

**18TH ASIA SECURITY SUMMIT**  
**THE IISS SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE**

**FOURTH PLENARY SESSION – Q&A**

**SUNDAY 2 JUNE 2019**

**GENERAL WEI FENGHE**

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

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

General Wei, you have attracted so far 15 people interested in making a comment or asking a brisk question. By the agreement that we arrived at yesterday, I will take four or five questions and comments and then return to you for your response. Given that I have got quite so many, could I please ask all of you to ask a crisp, brief question so we can accommodate as wide and diverse an array of perspectives as possible.

**Stephen Smith, Distinguished Fellow, Perth USAsia Centre, University of Western Australia**

Minister, thank you for your contribution this morning. I have been coming to Shangri-La Dialogues for nearly a decade and at each Shangri-La Dialogue I have attended I have heard the call from China or elsewhere that the United States needs to adjust or accommodate its approach to take light of and accommodate the rise of China as a great power. In the blink of an eye historically over the next two to three decades, India, the world's largest democracy, will be a great power and Indonesia, the world's third-largest democracy, will be the fourth-largest economy in the world and be a global influence, not just a regional influence. How does China propose to adjust to and accommodate the rise of India as a great power and the rise of Indonesia as an international and global influence, not just a regional influence?

**Dr Lynn Kuok, Senior Research Fellow, University of Cambridge; Visiting Scholar, Paul Tsai China Center, Yale Law School; Associate Fellow, IISS**

You mentioned earlier, General, that the PLA vows not to yield a single inch of the country's sacred land, but it will not seize anything from others either. Now, that is all well and good, but the question of course is how valid is China's consideration of what is China's and what is not China's? China has been island-building and militarising in the South China Sea and you mentioned that it is the legitimate rights of a sovereign state to do so. That is true. However, in the case of the features in the South China Sea that China occupies, sovereignty is highly contested and in the case of one feature – Mischief Reef – a tribunal actually found that, because it is a low-tide elevation within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ), it is within Philippines sovereignty. I find it hard to understand; if you could explain please how China can on the one hand say that it will not seize anything from others and yet feel that countries should be reassured by that promise, because it seems to have a very expansive approach to what belongs to China.

**Henry Boyd, Research Fellow for Defence and Military Analysis, IISS**

Thank you, General, for such an interesting and thought-provoking speech. The speed and scale of the People's Liberation Army's modernisation process in recent years has been incredibly impressive. I wondered if you could just say a few words about which areas you think you have seen the greatest progress in recent years and which areas still need some more work?

**Ken Jimbo, Professor, Faculty of Policy Management, Keio University, The Tokyo Foundation**

General Wei, I would like to get your perspective on the issue of the US–Russia withdrawal of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, on the two specific agendas. First of all, the US potential for deployment of either intermediate- or medium-range missiles, not necessarily nuclear, but conventional forces in the Western Pacific; how do you respond to such a potential? Secondly, some call for China to join the renegotiated INF Treaty, like arms control with Washington and

Moscow. Currently we heard from Beijing that there will be zero chance for this, but is there any potential to make your nuclear doctrine force posture be more transparent, triggered by this debate?

**Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto, PhD Candidate, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University**

In his speech, Prime Minister Lee of Singapore acknowledged the stability that the US military power had brought to the region since the end of the Second World War, whereas China's emergence as a new major military power is creating more anxieties in the region. I would like to ask you, General, whether you agree with this statement.

**Caroline Atkinson, Executive Committee, Peterson Institute for International Economics; Former Head of Policy, Google; Former Deputy National Security Advisor, White House; Trustee of the IISS**

Thank you to the General. I have a quick question. All of the other conversations and statements that we have heard from defence ministers here today and yesterday have referred to the value of international norms and a rules-based international order. I wonder if this has any relevance or meaning for China, as this phrase was not in the General's conversation.

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

Colleagues, thank you for your questions; I would like to give responses to your questions. Just now, five or so questions were raised about China-India relations, about INF, about China's island-building, about international order. Now let me give you some responses.

