



MEMORANDUM

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To: Representative Randy Forbes
Attention: Reed Eckhold

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Subject: **China's Defense White Paper**

This CRS Memorandum responds to your request for succinct analysis, with stress on new elements, of the Defense White Paper for 2010 that was expected since late 2010 and issued by the People's Republic of China (PRC) on March 31, 2011. Please contact me at 7-7606 for further discussion of any questions.

Overview and Implications for Policy

Compared to the United States, the PRC does not have nearly the same level of transparency about its military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), but the PLA has adopted transparency as a goal and has improved in being more open. The overall purpose of the Defense White Paper seems to be to counter what Beijing calls the "China Threat Theory" and to affirm that the PRC remains a peaceful power pursuing "Peaceful Development" with a military that is "defensive in nature." Before the release of this White Paper, China's protests and actions in 2009 and 2010 raised particular concerns in the maritime areas of the South China Sea, East China Sea, and Yellow Sea. The United States and Asian countries vocally highlighted their concerns in 2010. Perhaps with resolution of a domestic debate about keeping former paramount leader Deng Xiaoping's call to "keep a low profile," the Defense White Paper offered continuity in reassuring other countries worried about the PRC's greater assertiveness in using the PLA to advance China's security interests and sovereignty. Nevertheless, the Defense White Paper did not provide a full enough picture to assess whether China poses a threat, because the White Paper was heavy on stated intentions but light on details about capabilities. Even examining just the White Paper's stated intentions, the United States and other countries might question the PRC's rhetoric about its goals given the reality of facing challenges from China. Based on the White Paper as propaganda and policy, there are areas of convergence and divergence with U.S. goals and interests.

Thus, U.S. engagement with the PRC could expand its security cooperation and learn more about the PLA, consistent with U.S. efforts to shape China's rise as a peaceful, responsible, and rules-based power. However, the jury is out on the success of this strategy. Questions remain about the PLA's current and future capabilities and coordination between military and civilian command and forces. Meanwhile, expanded roles for the PLA also increase its capabilities, influence, and deployment of forces inside China, near borders and coasts, and farther from China, while mistrust and certain actions continue to challenge U.S. and allied security. Challenges could require more U.S. and allied resources in the

diplomatic and defense presence worldwide. The goal of U.S. military engagement with China is to reduce misunderstanding, misperception, and miscalculation. However, U.S. policy also might face competing interests and threat perceptions, including about U.S. dominance, Iran, and North Korea. The stark difference is that the Defense White Paper included roles for the broader “armed forces” in internal security, which has presented limits to U.S. cooperation with China, given concerns about human rights.

No Reciprocity in Transparency But Improving

Compared with the United States, the PRC does not have the nearly the same level of transparency about the PLA. Reciprocity in transparency is not likely. Yet, the PLA has adopted transparency as a stated goal and has published more information about its policies. The United States has published a number of national security policies that include: National Defense Strategy (June 2008); Quadrennial Defense Review (February 2010); Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report (February 2010); Nuclear Posture Review Report (April 2010); National Security Strategy (May 2010); National Space Policy (June 2010); National Security Space Strategy (January 2011); and National Military Strategy (February 2011).

The PRC Defense White Papers seem more comparable to the U.S. National Security Strategy. The White Papers usually included an assessment of China’s strategic environment and security threats, defense policy statements, leadership, discussions of armed forces (military services, paramilitary, reserve, and militia forces), laws, defense industries and science and technology, defense budgets, arms control and weapons nonproliferation, military exchanges, and international security cooperation. Whereas China has pursued what it calls “Comprehensive National Power,” President Obama’s National Security Strategy urged a “Whole of Government” approach to strengthen U.S. national capacity.

