

CHINA'S SUPERPOWER CHALLENGE

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China: The Challenge

The Peoples' Republic of China represents the most serious challenge to Western and Canadian interests in the Pacific. The reasons are many and diverse. For instance, the Chinese economy despite the Asia economic crisis is still growing at an amazing rate, and as it grows, its military and political prestige grows along with it. Indeed, China is adopting a more aggressive military stance that may allow it to challenge the United States' position as the dominant power in Asia and perhaps on the globe by the first half of the next century. Factors that support this contention include:

- China has expanded its national security objectives;
- China has changed its patterns in the use of military force;
- China is developing a modern war machine and sea control capability and;
- China is attempting to build an anti-American and anti-West alliance.

Changes in National Security Objectives

China has looked historically only as far as the Great Wall in its national security policy, viewing anything outside of its territory as 'barbarian.' China's view of security policy has always been entirely defensive in nature. The voyages of Cheng Ho in the early 1400s and China's interest in the high seas was a historical anomaly. Successive regimes from the empire, to the republic, to the communists have adopted this Great Wall, defensive view of Chinese security.

Thus, China's national security objectives have remained constant since Mao Tse Tung, and allowed its potential opponents to determine Chinese military intentions and use of force. The national security objectives set by Mao included; sovereignty, reunification of 'lost territory', defense of China's borders, and modernization. Deng Xiao Ping outlined China's national security objectives as; sovereignty, defense of China, reunification of 'lost territory', and modernization. Deng also made the peaceful settlement of off-shore disputes part of his national security programme, and aimed for the joint administration of islands in areas of conflict.

Recently, however, China's espoused national security objectives took on a different tone. The Chinese Defence Minister, Chi Hoatian described his country's objectives today as, "...to consolidate national defense, resist foreign aggression, safeguard state sovereignty, ...maritime rights and interests and maintain national unity and security." "Maritime rights and interests" represents China's right and/or claim to new waters in the Pacific Ocean, new territories, and their riches above, and below the water, for the first time in China's communist era history.

Indeed, China is now claiming an area extending out to the 'Second Island Chain' in conjunction with a new naval plan to be completed in three stages. The 'first island chain' equates to a line

stretching from Japan to Okinawa, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia, and that area is projected by China to come under their control by the year 2000. This coincides with the first stage of a naval plan to develop a modern surface fleet. The 'second island chain' includes the Bonins, Marianas, and Palau, projected by China to come under their control by 2020. This is to coincide with Chinese naval plans to develop two aircraft carriers and their battle groups. From 2020 onwards, China is intent on having a 'blue water' fleet with global reach. General Xu Xin, the former Deputy Chief of the PLA General Staff stated that, "...Beijing wants a carrier." Ma Dazheng, a noted Beijing Academic said that everyone wants an aircraft carrier, from the, "...lowly peasant to the admiral of the navy... India has got one. Is China lesser than India?" This also comes at a time when China has developed a plan to harvest its EEZ.

The new and significant claim to "maritime interests" may explain the shift in China's doctrine and its use of military force in its international relations that has become more ruthless and self-interested, and that talks openly of 'regional' and 'local' conflict under 'high technology' conditions.

Changes in China's Use of Force

In the past, China's use of force, both in doctrine and in reality, was defensive in nature and can be traced back to the teachings of its ancient generals such as Sun Tzu. Chinese doctrine always called for an opponent who breached the Great Wall to be defeated in the interior of the country by trading space for time. Chinese doctrine in principle has remained constant from the days of the empire, to the republic, to Mao, and although the names attached to the doctrine may have changed over the centuries, the doctrine had not shifted from its basic principle, until recently. The same can be said for each case in which China has used force in its international relations. In each instance, Korea in 1950, India in 1962, the Sino-Soviet border in 1969, and Vietnam in 1979, China probed its opponents, warned them of Chinese intentions, demonstrated its intentions through troop movements, and then attacked to achieve limited objectives; after which China pursued detente. All operations were in close proximity to Chinese borders, and all were areas critical to China's national security. Simply, China reacted with force each time a hostile power encroached on its borders or attempted to contain China. For example, China's punitive invasions of the Parcel Islands in 1974, of Vietnam in 1979, and its support of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia demonstrated to the Soviet Union, that China would not be contained. Secondly, one of the fundamental cornerstones of the People's Republic of China's national security policy has been the reunification of the Chinese homeland. To this end, China has engaged in the use of force twice; once in Tibet in the 1950s and, along the Sino-Soviet border in 1969.

