

China's 2012 Defense White Paper: Panel Discussion Report

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**China's 2012 Defense White Paper:
Panel Discussion Report**

Executive summary

On May 17, 2013, CNA's China Studies Division and the National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies held a panel discussion on China's most recent defense white paper, released on April 16, 2013. The following are the key observations that emerged from this discussion.

China's defense white papers are authoritative statements on China's defense and security policies, released every two years. "Fully vetted and staffed by the various organs of the Party-State," they represent the coordinated and authoritative views of the Chinese government writ large, not just those of the Chinese military. These authoritative statements seek to inform and shape both domestic and international audiences in accordance with Chinese Communist Party-approved priorities.

This year's white paper has a new format. Rather than broadly assess China's "external environment, basic defense policy principles, budgets, and doctrine for force employment," this year's edition focuses more on describing the use of China's military and how such use benefits both the Chinese people and the international community. The paper describes how the military is (1) protecting Chinese citizens, (2) defending China's sovereignty, (3) responding to domestic emergencies, (4) assisting with economic development, (5) safeguarding overseas Chinese interests, and (6) demonstrating the military's international commitment to peacekeeping, disaster relief, and sea lane protection.

The white paper contains different messages for different audiences. The white paper seeks to send messages to both domestic and foreign audiences, providing each with a different takeaway. Domestically, the white paper conveys messages to (1) Chinese citizens, (2) Chinese officials across the various Party and government bureaucracies, and (3) the Chinese armed forces. The paper also highlights to foreign observers the Party's military and security priorities. Shaping aspects include sending (1) messages of concern, which seek to relay international issues that are causing China's leadership unease, and (2) messages of intent, which seek to reassure that China's military is a defensive force that won't threaten others as it develops its emerging "expeditionary" capabilities in order to defend China's growing overseas interests.

This year's white paper closely tracks with and reinforces Chinese Communist Party priorities. Much of the white paper reflects Party priorities, as enunciated in the 18th Party Congress work report. Of note, that work report discusses China's intent to develop the military into "powerful armed forces that are commensurate with China's international standing and meet the needs of its security and development interests." This likely demonstrates that developing "powerful armed forces" is (1) a strategic task of China's overall modernization efforts, (2) a prerequisite for meeting China's "other development needs," (3) a requirement for China's international standing as a "major power," and (4) a key to keeping pace with China's increasingly global national interests.

China’s perspective on the international situation is slightly more negative than it was in the 2010 edition. Although this year’s white paper portrays positive aspects of China’s international situation, its tone is slightly more pessimistic than that of the 2010 edition. Positive aspects noted in the paper are that “peace and development remain the underlying trends” and that overall, “the international situation remains peaceful and stable.” Negative assessments in this year’s paper include concern over the increase of “hegemonism, power politics, and neo-interventionism”; a slowdown in the shift towards a globalized, multipolar world; a slowdown in China’s ability to close the power gap with the United States; and regional concerns such as U.S. activities in the region and China’s maritime sovereignty disputes—especially its dispute with Japan. As a result, the paper notes that China faces a “complex and volatile security situation.”

The white paper contains key new information. New to this white paper are discussions of (1) China’s policies on the use of its armed forces for various tasks, (2) military levels of readiness, (3) ground force unit designators, (4) service personnel numbers, (5) missile designators for some ballistic and cruise missiles, and (6) the military’s role in defending international sea lanes and China’s overseas interests.

China’s “no first use” nuclear policy remains in place. Unlike previous defense white papers, the 2012 defense white paper fails to mention China’s “no first use” nuclear policy. As a result, Western observers expressed concern that this omission implied a change or abandonment of China’s nuclear policy. Noting that Westerners were taking away the wrong message, the Chinese military quickly mobilized a public relations campaign to correct this message and reassure the international community that China has not abandoned its “no first use” policy.

China's 2012 Defense White Paper: Panel Discussion Report

Daniel M. Hartnett¹

On April 16, 2013, the People's Republic of China (PRC) released The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces, the latest version of its biennial defense white paper. Continuing a practice since the publication of China's first defense white paper in 1998, CNA sponsored a panel discussion to review, analyze, and comment on this important document. This event was once again co-sponsored by the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University. Panelists for this event included Dr. David M. Finkelstein, CNA China Studies; Dr. Phillip Saunders, Institute for National Strategic Studies; Ms. Bonnie S. Glaser, Center for Strategic and International Studies; and Mr. Dennis J. Blasko, CNA China Studies and retired U.S. Army foreign area officer. This report reflects the major themes that emerged in our discussions.

