

# IMPLICATIONS OF CHINA'S NAVY MODERNISATION

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The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) celebrated its sixtieth anniversary with a well-publicised unprecedented 'coming out' party on April 23, 2009. This preceded the sixtieth anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party on October 1, an event of major importance for the Chinese leadership. The manner in which the PLAN's anniversary has been celebrated presages that the navy will play a major role in the years to come and that China's leaders feel confident of the country's position as one of the world's major powers.

Of the over 300 ships in the PLAN's inventory, 25 vessels and 31 aircraft took part in the review. This included, for the first time in public, four submarines, including the new indigenously-built Jin class nuclear-powered attack submarine equipped with 8,000-km range ballistic missiles. This submarine can target parts of the United States. China's President Hu Jintao, who reviewed the fleet, was projected as a confident leader capable of holding his own in the international community and leading the country into the coming era. China used the occasion to highlight its international stature. Foreign ships participated in the review as naval delegations from 29 countries watched. India's Navy Chief was among those who witnessed the

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display. The review was a clear demonstration of China's strength and signalled that China's navy had come of age.

A good example of this new found confidence was the remark of a senior Chinese Navy officer to US Admiral Keating during the latter's visit to China recently. According to Admiral Keating, the senior Chinese Navy officer told him, ostensibly half jocularly: "As we develop our aircraft carriers why don't we reach an agreement, you and I. You take Hawaii East, we'll take Hawaii West and the Indian Ocean. We'll share information and we'll save you all the trouble of developing your naval forces west of Hawaii". The proposal, disclosed by Admiral Keating during a visit to Delhi in mid-May 2009, reflects long-held Chinese aspirations.

Traditionally, China has been a continental power which has remained locked in land warfare and neglected the sea. China's Communist leadership similarly favoured the PLA's ground forces with which it forged intimate bonds during the long years of guerrilla warfare on the path to power. However, Deng Xiaoping, the pragmatic Chinese leader who initiated the reforms and "open door" policy at the end of 1979, anticipated the need for naval power in the future. Opinion in favour of building the navy was created through articles in the media, which, particularly since the mid-1980s, recalled the exploits of China's 15<sup>th</sup> century eunuch Admiral Zeng He. Articles by think-tanks and in the magazines at the same time recalled that the major imperialist powers all had powerful navies and dominated the seas. China, they clarified, needed a navy not to create an empire but safeguard its own territories. In a far-reaching move, Deng Xiaoping in 1982 appointed his protégé Admiral Liu Huaqing, one of the very few Chinese military officers to have actual maritime experience and have served for a while in the navy, to modernise the PLAN.

Admiral Liu Huaqing focussed first on formulating a strategy for the PLAN and then developing an indigenous ship-building capability. He was conscious of the fact that China did not have a developed navy and that neither had China's military establishment developed a strategy for the navy. He was of the view that the navy required its own strategy for war and accordingly tasked groups of officers to formulate draft strategies and doctrines specifically for the navy. Admiral Liu Huaqing defined his concept as "active defence strategy, coastal waters warfare". In the process of finalising this formulation, the term "coastal waters" needed to be defined. This was defined by the navy as the seas within 200 miles of the coastline. Admiral Liu Huaqing, with Deng Xiaoping's approval, defined this to include "the Yellow Sea, Eastern Sea (East China Sea), the Southern Sea (South China Sea), the Nansha Archipelago and Taiwan, the seas on this side and that side of Okinawa, as well as the Northern Region of the Pacific." All outside these coastal waters were the "medium and far seas". In 1985, Admiral Liu Huaqing for the first time officially enunciated the "Coastal Waters Defence Naval Strategy", thus, launching the process of modernising the PLAN.

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China's strategic navy planners also recognised that the PLAN would be required to play an increasingly larger role in the future, particularly in the South China Sea and waters around China. This, they postulated on the basis of the provisions of the "UN Convention on the Law of the Sea". Chinese calculations indicated that China's maritime space exceeded three million square kilometres, with the coastal seas and continental shelf measuring almost 273 million hectares. They looked at this maritime space as a strategic resource replacement area as land resources get depleted. Additionally, maritime trade was developing fast and they anticipated then that the volume of sea-borne trade would grow to over US\$ 1 trillion by 2020 and that the sea lanes of communication would become "lifelines of national existence and development".

