

China's National Defense in 2008

Panel Discussion Report



February 6, 2009

CNA China  Studies

**National Defense University
Institute for National Strategic Studies**

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Executive Summary

On February 6, 2009, CNA China Studies and the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University convened a panel discussion on China's sixth defense white paper, which had been released by Beijing on January 20, 2009. The following are the main observations that emerged from that roundtable.

China is asserting a new global role. The 2008 White Paper displays a China that is more confident and assertive about its role in the world than at any time in the past. The White Paper says that China has reached a “historical turning point” and, for the first time, depicts China as a central player in global military, political, and economic affairs, saying that “China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world, nor can the world enjoy prosperity and stability without China.”

The Asia-Pacific region is depicted as more stable than in the past. This year's White Paper provides an upbeat view of China's security situation as having “improved steadily.” The paper touts numerous regional cooperative efforts as evidence that the Asia-Pacific region is “on the whole” stable. It also depicts a less volatile Korean peninsula, and it makes no mention of Japan's external military orientation. In the greatest shift, this White Paper declares that “the situation across the Taiwan Straits has taken a significantly positive turn.”

However, all is not well. This edition stresses the growing “influence of military security factors on international relations,” saying both that military competition is a potential source of future global conflict, and that military means may become a substitute for diplomatic discussion. For the first time, the White Paper says that China faces “containment” from the outside and that its position is weakened by the economic, technological, and military “superiority” of other “developed” nations.

Is the United States to blame? This edition displays significant concerns about U.S. intentions and capabilities. While some previous editions also leveled sharp criticism at the U.S., in the 2008 version the United States is the *only* nation singled out by name as negatively affecting the security of the Asian region. This version also blames the United States for the global financial crisis, and hints that it is the primary nation seeking to “contain” China.

China's national security interests are expanding. The White Paper implies that China's national interests are expanding outward and that these justify expanded defense capabilities. It discusses the PRC's desire to “increase the country's capabilities to maintain maritime, space and electromagnetic space

security” in order to effectively carry out both deterrence and Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). Oddly, it does not mention the PRC’s recent cooperation in anti-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa, even though that effort was well publicized elsewhere.

The economic factor is seen as crucial to security. The economy is portrayed, more explicitly than in previous years, as a crucial component of national and global security. In addition, there are multiple mentions of the need for China’s military modernization and reform to be coordinated with or even subordinated to larger economic development priorities.

Some new information is given, but not very much. Participants disagreed on whether this edition provides significant new information on the strategic goals of China’s national defense. Although this White Paper has added new sections on each of the PLA’s services and on China’s military reform efforts, the actual information provided is, for the most part, nothing new. The White Paper does provide some new information on PLA training and on nuclear strategy.

Transparency remains limited on important issues. Panelists noted that the White Paper still contains frustratingly little detail on such topics as the PLA’s budget and personnel breakdown. However, a long-term perspective suggests that China’s White Paper is slowly becoming more transparent; and that its current level of transparency is roughly equal to that of most ASEAN nations, though it lags significantly behind other Asia-Pacific nations, including Japan, South Korea, and Australia.

The white paper must be considered along with other official sources on China’s defense modernization. Panelists underscored that the White Paper is not the only source of information on China’s military. It provides Beijing’s official views on the state of international and regional security, but participants noted that for its implications to be fully understood it should be read alongside other public texts and statements from the PLA, the Ministry of National Defense, and the Chinese media.

China's National Defense in 2008 – Panel Discussion Report

Dr. Alison A. Kaufman¹

On January 20, 2009, the PRC released *China's National Defense in 2008*, the latest version of Beijing's biennial defense white paper. Since the publication of the first edition in 1998, CNA has sponsored an event to discuss, analyze, and comment on each version of this important document shortly after its release. For our sixth such event, this year we were delighted to partner with the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University in holding a panel discussion of this newest edition. Our panelists included Dr. David Finkelstein (CNA China Studies); Dr. Michael Swaine (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace); Dr. Evan Medeiros (RAND Corporation); Mr. Dennis Blasko (LTC, U.S. Army, Retired); and Dr. Phillip Saunders (National Defense University). This report presents the major themes that emerged in our discussions.