“Six Firsts”

The PLA spokesman held a press conference to release the Defense White Paper of 2010. In addition, in an interview with the PLA’s main newspaper, *Jiefangjun Bao* [*Liberation Army Daily*], the Director of the PLA’s Foreign Affairs Office also claimed that this latest White Paper had “six firsts,” or unprecedented elaborations, about: (1) military confidence building measures (CBMs) with Taiwan; (2) seven uses of the armed forces in peacetime in Diversified Military Tasks; (3) military modernization since the founding of the PRC in 1949; (4) joint operations; (5) the military legal system; and (6) military mutual trust.

Discussion of possible CBMs with Taiwan was not new. The Defense White Paper of 2004 also proposed CBMs to end the state of hostility across the Taiwan Strait. Still, the White Paper of 2010 devoted a paragraph to Taiwan. Taiwan has expected increased PRC pressure on political negotiations following economic agreements, and CBMs and other military talks. This latest White Paper likely reflected the authoritative speech of PRC leader Hu Jintao on “Peaceful Development” in December 2008, in which he made “six proposals” including the last one to “end the state of hostility and reach a peace agreement, including exploring the establishment of a mechanism of mutual trust for military security.”

The White Paper of 2010 included a section with newly explicit explanation of “deployment” of the armed forces in seven tasks. The Diversified Military Tasks and capabilities for Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) provided a new justification for China’s increasing military budgets. The other two rationales highlighted in the section on “Defense Expenditure” that were previously cited were: improving living conditions for troops and promoting the “Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA).”

Also, the White Paper included a new section devoted to the PLA’s efforts to increase joint operations, referring to a “new generation of doctrines on command in joint campaigns and operations.” There was

already a clear indication of the PLA's shift to jointness at the 4th plenum of the 16th CPC Central Committee in September 2004, when Hu Jintao became Central Military Commission (CMC) chairman and the commanders of the PLA Air Force, Navy, and Second Artillery rose to be CMC members for the first time in the PLA's history. This change reflected new action to integrate the PLA as a joint force.

The 2008 Defense White Paper already called for CBMs in promoting international exchanges. But the 2010 Defense White Paper shifted to stress CBMs as the method for international cooperation. With a new heading of "Military Confidence-Building," this section discussed the PLA's foreign exchanges in greater depth to include new discussion of: Strategic Consultations and Dialogues; Border Area Confidence-Building Measures; and Dialogues and Cooperation on Maritime Security. There were also previously covered topics of Regional Security Cooperation and Military Exchanges. Previous White Papers, many books, and articles already have presented views and history of the PLA's modernization since 1949. PRC media have announced laws and regulations for the armed forces.

Further Questions

The Defense White Paper did not provide a picture to assess whether China poses a threat, because the White Paper was heavy on stated peaceful intentions but light on details about military capabilities, particularly about the PLA's future force and how it would use force to defend and/or advance China's interests. There have been more questions about China's expanded interests and projection of power farther away from China. China has tried to stake sovereign claims to Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) (up to 200 miles from the coast) beyond territorial waters (up to 12 miles from the coast), while the United States and other countries assert access and freedom of navigation in and flight over the high seas. In 2010, the PLA also expressed "opposition" to U.S. and South Korean exercises in the Yellow Sea. There were no details on satellites, anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons, space program, aircraft carriers, ships, strategic and other submarines, fighters including the J-20 fighter that was flight tested during Defense Secretary Robert Gates' visit in January 2011, aerial refueling for operations far from China, new nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missiles, anti-ship ballistic missiles, land attack cruise missiles, or short-range ballistic missiles threatening Taiwan. The main section on "Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense" was consistent with the long-term approach of Military-Civilian Integration but did not detail the roles of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) and enterprises with foreign interests involved in aviation, aerospace, shipbuilding, ordnance, nuclear power, and electronics.

The White Paper's section on the PLA Navy referred to an "Offshore Defense Strategy," but that was not defined. The PLA has been vague about what it calls the "Near Coast," "Near Seas," and "Far Seas." This White Paper also added a new note that the PLA Navy has explored logistical support for "sustaining long-time maritime missions." Yet, that was not the first indication from the PLA. Since the PLA Navy began anti-piracy operations in late 2008, it has mentioned talk of foreign bases or other arrangements.

