

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Proximity of Security Risks in China's National Defense White Papers

¹ Shiyan Luo; ² Yi Zhang*¹ Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi'an, China² Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi'an, China

ABSTRACT

National defense white papers present official assessments of security environments and explain the rationale for defense policy. Yet how security risks are discursively constructed in China's national defense white papers has received limited attention. Drawing on Proximity Theory, this study examines China's national defense white papers published between 1998 and 2019. Through corpus-assisted retrieval, manual screening, and contextual annotation, 395 risk-related segments are analyzed in terms of Outside-Deictic-Center entities (ODCs), Inside-Deictic-Center entities (IDCs), and spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization.

The results show that the white papers construct diverse military, regional, political, and non-traditional risks. These risks are linked not only to China's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security, but also to regional stability and international order. Spatial proximization dominates by connecting external developments with specific security objects. Temporal proximization presents risks as persistent or unresolved conditions, while axiological proximization contrasts negative ODC practices with positive IDC values. Together, these strategies construct a security narrative in which defense responses are generally presented as reactions to prior external pressure or disruption.

Keywords: national defense white papers, Proximity Theory, security risk representation, corpus-assisted discourse analysis

ARTICLE INFO

Received: [17/08/2026]**Accepted:** [23/08/2026]**Published:** [27/08/2026]**Issue Period:** July – August 2026 (Bi-Monthly)**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.56293/IJMSSSR.2026.6329>**Copyright:** © 2026 The Author(s). Published by IJMSSSR. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) License.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a resource through which states define security situations, articulate policy positions, and shape international perceptions. Critical discourse studies emphasize that discourse participates in the construction of reality, identity, and ideology (Fairclough, 2003; Zhang & Shi, 2023). From a critical-cognitive perspective, linguistic choices also shape how readers construe events, responsibility, and consequences. Proximity Theory is relevant here because it explains how external risks are construed

as related to an inside deictic center through spatial, temporal, and axiological dimensions (Cap, 2008; Wang, 2024; Zhang, 2024).

National defense white papers are important official texts within national security discourse. They present a country's defense conditions and strategic position while carrying political, military, and communicative significance (Gao & Huang, 2024). As strategic defense discourse, they have cross-cultural and dialogic functions (Zhao, 2021) and can reflect security assessment, identity positioning, and policy choices (Yang & Zeng, 2026). China's national defense white papers therefore provide an important corpus for examining China's national defense discourse and national security narrative.

Security risk representation deserves particular attention in these texts. China's white papers repeatedly emphasize peaceful development, a defensive national defense policy, and international security cooperation, while also accounting for instability, uncertainty, and disruptive factors in the external environment. Compared with war mobilization discourse, their security descriptions are more formal, restrained, and institutionalized. They often represent risks through expressions such as risk, challenge, instability, uncertainty, and conflict, as well as specific sources such as hegemonism, power politics, and extremism. This study therefore focuses on security risk representation rather than direct threat construction alone (Wang, 2024; Gong & Zhang, 2025).

Focusing on lexicogrammatical realization helps move the analysis beyond thematic interpretation. Since purely qualitative CDA may be affected by text selection and interpretive judgment (Fairclough, 2003; Zhang & Shi, 2023), corpus-assisted analysis can improve systematicity. At the same time, studies on proximization show that risk construction is realized through specific resources, including internal and external entities, motion verbs, verbs of effect, consequence nouns, modal expressions, and evaluative resources (Cap, 2008; Rong, 2024; Zhao, 2020).

Accordingly, this study adopts a corpus-assisted proximization approach. It examines ten English national defense white papers issued by China since 1998, identifies the external entities, actions, phenomena represented as security risks and the internal objects associated with them, analyzes the lexicogrammatical resources of spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization, and discusses how these strategies contribute to China's national security narrative and the image of a defensive national defense policy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Studies on National Defense Discourse

This section reviews studies on national defense discourse in order to clarify the research background of the present study.

2.1.1 National defense discourse as political and strategic communication

National defense discourse is not merely descriptive language about military affairs. It includes national defense white papers, military news reports, defense press conferences, and other discourse related to defense policy and military strategy (Liang & Tan, 2015). Compared with general policy discourse, it is more closely connected with national security, war and peace, military development, and international strategic interaction.

The strategic communicative function of defense discourse has also been emphasized. Shi and Mei (2021) argue that China's national defense discourse is characterized by self-defense, cooperation, transparency, and stability. Zhao (2021) further notes that national defense white papers serve cross-cultural and dialogic functions. Together, these studies show that national defense discourse not only reports security conditions but also explains a state's security position to external audiences.

2.1.2 Previous studies on national defense white papers

Existing studies on national defense white papers can be broadly divided into studies on China's white papers and studies on foreign defense white papers or strategy reports.

Studies on China's national defense white papers have mainly examined external communication, defense policy representation, and national military strategy. Shi and Mei (2021) and Zhao (2021) show that these white papers explain China's defense policy to international audiences and present a strategic orientation centered on self-defense, cooperation, transparency, and stability.

Research on foreign defense texts further confirms the analytical value of this genre. Gao and Huang (2024) show that the 2022 U.S. National Defense Strategy constructs ideological opposition and legitimizes military expansion through discourse strategies. Yang and Zeng (2026) find that Vietnamese defense white papers reflect changes in international, regional, and domestic contexts, while Tian (2017) shows how Japanese defense white papers construct the "China threat." These studies indicate that defense white papers are official texts in which security perceptions, identity positioning, and strategic communication are intertwined.

