

**DOCTRINAL CHANGES, FLEET MODERNIZATION AND NEW
MARITIME ROLES OF THE CHINESE NAVY:
IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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1997



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21 July 1997

CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "**Doctrinal Changes, Fleet Modernization and New Maritime Roles of the Chinese Navy: Implications for Asia-Pacific Security**" submitted by **Anil Joseph Chandy** is in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree to any other University and is his own work.

It is recommended that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

(Dr. Kanti P. Bajpai)
Chairperson



(Dr. Kanti P. Bajpai)
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For Mommy, Achachan and Suja

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What has been a long voyage of discovery to a compelling destination would not have become a reality if it were not for the constant support, encouragement and affection from a number of individuals. My gratitude to all of them is particularly heartfelt.

To Dr.Kanti Bajpai, my supervisor at the Disarmament Studies Division for providing the impetus and the essence for this study. Drawing on his deep knowledge of security issues, he has helped me mature my thoughts and I can only hope that this work will atleast partially satisfy the high academic standards he sets for himself.

To Dr.Madhu Bhalla, my teacher at the Centre for East Asian Studies who helped me unravel the mysteries of Chinese politics and who has inculcated in me an undying curiosity about that nation. She has always had the patience to listen to my vague ideas and insensible ramblings on the subject under study and I consider myself particularly lucky to have been initiated into the study of China by her.

To Commander Vijai Sakuja IN, for making available to me his time as well as much valuable material on Chinese maritime strategy and the PLA-Naval inventory. Without his expertise as to the capabilities of various ships and weapons, I could not have managed this work.

To Dr.Varun Sahni for letting me have his superb collection of books and materials on seapower while this study was in progress and for recognising the efforts of a student who shares with him a belief in the eternal importance of navies.

To Madhumati, Sonika, Sahad, Arundhati, Kanchan and Nissim: good friends who have helped me in various ways in undertaking and completing this work.

To Mrs. and Mr.Varghese for their excellent word processing skills which ensured that this work finished within the deadline.

Last but most important, I thank my parents who made me aware of the world at an early age and my sister Suja for her love and for just being there. Without them this study could never have been done and the most I can do at this stage in life is to dedicate this work to them.

ANIL JOSEPH CHANDY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The international system and the violence that is associated with it operates in a well defined framework: the state-centric system of international relations. The primacy of the state is the basis of most theories of international relations. Associated with this view is the corollary that in a world of states, military power is the ultimate arbiter. This study investigates the intricacies of maritime military power. The main focus of this work will be to examine what motivates a state to acquire and maintain a navy; more specifically, it seeks to understand the underlying principles that motivate the People's Republic of China to acquire and expand elements of maritime power.

In the context of the end of the Cold War and the decline in world defence spending, the Asia-Pacific is the only major region where naval expansion rather than contraction is occurring on a sustained basis. The central feature of this build-up of maritime power in the area is the growth and modernisation of the Chinese People's Liberation Army-Navy.

The Rise of Chinese Seapower Mentality

Throughout China's history, the maritime element has been conspicuous by its relative unimportance vis-a-vis other fighting arms in the country's overall national security strategy. From the birth of the Communist People's Republic in 1949, Chinese defence policy was determined almost wholly by Chairman Mao Ze Dong, an avowed "continentalist", who felt that the land army, nuclear forces and a supporting airforce would make up the main elements in the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) defence

posture. A relatively weak naval arm was assigned the role, eventually, of coastal defence. In Chinese perceptions, an invasion by the former Soviet Union across the common land borders constituted the greatest threat. Although invaded many times from the sea, the new People's Republic did not foresee any major sea-based threats, despite the existence of Nationalist Taiwan a mere 200 nautical miles to the east.

The end of the Cold War and superpower confrontation, the decline of land-based threats, the search for more natural resources fuelled by a surging economy and a burgeoning population, and the existence of several maritime disputes in which China is actively embroiled have however influenced China's defence planners to attempt to revise traditional military strategy and reappraise the utility of the Chinese Navy.

Other factors have also been responsible for the navy's growing importance. Among these, the more crucial ones have been: the rise of Deng Xiaoping to paramount leadership, the enunciation of the Four Modernisations programme with its emphasis on cost-effectiveness and technological sophistication in defence; the realisation that, for an economically resurgent China, protection of sea-going commerce and trade requires the presence of a powerful naval fleet; the inherent ability of a naval arm to project power (specifically at China's neighbours with whom Beijing has many a maritime dispute); and the need to patrol one of the world's longest coastlines and largest continental shelves.

The rise of Deng Xiaoping was also instrumental in propelling Admiral Liu Huaqing to a position of prominence in the military hierarchy. Admiral Liu, after his elevation, sought to implement concrete plans for developing the Chinese navy into a powerful and modern fleet. Through him, China's leaders recognised the utility of a sea-based nuclear deterrent and a second strike capability which actively enhanced China's strategic posture.

Underlying these changes was a newfound seapower mentality, the lack of which had characterised the Chinese strategic vision for centuries. Important changes were wrought in the war-fighting doctrines of the PLA from Mao's land-based "people's war" concept to a more active and offensive posture essentially championed by the navy. Being in the forefront of the vigorous modernisation drive, the navy has managed to increase its share of the defence budget significantly. This is reflected in the qualitative change occurring in the naval forces. Naval men have actively sought to influence and change defence policy orientations in the highest decision making bodies and the People's Liberation Army. The navy's importance is today underlined by the active role assigned to it in a revised military doctrine which prepares the PLA to respond successfully to potential conflicts around China's periphery, conflicts which may be intense and of a limited duration.

The objective of this research is to tease out the factors and implications of the growth of Chinese naval power.

The study will attempt to determine whether the ongoing modernisation programme in the Chinese navy with regard to the acquisition of more sophisticated ships and upgradation of weapon and technological capabilities constitute a systematic effort to alter the maritime balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region in China's favour. The study will seek to link up economic performance and the 'four modernisations programme' to a revised defence posture. Also examined will be the impact the Chinese Communist Party and its ideology have had on defence and security related issues, particularly those applicable to the navy.

While carrying out this assessment of the Chinese navy, the study will have as a background the political uses of seapower and treat the growth of the navy as an

instrument of foreign policy. Maritime disputes which may potentially involve an application of naval power will also be examined, thus trying to resolve the problems regarding the interpretation of Chinese security perceptions which are directly related to the navy's goals, priorities and mission capabilities. The last part of the study will attempt to determine the implications of China's new naval power for regional security.

An underlying concern of the study is to investigate the reasons why a "continental" power, such as China, seeks an expanded maritime role. If this is the case, what are the prospects for the continued growth of the navy in attaining 'blue-water' capability on the lines envisioned by recent doctrinal changes? The thesis will attempt to assess as accurately as possible whether Chinese maritime power will be successful in developing the capabilities and roles it sets for itself.

Before examining the motivations that have precipitated a naval arms build up in the Asia-Pacific, it would be useful to determine why states seek to enhance their maritime strength. The reason for this lies in the concept of seapower.

The Concept of Seapower

Seapower is the label attached to countries which possess great maritime strength.¹ As an abstraction different from land and air power, it may be applied to the material instruments a country uses to achieve maritime objectives. Seapower is often defined in terms of what naval and maritime greatness enables a country to do. While regarding military power as one of the major components of the power of a state, it is

1 Geoffrey Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age* (London, 1984).

argued by seapower advocates that seapower is the higher or superior form of military power over land or air. Its advantages are

(a) flexibility in use for operations and deployment. Elements of seapower can be easily divided into various groups which perform multifarious functions. As such, seapower is also the only medium that incorporates aspects of land and air warfare,

(b) sustainability of seapower which is undergirded by the fact that a warship deployed off an enemy's coast can stay there for a very long period of time. Land forces and airforces cannot attempt such deployment without inviting opposition of some sort.²

Specifically, seapower confers more mobility on the possessor resulting in wider access to states and resources. It employs a higher form of technology than land power, but not as high as air power. However, it requires more innovation from airpower technologies (e.g., the use of aircraft from a ship is far more demanding than operations from or on land). Seapower also carries tremendous political weight. Ships, being sovereign territory, have a higher visibility and carry far larger symbolic load. Another important characteristic of seapower is that it can operate on a global scale, with few restrictions.³

The methods by which countries attempt to maintain or increase their seapower and how they try to use it to achieve desired objectives in peace and war is referred to as a 'maritime strategy'.

Throughout history no one type of nation has existed with regard to strategic planning and military power. This difference is most visible in the orientation in military

2 H.J. Kearsley, *Maritime Power and the Twenty-first Century* (Aldershot, 1993), p.21.

3 Herbert Richmond, *Seapower in the Modern World*, (London, 1934), cited in Till, n.1, p.17.

thinking of nations. Some nations stress maritime strength, while others favour a strong land army.

Maritime Nations

For a maritime nation, the navy is the primary strategic arm of the defensive structure, dominating security policies and maintaining an 'offensive' and 'power-projecting' stance on the high seas. The maritime nation's dependence on land forces is considerably lower as it does not see the threat of large land-based invasions.⁴ Most maritime nations are insular in their geography and depend on the utility of sea-borne trade. Sea-borne trade and commerce constitutes for them the most prominent aspect of economic well-being. A powerful naval fleet then becomes vital, with responsibilities ranging from protection of maritime commerce to keeping open the maritime nation's Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs).

A maritime nation's navy will probably be the 'blue water' type. A 'blue water' naval fleet is one that can operate at great distances from the homeland on the high seas using an assortment of powerful warships. These navies will have the capacity for offensive strikes against any enemy country (by strategic bombardment and naval air attacks), help in invasions of the enemy mainland through strategic sea-lift of amphibious forces in times of war, and act as a deterrent to potential competitors who threaten trade and security of the maritime nation. The 'blue-water' navy is also the primary instrument used for a 'blockade' of ports and the coast of an enemy. As long as the enemy fleet has to be engaged by the maritime nation's navy, the blockade will be

4 Clark G. Reynolds, *Command of the Sea: The History and Strategy of Maritime Empires* (New York, 1974), p.12.

'naval' which denies the enemy use of his merchant marine and warships. If the enemy fleet has been destroyed, the character of a blockade will be 'commercial' whose primary purpose is the interdiction of trade. Blockade may be 'direct', where the fleet remains on station just off enemy ports, or 'indirect', where the fleet tracks and destroys enemy ship movements based far away at sea.⁵ In a maritime nation's warfighting methods, its navy would dictate the combined operations of all service arms. This ranges from tactical bombardment and logistical support for invasions to strategic bombardment of inland targets. The latter is the ultimate expression of naval superiority, and a 'blue-water' navy can demonstrate the effectiveness of its firepower well beyond the enemy coastline.

Continental Nations

For continental nations the army (land forces) will be the main strategic arm of the nation's defence, as threats to national security are primarily land based. The navy will often have a 'defensive' strategic stance and the principles governing naval operations will be those which give the army enhanced strategic advantage. The navy also performs the role of defending against invasion through patrol of coastal areas and denying any enemy the use of bases nearer the homeland. Combined operations are of intrinsic value, and the navy has to play the supporting role for the army. To capture enemy bases in support of land operations, it will need limited 'sea lift' capability.⁶ The continental nation's navy will be lacking in the resources for effective sea-control as well

5 Reynolds, n.2, p.13.

6 Ibid., p.14.

as doctrines for amphibious operations due to a lack of experience (and importance) in such warfighting methods. Strategic bombardment and inland strikes on enemy territory will be left to the army and the air force in a continentalist strategy. The continental navy may use small flotillas for interdiction of enemy shipping, but, as these lack integrated power-projection capabilities, vulnerability to attacks from other navies will be great. But if utilized in overwhelming strength, such a war on commerce may well serve as a useful 'counter blockade' preventing vital supplies from reaching the mainland of the enemy (assuming the enemy has a maritime character). The continental nation will resort to maintaining an efficient but second-class fighting fleet aimed at restricting enemy offensive action and deterring an enemy from attempting domination of local waters.

Admiral Raoul Castex, the French Admiral of World War I, as summarised the nature of a continental power in the following terms:

- (a) The continental power can only aspire to be 'a secondary naval power'.
- (b) Its naval assets are limited due to the need to guard territorial boundaries.
- (c) Limited counter-offensives only may be possible for it to get concessions from superior foes.
- (d) The significance of airpower is crucial.
- (e) The navy's role will be defensive in nature for protecting the coast line.
- (f) Trade warfare becomes a useful medium for such continental powers.⁷

7 Raoul Castex, *Theories Strategiques*, vol.I (Paris, 1929), p.200. Cited in Till n.1, p.27.

Sources and Elements of Seapower

Geoffrey Till provides a model of the sources and elements which constitute sea power.⁸

Sources	Elements	SEAPOWER
Maritime Community	Merchant Shipping	
Resources	Bases	
Styles of Government	Fighting Instrument	
Geography		

The sources of seapower, as the model illustrates have strong linkages to each other. The 'maritime community' is crucial to the development of key elements of seapower.⁹ The navy and the merchant marine operated by a nation are, after all, direct results of the maritime orientation of the populace. Alfred Mahan suggested that since maritime trade contributed significantly to a country's economic well-being, protection of shipping was the most important justification for a combat fleet.¹⁰ A nation's population that has a maritime orientation would be able to provide able seamen for both commercial and military purposes.

Economic strength and 'national resources' help develop a nation's seapower in many ways. They provide money for defence, offer general support and give a maritime nation resilience in the face of adversity.¹¹ It is significant that this line of thinking,

8 Geoffrey Till, n.1, pp.75-83.

9 Till, n.1, p.75.

10 Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Seapower upon History 1660-1783* (Boston, 1890), p.23.

11 Till, n.1, p.77.

where resources are a crucial element, has appeared consistently in Marxist writings. While citing the British example, Admiral Sergei Gorshkov said that a powerful economy provided England with the strongest navy in the world.¹² Frederick Engels wrote that a modern warship is not only a product of major industry but at the same time an example of it. The country with a major shipping industry could enjoy a virtual monopoly in the construction of these ships.¹³ A nation's industrial expertise, ship-building skills and the financial ability then are key ingredients in naval success. As a point of fact, seapower and the national economy have had a symbiotic relationship with the one enhancing the other.

Mahan wrote that particular forms of government with their accompanying institutions and the character of their rulers have, at one time or another, exercised a very marked influence upon the development of seapower.¹⁴ Resources and wealth were not enough in building up seapower, but a country's decision-making process had to be geared to a maritime orientation in policy if it was to be a sea power of any consequence. The nature of government and the willingness to invest in shipping and its protection have therefore dictated the eventual strength of a nation's navy.

Naval and maritime strategists consider a country's 'geography' as an important determinant of its urge to go to sea.¹⁵ Geographical considerations, such as the nature

12 Sergei Gorshkov, *Navies in War and Peace*, published as *Red Star Rising at Sea* (Annapolis, 1974), cited in Juergen Rohwer, "Russian and Soviet Naval Strategy", in J.K. Skogan and A.O. Brundtland (ed.), *Soviet Seapower in Northern Waters: Facts, Motivation, Impact and Responses* (London, 1990), p.15.

13 Frederick Engels' quote, cited in Till n.1, p.78.

14 Mahan, n.10, p.58.

15 Till, n.1, p.81.

of the coast, availability of natural harbours, riverine economy and communications all help shape maritime strategy both in terms of conception and execution.

These sources influence a number of elements which ultimately contribute to the overall structure of seapower. 'Shipping' is one of the essential elements in maritime power. According to the 'boxer analogy' regarding seapower, the merchant shipping provides the stamina and strength, bases give the ability of move and manoeuvre and the navy provides the power to hit.¹⁶ The merchant marine uses the sea as a medium of transportation and trade, but it can also double as warships for logistical support and convoy protection. Another element of seapower is the existence of 'bases'. Bases are important for operations far away from home in times of war. They also determine the general level of serviceability and combat readiness of warships. Naval bases range in degree of utility and importance from fleet anchorages to main bases with supporting industrial establishments.¹⁷ Bases thus serve to support and conduct various forms of naval activity ranging from a place of shelter to repair work and replenishment for a fleet. The 'fighting instrument' denoted in the constituents of seapower is the navy. The most important aspect of power of a navy at sea used to be the possession of 'capital ships' which epitomized the strength of a fleet. In the history of seapower, this role has shifted from the battleship to the carrier and to the submarine.

16 Ibid., p.85.

17 Bernard Brodie, *A Guide to Naval Strategy* (New York, 1965), p.180

Theories of Naval Utility

The advent and spread of nuclear weapons in the last fifty years has led many individuals to comment on the inevitable demise of conventional forces, or at the very least a great reduction in their utility.¹⁸ The service arm most threatened by this line of thought is the navy, mainly because warships constitute large and easy targets. Thus, the utility of a navy in the era of nuclear war has been severely questioned.

Naval and maritime strategists have however responded by pointing to different strategic and tactical roles which navies may assume. Various theories have come into existence regarding the utility of seapower.

The study of seapower illustrates a continuity with the past. Many of the principles laid down by Alfred Thayer Mahan regarding maritime strategy have endured. While most maritime states have not defined the exact roles which their navies are expected to fulfil, for analytical purposes a not-so finite distinction between roles has to be created. Two roles may be distinguished: naval use in peacetime (i.e., in an environment short of actual hostilities breaking out); and the utility of a navy during war.

Naval Use in Peacetime

In trying to elaborate principles concerning naval use in peacetime it is useful to review the writings of Edward Luttwak, James Cable and Ken Booth.

Edward Luttwak in his *Political Uses of Seapower*, has created the term "naval suasion" used to describe the political applications of naval power.¹⁹ "Suasion" is

18 H.J.Kearsley, n.2, p.4.

19 Edward Luttwak, *The Political Uses of Seapower* (Baltimore, 1974), p.7.

comprised of "latent" naval suasion and "active" naval suasion. Latent naval suasion has a "deterrent" mode and a "supportive" mode. It is concerned with the reaction that is evoked in a target (individual or group) due to routine and undirected naval deployments or movements. This can be in a deterrent mode against a potential foe or supportive of an ally.²⁰

Active naval suasion is the reaction evoked through a deliberate and purposeful naval action intended to give a definite signal to a target. This too can be a positive action to support or reassure an ally or client state, or it can be negative in nature, intended to coerce a target through positive compelling actions or negative deterrent actions.²¹

James Cable looks at many aspects of active naval suasion, calling it active 'gunboat diplomacy.' He divides the coercive mode into four sub-groups.

1. Definitive Force: Naval use which is intended to remove the cause of a dispute, i.e., a 'fait accompli'.
2. Purposeful Force: It is intended to threaten or actually inflict damage on a target in order to guide the actions of that target. The target of this type of active naval diplomacy has two choices - to comply or to resist.
3. Catalytic Force: Precipitates an impending action or a problem. It is a mode for potential conflict escalation.

20 H.J.Kearsley, n.2, p.5.

21 Edward Luttwak, n.19, p.8.

4. Expressive Force: Such use of naval force mainly displays one's own attitude or feelings rather than affecting a target. It may be underline a commitment or be a device to let off national steam.²²

Cable's theory of naval utility progresses from bargaining and signalling to coercive diplomacy and deterrence which leads to a show of force and results in 'gunboat diplomacy.' "Gunboat diplomacy has its full efficacy when behind the gunboat was known to lurk a cruiser, and behind the cruiser a formidable battle fleet, argues Lawrence Martin."²³ The crucial psychological dimension of gunboat diplomacy can be seen here; the 'perceptions' of the target, and the 'credibility' of the initiator.²⁴

Bargaining and signalling involve routine naval movements and deployments. More forceful methods, like disruption of routine naval movements to convey concern to a target state, is adopted for coercive diplomacy/ deterrence. This remains non-threatening to the extent of the initiator's or target's ability and willingness. 'Show of force' allows for no misinterpretation of intent.

"Gunboat diplomacy, the final product, is the use or threat of limited naval force (by a state), otherwise than as an act of war, in order to secure advantage or to avert loss, either in the furtherance of an international dispute or else against foreign nationals within the territory or jurisdiction of their own state."²⁵

22 James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy*, second edition (London, 1981), p.16.

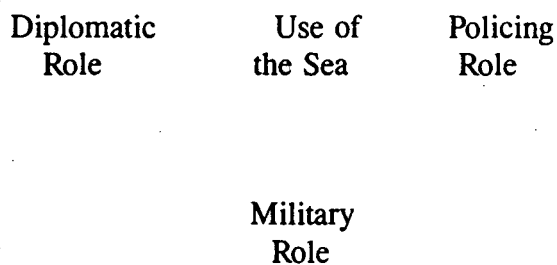
23 L.W.Martin, "The Use of Naval Forces in Peacetime", *Naval War College Review*, January/February 1985.

24 Kearsley, n.2, p.6.

25 Cable, n.22, p.21.

Ken Booth describes the peacetime uses of a navy in a geometric form. He views the role of a navy as three sides of an interrelated triangle.²⁶

Diagram 1



The 'diplomatic role' is one in which the navy buys time for diplomacy to "negotiate from a position of strength." It is designed to reassure allies and to threaten adversaries. The navy is also able to enhance the prestige of a state in the eyes of the international community (Cable's expressive diplomacy).

The 'policing role' consists of coastguard responsibilities and reinforcement of sovereignty over the state's own population. While similar to Luttwak's 'latent naval suasion', it is instead directed internally by the initiating state, for enhancing stability and development.

The military role of the navy would include coercive active naval suasion', 'show of force' and 'gunboat diplomacy' in preparation for a potential conflict. Booth also

26 Ibid.

includes "extended defence" which is otherwise known as 'power projection', i.e., operating beyond a navy's coastal waters.²⁷

Naval Use in Wartime

In examining the application of naval power in times of war, Geoffrey Till concentrates on a concept that, in terminology, is reminiscent of Mahanian notions. 'Command of the sea' is used by Till as a substitute for the more modern phrase, 'sea control'. While many theorists and naval men object to 'command' as being too finite a word which allows for little flexibility, Till incorporates the idea in his theory in the following way.²⁸

Winning, keeping, contesting or ignoring command of the sea	COMMAND OF THE SEA	Purposive or preventive use of the sea
Decisive Battle		Trade
Fleet-in-Being		Coastal Tasks
Blockade		Projection of Power
		Naval Diplomacy
		Strategic Deterrence

Till believes that there are three ways in which a state can command the seas: through decisive fleet action; keeping a fleet in being (threat of battle is always maintained); or blockading an opponent's fleet. All have varying impact upon a state's ability to carry out functions listed under "use of the sea."

27 Ken Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy* (London, 1977), pp.16-21.

28 Geoffrey Till, *Modern Seapower: An Introduction* (London, 1987), p.6.

The role of a naval arm in war may be summarised to include three key points.

1. Naval action that is brought in direct support of land warfare by assisting with the transport of troops, their landing by force, fire support and heavy logistic support.
2. Naval actions that are purely naval, i.e. those aimed at other naval elements or consisting of autonomous operations against shore targets. Ensuing 'control of the sea' for freedom of action in the area of operations is an important feature of this type of naval role.
3. Naval actions that are aimed at three common denominators namely territory, maritime commercial assets, or maritime forces.²⁹

Finally, Admiral Hill's writings on the use of naval force in the modern conflict environment may be reviewed. He does not believe in a complete distinction between 'sea control' and 'command of the sea'. All maritime conflicts have elements of both in them. Hill introduces the idea of 'reach', or the navy's ability to travel to a distant shore and stay there. The unglamorous but vital role of logistic support is recognised as "an important element of reach and in modern times, with few bases available to powers, it is either necessary to cultivate friends or provide autonomous means if reach is to be sustained."³⁰ This means a combination of qualities in warships, auxiliaries and the sailors who man them. 'Power projection' has a specific appeal and relation to the issue of sustainability and a wide universal application, to virtually every maritime power. Sustainability is perhaps the most vital element of reach, and due to advent of EEZs (Exclusive Economic Zones) virtually every navy now requires a form of 'blue-

29 Hubert Moineville, *Naval Warfare Today and Tomorrow* (Oxford, 1982), p.116.

30 J.R. Hill, *Maritime Strategy for Medium Powers* (London, 1986), pp.79-89, cited in Kearsley, n.2, p.74.

water' ability in its fleet, i.e. a wide base of local effectiveness and a narrow peak of universal competence.

Hill accords to the phrase 'sea denial' equal merit as the more prominent terms 'sea control' and 'command of the sea'. Attempts to deny control is a more relevant and more realistic strategy in modern naval war. He has also provides a list of possible 'levels of conflict' which any state's navy may encounter and must be prepared to deal with. Three distinctions are made.³¹

Armed Peace

1. Fleet/ship readiness
2. Effectiveness, efficiency, training, organization.
3. Intelligence-gathering, surveillance.
4. Presence, port visits
5. Constabulary duties (fisheries, EEZ, customs).
6. Strategic deterrence
7. Demonstration of rights (geographically restricted)
8. Demonstration of resolve (non-geographical)

Low-intensity Operations

9. Amphibious landing by invitation
10. Evacuation of nationals
11. Counter-terrorist operations

31 Ibid, p.149.

12. Illegal immigration control
13. Counter piracy operations
14. Offshore installation protection

Higher Level Operations

15. Ship passage against opposition
16. Amphibious landings on hostile shore
17. Bombardment of the shore
18. Denial of passage (blockade)
19. Denial of sea areas
20. Local or restricted sea battle
21. General war.

Missions of Modern Navies

In the increasingly uncertain post-cold war security environment of intra-regional tensions, interstate conflicts, and low-level insurrections, it is far from clear where a situation that might require the commitment of naval forces may arise. Maritime disputes and claims may be the most logical context for deployment of seapower, but political, cultural and economic tensions that prevail may indirectly require naval force projection. The mission of the world's navies have therefore been substantially altered. Navies may now be required (a) to display by their presence an interest in a situation and a readiness to act if necessary, (b) to support intervention by safeguarding and by

providing humanitarian assistance to beleaguered peoples, and (c) to intervene directly to defeat an aggressor nation.³²

The levels of threat to forces so deployed also vary considerably, from those threats emanating from the proliferation of small arms (such as piracy, terrorism) to large scale, organized nuclear armed military forces. Missions for naval forces thus will have to be developed in relation to the nature of a situation or conflict and the national interests involved. These naval missions will tend to evolve as a situation evolves or as conflicts threaten to escalate. Broad mission categories thus evolved may include (a) influence, through presence of naval forces, (b) enforcement or intervention using naval power, (c) quarantine or the containment of spillover effects on the national interest through both the aforesaid factors, and (d) direct protection (deployment of seapower for the defence of territory and waters). Patterns of naval missions then are likely to be those reflecting the maintenance of credible long-term commitments to security, interspersed with the need to accomplish quick, visibly effective tactical action to reinforce the perception of the ability to prevail in any conflict.³³

This study proceeds to understand the growth and spread of Chinese naval power using the following chapter schema. The first chapter will trace the background of naval development in Communist China in the first thirty years after 1949 under Mao Ze Dong. The political climate that prevailed, ideological preferences and technological priorities which influenced naval force structuring will be related. The second chapter of this study will look at doctrinal changes and fleet modernization programmes initiated

32 David J.Campbell, "What are the Threats?", *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute, March 1996, p.62.

33 *Ibid.*, p.63

after 1978, seek to understand Chinese military and naval strategy, and throw light on current naval strategic goals. The third chapter details the inventory of the People's Liberation Army-Navy and assesses its strengths and weaknesses related to altered strategic doctrines. The fourth chapter will investigate the implications Chinese naval growth is having on regional security in the Asia-Pacific.



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CHAPTER II

POLITICS, IDEOLOGY AND NAVAL POWER

The aim of this chapter is to give a brief overview of the political developments and ideological orientations which influenced China's naval development from 1949. The chapter also traces the navy-building programmes initiated by Mao Ze Dong notwithstanding his preference for land forces and guerilla warfare. The Navy's modernization and acquisition programmes which began in this era mainly through Soviet aid to China in naval technology and platforms, the subsequent break with the Soviets, the Chinese navy's urge to develop through other foreign procurements, the debate between technological expertise and correct political orientation are all dealt with here. The last part of the chapter recognises China becoming conscious of maritime rights and claims that has become an important factor leading to the naval fleet modernization programme which is the focus of this study.

