

MITIGATING THE ARMS RACE

Jayantha Dhanapala assesses the security policies of the world's great powers that be

The five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (P5) – all of them nuclear weapon-armed states – usually signal their defence policies through official documents such as white papers and nuclear posture reviews. Since three of them – the US, UK and France – are also members of NATO, the Strategic Policy Review of this military pact is also relevant. The information provided is as opaque as their military budgets, but commentators help the general public to decipher the facts as far as possible.

In April, France and China published White Papers which have stirred international interest, while from the European perspective, an unofficial report by four distinguished retired statesmen – Lord Desmond Browne (UK), Wolfgang Ischinger (Germany), Igor Ivanov (Russia) and Sam Nunn (USA) – provides a welcome independent reassessment of the situation.

From Sri Lanka's point of view, the defence policies of China after the assumption of the new leadership of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang are of special interest. A recent border incident between India and China appears to have been resolved, although the origins of it remain murky. The choice of India for the first foreign visit by the new Chinese Prime Minister is also encouraging.

At the same time, the



prestigious Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reveals in its annual report that China has become the fifth-largest arms exporter, displacing the UK from that position. Chinese arms exports rose 162 percent between 2008 and 2012; and in terms of military expenditure, although it is far below the US, China ranks second. In its latest Yearbook, SIPRI also concludes that “only China seems to be expanding its nuclear arsenal.” The policy

paper entitled ‘The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces’ issued by the State Council seeks to place China in the modern context, while emphasising its defensive character.

Fundamental principles are laid down at the beginning: “China opposes any form of hegemonism or power politics, and does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. China will never seek hegemony or behave in a hegemonic manner, nor will it

engage in military expansion. China advocates a new security concept featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination, and pursues comprehensive security, common security and cooperative security.”

The role of the Chinese military in economic development, international disaster rescue, relief efforts, and joint exercises and training with other countries is outlined in the report. In effect, the report is not a comprehensive

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policy paper, but a description of the role envisaged for the Chinese military in the immediate future. It is intended to allay fears about an aggressive and expansionist China.

And the French White Paper *Le Livre Blanc*, written by a group on the direction of President François Hollande, contains very few differences from the 2008 paper of former President Nicolas Sarkozy. Setting the strategic policy for the next 15 years, the paper asserts that nuclear forces are “the ultimate guarantee of our sovereignty.”

Along with protection and intervention, dissuasion is identified as one of the three priorities of France’s strategic thinking on defence. However, responding to the economic woes affecting Europe, military expenditure is capped at current levels. A reported 24,000 jobs will be cut, bringing the defence budget to 1.5 percent of GDP. Intelligence and cyber security are being given priority.

French intervention in Libya and its ongoing operations in Mali indicate that France will continue to engage in foreign military operations where it sees its national interest being

involved. As perhaps the most conservative nuclear weapon state, the White Paper is silent on France joining multilateral nuclear disarmament efforts. This is not surprising, and it has led a critic to say that France’s defence will consist of nuclear weapons plus the gendarmes. Following France’s humiliation by Nazi Germany, the nuclear weapon has become the sole guarantee of national survival and thus, an article of faith in French nuclear policy.

Building Mutual Security in the Euro-Atlantic region is the independent report of four

retired politicians from the US, Russia, UK and Germany. Their reassessment of the Euro-Atlantic security situation in the context of the crisis in the Eurozone, the shift of power to the Asia-Pacific and other contemporary developments is frank.

“The blunt truth is that the security policies in the Euro-Atlantic region remain largely on Cold War autopilot: large strategic forces are ready to be launched in minutes; thousands of tactical nuclear weapons remain in Europe; a decades-old missile defence debate remains stuck in neutral and new security challenges associated with prompt strike forces, cyber security and space remain contentious and inadequately addressed,” the report states.

And it questions the rationale for huge military budgets when other priorities in their own countries and the world in general demand attention. It calls for a new dialogue mandated by political leaders to address all defence issues comprehensively and in an integrated way, moving to mutual security in the Euro-Atlantic region with priorities and phases specified.

The recommendations include a set of core principles to guide the dialogue, and the establishment of a new Euro-Atlantic Security Forum to implement the proposed steps and continue the discussion.

All security policies must recognise that world military expenditure totalled US\$ 1.75 trillion in 2012, a fall of 0.5 percent in real terms from the previous year. But spending cuts in rich Western countries, especially with the withdrawal from Afghanistan next year, should not be offset by the newly emerging economies engaging in arms races or the global powers rushing into new military interventions, as in the case of Syria.



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