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**China's 2012 Defense White Paper: The Diversified Employment
of China's Armed Forces**

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Introduction

China released the latest version of its biennial defense white paper (DWP) on April 16, 2013. DWPs – China’s most authoritative publication on national security – are published by the State Council’s Information Office and approved by the Central Military Commission (CMC), Ministry of National Defense (MND), and State Council. They include input from organizations throughout the PRC government, Chinese Communist Party, and People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Beijing primarily uses DWPs as a public relations tool to ease deepening international concern over China’s military modernization and answer calls for greater transparency.

Of note, this is the first DWP published since Xi Jinping assumed the CMC Chairmanship in November 2012. Although DWP preparations almost certainly began before Xi became CMC Chair, official PRC press suggests the paper contains strategic priorities specific to Xi.¹

New Approach to Format and Content

All seven of China’s previous DWPs, published from 1998 to 2010, were titled “China’s National Defense.” They provided a comprehensive overview of China’s security environment, national security goals, general defense policy, major areas of concern, defense management, and international activity, among other issues. The 2012 DWP, titled “The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces,” departs in both format and content from previous white papers. It is a shorter thematic paper that is less formal and ideological.

In an interview with the PLA’s official newspaper, Major General Chen Zhou, a senior fellow at the PLA Academy of Military Science and the DWP’s coordinating author, stated China plans to alternate between “comprehensive” and “subject-specific” DWPs.²

Notable Themes: US and Japan, Maritime Security, Realistic Training

The full text of the 2012 DWP includes five chapters: (1) New Situation, New Challenges and New Missions; (2) Building and Development of China’s Armed Forces; (3) Defending National Sovereignty, Security, and Territorial Integrity; (4) Supporting National Economic and Social Development; and (5) Safeguarding World Peace and Stability. The paper also includes Appendices that outline the PLA’s global footprint, providing information on joint exercises and training with foreign militaries, participation in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and contributions to UN peacekeeping operations.

- The 2012 DWP includes somewhat stronger language on the U.S. than in the past, suggesting concern with the U.S. “rebalance” to Asia policy. Though it does not identify the rebalance explicitly, the DWP includes new language about how the adjustment of U.S. strategy in Asia “frequently makes the situation there tenser.” In past DWPs, China has reserved this type of language to characterize the negative effect of U.S. weapons sales to Taiwan to the U.S.-China relationship.

¹ Xinhua, “China Voice: Diversified Employment of Armed Forces Guarantees the ‘China Dream,’” April 16, 2013. OSC ID: CPP 20130416968284. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

² Luo Zheng, “Provide Strong Support for Our Nation’s Peaceful Development – An Interview with Chen Zhou, Director of the National Defense Policy Research Center of the Academy of Military Science,” April 16, 2013. *Jiefangjun Bao* (PLA Daily). OSC ID: CPP20130417787007. <http://www.opensource.gov>; Xinhua, “China Declassifies Designations of PLA Corps,” April 16, 2013. OSC ID: 20130416968122, <http://www.opensource.gov>; Michael Kiselycznyk and Phillip C. Saunders, *Assessing Chinese Military Transparency*, (Washington, DC: June 2010), p. 4.

- The 2012 DWP identifies Japan as a security concern more straightforwardly than in past papers, accusing Japan of “making trouble over the issue” of the Senkaku/ Diaoyu Islands. Past DWPs have briefly addressed Japan’s reconsideration of its concept of self-defense and its “military” alliance relationship with Washington, but have generally focused on the cooperative aspects of the China-Japan defense relationship. This language has already spurred Tokyo’s first ever demarche of a Chinese DWP. In July 2012, Japan’s publication of its own defense white paper resulted in a demarche from China.³
- The 2012 DWP expands on the importance of the maritime domain to the pursuit of China’s core interests. Specifically, it highlights the need for a modern navy to protect maritime territorial sovereignty, secure maritime resources for China’s sustainable development, and safeguard the security of international sea lanes of communication.
 - The DWP presents the PLA Navy as a modernizing force that is increasingly operating in distant seas. A lengthy section on "intensifying blue-water training" states “combined task forces composed of new types of destroyers, frigates, ocean-going replenishment ships, and shipborne helicopters" will conduct training in missions such as "remote early warning, comprehensive control, open sea interception, long-range raid, anti-submarine warfare, and vessel protection at sea."
 - For the first time in a DWP, the 2012 iteration explicitly identifies the protection of overseas interests as a PLA priority. Previous DWPs have included similar themes in their discussions of international security cooperation. However, the 2012 DWP suggests maritime security is now a central component of this mission, citing the PLA Navy’s role in Gulf of Aden antipiracy operations and in the evacuation of Chinese citizens during the 2011 Libya crisis.
- Finally, the 2012 DWP emphasizes the PLA’s efforts to increase combat readiness and strengthen realistic combat-relevant training. Though “combat readiness” has long been a PLA priority, it has become a major theme in PLA media and authoritative documents since Xi Jinping became CMC Chairman.⁴ Importantly, this is part of a larger effort by Beijing to modernize the PLA training cycle and develop a professional force, and not an indication of plans to actually conduct combat operations.⁵

Notable Omissions: Policy Shift or Editing Casualty?

