

**The 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday of the  
People Liberation Army/Navy [中国人民解放军海军]  
And China's Maritime Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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On April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009, China organized a fleet review in the northern port of Qingdao to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the People's Liberation Army-Navy. Chinese scholars now insist on the interrelation between sea power and national prosperity. Wu Qi described sea power as “*a vital determining factor in the long term prosperity of the State*”, quoting the historical examples of the rise and decline of the past empires (1).

As the world's first economic power for several centuries, imperial China certainly missed its opportunities to become a sea power. Chinese maritime trade in the Indian Ocean predated the famed Eunuch-Admiral Zeng-He whose seven expeditions' 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary were widely celebrated in China in 2005. Some of his ships reached the Atlantic and he played an important geopolitical role by checking on the southern neighbors of the threatening Tamerlane (*Timur-i-lang 1336-1405*).

Fearful of foreign influences, Chinese rulers forbade the repetition of such naval expeditions. Four hundred years of self imposed isolation brought disaster when the Anglo-French squadrons forced their way into China's ports. Like Japan, China quickly learned the lesson and acquired Western warships and techniques. But when its modern battleships were neutralized by inferior Japanese cruisers at the battle of Yalu in September 17, 1894, China lost not only Korea

and Taiwan but also the prospect to use sea power to its advantage: ensued half a century of national calamities, culminating with Civil War and Japanese invasion (2).

### **Soviet and Western influences in the development of the PLA Navy.**

When Mao seized power in 1949, he made it clear that imperialists would never again set foot in China. He stressed the necessity “to build up not only a strong army but also a strong navy” (3). With its February 1950 treaty with the USSR, Beijing secured access to Moscow’s military technologies. On the naval side, the Soviet alliance allowed the transfer and the construction in China of frigates, submarines and torpedo boats. This burgeoning naval force enabled the People’s Liberation Army [PLA] to capture the littoral islands still controlled by the Nationalists. As China failed to conquer the emblematic Quemoy and Matsu islets in 1958, Mao embarked on the hazardous path to build a nuclear ballistic missile submarine. The split with Moscow two years later ended a decade of intensive technology transfers and brain drain from the Soviet ally. But despite the internal turmoil caused by the Cultural Revolution, the PLA Navy still managed to build four classes of guided missile destroyers and frigates and reproduce Soviet submarines and missile boats during that second decade.

At first, the threat of the Taiwanese navy and US 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet off its coast and in Vietnam represented the rationale for this costly program. In 1969 however, Mao chose to challenge the Soviet leadership over the Communist block. He deliberately attacked Soviet troops on a disputed river island provoking Moscow’s ire and unexpected build-up across the long border. Facing explicit threats of Soviet pre-emptive nuclear strikes or invasion, Mao and the over ambitious Lin Biao – killed in 1971 after a failed coup attempt - accelerated the nuclear submarine programs while China embarked on

its historical rapprochement with the United-States now very much needed to counterbalance the Soviet menace (4).

As Mao's pragmatic successor, Deng Xiao Ping normalized relations with the United-States in 1978 and launched on that same year his vast reform that included opening up to Western capitalism and technologies. The US, the UK, France, Italy transferred armaments or dual technologies that helped to upgrade the PLA's hardware. Its backwardness had been made obvious after Beijing's ill-fated punitive expedition against Moscow's Vietnamese ally in 1979. It was mutually advantageous for Beijing and Washington to upgrade the PLA and complicate Soviet calculations (5). The technology transfers enabled the Chinese Navy to acquire combat systems, air defense missiles, anti-submarine sensors and torpedoes, naval helicopters, gas turbines and diesel engines. Meanwhile, China had managed to fire a ballistic missile from a submerged submarine and commissioned its first nuclear submarines (6).

In the aftermath of the UNCLOS treaty creating the economic exclusive zone [EEZ], China issued in 1985 a new strategic doctrine of "offshore defense". Peripheral conflicts and limited wars involving naval and air forces were deemed more likely. They found an illustration with China's brutal seizures of the Vietnamese occupied Paracels/Xisha and Spratley/Nansha islands in 1974 and 1988. The new doctrine aimed at "winning local wars under normal conditions". Liu Huaqing, the new navy commander (1982-87) and admirer of Gorshkov's blue water navy drew a map for future naval operations up to the first and second chain islands in the Western Pacific (7). While Western support had improved ships designs, the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre resulted in a Western arms embargo preventing further weapons transfers.

