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The 2010 U.S. QDR and Its Impact on China

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The 2010 U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) has particular bearing on China, specifically parts concerning Afghanistan/counterterrorism, anti-access capabilities, and military transparency.

Afghanistan/Counterterrorism: Counterterrorism remains a high defense priority for the Pentagon, and as the 2010 QDR is a war-time document, it further emphasizes the imperative for the United States to win the counterterrorism wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Subsequently, the Pentagon has to rebalance and reform its defense institutions and processes accordingly, amidst an uncertain global security environment. American armed forces have to be restructured to be able to both defeat terrorists and deter potential enemies.

Although the United States will start its military withdrawal from Iraq this summer, it could remain in Afghanistan for some time. This is despite the recent White House surge announcement, with subsequent plans to begin withdrawal in 2011. The Bush administration apparently underestimated the Taliban's resilience in resisting foreign occupation. After having been in Afghanistan for nine years, U.S./NATO forces still cannot stem al-Qaeda's influence or defeat the Taliban. President Obama and the 2010 QDR might also not be able to gauge the depth of the unknown ahead.

The U.S. surge in Afghanistan raises a dilemma for China. America might be interested in having Chinese assistance, either by using China as a conduit to assist the U.S./NATO mission within Afghanistan, or by having China play a more prominent role with economic restoration. While understanding that the NATO mission in Afghanistan does have a UN mandate, China is also wary of conflict escalation within Afghanistan and inter-linkages with another neighbor, Pakistan. China is keen for stability in both neighbors and apprehensive of America's expanding influence in South Asia. It is hard to envision China opening its part of the Wakhan Corridor or dispatching its military to join NATO in Afghanistan. Rather, China is more likely to contribute to the international effort to assist Afghanistan's civil recovery.

Anti-Access Capabilities: This QDR highlights the possibility of the United States using force in an anti-access weaponry and tactics environment, underscoring that the U.S. military has to be "capable of fighting limited and large-scale conflicts in environments where anti-access weaponry and tactics are used." This seems to refer directly to China, as it is understood that the Chinese are building a dissuasive capacity in terms of a Taiwan contingency.

For a long time, Taiwan has been an issue between China and the United States. The People's Republic views the Taiwan issue as its core interest and insists that the United States has already admitted that Taiwan is a part of China. Therefore, the United States should not intervene in China's internal affairs. The United States may have left room to interpret the Chinese view in America's favor. The recent discord between Beijing and Washington on U.S. arms sale to Taiwan reflects the nature of this bilateral disagreement.

Across the Taiwan Strait and the Pacific, Beijing, Taipei and Washington are mutually hedging. Taiwanese authorities need U.S. military support to hedge against military

Shen Dingli, Director of the Center for American Studies at Fudan University, explains that "This QDR highlights the possibility of the United States using force in an anti-access weaponry and tactics environment...This seems to refer directly to China, as it is understood that the Chinese are building a dissuasive capacity in terms of a Taiwan contingency."



“However, structural differences between the two mutually distrustful countries have prevented China from being more open. Currently, China nominally spends one-ninth of the U.S. defense budget. Even if purchasing power parity and hidden spending are taken into account, China does not spend more than one-fifth of the U.S. budget. For a possible Taiwan contingency, the United States presently still enjoys overall dominance.”

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action from the mainland. The United States has long supported the so-called *status quo*, a non-unification but somewhat *de facto* independence for Taiwan, to hedge against the mainland regime. Indeed, the U.S. Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act in 1979 as a legally binding deterrent against Beijing. While the mainland agrees with the positive side of the *status quo*, i.e. non-quest of *de jure* independence by Taiwan, it makes its own efforts to hedge against such an eventuality. Clearly, the Pentagon needs to make sure that Beijing is sufficiently deterred, while China is interested in deterring America from entering into a Taiwan Strait confrontation.

Various public reports indicate that China has made headway in building its capacity to dissuade U.S. military forces from entering the Taiwan Strait. China's precision-guided sea-based and land-based anti-ship capabilities, and its improvement in monitoring and surveillance technologies, could increasingly pose a challenging gesture to U.S. armed intervention. Consequently the United States has strengthened its naval missile defense capacity. Ideally both China and the United States need to be aware that the Taiwan issue has to be resolved politically, but technically China wants to ensure that America cannot check it for too long at and near its home area.

Military Transparency: This QDR again raised the question of the direction of China's military modernization. While welcoming a “strong, prosperous, and successful China that plays a greater global role” the QDR asks China to clarify its rationale for force development and its decision making processes. Previous administrations have also pressed China to offer more defense transparency. In fact, this QDR published the “Main Elements of U.S. Force Structure, FY 2011 – 15” to showcase U.S. defense transparency.

However, structural differences between the two mutually distrustful countries have prevented China from being more open. Currently, China nominally spends one-ninth of the U.S. defense budget. Even if purchasing power parity and hidden spending are taken into account, China does not spend more than one-fifth of the U.S. budget. For a possible Taiwan contingency, the United States presently still enjoys overall dominance. Under such circumstances, China is uninterested in more transparency in order to preserve its strength. While the essence of Western deterrence is to present credible force to coerce the opponent, oriental wisdom seeks to hide inferiority by being vague. China does understand the negative side of this philosophy. Being vague can induce an opponent to assume the worst, which in this case is good for China. However the counterargument is that being vague could also encourage an opponent to increase its defense capacity to hedge against China.

Beijing is incrementally allowing military transparency through more dialogues, exchange visits, and publishing Defense White Papers. It has better explained its defense doctrine and budget composition, although not its force planning and weapons acquisition. It is also adapting to the international expectation of increased transparent weapons testing and development. Three years ago, China was reluctant to admit that it had conducted an anti-satellite test, but earlier this year it publicly announced that it had successfully carried out a medium-range anti-ballistic missile interception test. This could also be interpreted as China's gradual adoption of Western style deterrence—showing credible force to prevent a crisis from happening. Over the next decade, it is expected that China will unveil more of its defense modernization, as this is nearly impossible to conceal. After acquiring certain capabilities, Beijing will be more confident in presenting them, for both deterrence and exportation.

In summary, the 2010 QDR presented the latest strategic thinking of the United States. It opens a window to understanding U.S. defense logic and implementation, but leaves an impression of an overarching global military that is both powerful and under stress. However, this QDR lacks an evaluation of past U.S. strategic mistakes in entering Iraq irresponsibly and in leaving arrogantly without apologizing to Iraq and the world. China-U.S. security relations have a similar nature: China has not come close to America to threaten the United States, but the United States has persistently interfered with China's domestic affairs. America thus invites insecurity and erodes its strength and leadership that the QDR has tried to sustain.