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Admiral Liu Huaqing simultaneously embarked on a mission to purchase modern vessels and obtain the latest technology for building naval fighting vessels. He sourced the Soviet Union, Germany and France. The success of Admiral Liu Huaqing's policy became evident within a decade and a half when Chinese shipyards began building frigates and destroyers. Later, they built diesel-powered submarines and still later, nuclear-powered submarines. The Jin class submarine represents the latest version of a submarine indigenously built in China and is reputed to be just below similar cutting-edge submarines built by the USA and Russia. The Chinese Navy now, within just two decades of initiation of its modernisation plans, has the capability to target the USA and definitively delay any effort by the US, or other navy to reach Taiwan in time to assist it in the event of hostilities between China and the island nation. It remains, however, the smallest of the three Services in the PLA.

China's navy has gradually transformed itself from a coastline-hugging brown water navy into one with blue water capability. Chinese strategic planners had envisaged a three-stage development. In the first stage, the strength of the existing navy was to be augmented—mainly with purchases from the erstwhile Soviet Union and advanced West European countries—and facilities for building naval fighting ships created. The navy was to develop the capability of guarding its territories up to the first island chain. This comprises a series of islands that stretch from Japan in the north, to Taiwan, and Philippines in the south. In the second phase, the PLAN was to become a fighting arm capable of delaying attempts by the US and other navies from speeding to Taiwan's assistance in the event of hostilities, safeguarding China's coastline and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and protecting China's territories up to the second island chain. The second island chain includes Guam, Indonesia and Australia. Emphasis was, therefore,



given to construction of submarines of which China now has over 60. In the third stage, it was to acquire blue water capability and global reach by the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century. The envisaged role of the PLAN is to safeguard China's energy routes and supplies, its sea-borne commerce, and eventually help recover the claimed and currently disputed offshore territories. Regional dominance would be a prerequisite. As the PLAN grew to its current strength of 225,000 personnel, the operational doctrine of the Chinese Navy was appropriately revised and it today mandates "offshore defence", which implies authorisation of pre-emptive action. To suit its operational goals, the PLAN concurrently altered its organisation table and inventory to add a naval air arm, or PLAN Air Force and two brigades of Marines. The PLAN Air Force, incidentally, shares some types of fighter aircraft with the PLA Air Force (PLAAF).

The PLAN has quietly been playing an ever increasing role in China's security, especially in the region. It has been used to reinforce China's stand in cases where the legality of offshore oil exploration concessions granted to foreign companies by other countries has been contested by Beijing. It has also been used to assert China's claims on the disputed Spratly and Paracels archipelagos and in offshore territorial disputes with Japan. Chinese Navy ships have fought silent battles separately with naval vessels of the Philippines and Vietnam. Beijing has asserted that it will protect its claimed territories by force, if necessary, and has enacted a maritime law to that effect. While Chinese Navy planners have been conscious of the need to protect Chinese commerce transiting the Malacca Strait and have been uneasy at US-led efforts to patrol the strait, they have so far refrained from undertaking regular patrols of these seas. This restraint would have been prompted by the need to avoid the possibility of a higher level of confrontation and raising concerns in neighbouring countries in the region. PLAN submarines and intelligence vessels have, nevertheless, been regularly patrolling the Taiwan Strait to

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take soundings, map the sea-bed, record engine signatures, as well as monitor the various US and Japanese vessels that visit. US intelligence recently declassified assessments revealing that secret long-range patrolling by Chinese Navy submarines increased appreciably in 2008. The PLAN's submarine arm conducted twelve secret long-range patrols in 2008 compared to seven in 2007, two in 2006 and none the year earlier. These measures are intended to delay vessels of the Japanese, US and other navies from rushing to Taiwan's assistance in the event of hostilities between China and Taiwan. A former PLAN East Sea Fleet Commander and delegate to the CPPCC, Zhao Guojun, publicly stated, on the sidelines of the National People's Congress deliberations in Beijing earlier in 2009, that the PLAN had the military capacity to defend

China's territory in the South China Sea.

