

# Chinese strategic review warns of “big power competition” in Asia-Pacific

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*Strategic Review 2012*, the first annual paper produced by a new Chinese military think tank, describes a rising risk of “big power competition” and war in the Asia-Pacific region—driven by the US “rebalance” to Asia and the regional tensions it has generated.

The 50,000-word document was published in both Chinese and English in late May by the Centre for National Defence Policy (CNDP), a part of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Academy of Military Sciences. Founded in December 2011, the CNDP has been tasked with studying national defence policy and drafting annual strategic reports on China’s security.

The report is clearly focused on the implications of the Obama administration’s “pivot” to the Asia-Pacific region, which aims to step up the deployment of US military forces and strengthen US strategic and military alliances to encircle China.

The *Strategic Review 2012* states: “Amid strategic competition among the big powers, the fierce oceanic competition and frequent regional conflicts, the complexity, sensitivity and uncertainty of China’s security environment loom large.” China faces “heightening strategic pressure” for the first time since the end of the Cold War in 1991, with the Asia-Pacific region now a “new global centre” for “geopolitical, economic and military competition.”

While being the “economically most dynamic region,” the Asia-Pacific also saw intensifying rivalry over maritime rights and an “increasingly intensive arms race.” That, combined with “populism emerging in some countries” was driving “the greatest readjustment since the end of World War II.”

As a direct result of the US encouraging regional allies like Japan to assert maritime territorial claims against China, such as over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands

in the East China Sea, the review warns that a military clash could occur between China and Japan.

Commenting on the report, Liu Lin, a researcher at the Academy of Military Science, the publisher of the review, told China Radio International that confrontation between Japan and China is the new “normal.”

He said, “It’s hard for both sides to make compromises. What’s more, the US involvement and the historical legacy [of Japan’s invasion of China in the 1930s and 40s] have made the matter even more complicated.”

Liu stated that American strategy was bound up with a broader objective of containing any challengers emerging out of the Euro-Asian continent “by tightening control of the Indian and the Pacific Ocean.”

This reflects the recognition in Beijing that at the heart of US strategic calculations is establishing the capacity to impose a crippling naval blockade on China by cutting off its vital supplies of raw materials and oil from the Middle East and Africa via the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. This would involve several key US allies, including Japan and Australia.

Huang Dahui, director of the Centre for East Asia Studies at Renmin University in Beijing, told the state-controlled *Global Times* that the Sino-Japanese row over the Senkaku Islands was not about three rocky islets, but deeper antagonisms between the two nations, rooted in the changing balance of their economic weight. “China has overtaken Japan as the world’s second largest economic power. But Japan sees China as a threat and competitor instead of a partner,” he said.

The real prospect that military clashes between China and Japan could trigger a wider conflict, involving the US and other powers, was underscored by a computerised war game exercise held in Taiwan on

May 28, addressing a scenario of a war breaking out between Japan and China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

According to Taiwan's *Liberty Times*, the scenario rapidly spiralled into a conflict between China and the US-Japan alliance, with Russia later joining the Chinese side. Taiwan was forced into the US-Japanese camp, prompting Beijing to threaten to invade the island, which it regards as a renegade Chinese province.

Although the official story of the simulated war game insisted that it concerned only "a small-scale regional war" around the East China Sea, the rapid entanglement of four of the world's largest economic and military powers—the US, China, Russia and Japan—points to the danger of a global nuclear conflagration.

*Strategic Review 2012* was a second attempt by the Beijing authorities, after the publication of a defence white paper earlier this year, to defuse allegations by the Obama administration and various Western commentators that China lacks transparency about its military and strategic posture. The documents insist that the threat of war derives not from China, but from the United States.

Washington has in recent weeks escalated its pressure on Beijing, depicting it as a major threat to peace and the largest source of cyber hacking into US government and corporate data. The latest Shangri-La security conference in Singapore, held just days after the release of the *Strategic Review 2012*, was a case in point. In the presence of defence ministers and senior military figures from the US and Asian countries, including China, US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel stated in his speech that some cyber intrusions "appear to be tied to the Chinese government and military."

In fact, the greatest source of the war danger lies in the militarist policy of the US government, which is seeking to maintain its post-World War II dominance over the Asia Pacific, home to the world's largest cheap-labour platforms, such as China, India and South East Asia. To offset its relative economic decline over the past three decades, Washington is relying on threats of military force to ensure that China will continue to respect economic relations established in line with US geo-political interests.

In the latest provocative step, despite a request from the Chinese government to stop, the US and Japan will

hold a planned joint "island taking" amphibious drill in California on June 10, clearly aimed at China. Set to take place just two days after Chinese President Xi Jinping's first meeting with Obama, also in California, the drill is designed to send a strong warning to the new Chinese leadership.

The Japanese government has publicly stated that the joint drill seeks to strengthen the "defence of the Southwestern islands"—including the Senkaku Islands and Okinawa. Japan's participation will consist not only of troops, but also of a new naval helicopter carrier.



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