**“Active defense” and the “Revolution in military affairs with Chinese characteristics”.**

Facing the aftershock of Washington’ spectacular victory in the 1991 Gulf War against an entrenched army resembling the PLA, Beijing redefined its doctrine to be able to win “local wars under conditions of modern technologies”. The PLA also refocuses on “active defense”, promoting first strikes against a potential enemy within the framework of its defensive strategy and blaming Iraq for having remained passive while the coalition was building up its forces alongside its borders.

With the Perestroika and the end of the Cold War, the Soviet threat receded. Formal military relations were resumed between China and Russia allowing Soviet know-how and weapons to be substituted to Western support. A starving post-Soviet defense industry was eager to secure Chinese contracts. The end of the Cold War also meant the lifting of the [COCOM] restrictions on the export of Western dual use technologies. Partially circumnavigating the Tiananmen embargo, China took advantage of this opening door acquiring space, laser and ballistic missile technology in the US as well as aircrafts, ground vehicles, marine engines and machine tools in America and in Europe (8).

Absorbing new technologies implied transforming the largely inefficient Chinese defense industry. Although the military was but the “fourth modernization”, Deng Xiaoping had clearly explained the link between national reform and national defense: “combine the military and the civilian”; “combine war and peace”; “leave the civilian, support the military”.

In 1994, the military commission – now headed by the blue water minded Liu Huaqing – prepared the 9<sup>th</sup> five years plan. As Liu explained, the growth of the independence party in Taiwan was a major driver in Chinese military modernization. Until then, the PLA

had no credible means to invade or defeat Taiwan. From now on, China would improve both its sealift and airlift capabilities to project troops and would expand its Second Artillery's missile force targeted against Taiwan and its aviation to secure air dominance over the strait. For Liu, "the development of science and technology for national defense was not a technological issue but a strategic issue..." (9).

The results of this effort were spectacular: General Li Jinai, the head of China's General Armaments Department, called in 2003 the marked improvement in national defense scientific research and production as «*the best period of development ever in the country's history...* ». During the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> five years plans, China was able to build four new classes of guided missile destroyers including two air defense destroyers [Luyang II] comparable in some respects to US AEGIS ships and two batches of stealth frigates inspired by the French La Fayette acquired by Taiwan. Chinese yards also produced two classes of strategic and nuclear attack submarines [Jin and Shang] as well as two classes of conventional submarines [Song and Yuan]. All these platforms merged foreign technologies acquired legally or secretly into genuine and apparently successful Chinese designs. The PLA's naval programs obviously benefited from the revolution in shipbuilding that has made China the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest shipbuilder in the world, having surpassed Japan in 2008.

Trained as an electrical engineer and a former Minister of Electronics Industry, President Jiang Zemin initiated an information revolution on military affairs in his capacity as the chairman of the Central Military Commission [CMC]. The Academy of Military Science and National Defense University became reservoirs of translated military literature on the US Revolution in Military Affairs [RMA], an obvious source of inspiration for the PLA strategists who have made a priority of the "informationization of China's national defense and armed forces" (10).

The rapid growth of the civilian Information Technology [IT] sector in China has supported the current attempt to transform the PLA into an IT-based force with a doctrine of Integrated Joint Operations. The objective is to break the barriers between the services – born of Mao’s suspicions towards a single PLA - and to create an integrated system of operating units [Land, Sea, Air, Space and Electronic Warfare] sharing common elements for ISR [Information, Surveillance and Reconnaissance], C4 [Command, Control, Communications and Computer], K [Kill/ Digitized and Interconnected Weapons Platforms] and Integrated Logistics (11).

### **China’s maritime security and the Taiwan issue.**

From a geo-strategic perspective, Beijing’s economic development is dependent on sea communications and vulnerable to strikes on its coastal economic centers. In a study of China’s coastal defense strategy, Dalian’ Ships Institute researchers Dang Fu Quan and Wu Yi note that “since World War II, 80% of the military conflicts have taken place in local maritime areas, a fact that requires to make a priority of the nation’s maritime security and rights” (12). During the 1990s, the Spratley/Nansha issue seemed to be the most dangerous maritime dispute in Asia. Departing from its abrupt and bilateral approaches, China signed at the ASEAN China summit of November 2002 a declaration, which called for a peaceful settlement of the territorial issues in the South China Sea. In March 2005, China, the Philippines and Vietnam agreed to a joint survey on oil and gas in the area. Similarly, China and Japan signed in June 2008, an agreement to develop jointly the Chunxiao/Shirakaba gas field despite their unresolved dispute over the Senkaku/ Islands and EEZ delimitation. Without relinquishing their sovereignty claims, China and its neighbor have decided to leave this problem to the wisdom of future generations (13).