Introduction: A “capstone” edition

This is the sixth edition of the defense white paper in 11 years; as Dr. Finkelstein noted, it seems safe to say that the biennial publication of the White Paper has become a “firm habit of the PRC government.” Moreover, panelists agreed that both in its confident tone and in its extensive retrospective on PLA reform, this edition depicts a “China that has come of age.” The year 2008 marked the 30th anniversary both of China's economic “reform and opening” and of the PLA's modernization efforts, and this edition showcases that point in a new chapter on the “Reform and Development of the PLA.” The 2008 White Paper lists the many ways in which the PLA has transformed itself since the 1970s, and goes on to depict the current “new stage of the new century” as a “new historical starting point” for yet greater achievements in the future.

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China is asserting a new global role.

There was a general consensus that the 2008 White Paper displays a China that is more confident and assertive about its role in the world than at any time in the past.

Dr. Finkelstein and Dr. Swaine suggested that this White Paper depicts a China that, for the first time, not only perceives itself as a power of international significance, but is not reluctant to say so. Writing that China has reached a “historic turning point,” the authors of the White Paper emphasize that China will play a major role in the future direction of the global order.

Panelists highlighted two points:

First, the 2008 White Paper stresses that China has become a key player in a truly interdependent world. The White Paper asserts that a “profound readjustment ... [has taken place] in the global security arena,” and explains that “world multi-polarity [is] gaining momentum,” perhaps pointing

“Historic changes have taken place in the relations between contemporary China and the rest of the world. The Chinese economy has become an important part of the world economy, China has become an important member of the international system, and the future and destiny of China have been increasingly closely connected with the international community. China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world, nor can the world enjoy prosperity and stability without China.”

– *China’s National Defense in 2008*

toward the implication that China is now one of the poles. As such, China is no longer a sideshow in the global drama, but a central player – as indicated by the striking statement that “China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world, nor can the world enjoy prosperity and stability without China.” This goes a step beyond the 2006 edition, which stated only that China was “bound up with the rest of the world.”

Second, the White Paper suggests that other nations should trust China to live up to this role. Stating that “China is playing an active and constructive role in multilateral affairs,” the White Paper gives numerous examples of China’s cooperative efforts and military exchanges around the globe – perhaps as evidence that China is in fact acting as the “responsible stakeholder” that former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick called on it to become.

The Asia-Pacific region is depicted as more stable than in the past.

This year's White Paper provides a relatively upbeat view of China's security situation, and leaves out or tones down discussion of some of the major perceived regional threats from previous editions.

Dr. Swaine noted the relatively unparanoid tone of this year's White Paper. The authors write that "China's security situation has improved steadily," and many of the threats that dominated previous editions – North Korea, Japan, and Taiwan – are barely mentioned. Panelists pointed to the following statements as evidence of the PRC's relatively upbeat assessment of the Asia-Pacific security situation:

- "The Asia-Pacific security situation is stable on the whole."
- "The Six-Party Talks on the Korean nuclear issue have scored successive achievements, and the tension in Northeast Asia is much released."
- In the greatest shift, this White Paper declares that "the attempts of the separatist forces [presumably the DPP] 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."
- In contrast to the 2006 edition, there is no mention of Japan's external military orientation. The White Paper notes that "China-Japan defense relations have made headway" through several forms of mil-mil exchange.

The Paper also touts numerous regional cooperative efforts – including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), China-ASEAN ties, the East Asia Summit (EAS), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations, and the Six-Party Talks – as evidence that "it has become the policy orientation of all countries [in the Asia-Pacific region] to settle differences and hotspot issues peacefully through dialogue."

However, all is not well.

The White Paper suggests that several old threats persist, and that a few new ones have emerged.

Even with this improved situation, however, the White Paper states that "there still exist many factors of uncertainty in Asia-Pacific security." As in past years, this edition suggests that China faces threats both internally and from other nations. Some of these threats are familiar: the authors express concern about internal threats from "separatist forces" in Taiwan, Xinjiang, and Tibet; and their discussion of external threats includes mentions of global "power politics" and "hegemonism" that have, by now, become rote for these White Papers.

