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## Preliminary Thoughts on Building a New-Type National Defense Decision-Making Advisory System in China (Postprint)

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] The national defense decision-making consultation system constitutes a crucial supporting force for national defense and military construction and development. Establishing a new-type national defense decision-making consultation system bears far-reaching implications for the comprehensive deepening of reforms and the long-term development of national defense and the armed forces.

[Method/Process] This study analyzes the general situation of China's national defense decision-making consultation system construction, examines the significant importance of China's new-type national defense decision-making consultation system for new-type think tank construction, comprehensive deepening of reforms, and distinctive military transformation, and proposes preliminary recommendations for the construction of China's new-type national defense decision-making consultation system.

[Results/Conclusion] Adhering to Comrade Xi Jinping's series of important discourses as the guiding ideology, defining objectives and principles, promoting the construction of the "Four Modernizations," perfecting key elements, and strengthening domestic and international influence should serve as important initiatives in the construction of China's new-type national defense decision-making consultation system.

## Full Text

# A Preliminary Consideration on the Construction of China's New National Defense Decision-Making Consultation System

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**Abstract:** The national defense decision-making consultation system constitutes a vital supporting force for national defense and military development. Establishing a new-type national defense decision-making consultation system carries profound implications for comprehensively deepening reforms and ensuring long-term development of national defense and the armed forces. This paper analyzes the current state of China's national defense decision-making consultation system, examines its significance for new-type think tank construction, comprehensive deepening of reforms, and distinctive military transformation, and proposes preliminary recommendations for building this new system. The findings indicate that adhering to Xi Jinping's series of important discourses as guiding ideology, establishing clear objectives and principles, promoting "Four Modernizations" construction, strengthening key elements, and enhancing domestic and international influence should serve as crucial measures for developing China's new national defense decision-making consultation system.

**Keywords:** think tank construction; strategic management; scientific decision-making; civil-military integration

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The construction of a national defense decision-making consultation system represents an essential component of national defense and military development. In this new historical period, China's national defense and military construction has entered a new stage of comprehensive deepening of reforms and healthy, rapid development, placing new and higher demands on the decision-making consultation system. Xi Jinping once pointed out at a meeting of the Central Military Commission: "Given the complex and changing security situation, with numerous emergencies and major tasks, the Commission's own working methods also face innovation challenges. We must improve deliberation, decision-making, and working mechanisms to ensure the Commission operates with agility and high efficiency" [1]. The Party and state have also proposed improving decision-making consultation mechanisms, building new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics, and advancing the internationalization and legalization of think tanks. Therefore, exploring the establishment of a new-type national defense decision-making consultation system holds far-reaching significance for national defense and military development and comprehensive reform. This paper first briefly elaborates on the current state of China's national defense decision-making consultation system. Through studying Xi Jinping's series of important discourses, we argue that establishing a new-type national defense decision-making consul-

tation system is an urgent priority for China' s national defense and military construction. Finally, we propose preliminary recommendations for building this system.

## 1. Overview of the Development of China' s National Defense Decision-Making Consultation System

More than two thousand years ago, China developed the concept of “think tanks” and “advisors” to “assist governance with wisdom.” Currently, academia defines decision-making consultation as decision-makers soliciting suggestions, countermeasures, and arguments from consulting institutions or experts on comprehensive, strategic, and holistic issues [2-3]. A decision-making consultation system refers to the collective term for all related working systems that provide consulting services for macro-management and strategic decision-making needs of decision-making bodies. This typically includes organizations such as research institutions, investigation agencies, intelligence and information organizations, think tanks, staff advisory bodies, expert consultation organizations, professional societies and associations, research institutes, and universities, along with their consulting services, related policies, regulations, and systems, as well as technical support like decision-making information systems and expert systems. Specifically in the defense domain, to meet the needs of national defense and military development, China' s current national defense decision-making consultation system primarily comprises a scientific, standardized, and institutionalized consulting institution system along with related operational support mechanisms.

