

China's Military and the New World Order

A Review of The People's Liberation Army's White Paper

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In December of 2004 the People's Liberation Army issued its status report White Paper, summarizing its view of the global configuration of forces, and projecting its response.

The operating assumptions of this key document are:

- (1) while the international situation is stable, there are factors present of instability, uncertainty, and insecurity which are increasing, at the same time that hegemonism and unilateralism are gaining;
- (2) the tendency towards multi-polarization is deepening;
- (3) new changes are altering the existing balance of power;
- (4) while the developing world is increasing global democratization with its increasing voice, the gap between the North and the South is ever widening;
- (5) the World Wide Revolution in Military Affairs requires both new technology and new doctrines;
- (6) localized wars of a geopolitical, ethnic and religious nature are a constant threat;
- (7) any attempt by Taiwan to separate will be crushed; and
- (8) non-traditional threats are on the increase.

To properly position the White Paper in perspective, it is essential to examine the 1999 study by two Senior PLA Colonels entitled *Unrestricted Warfare*. The latter was characterized by the U.S. as the doctrine of a technologically weaker China as it confronts superior U.S. power.

A careful examination of this study reveals a thought through evaluation of both U.S. and Chinese strengths and weaknesses in technology, strategy and doctrine. There is little doubt that the wake up call for the PLA was triggered by the Gulf War – Desert Storm.

China's response, it is argued is multiple, ranging from altering force levels and increasing its educational/technical levels; developing a seamless strategy for a transition from a peacetime to a wartime economy; seeking a leapfrog strategy in military technology; not falling into the trap of seeking superiority in all areas of military technology; and,

constructing and reinforcing an alliance structure of both a multi-lateral institutional nature as well as on the bilateral level.

In December of 2004 the Chinese People's Liberation Army issued its White Paper on [China's National Defense in 2004](#) [White Paper Defense 2004]. The Paper situates the defense posture in the context of China's drive for modernization, emphasizing that as the country is relying mainly on its own efforts, it therefore [emphasis added] poses no threat to anyone. The two pillars are an independent foreign policy and a defensive military one, which will neither be expansionist nor hegemonic.

The strategic assumption is that while the general international environment is stable, there is an increase of uncertainty, and instability. [ibid: (01): 1]

Two tendencies are occurring simultaneously economic globalization and multipolarization, with a changing balance of power, displaying collaboration and competition. [ibid: 8]

While the voice of the developing world is having a greater impact on international relations thereby contributing to a greater democratization, the gap between the North and the South is ever widening. [ibid] The Iraq war has had far reaching influence on international and regional security, reflecting a hegemonic and unilateralist tendency, seeking strategic territory, resources and dominance. [ibid]

The role of the military is also playing a greater role in the configuration of national security via the Worldwide Revolution in Military Affairs [RMA] as military establishments strive to shift from mechanization to informalization, which entails new military doctrines in conformity with high-tech weaponry and equipment. Here to the gap between militaries is growing. [ibid]

Local wars have emerged as a consequence of the interaction of geopolitical, and ethnic conflicts intermingling with political and economic contradictions. This has made the fight against the root causes of terrorism ever more difficult. [ibid]

While the dominant trend among Asian nations is consultation through the mechanisms of ASEAN, the Asian Regional Forum and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the security situation is being complicated by the U.S. reinforcing its regional military alliances and accelerating deployment of its missile defense system, while Japan is preparing to overhaul its Constitution and has significantly increased its foreign military activity. There remain uncertain factors in the resolution of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, while threats from terrorism, separatism and extremism remain grave, as do smuggling, piracy, drug trafficking and money laundering. [ibid: 2]

The Taiwan Issue

The biggest immediate threat to Chinese sovereignty, peace and stability remains the Taiwan administration's desire to employ Constitutional reform as a threat to the status quo.

The US is contributing to the destabilization of the region by increasing its qualitative and quantitative arms sales to Taiwan.