The People's Liberation Army is unique among the world's major armed forces for the importance it has attached to political activity and ideological indoctrination. It is the primary instrument of power for the Chinese Communist Party, used not just to conquer and defend but also to indoctrinate, educate, control and mobilize the Chinese people.¹

Though it is a branch of the PLA, the navy of the People's Republic of China has been continuously granted a position of privilege in the system of compulsory political participation. Naval politics and the navy's involvement in the tides of politicization and professionalization have been characterised by phases of superficial involvement

1 David G. Muller, *China as a Maritime Power* (Boulder, 1983), p.69.

punctuated by radical indoctrination campaigns. A symbiotic relationship may be said to have evolved between the Party and the navy, and the latter has almost always reciprocated by verbally and symbolically furthering politicization programmes while simultaneously clamouring for a more modern and active force structure.

Naval modernization in Communist China after the birth of the People's Republic in 1949 initially became secondary to a predominantly continentalist warfighting strategy. It is also true that under Chairman Mao Ze Dong, China never attempted to assume maritime security responsibilities aggressively by employing the navy. The trend under Mao was the perpetuation of the continentalist tradition, where the land forces were most important. The Chinese communist leadership sprang from the peasantry with little formal education and less technical skills. Trained only as guerilla fighters and to an extent as experts at riverine warfare they were quite alien to the uses of naval power and maritime security.²

These aspects of the nature of the leadership would act as an obstacle when programmes of naval modernization were later initiated. Naval development itself remained a low priority issue with only a small force organised for coastal defence, the main arm of maritime strength. The primary responsibility of even this force was to protect the PLA's short range aircraft based on the coasts.

Beginning of the Modernization Debate (1950)

The defeat sustained by PLA forces while attempting to retake the island of Quemoy in 1949 from Nationalist Taiwan convinced the Chinese to rethink naval

2 Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon* (Annapolis, 1982), p.183.

policies. Mao's endorsement of the need to build a powerful navy was largely a result of the Nationalist presence across the straits and its navy's control of maritime traffic and sea lanes. The continued harassment of China's coastal shipping by the Nationalist navy was also instrumental in this. So was the presence of the US Navy in the Taiwan Straits and the fear of an amphibious attack on the mainland. In clear violation of US neutrality policy between the Mainland and Taiwan, Chiang Kaishek's Nationalist navy and airforce interfered with Chinese water communications.³ Taiwan was also in possession of the thirty-odd islands off the mainland coast and regular forays by vessels based on these islands succeeded in partially closing down many Chinese ports.

In the aftermath of the Korean War, Mao Ze Dong directed the navy to redefine responsibilities. The new missions outlined were aimed at achieving three strategic goals.

- (a) Eliminate Nationalist naval interference and thereby ensure maritime safety in navigation and transport.
- (b) Participate in the recovery of Taiwan at the appropriate time.
- (c) Oppose the imperialist aggression from the sea.⁴

3 Ibid, p.186. Realising that the Nationalists had lost the Civil War in China the US had been committed to a policy of 'non-interference', regarding happenings in the Taiwan Straits. The US reversed this policy when North Koreans invaded South Korea. The US considered the invasion of Taiwan by Communist Forces, a direct threat to the security of the Pacific area and accordingly President Truman ordered the US Navy Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Straits. Although the Korean war had little direct influence on the development of the PLA-Navy, it did serve to illustrate China's backwardness in seapower. China's navy did contribute to some mine-laying operations (inshore) as well as ferrying supplies to North Korea but had a minimal role compared to the PLA Ground Forces.

4 "The Bright Light Illuminating the Sea: Commanders and Fighters of the PLA Navy Cherish the Memory of Chairman Mao," *Foreign Broadcast Information Service: China* (FBIS, October 1977), p.11.

These strategic tasks supplied the new naval leadership with much wanted visibility and high-level backing for improving the navy. The lack of reliable warships however initially restricted the Chinese to strengthening coastal defence. This meant improvements in sea-defences all along the coast. From Shanhaiguan to Qingdao, massive fortifications made of reinforced concrete capable of withstanding anything but direct and powerful hits were built in the period up to 1952. Trenches were dug and machine guns and artillery placed every few thousand metres. Regular patrols were also started which kept up a constant watch off the coast. The maritime militia - essentially consisting of armed junks and fishing trawlers - became an integral part of coastal defence and of the attacks the Chinese navy launched shortly thereafter against the Nationalists.⁵

After the end of the Korean war in 1953, the Chinese leadership finally began to explore new measures aimed at retaking territory lost to Taiwan. Attention was mainly focused on the recovery of key offshore islands. The three key points were the Dachen Islands, a hundred miles southeast of Shanghai, the Matsu Island and Quemoy further south. The strategic location of these islands meant that they could effectively seal off any sea approaches to communist ports in Zhejiang and Fujien.

Skirmishes broke out at sea, aided by airpower and paratroops, and the Nationalists for the first time came off second best. This was a tremendous morale boost for the Chinese navy which had succeeded in sinking a Nationalist destroyer. The battle was extolled in the Chinese press as an example of 'People's War at Sea' (where armed patrol boats hid in a crowd of fishing junks, dashing out to attack in the cover provided).

5 Muller, n.1, p.84.

Further naval activity led to the Chinese finally evicting the Taiwanese from the Dachen Islands in 1955.

These successes against the Nationalists bolstered the Chinese navy. It strengthened the claims of those who advocated more professionalism and a willingness to adopt western-style tactics and proven assault techniques and equipment. Championed by Lo Ruiqing, Minister of Chinese Public Security Forces and a high-ranking PLA general, naval modernizers considered Maoist protracted warfare strategy outmoded and stated that blockading with naval forces and new technical equipment aimed at annihilating any invader (whether by land, sea or air) was the method to be studied and used.⁶

Ideological Purity versus Technological Priority

Lo Ruiqing's statement highlighted the beginning of the argument regarding military and economic modernization. On one side were the advocates of military, economic and technological systems that favoured a 'forward defence' posture based on deterrence and emphasising professionalization. They also urged the importation of superior foreign military technology (preferably from the Soviet Union) and advisors. The maritime supporters wanted a naval force that could operate beyond the protection of the forts ashore - not a 'blue-water' naval fleet, but a force that could perform at least limited 'blue-water' operations and re-establish Chinese naval control over adjacent territorial areas.

6 Swanson, n.2, p.190.

On the other side were the ideologues: made up of the guerilla warfare advocates, the xenophobes, the continentalists and traditionalists. They favoured a strong, conventionally armed land force equipped to fight protracted People's War. Mistrusting foreign technologies and favouring a path of self-reliance, they retained an almost mystic belief in Maoist military doctrine.⁷ They promoted the continued development of a highly-politicized revolutionary guerilla army.

Despite the grave casualties sustained by the PLA in Korea, most Chinese ideologues retained a fierce belief in Mao's People's War. Guerilla warfare in the overall scheme of continentalist defence, guided by the principles of People's War, was still seen as a useful method of luring the enemy in deep and destroying it. The concept of, and attempts to build, a naval force was alien to the very idea of People's War. Soviet assistance to the naval build up, when forthcoming, was looked upon as an issue where the Chinese were bartering their hard earned sovereignty.⁸

Response of the Chinese Communist Party

The chief policy instrument backing the claims of the ideologues, the Chinese Communist Party, itself had a number of complaints.

First, the Port Arthur-Dalian transfer from the Soviet Union to Chinese control which seemed to represent neo-extra territoriality. Soviet refusal to leave behind defensive weapons and facilities at the port was seen as a source of concern given the

7 Ibid., p.207.

8 John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China's Strategic Seapower: The Politics of Force Modernization in the Nuclear Age* (Stanford, 1994), p.17.

threat of US aggression.⁹ A second complaint, related to the relegation of the political commissar aboard warships to the professional commanders. For the ideologues, this idea betrayed a lack of understanding of Maoist thought and ideological education.¹⁰ The CCP was also concerned about the disparity in pay between Army and Navy personnel, which clearly favoured the navy. The Party felt that this was leading to extravagance by naval personnel, completely contrary to idea of socialism and revolutionary fervour.¹¹ Fourth, the training system had been redrawn to meet high professional and naval warfighting standards under Soviet influence. For the ideologues, the navy constituted a bastion of the 'elite' with its superiority in technical education, weapon systems and professionalism.¹²

The party's response to these issues was the enactment of a retrenchment policy in the navy from 1957 stemming mostly from concern over proper political direction of the force and a budget squeeze. Campaigns were launched to emphasize thrift in training. Many austerity measures and programmes, ranging from saving fuel to cutting down mess expenditures, were called for. Curtailment of Soviet influence also became one of the major tenets of reorientation of the navy. Engagement of the navy and naval personnel in national construction projects were made mandatory.¹³ These steps were

9 Swanson, n.2, p.208. Extra-territoriality means the right of a foreign government to establish courts of its nationals residing in 'backward' countries on the ground that these countries do not possess a reasonable brand of justice, which can be applied to all. Soviet Union relinquished right of extra-territoriality over China in 1924. Hence the reference to the term.

10 Lewis and Xue, n.8, p.15.

11 Ibid., p.16.

12 Swanson, n.2, p.209.

13 Ibid., p.211.

taken to bring the navy back into the revolutionary fold, through reidentification with Maoist doctrine, reduction in naval expenses and limiting professionalism, which were seen to have been surrendered when the navy acting under Soviet influence had opted for the following changes.

Facility Modernization: This included rapid modernization of naval bases and shipyards primarily with Soviet aid and technology. New anchorages, dry docks, repair facilities, warehouses and other such infrastructural items were built. At Qingdao work progressed on shipyards and shipworks, mainly on facilities left behind by the United States.¹⁴ Shanghai was the nerve-centre of maritime enterprise. Shipbuilding colleges and schools modelled after the Leningrad Institute of Shipbuilding were started. The five departments of this college specialised in construction, dynamics, electrical engineering, machine-building and the economics and organization of the ship-building industry.¹⁵ Naval arsenals and torpedo factories were added at Jiangnan base. Although slower paced in South China, naval facility reconstruction nevertheless progressed at Canton, Whampoa, and the Hainan Island.

Naval Weaponry, Training and Professionalism : Naval hardware was supplied to China by the Soviet Union. These included P4 motor torpedo boats, S-1 class submarines, Gordy Class destroyers and Kronstadt class submarine chasers.¹⁶ Active

14 Ibid., p.195.

15 Ibid., p.196.

16 "The Chinese Communist Navy," *Office of Naval Intelligence Review*, declassified (Autumn 1954), p.39. Cited in Lewis and Xue, n.8., p.8.

support was also provided in shipbuilding. Four Riga Class escort destroyers were constructed at Shanghai in addition to the supply of plans for W-class submarines and Soviet designed Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) craft, T-43 minesweepers and P-6 class torpedo boats. Mao Ze Dong's visit to the fleet and ports where he watched vessels operating at flank speed and other exercises, was a great source of inspiration for the navy. The 'Great Helmsman's' call for advanced technology training and scientific work was exactly what the navy wanted. Coinciding with this was the establishment of the Academy of Military Sciences.¹⁷ Several conferences were organized in which naval men and technocrats participated to chart out the new course for the navy. Training became much more professional with the study and analysis of the style of operations of major seapowers. Soviet influence was also extolled in the available literature on naval activities and party communiques.

Naval Organization, High Command and the Fleet System

Other important matters sorted out by the naval leadership included the organizational structure of the Chinese navy. This had been spelled out by Mao, created for the purpose of people's war. The navy was organized more or less on army lines with the Naval headquarters created in 1950 enjoying a fair degree of autonomy. Operational matters were under the purview of the navy, the General Staff Department, and the Central Military Commission. Command and control in the navy was also through Military Region Commands modelled after the army's traditional provincial

17 "Chinese Academy of Military Sciences Set Up", New China News Agency (NCNA) in *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), no.1736 (March 16, 1958), p.2. Cited in Swanson, n.2, p.195.

command system.¹⁸ Tactics to be employed were those of guerilla warfare and explicitly defined.

Adopting a three-fleet system in 1955, the Chinese divided the navy into the North Sea fleet operational in the Yellow Sea and Bohai Gulf from the Korean border to the Shandong-Jiangsu provincial boundary. The East Sea fleet's operating status was till the Guangdong province and the South Sea Fleet was responsible for waters extending from the Guandong boundary and the Vietnamese borders which also included Hainan island. The fleets were headquartered at Qingdao, Shanghai (later shifted to Ningbo) and Zhanjiang respectively.¹⁹

The Debate Continues 1957-59

The ideological backlash of the late 1950's coupled with China's distancing itself from the Soviet Union was a significant event for the navy. Under the onslaught of the traditionalists, steps had been undertaken to counter growing Soviet influence. The Chinese Communist Party also made other gains as reflected by the statement of Admiral Su Zhenhua, first political commissar of the navy, which opposed doctrinairism and formalism in the navy at the time of the 1957 naval activists conference. The People's Daily followed with an article on the navy's role which conspicuously omitted Soviet influence but commended the naval arms for promoting agricultural production, economy in operations and for further encouraging inventions or recommendations by sailors and

18 US Navy Department, ONI (declassified report) Serial 10-5-58 April 15, 1958. Cited in Muller, n.1

19 Harvey W. Nelson, *The Chinese Military System* (Boulder, 1977), p.171.

enlisted men that had resulted in savings for the government.²⁰ It was emphasized that the People's navy must continue to manifest the glorious traditions of the PLA in the spirit of devoting their service wholeheartedly to the people and in elevating political awareness.²¹

Others write-ups by leading admirals clearly aimed at strengthening the Party's absolute leadership of the navy. It was quite critical of the 'rightists' (modernizers) who wanted to see the Party's control removed. The highly class-conscious members of the navy, they said, should recognise the role of the Party for without the former, there would have been no People's armed forces.²²

While the modernizers continuously bemoaned the lack of a naval tradition or a foundation on which a strong force could be built, stressing thus that ideas had to be borrowed from abroad, the ideologues contended that the navy was built on the foundation provided by the PLA, and on the personal experience of Chairman Mao Ze Dong and that the Navy should be guided by these two elements in setting out basic strategy and tactics for victory in people's revolutionary warfare.²³ It was not then a question of tradition, experience or foundations but whether the correct method of study and Mao Ze Dong thought were applied. The ideologues stressed 'unity of study with practice' as against 'mechanical copying'. Political cadres re-iterated that Mao's ideas

20 Swanson, n.2, p.210.

21 "Build up a Powerful Naval Defence Force" Renmin Ribao (People's Daily) quoted in South China Morning Post (SCMP) no.1498 (March 27, 1957), p.5. Cited in Swanson, n.2, p.170.

22 Zhou Xihan, "Let us Inherit and Uphold the Glorious Tradition of Our Army and Strengthen the Building of Our Navy," SCMP (30 July 1957). Cited in Muller, n.1, p.46.

23 Swanson, n.2, p.211.

differed fundamentally from those of the 'dogmatists' since they were formed according to actual situations and not on the advice of foreigners.²⁴ The key method was to crack down on superstition and slavish ideology, for the People's forces dealt with the masses, for whom reality was the touchstone. Modernization methods were also to be charted according to Chinese conditions, as 'theory is derived from practice and skill attained through toil.'²⁵

The Naval 'Red' versus 'Expert' Policy (1959-1966)

After the break with the Soviet Union, the Chinese faced problems on multiple fronts. Spares were not available for the lend-lease weapon systems received from the Soviet Union. It was compounded by a general economic depression orchestrated by the Great Leap Forward (GLF) programme of Mao. This period of strain was characterised by four main trends in Chinese strategic goals. The primary one was how to assure national security. Following this were thoughts on how to achieve 'great power' status, the question of reunification (Taiwan and other regions) and the promotion of revolution and socialism in the world.²⁶ The technology versus ideology debate subsequently gathered momentum.

The elevation of Marshal Lin Biao to the post of Vice-Chairman of the Military Affairs Commission coincided with this. The first issue to engage Lin Biao was the mechanical failures that the navy was experiencing. The second was how to determine

24 Ibid., p.212.

25 Ibid., p.212.

26 Ibid., p.224.

what technological priorities were there to be calculated and implemented, for naval development. The navy itself was divided over how to address the modernisation question. While some leaders believed in the efficacy of a Soviet- style missile submarine programme with a keen eye on naval developments taking place around the world, the others wanted to build the coastal defence forces. On top of this, Lin Biao had to accommodate the arguments of the ideologues who viewed most new concepts in naval building as 'revisionist', for they wanted the concept of people's war to be strengthened by putting to use China's vast manpower to fight a protracted war within Chinese territory in the event of invasion. For them the navy was a minor factor clearly relegated to the task of traditional coastal defense and guerilla style interdiction operations.

Expert Phase

Lin Biao initially chose a compromise path by championing the cause of a technologically proficient naval force subordinate to politics. Lin put his own men in charge of the navy to ensure complete cooperation. Prominent among those who had just attained flag-rank were Li Zuopeng, a long time Lin protege who was named both navy Deputy Commander and First Political Commissar. Admiral Xiao Jingnang retained his position as Chief of Naval Operations perhaps because he had served for many years under Lin during the civil war.²⁷ Another old Lin associate, Vice Admiral Fang Qiang

27 William W. Whitson, *The Chinese High Command* (New York, 1973), p.14.

was to head the Sixth ministry of Machine Industry. The ministry created in 1963 was changed with merchantship and naval combatant construction.²⁸

For a time it seemed like the 'experts' had prevailed over the 'reds'. Lin Bio's determination to move on boldly with naval research and development projects despite political opposition certainly seemed to reflect this. The navy also paid keen consideration to theoretical and practical programmes.

The importance of this era for China's naval build up was the beginning of the study of nuclear propulsion and construction of a tear-drop shaped nuclear submarine hull. Highly theoretical research was present in this effort, carried out at the Shanghai-Jiaodong University. A continuous stream of articles in Chinese Shipbuilding Journal, showed that there was awareness of experiments being carried out by Western and Soviet experts. Other priorities included research on highly sophisticated subjects such as linearized theory for two-dimensional and fully cavitating hydrofoils, manoeuvrability of jet propulsion ships, forecasting methods for performance curves, points of navigable working conditions for the turbine super-charged two-stroke diesel engine, theory and analysis of vertical blade propellers and their characteristics.²⁹ Engineering efforts were concentrated on British Napier and West-German Junker four-shaft engines. Capable of tremendous power and of a light weight, these were excellent for use in torpedo boats and hydrofoils. Relying on Soviet plans that had been left behind, the Chinese pressed on in the production of submarines and small surface combatants.

28 Chu-Yuang Chen, *The Machine-Building Industry in Communist China* (Chicago, 1977), p.13. Cited in Yeu-Farn Wang (Aldershot, 1993), p.20.

29 Article no.2, Joint Publications Research Service of United States Information Service (Trans. from *Zhongguo Zaochuan*) no.24, April 1964. Cited in Swanson, n.2, p.164.

World class submarines were almost in serial production as well as a follow on prototype of the Soviet R-class. These potentially helped to extend China's offensive capabilities at sea. The conventionally powered G-class missile submarine's prototype, based once again on Soviet plans was constructed at Dalian in 1964, carrying three surface to surface missiles (SSM) (SS-N-4-Sark) each having a 600 m range. Although installation and development of the weapon system suffered from lack of technical expertise, it was a beginning nevertheless. Also constructed were a large number of hydrofoils and coastal patrol crafts with mine laying capabilities, all the while keeping older fast-attack craft in good working order. This was also true of older amphibious warfare vessels like LST's (Landing Ship-Tank) LSM's (Landing Ship-Mechanised) and LSIL's (Landing Ship-Infantry Landing) which were kept at peak conditions for use in military operations.

The operational training of naval personnel also was carried on at rapid rate. This was described as intensive practice in the harbour and qualitative practice at sea.³⁰ These ranged from regular classes in fitting out vessels for seagoing, practising shipboard routines, to engineering aspects, navigation and weapons drills. This state of affairs was however brought to an abrupt end with Lin Biao shifting allegiance to the side of the ideologues.

'Red' Phase

In sharp contrast to his earlier deviation to the side of expertise, Lin Biao subsequently launched a campaign that was intended at consolidating political control over all elements of the military. Naval commanders and fleet level political commissars

30 J.C.Cheng (ed.), *The Politics of the Chinese Red Army: A Translation of the Bulletin of Activities* (Stanford, 1966), pp.639-40.

were urged to 'learn from the Army.' Ideological training among the crew took on added importance. The influence of political commissars reached its zenith. Unlike the Soviets, the Chinese ordered the commissar to sharpen technical expertise in addition to ideological education to gain the confidence of naval rank and file and to avoid a 'watch dog' image. But the commissars took complete charge of supervisory matters from navigation to safety measures. Thus CCP control over the routines aboard warships was strengthened. The Captain and Chief Officers were to remain nothing more than 'watch-standers', according to this method. The organizational and psychological aspects of ship-board life remained in the hands of the political commissar. This politicised nature of shipboard routine brought forth its own problems. Over-zealousness in commissars was obviously resented by the officers but most chose to stay silent for punishment of mutiny would be swift and terrible. Lin Biao further initiated a programme called "four good units" and 'five good sailors.'³¹ It sought to implement designations of political excellence for ships and individuals who were expected to promote political unity, livelihood, military skills and tactics. The qualifications for a division, to meet this criteria, was to be good in (1) political and ideological work; (2) the "three-eight" work style; (3) military training; and (4) arranging daily life.

Naval conferences in the Lin Biao era played up these designations, commanding divisions and units which came 'good' while pressuring those who had difficulty attaining these standards. They were exhorted to make 'good' by cooperation between crew and officers listening to the crew's suggestions for officers, and regularly and promptly

31 Swanson, n.2, p.231.

submitting problems concerning tactical direction to the Party Branch Committee.³² The naval school's cumbersome curricula was made even more so by the imposition of political ideas, thus complicating the teaching of technical and tactical skills. What was extolled by the CCP was the idea of a "bare-foot" commander and "thatched hut" naval school as excellent examples of revolutionary practice. Needless to say, these matters would in the long-run succeed in relegating the already backward navy further.³³ There are many instances of CCP recommendations becoming physically and materially destructive. A prime illustration is a coastal PT-boat squadron undertaking an 'open ocean mission' under the aegis of the CCP resulting in serious mechanical damage and personnel injuries.³⁴ Added to this, the CCP was always suspicious of the emerging naval technocrat who would confuse technical skill with wrong ideological direction and 'revisionist' tendencies.

The PLA and the CCP attempted to check these tendencies by bringing naval officers and men into closer contact with the masses by putting them to work on the shore in a major land reclamation movement. Thousands of sailors of the East Sea Fleet cleared 7000 acres of land and planted crops in addition to constructing a large dike and new river channels for irrigation.³⁵ Later party statements reflected the fact that a

32 Ibid., p.231. Three-eight work style: A 'tradition' fostered under Mao Ze Dong, where it was summed up by Mao in three phrases and eight additional characters, meaning firm, correct political orientation, a plain hard-working style, flexibility in strategy and tactics; unity, alertness, earnestness and liveliness.

33 Ibid., p.232.

34 "Naval Committee Defeats Lo Ruiqing's Line", (NCNA), 5 December 1967.

35 "A Certain Naval Unit in Ch'ung-Ming Island Reclaim Over 6,000 Mou of Land on Barren Beach," *Dagong Bao* (Peking) in SCMP no.2749, 8 May 1962, pp.13-14. Cited in Muller, n.1, p.68.

great majority of these were educated youth from the urban areas who had to be motivated by ideological fervour for instilling revolutionary ideas.

The Navy and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1971)

While the naval leadership may have been little impressed in reality with Lin Biao's moves to further politicize the armed forces, they badly needed his support for the Navy's development and thus complied with outwardly in the political agenda. 'Operational posture should not suffer' was their main motto. The navy spent a considerable amount of time in political indoctrination programmes from 1960 to 1965. Also, most naval leaders were long time followers of Mao as well as 'Long-Marchers' themselves. They did not want to completely do away with ideological training and politicisation. They however sought to draw the line when political activity threatened to endanger combat readiness.³⁶

The ensuing strategic debate was the manifestation of a longer power struggle, one that pitted ideologues against the emerging neo-maritime advocates. Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping (then general secretary of the CCP) were the main voices among the latter. China's destiny, for them, was inseparable from intellectual freedom. They sought to de-emphasize domestic and foreign 'class struggles' by wanting to improve the economy through adopting wage and material incentive programmes, borrowing foreign technology, creating a strong and effective collective leadership system and the development of a modern military force. Liu and Deng both wanted to improve China's navy and merchant fleet either by purchase or charter. They felt that, unless China

36 Muller, n.1, p.131.

modestly copied foreign designs and production techniques, any large scale maritime building programme was unattainable.³⁷

The Cultural Revolution which was initiated in 1966 was a turning point in the navy's and its main modernization advocates fortunes. In the early days of the Cultural Revolution, the navy was still training at an exhaustive rate but the renewed emphasis on compulsory politicisation created serious rifts between the ideologues and the modernizers. Admiral Su Zhenhua, a long-time comrade of Deng Xiaoping, was at that time a full admiral and first political commissar of the navy. While his early programmes hinted at an effort to bring together 'red' and 'expert' politics, he was clearly more inclined towards greater professionalism and infusion of better technology. Su's crime was paying only lip service to the political-reinforcement campaign and identifying himself with the Deng-Liu Shaoqi He Long clique. Marshall He Long, the Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission, was another who felt that operational training had been degraded by the emphasis on ideology.³⁸ As the Cultural Revolution gathered momentum, Li Zuopeng, Su Zhenhua's replacement and a Lin Biao follower, exhorted all officers and men to respond to the great revolutionary call of Chairman Mao. Admiral Wang Hongkun, speaking on behalf of the PLA Navy, announced that all commanders and fighters of the navy should respond with the greatest resolution and enthusiasm to Chairman Mao's call. Politics was asked to be put in command and the military and navy were urged to go to the masses to make the Cultural

37 Swanson, n.2, p.237.

38 From FBIS-CHI (8 December 1967), p.CCC 10. Cited in Lewis and Xue, n.8, p.144.

Revolution even better.³⁹ While the entire naval fleet and merchant marine may have pledged to support the extreme left, clashes between fishermen and naval personnel with the Red Guards broke out repeatedly on the Zhoushan Islands and other ports such as Qingdao and Dalian. The frustration of military and naval commanders was compounded by the fact that Mao was urging them to shorten military education at training schools. This led in turn to Lo Ruiqing's submarine policy of thirty percent non-qualified crewmen to seventy percent qualified crewmen being replaced by an irresponsible and dangerous system that approved deployment of submarines to coastal areas with as much as eighty percent of the crew newly assigned. The basic training period of submarine crews was halved and torpedo target practice and weapons drills shortened. Naval personnel were also made to observe compulsory shore-duties for a period of three years.⁴⁰

The 1967 Wuhan uprising witnessed the deployment of gunboats from the East Sea Fleet to quell the challenges to the 'leftists'. Strongly criticised by the emerging power centre around Madam Mao, the Wuhan uprising proved to be a turning point in the course of the Cultural Revolution. Many naval commanders, did not approve of this deployment and ordered the navy to root out the Red Guards. Simultaneously many high-level purges occurred within the navy. Admiral Zhang Xuesi was purged from the position of Navy Chief of staff. Kang Zhiqiang, director of the Naval institute, and North Sea Fleet political commissar Fang Zhengping were also casualties. Admiral Fang

39 NCNA release, 13 November 1966 in SCMP no.3823 (18 November 1966), p.6. Cited in Swanson, n.2, p.238.

40 In 'Radio Talk Describes Conscription System in China,' FBIS-CHI (17 April 1974), p.e9. Cited in Swanson, n.2, p.178.

Qiang, minister of the ship building industry (Sixth Ministry of Machine-building), was identified as a partner of the Liu-Shaoqi - Deng clique and purged. His departure greatly affected the momentum of maritime research, development and construction. These modernizers' reliance on European charter systems and their urge to buy up more merchant vessels and import foreign technology were frowned upon. This in turn would affect the management of shipyards too. Liu and Fang were criticised for reliance on technocrats and the deemphasis of naval construction in favour of economic interests. At the Hudong Shipyard at Shanghai, the main base for production of merchant vessels and naval combatants, a power struggle between Maoists and anti-Maoists led to the virtual closure of the dock. The technocrat, anti-Maoists pushed for more rational management approaches to research, production and construction that required learning Western methods. The Maoists opposed these ideas on the principle of self-sufficiency. A naval unit would be sent subsequently to Hudong to stabilise the situation. These incidents adversely affected China's shipbuilding. During the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, China produced only sixteen major combatants. Twelve R class submarines and four Jiangnan frigates (similar to the Soviet Riga class). Smaller vessels continued to be built as they did not require a further high level of construction skill and were based on prototypes built prior to 1966 for technological skill and know-how.⁴¹

The 1967 Naval Conference saw the articulation of such maxims as "Sailing the seas depends on the Great helmsman" and "Making revolution depends on Mao Ze Dong thought." While castigating 'counter revolutionary revisionists' like Peng Dehai, Lo Ruiqing and others, it sought to build the world's strongest navy - the PLA navy aimed

41 Swanson, n.2, p.246.

at revolution and powerful enough to defeat imperialism.⁴² Several scenarios of guerilla warfare and 'people's war at sea' were portrayed as the navy veered continuously to the left in an unrestricted effort to placate the ideologues while staying clear of political infighting.