A few years ago, China's leadership decided to publicise its ambition of possessing a blue water navy. Accordingly, a series of articles began appearing in the official Chinese media lauding the exploits of the 15<sup>th</sup> century eunuch Admiral Zeng He. These extolled his seven voyages through the Indian Ocean and around Africa, but keeping in view international sensitivities, predictably highlighted the peaceful, mutually beneficial commercial aspects of his journeys. Incidentally, the name "Indian Ocean" has rankled Chinese leaders and military strategists for a long time and articles in China's military literature and Party newspapers periodically declare that the name Indian Ocean does not mean that it is "India's Ocean". The PLAN began undertaking voyages across the Indian Ocean on goodwill visits to Pakistan, the Gulf, Europe, Africa and India. PLAN ships similarly crossed the Pacific to pay goodwill visits to the USA. With each visit, the PLAN slowly inched toward

acquiring blue water capability. The PLAN also began conducting exercises with the Pakistan Navy and, subsequently, small-scale exercises with other navies.

China took a major step at the beginning of this year, which demonstrated that it was well on the way to acquiring a modern blue water navy with global reach. It deployed two destroyers and one supply ship of the PLAN, including one with helicopters and 800 soldiers, including Marines, aboard. The flotilla was deployed for anti-piracy operations off Somalia in the Gulf of Aden. The deployment of Somalia was significant. It confirmed that PLAN ships could use Pakistani ports in case of need; that the PLAN was capable of undertaking offensive operations at sea; that PLAN could operate in waters far from home; and that the PLAN could maintain its ships at sea in operational mode for long stretches. Another important feature became evident when the tour of duty of the PLAN ships off Somalia coincided with a joint exercise of the Chinese and Pakistan Navies and sudden dispatch to the South China Sea of a PLAN warship to enforce its territorial claim. These confirmed that the PLAN had acquired the operational and logistical capability to conduct multiple operations in different theatres. This deployment occurred after a senior officer each from the PLAAF and PLAN were appointed last year, for the first time ever, to the PLA General Staff Headquarters to enhance inter-Service coordination and compatibility in joint operations.

The hitherto hidden muscular role of the PLAN has become more visible in the past few months. This had been hinted at in China's Defence White Paper, 2006, which had announced that the PLAN would take on a more expansive role, reaching out beyond the coastline. While confrontations have occurred between Chinese and US Navy vessels, the manner in which Chinese vessels confronted the US survey ship the USNS *Impeccable* in March was clearly deliberate and more serious. US officials were quick to describe the confrontation, which occurred just days before the first summit meeting between new US President Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao, as the "most serious" incident since

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that involving the EP-3 aircraft in 2001 while the Chinese responded that the US Navy ship had intruded into China's EEZ. The incident predictably found an echo in the deliberations of the National People's Congress then underway in Beijing. It prompted a senior PLAN officer to again hint that China would acquire an aircraft carrier. The object of the confrontation with the USNS *Impeccable* was to demonstrate that the PLAN is capable of defending its waters and willing to confront even the USA if necessary to safeguard its interests. The latter is

a clear signal to Taiwan and other countries in the region, that have offshore disputes with China, that they should not bank on US assistance. In case the message was not adequately clear, another stand-off occurred between Chinese vessels and a US Navy survey ship in end April, barely days after the PLAN celebrated its sixtieth anniversary. This was the fifth such stand-off in recent months. The messages are a clear indication that Beijing feels it has a navy which can delay, or frustrate, the assistance that the few other more powerful navies operating in the region viz US, Russian and Japanese, can render to the neighbouring countries. US Admiral Michael Mullen told a defence conference recently in Washington that China's build-up of sea, military and air power appeared to be aimed at counter-balancing US power in the Pacific.

That these encounters were not restricted to isolated events in a limited time period has been evidenced by the latest incident that occurred on Thursday June 11, 2009. In this still unpublicised incident, described by US military officials as an "inadvertent encounter", a Chinese submarine hit an underwater sonar array being towed by the destroyer USS *John McCain*. This incident occurred in Subic Bay off the Philippines coast. The submarine and destroyer did not collide though the array was damaged. The US description of the incident as "inadvertent" is based on the assessment of US military officials that staging such an incident would be risky as the submarine's propellers could have got entangled in the array.



