

**How China's Defense Establishment Views China's Security Environment:
A Comparison between the 2019 PRC Defense White Paper and Earlier Defense White
Papers**

Michael D. Swaine

(The author is deeply indebted to Sylvie Zhong for her assistance in the preparation of this article.)

While reaffirming China's longstanding "peace and development" line and offering a more positive take on many developments in Asia, the 2019 Defense White Paper highlights many negative features of the global security environment. This suggests an unresolved internal contradiction in China's security views and policies. Such an apparent contradiction is perhaps resolved by the Defense White Paper's description of strategic competition as driven largely by the U.S., not by China, and out of step with deeper global trends. Indeed, the PLA under Xi Jinping is depicted as working with other countries to realize Xi's "shared community for mankind" as it strengthens its deterrence capabilities. Yet this propaganda-laden take reinforces the suspicions of many regarding China's "real" goals. Beijing must inject a much more pragmatic, hard-power perspective into its public security stance and engage Washington on that basis in order to realize a meaningful level of stability based on mutual accommodation.

Most observers of China's rise and the increasingly troubled Sino-U.S. relationship tend to focus primarily on the frictions in the areas of trade, investment, and technology development. While these are certainly important, in fact the most critical driver of potential instability between Washington and Beijing consists of clashing security perceptions and policies. There is much rhetoric in Washington and elsewhere about China's supposed intention to replace the U.S. as the dominant global military superpower. This, along with some worst-case Chinese scenarios, fuels an increasingly hostile, zero-sum set of assumptions in both China and the U.S. Yet, with some notable exceptions, surprisingly little U.S. analysis behind such rhetoric looks more broadly at the most credible evidence about Chinese security views, often preferring instead to cherry-pick statements by reliable or unreliable Chinese sources to support what amounts to a mirror image of America's historical drive for military superiority.

Admittedly, it is not easy to obtain reliable data on Beijing's security perceptions and objectives. Despite China's many successes, the leadership in Beijing still sees the nation as relatively weak and under pressure from the U.S., thus requiring considerable secrecy on sensitive security matters. Although interviews with Chinese military and civilian analysts and a close reading of leaders' speeches can glean much useful information, the most authoritative and arguably the most reliable source on official Chinese security perceptions and defense policies consists of the biennial PRC Defense White Paper (DWP), published since 1998. The most recent DWP was published in July 2019.¹ Although these documents offer a carefully controlled description of security and defense issues designed to influence foreign perceptions, they also contain insights into how Beijing itself views its own security environment.

This article focuses primarily on the description of China's security environment and the content and purpose of its defense policy as contained in the 2019 DWP. It compares statements in the 2019 DWP to those in earlier DWPs. Supplemented by additional Chinese and Western sources and the author's nearly thirty years of experience studying China's security views, it presents a bottom-line assessment of how Beijing is reacting to (and proactively is seeking to shape) its increasingly challenging security environment, especially vis-à-vis the United States. The article first identifies the key features of China's security situation and its defense mission, policies, and strategies that are found in current and past DWPs as well as in some additional sources, comparing similarities and differences over time. It then assesses the implications of these findings for current Sino-U.S. security competition and its possible evolution over time.

Basic Continuity but With Some Significant Changes in China's Security Environment

Perhaps the most critical baseline feature influencing China's view of its security environment is Beijing's characterization of dominant global security trends. Since the beginning of reform and opening, the Chinese leadership has described this trend as one of "peace and development," thus placing a central stress on economic growth over security imperatives, such as an arms race or preparations for war. The 2019 DWP is consistent with virtually all past DWPs, and many other authoritative Chinese statements, in affirming such a peace and development trend. But it adds, in a phrase used since 2008, the notion of "win-win cooperation" constituting "the irreversible trends of the times."² Moreover, as with all DWPs since the 2010 document, the current 2019 DWP notes that China faces a "strategic opportunity for its development" (发展的重要战略机遇期), thus reinforcing the focus on peace and development in a relatively placid security environment.³

At the same time, all DWPs, except for the 1998, 2000, and 2006 documents, state versions of the notion that "the international security situation is undergoing profound changes."⁴ In the standard section on the International Security Situation, the 2019 DWP cites the "irreversibility" of certain generally positive changes, such as multipolarity, economic globalization, and the information society.⁵ These phrases are all similar to those in the 2010, 2013, and 2015 DWPs. While repeating references in the 2015 DWP to undefined changes in the balance of power and the importance of the Asia-Pacific geostrategic landscape (see below), the 2019 DWP for the first time also stresses that "the strength of the emerging markets and developing countries keeps growing."⁶ This is in line with the Chinese emphasis on multipolarity and the still-rapid growth of the less-industrialized states.