The results of the Cultural Revolution in China and particularly for the navy were disastrous. If it was intended at reinforcing technological isolationism, coastal defence and politicisation at the expense of operational training and strategic weapons development, it achieved those goals and more.⁴³ Morale and combat readiness suffered with new schools of naval strategy based on 'people's war at sea' articulated by the Maoist admirals speaking about making the navy a "great red school of Mao Ze Dong thought."⁴⁴

The Neo-Maritime Spirit and Political Opposition (1971 to 1976)

The 1970's saw the recovery of the navy from the ravages of the Cultural Revolution. Although the Cultural Revolution continued in name till the mid-1970s Lin Biao died after his aborted coup attempt of 1971. The navy at this time saw its share of defence expenditure rise and maintained for a decade. Still articulated predominantly by the 'People's war at sea' school of thought, it however succeeded in returning to a certain level of technical expertise, thanks to the added cash flow. Naval programmes

42 In FBIS-CHI (27 December 1967) pp.CCC6-B from NCNA International Service, 24 December 1967. Cited in Muller, n.1, p.129.

43 Swanson, n.2, p.250.

44 NCNA International Service (Peking), 4 September 1968 quoted in FBIS-CHI (5 September 1968), p.b1. Cited in Lewis and Xue, n.8, p.54.

were dictated mostly by Madame Mao and her 'Gang of Four' in those years. Until 1971, China's merchant fleet and ports were old and outdated. Heavy dependence on foreign charter vessels were required to move goods and the ports lacked facilities for container handling.⁴⁵ To reach maritime self-sufficiency, the 1970s saw China set out to modernize port facilities and purchase vessels. From 1971 to 1976, China purchased hundreds of freighters, tankers and bulk carriers amounting to 2.5 million gross tonnes. Almost a hundred vessels were built in her own shipyards. Ports and shipyards received major facelifts.⁴⁶ China also joined the International Maritime Satellite Organization (INMARSAT).

The radicals with Madame Mao generated much heat against these purchases and modernization. Strong criticism came from the radicals for a 'worship of things foreign' and 'betraying the nation' with backing from the West.⁴⁷ This period coincided with the reappearance of Deng Xiaoping (1973). The tough, pragmatic veteran, after his purge in 1966, was recognised as one of the more vocal advocates of Chinese maritime supremacy. Deng apparently cared little for the radical brand of politics. He was named vice premier and vice chairman of the Central Military Commission in 1973, and his appointment did much to smoothen the way for the maritime modernizers. The radicals who did not approve of Deng were more agitated when the navy announced its uniform change (after ranks and insignia had been done away with in the 1960s) reverting to

45 Swanson, n.2, p.266.

46 Barry M. Blechman and Robert P. Berman (eds.), *Guide to Far Eastern Navies* (Annapolis, 1978), p.96.

47 Xinhua, 9 May 1980 in FBIS-CHI (9 May 1980), p. e.1. Cited in Swanson, n.2, p.188.

Western-style naval uniforms. Madame Mao called the naval, 'Soviet revisionists' and ordered the public press to desist from publishing any pictures depicting naval men in their new uniforms.⁴⁸ The naval war with Vietnam and the capturing of the Paracels in 1974 was also personally overseen by Deng. While the radicals saw this as a victory for 'People's war at sea' and continually attacked Deng, Mao finally stepped in to diffuse the political tension. The radicals wanted bolstering of conventional and ground forces and were for scrapping the navy building programme. Deng and Zhou En Lai enunciated the 'Four Modernizations programme,' the comprehensiveness of which called for a plan to modernize industry, agriculture, science and technology and national defence. Deng proposed a thirty percent reduction of China's military strength, concentration on industrial modernization, enhancing nuclear weapons, communications and logistics.⁴⁹

The ideologues clamoured against these measures with new radical criticism that emphasised spiritual and political attitudes and opined that wars are not won solely with weapons but with correct political orientation and unbending will.⁵⁰ Deng's policies were also aimed at strengthening centralized control over the armed forces. But the fact that these policies were meant to be implemented at the expense of ideology would delay Deng's bid to control China's destiny.⁵¹ For in 1976, Deng's chief patron, Zhou En Lai, died and under the radical onslaught Deng was again purged. On September 7, 1976 Mao Zedong himself died and as the Chinese nation went into mourning for the

48 Swanson, n.2, p.200.

49 George Lauriat, "Another Coming Conflict of Comrades Ahead," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 5 October 1979, p.58.

50 Swanson, n.2, p.271.

51 *Ibid.*, p.273.

single most powerful individual who had controlled China's destiny since 1949, the tide finally turned against the radicals, Madame Mao and her 'Gang of Four'. 'Rehabilitation' of purged former men became the order of the day. The return of Deng Xiaoping to supreme authority in 1978 witnessed the resurgence of a new maritime spirit. The modernizers although still plagued by the lack of facilities which the navy faced had succeeded in turning the tide against the ideologues.

The Navy as an Instrument of Foreign Policy

Throughout the 1960s China did not have major maritime relations with other countries. Operational on two levels; the first, naval assistance lent to a few African, Asian and East European countries and second and most important, a sudden interest regarding international delineation of maritime economic zones, prompted by the South China Seas' potentially vast oil reserves.

The Chinese had been early beneficiaries of massive Soviet naval aid in modernization and fleet construction. In fact, the reliance for ships, spares and tactical doctrines were so great that when the Soviets pulled out in the late 1950s, China's shipbuilding programmes remained scuttled. The Soviet Union had however provided blue prints and even a few vessels for the fledgling submarine and surface force of the Chinese navy. Added to these were designs of patrol boats and torpedo boats and some maritime aircraft. They had also returned certain ports (eg. Dalian) to China and reinforced shore-based artillery and defence. Soviet naval aid helped in providing China with a much needed base from which to commence indigenous ship construction and research and design programmes. Thus, throughout the 1960s, the Chinese were involved in deciphering the blue prints the Soviets had left behind and it was only in the

post-Cultural Revolution phase that they could concentrate on strengthening the maritime force structure.

Sorting out problems relating to the maritime force structure in the 1960s and early 1970s the Chinese set out to gift small naval craft to other countries. Since the Soviet Union and China had fallen apart in all spheres by then, much of this was intended to win political favour at the expense of Moscow.

North Vietnam received a great deal of Chinese naval aid, and this assistance was increased in the late 1960s with US involvement in the Vietnam war. The presence of the US Seventh Fleet in the Gulf of Tonkin was seen as a threat to China's security. Naval instructors imparted training to the Vietnamese in tactics and maintenance. Naval bases were also built.⁵² North Korea was another who profited from Chinese naval largesse in this period. Naval aircraft and gunboats were given to North Korea. The Soviets however outmatched the Chinese by providing the North Koreans with submarines (W class) and Komar class missile boats.⁵³ Other recipients of Chinese naval aid were Albania in Europe and Tanzania in Africa. Albania which sided with China during the Sino-Soviet split received patrol boats, and the Chinese helped the Albanians restore four Soviet submarines impounded by Albania when those two countries fell apart. About 30 Huchuan class hydrofoil torpedo boats were given to Albania from 1968 to 1971. Chinese technicians supervised the construction of a small naval base at Dar Es Salam and eight Shanghai patrol gun boats were also transferred to Tanzania. Another substantive relationship which developed during this time was the

52 S.K.Ghosh, "China's Naval Power", *Strategic Analysis, IDSA Journal* (New Delhi), July 1971, p.78.

53 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1976-1977* (Surrey, 1976), p.298.

Sino-Pakistan naval aid programme. Vice-Admiral Muzaffar Hasan, commander of the Pakistan navy, visited China in September 1970, meeting both Mao Zedong and Zhou En Lai. Considerable naval aid to Pakistan continued all through 1970s into the 1980s.⁵⁴

Gunboat Diplomacy

China's first exercise of what might be termed 'gunboat diplomacy' occurred in 1966 across the Pearl river estuary in Macao. The Portuguese colony's police had clashed with unruly Chinese construction workers. Spurred by the background of the Cultural Revolution in China, demonstrations against the Portuguese followed which turned violent and resulted in eight Chinese deaths.⁵⁵ Local naval forces of the PLA navy primarily consisting of gunboats instituted a partial blockade of Macao. Their menacing presence finally forced the hapless colonial administrators to apologise to Beijing and accepting strong Chinese control and influence in Macao's affairs.

Interest in Law of the Sea

Coinciding with the development of maritime power was Beijing's realisation that national interests extended beyond the coast. Ending decades of isolation, China sought to shape the international maritime political environment to suit these interests. China's leaders realized that the country would benefit greatly from common rules regarding universal issues such as territorial waters limits, delimitation of exclusive maritime

54 *Peking Review*, 30 September 1970, p.4.

55 Muller, n.1, p.210.

economic zones and free passage for ships through international straits. After formally joining the UN in 1971, China made known its views on issues of maritime sovereignty in various forums leading up to the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea in 1973.

Chinese articulation of issues had two main points:

- 1) China sought to project itself as the champion of Third World claims.
- 2) China sought to maintain flexibility concerning the position it would ultimately take and restricted itself to announcing general principles.⁵⁶

Most of China's statements on matters related to maritime jurisdiction centred around the extent of a country's territorial sea with respect to the adjacent coastline. By the 1970's most countries had extended this limit to twelve nautical miles as opposed to the prevailing three (China herself doing so during the 1958 Jinmen crisis). To prevent foreign exploitation of fisheries, many Latin American countries claimed a 200 mile territorial water limit. Opposed by the US and USSR, this claim was supported by China as a 'just claim' against imperialist interjections, although she herself refrained from making such a claim. China believed that each country had a right to define her maritime boundaries, independently negotiating over-lapping claims of neighbouring countries in a spirit of 'equality and reciprocity'. Such claims were to be determined 'reasonably', based upon coastal conformation, width of the continental shelf and conditions regarding coastal resources. Uniform rules regarding these were opposed. Special attention was paid to the issue of the continental shelves which the Chinese considered an integral part of their territory.⁵⁷

56 Muller, n.1, p.210.

57 NCNA, 21 March 1973 in FBIS-CHI, 22 March 1973, p.A2. Cited in Marwyn S. Samuels, *Contest for the South China Seas* (New York, 1983), p.10.

The conference on the Law of the Sea saw the emergence of the issue of exclusive economic zones (EEZ). The Chinese adapted their position to the majority view of claiming exclusive rights to the economic exploitation of sea areas adjacent to the coasts. Economic development and national security were the issues the Chinese emphasised while stating their case. Flexibility regarding claims continued to be the Chinese position, although in practice Beijing could be rigid when its own claims were involved such as in the China seas. China remained suspicious of research projects carried out by other coastal states as they were seen as a cover for resource-related surveys aimed at economic exploitation and intelligence gathering. South Korea, Japan and the Soviet Union were clearly seen as carrying out such operations.

China's outlook on naval strategy after 1978, spurred by these issues, attained a more 'forward defense' appearance. Till then, China had maintained that it was opposed to all foreign military activities and installations on the 'high seas' and exclusive economic zones of coastal states. This after 1978 would have prevented Chinese naval exercises in the West Pacific and may have been responsible for a review of the stand.⁵⁸

On the question of free passage for international shipping, China maintained that civilian ships should be able to pass freely but prior notice be given for the passage of naval warships. Allowing passage of warships would be the choice of coastal countries. This stand seemed to go against what was to be expected from a nation with oceanic naval aspirations. China seemed to be more concerned at preventing deployments by major seapowers. The PRC also took the position that the international seabed be

58 NCNA, 15 May 1978 in FBIS-CHI, 17 May 1978, p.A1.

available to all countries.⁵⁹ However, its exploitations should not be handed over to private corporations. Beijing supported the creation of an authority to monitor and regulate exploration and exploitation of international zones. China was to go back on its earlier stand when she herself started courting western oil companies for oil exploration in the South China Seas beginning in the 1980s.

This chapter has been able to document the contradictory pulls experienced by the PLA-Navy regarding correct ideological perspectives and technological expertise. The Navy was thus involved actively in almost all the political issues which affected China during this period. It was able to continue its shipbuilding programme which suffered only during the period of the Cultural Revolution. Although China was significantly able to increase the number of ships its navy possessed, the strategic doctrines guiding naval operators continued to be one of 'coastal defence'. The focus of this study, to which we turn now is the doctrinal changes and modernization of the fleet in naval operations.

59 *Beijing Review*, 26 April 1982, p.12.

CHAPTER III

DOCTRINAL CHANGES AND MODERNIZATION OF THE NAVY

Introduction

The modernization drive initiated in the Chinese armed forces after 1978 by Deng Xiaoping served to make the People's Liberation Army and its leaders rethink Chinese security strategies. While the PLA and the Chinese leadership were unwilling to do away with the term People's War for their military doctrine, they did refocus defence priorities by qualifying the Maoist concept with the terms 'under modern conditions'. This chapter attempts to trace the evolution of China's modern strategic thought and thereby explain current Chinese military strategy and threat perception. With this as a base it will seek to study the ways and means by which the PLA-Navy has benefitted from reformed strategic thinking and the modernization drive.

People's War

In People's War, the army and the paramilitary forces supported by the populace conducts a protracted war against an invader. Initially, the main Chinese forces using conventional tactics would carry out a strategic withdrawal supported by guerilla-style operations until the invading forces were over-extended and dispersed. When this occurs, overwhelming Chinese forces would be concentrated to annihilate the enemy forces in detail.¹ In the Marxist literature, People's War is the means to secure political ends.² It is the primary method of fighting of the Chinese Communist Party. Territory

1 *Handbook on Chinese Armed Forces* (Defence Intelligence Agency, 1976).

2 Rosita Dellios, *Modern Chinese Defence Strategy* (New York, 1990), p.11.

is not just 'defended', or 'reclaimed', it is 'liberated'. The radical definition of People's War addresses anti-colonial (national liberation) wars. A conservative definition of People's War may offer the idea of amorphous military forces fighting by unorthodox means within a territory that is to be defended against conquest or reclaimed in the event that the invader has established control.³

The radical definition, while including the military aspect, extended the concept of People's War to the identification of a significant political component prevalent in modern revolutionary warfare.⁴ The planned achievement of military victory with an important contribution from the psychological ascendancy of the defender is stressed in People's War. Thus Rosita Dellios comments that the same objective applies to People's War like that of nuclear weapons. Both aim to deter. The threat of People's War like that of nuclear weapons, must be credible, and to be credible it must be perceived as capable of actually inflicting the unacceptable losses that are threatened.⁵

The Constituents of Chinese Military Thought

Chinese military thought has resulted largely from the amalgamation of three key ingredients. These are: Ancient Chinese Military Thought (as characterised by the Sun Zi treatise), the contribution of Mao Ze Dong, and Marxism-Leninism. Apart from these cultural and historical legacies, Mao Ze Dong's personality and reliance on specific conditions supplemented by military, political and social experiences have all contributed

3 Ibid., p.11.

4 Ibid., p.12.

5 Ibid., p.14.

to the forging of Chinese defence doctrines.⁶ An important stream of thought which runs through Chinese strategy, ancient as well as modern, is the stress on the psychological element in combat.⁷ The core of People's War and the laws of Sun Zi are guided by three principles: (1) Mind is superior to matter; (2) Thought is more powerful than weapons; (3) Doctrine overcomes brute strength.⁸

These principles emphasize the importance attached by Chinese to the one cultural trait predominant in their military conflicts and thinking: the supremacy of man over machine. The concept of Mao's People's War however differs from ancient Chinese military strategy by its reliance on guerrilla warfare units coupled with the use of organised armed forces. It further embodies many facets of Soviet strategy such as "luring the enemy in deep" and subsequently destroying the invader. From the Soviet system is also borrowed the Chinese Communist Party's absolute control over strategy and war-fighting, the chain of military command being couched in ideological and political principles guiding the Chinese People's Liberation Army. The Armed Forces, compared to other institutions under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) enjoy greater autonomy and exert more influence in the process of military-political decision-making in China.⁹

6 Georges Tan Eng Bok, "Strategic Doctrine", in Segal and Tow (eds.), *Chinese Defence Policy* (Urbana, 1984), p.4.

7 William Long, "Mao Ze Dong as a Strategist", *Army*, April 1972, p.12 cited in Tan Eng Bok, n.6.

8 Edward S. Boylan, "The Chinese Cultural Style of Warfare", *Comparative Strategy*, vol.3, no.4, 1982, p.353.

9 Paul H.B. Godwin, "Mao Ze Dong Revised Deterrence and Defence in the 1980s", in Paul H.B. Godwin (ed.), *The Chinese Defence Establishment* (Boulder, 1983), p.23.

The constituents of Chinese military thought have also got to be understood in their correct domestic context in order to comprehend the current strategic goals governing the People's Liberation Army. Chinese military thought is composed of military science, the study of which seeks to apply war and the laws directing the conduct of war by supplementing it with major theories of war and strategy to the Chinese military environment.¹⁰ It inspires military doctrine, which is otherwise known as the prevailing national security strategy of People's War and since 1978 as People's War under Modern Conditions. Doctrine emphasizes and explores the theoretical basis of Chinese military science.

Of corresponding importance is the idea of military art. Quintessentially Chinese in character, military art derives its importance from its position in Chinese defence thinking as constituting the practical side of the prevailing national security strategy. Military art will contain what the Chinese regard as strategy, operations and tactics.¹¹ In defining each of these terms or conditions, it is seen that strategy as the Chinese view it is roughly equivalent to the Western military concept of theatre operations. Chinese strategy seeks to employ forces during a conflict at the front and on multi-front levels. The Western equivalent for this is tactical concentration, but in the Chinese context what constitutes strategy is clearly operational at a lower level (i.e., in theatre combat) to the idea of military doctrine.¹²

10 Tan Eng Bok, n.6, p.8.

11 Ibid., p.7.

12 Tai Ming Cheung, "Trends in the Research of Chinese Military Strategy", *Survival*, vol.6, no.2, May-June 1987, p.241.

Operations encompass the explicit use of forces ranging from field armies to corps level units up to large group armies. Thus operations reflect the nature of actual military campaigns. Tactics for the PLA focus on the use of military forces at or below divisional strength, specifically from the regimental level to platoon size groups.¹³ It deals with the nuances of actual combat operations for units on the battlefield. It is from here that Mao Ze Dong had derived the military operational posture of "active defence". Active defence, which was initially conceptualized for the purpose of Maoist 'protracted war' maintains stage by stage operations starting with the enemy's strategic offensive and the Chinese forces' strategic defensive, the enemy's strategic consolidation and the defender's preparation for the counter offensive, till the period of massive counter offensive by the PLA ensuing in the invader's retreat and subsequent destruction.¹⁴

Active defence exemplifies the continued emphasis on 'man over material', as from a Chinese point of view the PLA would always be in a position of material inferiority in relation to invaders, at least initially. The Chinese sought to replace positional warfare with highly manoeuvrable mobile warfare. The latter's effect was enhanced even more by the reliance on guerrilla warfare as a complement to regular fighting forces to attain what the Chinese call 'local superiority.'¹⁵ It is in the field of operations that this linkage between strategy and tactics is created to coordinate the combat of combined forces.

13 Ibid., p.244.

14 *Selected Works of Mao Ze Dong* (Beijing, 1976), p.193.

15 Cheung, n.12, p.250.

Rethinking Chinese Defence Doctrine

Many analysts of contemporary Chinese defence strategy are of the opinion that People's War as the guiding unified doctrine of the PRC's armed forces has become obsolete with the beginning of the modernization programmes.¹⁶ In this context, they also argue that Chinese threat perceptions have significantly altered and that the strategic environment which prevailed when principles of People's War were formulated has disappeared forever.¹⁷ A progressive weakening of the Maoist military legacy is discernible since the 1980s. New perceptions regarding the military environment and the adaptation of a changing security outlook to Chinese conditions reflect this. People's War is a concept in whose unified strategy the land forces historically had the greatest relevance. Modernization and accompanying doctrinal changes have altered this pattern in developing individual strategic doctrines for the hitherto neglected PLA-Navy and Air Force.¹⁸

The PLA's principal research institutes have been given the task of conceptualising and defining emerging single service strategies. The Academy of Military Sciences, the National Defence University and the Beijing Institute of International Strategic Studies have been created with the sole purpose of actualising this.¹⁹ The main aim of the reform process which has swept the armed forces after Deng Xiaoping took over as Chairman of the CCP is to develop and integrate these

16 Jonathan Pollack, "Rebuilding China's Great Wall: Chinese Security in the 1980s", in Paul H.B. Godwin (ed.), n.9, p.12.

17 Godwin, n.9, p.30.

18 Dellios, n.2, p.30.

19 Cheung, n.12, p.253.

organs of the PLA into the advisory and policy making structure of the military high command. In the past, they were very much in the periphery of the decision-making process.²⁰ The PLA aims in this way to intensify the study of comprehensive and tri-service application of armed force. Scientific research which has garnered new importance after the reform process set in, rather than ideology will undergird proposals regarding force structure modernization. The core areas covered under scientific research include the construction programmes of the armed forces studies related to combat preparedness, tactics, and training of the services and various related academic issues.²¹

The new generation of Chinese leaders both military and civilian consider defence research as a fundamental pre-requisite of the PLA's force modernization. As former minister of defence Zhang Aiping has said:

the development of military science must be ahead of the development of China's armed forces. It will be impossible to explore and understand the rules governing future wars if we stick to conventions and regard our past war experiences as dogma.²²

People's War Under Modern Conditions

The 1978 Third Plenary session of the Eleventh Party Central Committee was a landmark. Deng Xiaoping as new head of the Central Military Commission set the PLA on the road to modernising its force structure and strategic doctrines. The call was given

20 Ibid., p.256.

21 General Political Department, Chinese People's Liberation Army (ed.), *China's Army Ready for Modernization* (Beijing, 1985), p.17.

22 Cheung, n.12, p.260.

to make the PLA, "a powerful, modernized, professional and revolutionary military force."²³ The session insisted on the implementation of policies that would help in shedding ideological barriers created by extreme 'leftism' and resolved to turn the PLA progressively into an armed force comparable to the most modernized armies of the world.²⁴

As a point of fact, decisions adopted at the 1978 Third Plenary Session for greater modernization and profesionalization had been articulated by Deng Xiaoping on his first 'rehabilitation' in 1975. Deng had then criticised Lin Biao's style of work in the PLA, holding him responsible for discarding traditions and the style of work established by Mao Ze Dong.²⁵ The problems besetting the armed forces were summed up by Deng. In his opinion, the PLA suffered from 'bloating, laxity, conceit, extravagance and inertia'. Although he reiterated that this was not the general picture it was said to 'apply to a number of units and comrades.'²⁶ Deng proposed a system of cures for the ills affecting the armed forces. These were: to streamline the organizational set up: promote unity and hard work to oppose factionalism; inculcate the correct political spirit to ensure discipline and stability; maintain thrift in the PLA's use of funds; and to actively assume responsibility for criticising and correcting earlier mistakes.²⁷

23 Jonathan Pollack, "Structure and Process in the Chinese Military System", in Kenneth G.Lieberthal and David M.Lampton (eds.), *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley, 1992), p.153.

24 Ibid., p.157.

25 Ellis Joffe, "Civil-Military Relations", in Segal and Tow (eds.), *Chinese Defence Policy* (Urbana, 1984), p.23.

26 *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Beijing, 1984), pp.27-38.

27 Deng, n.26, p.36.

Scientific research had to be promoted aggressively on conventional as well as sophisticated weaponry. Standardization of weapons for all combat units were a must, and the strategy governing war-fighting had to be thought out to suit specific conditions. Military operations and training had to be made stricter and more effective. Deng stressed the importance of combined arms operations and the need to integrate the working mechanisms of all three services of the PLA and the Strategic Rocket forces. He sought to replace the old revolutionary formula of 'millet plus rifles' style of military operations. China's current high-regard for electronic war and technological sophistication made a beginning here. Higher levels of command capability and C³I (Command, Control, Communication and Intelligence) capabilities were to be introduced.²⁸

From 1983, the perception of the Chinese leadership, regarding the real world situation altered considerably. The vigorous defence build up by the US, the general balance between the US and the Soviet Union which emerged in the military arena, and the economic difficulties that were affecting both the superpowers contributed to the view in China that a superpower military confrontation could be ruled out for the immediate future. Beijing was quick in formulating its own foreign and security policies to suit the era of new detente which was emerging.

Domestic economic modernization considerations also had considerably reduced the resources China had hitherto allocated for national defence. The idea that national defence was to be secured only from the benefits accruing out of market reforms and the modernization process prevailed as the dominant opinion among the Chinese leadership.

28 Ibid., p.37.

Thus, in 1985, Deng Xiapoing, while addressing the Central Military Commission, chose to articulate the 'strategic shift' which the new security environment had called for, i.e. the impossibility of an all-out nuclear war involving the superpowers.²⁹

The PLA leadership in responding to this situation thought that there was the need to closely study the nature of future wars. The PLA felt that superpower confrontation could still occur in 'peripheral hotspots' but with less frequency. Secondly, there was also the question of increased incidence of 'local wars' in some regions. Chinese defence modernization and security policy should be seen to adequately address any such eventuality in China's periphery. This 'historic transitional period', the PLA said, had to be made use of to study military theory in an attempt to bring it into conjunction with regional strategic realities and global security trends.³⁰

In this context, the PLA put forward, through its premier research institutes, a set of long-term policies such as 'National Defence Strategy for the Year 2000' and a 'Five Year Plan on Military Art Research' where three priorities were highlighted. The first priority was to conduct research on the characteristics and laws of future wars. The second was to explore ways to perfect the composition of combat power based on changes brought about by new types and methods of warfare, operational level concepts, command and control principles and equipment. Third, it was necessary to reform and implement training stipulations produced by these changes at the operations level in

29 Georges Tan Eng Bok, "How Does the PLA Cope with 'Regional Conflict' and 'Local War'?", in R.H. Yang (ed.), *SCPS PLA Yearbook 1991* (Kaoshiung), p.145.

30 Yang Dezhi, Speech on "All Army Symposium on Theory of Operational Art" reported by Xinhua, 1986, quoted in Tan eng Bok, n.29, p.146.

military art.³¹ The organization of the military, the procurement of weapons systems, the creation of elite units (for airborne assault, air, marine and mountain warfare) and combined exercises have all reflected the adoption of an integrated training programme based on the three priorities.

Local Wars in Chinese Military Thinking

In the Chinese military context, Deng Xiaoping is credited with modifying the classical Marxist-Leninist theory of wars which specified that they are the product of capitalist imperialism's pursuit of world domination. He developed and refined Lenin's thesis on the source of war, by stating that world domination was not restricted to the capitalist imperialists but that Soviet social imperialists also had the same goal. Although the motives of the two blocs may differ, the substance of their action would be identical. Deng concluded that 'hegemony bred modern war'.³² Whilst direct confrontation between superpowers could be ruled out, their involvement in proxy wars fought in the Third World were likely to increase. The Chinese noted that of the one hundred and forty odd conflicts which had occurred since World War II, more than 95 percent had been in Asia, Africa and Latin America. They attributed this to the historical contradictions that had continued to exist between oppressed peoples and oppressed nations and old and new colonialists and their agents.³³

31 Tan Eng Bok, n.29, p.146.

32 "Deng Xiaoping on Peace and War", *Beijing Review*, no.14, 3-9 April 1989, p.19.