In terms of China-India relations, generally speaking this relationship is sound. In particular, President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi have provided some guidance for the relationship and the confidence of the strategic partnership has enjoyed sound growth. I paid a visit to India last year. The minister of public security, minister of foreign affairs, as well as the minister of defence of China all visited India. Our two militaries reached an important consensus – that is, to properly implement the consensus reached between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi in an informal summit in Wuhan. Both sides are committed to promoting a cooperative and stable relationship between the two sides. The momentum of the relationship is getting better and better. We are making active efforts to further grow this bilateral relationship.

Having said that, we have differences in the relationship as well, but the differences cannot be compared to the overall sound cooperation. The Chinese side is ready to work together with India to properly handle the boundary question and at the moment the management of the boundary question is sound. The two sides have had close communication with each other and the border area is generally stable. The common interests of China and India far outweigh our differences. A sound China-India relationship not only serves the interests of both peoples; it is also conducive to the stability of the whole world as China and India are the two biggest developing countries in the world. The military-to-military relationship between the two countries has also enjoyed healthy growth and steady development. Our consensus reached is that the two militaries need to work together to contribute to the overall relationship between China and India.

On the second question, I heard a question about island-building, especially on China's construction on islands and reefs and deployment of military facilities. I think for China to build limited defence

facilities is totally legitimate. China's islands and reefs in the South China Sea are part of the Chinese territory and there is no dispute as to China's legitimacy to build facilities on its own territories. However, we need to think: what is militarisation? Building facilities on one's own territories is not militarisation. What can be called militarisation? I think with some military knowledge we would know that this is not tantamount to militarisation. We are deploying the facilities because we fear the threat, because there is threat. In the past, when conditions were not ripe, our people stationed on the islands and reefs were living in very poor conditions; but now we have the resources, we will improve their living conditions. We are also improving the facilities on those islands and reefs to provide better services. These are not militarisation. Some countries instead have blatantly showed muscles in this region. How can we respond to that? Can we use handguns to cope with such threats? I think it is legitimate for us to respond to such threats by deploying some facilities.

As for the development of the Chinese military, China has always developed its military to defend its national sovereignty and security. As a major country, we follow a defensive policy that is defensive in nature. As I mentioned in my speech, our policy is not to attack anyone if not attacked, but we will surely counter-attack if attacked. We must make sure that our people enjoy a better life, enjoy a safe environment of working, and to achieve that we must have a strong army to defend them. Without a strong army our country will not be safe. In the past, when China was under nuclear threat, blackmail or threat of using nuclear weapons, China was under the threat of total elimination and under those circumstances we were forced to declare our own nuclear arsenal. I was the commander of the First Rocket Force of the Chinese Army, so I know it perfectly clearly.

I think the development of the Chinese military is close to the hearts of many and the issue that is cared about most is whether China wants to seek hegemony by developing its military. I want to make it clear and I want to invite you to think: who has China invaded? Since the founding of the People's Republic of China we have never taken the initiative to send out troops to fight a war with another country. Those wars that were forced upon us were fought to defend our sovereignty and security. We have never taken an inch of others' land. The second question is: who has China threatened? China is a big country but we have not bullied smaller countries or weaker countries with our size or strength. China is the only country that has pledged not to use nuclear weapons first. We maintain that issues should not be resolved through use or threat of force. We have not achieved what we have achieved today by military expansion or colonial exploitation. Who is the one that uses such approaches to achieve what they have achieved? I think it is clear to many, and China will never do that.

**Meia Nouwens, Research Fellow, Chinese Defence Policy and Military Modernisation, IISS**

Thank you very much, General Wei. My question is about China's strategy of active defence. You said that China will not attack if it is not attacked but it will surely counter-attack if it is attacked. Can you please provide some clarification as to what constitutes an attack on China? Is this kinetic or other?

**Asanga Abeyagoonasekera, Director-General, Institute of National Security Studies**

When you look at the complex security challenges of the world, I think I would draw your attention to Sri Lanka, the Easter Sunday attack, where we lost 250 lives within 60 minutes. I actually witnessed the attack in Shangri-La myself, the bombing. My question is basically on China's role in anti-terrorism and violent extremism: what is China's role? Our president's first visit after the attack was

to China, to strengthen security cooperation. What is China's role in anti-terrorism as well as violent extremism?

