

CHINA'S NAVAL STRATEGY: STRATEGIC EVOLUTION AND EMERGING CONCEPTS OF WARFARE

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Throughout modern history, the symbiotic relationship between the rise of global powers and the emergence of a strong naval component to their security strategies appears to be a thematic rule.

As China continues to rise as a political, economic and military power in the international order, its national interests are bound to grow, and assume a global character. A potent dimension of these growing national interests is going to be manifested in the 'seas' – an arena encompassing security, economic, and nationalistic concerns for the Chinese. Also, the ability to operate in the world waterways would allow China to enhance its influence in shaping the order of emerging world politics. As such, any naval strategy would be a multi-faceted approach.

This paper attempts to analyse the naval-military dimension of China's growing national interests, and thereby chart a naval strategy for the People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLAN). As any strategic construct is rooted in a host of historical and cultural factors, the paper endeavours to locate a strategy for the PLAN within the dynamics of the changing security perception, doctrinal evolution, and capabilities orientation.

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LOCATING THE 'SEAS' IN CHINA'S STRATEGIC THINKING

Unlike the ancient strategic construct of continental defence, modern-day China recognises that correct knowledge of the sea, and safeguarding sea territory and national maritime interests have a strong bearing on a nation's rise and decline, and "prosperity of the motherland."¹

At 14,500 km, China has one of the longest coastlines in the world. Factors of geography render this coastline a very peculiar character—the shape of China's coastline is widely extended from north to south, but extremely shallow from east to west. As such, China's defence depth along its coastline becomes extremely shallow due to numerous islands in the Pacific Ocean. According to Chinese scholar Xu Qi², **threats to nations' security interests often increase as their spatial distance decreases. The vast expanses of the ocean, thus, establish a direct relationship between maritime geo-strategic positions and national security interests.** Furthermore, the National Defence White Paper 2004 clearly states that the PLAN aims at establishing "command of the sea". Conceived in such strategic thinking, it becomes imperative for the Chinese Navy to seek avenues to deepen its depth of defence and create as large a space for fleet manoeuvrability as possible.

Along with geography, the **context of geographic orientation³ further complicates the issue of naval strategy for China:** China has disputes with regard to claims over territorial waters with almost all its neighbours—with Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam over the Spratly and the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, and with Japan over the Senkaku or Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. Territorial or territorial related disputes, if not settled amicably or through peaceful negotiations,

1. Shen Shungen and Yang Dechang, "Each China Sea Fleet Conducts Education in 'Outlook on Sea' Among Units, Boosting Enthusiasm of Officers and Men For Building Powerful Navy," *Jiefangjun Bao*, December 16, 1989, p.1. Cited here from *Joint Publication Research Service, China* (JPRS-CAR-90-011), February 12, 1990, p.63.
2. Xu Qi, "Maritime Geostrategy and the Development of the Chinese Navy in the Early Twenty-First Century," translated by Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein, *US Naval War College Review*, vol.59, no.4, Autumn 2006, pp. 47-67. The article was first published in *China Military Science*, vol.17, no.4, 2004, pp. 75-81. Xu serves as a Senior Captain in the PLA-Navy. In the article, he asserts that China's existence as a nation, its development, and great resurgence, all increasingly rely on the sea.
3. The phrase is defined as "geographical relations among the nations." Ibid.

have a high potential to lead nation-states into armed conflicts or eventful wars⁴. These disputes are further complicated by historical, cultural, political, military and economic factors. The phenomenon of nationalism acts as a major force in aggravating the issues related to territorial disputes. Since, China regards these disputed waters as its historical claims, it perceives future threats to its territorial integrity and sovereignty as emanating from the sea.

In order to chart a naval strategy for a country, it is necessary to explore the importance accorded to the sea in a nation's strategic security thinking—both contemporary and historical. Nuanced approaches to the study of strategic culture⁵ would further guide us towards the country's strategic behaviour with regard to issues related to the seas: China, for the most of its history, faced security threats from the northern and western frontiers. As such, **successive dynasties in China gave primacy to land security over maritime security** and focussed national resources on building up the Great Wall. China's self-image as the "centre of the world," and foundation of a self-sufficient agricultural economy further degenerated any incentive for a maritime strategy in the Chinese strategic thinking⁶. But, in spite of these strategic preferences, **China had a substantial naval component to its security strategy, particularly during the Song (AD 960-1279), the Yuan (1271-1368),**

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4. Tuomas Forsberg, "Explaining Territorial Disputes: From Power Politics to Normative Reason", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 33. no. 6, 1996, p.443; see also Catley and Makmur Keliat, *Spratlys: The Dispute in the South China Sea*, 1997. According to the authors, there were 86 serious international conflicts between 1919 and 1975, and of this number, 39 originated from territorial disputes.

5. Strategic culture is defined as "the body of attitudes and beliefs that guides and circumscribes thought on strategic questions, influences the way strategic issues are formulated, and sets the vocabulary and perceptual parameters of strategic debate," Jack Synder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options* (Santa Monica, Calif: RAND, 1977), p.9.

6. Ibid.

and the Ming (1368-1644) Dynasty periods”⁸. The navy was completely degenerated during the Qing Dynasty period (1644-1912). Some scholars attribute the neglect of the navy by the Qing rulers to the dominance of the Confucius ideology in the Chinese strategic thinking during this period.⁹

One of the Ming texts on strategy and statecraft, *Cao Lu Jing Lue*¹⁰ lays down a strategy for combating coastal pirates: “Defending against their landing (on shore) is not as good as defending against them at sea. Defending against them in coastal waters is not as good as heading out to sea and defending them outside the coastal waters.” Analysed under the nuances of modern military lexicon, the author of the text can be clearly perceived as arguing for an offshore strategy for the naval forces to deal with security threats. **As such, this ancient text serves as proof of the existence of a ‘sea-going’ strategy in Chinese military strategic thought.**

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7. The Song Dynasty (AD 960-1279) deployed the world’s most powerful and technologically advanced navy. In fact, the Song regime was the first in China to establish a permanent national navy as an independent Service, administered by a central government agency. China remained a sea power during the rule of two succeeding dynasties: the Yuan (1271-1368), and the Ming (1368-1644). While the Yuan used large fleets to undertake invasions of Vietnam, Java, and Japan, the Ming Dynasty’s most notable naval achievement perhaps remains Zheng He’s “Treasure Fleet” voyages undertaken from 1405 to 1433. These voyages are divided into three groups: the first group comprised the first (1405-07), second (1407-09), and third (1409-11) voyages targeted at reopening the Strait of Malacca, and reinitiating contacts in the Indian Ocean; the second group includes the fourth (1413-15), fifth (1417-19, and sixth (1421-22) voyages that expanded Ming trade and diplomatic contacts to the Middle East and East Africa; the seventh voyage (1431-33) retraced earlier voyages as far as Hormuz and sent out smaller contingents to East Africa. For a detailed discussion on the subject, refer, Andrew R. Wilson, “The Maritime Transformation of Ming China,” Ch. 1, Part III, *Chinese Maritime Transformations*, in Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein and Carnes Lord, eds., *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformations in Comparative Historical Perspective* (Maryland: US Naval Institute Press, 2009), and Bernard D. Cole, “The Organization of People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).”
 8. Though it is widely held that Zheng He’s “Treasure Fleet” was not driven by expansionist tendencies, Andrew R. Wilson maintains that the voyages were, in part, directed towards advertising the rising military and economic power of the Ming Dynasty to the coastal and island kingdoms of the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. The military power in this case was clearly meant to overawe, coerce, or compel these states. Further, the economic dimension of the voyages was concerned with expanding the existing Chinese trade links with the coastal kingdoms.
 9. Cole, n. 7.
 10. Although the author of this text is unknown, scholars believe that it appeared some time in the early Wan Li period. In general, the text argues that force is necessary to deal with external threats. Though it does exhibit some of the language of the Confucian-Mencian strategic discourse. Cited here from Alastair Ian Johnston, *The Parabellum Paradigm and the Ming Security Problematique* (UK: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Further, the Opium Wars exposed imperial China's military weakness to attacks from the sea and led to the so-called "century of humiliation," wherein the Chinese continuously suffered political and military subjugation at the hands of the Japanese and the Western powers. As a consequence of this, upholding China's territorial integrity and sovereignty still ranks as a priority in Chinese military-strategic thinking.¹¹ Therefore, since China has been able to resolve most of its territorial disputes with the neighbouring states, except for India, ensuring the security of its maritime interests and claims becomes the natural extension of the concept of maintaining national integrity.

