

National security legislation justified

China's law tailored to nation's real conditions amid challenging external environment

Editor's note: This year marks the 10th anniversary since a comprehensive national security outlook was proposed. How does the outlook help China strengthen its national security against the background of increasingly complex domestic and external challenges? And how should one view the recent developments related to national security? Tao Jian, former president of the University of International Relations, shares his views on the issue with China Daily's Zhu Ping. Excerpts follow:

Question 1: In the 10 years since it was proposed, what have been the most important achievements of the national security outlook compared with the traditional outlook that existed before?

A1: According to China's National Security Law, national security means the State not facing any danger or threat internally or externally to its sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity, or the welfare of the people, sustainable socioeconomic development, or the capability to maintain security.

The overall national security outlook has developed in the new era. On April 15, 2014, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, proposed the "overall national security outlook" at the first meeting of the Central National Security Commission of the CPC, pointed out the necessity to adhere to the overall national security outlook, treat the people as the purpose, political security as fundamental, economic security as the cornerstone, military, cultural and social security as the guarantee, and the promotion of international security, to embark on a national security path with Chinese characteristics.

This exposition established the "five-in-one" framework of the overall national security outlook.

In the decade since the proposal, the overall national security outlook has expanded to cover as many as 20 areas — political, military, territorial, economic, financial, cultural, social, technological, cyber, food, ecological, resources, nuclear, overseas interests, space, deep sea, polar regions, biological, artificial intelligence, and data security — embodying the concept of "comprehensive security".

However, not all the problems the 20 sectors face should be classified as national security threats until they reach a significant scale. For example, an individual telephone scam does not represent a national security problem. But the

more than 437,000 tele scams cracked down nationwide in 2023 do present a challenge to national security.

Also, equal efforts are not needed to deal with each of the problems faced by the 20 sectors. Yet it would be wrong to deal with national security issues in a particular sector and ignore the others.

In light of the unprecedented complexity and challenges, the achievements of the outlook have been threefold. First, China has safeguarded national security and maintained political stability, as well as advanced scientific development and helped intertwined high-quality development with high-level security.

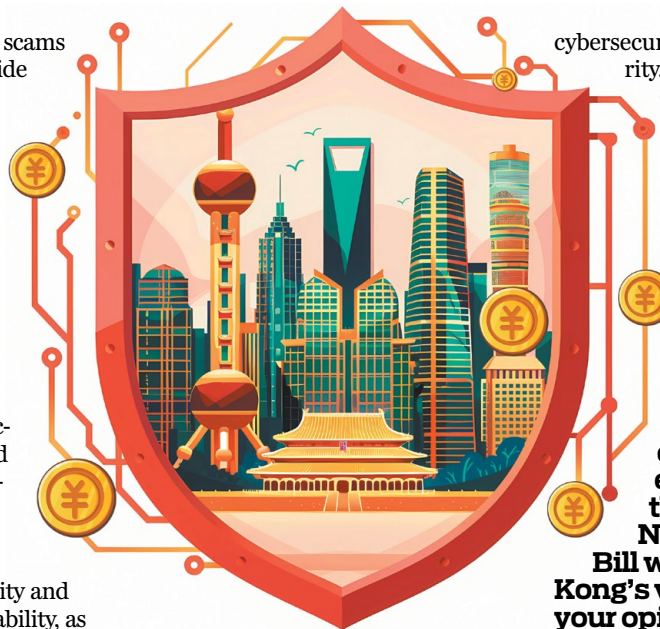
Second, the overall nature of the outlook surpasses traditional security concepts and thinking. It is tailored to China's real conditions. Over the past decade, China has been facing an unprecedented challenging external environment due to some Western countries' China-containment policy. On the domestic front, China's main contradiction, that is, the contradiction between people's increasing aspirations for a better life and the unbalanced and inadequate development is evident in income disparities, urban-rural gaps, regional differences and the levels of productivity in different sectors and regions. In this context, the national security outlook addresses a series of major issues.

And third, the outlook highlights the idea of putting people's security first. It makes clear that security is an important part of the people's aspirations for a better life.

Q2: How do you evaluate China's national security situation now? What are the biggest challenges facing China?

A2: China's national security situation is undergoing significant changes. From an international perspective, China's current external environment is "extremely complex".