2.1.3 Limitations of existing studies on national defense discourse

Despite these contributions, existing research has tended to focus on macro-level issues such as national image, strategic intention, identity construction, external communication, and socio-historical context. These perspectives are important, but they do not fully explain how security meanings are constructed through specific linguistic forms.

Relatively little attention has been paid to how security risks are linguistically constructed in national defense white papers. Since such risks are often expressed through institutionalized terms such as instability, uncertainty, challenge, and disruptive factors rather than direct threat language, macro-level analysis alone cannot adequately explain the relationship between external risk sources, internal objects of protection, and the linguistic resources connecting them.

Another limitation concerns the lack of systematic attention to lexicogrammatical resources. Nouns denoting risk, nouns naming threat sources, verbs of impact, modal expressions, temporal markers, and evaluative resources may all contribute to risk representation. Yang and Zeng (2026) call for more fine-grained analyses of discourse strategies in defense white papers, and Zhang and Shi (2023) argue that corpus-assisted CDA can identify recurrent linguistic patterns and reduce the subjectivity of purely qualitative analysis.

These limitations suggest the need for a framework that links linguistic form with risk cognition. Proximity Theory offers such a framework.

2.2 Proximity Theory in Political and Security Discourse Studies

Proximity Theory provides a critical-cognitive approach to risk, threat, and crisis construction. Its applications to political, media, diplomatic, environmental, and security discourse clarify the theoretical basis of the present study and show why it can be combined with corpus-assisted methods.

2.2.1 Proximity Theory as a critical-cognitive approach

Developed by Cap, Proximity Theory explains how discourse constructs external entities, events, or value conflicts as moving toward the inside deictic center, thereby producing a sense of risk, urgency, or

the need for action. Cap (2008) proposes a three-dimensional model of spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization to account for legitimization in political discourse.

Proximization Theory is critical-cognitive because it explains not only what linguistic forms appear in discourse, but also how they shape readers' construal of risk, responsibility, and action. Studies in critical cognitive linguistics show that language constructs social reality through cognitive models (Zhang, 2024), and that proximization is useful for explaining how discourse strategies influence the understanding of social events (Wang & Zhang, 2022; Rong, 2024).

2.2.2 Applications of Proximization Theory in political, media, and diplomatic discourse

Previous studies have applied Proximization Theory to political speeches, White House discourse on North Korea, Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address, and trade war discourse, showing how spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization support the construction of threat, conflict, and legitimacy (Hu & Qian, 2019; Yan & Zhang, 2018; Zhao, 2020).

In media and diplomatic discourse, Proximization Theory has also been used to analyze German media reports on the "Huawei threat," U.S. election news, and Russia–Ukraine diplomatic conflict, revealing how different actors construct risk narratives, stance, and legitimacy (Rong, 2024; Yan & Hu, 2025; Zhou, 2021).

Environmental and public risk studies are especially relevant because policy discourse does not always construct risk through clearly antagonistic entities. Gong and Zhang (2025) and Wang and Zhang (2022) show that external risk entities may be abstract, complex, and institutionally framed, which is similar to the restrained risk language in China's national defense white papers.

2.2.3 Proximization studies on defense and security discourse

Defense and security discourse is especially compatible with Proximization Theory because it typically involves external risk sources, internal objects of protection, policy explanation, and value positioning.

Xin's (2024) study of U.S. defense reports provides a direct example. By identifying threat types, retrieving relevant lexical items, and analyzing spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization, the study shows how defense texts relate external threats, internal objects of protection, and concrete linguistic resources.

Wang's (2024) study of Germany's first National Security Strategy also shows that national security strategy texts structure security meaning spatially, temporally, and axiologically. Gong and Zhang's (2025) analysis of environmental discourse further suggests that risks in policy texts may appear in abstract, complex, and institutionalized forms. This insight is important for analyzing China's national defense white papers, whose security expressions are often restrained rather than overtly alarmist.

2.2.4 Research rationale and the present study

The studies reviewed above demonstrate the analytical value of Proximization Theory in explaining how discourse constructs external entities, events, or values as cognitively relevant to an internal center. This perspective is particularly relevant to China's national defense white papers, which tend to formulate security concerns in a formal, restrained, and institutionalized manner.

In this sense, security risk representation is a more appropriate analytical focus than threat construction alone. It enables the study to examine both explicit and implicit ways in which external security conditions are associated with internal objects such as national security, sovereignty, territorial integrity, regional stability, and the international order.

A corpus-assisted approach further strengthens the analysis by identifying recurrent lexicogrammatical patterns across the ten white papers rather than relying on isolated examples. Accordingly, this study combines corpus-assisted methods with Proximity Theory to examine how security risks are represented and how these representations contribute to China's national security narrative and defensive national defense image.

3. METHODOLOGY

2.3 Research Questions

This study examines the lexicogrammatical realization and discursive functions of security risk representation in the English versions of China's national defense white papers issued since 1998. Drawing on corpus-assisted methods and Proximity Theory, it addresses three research questions:

RQ1: What external entities, actions, or phenomena are represented as security risks in China's national defense white papers, and what internal objects are these risks mainly associated with?

RQ2: What lexicogrammatical resources are used to realize spatial, temporal, and axiological proximity in the representation of security risks, and what patterns of use can be observed?

RQ3: How do these proximity strategies participate in the construction of China's national security narrative and the image of a defensive national defense policy?