National Defence White Paper 2010 states that China "would continue to map out economic development and national security in a unified manner..... to realize the unified goal of building a prosperous country, and a strong military."

MODERN MARITIME POWER

According to Ni Lexiong,¹² when a nation embarks upon a process of shifting from an "inward-leaning economy" to an "outward-leaning economy," the arena of national security concerns begins to move towards the oceans.

Since the advent of the Four Modernisations programme, economic and strategic concerns play a crucial role in driving China's national policies. **The deepening co-relation among economics, national security goals and military strategy in Chinese strategic thinking** is best exemplified in the National Defence White Paper 2010. which states that China "would continue to map out economic development and national security in a unified manner.....to realize the unified goal of building a prosperous country, and a strong military." The maritime dimension of this evolving strategic construct finds resonance in the National Defence White Paper

11. This is exemplified by the fact that China's National Defence White Papers, published since 2000, maintain upholding Chinese territorial sovereignty and integrity as its core national interest. For details see, China's National Defense in 2010, published by the Information Office of the People's Republic of China, Beijing, March 2011.

12. Ni Lexiong, "Sea Power and China's Development."

2006. The paper clearly recognises access to raw materials and various media upon which economic development depends as a major national security concern, and notes, "Security issues related to energy, resources, finance, information, and international shipping routes are mounting." This emphasis upon economics as the cornerstone of national security concerns is ultimately leading China to focus its attention upon securing its Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) with the Middle East and Africa.

The notion of securing economic interests is gradually giving rise to the concept of "security boundary"¹³ within the Chinese strategic thinking. The idea of "security boundary" entails that **once a nation-state takes part in globalisation, it has the right to protect those national interests that have been integrated into the world.** As such, China's national interests "may not only involve all the regions of the world but could even include outer space."¹⁴ Therefore, in order to safeguard its ever expanding national interests, China should develop substantial military and strategic capabilities. Within the context of these developments, expansion of Chinese naval power becomes an obvious consequence.

On February 25, 1992, the National People's Congress passed the **Law of the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone.**¹⁵ This law defined the range of China's territorial sea and contiguous zones as 24 four nautical miles—twelve for the territorial sea, and twelve for the contiguous zone, extending from the baseline of the territorial sea. Article 2 of the law states, "The territorial sea of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is the sea areas adjacent to the PRC's land territories and internal waters. The land territories of the PRC include: PRC mainland, and coastal islands: Taiwan and nearby islets including the Diaoyutais (Senkaku Shoto); Penghu Islands (Pescadores); the Dongsha (Pratas); Xisha (Paracel), Zhongsha (Macclesfield Bank), and Nansha (Spratly) archipelagoes; and all the islands belonging to the PRC."

13. Z. Wenmu, "Sea Power and China's Strategic Choices," *China Security*, Summer 2006, pp.17-31.

14. Ibid.

15. Cited here from Alexander Chieh-cheng Huang, "The Chinese Navy Offshore Active Defense Strategy, Conceptualizations and Implications," *US Naval War College Review*, vol. XL VII, no. 3, Summer 1994, pp.7-32.

An interesting feature of this law is that it links China's sea rights to its perceived national interests.¹⁶ According to the senior PLA Col, L. Yijian¹⁷, the idea of sea rights in the Chinese context does not have any geographic limit. It legitimises the PLAN's efforts to achieve a degree of freedom of movement in key global waterways. Also, the concept of sea rights is considered as being integral to the notion of sea power.¹⁸ As such, it can be inferred that **the concept of sea rights is an open-ended notion in the Chinese strategic thinking, and includes "all maritime areas that have an important bearing on China's national security and fall within the PLAN's effective reach."**¹⁹

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Since it became a net importer of oil in 1993, China's dependence on natural gas and oil to sustain its economic growth has been increasing rapidly.²⁰ Therefore, **as the land resources are getting fast depleted, the sea serves as the most important strategic space for sustainable development.** The Spratly Islands in the South China Sea are often dubbed as the "second Persian Gulf"²¹ due to their perceived estimated potential for

16. For an understanding of the PRC's core national interests, see China's National Defense in 2008, Information Office of the State Council of People's Republic of China, Beijing, 2009.

17. L. Yijian, Senior Colonel PLA, *The Command of the Sea and the Strategic Employment of Naval Forces* (Beijing: The PLA National Defence University Press, 2004), p. 2003. Col Liu teaches at the PLAN Command College. Cited here from You Ji, "The Indian Ocean and China's Naval Build-up," in Ravi Vohra and P.K Ghosh, eds., *Indian Ocean Region* (New Delhi: Anamaya Publishers, 2008).

18. Wenmu, n. 13, pp.17-31.

19. "The Chinese Aegis Destroyers Mark the Subtle Changes in the PLAN's Offshore Water Strategy," January 20, 2005, www.wforum.com/specials/articles/07/12989.html

20. According to the US Department of Energy data, China's oil demand will increase to more than 14 million barrels per day (mbd) by 2025. The country's natural gas demand is also expected to reach 300 billion cubic metres (bcm) by 2030. Moreover, as per a report published in 2007 by the Ministry of Land and Resources, the country's oil reserves might last only 11 years if output volume stabilises at 2006 and no new reserves are found. For a detailed discussion on the topic, see Shebonti Ray Dadwal, "China's Search For Energy Security: Emerging Dilemmas".

21. Li Mingjiang, "China's South China Sea Policy: Claims and Changing Contexts."

oil and natural gas reserves. Also, China has recently gained the approval of the International Sea-bed Authority (ISA) to undertake deep sea mineral exploration activities in the southwestern Indian Ocean²². In 2001, China was granted similar rights to conduct exploration activities in the East Pacific Ocean. These developments, analysed from a security-strategic perspective, raise concerns regarding China's growing presence in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

China's threat perceptions, along with the development in naval capabilities point towards a forward defence posturing by the People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLAN). The extent and nature of this forward posturing by the Chinese Navy has become the most debatable issue within the strategic community.

EVOLUTION OF CHINA'S NAVAL STRATEGY

The PLAN was established on April 23, 1949, the day the Communist forces captured the presidential building of the Nationalist government in Nanjing. **Evolution of China's navy into a 'strategic Service' has taken place within the context of several inter-related factors:** China's changing threat perceptions, which, in turn, have been driven by changes in the domestic politico-economic environment, and international political balance. The changing security environment led to modifications in China's military strategy, and a simultaneous advancement in warfare capabilities. Further adjustments between intended and acquired capabilities too generated profound impacts upon the PLAN's modernisation and its strategic scope. **Due to the dynamic nature of all these factors, evolution of China's naval strategy often exhibits a non-linear pattern.**

PLAN WITHIN THE STRATEGIC CONSTRUCT OF MAO'S CHINA

From the time of its founding in 1949 till about the 1980s, the PLAN remained a subservient arm to the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and, hence, limited in its strategic reach and operational scope. During this period, **the Chinese**

22. The approval was bagged by the China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association (COMRA), and entails the exclusive exploration rights for 15 years, in approximately 10,000 sq km of area in the southwest Indian Ocean ridge.