Introduction: Demonstrating how the PLA supports the Party's goals

This year's defense white paper is Beijing's eighth since 1998. Therefore, as Dr. Finkelstein observed, it is "safe to say that the habit of issuing these documents has now taken firm root in Beijing." Moreover panelists agreed that this year's version focuses on demonstrating how China's military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), is upholding and defending China's national interests, as articulated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Dr. Finkelstein, for example, discussed how this paper portrays the PLA as a military undertaking activities in line with the CCP objective of developing a powerful military commensurate with China's standing as a great power. Ms. Glaser noted that this white paper reflects priorities articulated in the 18th Party Congress work report, released in November 2012, further demonstrating the PLA's aim to fulfill CCP objectives.

The role of China's defense white papers

In assessing the content of this white paper, the panelists highlighted the importance of properly understanding what these biennial, authoritative documents are and what they are not. Dr. Finkelstein noted that, while the PLA has primary responsibility for drafting and coordinating its publication, it is "not just the PLA's white paper." Although most of the content is provided by the PLA, it is "fully vetted and staffed by the various organs of the Party-State because it is a highly political document." In addition, the State Council's Information Office, not the PLA, publishes China's defense white papers. Rather than representing only the PLA's views, they "represent the coordinated and authoritative views of the PRC writ large" on China's security and defense policies.

¹ The author is a research scientist in the China Studies division at CNA in Alexandria, Virginia. The views and opinions in this report reflect the proceedings of the event held on May 17, 2013, and do not necessarily constitute the views of CNA or INSS/NDU.

According to Dr. Finkelstein, publication of a defense white paper serves two important functions for Beijing: informing and shaping. By way of informing, China's defense white papers "serve as vehicles to selectively provide basic data on China's defense policies and its armed forces." The document also provides the Chinese government with opportunities to "shape and manage domestic and international perceptions" in a way that accords with how Beijing would like its defense and security policies to be viewed. In other words, Dr. Finkelstein noted, it provides Beijing with an opportunity "to put its own spin on the implications of its policies."

A new format to this year's white paper

Panelists were quick to note that this year's defense white paper is structurally different from previous editions. Dr. Saunders observed how this year's paper, rather than broadly assessing China's "external environment, basic defense policy principles, budgets, and doctrine for force employment," focuses more on describing the use of China's military and how such use benefits both the Chinese people and the international community. According to Dr. Saunders, the focus for domestic audiences is on how the PLA is (1) protecting Chinese citizens, (2) defending China's sovereignty, (3) responding to domestic emergencies, (4) assisting with economic development, and (5) safeguarding overseas Chinese interests. For the rest of the world's benefit, the white paper explains PLA involvement in United Nations peacekeeping operations, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance activities, missions to safeguard international sea lanes, and international military exercises. For this reason, Dr. Saunders quipped, the theme for this white paper could be "What Red Can Do For You."

Dr. Saunders also pointed out that, because of the new thematic format of the defense white paper, it is difficult to compare it with past editions in order to measure its level of transparency—although he suggested that it would likely be considered more transparent due to the inclusion of some new information.² According to Chinese commentary, future defense white papers will alternate between a thematic and a broader approach.

Different messages for different audiences.

China's defense white papers serve a messaging function for Beijing, speaking simultaneously to multiple audiences. According to Dr. Finkelstein, the papers seek to convey messages to foreign audiences within the region and around the globe. He also noted that the white papers target three domestic audiences: Chinese citizens, Chinese officials across the various CCP and state bureaucracies, and the PLA.

The report has two message functions: to relay intent and to relay concern. According to Dr. Finkelstein, there were two messages of intent:

- *A standard message of "reassurance."* Similar to previous editions, this white paper seeks to assure the international community that no matter how the PLA evolves, "China's armed forces are for defensive purposes as well as the maintenance of international peace." In particular, Dr. Finkelstein pointed out that an entire section of this year's white paper discusses the PLA as a force for peace, highlighting PLA

² See pages 5 and 6 of this report for panelists' discussion on what was new in this white paper.

participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations, international and domestic humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, antipiracy operations off the Horn of Africa, and other international endeavors. Dr. Saunders agreed, stating that this year's white paper makes a "straightforward positive case for what the PLA is doing and argues that a range of daily actions have a positive impact." Commentary in the Chinese media about the white paper in the days following the paper's release reinforced the idea that PLA activities and developments do not pose a threat to others.