33 Chen Qimao, "War and Peace: A Reappraisal", *Beijing Review*, no.23, 9 June 1986, p.20.

While these conflicts continued to have regional limitations, superpowers involvement and the high incidence of wars in Asia had important implications for Chinese security. The Chinese perceived many unsettled issues in their Asian periphery that caused insecurity and was a constant source of instability. China's own territorial integrity and territorial seas were subject to threats and were constantly being violated. This made the eruption of local wars in seemingly relaxed situations the basic form of threat in the foreseeable future.

Local wars differed from general all out war in the sense that they were subject to many limitations, as the complete annihilation of the enemy was never sought. This limitation would affect the means of war, the space- scope of war, and the duration of war.³⁴

Although being aware of the necessity to make conceptual breakthrough in creating new military theories, the PLA leadership did not restrict defence planning and military preparations to contingencies deriving only from regional and local conflicts. The Chinese strategists seemed convinced that numerous small and medium wars in the future could have a nuclear element in it. Local wars could escalate with the use of tactical nuclear weapons, and medium nuclear retaliatory capabilities could prevent great powers from interfering to the benefit of their regional allies.³⁵ PLA leaders have since tried to determine the optimal approaches to winning local wars between China and its neighbours. Approved policy towards regional conflicts was to adopt every diplomatic means to check the outbreak of war, ensure victory if war was inevitable, and

34 Tan Eng Bok, n.29, p.148.

35 John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China's Strategic Seapower: The Politics of Force Modernization in the Nuclear Age* (Stanford, 1984), p.216.

to end the war on favourable terms after the predetermined goals had been achieved.³⁶ Chinese strategists, despite all this still worried about the possibility of 'lightning' or 'surgical strikes' by nuclear armed enemies against strategic targets in China during crises. The maintenance of a 'strategic triad' consisting of missiles, bombers and submarine launched nuclear arms was to be the main element of deterrence against such eventualities.

The Efficacy of the New Strategy

Historically, Chinese military doctrine has maintained that wars involving China's armies will be fought on their own terms and conditions. This leads to denying the enemy the ways and means to dictate and control proceedings in a conflict. People's War was successfully based on this premise where technologically backward forces have combined human wave and highly mobile guerilla tactics to overwhelm more sophisticated enemy forces. Some analysts have questioned the new People's War under modern conditions. Does China still hope to fight in the new era within the terms maintained by the PLA?³⁷ Or does China seek technological equality with the industrially developed world and therefore proposes to have military forces matching their level of development? The answer would seem lie somewhere between these two extremes. Since defence development in China has the lowest priority in the four modernizations programme, the resources left to the armed forces will not be sufficient to actively attain 'leading-edge' technological expertise for combat. China, then, may

36 Ibid., p.216.

37 Dellios, n.2, p.40.

still seek to substitute quality with quantity. This method of operations is true for all service arms of the PLA, including the Navy.

The refusal to fight on the enemy's terms and the corresponding psychological ascendancy enjoyed by Chinese forces have been the defining characteristic of People's War. But, as China develops and modernises its forces in tune with the rest of the world's leading military powers, traditional strategies are increasingly being replaced by technical expertise and combined arms operations,³⁸ both of which characterise the armed forces of those who threaten China's security. Is not then the fundamental tenet of People's War, which has the connotation of being acutely Chinese, seen to be compromised as a winning strategy?³⁹

The PLA and the Chinese leadership assure observers that this is not so.⁴⁰ For the Chinese, there has been a dramatic change in the nature of the country they are defending. With the Four Modernizations and Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic economic reconstruction programmes, China's wealth and strength is being increasingly relocated in the booming urban areas and coastal cities. They are no longer the 'pots and pans'⁴¹ which could be left to the enemy's mercy in Mao's protracted People's War. What the Chinese leadership has thus sought to do is to incorporate the idea of war-fighting in modern conditions to the general theory of People's War. The notion of China being the threatened country is still relevant (at least in PLA rhetoric), but reorganisation of the

38 Paul H.B. Godwin, "Towards a New Strategy", in Segal and Tow (eds.), *China's Defence Policy* (Urbana, 1984), p.40.

39 Jonathan Pollack, n.16, p.17.

40 Deng Xiaoping, n.21, p.20.

41 Mao Ze Dong, n.14, p.198.

PLA and its various service branches reflect a more 'forward deployment oriented strategy. The result has been to push forward the concept of Active Defence to include wider areas of operations. This has been rechristened as "active defence under new historical conditions."

Each service arm of the PLA has now embarked upon rapid induction of modern arms technology and high-skilled training for the personnel manning various units. A transformation is certainly occurring, the pace of which has mostly been dictated by the prevailing position of economic strength from which China has been able to set aside resources for defence development. The PLA is slowly changing from the world's largest 'junkyard army' with outmoded weapons of 1950s vintage.⁴² It has a keen interest in developing a well-pruned but more battle-worthy force structure. China's isolation from the mainstream of military technology and expertise is in the process of being rapidly reversed.

Another important contributor to altered Chinese security thinking and the gradual emphasis on naval and air forces over the primary role of the army is that the Chinese see no threat of an 'early, major nuclear war' which could be fought on Chinese soil.⁴³ The low-threat security environment has resulted from the disappearance of the Soviet land, naval and air threats, the gradual reduction in the US presence off the Chinese coast, the shelving of the border dispute with India and the general disappearance of the threat of continental conflict.⁴⁴

42 Godwin, n.9, p.10.

43 Mao ze Dong, n.14, p.213.

44 Godwin, n.9, p.12.

This has led Chinese planners to recast priorities in defence outlays. The navy has been the service arm to benefit most from this. The rate of naval modernization, though still dictated by the overall modernization of the country, is slowly gathering speed.⁴⁵ Defence budgets in China since 1990 have also become larger in percentage terms causing concern to countries in and around China. Chinese defence budgets have been traditionally difficult to determine, and it is widely felt that published and actual figures are quite different.⁴⁶

Recent Trends in Defence Expenditure

Since 1981, China's defence spending had undergone a sharp decline to stabilise at a more or less constant level by 1990.⁴⁷ This was attributed primarily to the Chinese leadership's desire to subordinate military modernization to the development of the overall economy.⁴⁸ Prior to 1990, China's defence spending fluctuated in response to various internal and external developments. Military modernization received less emphasis than the other areas of the 'Four modernizations'. While assigned a lower 'priority' most analysts view it as a "sequencing" by Chinese leaders, "designed first to

45 Jun Zhan, "China Goes to the Blue Waters: The Navy, Seapower Mentality and the South China Sea", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol.17, no.3, September 1994, pp.180-203.

46 Amitav Acharya and Paul M. Evans, "China's Defence Expenditure: Trends and Implications", *Eastern Asia Policy Papers* (Ontario), vol.1, 1994, p.3.

47 Ibid., p.4.

48 Edward P. Parris, "Chinese Defence Expenditures 1967-83", in US Congress, Joint Economic Committee, *China's Economy Looks Towards the Year 2000* (Washington, D.C., 1986).

modernize the civilian sectors of the economy and then after a broad firm base has been established to emphasize defence build-up."⁴⁹

Since 1990, these trends have however been reversed. The defence budget of RMB 28.97 billion in 1990 constituted a 15.2 percent increase from the 1989 budget of RMB 25.1 billion. The official defence budget continued to rise through 1991 to 1992 with increases of 12 percent and 13.8 percent. The 1993 budget increase was to the tune of 12.4 percent. As the official Chinese defence budget rose by 69 percent from 1990 to 1993, in 1994 it underwent a further 34 percent increase to RMB 58 billion (US \$6.76 billion).⁵⁰ These figures indicate that China's defence spending was 2 percent of the GNP in 1992.⁵¹ Since calculating China's GNP remains as problematic as estimating her defence expenditure, an economy that has experienced double-digit growth rates as a result of economic liberalization may very well contain increases in the defence burden. The official figures may thus belie China's actual defence spending. This is more so, when one considers the People's Liberation Army. It ranks behind only the United States and Russia in overall force size. In terms of personnel the PLA is the world's largest. It has over 3 million personnel, manning 24 Group Armies, over 5,500 fixed-wing combat aircraft, around 60 naval combatants exceeding 1000 tonnes displacement, strategic and theatre nuclear forces deploying at least 14 ICBMs, 60 IRBMs, 1 nuclear fleet ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) with 12 missiles, and an unknown number of air

49 Testimony by DIA Director James A Williams before Joint Economic Committee Hearings on "Allocation of Resources in Soviet Union and China 1982". Cited in, David G. Muller, *China as a Maritime Power* (Boulder, 1983).

50 "Gentle Giant", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 4 August 1994, p.15.

51 Acharya, n.46, p.7.

delivered weapons.⁵² A US \$6 billion defence budget cannot represent the cost of sustaining such a military capability. While taking into account the ongoing modernization programmes for both conventional and nuclear forces, the defence budget may be seen to be not just lacking in transparency, some analysts see its primary purpose as deception.⁵³

Several components of China's defence spending are not reflected in the official budget:

1. Hidden expenditures like the funds for defence scientific research are not allocated from the official defence budget. For instance, the PLA-Navy's R&D budget comes from the Ministry of Transportation.
2. Extra budgetary allocations such as those provided by the State Council to the PLA for enabling weapons purchase. These are necessary to cover capital expenditures on equipment including purchase of foreign military equipment and spending on special weapons projects.⁵⁴
3. While earnestly denied by the PLA, a portion of the earnings of China's defence industries and civilian production appears to be channelled to support defence programmes. The "conversion" of the military-industrial complex to civilian production is strongly supported by the state. An example of this is that military

52 *The Military Balance*, IISS, London, Fall 1993.

53 Paul H.B. Godwin, "PLA Incorporated: Estimating China's Military Expenditure", in Segal and Yang (eds.), *Chinese Economic Reforms - The Impact on Security* (London, 1996), p.57.

54 *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter* (August-September 1993), p.25.

output constitutes only 15 percent of total output of the China State Shipbuilding Corporation.

4. The use of barter trade in arms purchases by China also undermines the accuracy of the official defence budget. Up to 60 percent of the Russia-China arms trade is estimated to be covered by barter trade.
5. Income from the PLA's arms sales abroad is also not reflected in the defence budget. From 1989-92, China ranked fifth in global arms exports, though the share fell from US \$2.3 billion in 1990 to US \$100 million in 1992 - a direct result of the end of the Iran-Iraq war.⁵⁵

Recently released IMF data on purchasing power parity (PPP) calculations are important in determining China's defence expenditure figures. Gerald Segal estimates that since PPP based calculations triple China's GDP in current dollar value, they would also triple China's 1992 defence budget of US \$12 billion. Some agencies and institutes, however, believe this to be only half of China's real defence allocations. Chinese defence expenditure may actually be about US \$36-72 billion, making the country the world's second largest spender on arms.⁵⁶

Influences on the Navy

The PLA Navy is embarking on a massive modernization programme and transition to a blue water power. Its objective is to become a new world class Pacific power in the twenty-first century. In this connection, it has been asserted that 'Long before the navy achieves its long term objective,

55 Acharya, n.21, p.14.

56 The IISS *Military Balance* shows an approximate 5 percent of GDP spent on defence for China, when GDP is calculated using the purchasing power parity method. IISS, *The Military Balance 1994-95* (London, 1994), p.170.

the shift of its maritime strategy from brown water to green water defence has already exerted an impact on the regional power balance.' The countries bearing the brunt will be Vietnam and the ASEAN states which have territorial disputes with China over the Xisha (Paracel) and Nansha (Spratly) islands.⁵⁷

There are many analysts who, however, do not conform to such an 'alarmist' outlook. Michael Leifer points out that the build up of blue-water capabilities, although enhanced of late, is not a new phenomenon originating from the fruits of economic reform. Maritime claims in the South China Sea and the need to cope with the Soviet naval presence in Cam Ranh Bay were important considerations well before the benefits of economic reform became available. The programme of military modernization embarked upon to improve seaborne logistics capability was approved in 1977 before the commitment to economic reform. That the programme has been undertaken and sustained on a systematic basis, within budgetary constraints, has been driven by a consistent territorial imperative. While economic reform has facilitated a more active security policy in the maritime arena, the underlying goals have been set by a long standing view of the historic maritime domain of China. Active naval deployments in the area however date only from the 1980s. A greater budget share has enabled a more conspicuous defence build up, but this is more the pursuit of a long established policy rather than determining a wholly new one.⁵⁸

57 You Xi and You Xu, "In Search of Blue Water Power: The PLA Navy's Maritime Strategy in the 1990s", *The Pacific Review*, vol.4, no.2, 1991, pp.147-8.

58 Michael Leifer, "Chinese Economic Reform: The Impact on Policy in the South China Sea", in Segal and Young (eds.), n.29, pp.144, 148.

The navy, however, has been clamouring for a greater share in the defence budget, currently estimated at 15 percent. Vice Admiral Qu Zhenmou, Deputy Commander of the South Sea Fleet, urged the government "appropriately to increase investment in the Navy and to revise the Navy's combat forces and equipment to meet new strategic demands."⁵⁹ Evidently, this has been satisfied to a certain measure with the procurement from different countries of advanced weapon systems: radars and guided missile systems from Russia; the interest in the Ukrainian aircraft carrier which has been postponed (probably temporarily); upgradation with French help of Luda Class destroyers with 'Crotale' surface-to-air missiles; 16 Nimrod-type early-warning radar systems from the UK; US made Mk-46 and MOD-2 anti-submarine torpedoes; and from Australia 682-type fast attack craft.⁶⁰ In addition, defence of the South China Sea claims have also formed the rationale behind the acquisition of Su-27 fighter aircraft, development of the navy's guided missile, new generation, 4,200 tonne destroyers, more than 25 Jianghu-class frigates, and a 130-strong submarine force.⁶¹ Despite continuing logistical limitations, the Chinese navy has significantly increased its long-range deployments and exercises with larger formations of warships, all pointing to an effort to acquire sea-control capability extending beyond 1000 km into the South China sea.⁶²

59 Quoted in Jun Zhan "China Goes to the Blue Waters: The Navy, Seapower Mentality and the South China Sea", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol.17, no.3, September 1991, p.196.

60 *China's Military: The PLA in 1992-93, SCPS PLA Yearbook* (Kaoshiung, Republic of China), p.102.

61 Tai Ming Cheung, "China's Regional Military Posture", *International Defence Review* (June 1991), pp.618-22.

62 As quoted in Acharya, n.21, p.22.

Naval Strategy Reappraised

The capacity which the navy would like to develop is the effective concentration of force, using naval units, to engage in potential conflict scenarios that could arise around China's coastal periphery, in other words, sea-based local-war fighting capability where high technology plays an important part.

Although the navy's particular role in the modernization of the PLA and China's defence doctrines have occasionally been the combined services' force structure development, there has certainly been a reassessment of China's maritime strategy since the 1980s. The roots of this can be traced to Mao Ze Dong's 1975 endorsement of a navy development plan which sought to build an ocean-going navy. The building of naval capabilities in right earnest began only in 1982. This is also the period in which the aspirations and signs for a blue-water naval strategy began to emerge.⁶³

The 1980s coincided with China's economic reforms and trade-related 'opening up' to the world. This in itself was a significant, though not only inspiration for the rise of new thinking on the utility of seapower.⁶⁴ It was evident that in Deng Xiaoping's "doctrine of People's War under modern conditions" and "military strategy of Active Defence under new historical conditions", the navy had a major part to play.

This period thus witnessed the PLA-Navy attain a higher degree of technological consciousness. Scientific symposia were held under naval auspices where hundreds of papers on subjects like naval combat, mathematics, applied science, strategy and tactics were presented. The Navy's annual congress of 1982 made a break with the past by

63 Jun Zhan, n.45, p.191.

64 Leifer, n.58, p.148.

relegating discussions on political orientation and ideology and emphasised instead technological needs.⁶⁵ Vigorous efforts for modernization were pledged with the large-scale inculcation of scientific knowhow to make warships supremely combat worthy and to match the standards set by the world's leading naval powers. This meant that education and training programmes for naval personnel increased at a rapid rate, with operational research, military science and technology particularly stressed. The Falklands war of 1982 received a great deal of attention and study in the naval institutes and was used as a case in point for re-educating naval personnel on modern strategy and tactics.⁶⁶ Consonant with this, the navy was ordered to develop enhanced combat capabilities and a strategic framework for its operations.

Admiral Liu Huaqing: China's 'Alfred Mahan'

The man entrusted with this task was the new commander in chief of the PLA Navy, Admiral Liu Huaqing. Admiral Liu, who assumed command of the navy in August 1982, had been a long-time associate of Deng Xiaoping. In the early 1950s he had been transferred to the PLA Navy from the post of senior field-grade political officer in the Red Army.⁶⁷ Attaining the rank of Rear Admiral by the mid 1950s he then completed a course of study at the Voroshilov Naval Institute in the Soviet Union in 1958, the cradle of Soviet naval commanders. (Another former student of the Voroshilov Institute is Soviet Fleet Admiral Sergei Gorshkov.) Liu then became Deputy Political

65 Jun Zhan, n.45, p.193.

66 Ibid., p.194.

67 Jeffrey B. Goldman "China's Mahan", *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute Press, p.44.

Commissar of the Luda Naval Base.⁶⁸ In the next two decades, Liu served in a variety of critical fields as warship design, ship-building and the research and development of strategic weapons.⁶⁹ As commander of the navy, Liu Huaqing embarked on a course to chart out an improved force structure and operational doctrine as part of the ongoing military modernization process.

Since 1988, when he relinquished command of the navy, Liu has been Secretary General and ranking Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission and the senior-most serving officer in the Chinese Armed Forces.⁷⁰ After the death of Deng Xiaoping, Liu Huaqing is still a member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the only military figure among the highest echelons of leadership in China.

Admiral Liu had always been convinced that maritime interests are vital for a nation like China and that their protection is a major task for the navy. He stressed this point in the many publications and speeches which were intended to disseminate his ideas on naval strategy.⁷¹ The crux of Liu's thinking on the formulation of a new naval strategy for China, keeping in mind the new found sea-power mentality can be summarised in four points.⁷² First of all, seapower is a crucial element in China's attaining great power status and in articulating and protecting her maritime rights and

68 Lewis and Xue, n.35, p.212.

69 Goldman, n.67, p.45.

70 Ibid., p.45.

71 Jun Zhan, n.45, p.191.

72 Alexander C. Huang, "The Chinese Navy's Offshore Active Defence Strategy: Conceptualization and Implications", *Naval War College Review*, vol.47, no.3, Summer 1994, pp.10-22.

interests, second, the 'Pacific century' has emerged, and the navy has a historical responsibility thrust upon it to ensure peace around China and thus secure and further the path of economic modernization. Third, there is a race on for ocean resource cultivation. No other period of history has witnessed the constant dwindling of land-based resources and competition among great powers to garner resources from the seas. The navy's role in protecting maritime interests therefore becomes critical. Fourth, no longer is a large-scale, land-based invasion by a technologically superior enemy using tactical nuclear strikes the main threat. The existing security environment of China and the maritime interests of most countries making up the region make the outbreak of local or 'peripheral' wars more probable. In the event of such a conflict scenario arising, Liu wants the navy to be prepared and to be in a position to conduct combat far away from China's coasts. The navy must therefore gear up to fight in sea areas where China's maritime interests would be threatened.⁷³

Academic and Institutional Developments

After his elevation to the top post in the navy, Admiral Liu was instrumental in establishing the Navy Academic Guide Committee and the Navy Military Academic Institute with the primary aim of promoting naval strategic studies.⁷⁴ They were ordered to build a comprehensive theoretical framework for naval combat theories applicable to China's security environment. Since then, these institutes have completed many research projects which covered major naval strategic issues. The most important

73 Ibid., p.11.

74 Yaug Guoyu, et al, *The Navy of Contemporary China* (Beijing, 1987), p.527 cited in Lewis and Xua, n.35, p.213.

of these was titled 'On the Appropriate Development of the Navy in the Year 2000.'⁷⁵ Studies were also done regarding future Chinese naval policies, specifically on the situation in the China seas. The navy development plan, as the former is known, envisages a 'three-stage' enhancement of the navy's operational areas and augmentation of capabilities to facilitate it. This project has strongly influenced the strategy of Active Offshore Defence championed by Admiral Liu, the naval derivative of the PLA's military strategy of Active Defence under new historical conditions. Naval modernization in China has thus become inherently connected today to the Active Offshore Defence concept.

The Concept of Active Offshore Defence

During Admiral Liu's term as C-in-C of the PLA Navy the navy's 'blue-water' ambitions gradually surfaced. Liu interpreted anew the concepts of 'offshore operations' and 'active defence at sea', which in turn have been: significant for fleet building in the Chinese naval modernization process. At the time Liu took over command, China's security threat perceptions were still dictated by the fear of encirclement by the Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the corresponding naval build up in the

75 Si Yanwen, "The Blooming Naval Military Academic Studies", Jietangjun Bao, Beijing, 21 September 1989, quoted in Jun Zhan, n.45, p.191. One of the proposals for the Navy Development Plan looks well into the twenty-first century and offers a three-stage development plan: from the present to 2019 China develops a navy with large surface combatant vessels and nuclear attack submarines as its core force to protect all Chinese territorial waters; from 2019 to 2039, China acquires at least three light aircraft carriers and becomes a major force in the Western Pacific; 2049 onwards, the Chinese navy grows into a major seapower like the US navy.

Asia-Pacific and Soviet competition with China for influence in Indo-China had aggravated Chinese concerns over a Soviet invasion.⁷⁶

Thus, the Chinese navy's traditional concept of coastal defence against possible Soviet naval assaults was still very much in place, notwithstanding the broader geopolitical perspectives of the 1970s and 1980s and China's need to build an ocean-going navy.⁷⁷ The guiding principle of the PLA Navy's coastal defence concept of that period was to preserve combat capability and prevent early engagement with the Soviet Pacific Fleet in decisive sea battles and thus to protract war, divide the PLA Navy into smaller units with optimum use of high-speed fast attack and patrol craft. This method was termed People's War at sea which emphasised high mobility and high-maneuvrability, fast attack-fast retreat which were seen to make dents in the Soviet fleet. Relying on massive mine-laying operations, using both conventional and non-conventional vessels, in shore, harbour and ocean areas, supplemented with land-based artillery, missiles and the naval air force, the Chinese navy sought to constantly interdict Soviet Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) and block an amphibious offensive.⁷⁸

76 Lewis and Xue, n.35, p.

77 Huang, n.72, p.17. By the late 1970s and the 1980s the Chinese leadership under Deng Xiaoping had concluded that the superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union would not go to war against each other. With no imminent threat of a nuclear war in which China could be embroiled, the Chinese wanted to reframe foreign and security policies. The US was no longer an 'avowed enemy'. The Chinese perceived the economic difficulties of the Soviet Union also. Looking for resources in its own neighbourhood, China whose high population growth and policy of economic modernization which had been launched, needed natural resources badly. The disputes in the South China seas, whose beginnings were much earlier, began to be articulated by Beijing much more vigorously from this period.

78 Yang Shovqian, "Probing the Guiding Thought and Principles of Naval Operations in the Initial Phase of Future Anti-Aggression Warfare", *Haijun Zazhi*, July 1980, quoted in Huang, n.72, p.17.

This state of affairs continued till the mid-1980s though the modernization drive by then had gathered momentum. The Active Offshore Defence Strategy had yet to be adopted.

The turning point came, as illustrated by an incident, in early 1984.⁷⁹ In 1983, the PLA had planned a large-scale exercise code-named '804' on the Liandong and Shandong peninsulas. The background for the exercise was that the PLA was resisting a major Soviet landing invasion on these two peninsulas. The Chinese navy was expected to support the PLA ground forces. At the last moment the exercise was cancelled by the Central Military Commission with the excuse that preparation was needed for the National Day Parade. The truth however seems to be that the navy vehemently opposed the exercise, saying that it made no sense and was completely contrary to the prevailing strategic environment. Admiral Liu Huaqing is supposed to have been 'unenthusiastic' in the extreme, as the role envisaged for the navy in the planned exercise was in complete contrast to his Active Offshore Defence theory of naval strategy.

Admiral Liu pushed for a 'qualitative change' by explaining the central tenets on which Active Offshore Defence was based. They were, first, that the Chinese navy would be ready to fight virtually wherever its capability allowed it to, and, secondly, that maritime interests and their protection would be a major cause for future naval wars.⁸⁰ The two most fundamental elements of a modern navy according to Liu Huaqing were (a) a considerable number of advanced warships and aircraft equipped with the most modern and sophisticated weapon platforms (both conventional and nuclear) and (b) the

79 Jun Zhan, n.45, p.191.

80 Huang, n.72, p.18.

development of a talent-pool of human resources at all levels, particularly at command levels.⁸¹ These people had to be especially knowledgeable about modern sea combat theories, strategies and tactics. Admiral Liu noted that

The massive application of the new achievements of modern science and technology to the military arena has caused a fundamental revolution in weapons as well as brought many new features to modern sea combat. Sea combat has expanded from 'fleet versus fleet' or 'fleet versus coast' combats to long-distance attack and strategic sudden attack against inner land targets.⁸²

In keeping with the 'strategic transformation' of the Central Military Commission since 1985, the Chinese navy and its admirals have been able to downplay the occurrence of large-scale war with the Soviet Union. Offshore defence as a concept was in complete contrast to Mao's military principle of 'striking back only after being struck'. The debates between contemporary and traditional strategists continued into the late eighties and in 1988 Zhang Xueshan, Deputy C in C of the Chinese navy, noted that the principle of 'striking first' was to be applied in place of the earlier policy.⁸³ The naval leadership has thus successfully refocussed their attention on a number of potential but less virulent conflict scenarios and naval rivalries in the Western Pacific. Through these policies, the navy received the confidence to project its force further into the Pacific.⁸⁴ This reconceptualization of naval strategy is based on, the changing definition of the offshore concept and the naval application of the military doctrine of 'People's War

81 Jun Zhan, n.45, p.188.

82 Liu Huaqing, "Talents are the Key to Building a Powerful Modern Navy", *Hong Qi (Red Flag)* (Beijing), 1986, quoted in Jun Zhan, n.45, p.190.

83 Zhang Xueshan, "Several Viewpoints on the Changing Format of World Wars and the Development of Our Navy", *Military History* (Beijing), vol.17, no.4, 1988, quoted in Jun Zhan, n.45, p.190.

84 Lewis and Xue, n.35, p.216.

under modern conditions' and the military strategy of 'Active Defence under new Historical Conditions.'

The 'Offshore Defence' Concept

No precise distance has been given in defining the term 'offshore' by the PLA-Navy. Admiral Liu Huaqing on elaborating the concept specified that this 'offshore concept' was different from Mao's 'coastal defence' concept.⁸⁵ He stressed that 'offshore' was an idea relative to the 'high seas'. The geographic area which 'Active Offshore Defence' covers has also been explained by Admiral Liu. While initiating discussion on strategic change, Liu had gone on record suggesting that China had to develop a naval force which could effectively control sea areas from the Chinese coast to the 'Second Island Chain'.⁸⁶ Based on Admiral Liu's account the 'first island chain' is made up of the Aleutian islands, the Kuriles, the Japanese archipelago, the Ryukyus, Taiwan, the Philippine archipelago and the Greater Sunda islands. The 'second island chain' is composed of the Bonins, the Marianas, Guam and extends till the Palau group.⁸⁷

Quantifying this concept, "The Official military terms of the PLA" defines 'offshore' as the sea area from the Chinese coast out to two hundred nautical miles.⁸⁸ General Li Qianyuan, another advocate of Chinese maritime power, has defined

85 Huang, n.72, p.20.

86 Al Hongren, *An Inside Look into the Chinese Communist Navy: Advancing Towards the Blue Water Challenge* (Hongkong, 1988) translated Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS), USIS China (JPRS-CAR-90-052), July 1990, p.14.

87 Ibid., p.15.

88 *Military Terms of the PLA* (Beijing 1982), quoted in Huang, n.72.

'Offshore' as the sea area of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and continental shelf which extend between 12 and 350 nautical miles from the coast.⁸⁹

In the event that Chinese political and military leaders fail to endorse any specific distance at which naval operations may be justified, it is reasonable to believe the quantitative element in the 'Offshore Defence' concept as just a guiding principle. More important than the denotation of large sea areas may be the physical ability of the PLA Navy to exert command over or even control these large tracts of water.⁹⁰ Till then it would be useful to expect the 'Active Offshore Defence Strategy' to mean something between coastal defence and a full-forward defense oriented strategy. It is thus more or less a relative concept. The strategy by all accounts would set the navy the task of evolving itself into a 'limited blue-water' power projection force with the ability in the waters of the Bohai, Yellow Sea, East and South China seas.