3.2 Corpus Building

The corpus consists of the English versions of the ten national defense white papers issued by China since 1998, namely the white papers published in 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2015, and 2019. As official policy documents released for domestic explanation and international communication, they provide a continuous and authoritative body of data for examining security risk representation in China's national defense discourse.

The texts were collected, converted into plain text, cleaned, and proofread. Non-running materials such as tables of contents, page numbers, figure captions, layout-based information, and other non-substantive elements were removed. Formatting inconsistencies, irregular spaces, line breaks, punctuation problems, and special symbols were normalized to reduce retrieval noise. The size of the corpus is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Corpus Size by Year

	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2013	2015	2019	Total
Token s	14984	16581	19017	22765	17966	21303	20219	10131	6407	13478	162851
Types	2654	2872	3307	3362	2743	3645	3150	2125	1527	2802	7624

3.3 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Proximity Theory as the analytical framework. Developed by Cap (2008, 2014), it explains how discourse represents external entities, events, or value conflicts as moving closer to the inside deictic center, thereby creating a sense of risk, urgency, or the need for response.

A basic distinction is made between Inside-Deictic-Center entities (IDCs) and Outside-Deictic-Center entities (ODCs). IDCs are entities located within the discursive center, while ODCs are entities located outside the center and represented as possible sources of influence, threat, disruption, or conflict.

Proximization is examined through three dimensions. Spatial proximization concerns how external entities are represented as approaching, entering, affecting, or pressuring internal entities. Temporal proximization concerns how past experiences, present conditions, and future possibilities are compressed into the present. Axiological proximization concerns how external entities, actions, or values are represented as conflicting with the principles associated with the inside deictic center.

To make the framework operational, this study draws on the core lexical items and grammatical constructions of Proximization Theory, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Core Lexical Items and Grammatical Constructions in Proximization Theory (Cap, 2014)

Dimension	Core lexical items and grammatical constructions
Spatial	S1: Noun phrases construed as elements located within the deictic center (Inside-Deictic-Center entities, IDC)
	S2: Noun phrases construed as elements located outside the deictic center (Outside-Deictic-Center entities, ODC)
	S3: Motion verb phrases construed as the movement of ODC toward IDC
	S4: Action verb phrases construed as ODC exerting impact on IDC
	S5: Abstract noun cases construed as the anticipated impact of ODC on IDC
	S6: Abstract noun phrases construed as the resulting effects of ODC on IDC
Temporal	T1: Indefinite noun phrases construing ODC impact in alternative temporal frames
	T2: Discourse forms involving the contrastive use of the simple past and the present perfect, construing a threatening future extending from a past event
	T3: Nominalized phrases construing the presupposition of conditions for ODC impact to arise at any time in the future
	T4: Verb phrases involving modal auxiliaries construing conditions for ODC impact as existing continually between the present and the future
	T5: Discourse forms involving the parallel contrastive construal of oppositional and privileged futures extending from the present
Axiological	A1: Noun phrases construed as the positive values or ideology of IDC
	A2: Noun phrases construed as the negative values or ideology of ODC

As shown in Table 2, spatial proximization involves the identification of internal and external entities, as well as the representation of movement, impact, anticipated consequences, and resulting effects. In this study, it is identified through IDC and ODC noun phrases, motion verbs, impact verbs, and abstract nouns indicating risk consequences.

Temporal proximization is mainly realized through grammatical forms and temporal organization. It connects the past, present, and future, making a risk appear persistent, unresolved, escalating, or likely to occur.

Axiological proximization concerns value conflict. In the white papers, it is often realized when external actions, tendencies, or ideologies are contrasted with principles emphasized by China, such as peace, cooperation, sovereignty, stability, equality, and the international order.

3.4 Research Procedures

The analysis combined corpus-assisted retrieval with manual screening, annotation, and contextual interpretation. LancsBox was used for corpus retrieval, concordance observation, and basic corpus statistics, while UAM CorpusTool 6 was used to organize candidate segments, merge repeated hits, conduct manual screening and annotation, and generate category frequency summaries.

3.4.1 Retrieval of Candidate Risk-Related Segments

Candidate segments were retrieved in LancsBox through a staged keyword procedure. The search list combined theoretical considerations, close reading of the white papers, and preliminary corpus observation. It included general risk expressions, specific political, military, non-traditional, and instability-related terms, as well as impact cues such as undermine, endanger, harm, damage, and jeopardize. The final categories are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Categories of Search Terms for Identifying Security Risk-Related Segments

Search terms	category
<i>risk, threat, challenge, instability, uncertainty, conflict, tension, dispute, crisis</i>	Core risk expressions
<i>terrorism, separatism, extremism, hegemonism, interference, intervention, Cold War mentality, power politics, Taiwan independence, split, sabotage, hostility, containment, encroachment, provocation</i>	Political, ideological, and sovereignty-related risk sources
<i>arms race, missile defense, THAAD, military alliance, military presence, military deployment, military superiority, armed conflict, local war, arms sales, sell weapons</i>	Military and strategic security risks
<i>proliferation, weapons of mass destruction, non-traditional security, transnational crime, piracy, epidemic, public health, natural disaster, cyber security, bio-security</i>	Non-traditional and arms-control security risks
<i>destabilization, insecurity, volatile, turbulence, turmoil, hotspot, confrontation, unilateralism</i>	Supplementary instability and confrontation expressions refined through concordance observation
<i>undermine, endanger, harm, damage, jeopardize</i>	Proximization-related impact cues

3.4.2 Manual Screening of Candidate Segments

The retrieved concordance lines were not automatically included in the final dataset. Each candidate segment was checked manually in its surrounding context to determine whether it represented a security risk relation.

