

INTERNATIONAL AND STRATEGIC STUDIES REPORT



SEP 20, 2016

ISSUE. 39

Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Peking University

Reflections on Improving the Third-party Strategic Assessment Mechanism in the Military Field of China

**Yi Bensheng and Wang Qichao, Department of Military
Strategy Studies, Academy of Military Sciences**

In recent years, various forms of third-party assessment in the field of state governance have undergone rapid development, in particular, third-party performance assessment has been widely applied in some fields, and has achieved results. Its role and impact have attracted much public attention. This is a major breakthrough of governmental management behavior, and will provide more and more help for the reform and innovation of all levels of government and improve efficiency. In the West, especially in the United States, similar third-party assessments have become the norm. They are not only a necessary means in governmental organization and management, but widely used in various levels of national security strategy, defense strategy, national military strategy and theater and military services strategy and even in operational and technical levels. Against the background of defense and army reform, issues have arisen and needs to be addressed, which include China's national defense and army building, whether fields of military struggle need third-party assessment, who can be third-party assessors, and how

to organize and conduct third-party assessment etc.

1. The necessity and feasibility of improving third-party strategic assessment mechanism

At present, most of the strategic assessments in the fields in national defense and army building and military struggle are self-assessment and superior-to-subordinate assessment (namely, first-party to second-party assessment). Self-assessment is the assessment on draft strategies developed by strategy makers or the assessment on implementation and effectiveness of strategies by executors of strategies. Superior-to-subordinate assessment is the assessment on subordinate organs and units (executors) by superior authorities (decision makers). Although these assessments are easily organized with low costs, and can identify problems faster, they also have some disadvantages that are difficult to overcome. Specifically, as the evaluators are also strategy makers and executors of strategies, assessment conclusions are under the influence of various interests and constraints, their objectivity and impartiality are difficult to be guaranteed. In addition, because that evaluator teams are temporarily formed by frontline staff, professional knowledge, techniques and working time of the teams are also difficult to be guaranteed. Therefore, third-party strategic assessment mechanism needs to be introduced to solve the above problems and strengthen and supplement the existing assessments.

(A) *The necessity of improving third-party strategic assessment mechanism.* As an external mechanism of checks and balances, third-party assessment can compensate for defects in self-assessment and superior-to-subordinate assessment, and truly separate assessment subject from assessment object to avoid problems caused by overlapping of roles -- being the "umpire" and player at the same time. Its process is relatively transparent, and its conclusions are relatively objective. In promoting national defense and army building, preparation and implementation of military struggle and in particular strategic innovation, it plays a very important role. **First, it helps promote updating of**

military governance concepts. From management to governance, change of words means change of a whole set of concepts. Third-party strategic assessment is the application and reflection of the concept of pluralistic government in practice. It can change the "linear" mode in the field of assessment, which takes the forms of party A commanding party B or party B passively obeying party A, and effectively strengthen internal checks and balances. **Second, it helps compensate for the defects and deficiencies of the current strategic assessments.** As self-assessment and superior-to-subordinate assessment are easy to operate and familiar to operators, they have the advantage of low costs, but they also have prominent congenital defects and deficiencies, such as restrictions from interests and low level of specialization. Third-party strategic assessment is detached from the "chain of interests", and its level of specialization is relatively high. These features make third-party strategic assessment a necessary means of ensuring scientific and effective strategic assessment. **Third, it helps supervision and accountability at strategic level.** Third-party strategic assessment is both the anticipation and identification of quality of strategy and planning and the appraisal on organization and management level and task completion capacity of executive units and departments. Through systemic analysis of strategies and plans and their implementation results by a third party, the subject that develops and implements strategies can deepen its understanding of the current status and future development trend of strategies, and enhance its initiative and creativity in adjusting and implementing strategies, so that strategic objectives and tasks can be better implemented. **Moreover,** introduction of third-party strategic assessment is conducive to improving transparency of national security and military and raising the awareness of national defense.

(B) *The feasibility of improving third-party strategic assessment mechanism.* Since the third-party performance assessment pilot program was first launched in China in 2004, the practice of promoting third-party assessment in the country has been a great success. Although the concept of "third party" hasn't been used in the field of strategic assessment, there are many relevant institutions and practices. These

institutions and practices have laid the foundation for improving the third-party strategic assessment mechanism, the reasons are as follows: **first, relevant research and educational institutions can act as third-party strategic assessment agencies.** In China, research and educational institutions, especially many professional research and educational institutions within the military, have talent, theoretical and academic advantages. We can take the opportunity of the new round of national defense and army reform to further integrate them and divide work for them, strengthen their strategic assessment function and give them assessment tasks. Under the unified leadership of the CPC Central Military Commission, we can gradually establish an organizational system of third-party strategic assessment. **Second, experience of third-party strategic assessment has been gained in work.** For years, internal and external research and educational institutions of the military have conducted independently or been commissioned to implement various assessments, and have made many achievements. The assessments include national security environment (or situation) assessment, comprehensive assessment of national strength, assessment of national (regional) military strength, assessment of international (regional) strategic situation and construction assessment of major engineering projects etc. Through these assessments, the institutions have also gained rich first-hand experience, which has laid a good foundation for the practice of third-party strategic assessment. **Third, relevant units and departments have developed a large number of assessment model systems.** After years of independent development or introduction and modification, technical conditions for strategic assessment inside and outside the military have been significantly improved. For example, many systems have been built and put into use, including the joint operation research laboratory system developed by the Academy of Military Sciences, the war and battle wargaming and deduction system developed by National Defense University, PLA, China, experimental systems for systems of military services and modeling and simulation systems developed by relevant universities and institutions etc. They are playing their role in fields of theoretical research, military training, weapons and

equipment research and development and others. Technical support systems for third-party strategic assessment can be built by integrating and modifying relevant model systems in accordance with actual needs. Moreover, data accumulation for various strategic directions and relevant strategic fields has taken shape. Especially in the age of big data, many open source information is also available for use.