The Navy and Local War

Presently China is engaged in disputes with ten of its regional neighbours over sea resources, the delimitation of sea areas, territorial sovereignty and the ownership of islands in the China seas.⁹¹ These disputes may lead to armed confrontations, which according to the PLA would be characterised by "sudden outbreaks, a quick conclusion, a broad theatre of war, long distance battle zones from the land, and much greater

89 Li Qianyuan, "Strategy for the Defence of Exclusive Zone and Continental Shelf", *Academic Studies*, no.8, 1988, quoted in Huang n.72, p.18.

90 Huang, n.73, p.22.

91 Lewis and Xue, n.35, p.214. The ten regional neighbours with whom China has disputes are: Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines, Japan, Indonesia, Brunei, Thailand, Singapore and South Korea.

requirements for the capabilities, to stage combined operation by the three services of the PLA.⁹²

In 1988, Zhao Ziyang who was then First-Deputy Chairman of the Central Military Commission called for attending to three areas of military preparedness; the possible eruption of local wars and sudden clashes; the formation of elite troops or 'fist-units'; and reliable estimates of long-term national defence development in relation to the supposed characteristics of future wars.⁹³

Scarce resources for the military in the Deng Xiaoping era has made the PLA's task of decision making regarding rational expenditure and in formulating present military priorities all the more difficult. China seems to see the need for avoiding 'protracted war at all costs and prefers to engage the enemy close to his own borders. Quick strike elite forces and 'quick reaction' forces for all services have been created specifically to address this.⁹⁴ The need to control and defend maritime interests beyond close coastal waters, a capacity for long-range defence and intervention, and the ability to conduct limited operations in limited disputes over maritime areas has secured for the navy the top priority in force modernization.⁹⁵ The deterrent role of the navy as a conventional force and as part of the strategic triad for maintaining the Chinese state's influence in a given direction or sea area is also underlined.⁹⁶

92 Tan Eng Bok, n.29, p.146.

93 Ibid., p.147.

94 Ibid., p.149.

95 Lewis and Xue, n.35, p.216.

96 Ibid., p.216.

These trends require the navy to create 'task forces' in a state of constant readiness to cope with sudden conflicts of limited range in a high-technology battle-zone under various climatic factors. The 'quick strike units' of the PLA navy have been created after a thorough examination of British combat performance in the Falklands war. The navy's Land-fighting Brigade under the South Sea fleet is a unit of this kind. The navy has also constituted its 'quick strike' potential in the late 1980s with the organization of "High-Seas Unified Manoeuvre formations" aimed at conducting 'coordinate fighting' missions. Such naval unified missions may comprise quick-strike formations, reconnaissance formations and logistics support formations.⁹⁷ The former is made up of surface missile ships, submarines, naval, air and amphibious units. Reconnaissance duties are performed by surface, submarine and air assets. Logistics support formations, which are becoming increasingly important in the navy's ocean going deployment and operations, involve fleet replenishment oilers, oil and water tankers, submarine tender and salvage vessels, ocean tugs and recovery ships and other auxiliaries.⁹⁸ The roles and missions of the "High Seas unified manoeuvres formations" are to strike at sea and against the shore, conduct maritime reconnaissance, engage in anti-submarine warfare and undertake submarine rescue operations. Although coming under the heading of general missions imparted to 'quick strike' units, their main purpose would be for employment in regional maritime conflicts.⁹⁹

97 Tan Eng bok, n.29, p.147.

98 Ibid., p.149.

99 According to the main roles performed by the PLAN's 'land-fighting' units - defensive garrison, naval base security, and coastal surveillance - it might be confusing to refer to them as "Naval infantry" as in Soviet terms or 'Marines' on the US Marine Corps model. The intention of China seems to be to organize an
(continued...)

Features of the New Naval Doctrine

Four new strategic concepts are highlighted in the new naval doctrine of Active-Offshore Defence. These strategic concepts are intrinsically connected to China's overall defence modernization programme and the military doctrine of People's War under modern conditions. They are: the concept of extended strategic depth; the emerging perception of local war as the main form of armed conflict in the foreseeable future; the justification of offensive operations under the overview of the active-defence concept; and a reemphasis on 'expertise' and technological modernization over the 'red' (i.e. correct political and ideological orientation).¹⁰⁰

Extended Strategic Depth

The conceptualisation of extended strategic depth illustrates the new found importance of the PLA Navy in Chinese defence dispositions. 'Active Defence Under new Historical conditions' emphasises resolute defence of the prosperous coastal cities (an important part of China's new economic power) and aims thus to transform the maritime provinces in which these 'boomtowns' are located from the defensive frontline of Maoist People's War at sea to the 'strategic rear' in Active Offshore Defence.¹⁰¹ Needed strategic depth would be achieved by extending (for offshore operations) the defence forward into the China seas and the West Pacific. This new concept of active

99(...continued)

'elite force' which is closer to the US Navy Seals, or Britain's 'Special Boat Service', i.e., a marine commando arm.

100 Huang, n.72, p.20.

101 Shen Shungen, "The August 1st Colour on the Blue Sea: An Interview with Commander in Chief of the PLA Navy Admiral Zhang Lianzhong", *Naval and Merchant Ships*, no.8, 1988, quoted in Huang, n.72, p.21.

defence sees the PLA Navy as a tactical and strategic force and the newly evolving fulcrum of the People's Republic of China's national defence.

Localised Naval War

Localised naval war has been perceived as a potential threat to China and peace and security in the region, since the 'strategic transformation' of 1985 which noted the decline of the Soviet threat. The active defence strategy under new historical conditions is thus developed to cope with peripheral conflict spots.¹⁰² Into Chinese strategic thinking have come such variables as the naval balance of power in the region. Disputes over maritime territorial claims in the China seas which the PRC has with several ASEAN states and Japan are seen to be potentially volatile since the mid-1980s.¹⁰³ This has activated the navy's new importance in Chinese defence policy planning under the modernization programme.

Offensive Operations

The question can be raised whether the Active Offshore Defence Strategy makes the PLA Navy more offensive in combat posture than before. Many analysts of Chinese maritime aspirations would detect in the Active Offshore Defence Concept the guidelines required for an expansionist naval build up ultimately leading to offensive military actions at sea.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, it could also be argued that the doctrine pushes the

102 Lewis and Xue, n.35, p.226.

103 Tan Eng Bok, n.29, p.147.

104 Huang, n.72, p.21.

PLA Navy into taking up a defensive position intended to respond to and thwart naval assault and in extreme case scenarios to undertake preemptive offensives against maritime threats to China's security.

Theoretically, the navy's new doctrine is couched in 'defensive' terms, but on operational and tactical levels the fulfilment of strategic objectives may require the navy to carry out offensive operations. Alexander C. Huang, an analyst of Chinese maritime power sees this defence-offense ambiguity as part of the 'artistic' nature of military doctrine.¹⁰⁵ Thus the navy's conceptual vagueness is intended perhaps to retrieve maximum flexibility in tactical situations from its operational posture.

'Expertise' Replaces 'Red-ness'

A navy is a high-technology military service and contemporary Chinese admirals have time and again stressed the need for advanced equipment and modern warships. Only with these would the PLA-Navy be able to compare favourably with other maritime nations that operate in the Asia-Pacific-region. The modernization programme of Deng Xiaoping is successfully replacing Lin Biao's 'politics in command' working style.¹⁰⁶ Admiral Xiao Jingguang former commander in chief of the PLA Navy espoused his 'three orientations' as the navy's guidelines for meeting the new strategic requirements with technology as the priority. These are namely to 'face the modernization', 'face the world' and 'face the future.'¹⁰⁷ In order to effectively implement these kind of

105 Ibid., p.22.

106 Bruce L. Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon* (Annapolis, 1982), p.186.

107 Xiao Jiangguang, "Construct a Modernized Strong Navy: Commemorating the
(continued...)

strategic concepts, the PLA Navy needs officers and sailors with technical expertise, knowledge of science and familiarity with modern naval weapon systems.

Conclusion

The chapter has sought to systematically explain the derivation of the new naval element of strategic thought from revised perceptions in defence needs for China. There is a clear link detectable in the forging of Chinese military/naval doctrines to cope with the new orientation in China's external posture. This link connects military doctrine from Mao's People's War to Deng Xiaoping People's Wars under Modern Conditions. The naval aspect of military doctrine in the latter has achieved a much higher degree of sophistication. It is clearly aimed to consolidate China's position in the maritime arena which is determined to be critical to China's national interest.

The PLA Navy's contemporary Active Offshore Defence strategy is thus the 'art and science' of employing the navy in war and in securing peace.¹⁰⁸ It seeks to maintain adequate strategic depth, defence preparedness and military might for national defence through the effective protection of coastal and offshore waters.

107(...continued)

60th Anniversary of the Founding of the PLA", *Haijun Zazhi*, 25 June 1987, quoted in Huang, n.72, p.22.

108 Huang, n.72, p.24.

CHAPTER IV

THE INVENTORY OF THE PLA-NAVY

Introduction

The enumeration and acceptance of naval strategic objectives by themselves do not provide a nation with any heightened sense of maritime power. It is crucial in the case of a nation aspiring for maritime power, to have the services of a naval fleet which can effectively translate into force structure and operations, prevailing strategic ideas. In the case of China, the PLA-Navy's inventory has to be assessed in order to determine whether it can in any realistic sense satisfy the objectives outlined in the theory of Active Offshore Defence followed by a blue-water power projection capability.

Chinese naval development strategy has followed national five year economic plans which set out priorities and allocations in the distribution of resources to all armed services.¹ The emphasis in the 1986-90 Five Year Plan for the navy was on the improvement of electronics equipment, weapons and communications.² Admiral Liu Huaqing stresses that overall emphasis to the year 2000 would be on the development of sea combat forces including warships, submarines and aircraft.³

The ongoing phase is the fourth stage in the navy's development where upgradation of technological levels is stressed over increase in the number of hulls. The

1 Jun Zhan, "China Goes to the Blue Waters: The Navy, Seapower Mentality and the South China Sea", *Journal of Strategic Studies* (London), vol.17, no.3, September 1994, p.192.

2 Jeffrey B. Goldman, "China's Mahan", *Proceedings* (Annapolis), March 1996, p.47.

3 Tai Ming Cheung, "The Growth of Chinese Naval Power", *Pacific Strategic Paper* (Singapore), 1990, p.19.

previous stages of development were: the assembly stage, which was in the 1950s when the Soviet Union provided technological know-how and equipment to China for shipbuilding; the copying stage, primarily in the 1960s when, after the Soviet withdrawal and the end of naval cooperation, the Chinese were forced to copy Soviet designs and equipment already acquired to continue building warships; the design and trial-building stage, from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, when expertise and experience gained in the previous two stages of naval development allowed the Chinese to gradually improve on existing equipment as well as to design and indigenously build warships.⁴

By the early 1980s China's shipyards had completed construction of the first generation of indigenously developed warships. These include all types of naval hardware from guided missile destroyers to frigates, submarine chasers and nuclear submarines. The main problem with these ships is that most of their capabilities are rudimentary.⁵ Technologically the Chinese still are decades behind the Western naval powers and the Russian fleet. However, as many analysts argue, an ethnocentric analysis of Chinese defence (particularly naval) policies will yield unduly pessimistic conclusions. The Chinese do not require sophisticated or extensive military equipment equal to that of the military superpowers to carry out effective defence.⁶ A large offensive campaign against the US or the Russians will pose far more problems. But as the chances of this are remote the Chinese are more interested in substituting quality with quantity while

4 "China's Shipbuilding: Good Days Ahead", in *Beijing Review*, 23 June 1986, pp.20-22.

5 Cheung, n.3, p.24.

6 Gerald Segal in Segal and Tow (eds.), *Chinese Defence Policy* (Urbana, 1984), p.xv (Introduction).

simultaneously trying to develop upgraded weapon system and integrating them into already existing platforms. The focus in the fourth stage of naval development, therefore, is to upgrade ships with improved guns, missiles, torpedoes, anti-submarine hardware, more powerful engines, navigational equipment, coordinated radars and ship borne computers.⁷

Naval hardware can be classified into four categories, namely, surface forces, sub-surface forces, the naval air force and the merchant marine.

Surface Forces

Major Combatants : Currently the PLA-Navy's major surface combatants number close to sixty vessels. These are made up of different classes of destroyers and frigates (in Chinese parlance, 'escort ships'). Destroyers are essentially meant for anti-air and anti-surface ship warfare. Anti-submarine warfare (ASW) technologies may also be adapted to these ships. The most capable indigenously built Chinese anti-air warfare ship is the 4,200 tonne Luhu class destroyer.⁸

Built at the Tiangnan Shipyard, the first Luhu entered service in 1994. The PLA-Navy is supposed to have four of these, two of which are being completed. The ship is powered by General Electric LM 2500 gas turbine engines, and can attain a speed of 30 knots carrying a complement of three hundred. The Luhu is a guided missile destroyer

7 Jing-Dong Yuan, "China's Defence Modernization: Implications for Asia-Pacific Security", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol.17, no.1, June 1995, p.70.

8 Felix K. Chang, "Beijing's Reach in the South China Sea", *Orbis*, vol.40, no.3, Summer 1996, p.520.

equipped with the Thomson-CSF Crotale surface to air missile (SAM) system.⁹ In addition it carries eight Ying Ji (YJ-1) surface to surface missiles. It also has standard 100 mm guns and for anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operations is equipped with Whitehead A.244S ASW torpedoes. The Rice-Screen three dimensional air-search radar can detect and track airborne contacts to a distance of 185.3 km and can engage at 13 kms. The Luhu has a host of electronic countermeasures, good communications and sea-keeping qualities. It also houses the Chinese navy's first combat information suite, the French built TAVITAC combat data system.¹⁰

The ship that the Luhu is in the process of replacing has traditionally been the backbone of the Chinese navy's destroyer force. At 3,500 tonnes the Luda class is China's first guided missile destroyer. Commissioned first in 1971, the Ludas are in the process of being modernised with incorporation of sophisticated weapon and electronic systems.¹¹ At least three of the sixteen Ludas the PLA-Navy has in service have the Crotale SAM and TAVITAC combat data systems. Overhauling of the Ludas have taken place with French assistance.¹² From 1982 to 1987 the ships were fitted with HY-2 (Hai Ying) ship-to-ship missiles, anti-submarine warfare equipment, satellite navigation systems and a helicopter deck. The Luda Type III, which completed overhauling in 1995, is equipped with eight YJ-I-C-801 surface to surface missiles. In addition, these ships have four 130 mm guns and twenty-four guns of 57, 37 and 25 mm calibre. It is also equipped with Whitehead A.244S torpedoes for ASW and has a complement of 2

9 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95* (Surrey, 1994), p.115.

10 Chang, n.8, p.52.

11 Cheung, n.3, p.25.

12 *Ibid.*, p.25.

Harbin 2-9A helicopters. The electronics vary considerably in later ships of the class as do capabilities.¹³

Both these ship-types, although impressive, lag behind the most recent entrant into the PLAN destroyer inventory. This is the 'Sovremenny' class of guided missile destroyers, which even the US Seventh Fleet carrier battle groups and Aegis-missile cruisers have to take serious account of. Beijing has recently purchased two of this class from Moscow.¹⁴ The 'Sovremenny' is a revolutionary former Soviet design and its latest guided missile destroyer. The ship itself, at 7600 tonnes, is far larger than conventional anti air warfare ships. It is a versatile general purpose warship with Soviet SS-N-22 (Sunburn) surface-to-surface anti-ship missiles (range 160 km), a Helix helicopter, and 2 twin 130 mm guns.¹⁵ It also carries 44SA-N-7 (Gadfly) SAMs. ASW capability comes in the form of Kamov Ka-27 helicopters on board, and an anti-submarine rocket system.¹⁶ Induction of the 'Sovremenny' considerably strengthens the offensive arm of the major surface combatants.

The development of frigates or escort ships have also been consistent. The first models to enter service were the Chengdu (Soviet Riga class) in the 1950s. A modified type, the Jiangnan class followed in the mid-1960s. The first frigate domestically designed was the Jianghu class missile frigate launched in 1974. They make up the

13 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95* (Surrey, 1994), p.116.

14 Nigel Holloway, "Brothers in Arms", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 March 1997, p.20.

15 Richard D. Fisher, "Dangerous Moves: Russia's Sale of Missile Destroyers to China", *Backgrounder*, Asian Studies Centre of Heritage Foundation, 20 February 1997, p.8.

16 Bryan Ranft and Geoffrey Till, *The Sea in Soviet Strategy* (London, 1989), second edition, p.108.

largest single frigate class in the PLA-Navy. Primarily intended for coastal operations it is also the principal surface warship. Its armaments include the Sy-1 (Shui Ying-1) surface-to-surface missiles and 100 mm guns. The Jianghu displaces 1700 tonnes and has undergone substantial modification.¹⁷ The main weakness of the ship are its relatively poor anti-submarine and anti-aircraft warfare capabilities. Improvements have been conducted with the induction of YJ-6 SSMs (range 80 km),¹⁸ and enhanced fire-control and electronics equipment. The latest ships have gun houses on their 37 mm guns with possibly new air/surface search radars.¹⁹

To cover up the deficiencies in air defence capabilities, the Jiangdong class escort ship was launched in 1977. It is a dedicated anti-aircraft frigate equipped with ship to air missiles. There are two twin HQ-61 (Hongqi) missile launchers on her which are most effective in dealing with low to medium altitude targets. The Jiangdong frigate is designated an anti-air missile frigate. HQ-61 missiles, however, have had a long history of problems.²⁰ The vessel has also been a disappointment, and the programme has since been scrapped with only one surviving Jiangdong class FFG, the Yingtian. This may have been the vessel referred to by Chinese officials in highlighting the negative impacts of the Cultural Revolution on shipbuilding.²¹

17 Cheung, n.3, p.22.

18 Gordon Jacobs, "China's Naval Missiles", *Asian Defence Journal*, no.10, 1990, p.66.

19 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95* (Surrey, 1994), p.117.

20 *Ibid.*, p.118.

21 Cheung, n.3, p.26.

The latest frigate to enter service is the Jiangwei class guided missile escort vessel. Displacing 2100 tonnes and with improved power and electronic capabilities, its weaponry consists of 6 YJ-1 (C-801) SSM's with active radar homing up to 40 km. C-802 YJ-2 missiles are in the process of being fitted.²² The Jiangwei also has one HQ-61 SAM system on a sextuple launcher.²³ Five of the Jiangwei class have been built. All have Rice Screen Air/Surface search radar and electronic counter measures. Its vulnerability is its limited anti-airwarfare capability, for the HQ-61 as earlier noted has been beset by problems.

In addition to this, the Chinese have two old Jiangnan class frigates without missiles. They are also in the process of being retired as newer guided missile frigates are built.

Light Forces: The Chinese navy's destroyer and frigate force is backed up by a vast host of minor or light combatants. Fast attack, patrol, gun, missile, and torpedo boats make up almost 450 hulls. Added to this, the Chinese have almost two hundred of these type of vessels in reserve.

Fast attack craft (missile) is the most common platform used by the smaller navies of the world to threaten carrier battle groups. The Soviet Union led the way in developing relatively cheap and efficient vessels and then integrating them with powerful surface-to-surface-missiles, most notably the SS-N-2(Styx). The PLA-Navy's most modern fast attack craft are the Houjian (Huang) class and the Houxin class missile

22 Jacobs, n.18, p.67.

23 Chang, n.8, p.579.

boats. Laid down in the late 1980s and commissioned by the early 1990s, these craft carry 4 to 6 Yingji (YJ-1) surface to surface missiles. They have 37 mm anti-aircraft guns and possess electronic counter measures and surface search radars.²⁴

The bulk of the light forces fleet is made up of the 'Huangfen', a prototype of the OSA class of the Soviet Union, and 'Hegu', a derivative of the Soviet Komar class.²⁵ The Hegu class has a steel hull as opposed to the original Komar's wooden hull. The Chinese naval variants carry two Shui Ying (SY-1) surface-to-surface missiles. The OSA class of missile boats were seen by the world's smaller navies as a lethal new addition to seapower which altered the balance of naval conflict to their advantage. Larger and superior forces could be attacked and destroyed at minimum cost. The Osa is the world's most widely used fast attack missile boat.²⁶ The Chinese variant (Huangfen), carry 4 YJ-1 surface-to- surface-missiles. Initially fitted out with the HY-2 (Hai Ying), the (C-801) Ying Ji-1 has replaced the former. The class was produced in 1985 after most of the original OSA's acquired from the Soviet Union had been scrapped.²⁷

Among the fast attack gunboats, the famous Shanghai class number more than 100 vessels in the PLA-Naval inventory. Series production of the 'Shanghai' class of fast gun boat started at the Shanghai naval shipyard in 1961. More than three hundred and fifty have been built with five variants, designated I to V.²⁸ These differ mainly in bridge outline and the number and calibre of guns fitted and their instalment positions.

24 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95* (Surrey, 1990), p.129.

25 *Ibid.*, p.130.

26 Roy McLeavy, *Naval Fast Strike Crafts and Patrol Boats* (London, 1979), p.120.

27 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95* (Surrey, 1994), p.133.

28 McLeavy, n.26, p.124.

These boats also have the facilities to be fitted with mine rails, torpedo tubes and depth charges. The Chinese navy keeps almost two hundred of these boats in reserve.²⁹

The 'Hainan' class of fast attack patrol boats have provisions for fitting missiles (most probably four YJ-1) in addition to their 57 mm guns. Carrying depth charges and mines, this version of the Soviet SO-1 class is a versatile little craft. The programme commenced in the mid-1960s, and the Chinese have in active duty at least 95 of these boats.³⁰

The PLA-Navy's main torpedo craft are the eighty or more 'Huchuan' class fast attack hydrofoils. Designed and built by China, it is an all metal construction with a bridge well forward and a low superstructure. Initially launched in 1966, construction has been discontinued since 1989.³¹ A derivative of the earlier Soviet made P-8, the 'Huchuan' is based on an earlier displacement torpedo boat hull to which bow foil has been added for increased performance in relatively calm waters. The foil system comprises a bow subfoil to facilitate take-off and a trapeze or shallow 'V' main foil set back approximately one-third of the hull length from the bow. At high speed (Huchuan touches 55 knots) all but the stern of the hull is raised clear of the water.³² It is fitted with two 21 inch torpedo tubes and 4 China 14.5 mm twin machine guns.

These fast attack craft and patrol boats thus make up the bulk of the Chinese navy's capacity for offensive warfare at sea. These craft and the major surface combatants are complemented by minesweepers and mine layers (both coastal and ocean

29 *Jane's fighting Ships 1994-95* (Surrey, 1994), p.132.

30 *Ibid.*, p.134.

31 *Ibid.*, p.134.

32 McLeavy, n.26, p.118.

going), Chinese mine warfare forces include the latest in the inventory, the 'Beleijan' class of 1000 tonne displacement minelayers. The twenty-seven T 43 class of ocean minesweepers are divided between the three fleets and are the backbone of the ocean minesweeping/laying force.³³ The 25 Lienyun class minesweepers are operating in primarily coastal areas.

The 54 landing ships currently in service could land only 6,100 troops and 350 tanks in the event of an amphibious assault - this too in the unlikely event of 100 percent serviceability.³⁴ The naval infantry (the first land brigade) consists of just 6,000 men.³⁵ The land-fighting brigade is expected to be used in various roles such as seizing and securing beachheads independently or in coordination with army units in an amphibious assault and protect follow-on landing forces, capture and defend maritime forward positions, perform the land-fighting phase of naval operations and to defend the sea shore.³⁶

Submarine Forces

The PLA-Navy's submarine force is the largest and most advanced arm of the service.³⁷ It consists of more than a hundred submarines including the nuclear naval

33 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95*, p.113.

34 John Downing, "China's Evolving Maritime Strategy", (2 parts) *Jane's Intelligence Review*, March-April 1996, p.188.

35 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95*, p.114.

36 Georges Tan Eng Bok, "How Does the PLA Cope with 'Regional Conflict' and 'Local War'?", in R.H. Yang (ed.), *SCPS PLA Yearbook 1991* (Kaoshiung, 1991), p.146.

37 Cheung, n.3, p.23.

element of China. Apart from the nuclear forces the submarine arm is made up of mostly coastal patrol submarines and a few attack boats.

The nuclear submarine forces are headed by the single fleet ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) Xia. Its submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) are the Julang 1 (JL-1), an underwater launched derivative of the Dong-Feng 3 surface-to-surface missile.³⁸ The idea of building a nuclear submarine appealed to the PLA navy as early as the 1950s.³⁹ After the break with the Soviet Union, which critically affected naval arms acquisition, the Chinese set out to indigenously build the nuclear submarine arm. The lengthy, costly, highly scientific and technical process was slowed down in the late 1960s due to the Cultural Revolution. Put back on track after the 1978. Third Plenum, the first test-firing of the SLBM was conducted from a Soviet made Golf SSB in October 1982.⁴⁰ The first firing from the Xian was in 1985.⁴¹ Since 1988 the Xia SSBN has completed the nuclear triad with its 12 JL-1 SLBMs. Work is thought to be in progress for a modified version of the Xia, the (09-4) to carry the JL-2 SLBM.⁴² The 'survivable deterrence' concept of the nuclear forces is most prominently addressed by the SSBN. However, analysts have noted that at least three of a class are required to keep one SSBN continuously on the prowl. Five are necessary in order to have an

38 *Jane's fighting Ships 1994-95*, p.113.

39 John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China's Strategic Seapower: The Politics of Force Modernization in the Nuclear Age* (Stanford, 1994), p..50.

40 *Ibid.*, p.142.

41 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95*, p.113.

42 Eric Arnett, "Military Technology: The Case of China", in *SIPRI Yearbook: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Stockholm, 1995), p.379.

absolutely safe sea-launched nuclear attack capability.⁴³ Thus the utility of the 'Xia' appears questionable. The class has also faced technical problems and has to be continuously catered to in repairs. The Chinese navy probably looks to the (09-4) class to address these problems.⁴⁴ The main deficiencies are reactor safety, high noise levels of the engines, and high interior radiation levels. Nevertheless, as it was completely designed and produced in China, the Xia SSBN was a remarkable technological and military achievement.⁴⁵ It is deployed with the North Sea Fleet.⁴⁶

The actual forerunner of the nuclear ballistic missile submarine was the (09-1) or nuclear attack submarine. The 'Han' class of attack boats number five in the PLA-naval inventory. They entered service beginning in 1974 and have since marked a considerable boost in Chinese attack submarine capabilities. With enhanced range and endurance because of nuclear power, these are armed with surface-to-surface missiles YJ-1 (C-801) and torpedoes.⁴⁷ The Hans based at Qingdao with the North Sea Fleet had endured problems similar to the Xia SSBN. The submarine also has to surface to fire its YJ-1 missiles.⁴⁸

43 Geoffrey Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age* (London, 1983).

44 Lewis and Xue, n.39, p.148.

45 Christopher D. Yung, *People's War at Sea: Chinese Naval Power in the 21st Century* (Virginia, 1996), p.17.

46 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95*, p.113.

47 Lewis and Xue, n.39, p.129.

48 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95* (London, 1995), p.115.