Recently, however, China's use of force has taken a more aggressive course in terms of its maritime interests in the Pacific Ocean.

- In 1988, PLA naval forces attacked and sank three Vietnamese warships in the Spratly Islands.
- The Chinese completed a fighter plane capable air base on Woody Island in the annexed Parcel Islands during 1990.

- In March 1994, it was reported that the PLA had set up an early warning radar base on Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratlys.
- In October, 1994, Chinese naval and air forces shadowed the USS Kitty Hawk carrier battle group off of Korea.
- Then, in 1995, the PLA naval forces occupied Mischief Reef part of the Philippines territory.
- China test-fired highly accurate M-9 and M-11 missiles in July 1995, and March 1996, and conducted military exercises near Taiwan, raising stakes in the region, and necessitating the deployment of two American aircraft carrier battle groups. Only after the appearance of the American battle fleet did the Chinese relent.
- In May 1999, 12 Chinese warships entered the disputed Senkaku Islands area claimed by Japan.
- Late May 1999, saw Chinese warships train their guns on a stranded Philippine supply ship the Sierra Madre in the disputed Spratly Islands.
- Lastly, from July to September, 1999, China conducted a series of war games in the Nanjing Military District and in the Straits of Taiwan to protest Taiwanese president Lee's comments on 'state to state' relations. China announced on 15 July, 1999, that it possessed neutron bombs useful against troops on Taiwan's outlying islands, and against American carrier battle groups. China also test-fired its new 8000 Kilometre range DF-31 mobile ICBM on August 2 as a warning to both Taiwan and the United States.

Now Chinese military leaders are writing about 'local war under high technology' conditions. Senior PLA officers such as Colonel Qiao Liang are writing about 'Cyber War, and 'Dirty War,' in what is more aggressive, offensive doctrine than in the past. Without question, the Chinese have been willing to use force to meet their strategic objectives and to acquire strategically placed islands in the South China Sea to use as military bases for the modernized Chinese war machine.

Modernization of China's War Machine

Part and parcel of China's evolving international status, is their military build-up in the last eleven years. The PLA, strictly controlled by the Communist Party, is 2,820,000 service personnel strong, with a reserve component of 1,200,000 soldiers. While the PLA is very large, much of its equipment is old, but some elements of the military necessary for a modern war fighting capability have undergone considerable modernization. This trend towards modernization and build-up such as the move to acquire several Kilo class SSKs is driving the defence budget that seems to grow by more than eleven percent per year.

The strategic missile force operates some:

- 17 Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs),
- 46 Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) and,
- 12 Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile SLBMs.

The Chinese nuclear arsenal is about one tenth the size of the United States (1012 missile systems) and Russia's nuclear arsenal (1329 missile systems), however both parties are reducing their arsenals and moving them much closer in size to China. The land-based 13,000 kilometre range CSS-4 ICBM force believed to be deployed in hidden caves, on mobile launchers, and in hardened silos giving it great survivability, was targeted on both Russia (5) and until recently the United States (13). However, targeting arrangements can change quite rapidly. China's JL-1/CSS-N-3 1700 kilometre range SLBM is deployed on its Xia class SSBN and Golf class SSGS. It is a solid fuel system and increases the survivability of China's nuclear arsenal.

In terms of non-strategic forces, China also continues to deploy M-11, and M-9 SRBM, CSS-5 MRBM, and CSS-2 for use in local wars. The army main element comprises some:

- 76 infantry,
- a 9 division rapid reaction force,
- 11 tank and,
- 3 airborne divisions.

China's naval sub-surface forces possesses:

- 5 Han class SSN,
- and 56 SSK of various types.

The PLA(N) surface fleet is also large comprising some:

- 18 destroyers and,
- 36 frigates of various types.

China also possesses a small patrol craft fleet of:

- 185 well-armed fast attack craft,
- 121 mine warfare vessels and,
- 55 amphibious warfare ships.

The air force element of the PLA numbers some 4,132 combat aircraft.