### 1.1 Basic Development Status of China' s National Defense Decision-Making Consultation System

China' s national defense decision-making consultation system took shape during the 1950s and 1960s. Under the circumstances of internal and external troubles at that time, numerous consulting organizations were urgently needed to assist in developing cutting-edge defense technologies and military construction, leading to the emergence of many intelligence and information institutions, military science research organizations, scientific and technological demonstration research institutions, and expert consultation organizations. Renowned military think tanks such as the Academy of Military Sciences and prominent intelligence institutions like the China Defense Science and Technology Information Center were born during this period [4]. After more than half a century of development, China has now formed a rationally laid-out, scientifically classified, clearly hierarchical, and diversely typed national defense decision-making consultation system. Compared with general consultation systems, the national defense decision-making consultation system features high confidentiality requirements, close integration between decision-making and consultation, numerous restrictions and regulations, limited external cooperation and exchanges, and a primary focus on military and intra-system institutions.

## 1.2 Main Problems and Their Causes in China's National Defense Decision-Making Consultation System

Changing circumstances require new and even disruptive approaches to problem-solving. Currently, amid the vigorous global military revolution and the comprehensive deepening of national defense and military reforms, China's national defense decision-making consultation system still exhibits contradictions and problems that do not align with the evolving military situation. As Xi Jinping pointed out at an important meeting on December 27, 2013: "We have actively promoted the Chinese characteristic military transformation, adopting a series of measures in institutional restructuring and policy and system reform. However, deep-seated contradictions and problems such as unscientific leadership and management systems and relatively lagging policy and system reforms have not been effectively resolved, fundamentally constraining military construction and combat readiness" [1]. This statement indicates that military construction and combat readiness have placed higher demands on national defense decision-making consultation work, while also suggesting that such work has not yet fully played its role in defense institutional restructuring and policy system reform, with numerous deficiencies remaining.

Based on current national defense and military development requirements, we analyze that existing problems in China's national defense decision-making consultation system manifest primarily in three areas [5-7]. First, **macro-management issues**: the entire system lacks unified management and coordination mechanisms and overall planning, resulting in unscientific resource allocation, redundant waste, and lengthy reporting channels. Organizational forms and management methods urgently require innovation. Extra-systematic defense think tanks remain underdeveloped, with limited participation in national defense and military decision-making, and insufficient civil-military integration depth. Specialized decision-making consultation policies and systems have yet to be introduced, and participation in decision-making consultation lacks institutional arrangements. Second, **institutional construction issues**: institutional functions have become distorted, with consultation work reduced to drafting speeches and documents as secretarial teams, preoccupied with daily administrative affairs while conducting little in-depth scientific research and decision-making consultation. Institutional independence, scientific rigor, and socialization need strengthening, particularly within the intra-system institutions. There are few high-level think tanks with significant influence and international recognition. Some research institutions, in the rush to build think tanks, neglect their fundamental tasks of scientific research and truth-seeking. Personnel composition and knowledge structures are unreasonable, with age structure gaps, incomplete professional fields, lack of incentive measures, and shortages of leading figures and outstanding talents. Research equipment and technical means lag behind, lacking modern decision-making information systems and networks, as well as advanced information technology platforms. Third, **ideological and cognitive issues**: decision-making consultation work has not

received adequate attention, nor has it been scientifically and systematically integrated into the national defense decision-making system, resulting in poor awareness and popularity. Thinking remains closed, with limited internal and external cooperation and exchanges, particularly with foreign think tanks and consulting institutions, leaving China with insufficient international discourse power and influence. There is inadequate recognition of the importance of emerging technologies such as the Internet, Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence, lacking advanced technological concepts and work thinking that integrates human-machine-network approaches.

The root causes, we believe, include four main aspects: First, **inflexible systems and mechanisms**, primarily reflected in the relatively closed nature of national defense and military systems, decision-making consultation operation mechanisms that are ill-adapted to the times, and security and confidentiality strategies. Second, **unscientific institutional design**, including macro-level policy formulation, decision-making consultation work organization and management, and research resource layout and allocation. Third, **unsmooth institutional relationships**, manifested in serious business overlaps between institutions, vicious competition, numerous communication and cooperation barriers, research resource waste, and redundant research and construction. Fourth, **unliberated ideological concepts**, which have not broken free from traditional thinking patterns, let alone adapted to the new normal of national security and military struggle situations. In summary, the fundamental reason is that the current national defense decision-making consultation system cannot adapt to the new normal, new tasks, and new requirements of national defense and military construction.