The PLA Air Force added new details that it "strengthens routine combat readiness of air defenses, taking the defense of the capital as the center and the defense of coastal and border areas as the key. It has carried out MOOTWs, such as air security for major national events, emergency rescue and disaster relief, international rescue, and emergency airlift." But there was no detail on a "Strategic Air Force," as noted in the media, including the first "distant sea" drill far to the southern edge of the South China Sea in 2009.

The PLA Second Artillery (the missile force with strategic nuclear and conventional missiles) added "survivability" to its capabilities that also include rapid reaction, penetration, precision strike, damage infliction, and protection. But there was little discussion of new modernized strategic missiles.

The logistics units have sustained the PLA farther away from China. The 2010 White Paper boasted of logistical support for missions that included the escort (anti-piracy) naval operations in the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia, exercises with foreign militaries, rescue “both at home and abroad.” The armaments units have maintained equipment in “long distance and trans-regional maneuvers, escort operations in distant waters, and complex battlefield environments.”

While the White Paper stressed the PLA’s cooperation, including exercises, with foreign militaries, it did not mention that in September 2010, the PLA Air Force conducted the first air exercise with Turkey, a member of NATO, and flew and refueled its aircraft, including Su-27 fighters, through the airspace of Iran. U.S. policymakers might use the PLA’s policy to inquire about its outreach to NATO and Iran.

The 2010 Defense White Paper expressed opposition to “global missile defense” as detrimental to international strategic balance and stability, and newly included opposition to any country cooperating in or deploying missile defense overseas. However, the White Paper did not note China’s test in January 2010 of what it called its first successful test of a mid-course, missile defense system in space over China.

Coordination and Control

There is an issue of how well decisions are coordinated and centrally controlled in China, between military and civilian officials and forces, particularly in ASAT tests and in the maritime areas where China’s forces have confronted the naval and air forces of foreign nations, including the United States. For example, in March 2009, PRC surveillance aircraft, a naval frigate, PRC patrol and intelligence collection ships, and trawlers coordinated in increasingly aggressive and dangerous harassment of unarmed U.S. ocean surveillance ships, the USNS Victorious and USNS Impeccable, during routine operations in international waters in the Yellow Sea and South China Sea. Yet, in a later assessment, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 10, 2011, that “PLA Navy ships routinely operate in the South and East China Seas, including patrols near the Spratly and Paracel Islands. Chinese military and civilian ships continue to respond to U.S. naval research vessels in both areas, but the extent to which Beijing coordinates these responses is unclear.”

The 2010 Defense White Paper stated that China has coordination and control, but there are multiple units: “Organs of maritime surveillance, fisheries administration, marine affairs, inspection and quarantine, and customs are responsible for ensuring legitimate rights, law enforcement, and administration. The State Commission of Border and Coastal Defense, under the dual leadership of the State Council and the Central Military Commission (CMC), coordinates China’s border and coastal defenses. All military area commands, as well as border and coastal provinces, cities, and counties, have commissions to coordinate border and coastal defenses within their respective jurisdictions.” Moreover, “China has always treated military, police, and civilian efforts as a strong guarantee for consolidating border and coastal defenses and developing border and coastal areas. In recent years, China has steadily improved a border and coastal defense force system featuring the PLA as the mainstay, the coordination and cooperation of other relevant forces, and the extensive participation of the militia, the reserve forces, and the people in the border and coastal areas.” In addition, the White Paper stated that the PLA Air Force is the “mainstay of national territorial air defense,” and in accordance with the instructions of the CMC, the Army, Navy, and People’s Armed Police carry out some responsibility for territorial air defense.”