Three criteria guided this screening: the segment had to contain an explicit external entity, action, or phenomenon; this external factor had to be represented as affecting, threatening, undermining, challenging, or putting pressure on an internal object; and the relation had to be relevant to national security, sovereignty, territorial integrity, national reunification, development interests, regional stability, or the international order.

Segments that appeared only as section headings, general policy principles, cooperation proposals, or statements without a clear risk relation were excluded.

Table 4. Retrieval and Screening of Security Risk-Related Segments

Stage	Processing procedure	Number
Raw keyword hits	Hits retrieved through the final search-term list	1462
Unique candidate segments	Repeated hits in the same sentence or segment were merged	916
Initially retained segments	Segments retained after the first round of manual screening	732
Final retained segments	Segments retained after strict rechecking for ODC, IDC, and proximization mechanism	395

As shown in Table 4, the search list generated 1,462 raw hits. After duplicate removal and two rounds of manual screening, 395 segments were included in the final dataset. The search terms therefore functioned as retrieval cues rather than automatic coding labels.

3.4.3 Annotation of Proximization Strategies

The retained segments were annotated for three aspects: the ODC, the IDC, and the proximization strategy involved. ODCs refer to external entities, actions, or phenomena represented as risk sources, while IDCs refer to internal objects associated with or affected by those risks.

Each segment was also coded for spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization, with attention to the lexicogrammatical resources through which these dimensions were realized.

3.4.4 Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

The coded data were examined through quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis focused on the frequency and distribution of external risk sources, internal objects, and proximization strategies across the corpus. The annotation and statistical summary were conducted in UAM CorpusTool 6.

The qualitative analysis returned to representative examples and their broader textual contexts in order to explain how specific lexicogrammatical choices contributed to risk construction, policy explanation, national security narration, and the image of a defensive national defense policy.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the final dataset of 395 security risk-representation segments, this section analyzes ODCs and IDCs, the lexicogrammatical realization of spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization, and the contribution of these strategies to China's national security narrative and defensive policy image.

4.1 Multiple ODCs and Expanded IDCs in Security Risk Representation

The 395 retained segments contain multiple types of Outside-Deictic-Center entities (ODCs) and Inside-Deictic-Center entities (IDCs). The ODCs cover military, political, regional, and non-traditional security factors, while the associated IDCs extend from China's core national interests to regional stability and international order.

4.1.1 Military Pressure and Regional Conflicts as the Major ODCs

Table 5 presents the major ODC categories identified in the corpus.

Table 5. Distribution of ODC Categories in Security Risk Representation

ODC category	Frequency	Segment coverage
Military security pressure and arms competition	133	33.67%
Regional conflicts and hotspot disputes	103	26.08%
Non-traditional and transnational security risks	53	13.42%
Separatism and national reunification risks	47	11.90%
Terrorism and extremism	41	10.38%
External interference and infringement on sovereignty	34	8.61%
Security uncertainty and destabilizing factors	26	6.58%
Hegemonism, power politics, and unilateralism	22	5.57%

Note: Since one segment may contain more than one ODC category, the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Military security pressure and arms competition constitute the largest category, occurring in 33.67% of the retained segments. Typical ODCs include military alliances, arms races, missile defense systems, military deployment, proliferation, and weapons of mass destruction, which are generally represented as altering the military balance or weakening regional and global strategic stability.

Regional conflicts and hotspot disputes rank second, covering 26.08% of the data. Local wars, territorial and maritime disputes, and tensions on the Korean Peninsula and in the South China Sea are commonly presented as sources of instability in China's surrounding security environment. Here, an ODC may be an unresolved dispute or unstable regional condition rather than a clearly identified hostile actor.

Other categories further broaden the scope of security risk representation. Non-traditional and transnational risks include cyber threats, piracy, public health incidents, natural disasters, and transnational crime. Separatism, terrorism, extremism, external interference, hegemonism, power politics, and unilateralism introduce concerns about political unity, social stability, sovereignty, and international norms.

The distribution suggests that the white papers do not rely on a single enemy image. Military pressure and regional instability remain salient, but they are situated within a wider security environment involving political, ideological, social, and transnational challenges.

4.1.2 Sovereignty, Security, and International Order as the Major IDCs

The risks represented in the corpus are associated with several levels of IDC, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Distribution of Major IDC Categories in Security Risk Representation

IDC category	Frequency	Segment coverage
World peace and international security order	64	16.20%
Sovereignty, territorial integrity, and maritime rights	48	12.15%
China's national security and strategic security interests	30	7.59%
Peripheral/regional peace and stability	30	7.59%

IDC category	Frequency	Segment coverage
Development interests and overseas interests	29	7.34%
Social stability and people's security	24	6.08%
National reunification and cross-Straits relations	19	4.81%

World peace and international security order constitute the most frequent IDC category. Military competition, regional conflicts, terrorism, and proliferation are often represented as affecting strategic stability or the international security system, which means that the deictic center is not limited to China's territory but also incorporates broader regional and global security concerns.

Sovereignty, territorial integrity, and maritime rights form the second largest category and are closely associated with separatism, territorial disputes, external interference, and provocative actions. They reflect a state-centered concern with the protection of China's core national interests.

The remaining categories extend the IDC structure further. Development and overseas interests connect national security with economic development and international engagement; social stability and people's security are mainly associated with terrorism, extremism, disasters, and public health risks; and national reunification and cross-Straits relations are strongly connected with "Taiwan independence" separatist activities.