Navy was largely viewed as a coastal defence force²³, and was tasked with the defence of up to a dozen or so nautical miles (nm) of waters that extended from China's coastline and land territory of about 300 km that stretches from the coastline. This is the region where China's political and economically important cities are located.²⁴

Naval defence during this period was largely focussed on particular straits and waterways of strategic importance, or those that could be exploited by the enemy forces to invade China by sea. These included the Strait of Bohai, which is the maritime gateway to Tianjin and Beijing, and concerns the security of China's north coast; the Strait of Taiwan, which relates to the security of China's east coast, reunification of Taiwan with the Mainland and the security of the SLOCs around the islands; and the Strait of Qiongzhou, which is central to securing Hainan Island and China's south coast.²⁵ The PLAN's organisational structure in the form of the North Sea Fleet, East Sea Fleet and South Sea Fleet correlates with the defence of the three straits and the adjacent seas.

Some of the prime factors behind this strategic construct were: the continental-defence concept dominating China's military tradition, and its articulation in the form of the people's war doctrine; the influence of the Soviet naval doctrine upon China's military thinkers; and China's immediate national security concerns.

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23. Ibid.

24. Nan Li, "The Evolution of China's Naval Strategy and Capabilities: From 'Near Coast' and 'Near Seas' to 'Far Seas,'" *Asian Security*, vol. 5, no.2, 2009, pp.144-169.

25. Ibid.

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to follow.²⁶ The doctrine of people's war²⁷ relied on overcoming China's technological inferiority with its abundance in space, manpower, and time. The doctrine emphasised on "luring the enemy in deep," and employing manpower-intensive tactics of dispersion, mobility, harassment and attrition. **As such, People's War as a doctrine was rooted in the primacy of the land forces over the naval or air forces, and, hence, entailed a limited vision for the development of an independent naval strategy.** Also, the doctrine emphasised warfare to be conducted within the Chinese territory, and, therefore, had no scope for naval or air power missions of forward defence. Further, the Cultural Revolution of 1966 killed any incentive, whatsoever for the development of a modern navy.

The influence of the "Soviet Young School" naval doctrine within the Chinese military-strategic dominions further restricted the navy's strategic and operational growth. The operational guidance for the PLAN during the 1950s was a copy of the Soviet 'small battle' theory.²⁸ This guidance prescribed naval warfare to be conducted as a part of army-centred combined operations.

The Soviet model contained three major components: submarines were to be the capital ships, surface ships were for near-coast patrol missions, and naval air was to be land-based.²⁹ Such capabilities orientation rendered the navy incapable of operating in waters far from home or to execute an effective forward defence.

26. Paul H.B. Godwin, "Changing Concepts of Doctrine, Strategy and Operations in the Chinese People's Liberation Army 1978-1987," *China Quarterly*, December 1987, pp. 572-573.

27. According to the original definition, people's war "was conducted by a suppressed class or nation through mass mobilization in order to liberate itself." For a detailed discussion on people's war and its relevance to China's military strategy in the present times, see Dr. Alexander Chiech-cheng Huang, "Transformation and Refinement of Chinese Military Doctrine: Reflection and Critique on PLA's View."

28. You Ji, "The Evolution of China's Maritime Combat Doctrines and Models: 1949-2001," Paper No.22, Working Paper Series (Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, May 2002).

29. Robert W. Herrick, "Roles and Missions of the Soviet Navy: Historical Evaluation, Current Priorities, and Future Prospects," in James L. George, ed., *The Soviet and Other Communist Navies: The View from the Mid-1980s* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1986), pp.9-36.

Further, during the 1950s and 1960s, the central security concern for the PRC was small-scale incursions of the coastline by the Kuomintang (KMT) forces. To repel such incursions, the PLA relied more on the ground forces than the PLAN. However, the PLAN did play an important and offensive role during the amphibious-landing operations to capture inshore islands controlled by the KMT forces.^{30/31}

By the 1960s, Sino-Soviet relations began to deteriorate and China became increasingly worried over the possibility of a Soviet naval invasion of the Chinese Mainland. This fear psychosis was further aggravated by the worldwide naval exercises undertaken by the Soviet Union around this period—known in the West as “Okean 75.”³²

To thwart a Soviet offensive from the sea, the PLAN was required to assist the land-based defence by providing counter-amphibious-landing-operations. As China was to deal with a technologically superior enemy, the first issue to be addressed in such operations was how to survive the first wave of enemy strikes. The first phase of such operations was to “hide”, i.e. to conceal, disperse, and transfer ships to the second-line defence. This was to be accompanied by organising electronic interference and air-defence operations to simultaneously paralyse the enemy offence.

For the second phase, strikes were to be launched by establishing naval and air strike zones “within the coastal waters of several dozen kilometres” to exploit the advantages of concealment and land-based firepower support. Also, surprise attacks from multiple directions would be launched at the

30. Ibid.

31. In October 1966, the Chinese Navy’s South Sea Aviation Corps Anti-aircraft Artillery (AAA) entered the Vietnamese territory, to conduct operations against the United States of America. The navy for this mission was part of the anti-aircraft division of the Chinese Air Force. As per the Chinese accounts, over a period of two years and five months, the Chinese Navy’s anti-aircraft gun units shot down 175 US aircraft and damaged 128 others. Though this was the navy’s first battle on foreign soil, it could not be judged as a naval battle *per se*, as the naval forces only conducted operations supportive to the air force. For details, see Ai Hongren, *An Inside Look Into the Chinese Communist Navy*, Joint Public Research Service (JPRS), China (JPRS-CAR-90-052), July 16, 1990.

32. In April 1975, the Soviet Union conducted a multi-ocean exercise on the lines of previous such exercises in 1970. These naval exercises were dubbed as **Vesna** by the Soviets and Okean 75’ by the West. The exercises conducted a series of operations in the Atlantic and Pacific regions, and involved some 200 naval ships, submarines, and numerous aircraft. For details, see Norman Polmar, *The Naval Institute Guide to the Soviet Navy* (Annapolis, Maryland: US Naval Institute, 1986), Ch. 7, pp. 37-46.

It can be concluded that China's national security missions during the late 1970s and early 1980s were primarily focussed upon ensuring national survival in a major war with the Soviet Union.

enemy forces. These strikes were to be conducted during the enemy's moments of vulnerability, i.e. while the enemy landing force was switching ships, removing obstacles and organising itself into columns to drive to shore. Another method was to combine barriers, including mines and engineered obstacles, with firepower to prevent the enemy from removing obstacles and from driving to shore. **As can be noted, all these war-fighting methods primarily comprise defensive and delaying tactics.**

Therefore, it can be concluded that China's national security missions during the late 1970s and early 1980s were primarily focussed upon ensuring national survival in a major war with the Soviet Union. The PLAN's role during this period was to assist the defence of the coastal flank in an otherwise continental war. Safeguarding the SLOCs or acquiring claimed bodies of water does not appear to be shaping China's national strategic concerns during this period.

As the PLAN's ships at this juncture were too small, and ill-equipped in early warning, communication, and firepower, the navy was highly dependent upon land-based intelligence and firepower support for its operations. Hence, due to a major lack in capabilities, the PLAN continued to play a secondary role to the land forces till the late 1970s.