2. Subjects of third-party strategic assessments that can be carried out at the present stage and their content

In recent years, the army of China has undertaken some assessments at the working level, but only a few real strategic assessments have been carried out, and third-party strategic assessments are still in the starting and exploratory stage. When strategic assessment mechanism is not sound and assessment system is imperfect, comprehensively carrying out third-party strategic assessments is unrealistic. The assessments should select specific subjects and content and focus on specific points. Relying on open source information channels supported by special data protection, we can carry out research on national security issues of various strategic directions or strategic fields, including security threat identification, analysis of military capability needs, demonstration of military strength scale and structure and research on development trend of science and technology.

(A) *Issues of national security strategy.* Combining work of "the Belt and Road", we can conduct overall security or special security assessments in the fields like military, politics, economy, geography, technology, energy and transportation etc. Assessments of strategic gains and strategic risks should be highlighted.

(B) *Issues of national defense strategy and policy.* Based primarily on the operation of dedicated organizations for national security strategy and relevant strategic planning and design, we can have a comprehensive review of national defense strategy and policy and generation and distribution of national defense resources. They can be combined with five-year overall strategic assessment, mid-term (the

third year) strategic assessment, annual routine assessment and special strategic assessment. Five-year overall assessment and annual routine assessment should be highlighted.

(C) *Issues of battlefield strategy and military services (fields) strategy.* Based primarily on the new pattern of being uniformly led by the CPC Central Military Commission, choosing theaters as the main battle force and building main military services formed after the new round of national defense and army reform, we can conduct assessments according to relevant strategy making and planning needs. Regional (field) security threats, relative military strength of us and enemy and battlefield environment and combat pattern assessment should be highlighted.

(D) *Issues of army building and equipment development strategy.* Based primarily on future trends in science and technology and research on war form and combat pattern, we can focus on assessments on capacity requirements, scale and structure of army and research and development of new weapons and equipment.

(E) *Issues related to development of civil-military integration.* Based primarily on the development needs and process of civil-military integration, we can timely carry out performance and risk assessment on relevant plans.

3. Issues that require attention when promoting third-party strategic assessment

(A) *Cultivating and developing third-party strategic assessment agencies.* In western countries, many social organizations voluntarily serve as third-party strategic assessment agencies. In China, however, there are only a small number of social organizations engaged in third-party strategic assessment. Therefore, we need to develop third-party strategic assessment agencies from professional research and educational institutions. Within the military, institutions and universities, such as the Academy of Military Sciences, National Defense University, PLA, China, National University of Defense Technology and University of International

Relations, can be cultivated and developed. We can support them in establishing small professional assessment teams with distinctive features. Taking opportunities of civil-military integration and construction of the new type of think tanks, we can also develop third-party strategic assessment agencies in local research and educational institutions, such as the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Peking University and Tsinghua University. In addition, judging from the situation abroad, we can also cultivate and develop some specialized social organizations, such as Knowfar Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies and Southern Defense Think-tanks.

(B) Ensuring the independence of third-party strategic assessment agencies. The "soul" of third-party strategic assessment is its independence. To ensure the independence, third-party strategic assessment agencies within the military shouldn't be directly subordinate to strategy and policy making or executing departments, and their funding should be allocated separately from military expenditure. Third-party strategic assessment agencies outside the military should generally be independent legal entities that operate autonomously, develop independently, and are responsible for its own profits and losses. Their funding should be mainly from membership dues collected within the agencies, earnings from assessment services or donations without any conditions attached.

(C) Improving the credibility of third-party strategic assessment agencies. The credibility of third-party strategic assessment agencies is gradually gained. On one hand, strategic assessment agencies must make sure that the assessments are independent, content and methods of the assessments are scientific, assessment process is transparent, and assessment results are objective and impartial. On the other hand, strategic assessment agencies should strengthen relations with the media, make the best of the media to enhance the influence and guiding function of their assessments, and gradually establish their credibility in the process.

(D) Putting results of third-party strategic assessment to a better use.

Results of third-party strategic assessment should be used in the right place, and should be made acceptable to assessment objects, so as to achieve the purposes of scientifically developing or coordinating strategies and policies with the results, effectively enhancing performance of strategies and enhancing capacity for strategic governance. To this end, a feedback response mechanism of third-party assessment should be established. A sound mechanism of rewards and punishments should also be established by linking assessment results with financial budget, personnel arrangements, organization construction and administrative accountability of assessment objects.

(E) *Establishing and improving the system of third-party strategic assessment.* As we can see in practice, third-party strategic assessment is a complex and continuously improving process. To effectively avoid arbitrariness of its work and ensure traceability and verifiability of assessment results, things like the status and role, assessment content and assessment process of third-party strategic assessment as well as its relationship with other assessment subjects and coordination methods must be clearly specified and institutionalized.

(F) *Conducting pilot programs of third-party strategic assessment.* We should establish strategic assessment teams in relevant professional research and educational institutions as soon as possible, and maintain them in a stable state. With the implementation of overall, mid-term, annual and special assessments, we can give the teams subjects to evaluate. We should also purposefully and systematically explore experience and lessons of basic processes, methods, techniques and application of results of third-party strategic assessment, with which we can train talents, construct theories, develop operational norms and lay a solid foundation for popularization of third-party strategic assessment.

Edited by Dr. Gui Yongtao and Dr. Lei Shaohua

Tel: 86-10-62756376

Email: iiss@pku.edu.cn

Fax: 86-10-62753063

Web: www.iiss.pku.edu.cn

Address: IISS, Peking University, Beijing, China