However, this edition highlights a few new threats as well:

- Writing that the world is facing “diversified security threats,” the authors elevate non-traditional security threats to a new level, naming “terrorism, natural disasters, economic insecurity, and information insecurity,” and – elsewhere in the White Paper – the additional dangers of “climate change, serious epidemics, transnational crime and pirates.”
- This edition notably stresses that “the influence of military security factors on international relations is growing” and that “all countries are attaching more importance to supporting diplomatic struggles with military means.” Although the tone suggests that this is a regrettable development, it implies that this trend provides additional justification for investment in military capabilities.
- While the basic dichotomy of threats presented here – the potential for internal chaos and external crisis – is quite familiar both in Chinese writings in general and in previous White Papers, panelists suggested that the wording in this year’s edition is surprisingly strong. Dr. Finkelstein noted that the concern about “disruption and sabotage ... from the inside” provides a striking contrast to the “tentatively triumphalist” tone of the White Paper (see appendix 1), while LTC Blasko and Dr. Swaine noted that no previous White Paper has explicitly mentioned either the “superiority” of developed nations or stated that some of these nations might be seeking to “contain” China.

“China is faced with the superiority of the developed countries in economy, science and technology, as well as military affairs. It also faces strategic maneuvers and containment from the outside while having to face disruption and sabotage by separatist and hostile forces from the inside.”

– *China’s National Defense in 2008*

Dr. Medeiros noted that the 2006 edition of the White Paper had limited its discussion of China’s potential security threats primarily to Taiwan, and – along with Dr. Finkelstein – suggested that this more sophisticated discussion of multiple security threats may be used here as a potential justification for China (as well as other developing nations) to expand its military capabilities. LTC Blasko noted that the insecurity expressed in the White Paper has been echoed by President Hu Jintao’s repeated statements in other media – over 30 times in the official Chinese press since January 2006 – concerning what Hu calls the “two incompatibles”:

- 1) the incompatibility of the PLA’s current modernization level with the ability to win future “Local Wars under informatized conditions”; and
- 2) the incompatibility of China’s current military capabilities with the demands of fulfilling the “historic missions” with which the PLA has recently been

tasked, including defending expanded national interests. (The latter point is discussed more fully below.)

Is the United States to blame?

Despite its generally upbeat tone, this edition displays significant concerns about U.S. intentions and capabilities.

Panelists noted that the policies and programs of the United States are singled out (both explicitly and implicitly) as a major security concern for China. Several pointed out that criticism of the United States in the White Paper is not new; some previous editions have been, perhaps, even harsher. However, in the 2008 White Paper the United States is singled out to the exclusion of other nations that have, in the past, also drawn disparagement.

- The United States is the only nation mentioned by name as negatively affecting the security of the Asian region. One participant suggested that the U.S. may be what the White Paper drafters had in mind when they warned of China's potential "containment from the outside."
- "The U.S. has increased its strategic attention to and input in the Asia-Pacific region, further consolidating its military alliances, adjusting its military deployment and enhancing its military capabilities."
- Recent arms sales to Taiwan are blamed more on the United States than on Taiwan: "The United States continues to sell arms to Taiwan in violation of the principles established in the three Sino-U.S. joint communiqués, causing serious harm to Sino-U.S. relations as well as peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits."
- The current global financial crisis is said to have been "triggered by the U.S. subprime mortgage crisis."

China's national security interests are expanding and, with them, its need for defense modernization.

The White Paper implies that China's national security interests are expanding outward and that these justify expanded defense capabilities.

This edition significantly expands the definition of China's national interests, and accordingly expands the roster of tasks that may fall to the PLA in defending these interests. The White Paper also discusses – in very general terms – the military capabilities that may be needed to fulfill those tasks.

- The White Paper says that one aspect of China's "strategic framework" is "deterring crises and wars." Using wording similar to that in the 2006 White Paper, this edition emphasizes "building a lean and effective deterrent force and the flexible use of different means of deterrence." (It is notable that the 2006 used "lean and effective" to refer specifically to China's nuclear forces, whereas here it is less clear whether the authors are writing only about nuclear capabilities.) As one panelist pointed out, the stated need for "lean and flexible ... means of deterrence" suggests that the PLA seeks expanded means to respond to the perceived expansion of possible threats.
- In addition, the White Paper advocates "enhancing the capabilities of the armed forces in countering various security threats and accomplishing diversified military tasks." While the authors still emphasize the need to "raise the capability to win local wars in conditions of informationization at the core," they also list a host of tasks that fall under the category of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW), including "counter-terrorism, stability maintenance, emergency rescue, and international peacekeeping." To meet these demands, the armed forces must "increase the country's capabilities to maintain maritime, space and electromagnetic space security."