The IDC structure is therefore multi-level: sovereignty, security, territorial integrity, and reunification form the core, while development interests, regional stability, world peace, and international order extend the deictic center beyond the state itself.

4.1.3 IDC-Oriented Construction of Security Risks

Security risk representation depends on the relation established between ODCs and IDCs. An external entity, action, or phenomenon becomes relevant when it is represented as affecting a particular security object.

Several recurrent associations are evident: military deployment, alliances, and arms competition are linked with strategic balance, regional stability, and national security; regional conflicts and hotspot disputes with peripheral peace and international order; separatism and external interference with sovereignty, territorial integrity, and reunification; and non-traditional risks with social stability, people's security, and overseas interests.

These associations bring external developments into the discourse space of national defense and provide the basic structure through which spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization is realized.

4.2 Spatial Proximization as the Dominant Strategy

Spatial proximization occurs in 361 of the 395 retained segments, covering 91.39% of the dataset. It is therefore the most widely used proximization dimension. External entities, actions, and developments are brought into the security space of particular IDCs through expressions of movement, influence, pressure, or consequence.

The 361 segments contain 1,014 spatial lexicogrammatical instances. Their distribution is shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Distribution of Lexicogrammatical Types of Spatial Proximization

Type	Lexicogrammatical realization	Frequency	Percentage
S2	Noun phrases construing ODCs	325	32.05%
S1	Noun phrases construing IDCs	185	18.24%
S4	Action verb phrases construing the impact of ODCs on IDCs	146	14.40%
S5	Abstract nouns construing the anticipated impact of ODCs on IDCs	138	13.61%
S6	Abstract nouns construing the resulting effects of ODCs on IDCs	115	11.34%
S3	Motion verb phrases construing the movement of ODCs toward IDCs	105	10.36%
Total		1,014	100%

4.2.1 S2 and S1: Nominal Construction of ODCs and IDCs

S2 is the most frequent spatial type, accounting for 32.05% of all spatial coding instances. It is mainly realized through noun phrases such as *military alliances*, *missile defense systems*, *terrorist forces*, *Taiwan independence separatist forces*, *regional conflicts*, and *hegemonism*. These expressions identify the entities, actions, or phenomena positioned outside the deictic center.

S1 accounts for 18.24% of the spatial instances. Common IDC expressions include *China's national security*, *sovereignty and territorial integrity*, *peaceful reunification*, *regional peace and stability*, and *the international security order*. Their co-occurrence with S2 makes the relation between external risks and potentially affected security objects explicit.

(1) The deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in the Republic of Korea (ROK) by the US has severely undermined the regional strategic balance and the strategic security interests of regional countries. (China's National Defense in the New Era in 2019)

In Example (1), *the deployment of the THAAD system ... by the US* functions as the ODC, while *the regional strategic balance* and *the strategic security interests of regional countries* function as the IDCs.

The external deployment is thus incorporated into the regional security space through its stated effects.

The higher frequency of S2 indicates that ODCs are more often explicitly named than IDCs; in many passages, the relevant IDC has already been established by context and is left implicit.

4.2.2 S4: Action Verb Phrases Construing ODC Impact on IDCs

S4 accounts for 14.40% of the spatial coding instances. Verbs such as *threaten*, *undermine*, *endanger*, *interfere in*, *affect*, and *exacerbate* establish a direct relation between ODC actions and IDC interests.

(2) By continuing to sell weapons and military equipment to Taiwan and elevating relations with the Taiwan authorities, a handful of countries have interfered in China's internal affairs, inflated the arrogance of the separatist forces and undermined China's peaceful reunification. (China's National Defense in 2002) The verbs *interfered*, *inflated*, and *undermined* link external arms sales and political involvement with China's internal affairs and peaceful reunification. The actions are therefore represented not as distant developments but as direct interventions within China's sovereign and political space.

S4 commonly occurs in passages concerning sovereignty, territorial integrity, strategic balance, and regional stability, specifying how an external development becomes relevant to a particular IDC.

4.2.3 S5 and S6: Abstract Nouns Construing Risk and Consequence

S5 and S6 together account for 24.95% of all spatial coding instances. S5 is commonly realized through nouns such as *risk*, *threat*, *challenge*, *danger*, and *pressure*, which construe anticipated ODC impact. S6 includes expressions such as *instability*, *conflict*, *crisis*, *tension*, and *imbalance*, which represent adverse conditions or consequences.

(3) The Taiwan separatist force is the biggest threat to peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits. (China's National Defense in 2002)

The noun *threat* condenses the relation between the separatist force and its possible impact on cross-Straits peace and stability. Rather than describing a detailed sequence of actions and consequences, the nominal construction presents the security assessment in a compact form.

Such abstract nouns fit the institutional style of the white papers by classifying external developments as recognizable security conditions while avoiding strongly emotional formulations.

4.2.4 S3: Motion Verb Phrases Construing Expansion and Intensification

S3 accounts for 10.36% of the spatial coding instances. It is commonly realized through expressions such as *increase*, *expand*, *spread*, *intensify*, *emerge*, *escalate*, and *spill over*. These forms represent changes in the scale, intensity, or geographical reach of ODCs.

(4) Uncertainties and destabilizing factors are on the increase, and new challenges and threats are continuously emerging. (China's National Defense in 2006)

The expressions *are on the increase* and *are continuously emerging* present external risks as dynamic and increasingly salient. Their movement toward the deictic center is conceptual rather than necessarily physical: greater scale or intensity makes them more relevant to the current security environment.