The infrastructural base has clearly been laid for building warships and modernising the navy adequately for China's needs. Persistent efforts continue, however, to acquire technology and purchase the latest ships and armaments from advanced countries. That the PLAN will augment its fleet strength and particularly add submarines, destroyers and frigates to its inventory, was confirmed by PLAN Commander Wu Shengli on April 16, 2009. He said that the navy would accelerate plans to build a new generation of warships, submarines, fighter aircraft and high precision long range missiles. There are reports that in the next three years (2009-12), the hardware construction of China's naval force is going to accelerate to a much higher level. Implicit in this declaration is the Chinese leadership's goal of being able to challenge the US in case the latter intrudes in areas perceived as being of China's national interest. Work on construction of aircraft carriers has been underway in Chinese shipyards and it is anticipated that the first Chinese-built aircraft carrier will be inducted into the PLAN's South China Sea Fleet by 2015. This will be followed by two others within another ten years. China's growing volume of sea-borne trade and import of almost 70 percent of its petroleum requirements by sea ensure that PLAN will receive the required allocations of funds for its plans to modernise and strengthen its fleet. Meanwhile, the PLAN has begun formulating a new doctrine to replace the current doctrine of "Active Offshore Defence". The present doctrine implies authorisation for preemptive strikes and is intended to safeguard both the island chains that China regards as part of its territory or within its area of claimed influence. The proposed new doctrine of "Far Sea Defence" will authorise and permit operations beyond the 200-nautical mile EEZ and multi-dimensional precision strikes. The PLAN presently has 27 destroyers, 48 frigates, 54 diesel attack submarines and 6 nuclear attack

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submarines. Aircraft carriers, long-range support ships and submarines capable of launching ballistic and cruise missiles are planned to be added.

The addition of aircraft carriers to the fleet strength of the PLAN will immediately and considerably enlarge the 'reach', range and scope of the operations undertaken by the PLAN. China plans to add three aircraft carriers to its fleet by 2020. Separately, PLA officers and Chinese shipbuilding corporation officials 'leaked' information to journalists in early 2009 that China may have up to four indigenously designed and built aircraft carriers. Two of these would be nuclear and two conventional. They disclosed that the *Varyag*, acquired from Russia, will be readied as a training vessel. The *Varyag* has, incidentally, been reported as having left the shipyard of the Dalian Shipbuilding Corporation in March 2009 for an unknown destination. The Dalian Shipbuilding Corporation will be the site for construction of a 70,000-80,000 tonne displacement carrier. Another aircraft carrier is to be built at the newly constructed US\$ 3.6 billion Shanghai Jiangnan Changxing Shipbuilding base. The base is located off the coast of Shanghai on Chanxing Island. This aircraft carrier will be of indigenous design and various reports suggest that China already possesses the catapult techniques necessary to operate an aircraft carrier and that the deck of China's first aircraft carrier will be modelled on the US Navy's Nimitz class aircraft carriers. Construction of this base commenced in June 2005 and has been undertaken by the Jiangnan Shipyard (Group) Company Ltd, one of China's oldest state-owned shipbuilding companies. Nan Daqing, who is closely connected with the Chinese Navy and is also General Manager of the Jiangnan Shipyard (Group) Company Ltd, disclosed during an interview on Shanghai's Dragon TV three months ago that all the tasks necessary to equip the dockyard with the capability to undertake the task allotted by the Chinese Navy of building an aircraft carrier are complete. He repeated this in another interview in April 2009 to the Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*. This is the first statement by a representative of an entity which is directly involved that China is constructing an aircraft carrier. Other reports have indicated that security by armed police personnel at all entry and exit points to Dockyard No 3, which is used by the

military, has been enhanced. Security at Dockyard No 1, which is for civilian use, is provided by company security personnel.

The other companies involved in major shipbuilding projects for the Chinese Navy are the Dalian Shipbuilding Corporation, Huangpu Shipbuilding Corporation in Guangzhou and Shanghai's Hudong Shipbuilding Company. Chinese defence blogsites reveal that for these projects, the Dalian Shipbuilding Corporation will build a steam-turbine powered large air-defence destroyer, which will be an expanded 051C destroyer. The Shanghai Jiangnan Changxing shipbuilding base will construct three general 7,000-tonne class missile destroyers whose armaments include medium and long range air defence missiles, anti-submarine missiles and anti-ship and land-attacking missiles. Four of the upgraded version of the Type 052C destroyer, to be called the Type 052D, will be built by the Huangpu Shipbuilding Corporation in Guangzhou and are slated to become the air defence core of the PLAN aircraft carrier group. Shanghai's Hudong Shipbuilding Company is to build six, or eight, 23,000 class "flush-deck" amphibious transport dock ships. The PLAN continues to augment its submarine fleet. Unconfirmed reports suggest that the Bohai Shipbuilding Heavy Industry Company, the former Huludao Shipbuilding yard, will construct the Type 095 SSN while the Wuchang Shipbuilding Industry will construct the improved version of the Type 041 submarine.