Should Taiwan attempt "an incident" of Taiwan independence, it will be crushed "at any cost". It is for this reason that the first basic goal of China's national security doctrine is to stop separation and promote reunification". [ibid: 2-3; (02): 1] The goals remain the defense

of national sovereignty and maritime rights, the promotion of overall national strength, improvement of operational capabilities under conditions of informationalization, crack down on all criminal activities and the pursuit of an independent foreign policy. [ibid (02): 1]

The strategic doctrine is elaborated as shifting from a Manpower intensive to a technology intensive force, or RMA with Chinese characteristics. [ibid {03): 1] While this is understood as a gradual process whereby mechanization and semi-mechanization are pulled by informationalization in a leapfrog fashion. All of this is to be done within the concept of “present day People’s War”. [ibid: (02) 2] “Meanwhile, it [China] adheres to the people’s war concept and develops the strategies and tactics of people’s war.” This is understood as a seamless transition from peacetime to a war footing, should that become necessary. This is operationalized through an intensive program of dual-technology development. [ibid: (07) 1]

Military exchanges have been undertaken which are “non aligned, non-confrontational, and not directed against any third party”. Joint military exercises have taken place in the non-traditional security fields to address threats in those fields. [ibid: (02) 2]

Force levels have been reduced since September of 2003 by 1.5 million, with a further projected reduction by the end of 2005 by an additional 200,000, bringing the size down to 2.3 million troops. The officer corps is to be reduced by 15%, with new officers rising from the ranks of NCOs, with some functions being passed to a corps of civilian employees, presumably with high technical skills. While the Army is to be streamlined, the Air-Force, Navy and Second Artillery Force [read missile units] are to be strengthened, the goal being to gain command of airspace, sea lanes, with a strong amphibious forces, and the capacity for nuclear counter-strike, if attacked. The military education system is to be refocused, with emphasis on the acquisition of pre-assignment skills. [ibid: (03) 1]

China’s military expenditure was up from 2002-2004 by roughly 20% to 211.701 billion Yuan. With 2003 as the base year the comparison of China’s military budget with other Countries was as follows: 5.69% of the U.S., 56.78% of Japan, 37.07% of the U.K., and 75.94% of France. [ibid: (04) 1]

The increase primarily went to: (1) salaries, allowances and pensions; (2) social insurance subsidies; (3) cost of reorganization; (4) increased cost of military related education; (5) increased cost of new weaponry. [ibid]

Compulsory conscription eligibility in peacetime is from 18 years of age until 22. Deferments exist for sole family wage earners, and full time students, while Reserve units contain those from 18 to 35 years of age. Demobilized soldiers are entitled to a life long pension, government job placement assignments, however, should they find their own work, even with government assistance, they are exempt from income tax on a life long basis. [ibid: (05) 3]

In addition to its military mission the PLA maintains a civil assistance program. In the past decade 40,000 “points of contact” were established to alleviate poverty, with 3.7 million being elevated out of that status, and 2,800 primary and secondary schools constructed in poor areas. In addition the PLA has participated in infra-structure projects, technology transfer, and disaster relief, with the Military Academy of Medical Sciences being the first to isolate the SARS pathogen and develop a rapid reagent. [ibid: (08) 2-4]

In the realm of international security cooperation, the strategic and partnership relationship

with Russia is prominent, followed by consultations and working groups with the U.S. and consultations and dialogs with the France, the U.K., South Africa, Australia, Germany, Canada, Mexico, Italy, Poland and New Zealand, among others. Within the region, consultations were organized with Pakistan, Thailand, Japan, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, while a tripartite cooperation agreement was signed between China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. [ibid: (09) 1-2] Regional institutions are playing an increasing role, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the ASEAN Regional Forum, with its emphasis on preventative diplomacy and incrementalism. [ibid: 3]

In the “Non-Traditional Security Field” emphasis has been placed on joint manoeuvres with the SCO members, Pakistan, India, France, the U.K. and Australia. The range of issues subsumed under this category range from counter terrorism to drug smuggling, piracy and search and rescue. [ibid]

Over the last decade and one-half China has participated in 13 U.N. peace keeping missions including, Cambodia, Congo (Kinshasa), Liberia, East Timor, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Haiti, Western Sahara, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia/Eritrea, Burundi, and Ivory Coast. Ibid: Appendix 6] Military relations have been established with 150 countries, with 100 Chinese Military Attaches abroad and 85 Military Attaches stationed in China. Foreign observers have recently witnessed a number of Chinese military exercise, Northern Sword-0308U, Dragon-204, Iron Fist 2004 and a joint Chinese-British search and rescue operation. In addition, China has sent 1,000 military science students to 20 countries and received 1,245 from 91 countries. [ibid: (09) 5]

While China has maintained a policy opposed to the development and delivery of WMD, in the realm of conventional weapons it adheres to the policy of exporting weapons which help recipient states enhance their capacity for legitimate self-defense. China remains the only nuclear state to unconditionally guarantee its policy of non use or threat to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states and nuclear free zones. Ibid: (10) 1]