A growing concern in China now seems to be that of an inevitable encroachment with the United States' forces deployed on the First and Second Island Chains in South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Australia and the forward base of Guam. The new "Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation" (14) now include Taiwan and the South China Sea area while India has moved closer to the United-States and Japan.

China sees Taiwan – like Japan and the Philippines - as an outpost of America's military presence on its shores. General Wen Zongren called for the breaking of the "international forces' blockade against China's maritime security" to enable "China's rise". Incidents with the US Navy have happened culminating with the 2001 mid air collision between a Chinese fighter and a US reconnaissance plane (15) and the March 2009 harassment of a US intelligence ship by a group of Chinese vessels. On at least two occasions, in 1994 and 2006, Chinese submarines have successfully approached a US carrier – *Kitty Hawk* - and the event was made public by the US Navy in an effort to secure more resources to address this growing Chinese naval proficiency (16).

For more than a decade, the Taiwanese issue seemed to be at the core of this renewed US-PRC tension. The PLA's missile firings demonstration around Taiwan in March of 1996 (17) impressed neither Taiwanese voters - who later chose the independence party - nor the United States who dispatched aircraft carriers to the area and staged a spectacular "Summer pulse" seven carriers deployment to the Western Pacific in July 2004.

But in the end the PLA build up and Beijing's March 2005 anti-secessionist law may have forced Taipei's ruling independence party to abstain from a formal secession while the lobbyists for a two China policy lost momentum in the US. In 2008 the returning Kuomintang immediately sought an understanding with Beijing. Taipei has abstained to engage in a full fledged arms race with Beijing, although

it pursues the development of cruise missiles capable to strike the mainland and still hopes to procure the much wanted 8 conventional submarines originally promised by the Bush administration.

But the cross Strait military balance is shifting towards the PLA. The U.S. Department of Defense [DoD] believes “a near-term focus of China’s military modernization is to field a force that can succeed in a short-duration conflict with Taiwan and act as an anti-access force to deter or delay the arrival of U.S. reinforcements”. Some analysts speculate that China has already attained a capable maritime anti-access force (18). For the Japanese Ministry of Defense, the main mission of the Chinese naval forces is to “intercept enemy naval forces as far as possible away from China”. Japan has expressed its concern after the November 2004 intrusion of a Chinese nuclear submarine [Han] inside its territorial waters and the presence of bombers [H-6] and oceanographic vessels near its borders and in disputed areas (19).

### **China’s “anti-access” strategy and “Offshore Active defense”**

Xu Qi notes that open ocean-area defense is “an essential shield of long-term national interests”: *“in the future, some maritime powers may employ long-range strike weapons to attack into the depths of China. The vast, unobstructed character of the naval battlefield is favorable for military force concentration, mobility, force projection, and initiating sudden attacks”*. So far, China has limited naval reconnaissance capabilities. The PLA Air Force [PLAAF] and PLA Navy Air Force [PLANAF] fly six airborne early warning aircrafts and 10 medium range maritime patrol aircrafts supplemented by a hundred very short-range old surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft with surface search sensors. On land, China may have three over-the-horizon [OTH] sky-wave radar systems to detect aircraft carriers (20). Underwater detection capabilities are weaker. A few amphibious planes and forty helicopters have anti-submarine-warfare [ASW] sensors while only three destroyers are fitted with towed arrays. Major ports are protected by hydrophones

but given their noisy environment, their efficiency is probably much reduced.

Having absorbed the technology from French, Italian and Russian combat systems, China's 709 Institute is reported to have developed a local area network [LAN] to integrate the ship's sensors and weapon fire-control systems. The latest system installed on the air defense destroyers [Luyang II] is credited to provide the fleet with a picture of the tactical situation using inputs from radars and other sensors both on the ship and from airborne early warning aircrafts. The system is reportedly also connected with the land-based fleet command center and C3I center at the theatre level via high-speed data link to integrate China's land and sea based surface-to-air missiles [SAM] (21). Covering the 100 nautical miles wide Taiwan Strait and fielding the same long range Russian [S-300] and Chinese [HQ-9] missiles embarked on four destroyers, China's integrated land and sea based air defense architecture appears capable of offensive counter-air [OCA] and defensive counter-air [DCA]" operations (22).

