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## China's Defence Posture

On July 24, China released its major military policy document entitled China's National Defence in the New Era, also known as 2019 Defence White Paper of China. This White Paper evidently embodies President Xi's self-dictated era, strategy, goals, reforms, and rhetoric. It reflects the Chinese strategy of making China great again under the leadership of President Xi at home and abroad while disallowing any domestic or foreign foe to disrupt this historic mission. China released its first defence white paper in 1998 and since then Beijing has been releasing a new white paper from time to time, discussing various aspects of defence and security related issues pertaining to China.

China's past white papers shed ample light on numerous aspects of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Chinese security concepts and perspectives. China's past white paper of 2015 seemingly appeared to be signaling that a fundamental shift was underway in Beijing's security perspectives, especially alluding to China's assessment of its security environment probably confronted with increasing threats. According to some strategic experts, China's most of the past white papers have generally harped on the same broad assessment of the international situation. The overall 'tone and tenor' of past papers has remained one of peace and development, with least prospects for war among the major powers of a nuclear confrontation; and irrespective of articulation of such optimism, there has been allusions to factors of instability, including unresolved borders, some degree of tensions with immediate neighbours, perpetual concern for separatists, with specific emphasis on Taiwan. Holding the United States accountable for exacerbating regional instability has been the recurring feature of past white papers of China.

Nevertheless, the 2019 White Paper has evoked mixed reactions among defence and strategic experts. According to one defence expert, new White Paper is not only short of substantive updates but also contains confusing, arguable contradictory phrasing and exhibits simplistic, often unconvincing assurances meant for international public consumption. With regard to assertions in the 2019 White Paper: "China is always a builder of world peace... and a defender of international order... Never seeking Hegemony, expansion or sphere of influence... etc.," many experts are skeptical of these assertions. Many, in Vietnam and across the globe, still question the Chinese claim that the Beijing has never started any war or conflict. The 2019 Defense White Paper emphatically emphasizes on People's Liberation Army (PLA) embracing new concepts and missions that are significant in safeguarding China's national security. And also enabling it in winning informatized local wars. While explicating China's latest military strategic guideline, White Paper exhorts PLA must prepare to fight and win, in particular the need to prepare for maritime struggle.

While emphasizing on comprehensive full-spectrum operations, including peacetime probing and pressure, as well as combat readiness, it articulates a "holistic view of national security" embracing both traditional and nontraditional security and establishing an integrated joint operational system wherein all elements are seamlessly linked and various operational platforms perform independently and in coordination. It also highlights the need for safeguarding China's increasingly complex, far-ranging overseas interests that include four "critical domains" and corresponding forces: "seas and oceans, outer space, cyberspace, and nuclear..." Alluding to unprecedented maritime emphasis, the White Paper envisages that great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests." It underscores determination to strengthen Chinese "strategic management of the sea" and calls upon China to "build a combined, multi-functional and efficient marine combat force structure." Concurrently, it also emphasizes growing power projection capabilities by asserting that. "The PLAN will continue to organize and perform regular combat readiness patrols and maintain a military presence in relevant sea areas." Some experts have opined that this entails moving from "near seas defense" to "the combination of 'near seas defense' and 'far seas protection'". The Defense White Paper also stresses on the need to develop a limited blue water navy. Some defence experts find China's latest Defense White Paper as vague in many areas, and unclear even in its specifics. Nevertheless, what the report does reflect explicitly is that Xi remains large and in charge, determined to make China great again by all means necessary, guided by a grand strategy. Interestingly, how China sees the world and how the world sees China can lead to a seriously dizzying view.

— BK