As a final observation, China reasserts its opposition to all nuclear weapons and demands their destruction, in addition to opposing any program of weaponization of space. [ibid: 10) 2]

Analysis of the document

Prior to attempting to derive meaning it may be essential to situate the White Paper in the context of the broader rethinking of Chinese military strategy and tactics which was launched in early 1999, with the publication of Unrestricted Warfare by Senior Colonels Qiao Lang and Wang Xiansui. [Qiang and Wang, 1999] The American Editors of the publication, place their emphasis on two issues;

(1) a tactical guide for the 3rd World who are militarily inferior to the U.S.; and

(2) that in the new era warfare is unrestricted, there are no rules and nothing is forbidden. [ibid: 1]

A full examination of the document substantially qualifies the boldness of this last proposition. The authors argue that any surpassing of limits must be done within the

restrictions of opportunity and means. [ibid: 119] The more important guiding principle, however, is that the new principle of war is that it employs all means, not only military, [ibid: 4] to include stock market manipulation, computer virus invasion, fluctuation of exchange rates via rumour, [ibid:16] manipulation of the credit rating, media control, [ibid: 32-33] ecological warfare, psychological warfare, smuggling [of counterfeit] and drugs, cultural warfare, fear inducement and International law warfare. [ibid: 31-35, 18-19] In other words, the struggle for victory will take place on the battlefield beyond the battlefield, with victory being measured by control rather than kill rate. [ibid: 117, 18] This is not meant to imply that the traditional military arsenal has lost its meaning, although military threats are no longer the major factor in national security, [ibid:75] but rather that individual weapons are no longer important, and have been replaced by systems and systems integration, [ibid: 110, 7] comprising 100+ weapons. [ibid: 10] All of this requires a fundamental shift in military doctrine, including building weapons to fit the fight and the use of multigenerational weapons, [ibid: 13] constructing a force able to engage asymmetrical warfare, [ibid: 22] reduce force levels while increasing troop quality in high and mid-level technology, [ibid: 27] abolish traditional organizations, replacing them with integrated battle groups and centralized command with equality of the armed forces, complete unification resulting in total battle depth, with concealment, speed and accuracy. [Ibid: 63,66, 31]

From the perspective of the two Colonels, it is clear that "Desert Storm" not only changed warfare itself, but intensely shook the Chinese military. [ibid: 3, 51] Much of the White Paper is a response to that assessment. The Colonels, however, also see flaws in the U.S. system. The Americans have become slaves to technology, and will find it very difficult to defeat an adversary who employs unconventional and low-tech warfare, [ibid: 15, 13] still lags in the development of military thinking in conformity with military technology, [ibid: 65] has failed to reconcile post 1998 training doctrine of attack, defense, stabilization and support, with the new reality of total dimensional warfare, [ibid: 67] disproportionately neglects its unconventional warfare budget in comparison with its formal military budget [the former 1/25th of the latter] [ibid: 83], the Americans tend to go for unlimited objectives, [ibid: 138] and possibly most of all that the US wants victory but is unwilling to pay the price in casualties. [Ibid: 60]

The authors remind the readers that while one country is in the technological lead, they are not alone, [ibid: 12] and to attempt to maintain permanent weapons superiority will ultimately lead to national bankruptcy. To avoid this requires a different approach. This approach is summarized in eight principles: [Ibid: 134. 137-141]

- (1) Omnidirectionality – Eliminating the distinction between what is and what is not the battlefield.
- (2) Synchrony – Replace phasing of military action with simultaneity.
- (3) Limited Objectives – Objectives should always be smaller than the measure employed in achieving them.
- (4) Unlimited Measures – Everything available is to be employed to achieve limited goals.
- (5) Asymmetry – Find the soft spot in an adversary, and hit it unexpectedly.
- (6) Minimal Consumption – Be exceedingly thrifty in the expenditure of forces.
- (7) Multidimensional Coordination – Coordination of the various armed forces in different

spheres of activity. (8) Adjustment & Control of the Entire Process – Establish a feedback and revision system.

In some ways we can use this document as a check list base line in judging its implementability.

Having sketched out the new formulation, and the background set by the Colonels, let us draw attention to its meaning. The most significant issue is the so called informationalization of military doctrine. The centrality of this issue derives from the First Iraq War of 1991 when t.v. images were transmitted from the nose cone of attacking missiles, which themselves were laser guided, seen dropping down the smoke stack of an Iraqi factory. These images were portrayed as the cutting edge precision of the new U.S. weapons systems. It was later revealed that their accuracy was not quite as overwhelming as their general portrayal, nonetheless, it achieved its intended effect, which was to “spook” the rest of the world into awe of U.S. high-tech military capacity.