The PLA Chief of the General Staff, General Zhang Wannian, stated in 1994, "...Facing blatant interference by the American hegemonists...we must reinforce the Armed Forces more intensively." Since then, China has embarked on a major up-grade of its military forces in the last several years including both strategic and non-strategic assets. China has also continued to test, and develop nuclear weapons, and their delivery systems, as well as maintaining a substantial arsenal of WMD. Reports have suggested that the PLA maybe attempting to gain SS-18, SS-25 ICBM and MIRV technology from Russia and other former Soviet states. The follow-on system to the JL-1 SLBM, the 8,000 kilometre range JL-2 SLBM, is due to be deployed by about 2010, and could hit targets in the United States from China's home waters. It may even carry MIRVed warheads. China may also be incorporating global positioning technology in its M-9 SRBM, and radar based terminal guidance in its CSS-5 MRBM giving them high accuracy.

China is also developing two new ICBMs the 8,000 kilometre ranged DF-31 that was tested in August, and 12,000 kilometre ranged DF-41 on which computer simulations are now being completed. Professor Paul Dibb, head of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at Australia's National University, estimates that China will have a much more capable ICBM force by 2010, with 50-70 MIRVed ICBMs, in hardened or mobile based, and with a range of about 8,000 kilometres, and backed up by an equal ranged, highly survivable, SLBM force at sea.

The ground element's rapid reaction force of 9 divisions and 3 airborne divisions is a sizeable strike force by any standards, and is being trained in amphibious warfare. Intelligence Digest stated that, "A number of hand-picked ground-force units are being trained in sea crossing offensive capabilities ... including an elite group of the Guangzhou military region..." The PLA has started a force reduction of 500,000 men in its efforts to become a more professional army.

The PLA(N)'s increasing attempts to modernize its submarine forces is also impressive. Its Xia SSBN gives China a sea based leg for its nuclear forces, and this vessel will be joined by the new SSBN Type 094 class early in the next century. Additionally, rumours circulated in the Hong Kong press that Russia agreed to sell China 2 Typhoon Class SSBNs and their accompanying 8,000 kilometre ranged SS-N-20 SLBMs during the recent Central Asian Summit. The navy is also operating 5 Han SSN and is planning a new SSN Type 093 class, which will enable the PLA to project force far away from its shores. As well, reports abound that the Chinese are negotiating with the Russians for 2 Akula class SSNs. China has also purchased 4 Russian Kilo class SSK, as well as having plans to build 20 more, and has completed its first domestic Song class SSK and launched a second. These new submarines will give China a modern sea-based nuclear missile force, attack submarines to protect the sea-based nuclear deterrent, and attack submarines to engage potential opponents' maritime forces.

The PLA(N) is said to be developing a 'blue water' navy and a modern air force. It is important to point out that a PLA(N) naval squadron visited the United States in March 1997, quietly demonstrating China's ability to project power and influence to the very coast of the United States. Most importantly, China, deployed its first air-capable vessel this past year, and is rumoured to be moving towards an aircraft carrier. The People's Liberation Army PLA(N) training ship Shichang looks like a smaller version of the Royal Navy's RFA Argus aviation training ship. Shichang, according to the 10 June, 1998, issue of *Jane's Defence Weekly*, is designed with its super structure forward and large space to the aft of the ship for either 2 Harbin Zhi-9A helicopters or containers, much like the Arapaho concept tested by the Royal Navy on RFA Reliant in the 1980s. This should serve as a good training platform for the PLA(N) that has no experience in large ship handling or flight deck operations, but wants to develop an aircraft carrier battle group of its own.

Rumour has it that China has been working on its own aircraft carrier programme since 1984, when Australia decommissioned the HMAS Melbourne, a 19,500 ton ex-Majestic Class Light Fleet Carrier. The HMAS Melbourne was sold to China for breaking, and arrived at a Shanghai yard in 1985 where it sat undisturbed except for regular visits by PLA engineers until 1994, and may still be in existence today. It is clear from an article entitled "The Aviation Dream of the Chinese People" that appeared in the July, 1994 issue of *Shidian*, a semi-official magazine of the China News Service, that PLA(N) officers are being trained in large ship handling courses, and

flight deck operations. There have been several reports of the Chinese reconfiguring a runway to resemble an aircraft carrier deck for flight deck landing training by PLA pilots. Additionally, in 1987 a F-8 Chinese fighter was reportedly shot off of a steam catapult at the Lushun naval base according to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*. Additionally, according to 10 October, 1996, issue of *Far Eastern Economic Review* attempts were made by China to acquire the aging 32,700 ton, nuclear capable French aircraft carrier Clemenceau, due to be retired from service.