One incident that most significantly exposed the Chinese Navy's strategic and technological shortcomings was the **Sino-Vietnam conflict of 1974** over the Paracel (Xisha) islands. As the conflict arose during the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Navy's training was virtually in stagnation, and it had to face the enemy with inferior weapons. Moreover, **the battle served a strategic lesson to the navy that it lacked the modern warfare concept of "mastering the enemy by striking first and attacking with lightning speed."**³³

33. Hongren, n.31.

The Soviet security threat, coupled with certain other factors, initiated³⁴ a new strand within the Chinese military-strategic thinking and culminated in the form of the PLAN's first "ocean-going navy proposal." In 1975, the then Adm Xiao Jingguang submitted a report to Mao stating that the maritime defence line had to be projected relatively further away from the coastline.³⁵ Mao immediately approved the report³⁶, and on January 24, 1977, the PLAN submarine SS 252 undertook a voyage of over 3,300 nautical miles and completed a training exercise in the Western Pacific. This event changed the Chinese Navy's traditional coast guard image and paved the way for distant-waters exercises since then. **Post this event, the PLA Navy became a *de facto* independent Service.**

LOCATING A STRATEGY FOR PLAN WITHIN THE DYNAMICS OF THE LOCAL WARS DOCTRINE

With the arrival of Deng Xiaoping on the Chinese political scene in 1978, China's military doctrine graduated to people's war under modern conditions. The new doctrine, along with the Four Modernisations programme provided the crucial link among economic development, national security, and science and technology in the Chinese strategic thinking. As such, economic concerns came to be recognised as an integral aspect of national security strategy.

The strategy of active defence under "modern conditions" recognised that a strategic retreat³⁷ in the initial phase of warfare would result in China losing its most productive areas to the enemy forces. Hence, China

34. According to Ellis Joffe, there were four reasons behind the navy's proposal: the first was the growing Soviet naval threat close to China's shore; the second was the rapid development of China's merchant marine and the consequent need to protect sea lanes; the third was China's growing interest in offshore oil resources and its claims over disputed islands and ocean spaces; and the fourth was the ascendance of moderate leaders in China's power structure who recognised the need for military modernisation and building up of navy. Cited here from Huang, n. 15.

35. Ibid.

36. While talking with the navy's Political Commissar, Su Zhenghua, Mao showed his little finger and said, "Our navy is like this," he then showed his thumb and said, "The navy should be like this, big, so it can terrify the enemy."

37. The strategy of active defence as conceived by Mao included three stages: the first stage covers the period of the enemy's strategic offensive and the Chinese forces' strategic retreat; the second stage is the period of enemy's strategic consolidation and China's preparations for counter offensive; the third; and the final phase is when the Chinese troops launch offensive operations against the enemy forces, and force them to retreat. See Mao Zedong, *Six Essays on Military Affairs*, p.237.

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was required to extend its strategic depth away from the core centres of its economic activity. As such, China’s maritime provinces had to be converted from being the defensive front line of the Mao era, to the strategic rear. Accordingly, this strategic depth was to be achieved by extending the defence forward into the China Seas and the Western Pacific. This concept of active defence envisioned the PLAN not only as a tactical force but also a strategic force, and the spearhead of China’s national defence.³⁸

Although, the notion of extended strategic depth is not equivalent to the Western concept of forward defence, it does emphasise multi-layered defence lines or zones that can be extended beyond China’s territorial and maritime borders when the situation warrants.³⁹As operations conducted under such a strategy would largely entail an offensive posturing by the PLAN, it can be concluded that offence now became more pronounced within the strategy of active defence under modern conditions.

In spite of these developments, the Soviet Union remained China’s paramount security concern till the early 1980s. However, things begin to change by the mid-1980s, when Sino-Soviet rapprochement became increasingly possible. As a result of the new strategic environment, the “strategic transformation” of 1985⁴⁰ marked a drastic shift in China’s threat perceptions: China now perceived that its future armed conflicts would be local border wars and ruled out the possibility of an “early, total and nuclear” war.⁴¹ As such, China was now required to conceptualise a new strategic outlook in consonance with its changed security environment

The defence modernisation programme launched under “strategic transformation” further recognised the need to turn away from Lin Biao’s

38. Huang, n. 15. pp. 7-32.

39. Ibid.

40. The enlarged meeting of the CMC was held from May 23 to June 6, 1985.

41. Interestingly, the enlarged meeting of the CMC in 1985 had taken place just three months after Mikhail Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the Soviet Union, and expressed the desire to normalise Sino-Soviet relations.

“politics in command,” and modernise China’s defence forces along the lines of expertise, science and technology.⁴²

Following from the above determinants of China’s strategic environment, **four major factors appear to be influencing its overall military strategy: evolution of the defence concept of extended strategic depth to account for a war under “modern conditions”; the new military doctrine of “local border wars”; justification for offensive operations under the strategy of active defence under modern conditions; recognition for technology and expertise over “redness.”** Further, ensuring economic development was now an integral aspect of China’s national security strategy. The PLAN’s strategy, during the 1980s was conceived within the dynamics of this strategic construct.

OFFSHORE ACTIVE DEFENCE: EMERGENCE OF BLUE WATER STRATEGY

Along with these developments, one development that greatly influenced the evolution of China’s naval strategy was the rise of Adm Liu Huaqing as the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of the PLAN in 1982⁴³. Soon after assuming the office of China’s Navy Commander, Liu wrote a paper claiming that the development of capitalism was closely related to three factors: prosperity in navigation, opening up of new sea routes, and discovery of new continents. According to Liu, the centre of world civilisation shifted from the Orient to Western Europe, and then to the United States. But **the new “Pacific Century” would soon arrive, and the Orient would again become the centre of world civilisation. This was perceived as a historical opportunity for China, and the Chinese Navy was required to shoulder this historical task**

42. This is exemplified by the fact that under strategic transformation, it was decided to cut the size of PLA personnel by one million. To gradually downsize the army and reorganise the military along the lines of expertise still finds mention in Chinese military strategic thinking. For details, refer to White Papers on National Defense, published by the Information Office of the PRC, Beijing, China.

43. Admiral Liu Huaqing, a Long March veteran, had served in the 2nd Field Army under the command of Liu Bocheng and Deng Xiaoping in 1945. He was transferred to the PLAN in 1950 and was sent to the Soviet Union to study at the Voroshilov General Staff Academy from 1954 to 1958. Liu served as the Commander-in-Chief of the PLAN from 1982 to 1987, and was later promoted as the Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission.

The new strategy of 'offshore active defence' laid the ground for the PLAN's move towards creating a sphere of influence stretching up to the Northern Pacific.

by becoming an important force in the Pacific area to ensure successful modernisation of the country.⁴⁴

In consonance with this nationalistic mission, Liu laid out a plan for the Chinese Navy's operational reach, now referred to as the strategy of "offshore active defense."⁴⁵ In many ways, this strategy ascribes geographic parameters to the notion of 'extended strategic depth' in accordance with China's ever-growing national interests.

As per Adm Liu, "China's Navy should exert *effective control* of the seas within the first island chain."⁴⁶ Further, he described 'offshore' as a concept that is relative to the "high seas", and, therefore, the PLAN should be able to establish its strategic reach in the sea waters within the second island chain.⁴⁷ Hence, it can be established that if the doctrine of 'people's war under modern conditions,' led to the reconceptualisation of China's strategic frontiers, the new strategy of 'offshore active defence' laid the ground for the PLAN's move towards creating a sphere of influence stretching up to the northern Pacific.