China is noted to have reached an agreement with Russia for the purchase of twelve Kilo class submarines.⁴⁹ Of these at least four have been delivered to the PLA-Navy. 'Kilos' were built mainly for export by the former Soviet Union.⁵⁰ They are conventionally powered (i.e., diesel-electric), displace 3000 tonnes (dived), and are probably one of the classes replacing the ageing 'Romeo' class.⁵¹ The 'Kilos' obvious advantages are their cheapness, quietness, and ability to operate in shallow waters. Primarily armed with torpedoes (the original Soviet version was thought to carry a surface to air missile system), the Chinese will aspire to build the Kilo indigenously if license is purchased.⁵²

Another indigenously produced submarine is the latest 'Song' class intended to replace the old Type 0-33 'Romeo' class. It will also supplement the modified 'Ming' Type (035) class. The 'Mings' were primarily used for coastal patrol and mine laying. The 'Song' class is by far China's most modern conventional submarine with skewed blade propeller and hydrodynamic hull for greater stealth.⁵³ In addition to these, forty-odd 'Romeo' class submarines are still in service.⁵⁴

China's inventory of numerous diesel-powered attack boats, 5 nuclear attack submarines and one SSBN, although impressive, is inhibited by a number of factors reducing their effectiveness. First, with the exception of the nuclear submarines which

49 Jing-Dong Yuan, n.7, p.71.

50 Ranft and Till, n.16, p.120.

51 Yung, n.45, p.20.

52 Ranft and Till, n.16, p.120 and Nigel Holloway, n.14, p.20.

53 Jane's Information Service, *Sentinel* (Surrey, 1996).

54 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95* (Surrey, 1994), p.115.

have French-built Du-UX5 Sonars, the Chinese Sonars installed in most of the submarines are of Soviet design of 1950s vintage (eg. the Hercules, Feniks, and Shark Teeth Sonars). Second, the operational readiness of China's submarine fleet is also questionable, with the older boats spending very little time at sea (partly due to the low training level and availability of personnel). Chinese naval machinery is noisy. Vibration dampening technology for reducing noise is still being developed.⁵⁵ Absence of air-independent propulsion means frequent snorkelling which could be suicidal in the face of a modern enemy.⁵⁶

Naval Air Force

The PLA-Naval Air Force has always had an important role in Chinese naval strategy - from Mao's People's War at sea, where the naval air force (NAF) was expected to interdict the coastal invader's communication lines, to the current strategic conception, which calls for enhanced combat capability and a wider area of operations over the China seas. The NAF inventory, however, is not up to the role which the airwing is expected to play. If called upon for selective strikes against superior maritime powers, the NAF would have had to stretch itself (not always successfully), for it had mainly relied on outmoded aircraft and weaponry. The Chinese have recognised the difficulty in providing adequate air cover for naval operations.⁵⁷ Coupled with the modernization drive and altered strategic conceptions, the Chinese navy has set out to

55 Yung, n.45, p.19.

56 Downing, n.34, p.133.

57 Rosita Dellios, *Modern Chinese Defence Strategy* (New York, 1990), p.40.

effectively modernize its naval air arm.⁵⁸ Augmentation of capabilities have been restricted because of resource allocation, but the Chinese politico-military leadership today recognises the fact that the naval air arm has to be significantly bolstered if China is to enjoy 'local superiority' over nations with whom its interests clash in the China seas and Western Pacific.⁵⁹ The NAF's role is seen to be clearly wedded to China's vision of its maritime and territorial interests. With this in mind, the PLA Navy has set out to acquire for its air-arm, state of the art weapons, planes and technology.

The most recent addition to the Chinese air force inventory is the Sukhoi Su-27 Flanker air-superiority fighter from Russia. the Su-27 is clearly superior to any other aircraft which the PLA Navy or even the PLA Air Force has possessed. The first batch of 26 Su-27s were received in 1992 and by the end of 1995, China had acquired a further forty-six.⁶⁰ The Su-27 flanker's primary purpose is as a tactical fighter to seize and maintain air superiority over a theatre of interest, but the aircraft can also be used in a ground attack role. These aircraft are the only ones in Asia equipped with Archer air-to-air missiles which pilots direct to targets with the help of helmet mounted sights.⁶¹ The Su-27 can operate at speeds in excess of Mach 2 and has a range of 4000 km. In July 1996, China signed a contract with the Russian Federation worth \$2.5 billion for licensed production of the Flankers.⁶² Clearly, China means to mass-produce these aircraft in

58 General Political Department, Chinese People's Liberation Army (ed.), *China's Army Ready for Modernization* (Beijing, 1985), p.83.

59 Jun Zhan, n.1, p.192.

60 Holloway, n.14, p.20.

61 Yung, n.45, p.21.

62 Holloway, n.14, p.20.

the future and induct them into the air-force and naval air arm in place of China's J-7 (Derivative of Mig-21) fighters. Twenty four Su-27s has been earmarked for deployment with the PLAAF on Woody Island, where an 8000 ft runway has been built with the intention of providing improved air cover over the China Seas.⁶³

The principal fighters/ground-attack and strike aircrafts operating with the PLA-NAF are the Shenyang J-6, J-7. The J-6 is a derivative of the Mig-19.⁶⁴ It is a strike fighter operated by the naval air force for fleet air defence and anti-shipping strikes.⁶⁵ Armed with 4 AA-1 (Alkali) beam-riding missiles, the J-6 carries almost 1000 kg of undermining bombs and depth charges. The J-6 also has a PL-2 missile, equipping it for anti-ship capability.⁶⁶

The NAF has almost seventy Xian J-7s (Mig 21s), a land-based air-defence fighter with limited strike capability on enemy shipping and attacks on beachheads. The J-7 carries 500 kg bombs or thirty-six rockets and has two 30 mm cannon. In addition to air-defence roles it carries 2 Atoll air to air missiles. The J-7 only has a range of 1490 km which is one of its limitations, but is after all a supersonic fighter.⁶⁷

The strike aircraft which have been developed from the Shenyang J-6 is the Nanchang Q-5.⁶⁸ The fifty planes deployed with the NAF are operational for coastal shipping and ground attack (beachheads) roles. New adaptations of this aircraft are being

63 Downing, n.34, p.190.

64 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95* and *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1993-94*.

65 Cheung, n.3, p.18.

66 Jacobs, n.18, p.69.

67 *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1993-94* (London, 1994), p.54.

68 *Ibid.*, p.59.

configured to carry the C-601 air-to-surface missiles and cluster bombs. It also doubles as a bomber and carries a one tonne warhead. Range limitation is a problem with this aircraft also and nor is it equipped with any electronic war fighting capability.⁶⁹

The latest indigenously produced aircraft operating with the naval air force are the 30 Shenyang J-8s which serve as dual role (i.e., fighter/ground attack) all-weather fighters.⁷⁰ Equipped with 23 mm cannon, air to-air and air-to-surface missiles, these are the main 'dog-fighters' in the naval air force inventory, a role they might surrender to the Su-27 as they are added on.⁷¹ The Harbin H-5 which is a Chinese variant of the IL-28 Beagle of the former Soviet air force is an overwater strike aircraft employed mainly for anti-submarine and anti-surface ship warfare. It is in the process of being phased out or is in second-line roles as target-toning and electronic counter measure (ECM) training. the PLA-NAF operates fifty H-5s. The H-5s have two and four torpedoes and depth bombs respectively in addition to mines for their ASW and anti-surface warfare roles.⁷²

The bomber fleet consists of thirty Xian H-6s.⁷³ A derivative of the early Soviet supplied Tu-16, it is used for maritime reconnaissance as well. In addition, it is fitted with two underwing anti-ship missiles (C-601).⁷⁴ It allows them to engage

69 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95*, p.120; and Jacobs, n.18, p.70.

70 *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1993-94*, p.57.

71 Yung, n.45, p.25.

72 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95*, p.120.

73 Cheung, n.3, p.23.

74 Jacobs, n.18, p.70.

warships from a distance, boosting offensive capabilities. The H-6 also has the longest range among the PLA-NAF's aircrafts.

The naval air force also makes use of three Hanzhong Y-8 MPA maritime patrol aircraft. The Y-8 is the maritime patrol version of the Russian An-12 transport aircraft.⁷⁵ It is also in the process of being evaluated to replace the obsolescent Be-6 flying boats that the navy has for ASW and anti-shipping roles.⁷⁶

The helicopter fleet is composed of the ASW capable Aerospatiale Super Frelons. Although the first batches of these were French, they are subsequently being built in China, and called Zhi-8. Fifty Dauphin-2 helicopters also are used by the navy in anti-shipping and anti submarine warfare roles. Fitted with A.244 torpedoes and anti-ship missiles, their main platforms are the latest versions of escort ships and destroyers. The Chinese have been gradually building up experience of ship-borne helicopter aviation in recent years and a number of ships are thus designated 'platforms'.⁷⁷

Merchant Marine

In taking a comprehensive view of seapower, it is important to include the merchant fleet of the country studied. China's merchant marine is the sixth largest in the world in terms of number of ships and gross tonnage. In 1994 it had a fleet strength of 2510 vessels displacing close to 15 million gross tonnes.⁷⁸ Most of the ships are bulk carriers, general cargo vessels and unitised ships. The first category carries dry

75 Yung, n.45, p.30.

76 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95*, p.121.

77 Yung, n.45, p.31 and *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1994-95*, p.113.

78 *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95*, p.113.

cargo, General cargo, ships are any conventional vessel including reefers and part-container carriers, the last type are fully cellular container ships with fixed cell guides and roll-on, roll-off vessels.

The rapid growth of China's economy over the past 15 years has resulted in an average GNP growth of 9 percent since 1979. Trade, particularly seaborne trade has increased (from \$21 billion in 1978 to \$170 billion in 1992) and is quite evident in its maritime-related industries which recorded impressive growth in the number of Chinese produced ships of over 10,000 dead weight tonnes.⁷⁹ This also underlines the fact that China's shipping industry is capable of mass producing ships, and is a very useful ingredient in the state's overall maritime power.

Evolution of the Navy's Strategic Guidelines Based on Capabilities

Based on the inventory and capabilities of the Chinese navy it is possible to draw up certain strategic guidelines which have been reflected in naval operational doctrine since 1949. John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai create a table based on the period, policy and related outcomes.⁸⁰

While the navy's contingency planning considers possible surprise attacks along the coasts where economic development is concentrated, PLA strategists do not rule out amphibious invasions either. Conflict in the China Seas is potentially seen as escalating at the beginning of the next century.⁸¹

79 David G. Muller, *China as a Maritime Power* (Colorado, 1983), p.195.

80 Lewis and Xue, n.39, p.224.

81 Ibid., p.225.

Period	Policy	Outcome
1950-1975	Coastal defence with continental bias	Though the navy possessed aircrafts submarines and fast attack craft it was still not in a position to conduct effective sea-based coastal defence.
1976-1982	Sea-based coastal defence	This capacity was achieved with the addition of 33-class submarines, 051 class destroyers (Luda), escort vessels in series production from 1969, 1972 and 1976 respectively, all using domestic systems and equipment.
1983-2000	Sea-based coastal defence under the condition of limited nuclear retaliation	With the successful firing of the SLBM in 1982, the navy entered the era of limited nuclear retaliation. Validated in 1988 by tests from Xia SSBN.
2000-	Integrated sea-based deterrence	The (09-4) China's second generation SSBN should be ready by 2000. This sub will have greater survivability, and will be coupled with enhanced performance vessels of all classes.

The 'offshore navy' that China is in the process of developing thus must be on patrol by the year 2000. The present commander of the Chinese navy Admiral Zhang Lianzhong spoke of three systems, the development of which would facilitate continuous offshore deployments. These are underway replenishment ships (the capacity of which the navy has to considerably bolster), a long distance communication system and a global navigation system. Keeping this in mind, the navy's underway training has increased

considerably. Zhang Lianzhong justifies this by pointing out that the high seas are open to all. He reiterates naval policy for defeating any sea-based invasion in the mean time, which is based on the defence of a multi-layered perimeter.⁸²

The exterior perimeter is conceived as encompassing the seas out to the 'first island chain.' This region is to be defended by conventional and nuclear submarines armed with anti-ship missiles, by naval medium-range aircraft and surface combatants. The submarines would play a dynamic role in ensuring defence in depth, including laying of mines in the enemy's sea lanes of communications. The middle defence perimeter would extend to approximately 150 miles from the coast. Anti-ship aircraft, destroyers and escort vessels will carry the main-burden of defence in this area. The interior defence perimeter extends to sixty miles from the coast and would be the theatre of operations for the main naval air arm, fast attack boats and land-based anti-ship missile units.

Assessing China's Maritime Power

Over the past one and a half decades, the PLA-Navy has certainly increased its size and effectiveness. China has more than doubled its replenishment ship fleet, acquired and built faster and more powerful destroyers and frigates with greater range, and upgraded its submarine fleet, bringing in the nuclear deterrent element into its naval strategy.⁸³ However, doctrinal shifts and changes in inventory and organization do not readily become improvements in 'real' capability. The Chinese navy is still deficient

82 Quoted in Lewis and Xue, n.39, p.230.

83 Yung, n.45, p.40.

with regard to many capacities for developing a balanced, sea-going, power projecting fleet.

In determining a navy's power relative to that of others, there is no single fool proof method. However, if certain rudimentary criteria are used, a picture of actual capability emerges.⁸⁴ In assessing the Chinese navy's maritime power, the elements involved range from the naval personnel to infrastructure to the ships of the fleet. Five factors are addressed here: (1) number of vessels, (2) training (3) age of units (4) weapons and platforms (5) morale of personnel.

The number of Chinese naval vessels, presently more than 1,150, is impressive.⁸⁵ However, major surface combatants and submarines make up less than 15 percent of the total. The rest are smaller vessels of the patrol craft, fast-attack boat designation. The PLA-Navy is thus far from being a balanced fleet. If this was not problematic enough, the fleet's actual operating units at any given time is lower than many modern navies. Admiral Liu Huaqing addressed this problem when he was commander in chief and succeeded in redressing it to a great extent. He was instrumental in making the navy peg its level of combat preparedness and operational alert by the number of 'category-1' fighting ships (qualified for round the clock alert).⁸⁶ While in 1982 fewer than ten vessels were able to pass the qualifying tests, the rigid training system which was created led four years later to half the nation's

84 Michael A. Morris, "Chapters on Sources of Naval Capability and Hierarchy of Naval Expansion", in *Expansion of Third World Navies* (London, 1987), pp.22-96.

85 Downing, n.34, p.132.

86 Quoted in Lewis and Xue, n.39, p.124.

combat ships passing the test. In order to increase the number of 'Category-1' ships even further, the Naval Combat Ship Training Centre was created which allowed for shortening the readiness time for ready-alert submarines. Technological upgradation at most docks and bases also helped in making the ships more seaworthy and experiencing less technical problems.

Although modernization and technological upgradation of the fleet is proceeding, the Chinese navy has suffered from its ships being dated in terms of their original design and weaponry.⁸⁷ Most ships are of 1950s vintage, as are the sonars, radars, and weapons on board. Even the latest Luhū class destroyer, when compared to other ships of its class among world navies, by Jane's Intelligence Review was shown to be outdated in capabilities.⁸⁸ For instance, it compares favourably with the ex-US Navy 'Farragut' class destroyers which were 1960s Vintage.⁸⁹ Chinese made radars and sonars on these vessels also suffer from this problem: for instance, surveillance radars on the Luda class destroyers are of 1950s vintage, the Jiangwei frigate's air surveillance radar is from the 1940s and 1950s and all the Wokwon radars aboard major surface combatants and undersea surveillance radars on attack submarines are of 1950s vintage.⁹⁰

Weapons and platforms also suffer from the same problems. Some of the most important systems necessary for advanced maritime capability are absent in the Chinese naval inventory. Ever since the initiation of the Active Offshore Defence Strategy, air cover for naval ships is a pre-requisite in any successful operation. As our assessment

87 Yung, n.45, p.41.

88 Downing, n.34, p.133.

89 Yung, n.45, p.41.

90 Ibid., p.42.

of the inventory illustrates, the Chinese navy sorely lacks this. The only aircrafts which can reach China's most probable conflict spots and return are the Su-27s and the H-6 bombers.⁹¹ Sea-based air cover, Chinese strategists feel is crucial to improving the overall capability of the navy. The platform most logical for actualising this is the aircraft carrier. The debates which have raged in China over the utility of the navy's role in crises are all pegged to acquisition of a carrier.⁹²

The navy began to show interest in acquiring a carrier in the early 1980s. In the beginning, it was particularly interested in Britain's Vertical or Short Take Off/Landing light carriers. But the V/STOL carriers unsatisfactory performance in the South Atlantic in 1982 (during the Falklands crisis) caused the Chinese to re-examine options.⁹³ In 1985, the Chinese purchased the Royal Australian navy's 'Melbourne' at steel scrap price and embarked on studying the design of the flight deck and engineering specifications thoroughly. A course for carrier commanders has also been started at the Guangzhou naval academy since 1985.⁹⁴ The closest that China came to purchasing a carrier was in 1992 when Nikolayev Shipyard officials confirmed that the Chinese had tried to buy the Ukrainian Carrier, 'Varyag', a 67,500 tonne deadweight ship nearing completion at the Black Sea port.⁹⁵

Many PLA generals, however, saw the crux of China's national defence strategy in a perspective which had no place for the carrier. They felt that economic,

91 Downing, n.34, p.191.

92 Juan Zhan, n.1, p.198.

93 Ibid., p.199.

94 From Jane's Sentinel, n.53.

95 Jun Zhan, n.1, p.200.

technological and prevailing security considerations should have primacy in a carrier acquisition or building programme. They were vehemently opposed by the pro-carrier lobby, who claimed that an aircraft carrier was 'essential for the Chinese navy to go to the Oceans' and that budget consideration should not compromise naval operational capabilities.⁹⁶ In time, they have managed to extract from President Jiang Zemin a promise that China will build her own light carrier by the year 2000.⁹⁷ This may mean a slight amendment in the three-stage navy development plan already noted.

For the Chinese, it is not just enough to acquire the ship. An air arm, to be built up on the offensive lines that a carrier-based attack formation requires, will take at least another ten years from the time of commissioning of the ship.⁹⁸ Many analysts note that the Dalian shipyard has been equipped for undertaking such a construction programme.⁹⁹ China is also believed to be interested in the Sukhoi-33, the naval variant of the Su-27. A coupling of these forces would give China the necessary air cover for offshore operations. For the present, the PLA has sought to weave its way

96 Ibid., p.201.

97 Ibid., p.201.

98 Ashley J. Tellis, "Securing the Barrack: The Logic, Structure and Objectives of India's Naval Expansion", in *Naval War College Review*, Summer 1990, pp.91-93. According to experts, procuring a carrier is not enough to project power. The naval air arm has to be trained on effective, sea control and offensive missions, the entire carrier battle group has to be created where a balanced fleet of escorts (frigates), destroyers and submarines make up the hierarchy for effective force projection. Tellis speaks of India's carrier based naval air-arm development programme as becoming operational only twenty years after purchase of the HMS Hercules (INS Vikrant).

99 Jun Zhan, n.1, p.200.

around such a problem by the acquisition of aerial refuelling technology (from Iran) for extending the range and operational radius of its aircraft.¹⁰⁰

The PLA-Navy is also deficient in the area of anti-submarine warfare such as high quality depth charges, rockets and mortars. Most of the current weapon inventory is based on Soviet designs of the 1940s and 1950s. Similarly, the surface ships are armed with naval artillery based on former Soviet designs of the 1950s. The Luda destroyer's twin 130 mm and the Jianghu frigate's 100 mm guns are of 1930s firepower effectiveness. Computer-based integrated combat data and fire control systems are lacking on all but the modernised Luda and Luhu class vessels.¹⁰¹

The Luhu, again, is fitted with French 'Crotale' missiles which have a range of 7 nautical miles which could be too short in a combat situation. This problem may be solved to a great extent by the Sunburn missiles (SS-N-22) on the Sovremenny class destroyers, but the number of available missiles and platforms may still be inadequate to still the worries of the naval leadership on early engagement in combat.¹⁰²

The navy, whose morale has been generally high, has suffered much the same way as all PLA combat units have suffered after defence budgets were reduced from the 1980s. It has lowered the living standards of sailors, although naval personnel are better off than their army counterparts. A series of accidents, especially on the nuclear boats, have also contributed to the lowering of personnel morale.¹⁰³ The Navy leadership believes this can be properly solved by creating 'elite' units such as the nuclear

100 Cheung, n.3, p.25.

101 Yung, n.45, p.50.

102 Fisher, n.15, p.6.

103 Lewis and Xue, n.39, p.146.

submarine corps, a service which can act as an incentive, and increased budgetary allocations for defence and technological upgradation. These changes will be needed at an increased rate to cope with morale problems.

Conclusion

After an analysis of the force-structure and inventory it would seem that the PLA-Navy still has a long way to go before emerging as a power-projecting service. For China to attain the status of a maritime power, considerable development of naval capabilities will be required. Enhancing the navy's capabilities is also vital if China is to make the doctrinal changes that have been envisaged. Even if PLA-Navy capabilities are increased substantially, China's navy will be far behind that of the great powers Russia and the U.S. However, in the China seas, against other Asian opponents, it could be a strong foe.¹⁰⁴ To investigate and understand if this is likely to be the case is the main task of the following chapter.

104 Joseph R. Morgan, "Porpoises Among the Whales: Small Navies in the Asia and Pacific", East West Centre, no.2, March 1994, p.35.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY

In the light of developments taking place in the existing force structure and operational doctrine of the PLA-Navy, it is imperative to determine whether such a change will threaten the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific region. The following chapter proposes to look at some important questions related to a build up of Chinese naval power. These include: (a) whether the force modernization programmes would lead to a significant shift in the region's naval balance of power; (b) has the upgradation of China's defence capabilities contributed in any measure to the arms-build up occurring in the region? (c) would China employ force to settle the maritime disputes in which it is involved?

The chapter also proposes to study in some detail the nature of maritime claims and disputes, the costs and benefits of Beijing's use of force to settle these disputes, the nature of maritime confidence building measures proposed, the absence of which in the 'semi-enclosed' seas of the East Asian region could lead to 'naval incidents and misunderstanding' and finally to the utility of the present PLA-Navy in two hypothetical conflict situations. Thus, the implications for Asia-Pacific security would be treated as a bind of disjointed factors having both external and internal determinants. The aim of the chapter primarily would be to determine, the extent to which China and its navy are directly responsible for the changing security dynamic of the region.

China and the Asia-Pacific

The clash of Asian and European civilizations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had led to the prevailing Sino-centric civilization of the East Asian region being penetrated and eventually dominated by the military and economic power of the Western nations.¹ In the latter half of the twentieth century, superpower rivalries and policies of containment and counter-containment had led to the region becoming a major area for force deployments.² While politically China had been able to exploit the 'strategic triangle' that was in place in the Asia-Pacific to its own benefit, militarily it was never allowed to assert itself. It is this constraint which has ebbed in the post-Cold War era. Keeping this aspect in context, the modernization of the Chinese military force structure becomes a cause for concern. China today is engaged in a concerted drive to develop its comprehensive national power. The military element is a significant, though not the only constituent in this modernization drive.

Through more effective economic policies featuring market forces, diverse forms of ownership and extensive ties with the global economy, China is fast becoming an economic power with an active sphere of influence. The 'four modernizations'

1 Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal, "Rethinking East Asian Security", *Survival*, vol.36, no.2, Summer 1994, p.8.

The societies of East Asia: China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam all stemmed from ancient China and developed within the Chinese cultural area i.e., the area most influenced by characteristics of the Chinese civilization. For instance, the ideographic writing system; the Confucian classical teachings about family and social order, the official examination system and the imperial court. Age, size and wealth made China ('*Zhongguo*' or the middle kingdom) the natural centre of East Asia. China thus played the lead role in East Asia as a combined civil and military force.

2 *Ibid.*, p.9.

programme will enhance indigenous science and technology, improve infrastructure, and initiate a force modernization programme for the military.

The increase in Chinese power is viewed with suspicion by most nations of the Asia-Pacific. Many of the countries in China's periphery consider the 'middle kingdom' as aspiring to regional great power status. China, as one analyst noted, is after all an irredentist power to a degree, holding claims to territories that are presently controlled by other governments.³ The 'China Threat' theory which enjoys widespread support in the Asia-Pacific would mark China out as the primary expansionist power in the region, whose ambition (as in the case of regional disputes and sovereignty issues with regard to Taiwan) could become more aggressive as intentions are matched by increased strength in military capabilities.

China has historically seen itself as a 'wronged power' subjected to unending humiliations by other countries.⁴ Most of the territories it currently claims went out of its jurisdiction in the late nineteenth century. Beijing may with added wealth and strength set out to right the wrongs of a humiliating history and could very well view itself as not being committed to the territorial status quo of the region. The primary aim of Beijing's current external policy would then be to remake China as a great power and settle the territorial disputes in the country's periphery in its favour. China feels it is fully within its right to change the territorial status quo, even though most countries

3 Harry Harding, "A Chinese Colossus", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol.18, no.3, September 1995, p.110.

4 David Shambaugh, "Growing Strong: China's Challenge to Asian Security", *Survival*, vol.36, no.2, Summer 1994, p.43.

would view such actions as being aggressive and dangerous.⁵ In the realm of national security, the end of the Cold War thus has been a blessing for China. For the first time in over a hundred years, China does not face any significant external threat. Yet the absence of armed confrontation between China and another power does not mean that its defence planning overlooks the potential for conflict around China's periphery that could be threatening to Chinese interests.⁶

Implications for the Regional Balance of Power

In the light of fleet modernization and accompanying doctrinal changes of the PLA-Navy, the question could be posed whether such a build up would alter the regional balance of power and in addition pose threats to the security of China's neighbours. In trying to understand the concept of balance of power prevailing in the Asia-Pacific the point to be noted is that the principal ingredient in any regional balance has been the forward-deployed US military presence.⁷ That element has now waned with the US drawing down its forces. This leaves the countries of North and South East Asia to redefine regional threat perceptions and to redraw security strategies aimed at coping with altered threat perceptions. Another important change is that Soviet Union/Russia has

5 The definition of what action constitutes aggression is a knotty one. In the Asia-Pacific, China's claims on the territories presently occupied by other countries and the use of force to settle the claims in Beijing's favour would be treated by other countries as Chinese aggression. On the other hand, China does not recognise the sovereignty of many South East Asian countries over disputed maritime territories. It considers the present arrangement of each state absorbing claim areas into their provinces as an action denying Chinese sovereignty which justifies use of force. Thus each side is prone to perceive the other's action as aggressive.

6 Shambaugh, n.4, p.50.

7 Amitav Acharya and Paul M. Evans, "China's Defence Expenditures: Trends and Implications", *Eastern Asian Policy Papers* (Ontario), vol.1, 1994, p.26.

also ceased to operate its Red Banner Fleet based at Vladivostok. The concerns of the countries of the region would be whether regional powers would attempt to fill the "military vacuum" that has developed as a result of changes in U.S. and Russian deployments.

In the Asia-Pacific, the countries that are seen as possibly attempting to project power are China, Japan, and to a lesser extent, India. In recent years, India has been ruled out as a potential regional hegemon as it is seen to be constrained by domestic problems and reduced defence budgets, particularly for the navy.⁸ Of the remaining two, opinion is divided on whether Japan or China potentially constitutes a regional military threat.⁹

The current state of the naval balance of power operating in the region would clearly point at China having superiority, particularly with respect to the number of vessels it is operating. Japan possibly has the most capable naval force in the region. It is highly modernised and the reconfiguration of Japanese naval doctrines which extends the operational limits of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force into the East China Seas is perceived as an indication that threats to Tokyo's assets in the China Seas would not be tolerated. Japan whose life lines are through the China Seas has thus a primary interest in keeping the sea lanes open and operating.¹⁰ Any threat to regional stability

8 Panitan Wattanayagorn and Desmond Ball, "A Regional Arms Race"?, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol.18, no.3, September 1995, p.163.

9 "ASEAN Should be Wary of China's Military Expansion", *Sunday Times* (New Delhi), 29 March 1992, p.11.

10 Brian Cloughley, "Japan Ponders Power Projection", *Jane's International Defense Review*, July 1996.

would have grave consequences for Japan. India has been concerned with Chinese naval activity in the Bay of Bengal and the fitting out of Burmese naval bases by the PLA-Navy to harbour Chinese ships.¹¹

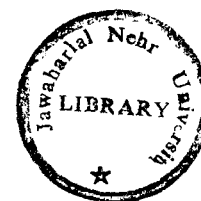


Table 1
Naval Balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific 1995

Country	Sub-marines	Carriers	De- stroyers	Frigates	Corvettes
China	60	0	18	38	0
Japan	18	0	8	58	0
India	15	1	5	21	14
Vietnam	0	0	0	7	0
Indonesia	2	0	0	17	0
Thailand	0	1	0	8	5

Notes: (1) Excluding US and Soviet Pacific Fleets.
(2) Indonesia has recently purchased 39 vessels from the former East German navy.

Source: IISS 'Military Balance' 1994-95 and Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-95.