As with past DWPs, this overall positive assessment of the international security environment is limited in the 2019 DWP by the listing of some negative features of the global security environment. Similar to previous DWPs, it refers to "prominent destabilizing factors and uncertainties in international security," noting as examples the setbacks occurring in arms control and disarmament, the continued spread of extremism and terrorism, and the intensification of nontraditional security threats.⁷ The 2019 DWP also asserts that "international strategic competition is on the rise," and in the section on the "Asia-Pacific," it states that the region "has become a focus of major country competition."⁸

Some observers have opined that the references to strategic and major country competition in the 2019 DWP signal basic agreement with the U.S. assertion, most notably contained in the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Defense Strategy (NDS) of 2017 and 2018,⁹ that state that great power strategic competition between the U.S. and both China and Russia now constitutes a dominant feature of the global security environment.¹⁰ However, these notions are generally also found in previous DWPs. Although the section in the 2019 DWP entitled “Defensive National Defense Policy in the New Era” refers to “the new landscape of strategic competition” (see below), the much earlier 2010 DWP also states “international strategic competition and contradictions are intensifying,” and several other DWPs note the increasing major power competition (albeit invariably combining such competition with references to major power cooperation).¹¹

More importantly, the 2019 DWP seems to exclude China from its reference to expanding major power competition. Instead, it references the increasingly destabilizing actions by other nations. Indeed, for the first time in a DWP, the 2019 document lists in detail the destabilizing actions carried out by the U.S., Russia, the EU states, UK, Germany, France, Japan, and India.¹² Most notably, the 2019 DWP reinforces the notion, which is also suggested by other Chinese authoritative and non-authoritative statements,¹³ that today the U.S. is the primary source of disruption in the international security order.¹⁴ As in the previous DWPs, the 2019 document states that the U.S. is undermining “global strategic stability” (全球战略稳定).¹⁵ But arguably it employs more direct, detailed, and stronger language than in the past to describe U.S. disruption, specifically mentioning the NSS and the NDS.¹⁶ In addition, the 2019 DWP suggests that Washington is destabilizing the global order by pursuing “absolute military superiority,” thereby presumably undermining the Chinese search for win-win outcomes and movement toward a more multipolar, cooperative security system.¹⁷

Yet, despite such ominous assessments of U.S. behavior, the 2019 DWP describes Sino-U.S. military relations as “generally stable” and it notes that Beijing “actively and properly handles its military relationship with the U.S. in accordance with the principles of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation.”¹⁸ This is again designed to show that, even though the U.S. is increasingly disrupting the global security environment, China is seeking stability and cooperation with Washington and rejecting strategic competition.¹⁹ In fact, such competition contradicts the main “peace and development” trend of the era and clashes with Xi Jinping’s notion that mankind is moving toward “a community with a shared future” (人类命运共同体).²⁰ The 2019 DWP explicitly links PLA modernization with this notion, stating: “A strong military of China is a staunch force for world peace, stability and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.”²¹

The picture in the 2019 DWP of a still positive if increasingly unstable (in some respects) global security environment is also reflected in the treatment of other nations, regions, and security issues. Departing from concerns expressed in the previous two documents but returning to earlier similar assessments, the 2019 DWP describes the Asia-Pacific security situation as “generally stable,” with efforts made to address differences and disputes through dialogue and consultation viewed as an increasingly preferred policy option for most regional states.²² The 2019 DWP again employs the idea of “a community with shared destiny,” in this instance to describe relations among the Asian nations.²³ It similarly describes the situation in the South