Overall, spatial proximization is dominated by ODC and IDC noun phrases, supported by impact verbs, abstract nouns of risk and consequence, and expressions of expansion or intensification. Together, these resources make external developments relevant to China's security, regional stability, and the wider international order.

4.3 Temporal Proximization as the Construction of Persistent and Potential Risks

Temporal proximization occurs in 157 of the 395 retained segments, covering 39.75% of the dataset. Although less frequent than spatial proximization, it presents security risks as continuing, recurrent, or capable of producing future consequences. The 157 segments contain 191 temporal lexicogrammatical instances, whose distribution is shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Distribution of Lexicogrammatical Types of Temporal Proximization

Type Lexicogrammatical realization		Frequency Percentage	
T2	Tense and aspectual forms construing the continuation or recurrence of ODC impact	111	58.12%
T3	Nominalized phrases presupposing conditions for future ODC impact	44	23.04%
T1	Indefinite noun phrases construing ODC impact in alternative temporal frames	23	12.04%

Type Lexicogrammatical realization		Frequency Percentage	
T4	Modal verb phrases projecting potential ODC impact	9	4.71%
T5	Parallel contrastive constructions construing oppositional and privileged futures	4	2.09%
Total		191	100%

4.3.1 T2: Tense and Aspectual Forms Construing Risk Continuity

T2 is the most frequent temporal type, accounting for 58.12% of all temporal coding instances. It is mainly realized through present perfect constructions and expressions of continuation, recurrence, or increase, such as *have continued*, *have become*, *still exist*, *remain*, *are increasing*, and *keep emerging*. These forms connect earlier developments with the current security environment and present their effects as unresolved.

(5) Divisive, terrorist and extremist forces of every description have continued to endanger the international community, and global problems such as the environment, narcotic drugs and refugees have become increasingly prominent. (China's National Defense in 2000)

The forms have continued and have become locate the origins of the problems in the past while emphasizing their continuing relevance. The risks are therefore represented as processes that persist or intensify over time rather than isolated events. The predominance of T2 indicates that temporal proximization relies mainly on continuity rather than predictions of sudden future danger.

4.3.2 T3: Nominalized Conditions for Future ODC Impact

T3 accounts for 23.04% of the temporal coding instances. Common realizations include nominalized expressions such as *proliferation*, *deployment*, *escalation*, *weaponization*, and *arms race*. By turning processes into relatively stable conditions, these expressions detach risk from a single event and leave open the time at which its consequences may arise.

(6) The international community is confronted with grave challenges in its efforts to stem the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and promote disarmament, and with the emerging danger of a new arms race. (China's National Defense in 2000)

The nominalizations proliferation and a new arms race present complex processes as established security conditions whose consequences are not confined to a specific moment. T3 thus gives security risks a continuing temporal presence without requiring an explicit prediction.

4.3.3 T1: Indefinite Descriptions of Recurrent Risks

T1 represents 12.04% of the temporal coding instances. It is realized through indefinite expressions such as *various security threats*, *some factors of instability*, *new challenges*, and *multiple difficulties*. These descriptions do not specify when a risk begins or ends, allowing it to apply across different temporal contexts.

(7) World peace and development are faced with multiple difficulties and challenges. (China's National Defense in 2008)

The phrase multiple difficulties and challenges generalizes security pressure rather than relating it to one bounded event. Its open temporal reference presents risk as a recurrent feature of the international environment.

4.3.4 T4: Modal Projection of Potential ODC Impact

T4 accounts for 4.71% of the temporal coding instances. It is mainly realized through modal or future-oriented verb phrases that project the possible consequences of an ODC, including *may undermine*, *will lead to*, *will jeopardize*, and *will be detrimental to*.

(8) The United States government should earnestly heed the appeal of the international community and stop the development and deployment of missile defense systems that may undermine global strategic stability. (China's National Defense in 2000)

The modal auxiliary *may* places the impact of missile defense systems in a possible future. Although the consequence has not necessarily materialized, it is presented as plausible enough to justify present concern. The low frequency of T4 suggests that the white papers make limited use of explicit predictions, preferring to describe risks as existing or continuing conditions.

4.3.5 T5: Contrastive Futures and Defensive Responses

T5 is the least frequent type, accounting for only 2.09% of the temporal coding instances. It occurs in conditional or contrastive constructions that place an undesirable future caused by an ODC against a defensive or preferred course of action.

(9) Should the Taiwan authorities go so far as to make a reckless attempt that constitutes a major incident of "Taiwan independence," the Chinese people and armed forces will resolutely and thoroughly crush it at any cost. (China's National Defense in 2004)

The conditional clause constructs a possible future in which separatist activities develop into a major incident, while the main clause projects a defensive response. The two futures are brought into the present security context before the potential consequence occurs.

Overall, temporal proximization is dominated by T2, followed by T3. The white papers construct risk primarily through continuation, recurrence, and intensification, while explicit modal projection and contrastive futures remain comparatively limited. Temporal proximization thus sustains the present relevance of security risks without relying heavily on predictions of imminent danger.

4.4 Axiological Proximization as the Construction of Value Conflict

Axiological proximization occurs in 114 of the 395 retained segments, covering 28.86% of the dataset. Although it is the least frequent of the three dimensions, it provides a normative basis for security risk representation by contrasting the negative values associated with ODCs with the positive principles represented by IDCs.