### 1.3 The “Four Modernizations” Development Trend of China’s National Defense Decision-Making Consultation System

As national defense and military reforms deepen, China’s national defense decision-making consultation system is undergoing profound changes, with existing problems gradually receiving attention and being addressed. For instance, traditional national defense decision-making consultation institutions are taking steps toward open cooperation, while extra-systematic defense think tanks such as the China Strategic Culture Promotion Association and the Knowfar Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies are gradually participating more in national defense and military decision-making consultation [8]. Based on current realities and following Qian Xuesen’s “comprehensive integration, attaining wisdom” philosophy of comprehensive wisdom [9], we believe the new-type national defense decision-making consultation system can be divided into four subsystems: institutional, regulatory, operational, and technological, gradually exhibiting a “Four Modernizations” development trend [10]: (1) **Flattening of the institutional system**, characterized by centralized management, clear rights and responsibilities, rational division of labor, and flexible coordination; (2) **Standardization of the regulatory system**, whereby under the

rule-of-law strategy, the decision-making consultation system will have normalized, scientific, and regularized institutional guarantees; (3) **Scientization of the operational system**, achieving unified planning, scientific coordination, complementary advantages, and comprehensive professional coverage; (4) **Intelligentization of the technical system**, representing the historical trend of employing advanced information technologies such as big data, cloud computing, Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence to equip decision-making consultation work for intelligent services.

## 2. The Significant Importance of Building China' s New-Type National Defense Decision-Making Consultation System

The national defense and military domain is the most competitive and confrontational field, as well as the most innovative and dynamic. Surveying the current state of major world powers, decision-making consultation work in the defense and military field is the most competitive, influential, strategic, and challenging compared to other fields such as industry, commerce, and public utilities. Many world-class think tanks, such as the RAND Corporation in the United States, the International Institute for Strategic Studies in the United Kingdom, and the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, are leaders in the defense and military strategy domain. Through studying and comprehending Xi Jinping' s series of important discourses and the spirit of the Party and state' s important policies, and combining this with practical work experience, we believe China' s new-type national defense decision-making consultation system takes development strategies, policy systems, and management issues of national defense and military construction under new circumstances as its research objects. It provides integrated research and consulting services for scientific, democratic, and law-based decision-making by the Party, government, and military. Compared with traditional and foreign decision-making consultation systems, it features many new characteristics and content in its external environment, guiding ideology, functional tasks, system architecture, research objects, governance structure, and operational management, carrying new and significant importance for new-type think tank construction, deepening national defense and military reforms, and Chinese characteristic military transformation.

### 2.1 Enrichment and Sublimation of New-Type Think Tank Construction

Currently, in advancing the modernization of the national governance system and governance capabilities, new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics are playing an increasingly important role. Consequently, establishing a national defense decision-making consultation system centered on national defense and military consulting institutions and organizations and supported by various think tanks has attracted growing academic attention. This system should not only possess the general functions of think tanks—such as providing policy ad-

vice, theoretical innovation, public opinion guidance, social services, and public diplomacy [11]—but also embody Chinese national defense characteristics and systematic advantages. The reason why the United States and the United Kingdom have become think tank powers lies not in how many top-tier think tanks they possess, such as the Brookings Institution or the International Institute for Strategic Studies, but fundamentally in their efficient modern government decision-making systems that serve decision-making bodies like the U.S. President, and their “think tank → small cabinet → president” decision-making consultation model. This is essentially consistent with the judgment that competition between nations is confrontation between systems. Therefore, China’s new-type national defense decision-making consultation system should not only demonstrate the advantageous strength of think tanks and consulting organizations but also manifest the scientific, unified, and coordinated systematic synergy, achieving systematic enrichment and functional enhancement on the basis of new-type think tank construction.