Panelists noted that this broadened definition of China's national interests may require the PLA to "go out" and serve China's interests far beyond its near periphery.

- Oddly, there is no mention of the PRC's recent cooperation in anti-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa, which has been much-publicized elsewhere.²

The economic factor is seen as critical to security.

Compared to past editions, the 2008 white paper more strongly emphasizes the economy as a critical component of national and global security.

Dr. Medeiros pointed out that compared to earlier versions, this edition puts a much stronger emphasis on economic status as a measure of national power and of economic uncertainty as a risk factor in international relations.

- "The Chinese economy has become an important part of the world economy."

² This omission may be the result of the long lead time required to draft, assemble, and coordinate the white paper throughout the Chinese government.

- “[T]hroughout the globe ... economic cooperation is in full swing, leading to increasing economic interdependence, inter-connectivity and interactivity among countries.”
- “In the aspect of world economic development, issues such as energy and food are becoming more serious, highlighting deep-seated contradictions. Economic risks are manifesting a more interconnected, systematic and global nature.”

LTC Blasko noted that, in keeping with this theme, this edition of the White Paper makes economic development the *centerpiece* of China’s modernization. As in the 2006 edition, this White Paper states that national defense will be “coordinated” with economic development; however, the 2008 edition goes on to add that the PLA “*subordinates* its development to overall national construction.”

Some new information is given, but not very much.

The 2008 White Paper introduces new sections on the individual services and on China’s military reform efforts, but participants noted that these new sections do not actually provide much new information.

LTC Blasko suggested that observers can read this – or any – White Paper as including a mix of information:

- “*old/old information*,” i.e., information that has been released before;
- “*new/old information*,” i.e., previously released information presented with variations in wording that may reflect evolution in thought or policy;
- “*old/new information*,” i.e., information previously released in the Chinese military media that may be new to non-specialists; and
- “*new/new information*,” i.e., information that has not been made openly available in the past.

What is new in this edition of the defense white paper?

The 2008 White Paper contains several new chapters: one each for the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Second Artillery, and one that summarizes the PLA’s “reform and development” over the past 30 years. Panelists largely agreed that *the expanded discussion of the services did not translate to a great deal of truly new information*: indeed, Dr. Swaine suggested that there was far less on the “primary strategic direction” of each service than in the 2006 edition.

LTC Blasko suggested that the “reform and development” chapter, on the other hand, contained *more detail than past editions on PLA training efforts*, particularly with regard to:

- the focus on training in “conditions of informatization” and “complex electromagnetic environments”;
- training for MOOTW; and
- the amount of training time spent on political and ideological work,

Participants disagreed on whether this edition provides new information on the *strategic goals of China’s national defense*. Dr. Swaine suggested that although Senior Colonel Chen Zhou, one of the primary drafters of the White Paper, stated that the 2008 White Paper for the first time would lay out the strategic goals of national defense, “these are nowhere to be found.” Dr. Finkelstein, however, noted that this White Paper is the first one that makes extensive reference to China’s *Military Strategic Guidelines*, and, together with Dr. Medeiros, suggested that the discussion of expanded national security interests and the consequent need for expanded military capabilities (discussed previously) might, indeed, constitute an articulation of strategic goals.

On *nuclear strategy*, Dr. Medeiros pointed out that the White Paper provides no truly new information, but does reiterate some themes and raise some additional questions.

- As in previous editions, the 2008 White Paper declares that China “remains committed to the policy of no first use of nuclear weapons.”
- However, in its more in-depth discussion of the PLA’s Second Artillery branch, this edition lays out more details about *the conditions under which the Second Artillery’s nuclear capabilities would be called upon*: If China comes under *conventional* attack, it will “go on alert in order to deter”; if China comes under *nuclear* attack, it will “seek to retaliate.” Dr. Medeiros noted that this is the first time those two conditions of attack have been differentiated, though the White Paper did not actually define what would count as an “attack.”
- Dr. Medeiros also noted that the wording implies that other services beside the Second Artillery and the Navy may also have nuclear capabilities: “If China comes under a nuclear attack, the nuclear missile force of the Second Artillery Force will use nuclear missiles to launch a resolute counterattack against the enemy either independently *or together with the nuclear forces of other services*.” Dr. Saunders, however, suggested that this possibility is over-emphasized in the English translation, and that the original Chinese-language text does not necessarily imply that the Army or Air Force has nuclear missions.
- The White Paper says surprisingly little on conventional ballistic missiles.

