



# CLAWS

## White Paper on “China’s Peaceful Development”: A Critique

### ■ Monika Chansoria

In an apparent attempt to appease regional and global concerns surrounding the mounting debate on China’s “Peaceful Rise” (*heping jueqi*) campaign, Beijing has issued an official White Paper titled “China’s Peaceful Development” (Information Office of the State Council, Beijing, September 2011). A first of its kind, the White Paper, outlines the primary motivations as China undertakes advancement of its modernisation agenda. The White Paper begins by posing critical questions such as the nature of the path of development that China has chosen to embark upon, and what this Chinese development implies in so far as the rest of the world is concerned.

From the time the concept of *heping jueqi* was proposed by Zheng Bijian, Vice President of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Party School at the Bo Ao Forum for Asia in 2003, the latest White Paper sees a calibrated and conspicuous substitution of the word “rise” with “development”. During the past decade, the word “rise” paved the way for apprehension in the region and was reviewed rather disapprovingly, given China’s opacity and dubiety of intentions, as it refuses to clarify the current status of, or future vision for, the modernisation of its growing military preparedness and capability. As a consequence, the entire debate on the impending “China threat theory” (*Zhongguo weixie lun*) has progressively gained significance both within Asia and globally.

### **Military Discrepancies: Internal Security Spending Topples Defence Budget**

Robust military modernisation of the People’s Liberation

Army (PLA) represents a contrasting facet to the tall claims made by China regarding its “peaceful rise”, thus, making it difficult to reconcile the two rather opposing, but equally reinforcing ideas. The emanating discourse has been further cemented with the exponential rise in China’s defence spending in real and absolute terms over the past two decades. According to the latest estimates, Chinese defence budgetary investments will race ahead at 18.75 percent, likely touching \$238.2 billion in 2015. This would exceed the combined spending of all other key defence markets in the Asia-Pacific, thus, reaching around four times the defence budget of Japan, the region’s next biggest spender.

Luo Yuan, at the PLA Academy of Military Science, argues that China’s rise would progress in a staged manner, beginning with the promotion of a peaceful environment and could end in the *jinglue* stage in which the international community would accept China’s efforts in building a new political and economic international order that ensures strategic balance. The disturbing aspect of Luo’s dictum is when he argues about the potential means that would be applied to bring about the mentioned change – would they be political means or military means? Luo asserts that while China champions the cause of its peaceful rise, it should simultaneously work towards the strengthening of its defence, making it conducive for the country to achieve higher strategic ability to wage a dozen local wars successfully.

In the event of a debate that the above-mentioned view is that of an individual and

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cannot be considered as the official Chinese policy, the fact that the official Chinese 2004 White Paper on National Defense, released by the Information Office of the State Council echoes a similar approach, cannot be annulled. The White Paper stated, “The PLA takes as its objective, to win local wars... making full preparations in the battlefields.”

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has accorded highest priority to internal security by reinforcing efforts towards strengthening the internal public security apparatus. The approach taken by China to “engineer internal peace” even at the cost of employing brutal use of force, may potentially manifest in the form of discontented factions emerging on the national, regional and local political scenes. The White Paper on Peaceful Development states:

China’s path of peaceful development may be defined as... achieve development by carrying out reform and innovation... The material basis for China’s modernization drive has become the cause of socialist development... By 2020, China will have built a society of higher-level initial prosperity with the one billion Chinese people enjoying full democratic rights... China’s social system and institutions will be further improved... To implement the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan of development is the near and medium-term goal of China’s pursuit of peaceful development... We will strengthen the building of socialist democracy, and advance the political structural reform actively and steadily... continue to treat all ethnic groups as equals and practise the system of regional autonomy of ethnic minorities, protect people’s freedom of

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religious belief according to law, and fully respect and uphold basic human rights and other lawful rights and interests of citizens...

The above claims made by the Chinese government are incongruous, enmeshed in inconsistencies and can best be described as hardcore propaganda, with the situation on the ground being a far cry from the reality. While on the face of it, China advocates building a society “enjoying full democratic rights,” an equally potent reality is that of its intent of using its military arm, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the People’s Armed Police (PAP) to crush any potential social discontent or faction of society that seeks social/political justice. China’s security agencies are currently engaged in a noxious, intense and prolonged crackdown against the popular unrest and political discontent prevalent in Tibet and Xinjiang, responding with a massive display of state force.

In perhaps the loudest public warning in March 2011, the mouthpiece of the CCP, the *Beijing Daily* newspaper, cautioned people against taking part in anti-government protests: “Everyone knows that stability is a blessing and chaos is a calamity... people intent on concocting and finding Middle East-style news in China will find their plans come to nothing.”

During the annual meeting of China’s legislature, a Finance Ministry budget report of 2011 showed that the actual spending on law and order, police, state security, armed civil militia, etc., in 2011, totalled \$95 billion, an increase of 13.8 percent over 2010. In comparison, the nation’s official external defence budget in 2011 stood at \$91.5 billion. The figures clearly depict that China’s internal security spending is pacing ahead of its officially announced external military spending. As was expected, the report did not provide any details on the specific arenas on which the internal security budget would be spent.