Recently, the 37,100 ton Russian Modified Kiev Class Aircraft Carrier Minsk was sold to South Korea for scrap. But it now appears to have been re-sold and delivered to China for use supposedly as a casino. Most disturbing though is the rumoured 1997 sale of the 75 percent complete 67,000 ton Ukrainian aircraft carrier Varyag (ex-Russian Kuznetsov Class) to a supposed Macao-based amusement firm, Chong Lot Travel Agency Limited. Chong Lot bought the ship for 20 million dollars and claimed that it was going to anchor the ship in the Macao harbour, but authorities do not want it, and have no room for the Varyag. Chong Lot's board of directors all hail from Shandong Province on the mainland, and its Chairman happens to be a former PLA general. Whether or not the aircraft carrier, partially completed and rusting, has been purchased for the PLA is open to question. Making the Varyag operational will take millions of dollars, but with plans calling for an operational carrier by 2020 approved by the 15th Communist Party Congress, the Varyag may be a quick fix solution allowing the PLA(N) time to gain experience in both carrier design and operation. Recent reports suggest that China has dispatched a delegation to Russia to discuss the development by Russian industry of an aircraft carrier for China's PLA(N). China has also ordered 2 Sovremenny destroyers from Russia along with the long-range, modern anti-ship SS-N-22 Sunburn missiles. The PLA(N) surface fleet has received 2 of the new Luhai class destroyers, 1 Luda III class destroyer, 2 new Jiangwei II class frigates, and has 1 additional Luhai destroyer in building and 3 additional Jiangwei II frigates fitting out.

China has also purchased 103 Russian SU-27 fighter aircraft along with a deal to manufacture 150 more of the weapon systems domestically, and may purchase the SU-27K variant for aircraft carrier operations. The recent Central Asian Summit saw Russia sell an additional 60 advanced SU-30 fighter aircraft to China to bolster its air capabilities. The PLA has also purchased Russian transport aircraft that can either be used as in-flight refuelling tankers, air transport, or a form of early warning aircraft. Indeed, Israel and Russia have recently agreed to outfit a number of the Ilyushin Il-76 aircraft as airborne early warning platforms for the PLA. These force modernizations both real and developing give the Chinese a credible power projection capability that might be used to threaten its East Asia-Pacific neighbours in the next century.

China's Recent Diplomatic Activity

China's diplomatic efforts in the last few years seems to be an effort to secure its Western borders so that it could concentrate its efforts on East Asia-Pacific concerns. China was and still is concerned about its Eastern flash-points: North Korea; its 'renegade province' Taiwan; the South China Sea; and its arch rival Japan. In 1996 China reached agreements with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, India, Myanmar, and significantly, Russia; all located along its Western border. This year observers began to consider the fact that China might be in the process of building a new alliance, a sort of 'Asian NATO' as a counter-balance to United States, NATO,

and their Asia-Pacific allies' military supremacy. China viewed NATO intervention in Yugoslavia this year with suspicion and fear. Naturally, China feared that its own volatile relationship with Taiwan and its own internal problems might be used by the United States as a pretext in the future for American military intervention in Chinese affairs. Indeed China, Russia, India, and Indonesia all share the same fears of American and Western intervention into their internal affairs. This fear of Western intervention led by the United States may be the driving force behind recent Chinese diplomatic moves to foster a military alliance to challenge Western global dominance.

Russia's relations with China are complex. Russia's superpower slide has come as a great insult to many Russian nationalists who have had their proverbial 'noses rubbed' in the West's Cold War victory and this tends to drive Russia toward China rather than Europe. Russia's Parliament is generally concerned and angry about NATO's eastward expansion, and the expansion plans are viewed with suspicion by many ordinary Russians, especially after Kosovo. Because Russian military equipment is much more advanced than China's, the constantly modernizing PLA is a potential cash cow for the financially strapped Russian government. Clearly, the Russians are not concerned about their 'high tech' weapon sales to China, a historic adversary. Russian President Boris Yeltsin, and Chinese President Jiang Zemin, have made statements about co-operating with each other in a bid to prevent what both nations view as American global dominance. Both states reacted angrily over NATO intervention in Yugoslavia this year and moved even closer together to counter Washington's military might. In early October 1999, China and Russia held joint naval exercises in the Pacific to test their ability to exchange data.