- *A new message of "expeditionary" intentions.* Saying that this might be the most important message in the white paper, Dr. Finkelstein observed that embedded in the paper's preface is the statement that China needs "powerful armed forces commensurate with China's international standing." He noted that this statement is a significant development due to its placement in the preface and its suggestion that, in his terms, "a 'powerful military' underwrites China's other developmental objectives." The white paper's emphasis on the expeditionary nature of the PLA was also reflected in the various commentaries published in official Chinese media in the weeks following the white paper's release.

Dr. Finkelstein noted that this paper also contains a second type of message—messages of concern, which reflect Chinese thinking about issues that are causing China's leadership unease. This year, such concerns include a perceived increase in "hegemonism, power politics, and neo-interventionism"; a slowdown in the shift towards a globalized, multipolar world; a slowdown in China's ability to close the power gap with the United States; and regional concerns such as the U.S. rebalance to Asia and maritime sovereignty disputes—especially its dispute with Japan. These issues are more fully discussed in the next section.

A slightly more negative view of China's international situation

Ms. Glaser stated that the assessment of the international situation is "less optimistic" this year than it was in the previous edition (2010), although it is not a radical departure. She noted that while the paper addresses both positive and negative aspects, it appears to emphasize the latter.

Concerning the positive aspects described in the paper, she highlighted two sentences in particular:

- "Peace and development remain the underlying trends of our times"—a significant point, given the ongoing debates in China since 1999 about whether China's strategic opportunity period is still valid.³
- "The balance of international forces is shifting in favor of maintaining world peace, and on the whole the international situation remains peaceful and stable."

³ The strategic opportunity period refers to the first 20 years of the 21st century, when China's leadership perceives China to be in a time of unprecedented opportunity during which it can focus on development and modernization without fear of being involved in major international conflict. This perception was first publicly articulated by then CCP leader Jiang Zemin in November 2002, when he gave the 16th Party Congress work report. Xinhua, "Full Text of Jiang Zemin's Report at 16th Party Congress," 17 November 2002.

However, Ms. Glaser felt that there were more negative assessments than in previous years. Noting global concerns, this year's report refers to "signs of increasing hegemonism, power politics, and neo-interventionism," terms not used in the 2010 edition.⁴ In addition, she noted, the paper asserts that China's security environment has become increasingly complex. She also stated that the paper takes a more pessimistic view of the development of globalization and multipolarity, both seen in Beijing as benefiting China. Furthermore, the 2012 white paper holds less optimism that China will be able to quickly close the gap in global power with the United States, due to the ongoing U.S. economic recovery.

This year's white paper also emphasizes regional security concerns, to include:

- U.S. activities in the region, such as strengthening its regional alliances, expanding its "military presence," and "frequently making the situation [in the region] tenser."⁵ In addition, the paper obliquely criticizes the U.S. Rebalance to Asia strategy as causing "profound changes" in the region.⁶
- Maritime sovereignty disputes, in which "some neighboring countries are taking actions that complicate or exacerbate the situation." Of note, Japan is singled out, as a country that "is making trouble over the issue of the Diaoyu [Senkaku] Islands."
- The risk of Taiwan separatism, which, although discussed less in this year's edition than in past ones, is again highlighted as a concern.
- Non-traditional security concerns, such as "serious natural disasters, security accidents and public health incidents."

As a result of these challenges, Ms. Glaser stated, "One can sense growing Chinese concerns about what is happening on China's periphery."

Reflects CCP priorities

Panelists noted that this white paper echoes recent CCP priorities, as articulated in the CCP's 18th Party Congress work report. Ms. Glaser, for example, described how the 2012 white paper repeats phrases contained within the work report, such as:

- The reaffirmation that "peace and development" remain the underlying trend of the times⁷

⁴ Ms. Glaser did note that hegemonism and power politics were listed as problems in the 2008 edition, although neo-isolationism was not.

⁵ Ms. Glaser stated that criticism of U.S. activities in the region is not a new phenomenon in China's defense white papers, and has been even stronger in previous editions.

⁶ Of note, the white paper does not refer to the U.S. Rebalance to Asia by name, but rather states that "The United States is adjusting its Asia-Pacific security strategy."

⁷ For the significance of this term to PRC national security planning, see David M. Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders its National Security: "The Great Peace and Development Debate of 1999,"* CNA Memorandum D0014464.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, December 2000).