China Sea as “generally stable and improving as regional countries are properly managing risks and differences.”²⁴ This is in marked contrast to the much more extensive, and negative, description of the South China Sea situation in the 2015 DWP.²⁵

Along with these new positive statements regarding the South China Sea, the 2019 DWP also asserts for the first time that “China exercises its national sovereignty to build infrastructure and deploy necessary defensive capabilities on the islands and reefs in the South China Sea.”²⁶ Also, unlike the 2013 and 2015 DWPs, the 2019 document specifically brings up the issue of the South and East China Seas in its “National Defense Policy” section, stating the standard position that the disputed maritime territories along China’s ocean periphery “are inalienable parts of the Chinese territory.”²⁷ In addition, similar to the 2015 DWP, the current document stresses maritime defense, repeating the call to “build a combined, multifunctional and efficient marine combat force structure.”²⁸ The overall impression is that although this sensitive maritime area is stabilizing on the basis of regional dialogue, China is nonetheless strengthening its position to defend its claims. This apparently contradictory stance is undoubtedly resolved, in the minds of China’s leaders, by the belief that Beijing’s military actions are contributing to peace and stability by deterring others (including the U.S.) from challenging its claims with force.²⁹

The treatment of Japan in the 2019 DWP is very similar to that in the 2015 DWP, albeit with slightly more moderate language. Japan is again described as attempting to “circumvent the post-war [peace] mechanism” and is becoming more “outward-looking in its military endeavors.”³⁰ This is in contrast to the very critical language in the 2013 DWP when Tokyo and Beijing were at loggerheads over the Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands.³¹ Whereas the Korean Peninsula is described in the 2015 DWP as “shrouded in uncertainty and instability,” in the 2019 document it is depicted as showing “positive progress” alongside continued uncertainty.³² For the first time, the 2019 DWP notes Australia’s supposed desire to play a “bigger role in security affairs” in the Asia-Pacific.³³

These generally moderate assessments of the Asian environment stand in contrast to the sharp comments on Taiwan in the 2019 DWP, undoubtedly reflecting the alleged disruption of cross-Strait relations resulting from the rise of pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party politician Tsai Ing-wen to the presidency of the ROC in January 2016, replacing the vastly more pro-China Ma Ying-jeou of the Nationalist (Kuomintang) Party.³⁴ While repeating the usual description of separatist independence forces in Taiwan constituting a grave threat to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the greatest barrier to peaceful unification, the 2019 DWP reverses the positive assessment of cross-Strait relations in the 2008 through the 2015 DWPs. Whereas the 2015 document states: “[i]n recent years, cross-Taiwan Straits relations have sustained a sound momentum of peaceful development,” the 2019 document asserts that “the fight against separatists is becoming more acute.”³⁵ It strongly criticizes the stubbornness of the Tsai government in its refusal to recognize the so-called 1992 Consensus that formed the basis for stable cross-Strait relations under President Ma Ying-jeou. Moreover, unlike in the 2013 and 2015 DWPs, in the 2019 document the Taiwan issue is mentioned in the “National Defense Policy” section (discussed below), using strident language derived from Xi Jinping’s remarks to express China’s resolute stance.³⁶ This negative shift in tone reflects the greater concern in Beijing about political trends on Taiwan and China’s need to convey strong deterrence signals to both the ROC government and the Taiwan public.

Regarding Beijing's important relationship with Russia, the 2019 DWP echoes the language of many recent DWPs in extolling the "strategic and cooperative partnership" with Moscow and, for the first time, describes the partnership as "playing a significant role in maintaining global strategic stability."³⁷ This take is directed at the allegedly destabilizing actions by the United States. The 2019 DWP also devotes more space than past DWPs to describing the partnership with Moscow. It depicts Russia in relatively neutral terms, such as "strengthening its nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities" in order "to safeguard its strategic security space and interests."³⁸ Notably, in the previous DWPs there is no mention of Russia in the "International Security Situation" section.