The 2012 DWP focuses on the PLA’s “diversified missions” and does not discuss issues that are not applicable to this theme. Thus, omissions of important defense policy issues that typically were included in past iterations are attributable to the change in the DWP’s structure rather than policy shifts.

- The paper does not mention China’s defense budget. In contrast, previous iterations provided a multi-paragraph section on China’s defense expenditures with details such as a rough breakdown of its categories of spending and a graphical depiction of its defense budget relative to advanced industrialized world powers. Although China announced this year’s defense budget numbers

³ Open Source Center. “Analysis: China – Defense White Paper Signals Increasing Concern Over US, Japanese Policies,” April 17, 2013. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

⁴ PLA General Staff Department, “Advance Military Work By Revolving Closely Around the Ability to Fight and Win Battles,” *Qiushi* (Beijing) (February 1, 2013). OSC ID: 20130201667001. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

⁵ Willy Lam, “Commander-in-Chief Xi Jinping Raises the Bar on PLA ‘Combat Readiness,’” *China Brief*, January 18, 2013. [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=40329&cHash=d7a108eeb831585907e389ed5a637ada](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=40329&cHash=d7a108eeb831585907e389ed5a637ada).

during the National People's Congress meeting in March, it is unclear how, if at all, it intends to publicize the slightly more detailed budget data it has previously made available in the defense white paper.

- The 2012 DWP does not explicitly refer to China's longstanding "no-first-use" (NFU) nuclear policy. Nevertheless, its description of the Second Artillery's nuclear counterattack role is consistent with the NFU policy. In response to charges the omission signals a shift in China's nuclear doctrine,⁶ Major General Yao Yunzhu of the PLA Academy of Military Science reaffirmed China's commitment to NFU.⁷

Little New Information Revealed in Efforts to Demonstrate Transparency

Official PRC and PLA media hailed the 2012 DWP as a milestone in transparency, pointing to changes made to the paper's form and content.⁸ The 2012 DWP does introduce some new information. However, it is largely information that was well known but never officially acknowledged, such as the designations of Group Armies under the Military Regions and a breakdown of how PLA personnel are allocated among the ground, air, and navy forces.⁹

Further, as in previous iterations, the 2012 DWP offers no substantive information on important defense issues, including China's space and cyber programs, research and development, wartime procedures, and operational principles. Nor does the paper provide data on several key weapon systems, such as the J-20 fighter aircraft and anti-ship ballistic missile. In the past, Beijing has refuted this criticism by emphasizing the importance of transparency about *intentions* rather than *capabilities*.

China's efforts to increase transparency fell short of foreign expectations in this regard. Objectively determining whether or not the 2012 DWP is more transparent than previous iterations is problematic for two reasons: first, there is no international uniform standard for military transparency, and second, the change in DWP format complicates across-the-board content comparisons.¹⁰ If China alternates between "comprehensive" and "subject-specific" DWPs, the closest comparison to the 2012 iteration is likely to be the 2016 "subject-specific" paper.

⁶ James M. Acton, "Is China Changing its Position on Nuclear Weapons?" *New York Times*, April 19, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/19/opinion/is-china-changing-its-position-on-nuclear-weapons.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

⁷ Yao Yunzhu, "China Will Not Change its Nuclear Policy," *China-US Focus*, April 22, 2013. <http://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/china-will-not-change-its-no-first-use-policy/>.

⁸ Xinhua, "China Issues National Defense White Paper," April 16, 2013. OSC ID: CPP 20130416968101. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

⁹ See Dennis Blasko, "The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century," New York: Routledge, 2012. pp. 87-102. See also Huanqiu Wang (Global Times Online), "Zhengyi Zhishi: Wei Wojun Touminghua Lichengbei Shi Yibu Jiaohao!" (Justice: A milestone in achieving military transparency is commendable!). January 16, 2013. http://mil.huanqiu.com/china/2013-01/3499687_3.html.

