

China's Defense Policy

Panel: Session 4 (Lilac & Tulip Room)
Date/Time: Wednesday, December 12, 2012 / 09:00-10:15
Speakers: Choo Jaewoo, Kyung Hee University (Moderator)
Cheung Tai Ming, University of California, San Diego
Han Yongsub, Korea National Defense University
Kim Heungkyu, Sungshin Women's University
Liu Qun, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
David Shambaugh, George Washington University
Rapporteur: Jonathan T. Chow, Reed College

Panel Short Summary

How is China's defense posture developing, particular in light of the recent leadership transition at the Eighteenth Party Congress? This panel convened experts from China, South Korea and United States to offer insights into the trajectory of Chinese defense policy.

Dr. Cheung Tai Ming noted that the most recent leadership transition broke with the tradition of outgoing top leaders retaining the chairmanship of the Central Military Commission (CMC), with Party General Secretary Hu Jintao stepping down as chair of the CMC and allowing his successor, Xi Jinping, to assume the top Party *and* military posts. This will give Xi an unprecedented opportunity to shape the discipline and doctrine of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) over the next two to three years. Dr. Cheung tentatively suggested that Xi may emphasize "national revival" and especially "techno-nationalism" in the military via the development of indigenous military technology.

Dr. Han Yongsub described an increasingly powerful China, pointing to its March 2012 defense white paper, which described the world as evolving from unipolarity into multipolarity as US power declines. He estimated that China's defense budget in East Asia will exceed the United States' defense budget for the region by the year 2030. China's assertiveness in the South China Sea and East China Sea will also continue to alarm its

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neighbors unless it makes a special effort to enhance mutual confidence. Nevertheless, Dr. Han argued that pressing transnational problems—such as in nuclear energy safety—may create opportunities for regional cooperation. Dr. Han concluded that China needs to improve its transparency and enhance military cooperation with its neighbors and the US.

Dr. Kim Heungkyu argued that persistent inefficiencies in China's military-industrial complex and a focus on domestic stability and economic growth will continue to constrain its military modernization. South Korea, for its part, regards China's military power with some ambivalence by virtue of the two countries' proximity to one another and vast differences in size. Efforts at bilateral military-to-military dialogue have been hindered by low levels of political trust, Chinese-North Korean relations, and uncertainty about the regional strategic environment.

Dr. Liu Qun noted that Xi Jinping's simultaneous dual appointment marks a greater degree of centralization and stability in military leadership. For the first time in Chinese history, a commander of the PLA Air Force has been elevated to the joint vice-chairmanship of the CMC. Dr. Liu stated that China has exhibited a great deal of transparency in military affairs through its defense white papers. He also emphasized China's strong interest in a peaceful and stable environment conducive to economic development and the need to pursue deeper dialogue and cooperation.

Dr. David Shambaugh observed that China's strategic environment has evolved over the past two decades. Its periphery is more peaceful than in the past, though still unsettled because of territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas. Doctrinally, the inclusion of energy security, non-traditional threats, space warfare and cyberwarfare greatly complicates China's mission requirements. However, Dr. Shambaugh remained skeptical about China's capacity to carry out these missions, noting that it has pursued a strategy of imitation rather than innovation in military technology, and that its ability to acquire weapons has been stymied by Western weapons embargos and Russia's growing reluctance to sell arms to it. Dr. Shambaugh concluded by noting that for all the PLA's modernization, it has not gone to war since 1979 and its capabilities remain untested.

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