Interestingly, for the first time India is mentioned in the context of efforts to build its military forces, unlike all previous DWPs that discuss India either in the context of a regional conflict or in the context of inter-state cooperation.³⁹

Finally, with regard to global military developments, the 2019 DWP for the first time specifically devotes an entire sub-section to the intensifying global military competition. Echoing the 2015 DWP, it states that "international military competition is undergoing historic changes," and it notes the prevailing trend to "develop long-range precision, intelligent, stealthy or unmanned weaponry and equipment" and the evolution of war toward "informationized warfare."⁴⁰ It also states that "intelligent warfare is on the horizon." However, with regard to the PLA's own development, the 2019 DWP states that the 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."⁴¹ Indeed, it seems that the 2019 DWP shows greater concern for the gaps between China and the other advanced military powers than the previous DWPs. It specifically mentions the military reforms carried out by the U.S., Russia, the UK, France, Germany, Japan, and India. It also points out that the application of cutting-edge technologies, such as AI, is gathering pace in the military field. None of these points appear in the previous DWPs.

A Still Defensive yet More Expansive and Ideological Defense Policy and Strategy

In responding to what is described as a basically peaceful yet increasingly challenging international security environment, the 2019 DWP affirms the continuity of the basic features of China's defense policy and mission, while adding some interesting new elements. Despite the stated shortcomings of PLA modernization as noted above, the 2019DWP nonetheless reaffirms the continuity of a defense strategy of "active defense," albeit now defined as "strategic guidance for China's national defense in the new era,"⁴² but "actively adapt[ed] to the new landscape of strategic competition, the new demands of national security, and new developments in modern warfare."⁴³ It also reaffirms China's "independent foreign policy of peace."⁴⁴

In contrast to the previous DWPs, the current document highlights "no first use of nuclear weapons," "the achievement of mechanization and informationization," "the modernization of military theory, organizational structure," and other areas as the strategic guidelines for active defense, while omitting "winning informationized local wars," "maritime military struggle," and "controlling major crises."⁴⁵ The latter guidelines were cited in the 2015 and 2013 DWPs. The

absence of any reference to maritime struggle probably reflects the reduced emphasis in the current document on maritime tensions (though not a reduced emphasis on maritime defense missions).

The 2019 DWP provides a list of China's national defense goals that, by and large, repeats those listed in the previous DWPs.⁴⁶ The one exception is an unprecedented reference to the need to safeguard "people's security" (人民安全), perhaps indicating a greater focus on domestic instability of various types.

In a manner similar to the 2015 DWP, the current document lists China's major defense missions and tasks as "national and people's security," "national sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security," "social stability," "political security," and "overseas interests."⁴⁷ But the 2019 DWP also cites the need to oppose "Taiwan independence," "Tibet independence," and "the creation of 'East Turkistan'" as national defense goals, undoubtedly reflecting Beijing's greater concern now about these dangers.⁴⁸

In addition, unlike previous DWPs, the current document stresses the need for China's defense strategy to "build a community with a shared future for mankind," an agenda described as conveying "the global significance of China's national defense in the new era."⁴⁹ As suggested above, this is obviously included in fealty to Xi Jinping's oft-repeated line. It is the first time that the leadership of a single person, directly and authoritatively linked to a specific policy line, has been so strongly asserted in a DWP.⁵⁰ All of this reflects the increased influence of Xi and his stress on strengthening party control and ideology in all areas, including the military.

That said, the 2019 DWP also places a high priority on developing greater military prowess. In defining China's military modernization goals, it echoes past DWPs by stressing the need to "build a fortified national defense and a strong military commensurate with the country's international standing and its security and development interests."⁵¹ At the same time, in an apparent attempt to reassure others that such goals do not threaten them, the 2019 DWP is also much clearer and more assertive in stating the standard refrain that China will never seek hegemony, and for the first time this position is discussed in two paragraphs. In fact, the 2019 DWP states: "Never seeking hegemony, expansion or spheres of influence" is the "distinctive feature of China's national defense in the new era."⁵²

As with the 2015 DWP, the 2019 document also refers to the PLAN's development of far seas or open seas protection (远海防卫) alongside "near seas defense." The only significant difference in this formulation is that the latter states for the first time that the PLAN is "speeding up" the transition of its tasks "from defense on the near seas to protection missions on the far seas" (加快推进近海防御型向远海防卫型转变).⁵³

