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### CHINA'S SHOW OF PEACE OR POWER?

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China is celebrating a new three day national holiday—"Commemoration of Seventieth Anniversary of Victory of Chinese People's Resistance against Japanese Aggression and World Anti-Fascist War"—the end of the World War II and end of Japanese occupation in China. China is commemorating this day for the first time and the event will be marked by a prodigious military parade. About a thousand troops from seventeen countries have been invited to participate in the event. Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, Serbia, Mexico, Belarus, Cuba, and Egypt are contributing formations of 75 personnel each, while, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Fiji, Laos, Vanuatu and Venezuela have sent teams of about seven each. The heads of states and 'special envoys' representing the states of thirty countries are expected to attend the ceremony including President of Russia Vladimir Putin, South Korea President Park Geun-hye, Pakistan's President Mamnoon Hussain, Myanmar's President Thein Sein, and Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang besides the heads of state of all Shanghai Cooperation Organizations (except India, which will be represented by the India MOS for External Affairs, General VK Singh). The parade will feature more than ten thousand Chinese troops with about two hundred military aircrafts flying overhead. The show is expected to unveil the opaque military status of China, see-ingly showcasing the hard power, rather than a peaceful celebration of the end of the appalling times.

According to Zhang Ming, the Chinese Vice Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through this parade, "the country is demonstrating its aspirations for peace and a firm will to defend it" and "I believe China's peaceful development will continue to win the support,



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understanding and blessing of the world”<sup>1</sup>. It has been officially stated on several occasions that this display is not directed at Japan, primarily to maintain the ‘peaceful’ sentiment of the parade.

As this grand parade represents ‘China’ at the moment, the lack of attendance from North America, European Union, India and Japan is indicative of the current reputation of China in the world.

The traditional view of any military parade is to showcase the hard power, and to generate patriotic/nationalistic sentiments in the minds of the citizens, and fear in that of enemy. The ‘power to hurt’ is often conveyed through such practices. However, today military parades have become a symbol of festivity, rather than war. It is difficult to negotiate with the behavior of China in the region, and it is unlikely that a military display is going to make it easier for the region.

Why does China need to celebrate this day at a time where its aggression is seen a problem for the region? There can be two reasons, one, seeking legitimacy through projecting power, and second, domestic turmoil. The strong personality of President Xi and his visions for the country–“rejuvenation of China” and military greatness have prompted him to showcase the military capabilities through the parade. Today, China seeks the legitimacy from the world that it is a great power, along with recognition that it is also the regional power. While the region is busy resisting the aggression, China is overtly displaying its military capabilities to the world, along with what it has achieved technologically. Indirectly, it is communicating that it has the power to hurt those who challenge China. This is a deliberate and calculated move by China.

Japan and the US represent the shackle that China wants to break through, but is not able to. Their absence is significant attendance in this ceremony would have been



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concluded as acknowledging the actions, aggression and power of China, in other words, providing legitimacy to its military objectives in the region.

Through military parades countries promote patriotism and nationalism which cannot germinate in a vacuum. Nationalism is a sentiment directed towards an enemy, and China's anti-Japanese propaganda highlights the enemy. Such a blunt presentation, when directed towards an enemy can be counter productive towards the Japanese residing in China, especially after the haunting memories of 2012 riots over the territorial disputes. "The humiliation narrative is a very important part of China's identity formation, but I didn't expect President Xi to continue on the same track, as his China has already risen to be a major world power," Professor Wang, commented recently. "In fact, the current administration has been giving even more emphasis to that narrative" he added.<sup>2</sup>

The current turmoil over the stock market, slow down of economic growth, environmental crisis, and corruption have rendered the policies and leadership of President Xi as weak and ineffective lacking justification for imposed authority. At this stage, the parade provides a distraction from the domestic problems and replaces that with a powerful image of China in front of the world. According to Zhang Lifan, a historian in Beijing, "As social conflicts continue to sharpen, the party needs to divert attention, and of course a parade is a good way to do that by whipping up nationalist fervor."<sup>3</sup>

Post 2010, China gained an image of a belligerent rising power. To further such a narrative it has escalated the conflict in the South China and East China Sea. Today, as Chinese troops march across Tiananmen Square with their impressive hard power, China hopes to send out a strong message to its challengers about China's regional and international standing.



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*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])*

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> China Focus: 30 national leaders to attend China's V-Day parade, Xinhuanet, August 25, 2015 [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-08/25/c\\_134553225.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-08/25/c_134553225.htm), accessed on September 02, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Jacobs, "As China's Economy Falter, Military Parade Offers Chance to Burnish Image" 1 September 2015 [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/02/world/asia/as-economy-falters-military-parade-offers-chance-to-burnish-chinas-image.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/02/world/asia/as-economy-falters-military-parade-offers-chance-to-burnish-chinas-image.html?_r=0), accessed on September 02, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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