China's economic and technological development and international competitive environment are undergoing drastic changes, with major power competition becoming even more severe. The current state and future direction of China-US relations are key variables affecting China's external security environment.



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Beijing's main geopolitical risks lie across the Taiwan Strait, as well as with the common challenges of climate change and international financing, which could pose a threat to the country's security. Besides, the political and security situations of small and medium-sized countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts require close attention. And the threat of terrorism remains a security issue that China needs to take into serious consideration, as the recent terrorist attacks on the outskirts of Moscow and on Chinese personnel in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan have once again reminded us.

In other words, global economic recovery is weak, geopolitical conflicts are intensifying, and protectionism and unilateralism are rising, slowing China's growth rate.

It is an arduous task, in such a situation, to simultaneously implement reform, advance development and maintain stability. Boosting economic recovery and development in itself is a tough job, especially at a time when deep-seated contradictions accumulated over the long term are becoming more complex.

In addition, following the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the technological and financial wars (the freezing of \$300 billion of assets of the Central Bank of Russia by the United States and the European Union), and the food, energy and cyber information wars waged by the US and other Western economies against Russia have sent a warning to China to prepare for extreme scenarios.

China should therefore strengthen its national security work in key areas such as political security, territorial security, economic security, social security,

cybersecurity and external security. There is also a need for China to expedite the construction of a new development pattern to boost its economic resilience, competitiveness and development capability in the face of foreseeable and unforeseeable storms.

Q3: Some foreign media reports claim the recent enactment of the Safeguarding National Security Bill will stifle Hong Kong's vitality. What is your opinion on the issue?

A3: The passage of the Safeguarding National Security Bill in the Hong Kong Legislative Council on March 19 fulfills the constitutional responsibility and historic mission of enacting a law based on Article 23 of the Basic Law 26 years after Hong Kong's return to the motherland. Fortifying the "protective wall" for the long-term stability and prosperity of Hong Kong, the law is a big milestone in the development of "one country, two systems" in the new era.

Neglecting security in the pursuit of economic development carries hidden risks. If the foundation of security is not solid, the edifice of development will be shaky. As a special administrative region of China, Hong Kong witnessed rampant violent demonstrations in 2019, leading to the withering of various industries, making it impossible to guarantee even the basic livelihood of the people, let alone boosting economic development.

The bill will help balance the maintenance of national security with the protection of rights, freedoms and economic development, enable Hong Kong to better leverage its status as a global logistics and financial hub to integrate with the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and deepen its open and close exchanges and cooperation with various countries and regions.

The implementation of the bill will not impact normal business activities and international exchanges and cooperation. But it will no longer allow foreign forces that have used Hong Kong as both a financial paradise and a bridgehead for anti-China and anti-communist activists to continue with their activities. The bill, however, will make real foreign investors more confident to invest in Hong Kong.

Q4: Many security issues are now intertwined, coupled with rapid technological developments. How should China improve security governance and address emerging challenges?

A4: China needs to strengthen national security coordination, improve the legal, policy, risk-monitoring and early-warning systems, as well as the national emergency management system for national security, and improve the security guarantee in areas such as the economy, major infrastructure, financing, data, resources, nuclear, outer space and oceans. It also needs to improve the layout of national security forces, and build a comprehensive, efficient national security protection system.

In the new era, the national security policy should address not only common security issues in the field of development but also special security issues during the process of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

That some Western powers are trying to sow discord between the Chinese government and the people is not new. They have been trying to do so for decades using various mediums including radio, television, newspapers and books to feed the Chinese people, especially the younger generation, with anti-Party and anti-government rhetoric. The Western powers have now shifted their focus to online media, which proves that "political security is the foundation of national security".

Political security determines the state of security in fields such as economic security, military security and social security. Without political security, security cannot be guaranteed in other fields. In fact, security issues in other fields will reflect the strength of political security. Therefore, it is necessary to promote national security with the ultimate goal of strengthening political security, making the maintenance of political security the primary task in responding to security risks and challenges in various fields, and fully leveraging its role as a fulcrum of the mechanism coordinating security in various fields.

Q5: Some foreign media reports claim the revised laws such as Counter-Espionage Law could accelerate the exodus of foreign enterprises from and decline in foreign investments in China. Are such reports misleading?

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