Intentions Not Capabilities

Despite U.S. and other foreign long-standing calls for the PLA to be transparent, the Defense White Paper did present strategic perceptions and intentions. Also, the 2010 White Paper more explicitly defined

China's security interests. This process stemmed significantly from a policy apparently announced in 2004 by the top leader Hu Jintao, who is Communist Party of China (CPC) General Secretary, PRC President, and Central Military Commission (CMC) Chairman. In late 2004, Hu Jintao reportedly gave a speech calling for "New Historic Missions of Our Military in the New Period of the New Century," expanding the PLA's roles and accelerating its modernization. The 2006 Defense White Paper declared those "Historic Missions" as support for keeping the rule of the CPC, for sustaining this period of strategic opportunity for national modernization, for safeguarding national interests, and for maintaining world peace and development. Relatedly, Hu called for the PLA to accomplish "Diversified Military Tasks," including responding to crises, preserving peace, and "deterring" as well as "winning" wars. The 2008 Defense White Paper added explicitly that the PLA carries out MOOTW.

Security Interests and Maritime Territory

The Defense White Paper of 2010 added explicit definitions of China's broad security interests with a new stress on China's "vast territories and territorial seas." The White Paper expressed worry about how "pressure builds up in preserving China's territorial integrity and maritime rights and interests." Also, it asserted that "suspicion about China, interference and countering moves against China from the outside are on the increase." While China has seen a growing need to "defend" its claimed territories and seas, the United States, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, and other nations have noted China's assertiveness if not aggressiveness in the East China Sea, South China Sea, and Yellow Sea.

The Defense White Paper of 2010 stated China's defense goals and interests as:

1. Safeguarding sovereignty, security, and interests of national development. The PLA is to guard China's land, inland waterways, territorial waters and airspace, maritime rights and interests, and security interests in space, electromagnetic space, and cyber space. "Cyber space" was newly added this time. Military force is also used for cracking down on what China views as domestic threats of "separatist forces" in Taiwan, Xinjiang, and Tibet. China has nuclear weapons under a policy of "No First Use."
2. Maintaining social stability. China's armed forces are used in domestic suppression of protests, or what China calls "maintaining stability," as part of MOOTW inside China. Such MOOTW are used against "non-traditional threats," including counter-terrorism and emergency rescue. While this White Paper did not explicitly define "armed forces" for these tasks, they include the paramilitary People's Armed Police (PAP). The White Paper of 2010 dropped a section that previously focused on the PAP.
3. Accelerating military modernization. The PLA's modernization makes use of information technology (IT), joint operations, high-tech weapons, "Diversified Military Tasks," the "Historic Missions," and Military-Civilian Integration in research and development.
4. Maintaining world peace and stability. The White Paper noted that China has contributed to international security cooperation, including UN peacekeeping, maritime escort, counter-terrorism, and disaster relief. "Maritime escort" was added since the PLA Navy began anti-piracy operations in December 2008 in the Gulf of Aden.

Power Projection

The Defense White Paper of 2010 seems to legitimize greater projection of power as China's armed forces have seen increased deployment both at home and abroad as a more expeditionary, capable force. While the PLA Foreign Affairs Office Director alluded to elaboration of seven Diversified Military Tasks

as new in the 2010 Defense White Paper, it seems that the explicit use of “deployment” was new. The seven tasks under a major section called “Deployment of the Armed Forces” are to:

1. Safeguard the borders, coastal and territorial air security
2. Maintain Social Stability
3. Participate in National Construction, Emergency Rescue, and Disaster Relief
4. Participate in UN Peacekeeping Operations
5. Conduct Escort Operations in the Gulf of Aden and Waters off Somalia
6. Hold Military Exercises and Training with Other Countries
7. Participate in International Disaster Relief Operations.

The one task that was new for the PLA has been anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and near Somalia that began in December 2008. Even for that task, the Defense White Paper acknowledged that PLA Navy ships were “mainly charged” with safeguarding the security of China’s own ships and people. Two of the seven missions were directed at domestic problems, while five were directed externally.