For operational bounds, the first island chain comprises the Aleutians, Kurils, Japanese archipelago, Ryukyus, Taiwan, Philippine archipelago, and Greater Sunda Islands. The second island chain further includes the Bonins, Marianas, Guam, and Palau group⁴⁸. As can be noted, the island chain concept is very much in consonance with China's perceived core national interests⁴⁹: securing reunification of Taiwan with the PRC, and establishing China's sovereignty over the disputed waters/water bodies. **Hence, the**

44. As cited in JPRS-CAR-90-052, July 16, 1990.

45. 'Offshore defence' is recognised as the official doctrine of the PLAN; See *China's National Defense in 2008*.

46. Huang, n. 15, pp. 7-32.

47. n. 44.

48. The islands specified as part of the second island chain are an assessment of the concept by Huang, n. 15, pp. 7-32.

49. For a discussion on China's national defence objectives, see *China's National Defense in 2010*, published by the Information Office of the State Council, People's Republic of China, March 2011, Beijing.

strategy of offshore active defence now established a direct relationship between China's national goals and its naval strategy, thereby according PLAN a position of primacy within China's overall military strategy. Furthermore, under the strategy, the PLAN becomes an instrument of Chinese foreign policy. However, it must be noted that the island chain concept is not regarded as the official strategy of the PLAN or any other organisation of the Government of the PRC.

Though several writings tend to restrict the island chain concept to a three-phase plan⁵⁰, thereby rendering a strict sequential order to China's naval development, it seems that **Liu's idea was, in fact, a very fluid concept, wherein China's naval strategy was to evolve according to its domestic and international circumstances**⁵¹. Therefore, the concept leaves space for China to establish a conjunction between the security scenarios that it expects to face and the capabilities that it needs to develop in order to deal with them. The ultimate aim being PLAN's evolution into a blue-water navy.

The "offshore defence" parameter has been further quantified in two different ways: The official *Military Terms of the PLA* defines "offshore" as the sea area from the Chinese coastline to an outward stretch of 200 nautical miles.⁵² Li Qianyuan defines "offshore" as the sea area of the "Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and the continental shelf," which extends between 12 and 350 nautical miles from the coast. Li argues that China's actual frontline is not the coastline of the Mainland or the 12 nautical mile territorial waters, but the 200 nautical mile EEZ, and the 350 nautical mile perimeter of the

50. As per this school of thought, China's blue water strategy is a three phased construct: during the first phase, the PLAN should be able to develop sea denial capability within the first island chain by 2000; during the second phase, the navy should be able to exercise maritime influence beyond the second island chain by 2020; and finally, during the third phase, the PLAN should become a naval power capable of making its presence felt globally by 2050. For details, see, You Ji, "The Evolution of China's Maritime Combat Doctrines and Models: 1949-2001," No.22, Working Paper Series, Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, Singapore, May 2002.

51. For a discussion on the topic, see James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, *China's Naval Strategy in the 21st Century* (Abingdon, Routledge 2008), Ch.3, pp.27-47.

52. *Military Science Academy, Military Terms of the PLA* (The PLA Warrior Publishers, 1982), pp. 430. In this volume, the sea area from 200 nm to 600 nm from the Chinese coastline is defined as the "mid-distance sea," and the open ocean beyond 600 nm is defined as the "far-distance sea." Cited here from Huang, n. 15, pp. 7-32.

Achieving air superiority would be an essential component of the military operations launched under 'offshore active defence.'

continental shelf.⁵³

By analysing the above mentioned definitions of the "offshore" concept, it can be concluded that in operational terms, the **PLAN's strategy in the 1980s was focussed upon establishing sea-control in sea areas stretching up to the Northern Pacific. Therefore, it can be concluded that the 'offshore defence strategy,' was largely a nationalistic project aimed at projecting Chinese sea power in the international waters⁵⁴ and to establish China's control over the disputed waters around its periphery.** In order to sustain this kind of forward projection, the PLAN would need to develop offensive capabilities of long-range precision strikes, long-range air attacks and the ability to launch preemptive strikes. Further, achieving air superiority would be an essential component of the military operations launched under 'offshore active defence.' **Hence, it can be deduced that couched in the notion of 'defence,' the 'offshore defence' concept was oriented towards offence.** This explains Liu's ambition to acquire an aircraft carrier for the PLAN.

However, as the strategy does not consider extending the PLAN's reach towards the Indian Ocean or the Southern Pacific, it can be deduced that **securing China's SLOCs passing through the Indian Ocean was not a concern within Liu's strategy.** One reason for this could be that throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the PRC was, in fact, a net exporter of oil,⁵⁵ and, hence, safeguarding China's shipping routes to the Middle East did not feature as a strategic concern in the Chinese national security thinking.

53. Li Qianyan, "Strategy for the Defense of Exclusive Zone and Continental Shelf: Thinking on National Defense Development Strategy," no.8, 1988, pp.7-9. It is noteworthy that Li, an army General, was the commander of the 1st Group Army in the Nanjing MR when his article was published. Cited here from Huang, *Ibid.*, pp. 7-32.

54. As per the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea III, sea area beyond the EEZ of a country is recognised as international waters. For details, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Convention_on_the_Law_of_the_Sea#UNCLOS_III

55. Gal Luftt, "Fueling the Dragon: China's Race into the Oil Market," *Institute for the Analysis of Global Security*, available at <http://www.iags.org/china.htm>

NAVAL DIPLOMACY: EXTENDED DIMENSIONS OF PLAN'S STRATEGY

Another dimension of naval strategy that is worth mentioning here is naval diplomacy. Post 1985, as China's national security strategy shifted to dealing with local and limited wars, it was recognised that such wars could be deterred or contained by conducting active diplomacy. Thus, the concept of naval diplomacy emerged in the PLAN's strategic thinking. The Chinese specify two ways for conducting naval diplomacy: **static and dynamic**.

The static approach refers to altering the deployment of the maritime military force, or developing such force and facilities that express China's political and diplomatic intentions. This approach serves to "promote mutual understanding, and to propagate China's independent foreign policy and the accomplishments of construction and reform."⁵⁶

The dynamic approach, on the other hand, refers to such acts of the maritime force that directly or indirectly express China's diplomatic and policy intentions. Such actions may "include fleet cruise and patrol exercises, either to show strength or to demonstrate sovereign jurisdiction over disputed areas." The dynamic approach might also involve ship visits to foreign countries and naval participation in scientific exploration and surveys. This approach, to a certain degree, intends to showcase China's resolve "to protect its national interests as codified by the international law."⁵⁷ **Following from these two strands, it can be deduced that symbolism is an integral aspect of China's naval diplomacy.**

It is interesting to note the similarities between the Zen He voyages conducted from 1405 to 1453 AD and the static approach of contemporary naval diplomacy. Analysed from the perspective of naval diplomacy, the PLAN's repeated patrolling in the South China Sea, China's anti-piracy

56. Tan See Sang, "Human Security: Discourse, Statecraft, Emancipation", as cited in "Reconceptualizing the PLA Navy in Post-Mao China: Functions, Warfare, Arms, and Organization," Working Paper Series, Paper No. 30, Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, August 2002, Singapore.

57. Ibid.

mission in the Gulf of Aden, the exploratory activities being conducted in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and the recent sea trials conducted by the country's first aircraft carrier, all appear to entail a major component of symbolism of the dynamic kind.

LOCATING PLAN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CURRENT STRATEGIC THINKING

Since the early 1990s, two factors have dominated China's national security concerns: Taiwan's move towards declaring independence, and the vulnerability of China's oil supplies coming from the Middle East. **The strategy that evolves from these security concerns manifests itself in the form of a three-dimensional structure of growth, energy shortage, and capabilities development.** The PLAN'S operational area for this strategic construct revolves around two different water bodies: the Indian Ocean, and the South China Sea, and thereby the Western Pacific.