However, Premier Wen Jiabao did suggest in his annual work report that a part of it would be channelised towards Internet controls, “... We will intensify our information security and secrecy, and improve management of information networks.” The remarks were consonant with the discourse of the meeting of the Central Committee of the CCP in December 2011, presided over by President Hu Jintao. The meeting forcefully discussed the converse impact of social media networks, which, in effect, could undermine the legitimacy of the Party and the government. The meeting

also saw a proposal to considerably taper the freedom of the media and Internet-usage by imposing severe, restrictive measures, and in the end, proposed that the government should “apply the law to sternly punish the dissemination of harmful information.”

The Central Committee of the CCP has urgently called for an ‘Internet management system’ that would strictly regulate the social networking and instant-message systems. According to a *Xinhua* report, Zhou Yongkang, most famously known for presiding over the brutal suppression of ethnic Uyghurs during rioting in China’s Xinjiang Province, urged the authorities “to solve problems regarding social integrity, morality and Internet management... and early introduction of laws and regulations on the management of the Internet.”

What seems alarming for China at the moment is that any attempt to shield or cover up the government’s or Party’s malfunctioning would be presented in a magnified format in the Internet age. Therefore, by means of imposing perhaps the strictest measures in recent years to limit media and Internet usage, the Chinese government and CCP are thwarting any potential medium/platform that could consolidate repressed groups or sections of society.

## The Litmus Test of “Managing” Ethnic Minorities

The Chinese debate tends to pivot around the constant fear among the Chinese leadership – the litmus test coming from within by the ethnic minorities. The projection of China’s “peaceful rise” being an internal rise, focussing on internal political and economic rejuvenation, puts in focus Beijing’s attention on dealing with internal strife. To achieve this aim, funds are being diverted from public welfare and other services, which can, in fact, address the root causes of the social unrest.

According to the state news agency, *Xinhua*, in January 2012, authorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, with a land boundary of 5,600 km, about a quarter of China’s total land border, will recruit 8,000 police officers for deployment, tasked to carry out security patrols along with the auxiliary police and militia, manage the migrant population and crack down against illegal religious activities.

Xiong Xuanguo, Secretary of the Committee of Political and Legislative Affairs of the CCP Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regional Committee, said local

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authorities must further improve their capabilities for maintaining social stability and amplify the crackdown on religious extremist activities “for the sound, rapid development of Xinjiang’s society and economy.” With the province making up more than one-sixth of China’s landmass, Xinjiang is critical to the economic ambitions of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Wang Ning, Director of the Economic Research Institute at the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences, accepts that the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region has played an integral role in the nation’s opening-up process and linkages with Central and South Asia, since the State Council established the Kashgar and Korgas economic development zones in May 2010.

The political and social turbulence in China’s restive regions, including Xinjiang and Tibet, is a critical pointer towards the larger issue of uneven distribution and benefits of economic incentives, and denial of political and religious freedom within China. The White Paper avers that China envisions itself as “a socialist democracy, providing regional autonomy to ethnic minorities, protecting people’s freedom of religious belief, and upholding basic human rights.” Beginning with Mao Zedong’s declaration that “political power flows out of the barrel of the gun” extending to the Tiananmen incident in 1989, the question arises: which facet of democracy would justify a “Tiananmen” or atrocities on the minority ethnic factions of a nation? The ongoing unrest in restive regions, including Xinjiang, and the recent series of self-immolations by dozens of Tibetan youth tell a different tale. There has been a steep rise in the armed Chinese paramilitary in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and the Aba Prefecture in the

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heavily Tibetan-populated region of Sichuan.

The White Paper advocates advancement of “political structural reform actively” – notwithstanding the existential aversion of a majority of China’s domestic polity towards any arrangement regarding political reforms and transformation. China’s 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2011-15) for Economic and Social Development has primarily been formulated to resolve its economic and social bottlenecks, thus, getting rid of a century of humiliation (*baituo guru*), and unveils a larger facet of the Chinese economic strategy—a discernment that it can no longer rely on export-oriented growth.

The experimentation with the electoral system involving representation of the people remains limited to the village level. Despite the Ministry of Civil Affairs, depicting this process as China’s “democratic tryst”, the looming shadow of the Party and its widespread and all-pervading cadres, interference of the township government, gaping inconsistency in the legal system for overcoming electoral malpractices, and lack of transparency are issues that cannot be ignored. The real power games begin upwards where the CCP cadres tend to dominate and elections are held through an indirect method.

### Conclusion

The White Paper highlights that the “central goal of Chinese diplomacy is to create a peaceful and stable international environment... it never engages in aggression or expansion... and China follows the principle of not attacking others unless it is attacked.” China’s overtly offensive military confrontations in the past, be it with India in 1962, with the erstwhile Soviet Union in 1969 when Chinese troops ambushed Soviet border guards in Zhenbao Island on

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the Ussuri River, and with Vietnam in 1979, display the intent of China’s politico-military strategy which appears laced with the ambition of becoming a powerful nation (*qiangguo*).

As China steps into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and looks to redefining its future, it certainly needs to focus not just on “upholding its core interests” but also address grave issues that remain at the centre of the ongoing unrest and political discontent prevalent in its complex social strata. The political method of realising this would be to review the nature and number of representative institutions. If China truly wants to achieve peaceful development, it needs to do much more than publish a mere White Paper which repetitively uses the word “peaceful” to justify the nature and future course of its growth. The need is to reorientate its internal political and economic strategy to one that would bring about all-inclusive growth, political and religious emancipation, and prosperity not just for the Han Chinese but for every single minority ethnic community residing in China.



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*Views expressed in this Issue Brief are those of the author and do not represent the views of the Centre for Land Warfare Studies.*



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