The 225,000-strong PLAN has three fleets namely, the North Sea Fleet, East Sea Fleet and South Sea Fleet. Main PLAN bases include those located at Lushun, Huludao, Qingdao, Shanghai, Zhoushan, Wenzhou, Xiamen, Guangzhou, Zhanjiang and Yulin. The South Sea Fleet is anticipatedly operationally the more important. While each fleet comprises surface ships, submarines, coastal defence and naval aviation, the South Sea Fleet, in view of its envisaged potentially larger operational role, has allocated to it both the Marine Brigades totalling approximately 10,000 personnel.

The PLA Navy's Marine Corps was reestablished by the Central Military Commission (CMC) in 1979 and placed under command of the PLAN. The first Marine Brigade was constituted in May 1980 and based in Hainan. The



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second Marine Brigade is also based in Zhanjiang, Hainan. Both brigades have a strength of 6,000 personnel, but in time of emergency, up to 28,000 personnel can be called up for service. The location of the Marines in Hainan clearly indicates that their intended operational role is in the South China Sea, namely, the Spratly and Paracel Island groups and, to a lesser extent, in Taiwan. The Marines are, however, considered elite troops and part of China's Rapid Reaction Forces. They are well equipped. In training, they receive particular emphasis in parachuting, amphibious warfare exercises, establishing beach-heads to launch direct assaults against the enemy and acting as a garrison

or assault group in island chains. The Marines have enhanced the operational role of the PLAN.

China already has the largest submarine force among the Asian countries, including 8-10 nuclear powered submarines. The Type 094 or Jin class nuclear-powered missile submarines have now entered service. The rapid development of the naval base at Sanya on China's southern island Hainan, near which a submarine construction facility is located, points to this. Plans earmark an aircraft carrier for the South Sea Fleet which exercises jurisdiction over the South China Sea. China's first aircraft carrier group, which is expected to include over 36 combat aircraft, is expected to consist of four type 052D destroyers, four general missile destroyers, two Type 054A frigates, and two Type 093 nuclear submarines. Such a force will have unmatched ready striking capability in the region. A bigger and modernised Chinese Navy will be a cause for concern in the region, which will be apprehensive that this navy will be used to settle outstanding offshore territorial disputes with countries like Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, etc in the first instance. Later, China could try to obtain better terms for negotiations in its dispute with Japan.



The South China Sea territorial dispute has the potential to become a major security issue between China and other countries in the region. The issue is complicated by the conflicting claims over territory and the estimated vast resources. The dispute encompasses the Paracel Islands, Macclesfield Bank and the Spratly Islands archipelago, but the Spratly Islands have attracted the most attention, having six claimants. Disputes exist additionally between China and Japan over the Senkaku-Diaoyutai Islands and between Korea and Japan over the Tokdo/Takeshima Islands.

Extra attention has been focussed on the Spratly Islands group, consisting of over 400 rocks, reefs and islands spread across 800,000 sq km, because of its estimated potential as a source of oil and natural gas. Chinese surveys describe the area as “the second Persian Gulf” with Chinese specialists asserting that the South China Sea could have reserves exceeding 130 million barrels of oil and natural gas. A survey undertaken by Russia tends to confirm these Chinese findings and assesses that there are up to 6 billion barrels of oil, 60 percent of which could be natural gas, in the area. The various claimant nations have, over the years, attempted to nibble away territory and while Vietnam occupies 20 rocks and islets, China is in possession of 8, the Philippines 8, Malaysia between 3-6 and Taiwan 1. The occupying nations have in some cases constructed structures or airstrips on the islands and regularly dispatch patrols to the area. This has led to confrontations and often low level, silent conflict, resulting in the deaths of seamen. Clashes at sea have occurred mainly between China and Vietnam and in a few instances between China and the Philippines. The frequency of confrontation in the area has been increasing over the years and especially since the 1980s, in part because of contracts being awarded to offshore oil exploration companies. The Spratly Islands have a strategic importance too, as they lie between Vietnam and the Philippines and could potentially block ships transiting through the South China Sea. Aircraft and helicopters based in the Spratlys would have the range to block the Malacca and Sunda Straits, both vital choke points for shipping going from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean.