The U.S. Department of Defense [DoD] sees a Chinese aspiration to develop "*a blue water Navy with space superiority*". Following the former Soviet Union example, China's procurement of new space systems, airborne early warning aircraft, long-range unmanned aerial vehicles [UAV] and over-the-horizon radars will enhance its ability to detect and target naval activity in the Western Pacific Ocean.

Launched by pair starting in 1972, Soviet active and passive radar satellites complemented the reconnaissance aviation to locate U.S. carrier battle groups. Radar satellites flew on a low orbit to collect information on a target ship every 20 to 30 minutes for a duration, which could exceed 70 days. The U.S. DoD credited the system with the ability to track aircraft carriers at all time and surface combatants by fair weather (23). China could develop a similar system in the next decade.

China also improves its long-range strike capabilities. The “Second Artillery” would play a central role in any Taiwanese confrontation. Its Theater Ballistic Missiles [TBM] systems have sufficient range to target U.S. forces in Japan and South Korea (24). The U.S. DoD also estimates that China as of 2008 has deployed over 1050 TBMs [CSS-6 and CSS-7] aimed at Taiwan, and that this total increases at a rate of about 100 missiles per year.

As a result of this rapid growth in numbers and improvements in accuracy, China could paralyze Taiwan’s communication links, command centers, airbases and ports with five waves of strikes in as little as 10 hours, according to Lt. Col. Chen Chang-hua, a Taiwan Ministry of National Defense official (25). Beijing is also focused on improving survivability of its strategic forces with the introduction of nuclear strategic submarines [Yin] armed with the – not yet operational - 8000 km [JL-2] missiles that should act as a deterrent against a possible U.S. intervention in a cross-Strait conflict.

In that context, China’s media have made no secret of the PLA’s alleged ability to strike naval vessels with ballistic missiles. In 1996, a Chinese technician revealed that a “*terminal guidance system*” was being developed for ballistic missiles (26). Short-range ballistic missiles [SRBM/CSS-5] are believed to be modified with maneuvering reentry vehicles [MaRVs] and radar or infrared seekers to provide the accuracy needed for terminal attack. OTH radar, satellites, and UAVs would monitor the target and relay the information through communication satellites to a command center, and then to the missile launchers. As the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence [ONI] explained, “*the missiles would fly their preplanned trajectories until onboard seekers could acquire the ship and guide the missiles to impact*” (27). So far these untested anti-ship ballistic missiles have had a propaganda and psychological effect to complicate U.S. war planning. They are quoted – perhaps

conveniently - as a motive to terminate the very costly U.S. land attack destroyer program [DD1000].

Besides this potential but still unproven capability, China is developing long range strike land-attack [LACMs] and anti-ship cruise missiles [ASCMs] that can be fired from land bases, bombers, submarines and destroyers to attack targets, including air and naval bases, in Taiwan, Japan or Guam. Among the most capable of the ASCMs acquired by the PLA Navy are two Russian-made missiles carried by eight Russian built submarines [Kilo/SS-N-27B Sizzler] and four Russian built destroyers [Sovremenny/SS-N-22] and a new LACMs-ASCMs [YJ-62] carried so far onboard two destroyers [Luyang II] and widely distributed in the Taiwan Strait. Their long range (beyond 250 km) implies over the horizon targeting. They supplement the ship and submarine earlier missiles [YJ-81] derived from the celebrated French Exocet.

The PLANAF and the PLAAF have a total of 450 bombers and fighter bombers including 200, which could perform anti-ship missile strikes [30 H-6, 50 FH-7 and 120 Su-30]. A cruise missile bomber variant [H-6K] first flew in 2007. Improvements include bigger search radar and seven missile pylons that would allow them to carry on distant strategic missions with future generation of Chinese long-range cruise missiles (28). The PLANAF has also purchased Russian anti-ship missiles [AS-17/KH-31A] to improve its inventory [YJ-81] (29).