**François Heisbourg, Special Adviser, Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique; Senior Adviser for Europe; former Chairman of the Council, IISS**

On Friday evening, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong stated that the lack of strategic trust was at the heart of American–Chinese tension. Now you, General, have used words like peace, cooperation, stability, development, win–win, but you did not use – unless something got lost in translation – the word 'trust'. Should we read anything into this omission? By the way, I asked pretty much the same question to Acting Secretary Shanahan yesterday.

**Shashank Joshi, Defence Editor, *The Economist***

Yesterday, Minister, one of your colleagues from the floor said that freedom of navigation was conditional. Would you agree? More specifically, you lambasted the US, France and Britain for coming from outside the region to stir up trouble, as you put it, in the South China Sea. How do you view that as consistent with Chinese naval and intelligence activity in the exclusive economic zones of other countries outside of the region? How do you square those two beliefs?

**Saira Basit, Vice Dean, Norwegian Defence University College**

Thank you so much. At the opening of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, some got worried while others gained great hopes of a more stable Pakistan, specifically when it comes to economic growth and the fight against terrorism. My question is, how does China view its role in the region as a hegemon? Is it cautious and efficient, or would you describe it in another way?

**Rufino Lopez, Deputy Director-General, National Security Council, Philippines**

I would like to speak on the issue of food. The South China Sea has been a traditional fishing ground since time immemorial for coastal states, the Philippines included. However, the action of China of late points to the fact that you have prevented fishermen from fishing, the destruction of the marine environment which was disturbed by destroying coral reefs, and somehow even harvesting of endangered species like giant clams. I would like to hear from you, Mr Defence Minister: how is this so? You are not only endangering the food security of your people – you have almost two billion people – plus the people of the coastal states.

**Anne-Marie Brady, Professor, Chinese Domestic and Foreign Politics and Polar Politics, University of Canterbury**

General Wei, I would like to ask a few questions on China's military activities in the Antarctic. I want to know if China will expand its logistics supported by the PLA in the Antarctic and, about the BeiDou Satellite System, will it expand its coverage in the Antarctic?

**Ernesto Braam, Regional Strategic Advisor, Southeast Asia, Embassy of the Netherlands to Singapore**

Minister, you said that the construction of limited defence facilities in the South China Sea is legitimate. Legitimate, I think in all interpretations, means in accordance with the law, in this situation of course in accordance with international law. Now, China is also a party to the UN

Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Now, my question is: how can China reconcile these two things, and also add to that of course the ruling in The Hague in 2016 on the case of the Philippines against China? That is my question; and also, how can this be seen as a win-win situation? To whom?

**Sophia Yan, China Correspondent, Daily Telegraph**

General Wei, under Chinese law private companies like Huawei are obliged to work with the government. Can you please detail in what instances the Chinese Communist Party would ask private firms to assist in matters of national security and national intelligence?

One more thing: you gave a list in your speech of ‘scars and tragedy in human civilisation’. I must ask – 4 June on Tuesday marks the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. Will the PLA this year finally recognise what happened back then?

**Khoa Pham, Chief Executive Officer, Yola**

General, is China committed to a legally binding code of conduct (CoC), and if not, why not? Do you have a committed timeline to complete the CoC?

**Alice Ekman, Head, China Research, Center for Asian Studies, French Institute of International Relations**

Thank you very much, General, for your very interesting speech. You referred twice to colonial exploitation. Hearing your speech, I have the impression that it is fully in line with Mao Zedong’s non-alignment policy and in general terms, referring to generalised foreign policy. To what extent do you agree with this impression?

You also refer several times to the centrality of the Communist Party of China. I think many in the room would doubt the fact that China is still a communist country. What would you say to them concretely to convince them that China is still a communist country?

**Termsak Chalermpananupap, Fellow, ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute**

My question is about President Xi Jinping. He has been talking about how China is now in a new Long March, but you, General, this morning are telling us that you are deploying military personnel in outposts in the South China Sea. Is there a contradiction here? You are actually deploying your military in the South China Sea in disputed areas, not Chinese territory. However, at the same time, your president is saying that China is retreating in the new Long March. Is there any contradiction?

