

18TH ASIA SECURITY SUMMIT
THE IISS SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE

FOURTH PLENARY SESSION

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GENERAL WEI FENGHE

**STATE COUNCILOR AND MINISTER OF NATIONAL
DEFENCE, CHINA**

Dr John Chipman, Director-General and Chief Executive, IISS

Ministers, your excellences, ladies and gentlemen, it is 8.40 in the morning on Sunday, 2 June and it is time for our fourth plenary session, our first plenary session of this second day of the 18th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue. We welcome also into the hall today His Excellency the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore, and we would all like to thank the President of Singapore for the marvellous reception and dinner she hosted for the delegates to the 18th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue yesterday evening.

I might open this morning's proceedings simply by sending the condolences of all of us at IISS.org, the Shangri-La delegates, to the family of former first lady of Indonesia Ani Yudhoyono, who sadly died yesterday in Singapore where she had long been under treatment for cancer to which she ultimately succumbed. We send our condolences to her family and to the delegation from Indonesia.

The IISS is extremely proud today to receive at the Shangri-La Dialogue General Wei Fenghe, the State Councilor and Minister of National Defence of China. General Wei was born in Shandong province. He joined the People's Liberation Army in 1970, so he has been part of the People's Liberation Army for nearly half a century. He is a member of the 19th CPC Central Committee, a member of the Central Military Commission of the People's Republic of China, the most senior Chinese delegate that we have received at the Shangri-La Dialogue, and we are honoured by his presence here today.

General Wei Fenghe and I have already had several conversations over the last 36 hours. I know that he has conducted many formal and informal bilateral and multilateral meetings. His presence here and his participation shows the Chinese commitment to defence diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific, for which we are all thankful. I would like now to invite General Wei Fenghe to deliver his plenary address on the theme China and International Security Cooperation. General Wei, the floor is yours.

General Wei Fenghe, State Councilor and Minister of National Defence, China

It gives me great pleasure to attend the 18th Shangri-La Dialogue. I would like to thank Dr John Chipman for inviting me here and thank the Singapore government, its Ministry of Defence in particular, for the warm hospitality. I would also like to congratulate His Excellency Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on his excellent keynote address the other day. This is my first attendance at the Shangri-La Dialogue as China's defence minister. I am here for mutual confidence, cooperation and peace. I am glad to speak on China and International Security Cooperation.

Humanity is at a crossroads. Building a community with a shared future for mankind is the right path forward and the trend of the times. The world today is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century. Destabilising, uncertain factors and challenges continue to arise. President Xi Jinping's great vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind is the answer to harmonious coexistence of people across the world, the effective solution to global problems and the right path towards world peace and human progress. We take note that the United States expounded on its perspective on regional affairs yesterday. We believe that any such perspective should take into account the common security and interests of regional countries. No approaches to regional issues should resort to military blocs, nor should they undermine the interests of others. We hold different views with the US side on several issues regarding the wrong words and actions of the US on Taiwan and the South China Sea. We express our firm opposition.

Now let's think about the following questions. Firstly, which should we choose: peace and development or conflict and confrontation? Peace and development remain the call of our times and a trend of history. However, global and regional hotspots flare up one after another and the risk of conflict and war persists. We see regional wars and conflicts, the spread of terrorism, the chaos in the Middle East and the refugee crisis in Europe. What is the reason for them? Who is behind all these and what is the root cause? These are the questions to be reflected on. Some deliberately create division and hostility, provoke confrontation, meddle with regional affairs, interfere in the internal affairs of others and frequently resort to arms. Whose interests on earth do they serve and whose do they harm?

Secondly, which should we choose: openness and inclusiveness or isolation and exclusiveness? See the world with an open and inclusive mind and there will be friends and partners everywhere. Yet see the world with a narrow and exclusive mind and there will only be enemies and adversaries. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, lately we see a growing backlash against globalisation and a surge of protectionism. A certain country champions unilateralism, puts its own interests before others and withdraws from international treaties and organisations. Are there not many countries suffering from the wilful infringement and sanctions?

Thirdly, which should we choose: win-win cooperation or a zero-sum game? Win-win cooperation makes the pie bigger and brings more benefits to all. However, a zero-sum game makes no winner and harms the interests of both sides. Currently, over 150 countries and international organisations have proactively joined China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Not long ago, 150 countries and 92 international organisations sent over 6,000 delegates to the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. People can tell what is right.

Fourthly, which should we choose: mutual learning among civilisations or arrogance and prejudice? A few days ago, China successfully hosted the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations. We believe that human civilisations are and should be colourful, equal, inclusive and willing to learn from each other. Not a single civilisation should be worshipped or belittled. History witnessed the enslavement of Africans, the expulsion of Native American Indians, the colonisation in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the killing of Jewish people. These are scars and tragedies in the history of human civilisation which do not go away. Unfortunately, some people recently picked up the decadent idea of the clash of civilisations. As racist and narrow-minded as it is, this is not right. How can we tolerate such a regress of history?