Finally, departing from previous DWPs, the 2019 document cites where progress has been made in reform efforts and where it has fallen behind schedule. Again, it asserts that the PLA has "yet to complete the task of mechanization" and is "in urgent need of improving its informationization."⁵⁴ This is clearly designed to rebut the notion that the PLA is a peer competitor with the most advanced militaries.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Perhaps more than any of its predecessors, the 2019 DWP presents a series of apparent contradictions in describing China's security environment and justifying its defense strategy and policies. On the one hand, it reaffirms the continued validity of the longstanding military strategy of "active defense" and China's "independent foreign policy of peace," and it offers a generally moderate assessment of a more stable Asia-Pacific region (with the exception of Taiwan). It also goes to considerable length to reassure others that in many ways China remains behind the advanced nations militarily and it is committed to never seeking hegemony.

On the other hand, the DWP also highlights an intensifying level of global and regional security competition involving new technologies and weapons systems. Of particular note, the 2019 DWP stresses the security challenges presented by the supposed "new era." These include not only technological changes and possible increasing domestic instability but also, and most notably, greater disruptions to the global order by the U.S., in part as a result of its search for "absolute military superiority."

This description of a disruptive U.S. is of course not unusual in Chinese rhetoric during the past several years. Yet the fact that it is brought up in an unprecedentedly direct and extensive manner and is contrasted with China's allegedly peace-seeking behavior reaffirms Beijing's clear desire to present itself to the world as a bastion of stability and cooperation, not as a proponent of obsolete great power rivalry and confrontation. It is also a pointed (if not explicitly confrontational) reaction to what it regards as the more destabilizing security-related actions taken by the Trump Administration, reflected in the more hostile approach toward China in the NSS and the NDS.

Therefore, far from confirming Washington's view of a global order dominated by growing strategic competition between the U.S. and its allies on the one hand, and China and Russia (and Iran) on the other, the 2019 DWP defines strategic competition as largely centered on the machinations of power-maximizing states other than China. Here Beijing is depicted as standing outside the fray, working to achieve a cooperative security environment while trying to deter others and uphold its rights. In this context, China's development and deployment of advanced weapons in the more placid South China Sea are seen as stabilizing, not provocative.

Finally, in asserting China's supposed commitment to avoid strategic competition, the 2019 DWP repeatedly cites Xi Jinping's desire "to build a community with a shared future for mankind," based in part on the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation as a strong and peaceful power. Indeed, as shown above, the DWP contains an unprecedented emphasis on the views and policy lines of China's top leader in defining the PLA's approach to modernization and defense strategy.

All in all, the 2019 DWP represents an expression of China's overall military response to what is viewed as a more challenging and in some ways more threatening environment. This response, focusing on Xi Jinping's dominant theme on the need to build a strong yet cooperative, positive-sum-oriented China, seeks to avoid a direct confrontation with the U.S. despite Washington's leading role in disrupting the world order in virtually every area. Beijing is thus presented as a

positive counterexample to a reckless and unpredictable Washington, strong and strident in the defense of its rights and interests but working with other countries to sustain the still-dominant trend of peace and development.

This stance is understandable, given China’s continued need to deepen and benefit from economic ties with other nations and to uphold Xi’s grand vision of unity and comity, while at the same time strengthening its military. However, to a great extent, this simplistic, propaganda-laden take on the world simply reinforces the suspicions of many in the West regarding China’s “real” goals. Many observers tend to interpret China’s honeyed words as designed merely to defuse efforts to confront China’s increasingly aggressive agenda in Asia and beyond. In this way, China’s feigned naiveté serves to reinforce what are in fact weakly supported worst-case assumptions about its goals, thus deepening tensions with the U.S. and others. Until Beijing 1.) injects a much more pragmatic, hard-power perspective into its public-security stance, and 2.) attempts to engage Washington on that basis in order to realize some meaningful level of mutual accommodation, the global security environment will continue to fray.

