.S. doctrinal documents. Although the strategy says there are improvements in such regions of key importance to China as the South China Sea, Beijing is clearly determined to strengthen its security capabilities in order to gain greater leverage over events. This position is consistent with the statements that the buildup of China's military potential deters the potentially aggressive intentions of other countries and, therefore, contributes to international stability. One of the most significant threats to China's security is Taiwan's possible proclamation of independence. Also, the latest version of the military strategy demonstrates the growing influence of the Communist Party and Xi Jinping personally on the country's armed forces. The recurring statement that, despite outstanding successes in China's military building efforts, the PLA still lags behind the leading armies of the world is aimed at easing international tensions caused by China's rise, primarily those in the Asia-Pacific region.

CHINA'S NUCLEAR POLICY

China is perhaps the most unusual member of the nuclear club. It is the only country in the "nuclear quintet" that does not disclose information about its nuclear arsenal, while at the same time it has the greatest potential for fast-track buildup of its nuclear weapons.

According to the Chinese nuclear doctrine, the nuclear potential should serve as the minimal deterrence. A retaliatory strike must be guaranteed. China has pledged to never be the first to use nuclear weapons, not to use retaliatory strike tactics and to never employ it against non-nuclear states. China retains an international image of the most restrained and responsible nuclear state, of which it is very proud. However, for Western countries, including the United States, such political obligations that are not enshrined in legally binding agreements have practically no significance.

China adheres to a consistent policy of concealing the scope and structure of its limited nuclear arsenal, as it fears that unfriendly countries may use this knowledge to undermine the Chinese deterrence potential, for example, by launching a preventive strike.

As a prerequisite for possible participation in nuclear arms control negotiations, China puts forward two fundamental conditions: further reduction of the nuclear arsenals of the two leaders in this respect—Russia and the United States, as well as the pledge by all nuclear powers not to be the first to use nuclear weapons. This will require, at least, the conclusion of further Russian-U.S. agreements in the field of nuclear arms reduction.

At the same time, the United States and China accuse each other of non-transparency. One of the main contradictions between the U.S. and Russian understanding of this concept, on the one hand, and the Chinese, on the other, is that the former urges the transparency of the nuclear potential itself, while the latter indicates the transparency of intentions.

The ratification of the New START treaty by the U.S. Congress was a great problem. Naturally, China realized that further arms reductions by the leading nuclear powers are almost impossible. Even though North Korea agreed to halt nuclear testing, the United States continued to deploy new interceptor missiles in Alaska and radars in Japan. When North Korea resumed nuclear tests, South Korea in 2016 agreed to host a THAAD missile defense system capable of monitoring China's strategic nuclear forces.

With the Trump administration's rise to power in the U.S., the situation worsened still more. The U.S. pullout from the Iran nuclear deal, the Paris Climate Agreement, and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) merely added to the U.S. image as an unreliable partner in international agreements.

From this perspective, China criticized the U.S.'s decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty and repeatedly stated it would not participate in a multilateral analogue of that agreement. In fact, it opposed the idea of making it multilateral in general. This position is pragmatic, since the edge over the United States and Russia in certain classes of missiles,

prohibited under the treaty, is China's only advantage over the leading countries in the nuclear field. Besides, intermediate and shorter-range missiles make up 95 percent of China's missile potential. These classes of missiles are of great strategic importance in a hypothetical confrontation with the United States in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, for they are capable of hitting targets located as far away as the second chain of islands, including Guam (the DF-26 missile).

* * *

The most general conclusion is that China is aware of the complex and comprehensive nature of the national security concept, which includes sustainable economic development, a robust industrial and technological base, national unity, a stable political system, and combat-ready up-to-date armed forces.

The "century of humiliation" discourse has had a significant impact on the formation of China's national security strategy, but the real impact of those events on the pace of China's development as a whole ended with the beginning of the policy of "reform and openness." Currently, according to experts, this term describes China's distrust and wariness towards foreign powers.

There is an obvious link between the regime's security and the ruling party's grip on the reins of power, but it is also clear that the emphasis on such strategic goals as the protection of territorial integrity and expansion of China's influence to the immediate periphery stem from the country's geographical position and historical experience.

By the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century China has undoubtedly turned not only into a global economic superpower, but also into a regional military superpower. At present, the development of the military potential is an important factor for fulfilling the Chinese Dream. As China pushed ahead with building up muscle as a nation, its military strategy, purely defensive in the Mao Zedong era, acquired a greater offensive component. The principle of "active defense," which emerged during Mao's rule, still remains relevant. As China's economic assets are spreading far and wide around the world, the PLA's global presence is becoming an imperative. Further growth of China's military

power will largely depend on the economic successes, on how the world situation develops and on the way world powers react to China's further development and its actions on the international scene.

The key concepts of the Chinese military strategy are those of "limited war under high-tech conditions" and "informationized limited warfare." The modernization of the Chinese armed forces proceeds along these concepts. Starting from the 2014 defense strategy, the PLA has been tasked with "winning victory in local informationized wars." In these conditions, the traditional warfare criteria are eroded. In terms of using information technology, sometimes there is no border between the state of war and the state of peace, military and civilian means, defensive and offensive capabilities. Therefore, the advantage is given to asymmetric potential and hybrid operations. The Chinese military strategy is also influenced by the perception of external threats and the conclusions drawn from the analysis of military operations by the armed forces of Western countries, mainly the United States.

In China's military strategy and military development, the "center of gravity" is gradually shifting from ground to naval forces. China's capabilities to control enemy operations in its adjacent marine areas are growing. In the future this range will expand further.

From the geographic viewpoint, most vulnerable are merchant sea routes and communication lines, which prompts further development of the armed forces' naval component. China had relations of partnerships with the United States during Mao Zedong's rule, but since the 1990s rivalry between the two countries has gradually been gaining momentum. With Donald Trump in office, bilateral relations have entered the phase of full-fledged strategic rivalry.

At present, China's armed forces are developing at a no slower pace than the most advanced armies in the world. The main successes in modernizing the Chinese armed forces have been achieved in such areas as missile technology and other high-accuracy weapons, space, cyberspace and command and communication infrastructure, designed to coordinate joint actions by different armed services.

As for nuclear forces, China fast-tracks the modernization of nuclear arms delivery vehicles and expands their variety. Many Western

experts say the future of China's nuclear potential looks uncertain, however, I think there is no solid reason to expect that China will abandon its compliance with the principle of no first use of nuclear weapons or limited nuclear deterrence.

Regarding the external aspect of security, China largely bears in mind the United States and its stance. This concerns, above all, the strategic rivalry between the two countries, "proposed" by the Trump administration, and issues of arms control. However, aware of the risks that such rivalry entails, China is keen to make it clear to the world community that it is not going to participate in it, thus emphasizing its role as a responsible great power that adheres to a fundamentally different line of behavior than the United States and all great powers that have ever existed. The same position is manifest in China's denial of hegemonism as a way of advancing its own interests at the expense of others, or securing the greatest freedom of action for itself by restricting everybody else's freedom.

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