China's Naval Strategy for the Indian Ocean: Primacy of Economic Security
Maintaining high economic growth is integral to the Chinese notion of "Comprehensive National Power (CNP)."⁵⁸ As economic progress is crucial for maintaining social progress and the stability of the Communist regime, ensuring energy security assumes a position of primacy in the Chinese strategic thinking. **Therefore, the ability to use national forces to achieve political and economic goals when the times warrant is central to Chinese strategic thinking in the 21st century.**

Though coal still remains the mainstay of Chinese energy needs, the share of oil in the country's energy mix currently stands at 25 per cent, and is expected to rise to 30 percent by 2030.⁵⁹ Therefore, oil will continue to be China's second most important fuel in the years to come. As the bulk

58. CNP is described as the "the sum total of the powers or strengths of a country in economy, military affairs, science & technology, education and resources and its influence," China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, 2000.

59. Hu Angang and Men Honghua, "The Rising of Modern China: Comprehensive National Power and Grand Strategy." Paper available at <http://www.irchina.org/en/pdf/hag.pdf>
Phar Kim Beng and Vic Y.W Li, "China's Energy Dependence on the Middle East: Boon or Bane for Asian Security."

of Chinese oil consumption, about 70 percent, is sourced from the Middle East⁶⁰, it becomes crucial for China to ensure the security of its energy supplies.

The Chinese oil ships from the Middle East travel through the Indian Ocean—right from the Persian Gulf to the Malacca Strait. Thereon, they enter the South China Sea, and finally reach the eastern coast of the country. The Chinese fear psychosis is rooted in the strategic thinking that in the wake of a Taiwan contingency, the US Navy would conduct a naval blockade of China's SLOCs with the Middle East, thereby paralysing the Chinese economy.

For this blockade to be operational, the Chinese identify two potential choke points on account of their narrowness, and, hence, limited depth of defence: the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca. Further, the Strait of Hormuz falls within the range of direct strikes by the littoral states. Therefore, any political instability in the Middle East renders the oil shipping passing through this strait extremely vulnerable. **This security dilemma gets further reinforced due to the US Navy's continued presence in the Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean**, and America's security commitments to Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

The "Malacca Dilemma"⁶¹, in many ways forms the crux of China's naval strategy for the Indian Ocean Region. In order to bypass the Malacca Strait, and thereby avoid any interdiction of its ships by the US Navy during times of war, China is investing huge reserves of money in laying

As the bulk of Chinese oil consumption, about 70 percent, is sourced from the Middle East, it becomes crucial for China to ensure the security of its energy supplies.

60. Beng and Li, Ibid.

61. In an enlarged annual conference of the CMC in December 2003, President Hu Jintao declared that "certain major powers" were bent on controlling the strait, and called for the adoption of new strategies to mitigate the perceived vulnerability. Thereafter, the Chinese press widely referred to the issue as China's "Malacca Dilemma". For details, See Ian Storey, "China's Malacca Dilemma," *China Brief*, The Jamestown Foundation, 2006.

China is rapidly increasing its influence and presence in the Indian Ocean Region by the way of joint naval exercises, UN peace-keeping missions, and arms sales.

oil pipelines through the Indian Ocean littorals.⁶² Along with this, China is also constructing port facilities along several Indian Ocean states. Though these ports are described by the PRC as representing purely commercial interests, military analyst often see these facilities as China's attempt to secure permanent naval bases in the Indian Ocean Region. Described under the strategy of the "String of Pearls,"⁶³ these infrastructural developments are regarded as aimed towards India's strategic encirclement—

the only Indian Ocean state capable of competing with the Chinese Navy. Here it must be mentioned that the "String of Pearls" is entirely contingent upon the Indian Ocean states taking the side of China in the event of an Indo-Sino War. Therefore, **a counter strategy for India to deal with the Chinese threat lies very much in the diplomatic and foreign policy domain. Along with enhancing its naval capabilities, India needs to foster its ties with the Indian Ocean littorals through economic, military, and cultural measures.**

In addition to this, **China is rapidly increasing its influence and presence in the Indian Ocean Region by the way of joint naval exercises, UN peace-keeping missions, and arms sales.** In November 2003, China conducted a joint naval exercise with Pakistan off Shanghai. This was China's first ever joint exercise with any country. In 2005, China conducted its first ever joint exercise outside Chinese waters, again with Pakistan. This naval exercise was conducted off Karachi.

62. Some of the pipelines that are being constructed or have been proposed by China along the Indian Ocean states are : a pipeline from Gwadar in Pakistan to Xinjiang, a 1,200-km oil pipeline from Sittwe/Kyaukphe in Myanmar/Bangladesh to Kunming/Rili in China's Yunnan province. Another pipeline is being laid across the Malay Peninsula in Malaysia from Yan (Andaman Sea) to Bachok (South China Sea). For details, see Gurpreet Khurana, "China's 'String of Pearls' in the Indian Ocean and Its Security Implications," *Strategic Analysis*, IDSA, 2009.

63. "The String of Pearls" describes the manifestation of China's rising geo-political influence through efforts to increase access to ports and airfields, develop special diplomatic relationships, and modernise military forces that extend from the South China Sea through the Strait of Malacca, across the Indian Ocean and on to the Arabian. See Christopher J. Pehrson, "String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China's Rising Power Across the Asian Littoral," *Strategic Studies Institute*, 2006.

Further, several Indian Ocean states are becoming the recipients of Chinese arms sales.⁶⁴ Since the 1960s, Chinese-made arms have been finding their way into Africa and Pakistan. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have been procuring Chinese arms and weapons since the early 1970s. Since the Indian military's withdrawal from Sri Lanka in 1990, Beijing has supplied Colombo with as many as 10 naval ships. In December 2002, Beijing entered into an agreement to meet Dhaka's defence requirements—the first signed by Bangladesh with any country. Myanmar has been heavily dependent on China for its military supplies since 1988. In 2005, Beijing signed a memorandum of understanding on defence cooperation with Malaysia and Indonesia. **Apart from generating revenue, these defence exports help in fostering political ties, and cultivating dependence.**

Along with this, participation in anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden, and conducting exploratory activities in the Indian Ocean not only provide the PLAN familiarity with the terrain, but also enable it to pursue deep ocean combat training.⁶⁵

Though there is no formal policy paper issued by the PRC with respect to the Indian Ocean, it can be concluded from the above discussion that China's Indian Ocean strategy revolves around enabling the PLAN to acquire strategic reach within the oceanic waters. The *modus operandi* to

64. For a detailed discussion on the issue, see Khurana, n. 62, Refer to Appendix C.

65. The strategic implications of the PLAN's Somalia mission are best explained by You Ji and Lim Chee Kia, "China's mounting dependence on sea-borne trade requires the PLAN to add a new focus to Liu Huaqing's strategy. Now the PLAN has to position itself as a regional navy but with beyond-region power projection capabilities that can be deployed in any area where China's economic security is under threat. The deployment to the Gulf of Aden testifies how this strategic adjustment has been implemented.....PLAN's Somalia task group provides the basic form upon which its future expedition fleets will be organized. Using its first deployment as an example, Destroyer 169 (7,000 tons), the flag ship for the South Sea Fleet with the navy's best C4ISR systems, specializes in sea control missions such as anti-submarine warfare. Destroyer 171 (7,500 tons) is one of the only two naval surface combatants that has the Chinese *Aegis* systems capable of area air defense. Refurbishing ship 887 is the PLA's largest and newest logistical vessel (22,000 tons) designed for long range logistical missions. These ships form the core components of an ocean-going flotilla. *If they are joined by a few more specialized warships, such as ASW and air defense frigates and a few submarines, a standard maritime battle group would be in order* (emphasis added)..... **Beyond doubt, China's deployment signals the beginning of its gunboat diplomacy and as one of the busiest sea lanes in the world, the Straits of Malacca will be one of the targets of China's gunboat diplomacy.....**"(emphasis added). See You Ji and Lim Chee Kia, "Implications of China's Naval Deployments to Somalia," *East Asian Policy*, pp.61-68.

accomplish this objective appears to be the diplomatic and bilateral channels being established by the PRC with the Indian Ocean littorals. Analysed from a military-strategic perspective, there is a strong possibility of these channels being used by the PLAN to establish a permanent presence in the Indian Ocean in the future.

