

IISA's Blog Post



Institute for Islamic Strategic Affairs

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Reading China's Troop Cut: Some Possible Reasons

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The China's World War II victory parade on September 3, brings a surprise. Amidst the parade's significance to the China's relationship with the world and other countries, particularly Japan, it brings a valuable stage for President Xi Jinping, to announce a plan to cut its troop by 300,000. This number certainly cannot be underestimated, that is more than 10% and will make the total number of troops down around 2 million personnel. Xi explains that it "fully shows China's sincerity and aspiration to join hands with the rest of the world to maintain peace." Furthermore, this 70th anniversary event of the end of the catastrophic war cannot be more appropriate to announce that. Moreover, as one of the most suffered nations by the war, China definitely has an extra point to convey a message of peace.

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Nevertheless, that statement is difficult to simply be treated as a message of peace. China's historical records of conflict with other countries or its position to violent conflicts happened in other places revokes a complete confidence toward President Xi's argument. In addition, the recent intense border disputes over, Senkaku/Diaoyu island with Japan and the South China Sea with some Southeast Asian countries, put another reason to doubt. The parade itself is criticised as the show of force of China's military power, which does not fit with the plan of decreasing the number of military personnel. Under this backdrop, some possible reasons of the statement of the troop cut, are explored and analysed.

First, the military reform: The People's Liberation Army has been undergoing a long-running reform program. At least, there has been four times personnel cut since Deng Xiaoping's regime, one million in 1985, 500,000 in 1997, 200,000 in 2003, and 300,000 now. The purpose is to increase its effectiveness, contextualizing with current needs and challenges. The orientation is about modernising the military force and optimizing technology. Yang Yujun, the spokesperson for China's Ministry of National Defense, [confirms](#) this, "Through the cut of troops' number, China's military will further adjust and optimize its scale and structure, make its troops more capable and its structure more scientific, and construct a modern military force system with Chinese characteristics." Interestingly, the military reform can also be linked to President Xi's effort against corruption. The "tiger and fly" corruption crackdown, in fact, has reached military bodies, including that involve some high-ranking officials such as Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong. In the previous month, the People's Liberation Army Daily in its front page editorial wrote "[if](#)

[we allow the growth and spread of corruption, the guns will rust, the pillars will collapse.](#)" [Xinhua](#) further elaborates the importance of the reform "to shake up structure, revise attitudes, and adjust interests are already set in motion," while warns against the rejection from some "special interest groups."

Second, the economic slowdown; The emerging economy has been facing a multi-aspect of the lowest economic slowdown after decades of rapid growth. The recent stock collapse and the devaluation of Yuan are the signals of its seriousness. Yang Yujun also mentions the economic motive behind it, "...conducive to pooling resources, speeding up the pace and improving the quality of informatization construction." Another similar opinion is given by Rory Medcalf, the head of the National Security College at Australian National University. Medcalf [argues](#) that the cut is mainly about providing more space to the budget, in which human resources are relatively costly as the increase of wage standard in China in the last decades. The personnel cut is a rational [choice to do at the moment](#), then.

Third, the support toward foreign policy with smart power: The China's foreign policy that is attempting to pave the road of mutual economic growth, for example the Silk Road, is often viewed as an aggressive and expansive hegemonic model of relationship. This model is not only considered as a threat for big countries, but also a danger for national interests of small countries,

especially by the majority of grass-root people.

Unfortunately, this view achieves its reinforcement from the

progressive advancement of China's military capability. The constantly and rapidly increase of the military expenditure is translated as China's ambitious to rule over the world and great potential to employ military actions if necessary. The Pew Research Center's research on the view of [the US](#) and [Asia Pacific public](#) toward China is

an example as how there is imbalance and malfunction on China's soft and hard power use. China's rise as a global power, thus, is perceived more as a threat, rather than an opportunity.

Whilst China's plan to cut on a number of the military personnel and its association with peace and disarmament should be appreciated, many things remains to be seen. Its implementation

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and impacts toward the PLA should be further reviewed. More

importantly, China's deeper contribution to the global peace and security is awaited as a concrete proof of President Xi's statement at the parade, "No matter how much stronger it may become, China will never seek hegemony or expansion. It will never inflict its past suffering on any other nation." Let's see, then.

About Us

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