Underwater weapons represent another powerful dimension of China's anti-access architecture. China sees the submarines - the «*poisoned arrow*» [Shashou jian] - as an asymmetric answer to delay the progression of U.S. naval forces while the PLA would try to secure victory in Taiwan. The choice of a submariner to command the PLAN during 2004-06 was significant (30). Older and noisy submarines [Ming] would serve to lay minefields while distracting and attracting U.S. ASW forces. The modern nuclear attack and

conventional submarines [Shang/Kilo, Song, Yuan] would stand good chances to remain undetected while attempting to ambush U.S. task forces. China may use Russian super-cavitating, high-speed underwater rockets [Skvall] and already fields deadly Russian wake homing [53-65] and anti-submarine [Test-71] torpedoes. Defensive minefields laid in advance could be activated or deactivated when required. They would include deep water rising mines such as a rocket-propelled rising mine [EM-52] as well as a remotely controlled bottom influence mine [EM-53] (31).

China has also doubled its sealift capability in the past fifteen years. The U.S. DoD estimates that the PLAN can transport 10 000 troops across the strait, a figure that may not be sufficient to secure a rapid victory even in the aftermath of a massive missile strike (32). Other observers believe that militia and civilian ships would enable the transport of over 30 000 troops. The first large amphibious assault ship capable of carrying two air cushion vehicles and four helicopters is in service with the South Sea Fleet. A series should follow greatly enhancing force projection prospects across the Taiwan Strait.

### **Chinese Navy's future roles.**

In addition to the near-term focus on Taiwan, U.S. observers believe that longer-term goals of China's naval modernization include *“asserting China's regional military leadership, displacing U.S. regional military influence, prevailing in regional rivalries, and encouraging eventual U.S. military withdrawal from the region, defending China's claims in maritime territorial disputes... [and]... protecting China's sea lines of communication...”* (33).

For their part, Chinese researchers underline that in a globalized world, war at sea is less and less advantageous for the initiator: “the military method to solve maritime geo-strategic issues has gone through two phases. The sea originally was a space where mighty

countries could invade markets and rob resources. The sea has now become a space to exchange resources and markets...If one country launches a war by using the sea blockade to seek a certain political or security objective, this country will pay the price in the political and economic spheres (34).

Naval forces are chess pieces that may exert a political influence with their capabilities and disposition. The construction of a naval base at Sanya in the island of Hainan and the current fleet disposition reveal that China is deploying its most sophisticated units to the South Fleet, including strategic nuclear submarines, destroyers, stealth frigates and its first amphibious assault ship. Hainan is a location of special concern for both the South China Sea neighbors and India. Meanwhile, China quietly completes the former Soviet aircraft carrier *Varyag* in Dalian to serve as a training platform in the neighboring academy. The PLA also negotiates with Russia for the purchase of ship borne fighters [Su-33] and has been sending military personnel to the Ukrainian carrier pilots training facility of Saki in the Crimean peninsula (35).

This development – long mocked by observers – has involved the Chinese government ever since the purchase of *Varyag*'s hull in Ukraine allegedly to be turned into a floating casino in Macau where the waters were too shallow. It was Beijing's pressure and trade concessions to the Turkish government that allowed the *Varyag* to be towed through the Bosphorus (36). Since 2006, officials have repeatedly ascertained China's future intention to procure carriers while the destroyers and support ships built in the past nine years already give China an escort group. In November 2008, Major General Quian Lihua stressed the defensive purpose of a Chinese carrier: *"Even if one day we have an aircraft carrier, unlike another country, we will not use it to pursue global deployment or global reach"* (37). In March 2009, Chinese media reported that Defense Minister General Liang Guanglie and his Japanese counterpart Yasukazu Hamada had discussed the carrier issue. Members of a

“Project 048 Engineering Command” responsible for developing “special large military ships” were said to be present at their meeting on 20 March (38).

At long last, Liu Huaching’s dream becomes true. It started in May 1980, when the powerful general was invited onboard the *Kitty Hawk* who ironically was later involved twice in close encounters with Chinese submarines. Liu was “deeply impressed by its imposing magnificence and modern fighting capacity”. He advocated the development of aircraft carriers to the PLA General Staff, created a course for future carrier’s captains and vowed to die with an everlasting regret if his recommendations were to be ignored (39). In addition to four ships, China also obtained several carriers blueprints including those of the *Varyag* and perhaps of the *Ulyanovsk*. They may serve as a basis for a future national carrier said to have been ordered at the new Changxi shipyard. Models for a “Chinese *Varyag*” show 32 long range cruise missiles [YJ-62] suggesting a main role as an anti-access defensive platform.