As well, Indonesia and China are becoming closer after what the Indonesians view as Western intervention in East Timor, and the suspension of American aid. China, Russia and Indonesia have all bristled about NATO intervention in Yugoslavia over Kosovo, and all fear that the West led by the United States may have reason to interfere in their backyards. Indonesian President Wahid, prior to his election as President, stated his interest in an alliance with China and India after a meeting this year with the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. His reason was to address the "lopsided" power of the West. Since becoming President of Indonesia, Wahid has gone to China to discuss closer ties and Chinese officials are discussing arms sales with their Indonesian counterparts. Wahid has also gone to Burma to discuss enhancing Indonesian and Burmese relations and made a point of stating Indonesia would not interfere in Burmese internal matters. Having Indonesia, one of the world's most populated nations, in a military alliance with China and Russia would be a major foreign policy coup.

Additionally, India in what might be described as a 'bolt from the blue' started to court Chinese support in an attempt to calm India's stormy relations with Pakistan and to counter Western power in the Indian Ocean. Russia and India have re-vamped their old cold war relationship and are again looking at Indian arms purchases from Russian companies. India would like China to restrain Pakistan. India, China and Russia share many critical foreign policy views. For example, like Russia and China, India opposed the NATO bombing campaign directed at Yugoslavia, India wants a stable Central Asia, India fears Islamic fundamentalists, India is against anti-ballistic missile defense, India believes in the primacy of the security council, and non intervention in a country's internal affairs. During this year's India-Pakistan conflict, India's Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh told China, that India did not view China as a "threat" any

longer. In response to India's overture, China's Foreign Minister Tang, stated that relations had, "entered a phase of improvement." Hard as it may be to believe, alliances have been built on less of a foundation of common foreign policy interests. Only time will tell if India will join China in an anti-United States/Western alliance.

Furthermore, China has over many years developed a close relationship with the Generals and international pariahs who rule Myanmar. Several reports have stated that the Chinese are preparing to base a naval squadron in the Coco Islands or Hainggy Islands off Myanmar. This relationship would allow China to project power into the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, or even to attack shipping choke points from the Persian Gulf to the Spratly Islands, where reports cite the presence of anti-shipping cruise missiles. Indian Defence Minister, George Fernandes stated that the remarkable growth of the Myanmar army from 160,000 to 450,000 soldiers in six years was done "with the support of China." In return, the ruling Myanmar generals and their army get support from China when dealing with the international community to the point that Myanmar is a Chinese client state.

Additionally, Iran and China have signed an agreement of cooperation and this has led to fears of a China-Iran alliance that might be used to threaten American interests in the strategically important Gulf region. In time of crisis, China might persuade Iran to shut down the Gulf, and cut the oil supply to east and west. This would have the immediate effect of taking American attention away from East Asia, and focusing it on the Gulf. While America military forces would be countering Iranian activities in the Gulf region, China could start moving against the United States' oil-dependent East Asia allies, particularly Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Iran could also use its influence to stifle Muslim extremism within Xinjiang Province, and in oil-rich, former Soviet states along China's frontier.

In summary, Russia, Indonesia, India, Myanmar, and Iran, have bi-lateral ties with China that one day could be formed into a military alliance in a furtherance of China's national security objectives.

In conclusion, China is preparing to challenge the United States and its allies, Asian or otherwise, for mastery of Asia-Pacific. As demonstrated in the paper: China has expanded its national security objectives; China has changed its patterns in the use of military force; China is developing a modern war machine and sea control capability and; China is attempting to build an anti-American and anti-West alliance. There can only be one reason for these activities. These are not moves directed at local opponents or guided by the principles of self-defence. This is a move aimed at the world's sole remaining superpower, the United States. American superpowerhood rests on the fact that it is master of the North and South American continent, the oceans that surround that land mass, and a forward presence in strategically important regions of the world such as, Western Europe, the Persian Gulf, and Asia. If China and the PLA can marginalize the United States in Asia, then they can challenge the United States' mantle as the world's only superpower. Only time will tell if they can be successful in their ambition.