About the Author



Michael Swaine is a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and one of the most prominent American analysts in Chinese security studies. Formerly a senior policy analyst at the RAND Corporation, Swaine is a specialist in Chinese defense and foreign policy, U.S.-China relations, and East Asian international relations.

He has authored and edited more than a dozen books and monographs and many journal articles and book chapters in these areas, directs several security-related projects with Chinese partners, and advises the U.S. government on Asian security issues. He received his doctorate in government from Harvard University.

¹ “China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

² “China’s National Defense in 2008.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, January 20, 2009, Beijing.

http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7060059.htm;

“China’s National Defense in 2010.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, March 31, 2011, Beijing.

http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7114675.htm;

“The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, April 16, 2013, Beijing.

http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7181425.htm;

“China’s Military Strategy.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, May 26, 2015, Beijing.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm;

“China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

³ “China’s National Defense in 2010.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, March 31, 2011, Beijing, 11.

http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7114675.htm;

“The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, April 16, 2013, Beijing, 3.

http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7181425.htm;

“China’s Military Strategy.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, May 26, 2015, Beijing, 3.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm;

“China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 6.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

⁴ “China’s National Defense in 2002.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, December 2002, Beijing, 6. <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20021209/index.htm>;

“China’s National Defense in 2004.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, December 2004, Beijing, 2. <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20041227/index.htm>;

“China’s National Defense in 2008.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, January 20, 2009, Beijing, 4.

http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7060059.htm;

“China’s National Defense in 2010.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, March 31, 2011, Beijing, 4.

http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7114675.htm;

“The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, April 16, 2013, Beijing, 3.

http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7181425.htm;

“China’s Military Strategy.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, May 26, 2015, Beijing, 3.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm;

“China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 4.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

⁵ “China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 4.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html;

⁶ “China’s Military Strategy.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, May 26, 2015, Beijing, 4.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm;

“China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹ United States. White House Office. National Security Strategy. December 2017.

<https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=806478>;

United States. Department of Defense. Summary of 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America. January 2018. <file:///Users/sylviez/Desktop/807329.pdf>.

¹⁰ For example, according to Dennis Blasko, “the Chinese leadership has got the message loud and clear from the U.S. National Security Strategy and National Defence Strategy that international strategic competition is on the rise.”

“Chinese Defense White Paper is Full of Self-praise.” Asian News International, July 30, 2019.

<https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/chinese-defence-white-paper-is-full-of-self-praise20190730095454/>;

Anthony H. Cordesman, “China’s New 2019 Defense White Paper: An Open Strategic Challenge to the U.S., But One Which Does Not Have to Lead to Conflict.” Center for Strategic & International Studies, July 24, 2019. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-new-2019-defense-white-paper>.

¹¹ The 2013 DWP states: “The Asia-Pacific region has become an increasingly significant stage for world economic development and strategic interaction between major powers. The US is adjusting its Asia-Pacific security strategy, and the regional landscape is undergoing profound changes.” The 2008 DWP notes that “The rise and decline of international strategic forces is quickening, major powers are stepping up their efforts to cooperate with each other and draw on each other's strengths. They continue to compete with and hold each other in check, and groups of new emerging developing powers are arising.” The 2004 DWP asserts: “New and profound readjustments have taken place in the relations among the world's major countries. While cooperating with and seeking support from each other, they are checking on and competing with one another as well.” And the 2000 DWP states: “Relations among big powers are complicated, with many interwoven contradictions and frictions. However, drawing on each other's strength,

cooperating with and checking and constraining each other remain a basic feature of their relationship."

"The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces." Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, April 16, 2013, Beijing, 3.

http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7181425.htm;

"China's National Defense in 2008." Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, January 20, 2009, Beijing, 4.

http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7060059.htm;

"China's National Defense in 2004." Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, December 2004, Beijing, 2. [http://www.china.org.cn/e-](http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20041227/index.htm)

[white/20041227/index.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20041227/index.htm);

"China's National Defense in 2000." Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, October 2000, Beijing, 2. <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/2000/index.htm>.