Transparency remains limited on important issues, but overall transparency is slowly improving.

Panelists noted that a number of important topics remain conspicuously absent from this edition of the White Paper. However, China's White Paper is slowly becoming more transparent over time and China's transparency is now roughly comparable to that of its neighboring ASEAN countries.

All panelists concurred that, as in previous White Papers, there is a dearth of information on the PLA's capabilities and personnel: in particular, there is little information on force structure, e.g., on the total number of personnel or the ratio of officers/NCOs/conscripts. There is also far less detail on the PLA's budget breakdown than foreign analysts would like to see. As Dr. Saunders noted, this is particularly frustrating given that China's defense white paper is the sole authoritative publicly available document on these topics. Dr. Saunders and other panelists also noted an absence of discussion on several issues that have loomed large in the international – and, at times, the domestic Chinese – media. These topics include the January 2007 ASAT test and China's expressed desire for aircraft carriers – topics that are not addressed in any other official, publicly available Chinese documents, either.

Dr. Saunders presented the key findings of an NDU/INSS study (which he conducted with colleague Michael Kiselycznyk), comparing the transparency of defense white papers from China and other Asian nations. He pointed out that the transparency of China's defense white paper *is* slowly increasing over time, and that it is not significantly less transparent than those of most ASEAN nations. It does, however, lag behind those of other Asia-Pacific nations, such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Dr. Saunders noted that as China's power grows, these countries are becoming the more appropriate basis of comparison. (A more detailed description of this study and its findings is in appendix 2.)

The white paper must be considered along with other official sources on China's defense modernization.

Participants reminded readers that the white paper is most useful when read alongside other PLA publications and statements.

Panelists highlighted three points for readers to keep in mind when considering these White Papers. First, the defense white paper does not reflect just the views of the PLA: it has been fully vetted by the Party and State apparatus, and covers not just military modernization but also political, economic, and diplomatic issues. It represents the official and authoritative views of the Chinese government.

Second, while the white paper may seem frustratingly vague on a number of issues, it serves several important functions both for the PLA and for its readers.

It is directed at shaping the PLA's image and communicating selective information on policies and capabilities to both foreign and domestic audiences.

For foreign readers, the white paper:

- Defines the PRC position, providing Beijing's "official views on the state of international and regional security." It may communicate messages, signals, and sometimes warnings to foreign governments.
- Provides a useful "summary and reference" on certain military issues.
- Can serve as the basis for future discussions with China.

Third, as both Dr. Saunders and LTC Blasko pointed out, defense white papers represent only one aspect of a country's overall military transparency. The issues highlighted in – or omitted from – the PLA's White Paper should be considered alongside the numerous other sources of information on China's defense and security sectors. In some areas, more detailed defense information is available from other authoritative sources, including the *PLA Daily*, official books and journals, public statements from the Ministry of National Defense and MND Information Office briefings, and the Chinese media. However, on other issues, the white paper defines the PRC position and additional information is not available from other official sources.

Appendix 1
Defense White Paper “Themes,” 1998-2008
Dr. David M. Finkelstein, CNA

Each PRC defense white paper has been a “child of its time” in regard to the context in the preface and the analysis of the security situation in the front section of the document. 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 the “Don’t Rock the Boat” edition. Compared to the 2000 white paper, its judgments on U.S. policies were fairly toned down. It also highlighted China’s cooperation in international security regimes and ratcheted down the rhetoric on Taiwan.

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? Because it heralds the good news for China that Beijing is becoming a major player in world affairs. But it also underscores worrisome news for China—namely, that Beijing’s future security is tied as much to forces beyond its shores and beyond its control as it is to the policies developed in Zhongnanhai.