## **2.2 An Essential Component of Comprehensively Deepening National Defense and Military Reforms**

Under the new normal, new-type think tank construction with Chinese characteristics has been placed on the agenda of comprehensive deepening of reforms and incorporated into top-level design frameworks, representing a strategic initiative for comprehensive reform. For the massive and complex systematic project of national defense and military reform, scientific top-level planning and coordination are essential, making the decision-making consultation system play an indispensable role. On one hand, the national defense decision-making consultation system itself constitutes an important component of the modern national defense and military system and should be incorporated into the agenda of comprehensively deepening national defense and military reforms and into the innovation of central and military commission deliberation and decision-making mechanisms. On the other hand, this system must provide decision-making consultation recommendations for national defense and military reforms, offering staff support, assistance, and talent backing, providing solution proposals, technical pathway selections, and intellectual inspiration, and fully playing the role of “think tank and external brain.” National defense innovation and reform constitute an interactive process from thought to action, from theory to practice, with the decision-making consultation system serving as an information repository, knowledge base, think tank, and advisory group that comprehensively participates throughout the entire process, providing brilliant intellectual sparks and reform wisdom.

## **2.3 An Urgent Requirement for Chinese Characteristic Military Transformation**

Contemporary warfare is confrontation between systems, and military struggle preparation is monumental, complex, systematic work. Currently, the military

domain is undergoing extensive and profound transformation, with informatization at its core and military strategy, military technology, operational concepts, operational forces, organizational structures, and military management innovation as its basic content. Aiming to reshape the military system, this transformation covers all areas of warfare and military construction, comprehensively reflecting rapid military technological progress, continuous military theoretical innovation, and profound military institutional reform. It demonstrates the complexity, systematic nature, systematicity, and profundity of military struggle preparation [12]. Meanwhile, in the Chinese characteristic military transformation, deep-seated contradictions and problems persist, including unscientific leadership and management systems, imperfect joint operational command systems, unreasonable force structures, and relatively lagging policy and system reforms. Therefore, a series of intricate major decision-making issues in military system confrontation and struggle—characterized by massive information, rapid situation changes, wide involvement, and numerous influencing factors—cannot be accomplished by any single individual, institution, or system. Instead, they require comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth participation from the decision-making consultation system, with no element or link being dispensable.

### **3. Recommended Measures for Constructing China’s New-Type National Defense Decision-Making Consultation System**

As circumstances change, so must our preparations. Based on the above analysis, we believe that establishing China’s new-type national defense decision-making consultation system is imperative. We propose implementation recommendations in five aspects, which can also be considered five main implementation steps, as shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

#### **3.1 Adhering to Xi Jinping’s Series of Important Discourses as the Guiding Ideology**

The Party and government have always attached importance to decision-making consultation work, with different ideologies, policies, and measures at various historical stages. Currently, Xi Jinping’s important discourses on decision-making consultation work represent a global strategic guiding ideology proposed from the perspective of comprehensively deepening reforms and the overall national defense and military construction cause under the new normal. These discourses feature strong relevance to practical problems, accurate judgment of future development directions, systematic and coherent main ideas, gradually deepening important viewpoints, and consistent internal logical mechanisms. Constructing China’s new-type national defense decision-making consultation system requires earnest study and comprehension of Xi Jinping’s series of important discourses as the guiding ideology, further emancipating minds, pioneering innovation, and

working diligently and pragmatically to continuously explore the path to building a new-type national defense decision-making consultation system.

### **3.2 Establishing the Objectives and Principles of the New-Type National Defense Decision-Making Consultation System**

Based on Xi Jinping' s series of important discourses and combining national defense and military construction realities, we propose that the fundamental objective of constructing China' s new-type national defense decision-making consultation system should be to improve national defense and military decision-making consultation systems and mechanisms, and to build a new-type national defense decision-making consultation system with Chinese characteristics and systematic advantages, thereby strengthening the scientification, democratization, and legalization of national defense and military decision-making. The core content should be building a batch of high-end new-type national defense and military think tanks, expert organizations, research institutions, and related collaborative systems with significant influence and international reputation. The basic principles should be: maintaining a global perspective and Chinese characteristics while grasping the orientation of national defense transformation; focusing on the overall situation of national defense and military construction to serve military struggle preparation; insisting on systematic construction and reform innovation for standardized, orderly, and coordinated development; and balancing scientific research, consulting services, and security confidentiality while encouraging bold exploration and daring advice.