At present the naval balance of power cannot be seen to clearly favour any nation in the region notwithstanding the naval modernization programmes of China. Any threat

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10(...continued)

Concerns regarding Japanese force projection into the China seas to an extent also act as determinants in force structure modernization in the armed forces of the countries in the Asia-Pacific. Japan which maintains great transparency regarding its defence posture closely monitors developments in its neighbourhood. It also has the technological capacity and wealth to rapidly move to a 'regional superpower' (both conventional and nuclear) status if the situation so warranted.

11 Rahul Roy Chaudhury, "The Chinese Navy and Indian Security", *Indian Defence Review*, vol.9, no.1, January 1994, p.54.

to the prevailing status quo would be a reality only when capabilities are matched by intentions. A reduced American presence in the Asia-Pacific may fuel more nations to independently examine threat perceptions. The implications of the growth of Chinese naval power can thus be better understood only in the context of regional threat perceptions.

Perceptions of Chinese Defence/Naval Modernization

The Asia-Pacific region is extremely diverse with extraordinary disparities in national economic resources and military capabilities as well as significant differences in security concerns and threat perceptions.¹² Thus it is to be expected that there will not be a uniform view within the Asia-Pacific region regarding the regional implications of a Chinese naval/military buildup.¹³ Regional perceptions of growing Chinese power, according to Amitav Acharya and Paul M. Evans, range from the 'benign' to the 'alarmist'. The 'benign view' considers the Chinese leadership's principal concerns as being economic reform and domestic stability and feels that 'expansionist designs' do not figure in the PRC's immediate external agenda. Military actions by the Chinese PLA would not be conducive to the foreign trade that spurs China's economic modernization and would also threaten markets and economic interests. Beijing is perceived to understand that an outward-looking military would surely subvert the inward-looking

12 Wattanayagorn and Ball, n.7, p.26.

13 Acharya and Evans, n.7, p.26.

political strategy of the Chinese leadership to seek legitimacy through economic performance.¹⁴

Table-2
Change in Asia Pacific Defence Expenditure (1985-1993)

Country	% of change
China	+12.6
Japan	+28.5
North Korea	+22.4
South Korea	+63.5
Malaysia	+31.2
Singapore	+36.2
Taiwan	+29.9
Thailand	+27.6
Indonesia	-2.2

Source: IISS Military Balance 1994-1995, p.171.

The adherents to a 'benign' view of Chinese naval power would also argue that the PLA-Navy at present lacks the forces to effectively 'command the seas' of the Asia-Pacific. Its present level of capability at the most would allow it to deny the use of resources to other countries of the area. Defence budget increase in the case of the Chinese navy and the PLA are matched by rising budgets of other countries in the region (see Table-2). For instance, if one were to put actual Chinese military budget figures at US \$12 billion (double that of the official figure of US \$6 billion), it is still the same level as that of South Korea at US \$12 billion, almost that of Taiwan at US \$10 billion, well below that of Japan at US \$40 billion and minuscule compared to US defence

14 Ibid., p.26.

spending of \$270 billion.¹⁵ Defence resource limitations, given the size of the PLA, would act to curtail the scope and speed of Chinese defence and naval modernization.¹⁶ External factors, such as technology denials related to China's suppression of freedom and human rights, also threaten the modernization. Technology denials in the wake of the Tienanmen incidents of 1989, it must be remembered, had a particularly debilitating effect on the Navy's modernization programme.¹⁷

The 'benign' view also maintains that China's current spate of arms purchases from Russia may be a temporary phenomenon, genuinely intended at modernising obsolete defence equipment and technology and not the commencement of grandiose plans to aggressively protract conflict in the Asia-Pacific.

The 'alarmist' view, which has far more adherents in the region, argues that despite easing of border tensions with Vietnam and India and the considerable dilution of a threat of war with Russia or the United States, Beijing still continues to arm the PLA and the navy in particular with modern weapons and leading-edge technologies that give the forces real offensive capabilities. The 'alarmists' see a shifting of Chinese strategic thinking from the continental to the maritime arena.¹⁸ Strong evidence is presented in the number and nature of maritime territorial disputes and claims that China is embroiled in. The 'alarmist' view further notes that in China's naval modernization

15 Chen Guoqing, "'China Threat' Rings Hollow", *Defense News*, 17-23 May, 1993, p.20.

16 Jing Dong Yuan, "China's Defence Modernization: Implications for Asia-Pacific Security", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol.17, no.1, June 1995, p.76.

17 J.N.Mak, "The Chinese Navy and the South China Sea: A Malaysian Assessment", *Pacific Review*, vol.4, no.2, 1991, p.156.

18 You Xi and You Xu, "In Search of Blue Water Power: The PLA Navy's Maritime Strategy in the 1990s", *The Pacific Review*, vol.4, no.2, 199-, p.148.

programme a strategy for acquiring forces for power projection and waging 'local war' is easily perceivable. The acquisition of enhanced capabilities in ships, weapons, electronics and other force multipliers for the navy, they argue, will inevitably lead to a shift in the regional balance of power, a shift which would be clearly in China's favour.

In the maritime domain, the South China seas with Beijing's all encompassing claims will be the natural arena for force projection.¹⁹ In this respect it is thought that the historical Chinese threat to South East Asia has shifted from political subversion and support of groups involved in extremist activities to a threat of direct military coercion aimed at making other nations succumb to Beijing's line on territorial claims.²⁰

A withdrawal of US forces from their role as an extra-regional balancer in the Asia-Pacific would also remove the constraints on China's intentions to employ force to resolve territorial claims. China's rhetoric on the peaceful and negotiated settlement of disputes is viewed with scepticism as a time-buying tactic for the modernization of its navy and the military more generally.²¹ The 'alarmist' view sees China's contradictory actions in the South China Seas - on the one hand opting for negotiated settlements, but, on the other, simultaneously increasing the number of islands under military occupation and claiming sovereignty by passing legislation on the issue - as strong evidence for the Chinese desire to dominate East Asia.

19 Acharya and Evans, n.7, p.27.

20 Mak, n.17, p.158.

21 Acharya and Evans, n.7, p.27.

In this context the question may be asked as to whether the contradictory views on Chinese defence modernization have had a significant impact on the ongoing arms build up in the region? Is 'China' the principal motivation for increased spending on modern weapon systems by the countries of the Asia-Pacific, or are they inspired by other factors? It is thus necessary to examine the rationale behind the 'arms-racing' occurring in the region.

The Regional Arms-Build Up

The Asia-Pacific faces a security future which the end of the Cold War has made in some ways more benign but also more complex and unpredictable.²² The wealth that the countries of the region possess and the strategic uncertainty that confronts them has led to a general rise in the levels of defence spending.²³ Many of the states are able to afford the expensive technologies that characterise modern conventional forces. Their rapid pace of economic growth helps to cater to such spending.²⁴ The region, as a result, has become the most lucrative market for conventional weapons after the end of East-West confrontation of the Cold War era. A broader range of weapons systems that transform strike capabilities have been purchased, including many force multipliers

22 Andrew Mack, "Key Security Issues in the Asia-Pacific" in Richard Leaver and James L. Richardson (eds.), *The Post-Cold War Order: Diagnoses and Prognoses* (Canberra, 1993), p.147.

23 Stuart Harris, "The Economic Aspects of Security in the Asia/Pacific Region", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol.18, no.3, September 1995, p.36.

24 Buzan and Segal, n.1, p.14.

such as air-to-air refuelling capability, airborne early warning and control systems (AWACS), as well as electronic surveillance systems.²⁵

Andrew Mack identifies several factors, internal and external, that contribute to the arms build up in the region. As the Asia-Pacific is a region distinctively maritime in nature procurement rates for naval weapon systems are particularly high. This is reflected in the first of the internal factors which is the concept of 'prestige arms racing'. This is an arms build up spurred by the purchase of weapon systems which are thought to portray a position of strength. New frigates, fighter aircraft, and submarines act as a source of status although none of these systems give their owners any particular ability for control of the surroundings. This sort of spending on military items is also partly the result of a dominant role enjoyed by the armed forces in political decision-making in the countries of the region. A second internal factor is that since economic growth is ongoing, the percentage of GNP devoted to defence spending can be maintained while absolute levels of spending increase. Third, there is the very real need felt by countries of the region to modernize their military, most of which currently rely on obsolete weaponry.

Among the external factors which can be attributed to the rise in defence expenditures, the reduction of US forces and America's doubtful commitment to regional security in the Asia-Pacific has paradoxically given the signal to East Asian countries to spend more on defence in line with U.S. concerns about 'burden-sharing'.²⁶ Another external factor is the maritime disputes between the countries of the Asia-Pacific. With

25 Mack, n.22, p.148.

26 Ibid., p.152.

the delineation and ensuing contestation of exclusive economic zones, new missions have been outlined for service arms, in particular for navies. The contest for control of these exclusive economic zones raises the real possibility of local war.²⁷

The most important external factory in the region's arms dynamic is the rising power of China.²⁸ As most East Asians are concerned with Chinese intentions in the South China seas, they are caught in a classic "security dilemma."²⁹ Regional security policies, with the possible exception of Japan, are firmly based on Realist principles where security is assumed to be enhanced by military strength, the central security problematic is one of aggression and the primary focus of security policy is that of military deterrence.³⁰ Thus the regional arms build up could be partially construed as a response to Chinese military/naval modernization.

In analysing the maritime reorientation in defence spending and threat perceptions, many analysts believe that the present driving force for development of seapower in the Asia-Pacific region is the emphasis on contingency planning in an increasingly uncertain security environment.³¹ The other key reason is the complete absence of land-based

27 Ibid., p.153.

28 Shambaugh, n.4, p.9.

29 'Security dilemma' is a situation in which countries compete with each other in military strength. If country A were to go in for a new weapons platform or force multiplier, country B, which feels its security is threatened, aspires to match it with its own platforms. The onus shifts, with each country trying to outdo the other. Strategies which seek to achieve security via superior military strength risk generating a 'security dilemma'. They create incentives for preemption in crises and escalation once the threshold of violence is crossed. This could lead to wars that none of the parties originally intended.

30 Mack, n.22, p.155.

31 J.N.Mak and B.A.Hamzah, "The External Maritime Dimension of ASEAN Security", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol.18, no.3, September 1995, p.126.

threats and recognition of the region as being inherently maritime in character, which is a matter of simple geography. The Law of the Sea conferences contributed to the creation of new maritime regimes and frontiers which led to the presently increased articulation of claims regarding disputed maritime territories.

Increase in Number of Incidents at Sea

A factor closely related to the rise of Chinese seapower is the increase in incidents of smuggling and piracy in the South China seas. Many of the other countries of the region fear that the PLA-Navy may have been responsible for these to an extent. One such was the case of the 'Alicia Star', a freighter bound for South Korea with a cargo of cigarettes which was forced at the point of arms to go into a Chinese port, where the cargo was confiscated.³² Observers felt that this was a display of over-zealousness by elements of the PLA-Navy. They felt it to be a deliberate exercise of 'extra-territorial sovereignty' by China. Piracy, it was claimed, was used by China to assert and extend its maritime claims. Beijing however was quick to put the blame for these incidents on rogue elements of the customs and public security forces. China reiterated that no PLA-Navy units had been involved.

Curiously, Russian vessels were at the receiving end of most pirate attacks. Estimates found that almost eighty percent of the ships victimised were Russian. Attacks such as these receded only when Moscow deployed a naval flotilla in the China seas and threatened to blow the pirates out of the water.³³

32 Michael Vatikiotis, "Gunboat Diplomacy", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 June 1994, p.22.

33 *Ibid.*, p.23.

The International Maritime Bureau based at Kuala Lumpur opines that coordinated seizure of ships, the detention in coastal ports and confiscation of cargo means that the PLA-Navy has to be involved. If this were proved to be true, it raises questions as to whether such actions are a direct fallout of the 'Offshore Active Defence Strategy' which gives the PLA-Navy an extended operational perimeter.

Patterns in Weapons Acquisition

Most East Asian countries are presently upgrading naval capabilities. The forces available to Japan are sizeable and well equipped. Japan is particularly strong in terms of air and naval forces.³⁴ The airforce is equipped with over 150 F-15 Eagle fighters while the navy has the only Aegis-class destroyers in East Asia. Acquisition of force multipliers coupled with already high technological levels give it a very capable force structure. The armed forces of Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and even the Philippines have all undertaken expansion and technological upgradation. These include: helicopter carriers, Chinese-made frigates and 'kilo' class submarines for Thailand; advanced frigates and air-power for Malaysia; mine-counter measure ships and corvettes for Singapore; upgraded air and naval capabilities with the acquisition of F-16 aircraft and C-130 Hercules transport planes plus frigates, submarines and different types of landing ships and corvettes for Indonesia.³⁵ The Philippines, arguably the weakest in naval capabilities, has sought to buy Australian - and Spanish - built patrol boats. The

34 Acharya and Evans, n.7, p.36.

35 Amitav Acharya, "Governance and Security in Southeast Asia: Assessing the Impact of Defence Spending," *Eastern Asia Policy Papers No.9* (Ontario), 1995, p.26.

latter, the 'Comoran type' are equipped with 'Exocet' missiles. Of the South East Asian countries, Vietnamese forces lack in effective power projection capability with outdated equipment. This state of affairs is especially true for platforms and weapons operated by air and naval forces.³⁶

Force projection capabilities of all the countries in the region are constrained by various factors. The Japanese forces are tied down by constitutional provisions in that country's political order that limit comprehensive force projection. The South East Asian states may be upgrading technology and weapons but still do not deploy platforms in sufficient numbers to control the seas of the region, and the Vietnamese are constrained by economic difficulties. As such there would be little threat of the armed forces engaging each other in conflict. For navies the key issue is that operational areas which lie mainly in the South and East China seas are of a 'semi-enclosed' nature.³⁷ Thus the issue of navies of different countries sharing operational perimeter could very well lead to incidents at sea, particularly in the context of maritime disputes.

The fledgling multilateral institutions of the area have suggested several measures in the maritime arena to maintain transparency in operations and foster a spirit of cooperation with regard to the use of the seas. Although nothing concrete has been agreed upon, it is worthwhile to understand those confidence-building measures aimed at navies of the region.

36 Acharya and Evans, n.7, p.37.

37 A semi-enclosed sea means a gulf, basin or sea surrounded by two or more countries and connected to another sea or ocean by straits or other geographically defined outlets. The Yellow Sea and the South China sea are both semi-enclosed seas.

Naval and Maritime CBMS

Maritime Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) may be divided into categories depending on the aspects of security they address. These are CBMs which may be used as a means to enhance the traditional concept of military security as well as the more modern concept of comprehensive security.³⁸ Military security related CBMs usually involve regional naval cooperation, prior notification of naval exercises and "avoidance of incidents at sea" agreements. Comprehensive security is advanced through measures of maritime cooperation in the region, like those regarding shipping safety, control of marine pollution and the initiation of cooperative marine scientific research and resource management regimes.³⁹

Maritime security is of great concern in the Asia-Pacific region. Security at sea is crucial to long-term economic prosperity of the region, as regional economic growth has been largely driven by seaborne trade, which is the great strategic vulnerability of the regional nations.⁴⁰ As most of the force level developments are taking place in the crowded environment of the China Seas, the chances of misunderstanding between maritime forces is great. Therefore, maritime and naval CBMs in the Asia-Pacific can contribute to regional stability by easing tensions and reducing the risks of conflict. Nations also need to understand the fact that they should pursue maritime interests and marine resource management in an ecologically sustainable manner in accordance with

38 Commodore Sam Bateman, "Asia-Pacific Maritime Confidence Building", in Jill R. Junola (ed.), *Maritime Confidence Building in Regions of Tension* (Washington, 1996), p.29.

39 Ibid., p.29.

40 Ibid., p.31.

the principles of international law. The regional multilateral institutions like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the 'track-two' initiative the Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) need to promote more aspects of naval cooperation such as joint exercises, ship visits and personnel exchange, navy to navy talks, peacekeeping, Sea Lanes of Communication protection, decisions regarding number of standing forces, sovereignty protection, doctrine development and transparency in fleet deployment.⁴¹

Most important perhaps is the need to actively bring China into regional fora because its external policy today has a strong maritime outlook. In fact, China has many characteristics of an aspiring seapower, such as, force level modernization, doctrinal changes and the actual employment of forces in the disputes that it has with other countries of the region.

Multilateral naval exercises in East Asian waters are presently limited to the annual exercises conducted by the Five Power Defence Arrangement in the South China Sea. These are the "KAKADU Fleet Concentration Periods" first held in May 1993 and subsequently KAKADU II in April 1995. The second exercise was a significant advance on the first, with twenty-two ships, two submarines and over 35 naval aircraft from Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, New Zealand and Singapore participating.⁴² Multilateral security cooperation of this kind is critical to ensuring maritime security in the Asia-Pacific.

41 Ibid., p.43.

42 Brian Robertson, "Security Cooperation in Asia-Pacific", *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute, March 1996, p.66.

Maritime Claims and Disputes

The greatest threat to stability in the Asia-Pacific are a number of territorial and maritime disputes in the China Seas, the existence of which has added a touch of volatility to that region. In the East China Sea, China has a long-standing maritime dispute over ownership of the Senkaku (Diaoyutai) islands with Japan. The major issues of contention in the South China seas are the disputed ownership of the Paracels and the Spratly islands.

Senkaku Islands

The Senkaku Islands dispute is the sticking point in defining sovereign territorial limits between Japan and China. Since the islands fall northeast of Taiwan and form an indisputable part of China's continental shelf, the Chinese claim ownership. Japan has however historically administered these islands. Until the discovery of large deposits of oil, these islands were uninhabited and of little consequence to both sides. The PRC government has often accused the Japanese of pursuing 'aggression, plunder and hegemony in claiming the Senkakus'.⁴³ Premier Zhou Enlai was however the voice of reason in his discussion with Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka in 1972 saying "Let us not quarrel over them now; they are tiny islets hardly visible on the map and have only become a problem since oil was discovered in the vicinity."⁴⁴ While resolution of the Senkaku issue resolution thus lay buried for many years, in 1978 Japanese patrol craft

43 NCNA, 11 March 1972 in FBIS-CHI, 13 March 1972, p.A8.

44 C.Muller, "Senkaku or Diaoyutai," *Swiss Review of World Affairs*, February 1975, p.7, cited in David G.Muller, *China as a Maritime Power* (Boulder 1983), p.215.

had to forcibly evict Chinese fishing boats. This incident threatened the forthcoming signing of a Treaty of Sino-Japanese Friendship. Fisheries agreements and oil exploration and how to go about these have yet to be decided between the two countries and these have blocked resolution of the dispute.

The Paracels

The Paracels have been claimed and controlled by Vietnam. When China seized the Southern Paracels from South Vietnam in 1974, the North Vietnamese who needed Chinese support in their war against the South did not complain.⁴⁵ Since 1975 Vietnam has renewed its claims to the islands. The border conflict between China and Vietnam in 1979 brought the issue of the Paracels to the fore. When China increased its naval presence in the area and published exhaustive claim records, Vietnam responded with its own report producing evidence to reinforce her own claims. These claims and counter-claims varied in intensity and culminated in 1988 in a violent clash between the two countries which left three Vietnamese ships sunk and seventy-seven Vietnamese sailors killed or missing.⁴⁶ Clashes were repeated again in 1992, notwithstanding an agreement between China and Vietnam renouncing the use of force to settle the dispute. The dispute has still not been resolved and probably will only be settled when rival maritime claims in the South China seas are laid to rest.

45 Ibid., p.216.

46 "Intelligence", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 April 1990, p.8.

The Spratly Islands

If the Paracels and Senkakus have been areas of Sino-Vietnamese and Sino-Japanese tensions, the area with the greatest potential for armed conflict is the Spratly archipelago, where not only China and Vietnam are claimants but also Taiwan, Malaysia and the Philippines.⁴⁷ The Spratlys had been under Taiwanese occupation between 1956 and 1970. Taipei which maintained a garrison on Itu Aba Island till 1983. The Philippines' occupation began in the 1970s. Manila declared the archipelago derelict and claimed it for itself. Oil exploration in the area was sponsored, with five wells drilled at Reed Bank, west of the main Spratly group, from 1976 to 1981.⁴⁸ Vietnam's presence dated from 1974, when an expeditionary force of that country occupied islands not already occupied. The Malaysian navy visited and claimed Amboyna Cay, the southernmost of the Spratlys in 1978.⁴⁹ Although it initially made its claim in 1971, it was only in 1974 that China published a map showing the extent of her claims in the South China Sea. The map showed an area extending up to some three thousand nautical miles south of Hainan Island and approached within fifty miles off the coasts of Vietnam, Philippines and Malaysia.⁵⁰ China followed up with many public statements on how the islands had to be returned to the "motherland". The Philippines' oil exploration at Reed Bank in 1976 brought forth a statement by the Chinese foreign ministry to the effect that Manila was in violation of the territorial rights and sovereignty of the People's

47 Muller, n.1, p.219.

48 R.Tasker, "Stakeout in the Spratlys", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 24 February 1978, p.11.

49 Marwyn S.Samuels, *Contest for the South China Sea* (New York, 1983), p.125.

50 Muller, n.44, p.220.

Republic. While on the one hand China continued to reassure South East Asian countries that dispute settlement would be through diplomatic channels, China's later behaviour seemed to indicate that force would be used to evict interlopers from the Spratlys.

Present Status of Disputes and Employment of Force

All the claimant states have incorporated the entire Spratly archipelago and the Paracels into their provincial administrative systems. Apart from enacting legislation that specifies the position of each territory vis-a-vis the state involved, they have also bolstered claims in other ways, including the use and threat of military force, 'showing the flag', occupying and fortifying islets, building up submerged features, establishing structures and markers on the islands, establishing scientific research stations supposedly mandated by international organizations, publishing maps, historical documents to substantiate claims, allowing tourists and journalists to visit the islands and the grant of concessions to oil companies for exploitation of the presumed reserves.⁵¹

China herself has done all these and much more. Its interest in the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS) has led it to claim the entire continental shelf. In addition to this, on 25 February 1992, the National People's Congress (China's legislative body), passed the Law of the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone, thus legalizing all maritime claims. Article 2 of the Law lists all of China's unsettled maritime disputes. The Chinese also signed a contract with the Crestone Energy Corporation of the US for oil exploration in an offshore block

51 Mark J. Valencia, "China and the South China Seas Disputes", *Adelphi Paper*, 298, London, p.8.

contiguous to a Vietnamese oil field.⁵² In the same announcement, Beijing also made it clear that it would use naval force when necessary to protect China-Crestone operations.⁵³

The ambiguity regarding the Chinese stand is further complicated by offers of joint scientific expeditions and development of the areas with the other claimants. While China herself has established weather and oceanographic research stations, so have other claimants. Vietnam has a research station, while Malaysia and the Philippines have made their islands 'tourist destinations'. China has a fledgling naval base on Fiery Cross Reef with helicopter landing pads and a 300 meter pier capable of handling 4000 tonne ships.⁵⁴ In addition to this, direct telecommunication links have also been established.⁵⁵

There is no doubt that with its growing economic and military potential as well as the sweeping territorial claims and willingness to use force, the PRC is the key player in the region. China's strategy seems to be simultaneously to strengthen its naval capability and enhance and expand its physical presence, thus legitimising its occupations to attract Western oil companies and to insist on the conduct of bilateral diplomacy with the other claimants as opposed to their call for internationalization of the issue.⁵⁶

52 Alexander Chieh-Cheng Huang, "The Chinese Navy's Offshore Active Defense Strategy", *Naval War College Review*, 1994, p.7.

53 Ibid., p.8.

54 Valencia, n.51, p.9.

55 Sheng Lijun, *China's Policy Towards the Spratly Islands in the 1990s* (Canberra, 1994).

56 Leszek Buszynski, "ASEAN Security Dilemmas", *Survival*, vol.34, no.4 (1994), p.94.

China seems to have developed a 'three nos' policy to deal with the China sea disputes.

These are:

- (1) No specification of claim;
- (2) No multilateral negotiations; and
- (3) No internationalization of the issue.⁵⁷

China's offers for joint development have met with little response from the other claimants. They suspect that China's idea of joint development seems to be foreign participation in the development of China's resources - as opposed to a pooling of rights to resources in disputed areas.⁵⁸

Although the ASEAN states have almost consistently tried to resolve differences, some of China's subsequent actions have destroyed the atmosphere of goodwill.⁵⁹ China has strengthened its naval-air capacity in the China seas, highlighted by the acquisition of aerial refuelling technology and considerable thought given to purchasing an aircraft carrier. The ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea had urged all claimants to settle disputes peacefully and called for regional cooperation in furthering safety of navigation and communication, pollution prevention, search and rescue, combating piracy and drug smuggling. China's response was again confusing. While initially it was slightly supportive, Beijing proceeded to redeploy three-Romeo class submarines from the North sea fleet to the South China Sea for patrol of contested areas.⁶⁰

57 Valencia, n.51, p.12.

58 Buszynski, n.74, p.95.

59 Valencia, n.51, p.13.

60 Nayan Chanda, "Divide and Rule", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 August 1994, p.18.

Significantly many analysts are of the view that in the offer of joint development, the People's Liberation Army was never consulted.⁶¹ The PLA's influence has increased after the Tienanmen Square incident of 1989. This has been reflected in the increasing budget of the PLA and letting the navy flex its muscles in the China seas. The new generation of Chinese leaders may feel that a harder line is necessary to win PLA support. The PLA still remains the Chinese leaders' one and only effective weapon in quelling 'external' as well as 'internal' threats.

The PLA-Navy's main complaint has been that while China has been unable to exploit its oil in the China Seas, militarily weaker states are taking advantage of Chinese restraint.⁶² China's military planners have used this argument in addition to the economic importance of its coastal provinces - as the justification for large budgets and modernization of the military in general and the navy in particular.⁶³ Some observers feel that internal dissent and fear of disintegration led the Chinese to 'recapture lost territories' through the blocking of potentially hostile regional naval forces and complete control of ports in the China seas. Some even suggest that China's naval buildup is stimulated by perceived threats, mainly from Japan, and the China seas problem is merely a convenient smoke-screen for this.⁶⁴ The reduction of Soviet and US naval presence is thus significant, and China may feel committed to fill the power vacuum.

61 Valencia, n.51, p.14.

62 Tai Ming Cheung, "Growth of Chinese Naval Power: Priorities, Goals, Missions and Regional Implications," *Pacific Strategic Papers*, Singapore, 1990, p.10.

63 Valencia, n.51, p.16.

64 Cheung, n.62, p.12.

Costs and Benefits of Chinese Use of Force in Settling Maritime Claims

If China were to go ahead and use force to settle the disputes in the China seas, regional stability would be certainly threatened. This sort of an unstable environment could be counter-productive to China's own modernization plans. China's behaviour will in all probability be determined by a careful analysis of costs and benefits accruing from the use of force.

The benefits for China in settling the disputes would be that the successful use of force would allow it to establish a strong 'foot hold' on the islands in the South China seas.⁶⁵ This Chinese presence could be exploited later in diplomatic parleys and negotiation with the parties involved. The 1974 Paracel Islands incident is a case in point, where China benefited from the use of force. There are economic benefits in the form of rich resources which would fall into Beijing's hands if the entire Spratly archipelago were to come under China's direct control. Occupation of what the PLA has called 'survival space' (the South China Sea) thus brings it many strategic benefits.

For creating a pan-Chinese identity as well as to curb internal dissent and giving strength and legitimacy to the post-Deng Xiaoping Chinese leadership, a successful use of force by the Chinese navy and airforce over the China seas would give Beijing many tactical benefits. The potential for use of force, thus is very real.

The negative consequences of an aggressive display of Chinese naval power in the South China seas would come in the form of the high costs involved for China in carrying out such a long-range mission, the possibility of the conflict dragging on depending on the involvement of regional powers and a substantial dent to China's

65 Thach Hong Nguyen, "Cost and Benefits of Chinese Use of Force in the South China Sea", *Pacific Research*, February 1996, p.25.

reputation as a modernising and progressive nation concerned only with economic prosperity. Sharp reactions might result from the use of force.