- The increase in problems such as “hegemonism and power politics”
- The growth of “multipolarity and economic globalization”
- The need to develop a powerful military “commensurate with China’s international standing and meet the needs of its security and development interests.”⁸

Dr. Finkelstein agreed, saying that the white paper’s statement about building a “powerful military commensurate with China’s international standing” reflects CCP priorities, and conveys the message that building such a military is:

- A strategic task of China’s overall modernization efforts
- A prerequisite for meeting China’s “other development needs”
- A requirement for China’s international standing as a “major power”
- A requirement in order to keep pace with China’s increasingly global national interests.

New information in this year’s white paper

Panelists noted that this white paper contains several new pieces of information, to include:

- Three PLA readiness levels. Depending upon the security situation, the PLA can assume one of three levels of readiness: Levels III, II, or I, from lowest to highest. The paper, however, provided no further information about what these levels involve.
- The first “direct criticism” of Japan. This is the first defense white paper to criticize Japan due to its maritime dispute with China over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.
- Service personnel numbers. Mr. Blasko pointed out that this is the first white paper to note PLA troop strength: operational ground forces = 850,000; the PLA Navy = 235,000; and the PLA Air Force = 398,000. It does not, however, provide the number of personnel in the Second Artillery.
- Unit designations for the PLA’s 18 group armies.⁹ This is also the first white paper to list the unit designators and home military regions for all of the PLA’s group armies.¹⁰

⁸ For a complete list provided by Ms. Glaser, see appendix A.

⁹ In the PLA, a group army is a ground force echelon roughly equivalent to a corps-level organization. Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 25.

¹⁰ By military region, the 18 group armies are as follows: 16th, 39th, and 40th (Shenyang); 27th, 38th, and 65th (Beijing); 21st and 47th (Lanzhou); 20th, 26th, and 54th (Jinan); 1st, 12th, and 31st (Nanjing); 41st and 42nd (Guangzhou); 13th and 14th (Chengdu). Mr. Blasko, however, noted that while this information has finally been officially published, it has long been known to PLA watchers.

Dr. Finkelstein added that the PRC media also highlighted the following first-time topics:

- China’s policies for the employment of the PLA in “diversified tasks”
- Select Second Artillery (Strategic Rocket Forces) missile designations¹¹
- Sea lane protection as a PLA mission
- Defending Chinese overseas interests as a PLA mission.

“New” information in a defense white paper

Mr. Blasko suggested that three categories of “new” information are apparent in China’s defense white papers:

- *Expanded information*, which brings readers up to date with developments discussed in earlier white papers. Generally, this is the most common form of new information, and often addresses basic national security and military policy issues.
- *New information included in a white paper*, which appears for the first time in a white paper but has been discussed in other official Chinese media sources.
- *Truly new information*, which the Chinese government divulges for the first time. Panelists noted that such information is rare, and typically consists of a specific fact or figure.

Of note, panelists agreed that China’s defense white papers are not vehicles that the PRC uses to announce new strategic policies.

Missing information?

Panelists also discussed how some information is absent from this year’s white paper. For example, Dr. Saunders noted that this paper fails to mention the military’s budget. Therefore, “it tells the audience what it’s getting, but doesn’t tell the price for delivering it.” Ms. Glaser noted that in the section addressing Taiwan and cross-Strait relations—which is shorter than in previous years—there is no mention of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. Panelists also addressed the omission of any mention of China’s “no first use” nuclear doctrine (discussed more fully in the next section).

However, Mr. Blasko cautioned against simply interpreting missing data as a change in China’s defense or security policy. One should read each of China’s defense white papers as part of a continuum rather than as a standalone document. Policies and views mentioned in previous editions are still valid unless expressly stated otherwise. Therefore, by way of example, he noted that the omission of mention of Taiwan arms sales in this year’s paper does not imply that China

¹¹ The two designations mentioned in the white paper are the “*dongfeng*” ballistic missiles and the “*changjian*” land-attack cruise missiles. No further information about these missiles is provided, however.

no longer objects to such sales. He also warned against the potential confusion inherent in the English translation of the document, which can result in a false impression of missing (or new) information. He emphasized the importance of reading both the Chinese- and English-language versions of a white paper and comparing them in order to possibly mitigate this problem.