Facing a complex and volatile international security situation, the Chinese government and armed forces stay committed to regional and world prosperity and stability. Those who are familiar with China's modern history must know that the country was once poor and weak and went through enormous misery. The Chinese people know very well the value of peace and the cruelty and destructiveness of war. Over the years some have been recklessly hyping up, exaggerating and dramatising the China threat theory, partly due to the lack of understanding of China's history, culture and policies, but more likely due to misunderstanding, prejudice or even a hidden agenda of their own.

China sticks to the path of peaceful development. Such a commitment is underpinned by China's socialist system, the independent foreign policy of peace and the cultural tradition that values peace

and harmony. China shall follow the path of peaceful development, which is a solemn commitment to the people of China and the world. This has been written into the Constitution of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC), thus reaffirmed as the will of the CPC and the state. If this is not even convincing enough for some people, then we don't know what they would believe. Over the past 70 years since the founding of the PRC, China has never provoked a war or conflict, nor has it ever invaded another country or taken an inch of land from others. In the future, no matter how strong it becomes, China shall never threaten anyone, seek hegemony or establish spheres of influence. History has proven and will continue to prove that China will not follow the beaten path of big powers seeking hegemony when it grows strong. Hegemony does not conform to China's values and national interests.

China adopts a military strategy of active defence. China's military strategy adheres to the principles of defence, self-defence and post-strike response. It stresses that, 'We will not attack unless we are attacked, but we will surely counterattack if attacked'. China develops its military entirely for self-defence. The purpose is to defend the country, provide people with a peaceful working environment and ensure that our people are free from the disasters of war and enjoy a better life. We have never bullied or preyed on others and we shall not let others bully, prey on or invade us either. China develops its military to cope with security threats. A similar scenario can be found in the past when China had to develop nuclear capabilities of its own under nuclear threat. China's defence expenditure is reasonable and appropriate. China enhances national defence in order to meet the legitimate needs to defend its own security and contribute to the world force for peace.

The Chinese military is dedicated to safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the people's force under the leadership of the CPC. The PLA has fought many battles and is not afraid of sacrifice. In the face of aggression, coercion or hardships, it has forged ahead from victory to victory. The more severe the pressure and difficulties are, the stronger and braver the Chinese people become. Adversity only brings our nation greater solidarity and strength. As the lyrics of the Chinese national anthem go, 'Arise, all those who do not want to be enslaved. Let us build the new Great Wall with our flesh and blood.' Faced with daunting and complex security challenges, the PLA vows not to yield a single inch of the country's sacred land, but it will not seize anything from others either. The PLA has no intention of causing anybody trouble, but it is not afraid to face up to troubles. Should anyone risk crossing the bottom line, the PLA will resolutely take action and defeat all enemies.

The Chinese military is committed to safeguarding regional and world security and stability. China is an active supporter of United Nations peacekeeping operations. It is the largest troop contributor among the permanent members of the UN Security Council and a major contributor of funds. We have established a peacekeeping standby force of 8,000 troops that is ready to be deployed. For years, China has been actively promoting bilateral and multilateral security cooperation. The China–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination has been running at a high level. The state-to-state and military-to-military relations between China and the US remain generally stable despite twists and difficulties. We have strengthened a sense of shared future with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, deepened our traditional friendship with India, Pakistan and other South Asian countries, maintained peaceful coexistence and good-neighbourliness with surrounding countries, and built good relationships with the countries and militaries of Africa

and Latin America. In October this year, China will host the 9th Beijing Xiangshan Forum. We welcome defence and military leaders and scholars from all over the world to attend this Forum.

Last, while striving for common prosperity in the Asia-Pacific, we must respect the core interests and accommodate the security concerns of all. China advocates that all countries – big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor – are all equal members of the international community. We should respect and accommodate the legitimate security concerns of one another. China understands and respects the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries and supports the social systems and development paths they independently choose. China is not able to progress in isolation from the rest of the world, and the world also needs China to prosper. We in China do not covet the interests nor envy the development of others. However, we shall never give up our legitimate rights and interests. No country should ever expect China to allow its sovereignty, security and development interests to be infringed upon.

As for the recent trade friction started by the US, if the US wants to talk, we will keep the door open. If they want a fight, we will fight till the end. As the general public of China says these days, 'A talk? Welcome. A fight? We are ready. Bully us? No way.'

With that, I would now like to further illustrate China's position on a few issues you may be interested in, first on Taiwan. The Taiwan question concerns China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Not a single country in the world would tolerate secession. When I visited the US last year I was told by the American friends that Abraham Lincoln was the greatest American president. I wondered why and they explained, 'It is so because he led the country to victory in the Civil War and prevented the secession of the US.' The US is indivisible and so is China. China must be and will be reunified. We find no excuse not to do so. If anyone dares to split Taiwan from China, the Chinese military has no choice but to fight at all costs for national unity. Hereby, I have a message for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) authorities and the external forces.