South China Sea: Dynamic Interplay Between the Forces of Nationalism and Agenda for Economic Security

It is in the context of economics that the PRC's "One China Policy" assumes a geo-strategic dimension. Apart from being an issue rooted in the notion of nationalism, sovereignty over Taiwan would provide the PLAN with sufficient strategic depth to establish sea control within the South China Sea, and thereby uphold its claims over the Spratly and Paracel Islands.

The importance of these two island chains in China's strategic thinking can be gauged from the fact that as early as June 1980, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs had issued a document entitled "*China's Sovereignty Over the Xisha and Nansha Archipelagoes is Indisputable*." The document argued that these two islands have been Chinese territories since the ancient times.⁶⁶ Further, another article, published in 1988, argued, "The strategically and economically important Nansha Islands and surrounding waters have a bearing on the basic interests of the Chinese nation. We should adopt a modern concept of the 'strategic ocean' in forming our perspective on these islands."⁶⁷

Maintaining control over the South China Sea is crucial to the Chinese economic interests. The South China Sea provides sea lanes of communication that connect Northeast Asia with Southeast Asia and the Middle East via the Indian Ocean. As the Spratly Islands lie between Vietnam and the Philippines, any naval or air capabilities based on this archipelago would have the range to block ships passing through the Malacca and Sunda

66. JPRS-CAR-90-052.

67. Shen Changjing, "What We Have learnt from the Spratly Island," *Jianchuan Zhishi*, February 1998. Cited here from JPRS-CAR-88-034, June 1988, pp.12-14.

Straits⁶⁸—the two vital choke points for the shipping passing through the South China Sea.

Further, as China's centre of gravity for economic development lies in the southeastern regions, any armed conflict in the region would leave its commercial centres such as Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen extremely vulnerable to enemy attacks. Therefore, in order to guarantee the border security of its commercial centres, it is important that China extends its defence depth towards the sea, and, hence, the primacy of Taiwanese reunification in the Chinese strategic thinking.

Moreover, as the SLOCs in the South China Sea are used by the US Navy and Air Force to traverse between its bases in the Pacific and the Persian Gulf, control over this strategic water body, and the adjacent waters of the East China Sea, and the Yellow Sea would enable the PLAN to project its power within the second island chain. **This strategy is very much in consonance with Liu's island chains concept.**⁶⁹

Though China and the 10 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea in 2002, not much progress has been made towards resolving the disputes. Recent Chinese objections to the Indo-Vietnamese oil drilling operations in the South China Sea further serve as an example of China's assertiveness regarding its claims over this disputed water body. As none of the littoral states is ready to compromise on its existing position on the South China Sea issue, it can be concluded that any resolution to this conflict would largely be achieved through the employment of force.

Following from this, it can be concluded that the PLAN's strategy for the Asia-Pacific region is geared towards establishing the PLAN as a regional blue water navy. This type of navy, while executing sea control within its own region, also possesses the capability to project power beyond its own

68. Jayadeva Ranade, "The Implications of China's Navy Modernisation," *Air Power Journal*, vol. 4, no.4, Winter 2009, pp. 1-16.

69. The importance of the South China Sea in Chinese strategic thinking is further exemplified by the fact that most of the recent maritime issues between the US and China have taken place in these waters, including the 2001 EP-3 incident, the 2009 USNS *Impeccable* incident and China's 2010 protests over the participation of *George Washington* CSG in military exercises in the Yellow Sea.

The fulcrum of this new military doctrine is the RMA with Chinese characteristics, whereby China aims to undertake simultaneous advancement in mechanisation and informationisation.

region and compete effectively for sea control and impose sea denial in distant waters.⁷⁰

EMERGING CONCEPTS OF WARFARE:

It was in the 1990s that the Chinese military doctrine assumed the new dimensions of 'high technology', and information warfare. The trigger for this doctrinal change was initiated by two simultaneous factors: end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the first Gulf War.

Disintegration of the Soviet Union, and consequent foundation of a unipolar world order led by the United States of America, provided the Chinese with the strategic rationale to develop a more capable military.

The Gulf War of 1991 provided China with the blueprint for its future military modernisation programme. The Gulf War introduced China to the modern warfare concepts of: the importance of electronic warfare, joint operations as the crucial element of warfare operations, importance of integrated command and control, importance of early warning, and advanced communication relay stations to the modern battlefield. Further, China learned about the new advances in high-tech weaponry that allowed the forces to conduct long-range operations and precision-guided munitions. In accordance with this new orientation of modern warfare towards high-technology weaponry, China's military doctrine subsequently graduated to

70. The PLAN planners divide the world's navies into three categories: the far-oceans offensive types (or global blue-water type), regional defensive and offensive type (or regional blue-water type), and coastal defensive type. The US Navy belongs to the first category, while the Indian Navy is alleged to be "sub-regional." The medium term (around 2020) goal of the PLAN is to become a regional blue-water navy. This type of navy can operate effectively for control of the seas within its own region. In the meantime, it also possesses the capability to project power beyond its own region and compete effectively for sea-control and impose sea-denial in the seas of the other oceans. As cited in Nan Li, "The Evolution of China's Naval Strategy and Capabilities: From the "Near Coast" and the "Near Seas to " Far Seas," *Asian Security*, vol.5, no.2, 2009, pp.144-169. .

“limited wars under high-technology” conditions.^{71,72}

While China was assimilating the concepts of high-technology warfare, the US military discourse started focussing upon a new “Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA).” This new RMA was centralised on the idea of intelligence and information as the basic and most crucial elements of future warfare scenarios. Consequently, the Chinese military doctrine evolved to **“limited wars under informationized conditions.”** The fulcrum of this new military doctrine is the RMA with Chinese characteristics, whereby China aims to undertake simultaneous advancement in mechanisation and informationisation,⁷³ thus, accounting for China’s relative lack in high-tech equipment, and information-warfare capabilities. The doctrine further aims to build informationised armed forces, capable of winning informationised wars by the mid-21st century.⁷⁴ In spite of this centricism with informationisation, the Defence White Papers do not spell out China’s information warfare doctrine. **Hence, it is difficult to ascertain the impact of informationisation on the PLAN’s strategy per se.**

In spite of this, the primacy of information-centric warfare is gaining a strong hold in the navy’s strategic discourse. This is exemplified through the following views expressed by the military analysts at the Navy Research Institute, Beijing:

...information deterrence is a new concept of victory without fighting wars....
The side controlling information will be able to manipulate the beginning,
middle, and end of the war, attack the enemy with advanced information

71. For a detailed discussion on China’s doctrinal evolution, see, David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*, (University of California Press), Ch. 3, pp. 56-107, 2004.

72. On January 13, 1993, President Jiang Zemin delivered a speech to an expanded meeting of the CMC in which he promulgated a new military strategy for the PLA to guide its future modernisation efforts. During the meeting he pointed out, “We had shifted our strategic guideline from aiming at engaging in an early war, an all-out war and a nuclear war to a local war under the condition of modern technologies, especially high technologies. This shift represents the development and improvement of our strategic guideline.” For details, see Wu Jun Sun Xiangli Hu Side, “The Impact of Revolution in Military Affairs on China’s Defense Policy,” Institute of Applied Physics and Computational Mathematics, Beijing, China.