### **3.3 Promoting the “Four Modernizations” Construction of the New-Type National Defense Decision-Making Consultation System**

Over 30 years ago, strategic scientist Qian Xuesen proposed the comprehensive wisdom philosophy, which utilizes modern information networks and human-machine integrated, human-centered intelligent systems to integrate human thinking and achievements, human knowledge and wisdom, and information, experience, and knowledge from ancient and modern times, both domestic and foreign. Its essence is to synthesize various elements including intelligence information, intelligent systems, networks, human knowledge, and expert wisdom to attain wisdom and support decision-making—namely, “comprehensive integration, attaining wisdom” [9]. This precisely represents an important methodology for advancing decision-making consultation work under the current rapid development of emerging technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence. Based on the above analysis, implementing new-type national defense decision-making consultation system construction requires comprehensive integration of the system' s institutions, regulations, operations, and technology, with layer-by-layer decomposition and gradual deepening.

**First, establish a new-type national defense decision-making consultation institutional system.** Following requirements for strengthening top-level design, overall coordination, and classified guidance, we recommend establishing

relevant decision-making consultation committees that can guide the business development of all national defense and military decision-making consultation institutions and directly report collected intelligence information and consultation suggestions from various institutions to central leadership. These committees should, as needed, establish joint meetings, federations, committees, or academic organizations for decision-making consultation institutions in various professional fields, whose work should be led and whose main responsibilities should be coordinating the construction and development of decision-making consultation work in their respective professional fields. Organizations such as the China Institute for International Strategic Studies and the China Defense Science and Technology Information Society have played important roles as bridges, links, platforms, and banners in practice, exerting significant influence in their fields. We should strengthen the construction of backbone and grassroots decision-making consultation institutions, creating a scientific, fair, and rational layout and environment to ensure that all institutions can directly provide intelligence information and consultation suggestions to the decision-making consultation committees, thereby highlighting institutional construction advantages and characteristics as well as the timeliness and accuracy of consultation suggestions. This establishes a flattened “decision-making consultation institutions → decision-making consultation committees → central leadership” institutional system and operational mechanism that conforms to macro-management decision-making development trends.

Second, **standardize and improve the decision-making consultation regulatory system.** Under the rule-of-law strategy, improving the standardized regulatory system represents an important measure for constructing a new-type decision-making consultation system. We recommend formulating a set of regulations and policies that meet current national defense and military construction practical needs and long-term development requirements, along with a set of well-governed, dynamic, and effectively supervised management systems and mechanisms, based on Xi Jinping’ s series of important discourses and documents such as the “Opinion on Strengthening the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics.” These should clarify the guiding ideology, overall layout, and strategic measures for constructing the new-type national defense decision-making consultation system, define the responsibilities, rights, and operational mechanisms of various functional institutions, and establish corresponding policies. Relevant systems should also formulate regulatory guarantee systems that suit their actual conditions to ensure rapid and accurate delivery of consultation suggestions to users.

Third, **scientifically plan the decision-making consultation operational system.** In accordance with the requirements for comprehensively deepening national defense and military reforms, we should construct an operational system with comprehensive professional coverage and high specialization. This forms the foundation for establishing a clearly positioned, distinctively featured, appropriately scaled, and rationally laid-out new-type national defense decision-making consultation system with Chinese characteristics. We recommend estab-

lishing a scientifically rational business domain division system under the guidance of decision-making consultation committees, based on institutional nature, business fields, advantageous characteristics, and talent expertise. This system should not only establish intelligence information systems, university think tank systems, and expert committee systems according to institutional nature, but also establish systems for military command, logistics support, equipment development, and other more specific scientific and technological fields according to business domains. We should build not only “aircraft carrier” and “destroyer” type think tanks but also “frigate” and “speedboat” type think tanks, and even more importantly, establish an all-round, three-dimensional think tank “fleet.” We should strengthen not only research on think tank construction itself but also uphold the principle that “learning is the foundation of governance” and continuously focus on theoretical foundations and scientific and technological research [13]. Through overall planning and coordinated arrangement, we can avoid redundant construction and prevent rash, disorderly development, thereby achieving optimized resource allocation and systematic decision-making consultation.

