

At the recently concluded Shangri-La Dialogue of Asian defence officials in Singapore, Beijing outlined key elements of its security doctrine. Conflicting perspectives of China and US on security have serious implications for Asia Pacific. Unfortunately, Canada is not playing an active role in this debate.



## China's Regional Security Doctrine: Is Canada Listening?

By Amitav Acharya

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The Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, held annually since 2002, is Asia's preeminent gathering of senior defence officials. The 9<sup>th</sup> Dialogue was held in Singapore last week (4-6 June, 2010) with defence officials from 28 countries attending, including the US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates, the Deputy Chief of the Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) of China, the National Security Adviser of India, and defence ministers of UK, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and a host of other Asia Pacific countries. Canada chose to be represented at a somewhat lower level by its Vice Chief of Defence Staff. The keynote speaker was South Korea's President, Lee Myung-Bak, who outlined his response to the sinking on March 26 of the South Korean navy ship Cheonan by a North Korean torpedo, with the loss of 46 of sailors.

A highlight of the meeting was a statement by General Ma Xiaotian, a senior PLA official, outlining Chinese concepts of security. It gave a window not only into the Chinese security philosophy, but also the difficulties of putting it into practice and applying it to the vital US-China relationship.

According to the Chinese Security Doctrine, a rising China will not seek hegemony, although it recognizes that such worries are understandable. Instead, China seeks the "common security of international community." China, the doctrine says, is increasingly interdependent with the entire Asia-Pacific region. It cannot maintain its own prosperity and security alone. The only true path to security lies in building a harmonious Asia-Pacific community which recognizes and tolerates the diversity of cultures and traditions.

China's new security doctrine outlines a new type of "partnership" with other nations and consists of five key elements. These are:

*Integrated security*, calling for a comprehensive partnership, with intertwined traditional and non-traditional security threats. It suggests a close link between economic development and security. Non-traditional security such as food shortages, climate change and pandemics will be viewed as major threats side-by-side with traditional security challenges such as inter-state conflict.

*Common security*. No country can address transnational security threats alone. But security can only be achieved in partnerships with other countries based on equal terms, without any nation dominating others.

*Inclusive security*, the third element, emphasizes the need for mutual trust, and rejects exclusive military alliances (reference to US alliances with Japan, South Korea and other Asia Pacific countries) which are targeted against other countries (read China). Such alliances are damaging and outdated. What is called for instead is full respect for each

other's core interests. China holds up the "ASEAN Way" of consultations and consensus and peaceful engagement of all nations as "a role model for new type of partnership."

*Cooperative security*, which implies that security is to be achieved through cooperation, involving mutually beneficial partnerships and leading to a "win-win" situation for all involved. Security cooperation could start in relatively easy areas, such as economic cooperation and humanitarian disaster relief and gradually expand to cover more difficult political and strategic issues.

*Evolving security*, the final element, strikes an optimistic note, suggesting that the understanding of security by China and other nations is not static, or dependent on short-term calculations or single incidents, but a long-term process subject to changes that will overcome historical animosities.

How can China's new security approach help managing the obstacles to a more stable US-China relationship? A clear hint of the difficulties came from the conflicting positions of the two sides on the role of US military alliances in the region and the issue over recent US arms sales to Taiwan. China's Gen. Ma sees a "Cold War mentality" in recent US moves to refocus and strengthen its alliances in the region. For China, such moves are contrary to the spirit of "inclusive security." US Secretary of State Gates on the other hand asserted that the US military presence in Asia Pacific, which is maintained primarily on the basis of its alliances with countries like Japan and South Korea, are a regional public good, protecting free access to critical sea lanes through which much of the region's commerce flows. Gates justified these alliances and the US military build-up in the region as a part of a policy of strong and effective "extended deterrence," which protects both the US allies from the threat of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. He maintained that the US is shifting to a more geographically distributed, operationally resilient, and political sustainable strategic posture in the region.

Gates accused China of breaking military ties with the US over the Obama administration's decision to sale arms to Taiwan. He insisted that such sales are consistent with long-standing US policy and that the weapons being sold were carefully selected to bolster Taiwan's defensive capability against a growing Chinese military build-up. But China views US arms sales to Taiwan as a direct challenge to its "core national interests," and evidence of the US failure to honour its past commitments, such as the 1982 China-US Communiqué which stipulated gradual reduction in US arms sales to Taiwan. One silver lining from this exchange was China's rebuttal of Gates' claim that US-China military ties were "broken." China has only temporarily suspended such ties at high levels. But low level visits continue.

The conflicting perspectives of China and the US on security have serious implications for Asia Pacific on regional security. Canada should not only be paying attention but playing an active role in this debate. But while Canada's major security partners such as the US, Australia, Japan and South Korea chose to send their highest defence officials to the 9<sup>th</sup> Shangri-La Dialogue, Ottawa's highest official was its Vice Chief of Defence Staff. Such neglect entails serious costs. Recently, another major forum of regional defence and security in Asia Pacific was announced. This would be a meeting of the defence ministers of the 10 ASEAN members plus eight others, including the US, China, Australia, New Zealand, India, South Korea, Russia and Japan. Canada was not even invited.

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