No change in China’s “no first use” nuclear policy

While the panelists noted that this year’s white paper fails to mention China’s “no first use” nuclear policy,¹² they cautioned against reading this as a change in China’s nuclear policy. According to Dr. Saunders, all previous defense white papers have had a section dedicated to China’s nuclear policy. In contrast, this edition has only a few paragraphs that touch upon this issue and omits any reference to China’s “no first use” policy.

Following the publication of the white paper, the PLA was quick to respond to Western concerns that China’s nuclear policy had changed. Dr. Finkelstein described how only a few days after a U.S. editorial speculated on whether the lack of mention of the “no first use” policy meant that China had adjusted its nuclear policy, a PLA major general wrote an article refuting the allegation. The rebuttal, Dr. Finkelstein noted, was not only quickly written and authorized but also was written in English and republished in several venues to ensure maximum distribution. This demonstrated that the PLA was able to move rapidly to ensure that incorrect analysis in the foreign media on this important issue was quickly corrected.

¹² China’s “no first use” policy is a long-standing political commitment to not be the first state to use nuclear weapons in a conflict. Instead, according to this policy, China will use nuclear weapons only in response to a nuclear attack on China.

Appendix A: Select similarities between 18th Party Congress work report and the 2012 defense white paper

The following table is adapted from a submission by panelist Bonnie Glaser, and compares some of the lines in the 2012 defense white paper with similar ones in the 18th Party Congress work report, released in November 2012.¹³ As high-profile statements of CCP priorities, Party Congress work reports are important guideposts for understanding China’s future trajectory.

2012 defense white paper	18th Party Congress work report
“It is an essential national development strategy to exploit, utilize and protect the seas and oceans, and build China into a maritime power. It is an important duty for the PLA to resolutely safeguard China’s maritime rights and interests.”	“We should enhance our capacity for exploiting marine resources, develop the marine economy, protect the marine ecological environment, resolutely safeguard China’s maritime rights and interests, and build China into a maritime power.”
“The issues of subsistence and development security and the traditional and non-traditional threats to security are interwoven.”	“China is faced with interwoven problems affecting its survival and development security as well as traditional and non-traditional security threats.”
“It is a strategic task of China’s modernization drive as well as a strong guarantee for China’s peaceful development to build a strong national defense and powerful armed forces which are commensurate with China’s international standing and meet the needs of its security and development interests.”	“Building strong national defense and powerful armed forces that are commensurate with China’s international standing and meet the needs of its security and development interests is a strategic task of China’s modernization drive.”
“Since the beginning of the new century, profound and complex changes have taken place in the world, but peace and development remain the underlying trends of our times.”	“The world today is undergoing profound and complex changes, but peace and development remain the underlying trends of our times.”

¹³ In China, National Party Congresses are held by the CCP every few years to solidify “central political tasks for the Party” for the near term. China’s 18th Party Congress was held from 8 to 14 November 2012 in Beijing, and saw the transition of China’s leadership from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping. Work reports released during Party Congresses are high-profile statements of CCP priorities that perform three general tasks: (1) identify major CCP achievements since the last Party Congress, (2) describe future Party challenges and opportunities, and (3) describe basic principles and broad policy goals to guide the CCP until the next congress. See Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution through Reform* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), pp. 159-60; and Michael D. Swaine, “The 18th Party Congress and Foreign Policy: The Dog that Did Not Bark?” *China Leadership Monitor* 40 (Winter 2013): 1-2.

2012 defense white paper	18th Party Congress work report
“The global trends toward economic globalization and multi-polarity are intensifying, cultural diversity is increasing, and an information society is fast emerging.”	“The global trends toward multipolarity and economic globalization are deepening. Cultural diversity is increasing, and an information society is fast emerging.”
“The balance of international forces is shifting in favor of maintaining world peace, and on the whole the international situation remains peaceful and stable.”	“Emerging market economies and developing countries are gaining in overall strength, tipping the balance of international forces in favor of the maintenance of world peace.”
“There are signs of increasing hegemonism, power politics and neo-interventionism. Local turmoils occur frequently.”	“There are signs of increasing hegemonism, power politics and neo-interventionism, and local turmoil keeps cropping up.”

Appendix B: China's Defense White Paper "Themes"

The following is a handout from Dr. Finkelstein describing the thematic content of each of China's eight defense white papers to date.

PRC Defense White Paper "Themes," 1998-2012

Each PRC defense white paper has been a "child of its time" in regard to the content in the preface, the analysis of the security situation in the front section of the document, and some of the key content. In retrospect, each can be given a thematic title:

1998: The "Début" Edition. This first edition was driven by the perceived need to counter what Beijing termed the "China threat theory" developing in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, especially in Southeast Asia. Until this time, China had issued no public document addressing defense policies, so the very act of issuing a defense white paper was a message—specifically, "We are becoming more transparent" and "Don't worry about China."