¹² See "China's National Defense in the New Era." Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, pp. 4, 8.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html;

The 2019 DWP states: "International strategic competition is on the rise. The US has adjusted its national security and defense strategies and adopted unilateral policies. It has provoked and intensified competition among major countries, significantly increased its defense expenditure, pushed for additional capacity in nuclear, outer space, cyber and missile defense, and undermined global strategic stability. NATO has continued its enlargement, stepped up military deployment in Central and Eastern Europe, and conducted frequent military exercises. Russia is strengthening its nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities for strategic containment and striving to safeguard its strategic security space and interests. The European Union (EU) is accelerating its security and defense integration to be more independent in its own security." "Major countries around the world are readjusting their security and military strategies and military organizational structures. They are developing new types of combat forces to seize the strategic commanding heights in military competition. The US is engaging in technological and institutional innovation in pursuit of absolute military superiority. Russia is advancing its New Look military reform. Meanwhile, the UK, France, Germany, Japan and India are rebalancing and optimizing the structure of their military forces."

¹³ See, e.g., "维护全球战略稳定，减少核冲突风险"—外交部军控司司长傅聪在第十六届北京军控研讨会上的讲话, October 16, 2019.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjbxw_673019/t1708323.shtml;

参考消息, "美国反复无常威胁全球稳定." August 9, 2019. <http://www.ckxx.net/p/179042.html>;

人民日报, "以和平合作守护世界安全—维护国际道义才有世界共同繁荣," June 27, 2019.

http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2019-06/27/c_1124676939.htm.

¹⁴ "China's National Defense in the New Era." Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 6–8.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ For example, whereas most of the earlier DWPs refer indirectly to the U.S. as one of "some powers," the 2019 document directly names it for each security threat or destabilizing factor that is suggested to be caused by the U.S. Moreover, while repeating some of the same examples of disruptive U.S. behavior as found in previous DWPs (such as cyber and space strategies and the

outdated and disruptive U.S. alliance system in Asia), the 2019 document also cites the U.S. THAAD deployment to South Korea, U.S. unilateralism and increased military spending, and the presumably provocative and destabilizing nature of U.S. national security and U.S. national defense strategies.

¹⁷ “China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 8.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

¹⁸ The 2019 DWP provides a long overview of the main accomplishments of the Sino-U.S. mil-mil relationship. *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁹ At the same time, the 2019 DWP repeats the standard PLA criticism voiced in many military-to-military interactions that China resolutely opposes the practices of the U.S. regarding 1.) arms sales to Taiwan, 2.) sanctions on the Central Military Commission Equipment Development Department and its leadership, 3.) illegal entry into China’s territorial waters, and so forth, and 4.) frequent close-in reconnaissance. *Ibid.*

²⁰ Helena Legarda, “Presenting China as a Responsible Power,” Mercator Institute for China Studies, August 1, 2019. Also see Elsa B. Kania and Peter Wood, “Major Themes in China’s 2019 National Defense White Paper,” Center for a New American Security, July 31, 2019, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/major-themes-in-chinas-2019-national-defense-white-paper>; and Dr. Subhash Kapila, “China’s Military White Paper 2019 – OpEd,” *Eurasia Review*, July 31, 2019, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/31072019-chinas-military-white-paper-2019-oped/>.

²¹ “China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 14.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

²² *Ibid.*, 5.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ The 2015 DWP states: “On the issues concerning China’s territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, some of its offshore neighbors take provocative actions and reinforce their military presence on China’s reefs and islands that they have illegally occupied. Some external countries are also busy meddling in South China Sea affairs; a tiny few maintain constant close-in air and sea surveillance and reconnaissance against China. It is thus a long-standing task for China to safeguard its maritime rights and interests.”

“China’s Military Strategy.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, May 26, 2015, Beijing, 4.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm.

²⁶ “China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 10.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁹ Lim Yan Liang, “China's Defence White Paper Emphasises Growing Military Competition, Homeland Security,” *Straits Times*, July 24, 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/chinas-defence-white-paper-emphasises-growing-military-competition-homeland-security>.

³⁰ “China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 6.
http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

³¹ “The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, April 16, 2013, Beijing.
http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7181425.htm.