2008: The “Tentative Triumphalism” Edition. The preface to this latest edition describes China’s place in the global order as being at a “new historical turning point.” Readers are 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, speaks to a China that clearly perceives itself as a power of international significance—and to a Beijing that apparently is no longer reluctant to say so. Paradoxically, this message is tempered by an equally eye-catching assessment that China is facing “...strategic maneuvers and containment from the outside while having to face disruption and sabotage by separatist and hostile forces from the inside.”

Appendix 2
China's 2008 Defense White Paper: How Does it Compare?
Dr. Phillip Saunders and Mr. Michael Kiselycznyk, NDU/INSS

Dr. Phillip Saunders presented findings from a forthcoming INSS study on transparency co-authored with Michael Kiselycznyk. The study attempts to assess Chinese military transparency over time and in a regional context by comparing China's defense white paper to those of other Asia-Pacific countries. By developing a methodology and using a standard set of criteria, it attempts to come up with an objective way to compare levels of military transparency.

The INSS study is adapted from a template for defense white papers devised by Dr. Choi Kang of the Korean Institute for Defense Analysis (KIDA), originally presented in a Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) working group in 1996, and subsequently published in the *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*. The INSS study adapted the categories in Dr. Kang's template and developed standardized definitions and a four-tiered set of criteria to use in evaluating transparency in each category.

Four levels of transparency:

- *Red* indicates a complete lack of information, and thus no transparency.
- *Orange* indicates that the white paper addresses the category, but provides only a cursory overview and a very low level of transparency.
- *Yellow* indicates that the white paper provides some level of detail and a medium degree of transparency.
- *Green* indicates that the white paper provides a high degree of detail, explanation, and analysis, and thus provides a high degree of transparency.

Saunders and Kiselycznyk used this system to compare China's six defense white papers (1998—2008) to assess changes in China's transparency over time and to evaluate China's white papers relative to those from 13 Asia-Pacific and ASEAN countries. The study is based solely on a comparison of defense white papers and does not include information publicly available in other government documents. The authors did not attempt to verify the validity and reliability of the information presented in the white papers.

Table 1: Transparency in China’s Defense White Papers Over Time

White papers	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008
Security Environment						
International	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Regional	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Internal	Orange	Red	Red	Red	Orange	Orange
National Security Goals						
Strategic	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Yellow
Tactical	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
General Defense Policy						
Doctrine	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Green
Mission	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Yellow
Major areas of Concern						
International	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Regional	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Internal	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Orange
Current Defense Posture						
Total Personnel	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Red
Structure of Force	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Command Structure	Orange	Orange	Orange	Red	Yellow	Yellow
Armaments	Red	Red	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange
Defense Management						
Overall Budget	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Budget Trends	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Planned Acquisitions or Procurements	Red	Red	Red	Red	Orange	Orange
International Activity						
Relationships, Exchanges & Joint Exercises	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green
PKO/Humanitarian Missions	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green

As shown in table 1, the authors found a slight increase in the transparency of Chinese defense white papers over time. With minor exceptions, the white papers increasingly offer more information on *Doctrine* and *Missions*. *Planned Acquisitions and Procurement* (2006), *Command Structure* (2006), and *Relationships, Exchanges and Joint Exercises* (2000). Some subtle increases in transparency over this ten-year period are not captured through the color coding. For example, the 2008 white paper showed marginal improvements in *Security Environment–International* and *Major Areas of Concern–Internal* that were not sufficient for a higher rating. On international issues, the 2008 white paper presented increased analysis of trends but not sufficiently deeply or sufficiently broadly across all trends to qualify for a higher rating. For the first time, the white paper explicitly names some separatist groups, but still does not discuss or analyze these groups.

Some areas have remained at a low level of transparency. These include *Security Environment–Internal*; *Major Areas of Concern–Internal*; *Structure of Force*, *Armaments*, *Budget Trends*; and *Planned Acquisitions and Procurements*. Transparency in some other categories fluctuates over time. For example, ratings for *Major Areas of Concern–Regional*, *Major Areas of Concern–Internal*, and *Personnel* all declined in 2008. The 2008 paper gave differing levels of attention to traditional and non-traditional security issues in Asia. If assessed separately, the discussion of regional traditional security concerns would receive an orange rating while the discussion of non-traditional security concerns would receive a yellow rating. For the first time, a figure for total personnel was not included, resulting in a red rating for that category.