¹⁰ See generally Michael Kiselycznyk and Phillip C. Saunders, *Assessing Chinese Military Transparency*, (Washington, DC: June 2010) and Adam P. Liff and Andrew S. Erickson, "Demystifying China's Defense Spending: Less Mysterious in the Aggregate," *China Quarterly* (March 2013): 1-26.

Appendix: China’s Defense White Papers, 2004-2012: Select Themes¹

SUBJECT	2012	2010	2008	2006	2004
U.S.	<p>“Some country has strengthened its Asia-Pacific military alliances, expanded its military presence in the region, and frequently makes the situation there tense.”</p>	<p>“China and the United States maintain consultations on such issues as non-proliferation, counterterrorism, and bilateral military and security cooperation.”</p>	<p>“Some major powers are realigning their security and military strategies, increasing their defense investment, speeding up the transformation of armed forces, and developing advanced military technology, weapons and equipment.”</p>	<p>“The United States is accelerating its realignment of military deployment to enhance its military capability in the Asia-Pacific region. The United States and Japan are strengthening their military alliance in pursuit of operational integration.”</p>	<p>“The United States is realigning and reinforcing its military presence in this region by buttressing military alliances and accelerating deployment of missile defense systems.”</p>
Japan	<p>“...Japan is making trouble over the issue of the Diaoyu Islands.”</p>	<p>“Since 2008, China and Japan have held several consultations over the establishment of a maritime liaison mechanism.”</p>	<p>“China-Japan defense relations have made headway. The two sides have held the seventh and eighth China-Japan Defense and Security Consultation, made their first exchange of port calls by naval ships, and held the first consultation over the establishment of a maritime liaison mechanism....”</p>	<p>“The United States and Japan are strengthening their military alliance in pursuit of operational integration. Japan seeks to revise its constitution and exercise collective self defense. Its military posture is becoming more external-oriented.”</p>	<p>“Japan is stepping up its constitutional overhaul, adjusting its military and security policies and developing the missile defense system for future deployment. It has also markedly increased military activities abroad.”</p>

¹ Excerpts are from the State Council Information Office’s English-language version of each defense white paper.

SUBJECT	2012	2010	2008	2006	2004
Taiwan	<p>“China enjoys general social stability and cross-Straits relations are sustaining a momentum of peaceful development.”</p>	<p>“On the basis of opposing "Taiwan independence" and adhering to the "1992 Consensus," the two sides have enhanced political mutual trust, conducted consultations and dialogues, and reached a series of agreements for realizing direct and bilateral exchanges of mail, transport and trade, as well as promoting economic and financial cooperation across the Straits.”</p>	<p>“The attempts of the separatist forces for ‘Taiwan independence’ to seek ‘de jure Taiwan independence’ have been thwarted, and the situation across the Taiwan Straits has taken a significantly positive turn. The two sides have resumed and made progress in consultations on the common political basis of the ‘1992 Consensus,’ and consequently cross-Straits relations have improved.”</p>	<p>“By pursuing a radical policy for ‘Taiwan independence,’ the Taiwan authorities aim at creating ‘de jure Taiwan independence’ through ‘constitutional reform,’ thus still posing a grave threat to China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as to peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits and in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole.”</p>	<p>“The separatist activities of the ‘Taiwan independence’ forces have increasingly become the biggest immediate threat to China's sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as peace and stability on both sides of the Taiwan Straits and the Asia-Pacific region as a whole.”</p>
Arms Sales to Taiwan	<p>NOT MENTIONED</p>	<p>“The United States, in the defiance of the three Sino-US joint communiqués, continues to sell weapons to Taiwan, severely impeding Sino-US relations and impairing the peaceful development of cross Strait relations.”</p>	<p>“... [T]he United States continues to sell arms to Taiwan in violation of the principles established in the three Sino-US joint communiqués, causing serious harm to Sino-US relations as well as peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits.”</p>	<p>“The United States has reiterated many times that it will adhere to the "one China" policy and honor the three joint communiqués... But, it continues to sell advanced weapons to Taiwan, and has strengthened its military ties with Taiwan.”</p>	<p>“[The United States] continues to increase, quantitatively and qualitatively, its arms sales to Taiwan, sending a wrong signal to the Taiwan authorities. The US action does not serve a stable situation across the Taiwan Straits.”</p>