The 114 segments contain 165 axiological lexicogrammatical instances. Their distribution is shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Distribution of Lexicogrammatical Types of Axiological Proximization

Type	Lexicogrammatical realization	Frequency	Percentage
A2	Noun phrases construing the negative values or ideologies of ODCs	122	73.94%
A1	Noun phrases construing the positive values or ideologies of IDCs	43	26.06%

Type	Lexicogrammatical realization	Frequency	Percentage
Total		165	100%

4.4.1 A2: Negative Values and Ideologies Associated with ODCs

A2 is the dominant axiological type, accounting for 73.94% of all axiological coding instances. It is commonly realized through expressions such as *hegemonism*, *power politics*, *unilateralism*, *Cold War mentality*, *neo-interventionism*, *separatism*, *terrorism*, and *extremism*. These expressions assign negative political, ideological, or moral qualities to ODCs and present them as incompatible with accepted security norms.

(10) Certain big powers are pursuing “neointerventionism,” “neo-gunboat policy” and neo-economic colonialism, which are seriously damaging the sovereignty, independence and developmental interests of many countries, and threatening world peace and security. (China’s National Defense in 2000)

The expressions neointerventionism, neo-gunboat policy, and neo-economic colonialism negatively evaluate the political practices associated with the ODCs. Their effects are represented through damage to sovereignty, developmental interests, world peace, and security, so the risk is constructed through both material consequences and value violation.

A2 also includes negative evaluations of concrete actions such as interference in internal affairs, arms sales to Taiwan, aggression, illegal occupation, and provocative military activities. These practices are presented as manifestations of broader ideological tendencies such as hegemonism, power politics, and separatism. The predominance of A2 indicates that axiological proximization relies mainly on negative characterization of ODCs. Rather than repeatedly elaborating China’s own values, the texts foreground ideologies and practices that make external actors or developments unacceptable within national security discourse.

4.4.2 A1: Positive Values and Principles Associated with IDCs

A1 accounts for 26.06% of the axiological coding instances. It is mainly realized through noun phrases referring to *peace*, *stability*, *sovereignty*, *territorial integrity*, *national unity*, *equality*, *cooperation*, and *international order*. These expressions identify the values and principles associated with the deictic center and define what needs to be protected.

(11) However, as long as hegemonism and power politics still exist, a country must have the capability to defend its sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security by military means. (China’s National Defense in 1998)

In Example (11), sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity, and security represent positive IDC values, while hegemonism and power politics constitute the opposing ODC ideology. This contrast provides a normative basis for the defensive action expressed by defend.

A similar opposition appears between separatism and national unity, external interference and sovereignty, terrorism and social stability, or unilateralism and international order. Although A1 occurs less frequently than A2, it remains essential because negative evaluation depends on an explicit or implied positive reference point.

Taken together, A1 and A2 construct a clear axiological opposition. Hegemonism, power politics, unilateralism, separatism, and terrorism are positioned against peace, stability, sovereignty, national unity, and international order, so external risks are represented as both materially harmful and normatively unacceptable.

4.5 The Narrative Logic of Security Risk Proximization

The findings reveal a coherent narrative progression in the representation of security risks. Diverse ODCs are first integrated into a comprehensive security environment and associated with national, regional, and international IDCs. Temporal resources sustain their relevance by construing them as unresolved, recurrent, or intensifying conditions, while conditional structures often place China's response after prior ODC conduct. The resulting narrative presents defense responses as protective and contingent rather than independently initiated.

(12) In recent years, cross-Taiwan Straits relations have sustained a sound momentum of peaceful development, but the root cause of instability has not yet been removed, and the "Taiwan independence" separatist forces and their activities are still the biggest threat to the peaceful development of cross-Straits relations. (China's Military Strategy, 2015)

The concessive structure acknowledges the positive development of cross-Straits relations before restricting its significance through but. The present perfect construction has not yet been removed and the adverb still construe separatism as an unresolved condition that continues to affect the present despite temporary improvement.

This temporal pattern avoids representing every security issue as an immediate emergency. Military competition, separatism, terrorism, and regional instability are generally construed as persistent structural conditions, so defense preparation appears as a response to enduring security circumstances.

(13) But if China comes under a nuclear threat, the nuclear missile force of the Second Artillery Force will go into a state of alert, and get ready for a nuclear counterattack to deter the enemy from using nuclear weapons against China. (China's National Defense in 2008)

The conditional clause if China comes under a nuclear threat specifies the circumstance under which military readiness becomes relevant. The projected counterattack follows the external threat and is explicitly connected with deterrence, construing military action as contingent upon prior ODC conduct.

This conditional sequencing contributes to the construction of a defensive policy identity. Axiological contrast reinforces this pattern by positioning sovereignty, unity, peace, and stability against interference, separatism, terrorism, and hegemonism. The legitimacy of military response is thus grounded in both causal sequencing and value opposition.

The narrative also extends national defense beyond the protection of immediate territorial and political interests. China is constructed not only as an IDC exposed to external risks but also as an actor contributing to regional and international IDCs through peacekeeping, cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and responses to transnational security risks.

Through this sequence, the white papers construct China's national defense policy as comprehensive in scope, conditional in its use of force, and oriented toward both national protection and shared security.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined how security risks are represented in China's national defense white papers through spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization. The findings show that the white papers construct diverse ODCs rather than a single external adversary. Military security pressure and regional conflicts are the most prominent risks, while separatism, terrorism, external interference, non-traditional security problems, and destabilizing political tendencies broaden the security environment. These ODCs are associated with a multi-scalar IDC configuration: sovereignty, territorial integrity, security, and national reunification form

the core, while regional stability, world peace, international order, development interests, and people's security extend the deictic center beyond the national level.