The unevenness of accuracy was deduced to be a mere technical problem which in time would be overcome. Anticipating some of this, Iraqi sites were “hardened” and were in turn met with so called “bunker busters” with or without depleted uranium [DU] ordnance as a facilitator of penetration. DU was employed since 1973, and employed in Kosovo and Sarajevo, but the Iraq campaign was its deadliest use, with 940,000 bombs, 4,000 artillery shells, and 75 Tons of bullets tipped with D.U. in addition to Pulsed Energy Projectiles (PEPs). [Sweet] New targeting technology was further enhanced by the variety of satellite systems, from the military version of the GPS to reconnaissance photography, to Beyond Visual Range Weapons Systems (BVR), over the horizon early warning radar, all providing real time tactical intelligence when integrated into a systems approach. A further punctuation was made when the Reagan “star wars” initiative was resurrected, directed against so called “rogue” states and their likely limited nuclear weapon and delivery systems. While the debate continues to rage as to its efficacy, it would seem reasonably clear that even if it was not fully reliable, even partial reliability would be sufficient to dissuade a potential attacker.

This is clearly a recognition that it is not likely to be fully deployed, but to a sufficient degree to thwart a “rogue state” attack with a very limited attack and retaliatory arsenal. Japan has agreed to participate in funding research, and has declared its willingness to deploy the system only to defend Japan [a rather strange part of their new military doctrine] adds to the high-tech equation. Willingness by other states to subscribe to the “star wars” systems, consequently becomes a political issue for the United States and a new acid test for its allies; a variation of the theme of the “coalition of the willing”.

It is also unlikely that the Chinese failed to notice that in late November 2004 the United States Congress approved a \$9 billion budget for the “Reliable Replacement Warhead Program”, aimed at producing a wide variety of new warhead designs, including new nuclear “bunker busters”. Should this initiative mature, it would likely result in the US seeking amendment of the test ban treaty, with budget estimates, by some, into the trillions of dollars. [Broad] An additional part of the equation is the U.S. position of reserving the right under conditions of its choosing to launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike. [Japan Times] These U.S. decisions have resulted in a Chinese shift to the reinforcement of its mobile counter-strike force. This will take the form of expanding the submarine fleet, with the associated engine quieting and other stealth technology, plus a highly mobile ground based accurate launching system capable of absorbing a first strike and retaliating. A recent report

[Halloran] revealed that targeting accuracy of Chinese short range missiles has improved to 20-30 meters from target, and that a Second Artillery Brigade drill moved its battery 563 km and was operational in two days. Both land and air launched cruise missiles as well have been added to the arsenal. In addition to the eight “Kilo-Class” diesel-electric submarines purchased from Russia, China is constructing the domestically designed “Song-Class” for near shore operations, and several nuclear powered attack submarines for longer range. Recent reports also describe acquisition of airborne long range targeting capacity, optical satellites and maritime unmanned vehicles [Ridley]. With an eye to the Taiwan equation, 100 regular and 4 tank landing craft are under construction. U.S., Taiwanese analysts have brought the credible threat level window down from 1010-2015, to 2006 – 2012. Taiwan clearly is seen as the most immanent threat to China, with U.S. supplied weaponry exacerbating regional insecurity.

Given the stated objective of, if necessary, shifting seamlessly from civil to military production, it is clear that China’s strategy for maximizing its acquisition of dual use technology is in no way surprising. The logo for this is the aero-space industry, where the line between a civilian and military booster rocket, while alleged, is factually non-existent. The provision by the U.S. of dual use technology to China, but attempting simultaneously to limit the duality of that use is rather silly. The most recent example of this was the U.S. criticism of the China Aero-Technology Import & Export Corporation for diverting to military use sophisticated machine tools purchased from McDonnell Douglas of the U.S. Why then is it provided? While some may argue that this is simply the pressure of capitalist enterprises to increase sales and profits, it is my contention that when dual use is made available it provides the U.S. with a technological benchmark in assessing China’s technology level. It may also be clear that any military applicable technology so provided has already been evaluated for its weaknesses, with counter measures developed or well along on the drawing boards. As an aside, a few years ago when I teased a senior Chinese official for accepting an Israeli designed device for suppressing submarine engine noise on the grounds that the U.S. clearly had developed counter measures to that technology, the response was, “We of course understand that, but it will push along our own design and counter measures.” I assume the same holds true for the “Python Air-to-Air Missile” currently mounted on Chinese fighter planes, although the public spin on this is that the sale was made prior to notification by Israeli to the United States. On the other hand when there are not effective countermeasures for proposed technology transfer, it will be blocked. We are here reminded of the U.S. successful pressure in 2000 on the Israeli’s to annul a signed agreement with China for the purchase of an updated “Phalcon” airborne radar system valued at \$250 million.