Firstly, no attempts to split China would succeed. Secondly, any foreign intervention in the Taiwan question is doomed to failure. I have taken note of the US speech yesterday which mentioned Taiwan. I want to ask: is the Taiwan Relations Act a law of Taiwan or law of the US? Is it a law of China or an international law? Is it an act of the UN? How can the US enact a law to interfere in China's internal affairs? Is there any sense in that? Thirdly, any underestimation of the PLA's resolve and will is extremely dangerous. We will strive for the prospect of peaceful reunification with utmost sincerity and greatest efforts, but we make no promise to renounce the use of force. Safeguarding national unity is a sacred duty of the PLA. If the PLA cannot even safeguard the unity of our motherland, then what do we need it for?

On the South China Sea, the current situation in the South China Sea is generally stable and positive. It is attributable to the joint efforts of the countries in the region. However, there are always people trying to make profits by stirring up troubles in the region. I just paid an official visit to Singapore and Vietnam. I exchanged views with the two defence ministers on the South China Sea issue and reached a lot of consensus. Here I have a few questions concerning the issue to discuss with you.

Firstly, who is threatening security and stability in the South China Sea? Over 100,000 ships sail through the South China Sea each year. None has been threatened. The problem, however, is that in recent years some countries outside the region come to the South China Sea to flex muscles in the

name of freedom of navigation. The large-scale force projection and offensive operations in the region are the most serious, destabilising and uncertain factors in the South China Sea.

Secondly, who would benefit and who would suffer from the chaos in the South China Sea? In the case of chaos in the South China Sea, we, the regional countries, are the ones to take the brunt of it. What are the purposes for certain countries to send military vessels and aircraft all the way from afar to this region? Are there not enough examples that some big countries intervene in regional affairs, make troubles, walk away and leave a mess behind?

Thirdly, should we count on countries in the region or outside the region for maintaining stability in the South China Sea? China and ASEAN countries have made good progress in negotiating the Code of Conduct (CoC). We hope that relevant parties will not underestimate the wisdom and ability of regional countries to properly handle differences and preserve peace. However, we welcome constructive suggestions from all countries.

Fourthly, is China's construction on its South China Sea islands and reefs militarisation? It is the legitimate rights of a sovereign state to carry out construction on its own territory. China built limited defence facilities on the islands and reefs for self-defence. It is only when there are threats will there be defences. In the face of heavily armed warships and military aircraft, how can we not deploy any defence facilities?

On the DPRK nuclear issue, China is committed to denuclearisation, peace and stability of the peninsula and to a negotiated solution through dialogue and consultation. The Chinese side has made active efforts in promoting peace talks and played an irreplaceable, constructive role. We hope that the US and the DPRK will accommodate each other's concerns with cool heads and patience, work towards the same goal and resume the dialogue for peace at an early date. The US and the DPRK need to adopt a dual-track approach and advance denuclearisation together with the establishment of a peace mechanism. We hope that the international community will positively respond to the legitimate concerns of the DPRK, trigger the reversible clause of the UNSC resolutions in due course, facilitate a declaration on the end of war and actively build trust among all parties.

On China-US relations, this year marks the 40th anniversary of China-US diplomatic ties. Despite all the ups and downs, the China-US relationship has been steadily growing in the past 40 years. The most valuable lesson we have learned from the four-decade-long relationship is that cooperation benefits the two sides while confrontation hurts both. Looking forward, the two countries should follow the consensus of the two presidents and promote a China-US relationship featuring coordination, cooperation and stability.

Through continued communication, the militaries of the two countries have agreed on many important issues. First, in terms of implementing the consensus between the two presidents, the two militaries agreed on making their relationship a stabiliser for the overall relations. Second, we agreed on maintaining regular communication on the strategic level. The day before yesterday I had a candid and practical discussion with Acting Secretary Patrick Shanahan. We reaffirmed the importance of maintaining communication and to develop a constructive military-to-military relationship. Third, in terms of managing risks and preventing conflicts, the two sides recognise that military conflicts or even a war between them would bring disasters to both countries and the world. It takes two to cooperate, but only one to start a fight. We hope that the US side will work with us towards the same

goal, follow the principles of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation, and steer the China-US relations in the right direction.

The achievements we have made in the past 70 years since the founding of the PRC is not a windfall or a handout from others. Neither was it made by engaging in military expansion or colonial exploitation. Instead, it has been achieved through the hard work, wisdom and bravery of the Chinese people, as well as through our win-win cooperation with the world since Reform and Opening Up. At present, under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, China enjoys political stability, social cohesion and steady economic growth. With peace, harmony, prosperity and governance prevailing in the country, China is making progress on all fronts. The Chinese people are striving to realise the Chinese dream of great national rejuvenation. The Chinese military is ready to work with the armed forces of other Asia-Pacific countries to jointly meet challenges, build an Asia-Pacific community with a shared future, and safeguard peace and stability in the region.

Thank you for your attention.

Dr John Chipman, Director-General and Chief Executive, IISS

Thank you very much, General Wei, for your description of China's active defence and for the two pledges I heard – first, neither to secede an inch of land nor to take an inch of land, and your second pledge that you will respect and accommodate the legitimate security concerns of others while not giving up your own legitimate security concerns.