SUBJECT	2012	2010	2008	2006	2004
International Security Situation	“China’s armed forces have always been a staunch force upholding world peace and regional stability, and will continue to increase cooperation and mutual trust with the armed forces of other countries, participate in regional and international security affairs, and play an active role in international political and security fields.”	“...China is promoting the establishment of equal, mutually beneficial and effective mechanisms for military confidence-building, which should be based on the principles of holding consultations on an equal footing, mutual respect for core interests and recognition of major security concerns, not targeting at any third country, and not threatening or harming other countries' security and stability.”	“China persists in developing friendly relations, enhancing political mutual trust, conducting security cooperation and maintaining common security with all countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.”	“China pursues a new security concept featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination, and adheres to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. It works to promote good-neighborliness, mutual benefit and win-win, and endeavors to advance international security cooperation and strengthen military relations with other countries.”	“Adhering to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, China persists in developing friendly relations and strengthening cooperation with other countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and devotes itself to promoting international security dialogues and cooperation of all forms.”
Maritime Security Situation ²	“...some neighboring countries are taking actions that complicate or exacerbate the situation...” “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.”	“Disputes over territorial and maritime rights and interests flare up occasionally...Pressure builds up in preserving China’s territorial integrity and maritime rights and interests...”	“...conflicting claims over territorial and maritime rights and interests remain serious, regional hotspots are complex...”	“...conflicting claims over maritime rights and interests... undermine trust and cooperation among states.”	[Does not identify maritime issues as an explicit concern in the broader security situation]

² This section cites passages on maritime security as they relate to the defense white papers’ description of the international security situation. It does not cite passages on maritime security from the papers’ descriptions of naval missions, implementation of laws and regulations, or border issues.

SUBJECT	2012	2010	2008	2006	2004
Space	<p>“China’s armed forces unswervingly... protect...national security interests in outer space...”</p>	<p>“In accordance with the principle of peaceful use of outer space, China has conducted bilateral cooperation and exchanges with Russia, France, Brazil, Ukraine, the United States and the European Space Agency (ESA) in the fields of space technology, space exploration and space science.”</p>	<p>“The Chinese government has all along advocated the peaceful use of outer space, and opposed the introduction of weapons and an arms race in outer space. The existing international legal instruments concerning outer space are not sufficient to effectively prevent the spread of weapons to outer space.”</p>	<p>“Major scientific and technological projects, such as manned space flights and the Lunar Probe Project, are being carried out to spur the leapfrogging development of high-tech enterprises combining military and civilian needs and to bring about overall improvements in defense-related science and technology.”</p>	<p>“Outer space is the common property of mankind. China hopes that the international community would take action as soon as possible to conclude an international legal instrument on preventing the weaponization of and arms race in outer space through negotiations, to ensure the peaceful use of outer space.”</p>
Nuclear Policy	<p>“If China comes under a nuclear threat, the nuclear missile force will act upon the orders of the CMC, go into a higher level of readiness, and get ready for a nuclear counterattack to deter the enemy from using nuclear weapons against China.”</p>	<p>“[China] has adhered to the policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons at any time and in any circumstances, and made the unequivocal commitment that under no circumstances will it use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or nuclear-weapon-free zones.”</p>	<p>“China remains committed to the policy of no first use of nuclear weapons, pursues a self-defensive nuclear strategy, and will never enter into a nuclear arms race with any other country.”</p>	<p>“China upholds the principles of counterattack in self defense and limited development of nuclear weapons, and aims at building a lean and effective nuclear force capable of meeting national security needs. It endeavors to ensure the security and reliability of its nuclear weapons and maintains a credible nuclear deterrent force.”</p>	<p>“China consistently stands for complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons. It always pursues a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons, and undertakes unconditionally not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or nuclear-weapon-free zones.”</p>

SUBJECT	2012	2010	2008	2006	2004
Cyber	"China's armed forces unswervingly... protect... national security interests in... cyber space."	"Some powers have worked out strategies for... cyber space... [and] enhanced cyber operations capabilities to occupy new strategic commanding heights."	NOT MENTIONED	NOT MENTIONED	NOT MENTIONED
North Korea	NOT MENTIONED	"China advocates resolving the nuclear issue in the Korean Peninsula peacefully through dialogues and consultations, endeavoring... to realize the denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula and maintain peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula and the Northeast Asia."	"The Six-Party Talks on the Korean nuclear issue have scored successive achievements, and the tension in Northeast Asia is much released."	"The DPRK has launched missile tests and conducted a nuclear test. Thus, the situation on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia has become more complex and challenging."	"The nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula has been brought onto the track of peaceful settlement through dialogue, and the process of the Six-Party Talks has made progress in the discussion of substantive issues and the institutionalization of the process."
Iran	NOT MENTIONED	"China is for the peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue through dialogue and negotiation, and for maintaining the peace and stability of the Middle East."	"China maintains that the Iranian nuclear issue should be resolved peacefully by political and diplomatic means."	"The Middle East has become more volatile. A settlement of the Iranian nuclear issue is not yet in sight."	NOT MENTIONED