Convergence and Divergence

Based on the PLA’s Defense White Paper as propaganda and policy, there are areas of convergence with U.S. policy, and U.S. policymakers could find common themes with PRC policy. There also are areas of divergence that challenge U.S. goals and interests. One U.S. goal since engagement with Beijing began in the 1970s has been the PRC’s integration into the international security, economic, and political system as a peaceful and responsible country. Nevertheless, the White Paper seems to show a rising China’s acceptance of much of the international system but not necessarily U.S. dominance and leadership.

Interdependence and Integration

The White Paper recognized China’s interdependence amidst globalization and international integration. It stated, “China has now stood at a new historical point, and its future and destiny has never been more closely connected with those of the international community. . . . By connecting the fundamental interests of the Chinese people with the common interests of other peoples around the globe, connecting China’s development with that of the world, and connecting China’s security with world peace, China strives to build, through its peaceful development, a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity.”

However, the White Paper also continued to look for the trend toward a “multi-polar world.” Moreover, looking back at the global financial crisis in which China’s clout rose relative to that of the United States, the White Paper noted that the “international balance of power is changing, most notably through the economic strength and growing international status and influence of emerging powers and developing countries.” The PLA asserted that “profound realignments have taken place in international relations.” In contrast, President Obama’s National Security Strategy declared U.S. maintenance of “military superiority” not only for securing the United States but also for global security.

The White Paper positively commended Asian-Pacific countries for “bilateral and multilateral” cooperation inside and outside the region. However, after Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke at a regional security meeting in Hanoi in July 2010, and urged a “collaborative diplomatic process” to resolve territorial disputes in the South China Sea, the PRC Foreign Minister reacted stridently to what he labeled “an attack on China” and a plot to make a “multilateral” problem in the disputes.

Criticism of the United States

In the two U.S.-PRC Joint Statements of November 2009 and January 2011, President Hu Jintao agreed to state that “China welcomes the United States as an Asia-Pacific nation that contributes to peace, stability, and prosperity in the region.” In contrast, the Defense White Paper did not include that sentiment but did print implied and explicit criticism of the United States by name with the United States as the only country given such critical depiction. The White Paper stated, “the United States is reinforcing its regional military alliances and increasing its involvement in regional security affairs.” In another instance, the White Paper critiqued that “the United States, in the defiance of the three Sino-U.S. Joint Communiqués, continues to sell weapons to Taiwan, severely impeding Sino-U.S. relations and impairing the peaceful development of cross-strait relations.” In the third instance, the White Paper stated, “with respect to relations between the militaries of China and the United States, two sides are still maintaining effective dialogues and communications after various ups and downs...” The PLA has blamed the U.S. side for “obstacles” in the military relationship, including arms sales to Taiwan notified to Congress in January 2010, for the PLA’s suspensions of some visits. The White Paper last year also criticized the United States explicitly, including for the global financial crisis triggered by “the U.S. subprime mortgage crisis.” Since the Defense White Paper of 2000, the only one that refrained from criticizing the United States by name was the one in 2002, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

U.S. security policies also have named China for particular security concerns, but China was not the only country so discussed. For example, the National Military Strategy stated concerns about the PLA:

We will continue to monitor carefully China’s military developments and the implications those developments have on the military balance in the Taiwan Strait. We remained concerned about the extent and strategic intent of China’s military modernization, and its assertiveness in space, cyberspace, in the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Sea. To safeguard U.S. and partner nation interests, we will be prepared to demonstrate the will and commit the resources needed to oppose any nation’s actions that jeopardize access to and use of the global commons and cyberspace, or that threaten the security of our allies.

Also, the Defense Department has published an annual report to Congress that focused on the PLA, which has objected to the singling out of China as a military “threat.” The report was originally called the report on “PRC Military Power,” as required by the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 2000 (P.L. 106-65), which was then revised by the NDAA for FY 2010 (P.L. 111-84) that changed the name of the report to “Military and Security Developments Involving the PRC.”