The South China Sea is also a strategically vital passageway through which sea lanes critical for many countries transit. More than 200 ships pass through it daily. The majority of oil, natural gas, other resources and commercial cargo flow through it to China, Korea and Japan from the Middle East and South East Asian countries. Japan receives 75 percent of its energy supplies from the Middle East through sea lanes passing through the South China Sea. The area is strategically important for the US which uses the freedom of the sea lanes of communication and the safety of navigation and overflight in the area, and is intent on maintaining these. The US Navy and US Air Force use the South China Sea passageway for transit between military bases in Asia and the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf areas. Additionally, US interests are guided by US commitment to the security interests of Japan and South Korea.

China is the region's most powerful entity involved in the dispute and has been aggressive in advancing and building its claims. Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei are in no position, either militarily or economically, to confront China. In its latest Defence White Paper, 2009, Australia too, unlike in the past report, has focussed on the rapid rise of China's military power. As part of building its case, China has cited Sung and Qing Dynasty records of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively. These are said to describe the location of the Spratly Islands. China then published a map depicting undefined dotted lines and claiming over 75 percent of the South China Sea. These claims, however, are flimsy in international law. In 1992, China's National People's Congress enacted the "Special Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone Act" promulgating these claims. Thereafter, its navy has confronted and periodically turned back fishermen of neighbouring countries who were transiting, or fishing, in disputed waters. It has simultaneously exerted diplomatic and other pressure to coerce oil companies like BP and Exxon to back out of offshore exploration agreements with Vietnam and built permanent structures on the islands and rocks in its occupation. China has invested larger sums in recent years. Towards the end of 2007, it announced that it would develop a "new city" in the disputed area. Later, in November 2008, China announced its intention of investing more than US\$ 29 billion in oil

exploration projects in these disputed waters. The only obstruction to China's moves was when it confronted Japan, a strong adversary, in a dispute over territory in the East China Sea. In the agreement concluded by both countries on June 18, 2008, they agreed to mutual exploration and exploitation. The agreement also asserted that all joint venture projects are to be located on the border between the two countries, as originally asserted by Japan.

While a powerful Chinese Navy undoubtedly poses a serious challenge to India, some defence analysts observe that the Chinese and Indian Navies have both made qualitative and quantitative improvements over the past decade. The PLAN has been noticed making effective use of its air and marine assets and using them in joint operational exercises. As evident from the PLAN's deployment in the Gulf of Aden, it appears to have decided on a policy of fielding adequate resources in an operational theatre and not sending merely a token presence. The deployment in the Gulf of Aden has demonstrated China's ability to send adequate forces and maintain an operational deployment for a long time. The conduct of an exercise with Pakistan and dispatch of a warship to the waters off the Philippines at the same time demonstrates that China's navy now has the capability to conduct operations simultaneously in more than one theatre. Its nuclear-powered submarines, which are equipped with long range ballistic missiles, have adequate strike range and reach. Cooperative linkages between the Chinese and Pakistani Navies are strong and PLAN vessels will be able to further extend operational 'reach' by using Pakistani ports. The Chinese and Pakistani Navies have been conducting joint exercises—probably of basic level—for some years now and they could, in the event of necessity,

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act in concert. China has for some years been trying to acquire influence in certain Indian Ocean littoral countries and has, nearer home, assisted in the construction of port facilities in Myanmar, Bangladesh and Pakistan. It has an interest in developing the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka. This activity has resulted in China having ready access to a ring of ports – known as the “String of Pearls” -- in the region. A modernised and strong Chinese Navy could choke off India's essential imports and maritime trade and mount an effective blockade of Indian ports in the event of hostilities as a preliminary step. The PLA Navy could later be used to threaten land targets and for direct intervention in case of hostilities. Analysts assess that while China's submarine capabilities are ahead of India's, the pace of construction of large tonnage surface battleships and an aircraft carrier in India is faster than that of China. They are of the view too that with the development of missiles, particularly the BrahMos, the technological standard of India's ship-to-ship missiles is superior.