

**New Roles in Areas of Non-traditional
Security of the Armed Forces
in the New Century**

**Sr. Captain Yang Yi
Deputy Director
Institute for Strategic Studies
National Defense University
China**

New Roles in Areas of Non-traditional Security of the Armed Forces in the New Century

Almost without exception, the armed forces of all countries come into being as an important component of state power with the primary mission to defend national security. Yet, roles played by armed forces in different countries sometimes differ from one other, because of different conditions in national security and development. In some countries, no responsibility is assigned for the armed forces other than national defense, while more diverse responsibilities are entrusted to the armed forces in other countries. With the latest development of international strategic situation and the gradual evolution of security perceptions, the armed forces in various countries are playing an increasingly important part in some areas of non-traditional security.

Changes of Roles of the Armed Forces: Opportunities and Challenges

During the Cold War era, the construction of armed forces of most countries focused on how to respond to and win a local war or all-out war that might break out at any time. Such policy orientation might be attributed to the sharp confrontations between two hostile blocs of the East and West, and also to the limitations of traditional security perceptions. As a result, it was extremely difficult for the armed forces to perform missions other than traditional military security. And it was inconceivable for them to touch upon possible cooperation with foreign armed forces in areas of non-traditional security.

Nevertheless, the new century ushered in changes. It has been proved by latest developments in international strategic situation that peace and development have become mainstreams of our times. After the Cold War, regional wars and conflicts have been continuing to disturb world peace and stability, but the possibility of a world war can be basically excluded in the foreseeable future, and possibly be avoided in the long run, because the force for peace is stronger than the force for war. The tendency towards multi-polarization of the world strategic pattern will be inevitable. A relationship of mutual cooperation and restraint among various strategic forces is taking shape. Furthermore, mutual dependence of economic interests among all nations of the world will go into depth with the development of economic globalization.

As to the Asia and Pacific, generally speaking, the security situation in the

region is heading for continuing relaxation, and in my view, a time of lasting peace and stability may be achieved. I have several reasons to support this optimism.

Firstly, almost without exception, all nations in the region give top priority to the development of national economy, and it has become common interest of all nations in the region to preserve an environment of peace and stability.

Secondly, the relationship of economic exchanges and mutual dependence among nations in the region is going into depth. It will become a brake to prevent disputes and contradictions among nations from escalating to conflicts or even large-scale wars.

Thirdly, confrontations and conflicts between blocs no longer exist. Coordination and cooperation have been enhanced, and are becoming more and more important features of relationship among nations in the region.

Fourthly, long existing hotspots are cooling down issues in the region and are basically under control. All governments agree that disputes among nations should be solved through dialogue and negotiations.

However, at the same time when traditional security threats or war threats have been reduced, non-traditional security threats have been on the rise. Among them are transnational uncertain factors, including international terrorist activities, organized transnational crimes, separatist activities of extremist ethnic or religious groups, flow of illegal immigrants and refugees, piracy in international waters and drug trafficking, etc. These are transnational security threats that could not be resolved with by any single country, and thus require cooperation and efforts by international society.

The emergence of the new security perception as represented by concepts of comprehensive security, common security and cooperative security is another positive factor, laying a logic base for nations to cooperate in areas of nontraditional security. It might be accepted that the dominant security perception in the later half of 20th century was reflected in forms of confrontation security, unilateral security and absolute security, and characterized by Cold War mentality. Cold War security mentality usually drew a line of demarcation simply according to ideology and social system in order to identify friend and enemy. It saw the pursuit of national security by various countries as a kind of "zero-sum" game, in which the security of the rival nation would mean insecurity for others, and the rise of other nations would surely pose security threats. Greatest danger

would come if a nation of different political system became stronger. Also, the Cold War mentality emphasized to pursue national security through the expansion of military power and consolidating military alliances, and emphasized to achieve a state of absolute security through establishing absolute military superiority by expansion of unilateral military power. Such security mentality led to an all-out arms race between the two hostile military blocs. Each party sought to achieve an absolute military superiority and establish its own security on the other's insecurity. In consequence, peace and security did not come. On the contrary, international security situation deteriorated.

After the Cold War, such security mentality became incompatible with the trends of our times for its disharmony with the strong desire of the people of the world for peace and development. Latest development of the international security situation evolved a brand new security perception. It stresses that all nations, no matter large or small, rich or poor, strong or weak, are equal members of the international society. It underlines the principle of non-interference in other nation's internal affairs. Domestic issues of any nation should be solved by itself, and international issues should be dealt with by concerned nations through consultation on equal basis. It brings about the concept of comprehensive security. Security should not be sought merely by military power. It emphasizes the importance of common security. National security should be viewed from broader perspective in context with the security of neighboring nations, of the whole region and of the world, aimed at common security of all nations. It advocates cooperative security that seeks peace and stability of the whole region and the world through promotion of security cooperation among nations. In short, the new security perception requires all nations to promote security dialogue and cooperation on the basis of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination in an effort to achieve security and development of all nations.

This security perception will be accepted by more and more nations and people in the world, and gradually become the mainstream security mentality of the world.

New Roles in Areas of Non-traditional Security of the Armed Forces in the New Century

As afore-mentioned, the possibility of an all-out war could basically be excluded while transnational crimes would pose new threats to international society. These are leading to changes in security mentality of international society. The armed forces of many countries have gradually involved more and more in areas of non-traditional security, and are playing a more and more important role. The time for members of international society to make common efforts to crack down transnational crimes is coming.

According to specific practices of most nations, the roles played by armed forces in areas of non-traditional security can be roughly divided into following three categories:

First, provide support to national economic development. In recent years, governments of more and more nations tend to accept that national security is no longer merely military security, and that the connotation and extension of national security are expanding. The position of economic factor has been greatly strengthened. As a matter of fact, economic security has become a more and more important component of national security. Without stable economic development and continuous improvement of living standard of its people, it's impossible for a country to keep internal political stability and to assure its security. This shows that it has become an important component of national security to assure the development of national economy, internal stability and social progress.