The costs of a Chinese use of force should not be overstated though. China recognises that the world considers it a superpower in the making and the reaction to a potential superpower's use of force in a limited and low-level conflict may not be great. In fact, China's policy manoeuvrability will be greatly enhanced by the weak responses of the US, ASEAN and other nations with interests in the region. For instance, as illustrated in the Mischief Reef Occupation, China clearly favours what observers call a 'leaking status quo' in the South China seas, a scenario which involves threats escalating to limited use of force that could however undermine regional stability.⁶⁶ The regional political mechanisms and their security framework, starting to operate in the region, are the institutions best suited to resolve such a potential conflict situation before it escalates.

Will China then attempt to settle maritime disputes with the use of force? China's advance into the South China seas more than any other issue is an extension of domestic politics.⁶⁷ Before the 'Law on Territorial Waters' had been adopted, it had been widely claimed that in terms of resources the South China sea held oil and natural gas

66 Ibid., p.25. Also see Rodney Tasker 'A Line in the Sand' *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 6 April 1995, pp.14-15.

Chinese forces occupied Mischief Reef over which the Philippines had declared sovereignty and proceeded to erect markers and concrete installations. Manila blew up these structures using its navy but noted the presence of Chinese warships in the area. Although China did not respond aggressively it must be noted that none of the ASEAN countries barring Vietnam protested. The US Navy (which may have had prior knowledge of the incident) also chose to do nothing.

67 Samuel S.Kim, "China's Pacific Policy", *International Journal*, Summer 1995, p.480.

reserves worth \$1 trillion. It was felt that, with the continuing exploitation of Xinjiang, the China seas would be the sole area for replenishment of resources in the 21st century. The southward push was to be China's primary strategic orientation.⁶⁸ The picture that emerges from recent Chinese internal military writings is that war is preferable to the surrender of sovereign claims in the South China seas. Violent conflict, then, might become a very real possibility in the next decade.⁶⁹

It needs to be perceived whether the PLA-Navy, on whom the mantle of settling the claims is sure to fall, has the capability to convincingly win a war against potential South East Asian opponents. The following two case studies will attempt to analyse this. The first one is on the utility of the navy with respect to a conflict situation in the South China seas against a combined Malaysia/Singapore force. The second scenario is the utility of a naval oriented invasion of Taiwan.

Combat Effectiveness of the PLA-Navy in the South China Seas

In assessing the utility of Chinese naval forces in a combat situation it has to be kept in mind that airpower would be critical. In a South China seas setting, where operational areas would be far away from coastal bases of the PLA-Navy, the need for excellent logistic support and complete control of the air is a pre-requisite to success. As was evident from the inventory of the PLA-Navy and the PLA-Airforce, China presently lacks the elements of airpower to consistently maintain air superiority in the

68 John W. Garver, "China's Push Through the South China Seas: The Interaction of Bureaucratic and National Interests", *China Quarterly*, vol. 13, no.2, December 1992, p.1027.

69 Kim, n.67, p.481.

South China seas.⁷⁰ None of the PLA Air Force's or the PLA Naval Air Arm's aircrafts have the requisite range and staying power, barring perhaps the Su-27s and the H-6 bombers.

Such force multipliers as inflight-refuelling capability may address this disadvantage to an extent but does not present an adequate solution. The PLA has recognised this state of affairs. The navy has therefore pushed for the acquisition of carriers, while Beijing simultaneously inducts more Su-27s to strengthen its air superiority. The base on Woody Island in the Paracels also gives the Su-27s wider operational range.⁷¹ Tactical air support for the Su-27s could come from the new generation J-8s and Su-24 Fencers. If operations could be planned and executed for these aircraft with adequate logistical support, China could theoretically attain a significant level of air control. AWACS aircrafts and anti-electronic warfare measures are also significant elements if China is to control the air over the Spratlys. Given the current force structure and pace of military modernization, it could be a decade before Beijing can successfully deploy such a force.⁷² As of now, Chinese air superiority over the South China seas cannot be taken for granted.

70 John Downing, "China's Evolving Maritime Strategy", (2 parts), *Jane's Intelligence Review*, March -April 1996, p.186.

Although no separate inventory has been indicated for the PLA Air Force in this study, it has to be stressed that the PLA Air Force uses much the same weapons and platforms as the PLA Naval Air Arm, albeit in larger numbers. As the naval air arm was analysed, no separate analysis of PLA-AF is given.

71 Nigel Holloway, "Brothers in Arms", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 March 1997, p.20.

72 Christopher D.Yung, *People's War at Sea: Chinese Naval Power in the 21st Century* (Virginia, 1996), p.27.

Even if China were to commit its most modernised surface combatant force in a task force for the South China Sea, there is no guarantee that control would be achieved. As the inventory indicates, Chinese surface combatants are particularly vulnerable to air strikes. Air-defences on almost all but the most modern Luhu-class destroyers and the Jiangwei-class frigates are weak. In view of this, Chinese naval commanders in a combat situation in the South China Seas would seek to organise their ships into tactical formations that would minimise their exposure to air attack while simultaneously maximising air defence resources.⁷³

At the operational level, the forces have the choice of two types of organisations for deployment. One would be that of *'force concentration'* which redresses Chinese deficiencies in C³I capabilities thus giving local task force commanders direct access to air defence assets. This method however has the inherent weakness that detection of such a large, concentrated group of ships would be relatively easy for China's potential opponents. The other level of organization would be that of *'dispersal of forces'* which make detection less likely but raises the danger that individual components of the task force would be engaged one by one and overwhelmed. In the South China Sea, Chinese naval commanders may choose 'dispersal' over 'concentration' as this method offers the possibility of dividing the opposing airforces (already small in number) and thus

73 Felix K. Chang, "Beijing's Reach in the South China Sea", *Orbis*, vol.40, no.3, Summer 1996, p.480.

A possible taskforce which the PLA-Navy might assemble for the Spratlys would include. Luda guided missile destroyers (6), Luhu guided missile destroyers (1), Jiangdong Type guided missile frigate (1), Jiangwei Type guided missile frigates (2) and an assortment of patrol boats, tank landing ships and minelayers. The force would also have 'Han' nuclear attack submarines (2) and 'Ming' class conventional attack submarines (1). Figures in parenthesis indicate possible number of units deployed.

effectively intercepting and destroying them.⁷⁴ The Chinese navy in such a scenario will also be operating in a comfortable position of 'local superiority'.

As the strength of any Chinese task force in the South China sea will depend on air defence assets, ships that are able to effectively manage integrated air defences must lead the task force. The Chinese currently possess two Luhu destroyers, six Jiangwei frigates and three modified Luda-destroyers. The 'Jiangdong' class, which has only one surviving member, although essentially launched for the purpose of air defence, may be of limited utility.⁷⁵

The addition of the new 'Sovremenny' class destroyers will however give the Chinese navy the much needed 'punch' through its forty 'Gadfly' surface to air missiles.⁷⁶ Even with these vessels, the Chinese navy will still not be able to muster enough principal surface combatants capable of an effective 'assault-task force'. The length of China's coastline (11,000 km) means that ships are widely dispersed in the three fleet-system. All of the ships most capable are deployed with the North Sea Fleet (guarding the sea-approaches to the Chinese capital). Although the 'Sovremennys' are yet to be deployed, they will in all probability be made part of the East and South Sea Fleets.⁷⁷ The deployment of a destroyer like the Sovremenny with the South Sea Fleet

74 Ibid., p.481.

75 Richard Sharpe (ed.), *Jane's Fighting Ships 1994-1995* (London, 1995), p.116.

76 Richard D. Fisher, "Dangerous Moves: Russia's Sale of Missile Destroyers to China", *Backgrounder*, Asian Studies Centre of the Heritage Foundation, 20 February 1997, p.9.

77 Deployment of the Sovremenny Guided Missile destroyer, would in all probability be with the South Sea or East Sea fleets for the following reasons.

1. The South Sea Fleet is the weakest at present, but is crucial with regard to the South China Seas while the East Sea Fleet's importance is with
(continued...)

based at Zhanjiang, that would effectively constitute the backbone of any Chinese taskforce to the South China sea will also serve to make clear Beijing's uncompromising stance on ownership of the disputed islands and willingness to use force if interests are threatened.

The South Sea Fleet is also China's weakest at present.⁷⁸ A large number of ships with good seakeeping, air defence and anti-ship capabilities need to be added to make it independently capable of constituting task forces. The current Chinese strategy which may involve moving ships from other fleets would only contribute to prematurely giving away China's intentions.

Redeployment of other ships from the North and East Sea fleets would contribute to slowing Chinese operations and allow opponents to strengthen defences and gain a tactical advantage. Strategic and operational surprise that is crucial to any successful action in the South China seas would as a consequence be lost.

Exercises, familiarisation cruises (indispensable in the difficult to navigate waters of the South China seas) involving frigate patrols and destroyer-frigate manoeuvres would also be treated by potential opponents as China's preparation for impending combat.⁷⁹ The Chinese navy itself lacks the support of good reconnaissance and intelligence gathering platforms. China's military outposts on the Spratlys and Parcels would be of

77(...continued)

respect to Taiwan.

2. The North Sea Fleet is oriented primarily toward Russia as well as guarding the sea approaches to Beijing. It would be ironic if the Russians had to face their own missile destroyers in a potential conflict with the Chinese. China also has no particularly vexing maritime dispute in the northern seas to deploy an effective multirole ship like the Sovremenny.

78 Cheung, n.62, p.16.

79 Chang, n.73, p.484.

limited usefulness although complete with communication and surveillance equipment. The effectiveness of these 'bases' can be easily nullified by any enemy force which wrests and maintains control of the sea and air around them.

Analysing the utility of the Chinese navy in a combat situation in the China seas, Felix K. Chang pits the Chinese navy and the air arm against a combined Singapore-Malaysian force sent to defend the Spratlys. At its present level of capabilities China would be forced into a battle of attrition to secure the islands. In his model, Chang arrays the combined Singapore-Malaysia air-fighter strength of twenty-six F/A-18 D 'Hornets' and F-16 C/Ds 'Fighting Falcons' for strike roles against three different Chinese naval task forces.⁸⁰ In addition, to neutralize China's fleet of 72 Su-27s, all eighteen F-16 A/Bs of Singapore and eighteen Malaysian Mig-29s are assigned to air-superiority roles. The Chinese are also given the upperhand in a number of areas such as lowered missile efficiency rates of South East Asian aircrafts, their need to carry external fuel tanks thus increasing load and reducing armament, the existence of state of the art air-search radars on all Chinese vessels and a high attrition rate on the Southeast Asian aircraft.

Taking into account the enhanced reconnaissance measures and 'cutting edge' training of the Southeast Asian pilots as opposed to undertrained Chinese counterparts, Chang concludes that Malaysia and Singapore using only airborne strikes could defeat three successive Chinese task forces in fourteen sorties. After the fourteenth sortie all air-search radars and surface to air missile systems on the Chinese ships would have been

80 Ibid., p.487.

neutralized.⁸¹ In the air, although outnumbered two to one, the 36 F-16 A/B and Mig 29s could take a heavy toll of Chinese Su-27s. While such a model presupposes certain factors in a potential conflict situation such as (a) the involvement of Singapore (crucial in combat because of its missiles and aircrafts which would be the back bone of Southeast Asian defence), (b) the non-use of Sovremenny class destroyers by the PLA-Navy whose deployment may mean a much higher attrition rate on Southeast Asian aircraft, and (c) the idea that Chinese pilots would certainly be less well trained than their Southeast Asian counterparts, the model does serve to illustrate the fact that Chinese sea and airpower have to be significantly increased to aid any successful use of force in the South China seas.

The Case of Taiwan

Ever since the founding of the People's Republic of China the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland has been an important priority for the leadership in Beijing. Force has never been ruled out as the method to be resorted to in achieving reunification. In the use of force, the navy has always been envisaged as having a primary role.⁸² In any successful invasion of Taiwan, the PLA would have to depend on a naval blockade aided by amphibious landings and air cover. At present, China's amphibious capabilities are not sufficient for an attack.

Even at 100 percent serviceability of all its amphibious landing ships the Chinese can only transport between five and six thousand troops. Sea lift capabilities are limited

81 Ibid., p.488.

82 Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon* (Annapolis, 1982), p.186.

to one division and the naval infantry in a combat situation will consist of the 12th, 1st, 31st and 42nd group armies.⁸³ China's difficulty lies in the fact that such an invasion cannot be easily concealed.

In attempting to blockade Taiwan, China will primarily rely on its submarine forces. The Chinese have over sixty active tactical attack submarines.⁸⁴ These can target Taiwanese shipping, as well as indulge in missile attacks on Taiwanese coastal areas and harbours. The Central Military Commission, perhaps with a blockade in mind and the need to resort to attrition warfare for a successful invasion of the island had ordered concerted efforts to strengthen this part of the naval fleet.⁸⁵ As a result major improvements are occurring in the new 'Song' class diesel electric submarines and the 'Han' nuclear attack submarines. The 'Kilo' class submarines purchased from Russia in their latest version (Project 636) as opposed to the first (Project 877 EKM), have a quieter propulsion and an automated combat information system capable of providing simultaneous fire control data on two targets.⁸⁶ China will also resort to the use of its ship-based cruise missiles and other tactical missiles for naval use in any attack on Taiwan.

As opposed to this, the Taiwanese have at their service one of the most lethal coastal batteries in the world. Additionally, they have purchased a total of 150 F-16s and 60 Mirage 2000s which could threaten the PLA-Navy effectively, given its weaknesses

83 Thomas Hirschfield, "The Year of the Rat", *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute, May 1996, p.58.

84 *Ibid.*, p.58.

85 John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China's Strategic Seapower* (Stanford, 1994), p.228.

86 Richard Sharpe (ed.), *Jane's Fighting Ships 1996-97* (London, 1996), p.116.

in air defence. While the principal surface combatants of China may avoid shore-based batteries and missiles by sailing farther out to sea when resorting to an attack, this leaves them open to the option of being engaged in battle by the Taiwanese navy.⁸⁷

The conclusion would therefore be that the PLA-Navy's present capabilities will not allow it to blockade or invade Taiwan successfully, chiefly due to deficiencies in air-defence systems, strategic sea-lift capability, air cover for amphibious assaults, detection range of PLA-Naval submarines and the dearth of modernised principal surface combatants. The Chinese would be forced to pay a heavy price in what may be seen to be goals of limited value to the People's Republic. Any invasion of Taiwan may serve only to remind the Chinese navy of its disastrous assaults on the island of Quemoy and Matsu in 1949.⁸⁸ The options presented here do not take into account the US presence in the Taiwan Straits with carrier battle groups. Such a deployment of US forces will shut out any Chinese window of opportunity that visualizes Taiwanese weaknesses in military capability.

Conclusion

The chapter has examined regional perceptions of Chinese naval growth and the implications for the Asia-Pacific. The China factor, it has to be assumed, is the most important external consideration facing East Asian strategic planning. Although the China factor is important, we have seen that the upgradation of armed forces in the Asia-

87 Felix K. Chang, "Conventional War Across the Taiwan Strait", *Orbis*, vol.40, no.4, Fall 1996, p.578.

88 Swanson, n.82, p.182.

Pacific is a function of such factors as 'prestige arms racing', growing economic power and uncertain American commitment to regional security. On the positive side interdependence between countries of the region in everything from trade to culture would certainly be an inhibiting factor in the use of force. This is where multilateral security institutions have a significant role to play.

Given China's current force structuring and its navy's combat capability, the constraints on Chinese use of naval force to settle maritime claims are great. The PLA-Navy certainly cannot risk its entire fleet for capturing a few islands far away from its coast. The strategy the Navy and the PLA would adopt in this regard will be strongly influenced by domestic political considerations. However, weak Southeast Asian responses may well provoke the Chinese to use limited naval force to gain control of disputed territories. Thus, a constructive engagement of China in regional security fora is crucial for regional peace and stability.

The PLA-Navy may not be a 'blue-water' capable naval force or might even be of limited use in 'sea control' roles, but it is nevertheless the most powerful 'resident' navy in the China seas.⁸⁹ As long as Japan keeps away from the China Seas and the US Pacific fleet has a reduced presence in the area, the Chinese navy will have almost uninhibited access to the seas around China. China has also shown its willingness to confront stronger fleets when they operate in the region. The October 1994 incident of the 'Han' attack submarine shadowing the US aircraft carrier 'Kitty Hawk' in the China seas illustrates this.⁹⁰

89 J.N.Mak, "Implications of the Tiananmen Incident: One Malaysian Perspective", in R.H. Yang (ed.), *The PLA in Transition 1990/91 SCPS PLA Yearbook* (Kaoshiung, 1991), p.101.

90 Douglas T.Stuart and William T. Tow, "A US Strategy for the Asia-Pacific", *Adelphi Paper* (London), no.299, 1995, p.40.

(continued...)

The changing strategic environment in the Asia-Pacific has enabled 'middle-power' navies to assert themselves. Although the PLA-Navy at present does not command the resources to successfully use force to solve regional disputes, it may achieve that capability in the next two decades. If, in response, the countries of the region also resort to arms procurement, the scenario would be that of a small area 'top-heavy' with naval forces. China is also believed to have what is perceived to be a continuation of the 'middle kingdom' mentality. Whether a liberal, hardliner or democratic government is in power in Beijing, China would want to dominate South East Asia (economically, politically militarily) and will not seek to moderate its territorial claims. Given that the commitment of US forces in preserving the territorial status quo is uncertain, China could become the most important actor in the Asia-Pacific.

90(...continued)

This incident is narrated in Ronald W. Lewis, "The Hunt for the Reds in October", *Airforce Monthly*, March 1995, pp.16-21. The 'Kitty Hawk' was shadowed by a Han-nuclear attack submarine. When maritime patrol P 3C Orions from the carrier battle group tracked the submarine and dropped sonobuoys to mark its position, the Chinese naval commander at Qingdao naval base scrambled strike aircraft in response. Beijing followed up with a statement that 'aggression' would not be tolerated and the Chinese coast would be resolutely defended.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This study has sought to provide a summarised view of the nature and state of the Chinese Navy's existence over the past forty-eight years. Within this time frame, state policy and related goals have had a marked influence on naval force-structuring. The study, while trying to determine the strength and capabilities of China's naval forces, has concentrated on the doctrinal changes which govern strategic thinking and levels of naval modernization. As such, the research has limitations. For instance, it does not take into account, the true character of China's domestic shipbuilding programme, industrial infrastructure and naval research and development. The study was also unable to determine (i) the true extent of Chinese defence budget allocations to navy building, (ii) major acquisitions planned and (iii) the political will of the Chinese leadership to see through naval force re-structuring. As the study has depended almost wholly on secondary sources, it has been only able to piece together a partial picture of China's navy and whether its present naval capabilities and their upgradation actually mark a turning point with the Chinese goals and interests taking on a more maritime orientation.

The study does show that China today almost certainly appreciates and probably intends to develop maritime power as a general purpose and multi-capable instrument of foreign policy. The first twenty-five years of the Communist Chinese navy bore the influence of ideological debates, which coloured the assessment of external threats faced by China, the naval weapons building and acquisition programmes, and the character of the sailors manning its warships. The emphasis on 'redness' over 'expertise' began to lose its hold over policy planning in naval circles only

with the beginning of the neo-maritime spirit in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. In that period, although naval budgets had increased and significant aspects of navy building (like the nuclear submarine construction programme) had proceeded, expenditures and modernization have to be evaluated in light of China's desire to proclaim to the rest of the world its ability to master high technology and the Chinese Communist Party's move to attain legitimacy through the presence of a powerful military. The 'coastal defence' orientation in naval doctrine in the period 1949-1978 also underlined the fact that the role of the navy was in the protection of China's local waters and in assisting the PLA's land forces in warding off external threats. Examples of China's use of naval power in that period, including gunboat diplomacy in Macao, eviction of the Taiwanese from disputed islands and even the use of force against Vietnam in 1974 over the Paracel Islands, were all instances that emphasised domestic political priorities and served to project the picture of a strong but 'besieged' China.

Even in the early days of the Deng Xiaoping- initiated defence modernization programme, strategic thinking was firmly rooted in the theory and fear of 'encirclement' by unfriendly powers. It is only since the mid-1980s that China has actively sought to rethink its security strategies. Realising that fear of 'encirclement' was a policy reaction which required considerable rethinking, the Chinese set out to redefine national security goals. China's gradual move out of isolation in this period illustrated to it the advantages of procuring wealth and strength from the waters around China. The Law of the Sea Conferences, where China participated with much enthusiasm, made it realize the tremendous benefits from continental shelves in the form of natural resources. The need for more oil and natural gas, as the modernization of industry and science gathered momentum, meant that China had to look around for these precious natural wares. The

South China Seas disputes which had been relatively dormant until then, were thus re-activated. Beijing realised the importance of a powerful navy to protect its maritime claims as well as trade and commerce and thus began to appreciate the critical nature of such things as Sea Lanes of Communications and effective Chinese control over them in the China Seas.

Our study has also shown that the doctrinal developments that occurred in conjunction with the revised foreign and defence policy orientations charted the course for naval fleet modernization. Although possessing a sea-based nuclear deterrent, the conventional war fighting capabilities of the Chinese naval forces remained at a premium. In such areas as anti-submarine warfare, air defence on ships, and logistics support for long-range operations, the navy was extremely backward. Seaworthiness and the combat readiness of ships and forces were low, and these deficiencies had to be rectified in "real time". Liu Huaqing's enunciation of the Offshore Active Defence Strategy as the guiding principle of naval modernization and subsequent sharpening of the navy's combat skills and the acquisition of related weapons have alleviated these deficiencies to a large extent. However as evident from the assessment of Chinese naval capabilities, there is a long way to go before China can effectively command the waters around it.

Acquisition of specific types of capabilities also illustrate the problem of the defence-offence ambiguity regarding a navy's strategy. In China's case, this problem is much more vexing. For instance, acquisition of a fleet carrier by the PLA-Navy would immediately lead to the region regarding China as having an aggressive and power-projecting stance. This is because of the utility of the aircraft carrier primarily as a weapon of offence. When placed in the context of maritime claims and disputes and Beijing's rhetoric about the possible employment of force to settle these disputes, an

alarmist reaction to a Chinese carrier in the Asia-Pacific region is understandable. The PLA-Navy and seapower advocates in China are actively trying to force the issue with the Chinese leadership. But as budgetary constraints continue to act as brakes on Chinese naval modernization, the PLA-Navy has had to be content with window shopping and the initiation of training courses for carrier commanders in its naval academies. The acquisition of a carrier by the PLA-Navy however seems to be only a matter of time. According to the new strategic doctrines, the PLA-Navy's ability to use carriers in its force structure will be ready only in a decade or so. China's decision to purchase a carrier will therefore be part of a long term acquisition programme.

It is beyond dispute that economics will play the crucial role in determining the nature of the PLA-Navy in the twenty-first century. The success of the Four Modernizations programme and consequent economic improvements will directly influence foreign and defence policies. China's economic progress will be dependent on the continuing diffusion of technology and skills as also capital - and thus accompanying changes in the distribution of economic and political leverage in the international system. In today's interdependent and yet highly nationalistic world, it is almost impossible to separate industrial development, wealth and the rise of a modern society from military power.

It must be remembered that from the period emphasising defence modernization starting in 1980, the basic capabilities of the Chinese navy have improved significantly. The destroyer and frigate inventory bears testimony to this. Acquisition of sophisticated ships, weapons, radars and force multipliers will keep up enhanced force levels. The modernization programme and doctrinal changes sweeping Chinese naval forces are without precedent in history. Added to this, capabilities in submarine warfare and

logistics support have been improved consistently. Where China has not been able to acquire state-of-the-art defence technology, the PLA has compromised by buying more dated weapon systems and attempted to 'reverse-engineer' them. China has considerable success in attempting such reverse engineering and high technology does not frighten policy makers or scientists who instead explore every way in which can be incorporated to suit Chinese conditions. This is particularly true with reference to missile technology, where the upgradation of surface-to-air, surface-to-surface, air-to-air and ship-borne missile systems mean that the PLA-Navy, given its lack of high quality airborne defence, can defend itself afloat in a combat situation even with reasonable air cover.

It should be clear that the PLA-Navy is no longer a second-rate naval power using technology of 1950s vintage. Some weapons systems are admittedly old, but, in the threat environment surrounding China, quantity rather than quality may serve the PLA-Navy's purpose. However, absorption of new technology is critical, for China's ability to face threats in the maritime arena in the next century depend on modernization. This is more important given the naval upgradation programmes of most Southeast Asian countries. In Southeast Asia, a wider range of modern maritime warfare capabilities is appearing, reflecting the broadening of interests beyond control of territorial seas. Most of the countries of Southeast Asia have outstanding maritime territorial disputes with China. These Southeast Asian maritime forces have significantly upgraded their capabilities to catch up with many modern navies of the world. Though the Southeast Asians are still not able to deploy weapons and platforms in the numbers which could threaten the security of individual countries, the buildup, which rests on the foundation of high economic growth, may still persist.

In terms of size, Chinese naval forces are still able to outmatch all the East Asian countries combined. The South East Asian countries however have an edge in airpower, even though here too China has superiority in numbers. Of increasing significance is the purchase of many force multipliers by Southeast Asian countries which enhance operational capabilities of their armed forces. Of the other significant players in the region Japan still is the premier seapower (discounting US forces). India also embarked on a naval acquisitions programme and build-up in the mid-1980s but is today faced with much reduced budget allocations which do not augur well for its navy.

Japan and China then are the regional heavyweights in terms of actual or potential wealth, size and strength of armed forces and influence in world affairs. In the long term, China however seems to be poised to comprehensively increase all aspects of its national power as it has far greater resources to depend on than its East Asian counterpart. Although not able to match Japanese technological levels, the Chinese armed forces may not need a technological parity or superiority to counter regional rivals militarily. China might thus seek the ability (considering the growing power of its neighbours) to concentrate and sustain forces far from their bases at a level sufficient to either completely overawe or quickly and comprehensively defeat any opposition.

Given is the threat environment in the Asia-Pacific, it must again be reiterated that the role of multilateral institutions, concentrating on the development of comprehensive security frameworks and economic growth, have an enormous role to play. In this context, India does have a role to play in constructively engaging all the powers in the region by participating in security fora such as ARF and CSCAP. Indian naval growth ten years ago had partly spurred the Chinese and other Southeast Asian countries to actively enhance maritime force structures. The 'two-carrier' navy, which

India possessed for some time, made it the premier regional naval power. Difficulties with regard to the modernization and upgrading of naval forces, in substantial measure due to a continuous budget squeeze, have today rendered the Indian navy far less capable of influencing the Asia-Pacific.

The new 'Look East' policy which the Indian government is championing rests on a growing volume of trade and commerce with the region. However the protection of trade to and from the Asia-Pacific (currently 8 percent of India's overall overseas trade) requires the presence of a silent sentinel in the form of a strong Indian navy.

Chinese foreign policy goals may ultimately not be expansionist or aggressive. With the end of its isolationist policies, China may seek greater the freedom of action in Asia by maintaining levels of naval strength that will give it the influence it feels to be its due in international relations. The worrisome aspect however is the maintenance of a coercive presence which theoretically marks China out to be a potential hegemon in the Asia-Pacific. Since 1978, the concept of 'Fortress China' has gradually crumbled. With the lack of credible land-based external threats, China's new security pre-occupations are tagged to the assessment of the maritime periphery. This alone explains China embracing maritime security responsibilities actively. While the earlier 'continentalist' war-fighting strategies were evolved keeping in mind principles of self-defence, new security perceptions view China as taking on a more active role as an influential actor in Asian international politics. Nevertheless, China has not ceased to be a continental power. This is why a mechanical restructuring of forces and strategic doctrines by neighbouring navies in response to a potentially blue-water capable Chinese force may well undermine the possibility of peace and stability in the region. As the smaller navies react by qualitative and quantitative enhancements of their strength, they

risk setting in motion a spiralling arms race of reaction and counter-reaction. In such an arms race, offensive and defensive intent and capability could become blurred and the resulting security dilemma could lead to the breakdown of regional order.

China's naval modernization thus must be viewed in the context of the larger issue of an important actor in the world system reorganising defence priorities and modernising capabilities which it lacks. China's new economic strength was made it realise the need to have armed forces which can match in skills and weaponry the most modernised armed forces of the world. China, however, will have to realize that redefinition of its international stature bring with it super power responsibilities. The growth in Chinese maritime capabilities, which will have a critical role in China's status in the world, must then be seen as the rediscovery by the Chinese nation of the utility of seapower.

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