Fourth, **construct the decision-making consultation technical system in an advanced manner.** The integration of new-type decision-making consultation work with emerging technologies such as the Internet, big data, and artificial intelligence represents a historical inevitability. The comprehensive wisdom philosophy accurately anticipated the essence of consultation work and information technology development trends. Currently popular concepts like “Internet Plus” thinking and Germany’s Industry 4.0 strategic vision are concrete manifestations of this philosophy. We recommend in-depth study of the comprehensive wisdom philosophy, organizing advantageous resources and forces to anticipate needs and technology development directions in advance, fully utilizing emerging technologies such as “cloud computing, Internet of Things, mobile Internet, big data, and artificial intelligence,” and researching and deploying comprehensive integrated discussion hall platforms to achieve an automated, intelligent, and wisdom-oriented decision-making consultation technical system that combines human-machine-network approaches as early as possible.

### **3.4 Strengthening Key Elements of the New-Type National Defense Decision-Making Consultation System**

After promoting the “Four Modernizations” construction, we must also strengthen key elements such as talent incentives, funding guarantees, methods and means, and operational models. Regarding talent incentives, traditional consultation institutions possess certain advantages in attracting talent, but they suffer from shortages of high-end talent urgently needed for decision-making consultation work, requiring the establishment of flexible talent incentive mechanisms that comply with new situation regulations. Regarding funding guarantees, traditional consultation institutions have relatively adequate funding, but they must improve funding efficiency and give greater

consideration to intellectual costs and values. Regarding methods and means, in addition to traditional social science research methods, we recommend employing scientific and technological research methods such as data mining, big data technology, and artificial intelligence technology, which will revolutionize consultation work. Regarding operational models, we should explore establishing a “small core, large periphery, extensive network” decision-making consultation service system led by the military and participated in by social think tanks and other consulting institutions, promoting diversified service providers and methods to meet the comprehensive, multi-level decision-making needs of national defense and the military. Many other factors are also involved, including quality control, 成果转化, and public opinion guidance, which will not be elaborated here.

Additionally, it must be emphasized that, unlike general think tank construction, building a new-type national defense decision-making consultation system requires attention to “Three Combinations”: combining the independence of the decision-making consultation system with the intimacy of decision-making bodies; combining internal-external, intra-extra-systematic, and domestic-foreign working models; and combining the confidentiality and openness of decision-making consultation services and achievements.

### **3.5 Enhancing the Domestic and International Influence of the National Defense Decision-Making Consultation System**

Throughout history and across the world, no decision-making consultation institution can succeed in isolation. Open innovation represents the only path to the growth and strengthening of decision-making consultation work, especially for the national defense decision-making consultation system. The contribution of decision-making consultation work is not limited to providing advice for the government; more importantly, it lies in contributing ideas to the government and society, improving the quality of policy discussions ideologically, and exerting broad social influence. This is the golden rule of decision-making consultation work, particularly think tank construction. China’s national defense decision-making consultation institutions must strengthen communication with the public, possess the ability to influence media and educate the public, guide national defense public opinion, construct a Chinese national defense discourse system, promote think tank diplomacy and internationalization, and play the role of a defense exchange bond. They must continuously enhance domestic and international influence and cultivate a world-class national defense decision-making consultation system and several world-class national defense think tanks. For example, the Xiangshan Forum, hosted by the China Military Science Society and the China Institute for International Strategic Studies, was upgraded from a Track II to a “1.5 track” dialogue in 2014, becoming China’s first security and defense dialogue with the most participating countries. In 2016, it attracted more than 400 representatives from 64 countries and international organizations [14], demonstrating that China’s national defense decision-making consultation

work has taken another solid step in its internationalization process.

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