Among the three dimensions, spatial proximization is dominant, occurring in 91.39% of the retained segments. It links ODCs with security objects through noun phrases, impact verbs, abstract nouns of risk and consequence, and expressions of expansion or intensification. Temporal proximization covers 39.75% of the data and mainly represents risks as persistent, recurrent, or unresolved conditions rather than imminent crises. Axiological proximization occurs in 28.86% of the segments and contrasts negative ODC values, such as hegemonism, separatism, terrorism, and interference, with the positive IDC values of peace, sovereignty, unity, stability, and international order.

These patterns contribute to a coherent security narrative. Diverse risks are integrated into a comprehensive security environment, associated with national, regional, and international IDCs, and maintained as continuing concerns through temporal resources. When military action is projected, prior ODC conduct is frequently placed in the initiating or conditional position, while China's response is presented as protective and contingent. References to peacekeeping, international cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and transnational security further extend national defense from the protection of core interests to participation in shared security.

The study demonstrates that proximization in national defense white papers does not depend mainly on dramatic representations of an approaching threat. Instead, it operates through the measured construction of relevance, persistence, and normative conflict, which is consistent with the formal and policy-oriented character of the genre. The study is limited by its focus on English texts and overall corpus patterns. Future research could compare English and Chinese versions, examine diachronic changes, and combine proximization with legitimation or other discourse-analytical frameworks.

REFERENCES

1. Cap, P. (2008). Towards the proximization model of the analysis of legitimization in political discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 40(1), 17–41.
2. Cap, P. (2014). Applying cognitive pragmatics to critical discourse studies: A proximization analysis of three public space discourses. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 70, 16–30.
3. Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.
4. Gao, X. L. & Huang, Y. W. (2024). An analysis of American national defense discourse based on the discourse-historical approach: A case study of the “National Defense Strategy of the United States of America” (2022). *Foreign Languages Research*, 41(4), 44–49.
5. Gong, X. Q. & Zhang, H. (2025). Critical cognitive analysis of environmental discourse: A case study of the U.S. withdrawal and re-entry into the Paris Climate Accord. *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching*, 46(4), 34–47.
6. Hu, Y. J. & Qian, L. (2019). A study of legitimizing political discourse from the perspective of proximization: Taking White House Press Secretary's political discourse concerning DPRK as examples. *Foreign Language Research*, (5), 18–23.
7. Liang, X. B. & Tan, J. L. (2015). National defense discourse studies: An emerging field. *Foreign Languages Research*, 32(6), 5–9.
8. Rong, H. T. (2024). *A legitimization analysis of U.S. presidential election news discourse from the perspective of proximization* [Master's thesis, Xi'an International Studies University].
9. Shi, X. & Mei, C. Y. (2021). National defense policy and global communication: Chinese national military strategy in a cultural-discursive perspective. *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 44(5), 72–83.
10. Tian, W. Q. (2017). The critical discourse analysis of discourse construction of “China's threat theory” in Japan's defense white paper 2016. *Foreign Language Research in Northeast Asia*, 5(2), 36–41.

11. Wang, Y. K. (2024). Analysis of the discourse space in Germany's first National Security Strategy: From the perspective of critical cognitive linguistics. *Journal of Intelligence*, 43(7), 97–103, 145.
12. Wang, Z. & Zhang, H. (2022). A critical cognitive linguistic study of Chinese poverty alleviation discourses in Chinese and Western media from the perspective of triangulation. *Foreign Language Education*, 43(6), 15–21.
13. Xin, J. M. (2024). *A research on the discourse construction mechanism of external threats in American defense reports from the perspective of proximization theory* [Master's thesis, Mudanjiang Normal University].
14. Yan, B. & Zhang, H. (2018). A critical cognitive analysis of China-US trade war discourses: From the perspective of proximization theory. *Foreign Languages Research*, 35(6), 16–22.
15. Yan, T. & Hu, K. B. (2025). A critical analysis of legitimization in diplomatic conflict discourses of Ukraine and Russia from the perspective of proximization. *Foreign Language Learning Theory and Practice*, (6), 11–24.
16. Yang, J. Y. & Zeng, T. Y. (2026). A study on the discourse of Vietnam's national defence white paper from the discourse-historical approach perspective. *Journal of Intelligence*, 45(1), 48–54, 63.
17. Zhang, H. (2024). How languages construct (social) reality: Critical cognitive linguistics perspective. *Foreign Language Education*, 45(5), 23–31.
18. Zhang, R. H. & Shi, X. Y. (2023). A critical discourse analysis of traditional Chinese medicine in Western media discourses: A corpus-based perspective. *Foreign Languages Research*, 40(1), 17–22, 29.
19. Zhao, Q. (2020). A study on the legitimization of political discourse from the perspective of proximization theory: A case study of President Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address. *Journal of Xi'an University of Architecture & Technology (Social Science Edition)*, 39(5), 79–86.
20. Zhao, X. Y. (2021). A study on cross-cultural communication of Chinese defense discourse from a cultural discourse perspective. *Journal of Hangzhou Normal University (Social Sciences)*, 43(1), 130–136.
21. Zhou, B. (2021). A study on news media stance from the perspective of proximization: A corpus-based analysis on reports about "Huawei threat" in German media. *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 44(3), 71–81.