**Michael Cole, Senior Fellow, University of Nottingham**

General Wei, do you believe that the presence of concentration camps in Xinjiang may be contributing to a greater threat to Chinese national interests worldwide? If that is the case, what is the PLA doing to respond?

**Jun Osawa, Senior Research Fellow, Nakasone Yasuhiro Peace Institute, Institute for International Policy Studies**

May I ask a question about the Chinese military strategy in the cyber arena? General Wei, you mentioned China’s military strategy is the active defence and a non-first-strike policy. However, in

the cyber domain it is difficult to define any border and it is difficult to define territory. Does the Chinese military apply this active defence policy in the cyber arena, and how do you apply your military strategy in the cyber arena as in active self-defence?

**Le Hong Hiep, Research Fellow, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute**  
General Wei, there have been some rumours or allegations that China is seeking a military presence maybe in Cambodia. Yesterday in the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report released by the US Defense Department, they have raised some concerns about this and I think there are some concerns amongst Southeast Asian countries about this rumour. Can you please confirm whether China is seeking a military presence in Cambodia or not?

**Alexander Neill, Shangri-La Dialogue Senior Fellow for Asia-Pacific Security, IISS-Asia**  
A follow-up question regarding Xinjiang. We have heard Asanga from Sri Lanka mention the terrible atrocities occurring recently. My question is actually linked to the Chinese presence in Syria in the Middle East, and the General referred to instability there. There are several hundred Uighur fighters in Syria, and I would like to ask the General what threat does he think exists from returning fighters from Syria to China.

**Dr John Chipman, Director-General and Chief Executive, IISS**  
Thank you very much. General Wei, you have had another ten questions or so. We have got about five minutes before we need to begin the next session, but I know that you have had time to think about all of these questions, about Cambodia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and the like. I wonder if you could give us some of your responses to those interesting questions.

**General Wei Fenghe, State Councilor and Minister of National Defence, China**  
If you give me enough time I will answer all these questions. I will spend the whole time of the second session to answer these questions.

Actually, I did not answer the question from the previous round on INF. Actually the INF was established in a very positive atmosphere that was very important to INF and to [inaudible] withdrew from it. That is also a bilateral treaty and it should not be arbitrarily expanded to other countries. China is developing its capabilities in an appropriate and reasonable fashion, purely for self-defence. We do not pose a threat to other countries. I will give a simple answer to the questions just now.

To the question about the strategy that China will not attack others unless attacked, I made it very clear just now and if I need to go deeper into that I will not have enough time to answer other questions.

About counter-terrorism, terrorism is a common enemy to all of us. China is committed to working together with other countries to fight terrorism. This is our position, which is very consistent. There is no doubt about that, and China is a victim of terrorism. One question I want to ask here is, what is the root cause of terrorism? What is the root cause of so many terrorists? Why, as counter-terrorism efforts go on, the more serious terrorism has become? Why are there so many Afghan and Syrian terrorists, why are there so many terrorists in Libya? How has the Islamic State been produced?

Actually terrorism is a common enemy and we need to respond to the threat together. We should not adopt any double standards.

Another question is about the South China Sea and freedom of navigation. In terms of the South China Sea, which is a question which attracted great attention, China has been committed to stability in the South China Sea. We are also committed to settling relevant issues by peaceful means through consultation. China has carried out some construction activities because some countries have been acting recklessly and are not following rules, so we have to carry out some self-defence. Other people are threatening us, come into our home all the time and threatening us. Why can we not develop some weapons to defend ourselves? This is purely reasonable.

Another question is about Huawei – in the interests of time, I will just answer some important questions. Huawei is a private company. China is opposed to the attempts of other countries to impose sanctions on private companies. Huawei is not a military company. Do not think that the head of Huawei used to serve in the army, the company that he has built is part of the military. That does not make sense; there are these kinds of ex-servicemen across the board. After their retirement from the military a lot of them have set up companies in countries across the board.

Some colleagues also raised questions about Xinjiang. To judge whether the policy of a country is good or not, I think there is a very important standard. We need to see whether people's lives have constantly improved and whether people are enjoying a secure and stable life. The policy of China in Xinjiang is absolutely right, because over the past more than two years there is no single terrorist attack in Xinjiang and the living standards of the local people have improved. The number of tourists to Xinjiang is about 150 million people; I visited Xinjiang last year. The average per capita GDP of Xinjiang people is \$7,500. With such sound economic developments, how can we say that Xinjiang is not developing in a good fashion? Xinjiang has carried out a vocational-education and training centre to ensure that there are no terrorist attacks, to help these people de-radicalise and help these people to learn some skills. Then they can better get reintegrated into society. Is it not a good thing? A friend can visit Xinjiang and see the situation out there with your own eyes.

Other questions have also been asked, for example, about the satellite-guiding system which has been independently developed by China that is aimed to support the Chinese people, to support the Belt and Road Initiative. It can also serve the development of the whole world. It is important to the development of the whole world.

To the question on the environment in the South China Sea, China is also committed to protecting the environment in the South China Sea. We have been stressing that we should not carry out excessive developments or utilisation of the South China Sea. It is important to preserve and restore the sound environment out there.

Another question is about Cambodia. Our Cambodian friends are out there and there is no such thing as China establishing its military presence in Cambodia. There is no such thing out there.

Another question is about the Tiananmen incident. This marks the 30th anniversary of that incident, and 30 years have proven that, as the leadership of the CPC, China has undergone major changes. How can we say that China did not handle the Tiananmen incident properly? There is a conclusion of that incident, that is, that incident was political turbulence and the central government took measures

to stop the turbulence, which is correct policy, and because of the propensity of the Chinese government China has enjoyed stability and development. If you visit China, you can understand that part of history.

Some colleagues also expressed a worry around whether China wants to be the number one in the world, become hegemon in the world. Yesterday the Minister of Defence of Singapore put forward a point about the relationship between the grass and the elephant. As I said, China is the biggest developing country while the US is the biggest developed country. China does not have the intention or capacity to vie for the number one position in the world with the US. The US is a developed country, while China is a developing country; there is a big difference in terms of the level of development between the two countries, and we are working for a community with a shared future for mankind. We live on the same planet Earth. No one can survive or thrive without each other. All countries need to depend on each other for their own development, so we need to cooperate with each other, enjoy harmony with each other and pursue common development. It is the only choice for the world. Conflict, confrontation between countries, including that between China and the US, does not serve the interests of the two peoples and it does not serve the interests of the whole world. I talked with Secretary Mattis in the past and that was our consensus; I also talked with Acting Secretary Shanahan and there was also an understanding between us. China and the US are two major countries and no one can defeat the other. A sound and stable relationship between the two countries, particularly a sound and stable relationship between the two militaries, is very important to the two sides. A stable military-to-military relationship is also important to the stability and peace of the whole region.

On the Antarctic, Antarctica and the Arctic are both the shared home of humanity. They should serve the interests of all countries. China does not seek a military presence over there.

I think I have answered all the important issues.

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

Okay. Why do we not conclude with your relationship with Sri Lanka?

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

What happened in Sri Lanka, the terrorist attack, was a disaster for humanity. China is also a victim of terrorism. The violent terrorist attacks in Xinjiang were a scourge for us. I think the recent terrorist attack was a catastrophe for the Sri Lankan people. We need to strengthen our collaboration and coordination in finding the root causes of terrorism and fighting them. Terrorism is a disaster for not just Sri Lanka, for Asia, but for the whole world, because they kill innocent people and they harm the results and interests of all countries. We need to work together to fight terrorism and we should not discriminate against different forms of terrorism.

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

Thank you very much for your speech at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, the conversation that you have animated, your replies to all the questions. I have to say that there are at least a dozen people who would have liked to have asked more questions; perhaps when you attend the Shangri-La Dialogue next year we will schedule 90 minutes for your session, so that all the questions can be

asked and all of the answers can be provided. I know that, General Wei, you are here for the rest of the day in Singapore and you have engaged a lot with our delegates, so perhaps some of the delegates who did not have their questions answered formally in this hall, you can discuss with them outside in the corridor. I want, on behalf of everyone attending the Shangri-La Dialogue, to thank you for your presence here and for the conversation and dialogue you have had with us here in Singapore. Thank you.