Expanding Cooperation

Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, issued the latest National Military Strategy in which he repeated President Obama’s objective of a “positive, cooperative, and comprehensive relationship with China that welcomes it to take on a responsible leadership role.” Mullen stated the military’s goals of a deeper military-to-military relationship to “expand areas of mutual interest and benefit, improve understanding, reduce misperception, and prevent miscalculation” as well as promotion of “common interests through China’s cooperation in countering piracy and proliferation of WMD, and using its influence with North Korea to preserve stability on the Korean peninsula.”

However, while the 2010 Defense White Paper included a new discussion of the PLA Navy’s anti-piracy operation, it did not portray this area as one for U.S.-PRC military cooperation. Indeed, the White Paper did not even mention contact with the U.S. military in discussing contacts with various foreign navies and

international groups. U.S. engagement with the PLA in anti-piracy included hosting the commander of the PLA Navy formation at the Headquarters of the U.S. Fifth Fleet in Bahrain in December 2010.

The White Paper might be relevant to the efforts of the Defense Secretary to start a “Strategic Dialogue” with the PLA that covers nuclear weapons, missiles, space, and cyber space. The PLA has resisted such talks or a visit to the United States by the Second Artillery’s Commander, despite this White Paper’s new stress on “Military Confidence Building” including “strategic dialogues.” Also, there was no mention of the U.S.-PRC Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) agreed by Presidents Obama and Hu. The White Paper noted international contact to mitigate “space debris,” though ASAT testing increased them.

The White Paper might be used for talks with the PLA about maritime security and PRC interpretation of international law and norms. Under the subsection on military confidence building in maritime security, the 2010 Defense White Paper stated that “China “strictly complies with the UN Charter, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and other universally recognized norms of international relations.” The White Paper acknowledged the U.S.-PRC Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) of 1998 under which both sides have held halting talks about U.S. concerns for international freedom of navigation and safety of U.S. Air Force and Navy personnel, and PRC concerns about foreign operations in its claimed sovereign EEZ. The White Paper recognized the need in the MMCA meetings for contributing to “safety” of maritime activities and avoidance of “accidents.”

Weapons Nonproliferation

The Defense White Paper had a section on “Arms Control and Disarmament” that was not new. China reaffirmed that “existing multilateral arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation systems should be consolidated and strengthened” and referred to UN Security Council Resolutions. However, the 2010 White Paper discussed the denuclearization and stability of the broader “Korean Peninsula,” without directly pressuring North Korea for its uranium enrichment program and attacks on South Korea in 2010. The 2006 White Paper did note North Korea’s missile and nuclear tests. Also, the 2010 White Paper did not say that Hu Jintao attended President Obama’s Nuclear Security Summit in Washington in April 2010.

Taiwan

The White Paper of 2010 seemed more relaxed about Taiwan than previous ones, stressed CBMs, and pointed to a policy of “Peaceful Development” of cross-strait relations, a resumed dialogue, and economic agreements. These new developments occurred after President Ma Ying-jeou took office in Taipei in May 2008. However, the White Paper did not discuss any changes in the PLA’s threat posture toward Taiwan, including effective reduction of over 1,000 short-range ballistic missiles. The White Paper also continued to blame “Taiwan independence separatist forces” as the biggest “threat” to peaceful cross-strait relations.

Domestic Security

The stark divergence between the U.S. and PRC armed forces is the latter’s role in internal security. PRC armed forces have been used against domestic demonstrators that include those with economic grievances, and Tibetan and Uighur ethnic minorities in the western regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. The PLA played the major role in the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989 and has since played a supporting role in internal suppression. The primary armed force for internal security is the PAP, while the riot police and militia also take part. The 2010 Defense White Paper discussed the militia’s role in what China calls “stability maintenance” and other tasks, and reported that China has 8 million militia members.