Technology acquisition is the key to the policy of “leap frogging” to the next stage of informationalized warfare. Self evidently there will have to a reformulation of strategic doctrine, which for purposes of continuity has been labelled modern “People’s War”. Accompanying this is a force reduction at career end, accompanied by substantial post demobilization benefits, and a significant elevation of required entry level skills. These, together with the dramatic increase in bi-lateral military exchanges, is clearly designed to augment the technical level, and familiarize the PLA with military science techniques of other countries. Increasing participation in UN Peace Keeping, is designed to “show the flag”, hone skills in projecting forces, al-be-they limited, and improving exposure to the latest crowd control techniques, following upon the disproportionate use of force during the Tiananmen affair.

Turning to the issue of arms sales, it is noteworthy that on January 3rd of 2005, the U.S. State Department placed a one page notice in the Federal Register [Federal Register: 133] that eight Chinese Firms, including China Great Wall Industry Corporation, China North Industry Corporation, and China Aero-Technology Import & Export Corporation, and one North Korean firm, the Paeksan Associated Corporation, are to be penalized by not being permitted to do business with the U. S. Government nor obtain export licenses allowing them to purchase controlled technologies from any U.S. company. [New York Times, January 18, 2005] The Federal Register Notice claims that the nine companies have exported material to Iran which has the “potential to make a material contribution to the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or cruise or ballistic missile systems.” It is alleged that these items include high performance metals and components which would extend the range of Iranian missiles. It is clear from the White Paper that the principle guiding China’s export arms policy is to assist a recipient country in “legitimate self-defense”. The issue then obviously turns on the definition of “legitimate self-defense”. For the U.S. anything which strengthens the Iranian military as a charter member of the “Axis of Evil” is illegitimate, while for the Iranians, and by extension the Chinese, those items supplied are indeed part of a legitimate self defense profile. While a cynic might describe this as part of the overall package of the recently signed \$100 billion, ten year petroleum deal between China and Iran for the development of the Yadavaran field, it must be noted that relations between Beijing and Teheran with a brief interregnum in 1979 almost effortlessly bridged the transition between the Shah’s administration and that of Imam Khomeini. The U.S. view of China’s policy is exclusively driven by its desire to both militarily weaken, and economically isolate the Iranian government, a game China has rejected.

If there is an arena which cross cuts the dominant themes, it is in the sphere of “Non Traditional” security, which comprises piracy, “counter-terrorism” [left for everyone to define the meaning of terrorist], search and rescue, and smuggling. It is this area alone which is likely to generate the greatest level of international cooperation.

At the political level, the White Paper makes it very clear that the current strategic doctrine is ant-hegemonic and multi-polar in orientation, while not being directed against a specific adversary. Much of the document belies the last of these points, as it is noted that Russia is the main strategic ally, as it appears first in any listing in the document, while the U.S. is identified as seeking territory and resources, while reinforcing its military alliances in the region, and its activities have made the fight against terrorism more difficult by its geo-political and ethnic policies.

In summary, the White Paper is tilting in a new direction by adding capacity to rhetoric. The priority objective is to develop sufficiently overwhelming air-missile-naval superiority to discourage the Taiwan authorities from altering the status quo, and just enough to lead the U.S. to back off supporting Taiwan should hostilities break out. A major supplementary goal is to construct relationships which consolidate as far as possible a multi-lateral voice in opposition to US unilateralism, and its global military base structure of 120. This is not the construction of a new alliance system, but rather the emergence of states with primary parallel policies. At the moment these would include as core participants Russia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization states, Iran, Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba, as well as Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia and the DPR of Korea, with the distant hope of India. At the secondary parallel level of course we note recent petroleum agreements with Angola, Ecuador, Egypt, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Libya, Myanmar, Nigeria, Oman, Peru, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Thailand and Yemen [Ridley, op cit], and the new Pakistani port of Gwadar,

[Ramachandran] while at a third parallel level France and Germany. If these are viewed as two concentric circles, we are likely to see in the future a third level of parallelism.

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