73. *China’s National Defense in 2004*, published by the Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, Beijing, December 2004.

74. *China’s National Defense in 2006*, published by the Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, Beijing, December 2006.

weapons to paralyse enemy aircraft, vessels and various command systems, and destroy important targets with precise firepower.⁷⁵

Though this doctrinal evolution did not mark any shift in the navy's strategic objectives, the emphasis upon modern technology, along with China's economic progress that enabled it to afford such technology, has transformed the capabilities structure of the PLAN.

In order to achieve its strategic objectives of reunification of Taiwan with the Chinese Mainland, and further its projection in the Western Pacific, the PLAN would need to develop two sets of capabilities. For the Taiwan contingency, the navy would have to focus its attention upon establishing local sea control for sea crossing and amphibious-landing operations. In order to achieve this objective, the PLAN would be required to perform the two-pronged missions of crushing or paralysing the Republic of China's (ROC's) counter-attacks to China's sea control operations, and simultaneously deny the US forces an entry into the theatre of operation. During the conflict, the American forces might also try to impose a no-fly zone over Taiwan, thereby further rendering it difficult for the PLAN to conduct its operations. As such, a war on Taiwan would be fought under a joint operations construct, largely composed of the navy and the air force. In order to conduct successful area-denial operations against the US forces, the PLAN would need to integrate its land-based aircraft, submarine force, and cruise missiles with its ballistic missile force. This thinking has begun to find resonance in Chinese strategic thinking as all the Defence White Papers, post 2000, lay an increased emphasis upon developing the joint warfare capabilities of the navy, air force and second artillery.⁷⁶ Further, the 2006 Defence White Paper clearly lays out that the navy, "...aims at gradual extension of the strategic depth for offshore defensive operations and enhancing its capabilities in integrated maritime operations and nuclear counterattacks."

75. Naval Captain Shen Zhongchang , Naval Lieutenant Zhou Xinsheng and Naval Lieutenant Commander Zhang Haiying, Navy Research Institute, Beijing, " The Military Revolution in Naval Warfare", *China Military Science*, 1996. Cited here from Michael Pillsbury, *Chinese View of Future Warfare* (Institute of National Strategic Studies).

76. *China's National Defense in 2010*, published by the Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, Beijing, March 2011.

To sustain projection in the Western Pacific, China would again need to rely upon developing its joint warfare capabilities, and, hence, the need for an integrated command and control. Further, this kind of projection is possible only with the help of long-range precision guided weaponry, and strong naval aviation. China's first aircraft carrier, the *Varyag*, can be regarded as a move in this direction.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the PLAN's strategy since the 1990s encompasses and articulates China's growing national interests, which now stretch from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. These growing national interests further are the constructs of a dynamic interplay among the factors of economics, nationalism, and geo-strategy.

CAPABILITIES DEVELOPMENT

Though the strategy of offshore active defence was laid down in the early 1980s, severe lack in capabilities impeded China's march towards the blue waters. This lacuna can be attributed to a host of domestic and international factors, namely: deficient economic resources to afford capital-intensive naval technologies and equipment, post-Tiananmen sanctions imposed upon China, near-absence of indigenous Research and Development (R&D), and the prevalent bias in the Central Military Commission (CMC) towards the land forces over the naval or air forces.

It was by late the 1990s that China embarked on a more serious plan to modernise its naval forces. Post 2000, there has been substantial progress in China's naval development programme. The genesis of this development can be located in the rapid economic growth witnessed by the PRC since the 1990s, which not only enabled China to invest in naval hardware and technology, but also established the 'seas' as the focal point of its security-strategic thinking. Also, by the late 1990s, the PLA had completed three rounds of downsizing since 1985. As a consequence, more funds were now available for developing a technology-intensive Service such as the navy.

In consonance with the strategy of offshore active defence within the doctrine of "limited wars under informationized conditions," China is

China's MaRVed missiles with conventional warheads would have the ability to degrade vital US defence capabilities, including the Aegis air and missile defence systems and carrier flight decks.

developing capabilities for offensive operations. The most potent manifestation of this strategy is exhibited through the emerging joint warfare construct between the navy and the second artillery. In consonance with this construct, China is developing a set of ballistic missile capabilities that include Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) (the DF-21C) and Short-Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBMs) (the DF-15 and 11). Along with conventional warheads, these missiles are expected to play a crucial role in a war with Taiwan. This kind of strategic

capability holds the potential of neutralising the air and missile defences of Taiwan, and simultaneously inflicting heavy damage on the Taiwanese naval forces before they can leave the ports, thus, severely jeopardising Taiwan's retaliatory capability.

The PLAN's enhanced capabilities in terms of strategic missile submarines (Jin class-Type 094, and Xia class-Type 092 SSBNs), and attack submarines (Shang class-Type 093, and Han class-Type 091/091G SSNs) further complement the nuclear-oriented force structure. Moreover, the Jin class SSBNs are armed with 12 strategic ballistic missiles with a range over 7,200 km. These missiles are believed to be equipped with Manoeuvring Advanced Reentry Vehicles (MaRVs). Such capability orientation enables the PLAN to confuse and, thereby, delay or deter, enemy naval operations. According to some analysts, China's MaRVed missiles with conventional warheads would have the ability to degrade vital US defence capabilities, including the Aegis air and missile defence systems and carrier flight decks.

Further, the Jin and the Shang class submarines also serve to project the PLAN in the distant waters. Not only are these submarines capable of nuclear deterrence, they are also sufficiently large enough to sustain operations in far and deep oceans, and carry a variety of weapon systems such as Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) missiles, Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles (ASCMs) and Land-Attack Cruise Missiles (LACMs).

In addition to these, the PLAN also has a fleet of non-nuclear submarines: the Kilos, the Yuans, the Songs, along with the older Mings and the remaining Romeos. The Kilo-class and Song-class submarines represent a major component of China's ASCM capabilities. Each of the 12 Kilos and 13 Songs is equipped with the SS-N-27B ASCM, and YJ-82 ASCM respectively. The Kilos are capable of launching missiles while submerged at a distance of about 300 km. Hence, these boats constitute a potent force to conduct area denial missions in nearby waters. Moreover, the numerical advantage offered by the PLAN's submarine force can be used to complicate the ASW picture for the opponent forces.

The PLAN's operational capability is further enhanced by its fleet of modern surface combatants. This fleet structure is led by the Russian origin Sovremenny DDGs. These ships are equipped with subsonic ASCMs with ranges of 160 km (Type 956E) and 240 km (Type 956EM). To overcome their subsonic speed, and thereby reduce their vulnerability to air attacks, these DDGs possess area air-defence capabilities. The Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAMs) on the Sovremennys have ranges between 25 km (Type 956E), and 45 km (Type 956 EM). Further, the Luyang-class of destroyers carry subsonic ASCMs with ranges of 150 km (Luyang I), and 280 km (Luyang II). The Luyang II DDGs are equipped with the Vertical Launching System (VLS) based SAMs with a range of 90 km. The Luzhou-class DDGs too are equipped with ASCMs with a range of 150 km. The SAMs on these ships are also VLS-based, with a range of 80 km.

A critical component of the PLAN's capabilities is emerging in the form of the PLA naval air force. The most potent components of this force structure are the Russian origin Su-30MK2 aircraft, the indigenous B-6s (also equipped with ASMs) and FB-7 maritime interdiction aircraft.

In spite of these structural developments, in order to fight a war under informationised conditions, China would need to enhance its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities.