

The Evolution of Taiwan's Military Strategy: Convergence and Dissonance

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On October 19, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) released the *National Defense Report 2009*. This is the first *NDR* issued by President Ma Ying-jeou's administration since it won the March 2008 presidential election. Under the sanction of the *National Defense Act*, Taiwan's MND publishes the *NDR* biannually since 1992 and the *Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)* since March 2009. The *NDR* and *QDR* are the most important policy documents published by the MND since they are the only open sources available for probing Taiwan's evolving military strategy.¹

Neither President Ma's original vision of a "Hard ROC (Republic of China)," a military strategy that was first articulated during the 2008 presidential campaign, or his predecessor's "Decisive Campaign outside the Territory," was assimilated in the *NDR* without some resistance and modification. A careful reader of Taiwan's military strategy should pay attention to these implications. Even a slight alteration in the word order, as the author will deliberate in the following sections, such as *Fang Wei Gu Shou, You Siao He Zu* (resolute defense and effective deterrence, 1996-2000; 2008-) and *You Siao He Zu, Fang Wei Gu Shou* (effective deterrence and resolute defense, 2000-2008) represent major conceptual differences in Taiwan's military strategy.

Akin to the previous Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration under Chen Shui-bian (2000-2008), the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) administration came into office with the belief that their predecessor made critical mistakes in military strategy for defending Taiwan. The newcomers, eager to encode their new ideas into military strategy, set forth to change the directives of the previous administration within the *QDR* and the *NDR*. Thus, both documents provide a good point of reference for understanding different doctrinal preferences between the DPP and the KMT.

While the current civilian executives push to change Taiwan's military strategy, the military establishment appears to be pushing back—preferring to maintain consistency in military strategy and reduce uncertainties over existing plans and programs. After all, the military views the business of military strategy as better left in the hands of professionals. The extensive internal edits and reviews that are built-in the standard protocols for formulating these high-level policy documents reflect a consensus among the different Services. As a result, the *NDR* and the *QDR* may be seen as the product of a political tug-of-war between civilian and military authorities.

From Offensive Defense, Forward Defense, to Defense-in-Depth (1949-2000)

From 1949 to 2000, Taiwan's military strategy underwent three-stages of evolution. In the beginning, the military's overall goal under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek was to retake Mainland China by force; however, Chiang did not have the military capabilities to carry out such a military adventure nor complete U.S. support. As a result, Taiwan's military strategy at the time was an "Offensive Defense" strategy (1949-1966), which was executed by increasing military presence on Taiwan-controlled offshore islands and conducting frequent raids on China's coastal area.

In the mid-1960s, Chiang abandoned the plan to use military force in retaking the Mainland after the United States repeatedly rejected his proposal. The raids along China's coastline gradually ceased. No military engagement occurred between both sides since the naval battle off Wu Chiou Island in 1965. Instead, Taiwan concentrated on fortifying its offshore islands and, at its peak, increased the force level to 170,000 troops on the tiny outposts. This was the era of "Forward Defense" (1966-1979).

For Taiwan's military planners, the withdrawal of U.S. troops stationed on Taiwan following the break of diplomatic relations between Taiwan and the United (8) States in 1979 implied that they would need to take over completely the responsibilities of rear-guard (the defense of Taiwan). In so doing, the first division-level redeployment from Kimmen Island to Taiwan took place in 1983 and marked the beginning of a continuous troop reduction on its offshore islands. Taiwan's military strategy thus entered the stage of "Defense-in-Depth" (1979-2000), which was heavily influenced by Army General Hau Pei-tsun's (as Chief of the General Staff during 1981-1989) operational concept of "Decisive Campaign at the Water's Edge."

The tactical depth that Hau proposed encompasses a three-layered defense:

- 1) to check the enemy on his shore,
- 2) to strike the enemy in transit, and
- 3) to destroy the enemy on Taiwan's beachhead.

Yet Hau argued that there was no hope for Taiwanese forces to sustain its command of air and sea power over the Taiwan Strait. In addition, according to Hau's concepts, China could not conquer Taiwan without first landing on Taiwan and in doing so would suffer great casualties when trying to defeat Taiwan's ground forces. That, according to Hau, would deter China from invading Taiwan or, at least, buy sufficient time for U.S. inter-

vention. Thus, Hau argues that to maintain “strategic sustainability,” Taiwan’s air and naval assets should avoid being committed in full strength during the initial stages of the campaign. All forces should be preserved in order to concentrate in the decisive campaign of engaging the enemy at the water’s edge.²

All of Taiwan’s *NDR* prior to 2000 adopted Hau’s concepts. In the *NDR 1996*, the MND first introduced “resolute defense and effective deterrence” as the overarching principles of Taiwan’s national military strategy. It stated:

Based upon the guidance of “strategic sustainability and tactical decisiveness,” our strategy is to fight the enemy vehemently with coordinated manpower and firepower, to let the enemy pay the unbearable price as to deter the enemy from invasion and ensure our national security. Should the enemy dare to land, we will gradually annihilate the enemy in the prepared positions by destroying the enemy on the beachhead, firmly defending our strongholds, and striking the enemy via our mobile forces. We will also mobilize the reserves to wear down the enemy. The enemy’s attrition will be so high as to contribute to our final victory.³

The concept of “resolute defense and effective deterrence” was defined in the *NDR 1998* as “a kind of defensive deterrence.” Its purpose is “to dissuade the opponents that the cost of using military forces will outweigh the gain.”⁴ In short, “resolute defense and effective deterrence” represents a model of “deterrence by denial” with “resolute defense” as the means to achieve effective deterrence.

Active Defense (2000-2008)

Yet, the Taiwan Strait missile crisis in 1995-96 exposed critical shortfalls in the “Defense-in-Depth” strategy. China’s missile tests over Taiwan demonstrated that its ballistic missiles could penetrate Taiwan’s layered defense without much difficulty and could inflict considerable damage on Taiwan. In the late 1990s, many civilians including then-Legislator Chen Shui-bian began questioning the validity of the “Defense-in-Depth” strategy. Meanwhile, Taiwan’s military rushed to build up its missile defense capabilities and, under the instruction of then-President Lee Teng-hui, initiated several clandestine programs for developing indigenous cruise and ballistic missiles in order to check China’s missiles at its source.

During the 2000 presidential campaign, Chen proposed the new operational concept of

“Decisive Campaign outside the Territory” to replace Hau’s “Decisive Campaign at the Water’s Edge,” and called for radical changes in Taiwan’s military strategy that could be labeled as the “Active Defense” strategy (2000-2008).⁵ Chen’s original concept of “Decisive Campaign outside the Territory” inferred two operational options: First, when deterrence is about to fail and enemy attack is imminent, Taiwan should employ pre-emptive measures to neutralize enemy military targets. The capabilities of deep strike against the enemy at its source would be the key factor for success in defending Taiwan. Second, given that the Army was seen to have no significant role in the fulfillment of “Decisive Campaign outside the Territory,” it was imperative to develop deep strike capabilities and strong air and naval forces.⁶

After Chen was elected president in 2000, the first option was abandoned and the second option was refined.⁷ Yet, what remained unchanged was the emphasis on checking the enemy on its shore and striking the enemy in transit than on destroying the enemy on Taiwan’s beachhead. During Chen’s first term, his ideas received considerable resistance from the Army, but the strategy of “Active Defense” gradually took shape.⁸ In the *NDR 2000*, though the term “Decisive Campaign outside the Territory” was omitted, some of Chen’s ideas were clearly visible:

After our force modernization and the continuous upgrade of our weaponry (9), we have already had active capabilities to conduct counter-measure operations and to achieve some deterrence effects. Therefore, traditional concept of “resolute defense and effective deterrence” is adjusted to “effective deterrence and resolute defense.” In addition to a compact, responsive, and efficient modernized force, [we are] to build an appropriate effective deterrent force.⁹

It was not merely a change of word order. Implicit in the *NDR 2000* was the re-definition of the relationship between “effective deterrence” and “resolute defense.” Both effective deterrence and resolute defense are means to achieve the purpose of defending Taiwan. The latter refers to the traditional concepts of ground war while the former specifically refers to air, naval and information counter-measure capabilities in general, and Hsiung Feng 2E (HF-2E, 600 kilometers range) cruise missile in particular. The *NDR 2004* offered the most comprehensive description about the “Active Defense” strategy:

In order to fulfill the concepts of “effective deterrence and resolute defense,” ... [t]o cope with the changing strategic environment in the future

and maintain our military superiority, [we will] actively develop, research and acquire the precision stand-off weapon systems and establish electronic counter-measure forces in order to augment our deep strike capabilities. Through the buildup of defensive counter-measure capabilities, [we hope to] deter the enemy from initiating hostility by complicating its probability of success.¹⁰

Under the “Active Defense” strategy, the tactical significance of Taiwan’s outpost islands was lowered. The troops deployed on Kimmen, Mastu and other offshore islands were reduced to below 20,000 in 2008. Meanwhile, the first unit of HF-2E was operationalized and the MND programmed the budget for the mass production of HF-2E. The longer version HF-2E BLOCK II (estimated 1,000 kilometers in range) was also developed and tested (*United Daily News*, April 26, 2007).¹¹

Toward Fortification Defense? (2008-)

Before 2008, most KMT politicians were not in disagreement with the “Active Defense” strategy or those counter-measure weapons such as HF-2E. Rather, they were opposed to having them be under Chen Shui-bian’s command on grounds that Chen might abuse them. Then-Legislator Su Chi (now Ma Ying-jeou’s Secretary General of the National Security Council), however, fundamentally rejected the “Active Defense” strategy and stated openly that the KMT would never consider developing any weapon that could strike Mainland China (China Radio International, September 12, 2007). Su believed that Chen’s “Decisive Campaign outside the Territory” was irrelevant for defending Taiwan and a dangerous idea that might provoke military confrontation in the Taiwan Strait. As a result, then-Legislator Su Chi boycotted the MND budget for the HF-2E production. As an alternative, Su proposed the idea of the “Hard ROC” during Ma’s 2008 presidential campaign, which has become the mantra of Ma’s military strategy. Under the “Hard ROC,” Su argued that the imperatives of defending Taiwan was “... the capabilities to sustain China’s surprise attack and maintain air superiority in order to deprive China from landing and occupying Taiwan. If China can not ensure its swift victory and create a *fait accompli* before the U.S. intervention, then China’s incentive of invasion is naturally decreased” (*United Daily News*, January 24, 2006).

By exclusively focusing on the defense of Taiwan Island, Su’s “Hard ROC” strategy ignored the tactical depth of Hau’s “Defense-in-Depth” strategy. Under the concept of a “Hard ROC,” Su argued that Taiwan’s arms procurement should be redirected to those items that could contribute to hardening the political or military assets on Taiwan Island.

Rather than big ships and fast planes, Su preferred runway repair kit (for maintaining local air superiority), sea mines (to deny the enemy's command of the sea), and troop transport helicopters (for rapid force redeployment within Taiwan Island) (*Liberty Times*, October 20, 2007). The concept of the "Hard ROC" appears to be no more than a strategy for fortification defense—and to some extent even a relegation of the traditional "Defense-in-Depth" strategy.

Thus, it is not surprising that the new idea of a "Hard ROC" encountered some resistance within the military. Moreover, the passivity of the KMT administration toward the MND's existing procurement programs invited considerable criticism. As Chen's case in 2000, despite the fact that the MND highlights Ma's term of "Hard ROC" in the *QDR 2009* and the *NDR 2009*, many concepts of "Active Defense" strategy from the previous DPP administration in fact remain unchanged. For example, in the *QDR 2009*, it suggests that Taiwan should "keep strengthening and developing the defensive counter-measure and asymmetric capabilities" in order to strike "against the enemy's center of gravity and vital weak points... as to utilize favorable (10) time and space, to paralyze and delay the enemy's offensive, and to defeat the enemy's invading forces."¹²

Also, while the *QDR 2009* and the *NDR 2009* reaffirms the return of Taiwan's military strategy to "resolute defense and effective deterrence,"¹³ the line of argument is not necessarily the same as before. Though responsible for by different branches,¹⁴ both use nearly identical language to emphasize the importance of checking the enemy on its shore and striking the enemy in transit.

According to [our] defense plans, after the enemy commences its offensive, [we will] utilize favorable opportunities and use [our] defensive counter-measure capabilities to strike the enemy's vital military targets and the enemy's amphibious forces while assemble and upload at [the enemy's] ports. Later, depending on the situation development, [our military actions] will place emphasis on two critical phases of "joint [sea] interdiction operations" and "joint anchorage attack" as to destroy the enemy at its weakest when in transit across the Strait.¹⁵

The *QDR 2009* makes the clear distinction that effective deterrence, comprised exclusively of those deep strike weapons such as HF-2E cruise missiles "is the means to achieve the goal of resolute defense."¹⁶ Thus, the positions expressed in the *QDR 2009* and the *NDR 2009* resembles the concepts of the "Active Defense" rather than "Defense-in-Depth" strategy.

In spite of the military's apparent concern about returning to the traditional concept of "Decisive Campaign at the Water's Edge" under the "Hard ROC" strategy, there have been no indications from the Ma administration that it will compromise their views encapsulated in the term of "Hard ROC." For instance, even though the KMT finally agreed to appropriate the budget for the production of HF-2E, which is already a mature and operational system, Ma ceased the development of the HF-2E BLOCK II, which has scored several successful records during the tests (*China Times*, September 1, 2008).¹⁷ The *QDR 2009* and the *NDR 2009* do not mark the end of the saga. Considering the widening gulf in threat perception presented by the civilian and military authorities, the publication of the two documents represents only the beginning.

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¹ In Taiwan's military terminology, the definition of military strategy is slightly different from the American usage. The term of military strategy in this article was adopted the American usage which focused on the employment of the armed forces – an operational art oriented definition. In Taiwan, the equivalent term is field strategy (*Ye Jhan Jhan Lyue*).

² `Hau Pei-tsun *Eight-Year Diary as the Chief of General Staff* (Taipei: Commonwealth Publishing Co., 2000), Vol. 1, p. 238. Original in Chinese.

³ *National Defense Report (NDR)*, 1996, pp. 63. Original in Chinese.

⁴ *NDR*, 1998, p. 53. Original in Chinese.

⁵ In Chen's campaign pamphlet. It claimed that "The concept of "Decisive Campaign at the Water's Edge" should be abandoned. The attrition style of warfare should be replaced by paralysis warfare. [We should] deprive the enemy's capabilities for waging war against us in order to prevent it from bringing war into our homeland and putting the lives and property of our population in danger." See Headquarters for Chen Shui-bian's Presidential Campaign, *Chen Shui-bian's Blueprint for the State: Vol. 1, National Security* (Taipei: Headquarters for Chen Shui-bian's Presidential Campaign, 1999), pp. 50-51. Original in Chinese.

⁶ *Chen Shui-bian's Blueprint for the State: Vol. 1, National Security*, pp. 37 and 51.

⁷ In June 2000, Chen first officially declared his ideas of "Decisive Campaign outside the Territory" in front of the military. The first argument referred to pre-emptive strike was totally deleted from his speech and the second one that exclusively highlighted the importance of air and naval forces was moderately modified.

⁸ Yet old ideas die hard. In Chen's first term, some notions embedded in the traditional "Decisive Campaign at the Water's Edge" were still kept in the *NDR*. For example, in *NDR 2002*, in addition to sustaining information, air and naval superiority, it still highlighted that "based upon the principle of annihilation of invading enemy and safeguard the homeland, [we will] concentrate precision firepower of all our Services in combination with Air-Land mobile strike capabilities, through continual counter-offensive, destroy the enemy on the beachhead and at the air-drop zone." The "Active Defense" strategy was fully implemented only after Admiral Lee Jui assumed the position of defense minister in 2004. Quotation from *NDR*, 2002, p. 81.

⁹ *NDR*, 2000, p. 64. Original in Chinese.

¹⁰ *NDR*, 2004, p. 63, Original in Chinese.

¹¹ In order to ease U.S. suspicion over Taiwan's indigenous development of cruise missiles, the MND affirmed in the *NDR 2004* that these missiles serve a defensive purpose (11) and will be used against China's military targets only. See *NDR*, 2004, p. 63.

¹² *Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)*, 2009, p. 42 and 49. Original in Chinese.

¹³ *QDR*, 2009, p. 47. *NDR*, 2009, p. 79. Original in Chinese.

¹⁴ The *NDR* and the *QDR* are responsible by the Strategic Planning Department and the Integrated Assessment Office of the MND respectively.

¹⁵ *QDR*, 2009, p. 48. The *NDR 2009* also makes an almost identical statement, see *NDR*, 2009, p. 80.

¹⁶ *QDR*, 2009, p. 42.

¹⁷ There are significant strategic and operational implications between HF-2E and HF-2E BLOCK II for the latter has the range of striking China's inland targets while the former can only reach China's coastal area. (12)