³² “China’s Military Strategy.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, May 26, 2015, Beijing, 4.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm;

“China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 6.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

³³ “China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 6.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁵ “China’s Military Strategy.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, May 26, 2015, Beijing, 4.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm;

“China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 7.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

³⁶ The 2019 DWP states: “China has the firm resolve and the ability to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity and will never allow the secession of any part of its territory by anyone, any organization or any political party by any means at any time.” In the 19th National Party Congress Report, Xi states: “We have the resolve, the confidence, and the ability to defeat separatist attempts for ‘Taiwan independence’ in any form. We will never allow anyone, any organization, or any political party, at any time or in any form, to separate any part of Chinese territory from China!” See Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.” Delivered at the 19th National Party Congress. http://english.qstheory.cn/2018-02/11/c_1122395333.htm;

“China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 10.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html;

³⁷ “China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 44.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html

[83d.html](#). Also see Elsa B. Kania and Peter Wood, “Major Themes in China’s 2019 National Defense White Paper,” Center for a New American Security, July 31, 2019, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/major-themes-in-chinas-2019-national-defense-white-paper>.

³⁸ “China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing. http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

³⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² The use of the term “new era” reflects obeisance to “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” introduced at the 19th Party Congress and designated as the long-term “guiding thought” of the CCP. This concept covers a broad range of areas, such as economics, politics, technology, national security, national defense, and military-force building. See 刘云山, 深入学习贯彻习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想, *People’s Daily*, December 20, 2017. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1106/c64094-29628985.html>;

The term “new era” is mentioned 28 times in the 2019 DWP. In contrast, it did not appear in the 2015 DWP, which instead stressed that China is at a critical stage of “reform and development.” “China’s Military Strategy.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, May 26, 2015, Beijing, 4.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm;

“China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 12.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

⁴³ “China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 12.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html;

As noted in Dennis J. Blasko, “China’s Head-Spinning Defense White Paper,” *Real Clear World*, July 26, 2019. https://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2019/07/29/chinas_head-spinning_defense_white_paper_113065.html.

The new developments in modern warfare apparently refer to the “trend of the new global military revolution” or the global Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), which is identified in Chinese statements as focusing on informationization. See the first paragraph of Section IV: “Reform in China’s National Defense and Armed Forces”; “China’s National Defense in the New Era.” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 9.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 9–14.

⁴⁶ These goals include: to deter and resist aggression; safeguard national political security, and social stability; oppose and contain Taiwan independence; crack down on proponents of separatist movements such as Tibet independence and the creation of East Turkistan (only mentioned previously in the 2010 DWP); safeguard national sovereignty, unity, territorial

integrity and security; safeguard China's maritime rights and interests; safeguard China's security interests in outer space, electromagnetic space and cyberspace (also only mentioned in the 2010 DWP); safeguard China's overseas interests; and support the sustainable development of the country. "China's National Defense in 2010." Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, March 31, 2011, Beijing.
http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7114675.htm; "China's National Defense in the New Era." Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing.
http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

⁴⁷ "China's National Defense in the New Era." Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 15–23.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

⁴⁸ "The prevention of separatist movements" is mentioned in other DWPs, but only the 2010 and 2019 DWPs list the prevention of Tibet and East Turkistan "independence" as a national defense goal.

"China's National Defense in 2010." Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, March 31, 2011, Beijing, 7.

http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7114675.htm;

"China's National Defense in the New Era." Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, July 24, 2019, Beijing, 9.

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁰ In fact, the 2019 document states that "it is imperative to comprehensively implement Xi Jinping's thinking on strengthening the military, thoroughly deliver on Xi Jinping's thinking on military strategy, and continue to enhance the political loyalty of the armed forces." It also asserts that: "China's armed forces unswervingly take Xi Jinping's thinking on strengthening the military as the guidance, firmly uphold General Secretary Xi Jinping as the core of the CPC and the whole Party." Ibid., 13–14.

⁵¹ Ibid., 38.

⁵² Ibid., 11.

⁵³ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁵ The 2019 DWP seems to press for an increase in defense spending, stating: "There is still a wide gap between China's defense expenditure and the requirements for safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests, for fulfilling China's international responsibilities and obligations as a major country, and for China's development." Ibid., 38.