As an important pillar of national security, the armed forces should and can contribute to national economic security and prosperity. To a certain extent, some military airports and naval facilities can be open to civilian use. The technological edges of the defense industry and defense science can be used to development civil products. The technologies of defense industry can be widely adopted in national economy to serve economic and social development. The advantages in equipments and better quality of military personnel make that the armed forces can directly take part in the construction of large-scale infrastructures.

Second, take part in disaster relief. The damages upon national economic development and people caused by natural disasters are sometimes even greater

than that by a regional war or armed conflict. For example, during the earthquake took place in Tangshan, China, on July 28, 1976, nearly 200,000 citizens lost their lives in dream and even more were injured. The whole Tangshan city was reduced to ruins. In view of the great destructiveness of natural disasters, all countries take it as an extremely important task to improve their ability of disaster relief. Under the conditions of market economy, in general, it is difficult to galvanize civilians to take part in disaster relief. And it is not easy to accomplish the mobilization of civilians in a short time. In comparison, the armed forces have obvious advantages in these respects. They can be quickly called upon and have high level of maneuverability. More important, servicemen are better qualified and disciplined in carrying out risky missions assigned by government. Because of these qualities, more and more nations see the armed forces as a principal force in disaster relief, and have very high expectations upon them.

Third, participate in international security cooperation. International security cooperation, which is closely related to national defense, might be understood as military diplomacy. After the Cold War, areas of international security cooperation have been expanded, requiring more and more direct involvement of the armed forces. In various forms of security dialogue and cooperation, bilateral or multilateral, official or semi-official, and in the negotiations and talks of international arms control and disarmament, the role played by the military is becoming more and more significant. The armed forces are indispensable for UN peacekeeping missions.

The Roles of the Chinese Armed Forces in Various Areas of Non-traditional Security

“The Law of National Defense of P.R. China” passed in March 1997 stipulated that, “The armed forces of P.R. China belong to the people. Its missions include consolidating national defense, defending motherland, safeguarding peaceful labor of the people, taking part in national construction and serving the people whole-heartedly.”

The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) shoulders dual task of defending national security and taking part in national economic development. Since the establishment of P.R. China, the PLA has fulfilled various tasks in areas of

non-traditional security assigned by the nation and people.

--- First, turning military facilities over to the public or converting them to civil use. In recent years, the Chinese armed forces have transferred part of military facilities to local governments or opened them to the public to support economic construction. As many as 101 airports, 29 harbors, 300 special railway lines 90 telecommunication lines and over 3 million square meters of land have been either opened or transferred to civilian use.

--- Second participating in disaster relief. Natural disasters take place in China frequently. Whenever a natural disaster occurs, the armed forces are always in the forefront of disaster relief missions. Over the past two decades, they have take part in emergency rescues and disaster relief missions on more than 10,000 occasions. During the catastrophic flood occurred in 1998, 300,000 troops were dispatched to flooded areas. They rescued more than four million people and rush-repaired 7,260 kms of dykes.

--- Third, contributing to the construction of major national and local projects. In the past two decades, the armed forces have devoted more than 400 million workdays to support construction of 10,000-odd key projects, including 150 railway, expressway and subway projects, 40 civil airports, 500 energy projects, 2,000 water conservancy projects and more than 20,000 kms of optical cable communication lines, etc.

--- Fourth, expanding foreign military exchanges. The Chinese armed forces have been active in developing military to military relations with foreign countries. In past years, more than 1,300, Chinese military delegations have visited over 80 countries. At the same time, some 2,300 foreign military delegations have visited China. China has attached great importance to friendly military exchanges and cooperation with developing countries, and offered assistance in personnel training, equipment and health care to over 70 countries.

China is also enthusiastic for expanding military to military contacts with Western countries. Extensive exchanges with foreign countries have promoted mutual understanding and trust between the PLA and other armed forces.

--- *Fifth, participating in the UN peacekeeping missions.* China supports the role of the United Nations in keeping international peace and security under the guidance of the UN Charter. From 1992 on, the PLA began to dispatch military observers to UN peacekeeping operations. Some 500 PLA officers have been sent to different UN missions, like UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSU) in the Middle East, UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM), UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), UN Operation in Mozambique (ONMOZ) and UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL). PLA personnel have accomplished remarkably their tasks in UN peacekeeping operations and made great contributions to international peace and stability.

--- *Sixth, playing an important role in international arms control and disarmament.* From 1980s, the PLA began to send delegates as members of Chinese delegations for negotiations of international arms control and disarmament. More important, the reduction of 1.5 million troops of the PLA since 1985 contributed significantly to international arms control and disarmament.

--- *Seventh, taking part in multilateral security cooperation.* In the past decade, multilateral security dialogue and cooperation have been developed gradually in the Asia and Pacific. The PLA joined in the process of such dialogue and cooperation from the very beginning and made great efforts in promoting the process. It is worthwhile to mention that National Defense University of China has been actively involved in the process. Last year, our university hosted the 4th ARF Meeting of Heads of Defense Universities/Institutions in Beijing.

The Chinese government steadfastly follows an independent foreign policy of peace and pursues a defensive national defense policy. China will continue its

open-door policy, and is becoming more and more prosperous and open. The development of democratic and legal system in China will go further into depth. A strong China will be an important stabilizing factor in the Asia and Pacific. In the future, the PLA will actively undertake and accomplish missions in areas of non-traditional security assigned by the Chinese government and people, and contribute to the peace, stability and prosperity in the Asia and Pacific.