2000: The "Calm the Worries But Stay Vigilant" Edition. This version came on the heels of a major domestic debate in 1999 in which concerns were raised about the prospects for China's security in the aftermath of a series of international events such as the errant bombing of the PRC Embassy in Belgrade and beyond. This edition had an important message for the Chinese people—that "peace and development" was still the keynote of the times, and that China was under no imminent threat of attack, but that the PRC must remain vigilant. This edition underscored China's rising concerns about the allegedly destabilizing impact of U.S. "hegemonism" and "power politics." It also was notable for its dire assessment that "the Taiwan Straits situation is complicated and grim"—reflecting worries raised by former Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui's "Two State Theory" (1999).

2002: The "Don't Rock the Boat" Edition. This iteration came after September 11th, the 16th Party Congress, and a leadership transition. This was also a period during which U.S.-China relations were beginning to slowly recover from a downturn that reached a nadir with the EP-3 incident. By 2003, Chinese analysts were assessing that the United States had put China on the back burner as "America's new enemy" because Washington, they asserted, was now forced to focus on the war against terrorism. This version, therefore, was a "don't rock the boat" edition. Compared to the 2000 white paper, it was a fairly toned down document as far as judgments on U.S. policies were concerned. It was also a document that highlighted China's cooperation in international security regimes, and the rhetoric on Taiwan was ratcheted down.

2004: The "Taiwan-Centric" Edition. If any single issue drove the 2004 version, it was likely the heightened concern over Taiwan, especially the policy predilections of Chen Shui-bian. The clarity of the paper's statements on the Taiwan issue made this obvious. Some scholars have argued that due to its careful layout of the objectives and progress of PLA modernization programs, the 2004 white paper could itself be viewed as an act of deterrence aimed at Taiwan.

2006: The “Globalization is a Double-Edged Sword” Edition. This document should be titled the “Globalization is a Double-Edged Sword” edition. Why? It heralded the good news for China that Beijing was becoming a major player in world affairs. But it also underscored worrisome news for China—namely, that Beijing’s future security was tied as much to forces beyond its shores and beyond its control as it was to the policies developed in Zhongnanhai.

2008: The “Tentative Triumphalism” Edition. The preface to this latest edition described China’s place in the global order as being at a “new historical turning point.” Readers were told that “China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world, nor can the world enjoy prosperity and stability without China.” The current construct, and the identification of the historical turning point, spoke to a China that clearly perceived itself as a power of international significance—and showed that Beijing, apparently, was no longer reluctant to say so. Paradoxically, this message was tempered by an equally eye-catching assessment that China was facing “...strategic maneuvers and containment from the outside while having to face disruption and sabotage by separatist and hostile forces from the inside.”

2010: “The PLA: A Military Force for Peace” Edition. The main message of the 2010 edition for external audiences was one of reassurance. The message being conveyed, within the white paper and during its public roll-out in the PRC media, was that Beijing had not changed its defensive military posture despite its growing military capabilities and its various extraterritorial military deployments. The paper itself went so far as to declare that China was “...connecting the fundamental interests of the Chinese people with the common interests of other peoples around the globe...and connecting China's security with world peace.” These messages of assurance came on the heels of a period of about two years during which Chinese foreign policy and security policy initiatives were described by foreign observers as “assertive” or uncharacteristically muscular. Consequently, one likely objective of this white paper was to calm the waters, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

2012: “The PLA: An Incipient Expeditionary Force for Good” Edition. This year’s white paper, the first-ever thematic edition (*The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces*), has an expeditionary flavor to it. The preface states: “It is a strategic task of China's modernization drive as well as a strong guarantee for China's peaceful development to build a strong national defense and powerful armed forces which are commensurate with China's international standing and meet the needs of its security and development interests.” The paper provides justifications for why the PLA has deployed, and will continue to deploy, for “diversified missions” that see the PLA going places and doing things. The paper emphasizes China’s growing overseas interests and the requirement for the PLA to be able to secure those interests as well as contribute to international security.



Cover photo credit: The China Marine Surveillance cutter "Haijian 66" and the Japan Coast Guard cutter "Kiso" confront each other near the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. China Marine Surveillance [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons (24 September 2012).

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