Espousing Russian concepts, a Chinese *Varyag* could provide an air defense umbrella for submarines operating east of Taiwan and participate in the missiles strikes against an incoming US fleet. This defensive role would not preclude prestige deployments and force projection especially against Taiwan’s eastern shores or to ensure sovereignty claims in the disputed areas of the South China Sea where local navies will be at an even greater disadvantage. In such a role a Chinese carrier would answer Hu Jintao’s November 2003 call for “*strengthening the system to defend the sea rights and interests of our country*” (40). So far, China had abstained to order a carrier, in order not to antagonize its neighbors and fuel the “Chinese threat” rhetoric.

Hideaki Kaneda, a retired Japanese admiral, supports the “String of Pearls” theory. Accordingly, China would establish partnerships and bases along its sea lanes from the South China Sea to the Persian Gulf in order to support a Mahanian Sea Power strategy: “*all of Asia*

*must wake up to the arrival of Chinese-style aggressive sea power. Japan, in particular, must reformulate its national maritime strategy with this in mind” (41).*

Indian observers have long worried about Chinese intentions in the Indian Ocean. India feels threatened by China’s inroads in the neighboring countries – most notably Pakistan, Burma and Bangladesh - and fears PLA bases in its vicinity. Jointly developed by China and Pakistan, the deep sea port of Gwadar lies near the Iranian border, 350 miles from the strategic Hormuz Strait. The Chinese have invested a reported USD \$ 200 million to develop railways connecting Gwadar to the rest of Pakistan. A pipeline from Turkmenistan to Gwadar will eventually link the port to western China, thereby enabling Beijing to circumvent the Strait of Malacca should the waterway be subjected to accidental or intentional closure.

There seems to be no indication so far that China would use Gwadar as a naval base. But the high profile deployment of two Chinese task forces to fight piracy off Africa, have signaled Beijing’s intention to maintain a naval presence in the Indian Ocean as long as the situation in Somalia has not improved (42). Until then, China’s strategy in the Indian Ocean seemed more concerned about finding new economic routes through Pakistan, Burma or Thailand than to establish a naval presence that would further antagonize India. These anti-piracy patrols remain in line with China’s policy to “promote international security cooperation” through “peace keeping diplomacy” as explained by Dunong Yi the head of the research department of the PLA international relations institute and as demonstrated by China’s participation in numerous UN sponsored operations (43).

**Conclusion: intentions and capabilities.**

China's White Book on defense for 2008 emphasizes the fact that "China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world, nor can the world enjoy prosperity and stability without China". China is engaged in a "phase of peaceful development" and has made repeated pledges that its forces were purely defensive (44). One Chinese researcher notes that in the actual "phase of peaceful development", it is important for China to improve its relations with its neighbors, suggesting "self restraint and patience" towards the United-States; "mutual assistance" with Russia; "cooperation" with Japan and "reconciliation" with India (45). One can notice that during two maritime incidents with Russia and the United-States, in March 2009, the Chinese government – perhaps fearful of a nationalistic reaction from its public opinion - has played down its protests.

The Chinese Navy remains a defensive force, outside of Taiwan and the disputed islands where it could be used offensively. The number of support ships is limited and limits its ability to deploy significant numbers of ships far from its bases. The number of new generation surface combatants represents one sixth of the combined state of the art surface combatants of Japan, South Korea, Australia and the US 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet. Chinese anti-submarine forces are inadequate and unlike the Soviet Navy the Chinese naval aviation does not yet fly long-range supersonic cruise missiles bombers. Nevertheless, the Chinese submarine fleet – both new and old – and large quantities of sophisticated mines make the prospect of a joint US-Japanese intervention in support of Taiwan highly hazardous.

Within a decade, China will have the ability to protect these submarines with an air defense umbrella provided by one or two carriers. The task of foreign anti-submarine forces will be further complicated and Taiwan will hardly be able to defend itself against overwhelming PLA forces. The same will be true for the South China Sea neighbors. Once China will have a carrier, they will not be able to defend their claims. The prospect for Chinese naval forces in the Indian Ocean would be less favorable without a base and China stated

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that it would not want to send its future carrier(s) in distant area, “to influence events ashore”. More importantly, like Japan and South Korea, China’s sealanes of communication remain highly vulnerable and for that reason alone, it is unlikely that Beijing would contemplate a maritime conflict – large or localized - that would inevitably derail the “phase of peaceful development”. But Beijing’s present and future “fleet in being” affects and will certainly limit the political options of its neighbors.

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Alexandre Sheldon-Duplaix's endnotes

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