Although the Chinese white paper’s discussion of the military budget consistently receives yellow ratings, there have been no significant improvements over the last ten years. The 2008 version contains more complete historical figures and, for the first time, breaks down the budget into regular, reserve, and militia components. However, no version of the white paper (or any other official document) provides more specific information on research and development, weapons procurement, spending outside of the regular defense budget, or projections of potential or planned future spending.

Table 2: China’s Defense White Paper Compared to ASEAN

White papers	China	Brunei	Cambodia	Indonesia	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Vietnam
Security Environment								
International	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow
Regional	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Orange
Internal	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Orange	Orange	Orange
National Security Goals								
Strategic	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green
Tactical	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Orange	Green	Orange	Yellow	Green
General Defense Policy								
Doctrine	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Orange
Mission	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow
Major areas of Concern								
International	Orange	Orange	Orange	Green	Yellow	Red	Red	Red
Regional	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Orange
Internal	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Orange
Current Defense Posture								
Total Personnel	Red	Red	Orange	Green	Orange	Orange	Red	Red
Structure of Force	Orange	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Orange
Command Structure	Yellow	Orange	Red	Red	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange
Armaments	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Green	Yellow	Orange	Red
Defense Management								
Overall Budget	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Budget Trends	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Red
Planned Acquisitions or Procurements	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Green	Orange	Orange	Red
International Activity								
Relationships, Exchanges & Joint Exercises	Green	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green
PKO/Humanitarian Missions	Green	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Green	Yellow	Red

As shown in table 2, the degree of transparency in China’s white paper was roughly comparable to that of ASEAN countries’ white papers. Only Indonesia and the Philippines offered a generally greater level of overall transparency. The chart indicates some differences in the degree of transparency in Southeast Asia. For example, Indonesia and the Philippines are very thorough in their discussion of *Security Environment*, compared to other countries. China and Singapore provide many details on *International Activity*. In ASEAN defense white papers, the least transparent areas were descriptions of specific military capabilities in *Current Defense Posture* and details on defense budgets and acquisitions in *Defense Management*. If ASEAN is considered as China’s peer group, the Chinese defense white paper offers comparable or slightly greater transparency.

Table 3: China’s Defense White Paper Compared to East Asia & India

White papers	China	Australia	India	Japan	South Korea	Taiwan
Security Environment						
International	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
Regional	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
Internal	Orange	Red	Green	Orange	Red	Red
National Security Goals						
Strategic	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green
Tactical	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
General Defense Policy						
Doctrine	Green	Green	Orange	Green	Green	Green
Missions	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
Major areas of Concern						
International	Orange	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Yellow
Regional	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Internal	Orange	Red	Green	Orange	Red	Yellow
Current Defense Posture						
Total Personnel	Red	Orange	Red	Green	Green	Orange
Structure of Force	Orange	Orange	Orange	Green	Yellow	Orange
Command Structure	Yellow	Red	Orange	Green	Green	Yellow
Armaments	Orange	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Orange
Defense Management						
Overall Budget	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Yellow
Budget Trends	Orange	Green	Orange	Green	Green	Yellow
Planned Acquisitions or Procurements	Orange	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow
International Activity						
Relationships, Exchanges & Joint Exercises	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Yellow
PKO/Humanitarian Missions	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Red

As shown in table 3, China does not compare as favorably with other Asia-Pacific countries. These countries are generally larger, more militarily advanced, and more democratic than ASEAN countries. China’s overall transparency is roughly comparable to India’s, although not necessarily in the same categories. China also matches closely with these countries on *International Activity*. Japan, South Korea, Australia and Taiwan all consistently offer greater transparency in five of the seven main categories. The Japanese and South Korean white papers are the most transparent of all those surveyed. Not only do they offer the most detailed information and analysis, but they are also the most standardized in form and content.

China receives a better rating than Australia and India in the *Defense Management: Overall Budget* category because the criteria for a green rating require a breakdown of defense spending into functional components. Australia and India include a breakdown by service but not a breakdown by functional category. Most countries in this group publish other official documents in addition to defense white papers that provide more data. For example, both Australia and India publish annual defense budget reports.