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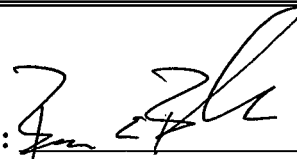
“China’s Pursuit for World Power Status: Is the Transformation of the People’s Liberation Army a Threat to the United States Global Interest and Security?”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title:

"China: Is the Transformation of the People's Liberation Army a Threat to the United States Global Interest and Security?"

Author: Major Gregory L. Grunwald USMC

Thesis:

The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze the increasing capabilities and goals of the PLA, and show that the focus of the CCP national strategy is to obtain a near mirror image military capability to the United States within the next decade. This desire from a Chinese perspective is not to modernize and transform the PLA in order to provoke military conflict with the US, but to have a deterrence capability to maintain its economic and diplomatic progress in the areas in which both nations have national interest.

Discussions:

In the last decade the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) has rapidly been modernizing and transforming its military in order to realize its ultimate goal in the 21st century to be recognized as a world power. Beginning with its rapid economic development in the last two decades of the 20th century, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) began to focus some of its diplomatic and economic powers globally in areas outside its borders in the East Asian region and most notably extended out to the far reaches of Africa. The primary reason for this is the future reality of necessary natural resources to maintain the economic and industrial modernization to gain equal ground among the current world powers, and to obtain regional hegemony. At the turn of the century the CCP focused its attention to the sacrifice the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) had been making economically which enabled the PRC to focus the financial means to the development of it infrastructure and civilian development. It was determined that in order to modernize and transform the PLA to compete with the US in the 21st century, military investment was going to have to become a higher priority. This modernization and transformation gained equal priority status to developing the economy. Modernization and transformation is a critical requirement to maintain developing China's economy and to be able to protect its interests at home and abroad. Without a strong military the PRC is aware that it will never truly have the recognition of a world power, and it will not be able to if it cannot compete with the US, especially in its own backyard.

Conclusion:

The US must stay vigilant in its economic and diplomatic efforts in all areas of interests globally that it will be competing with the Peoples Republic of China. More importantly it must ensure that the military maintains its technological superiority on the sea, air, and space to protect its interest in the unforeseeable future.

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Preface

The study of China's past century holds valuable lessons for military professionals that range from the tactics of counterinsurgency to the geopolitical implications of strategic decisions. An examination of their history helps one gain an understanding of their mindset and is why it is vital that the US remains engaged in diplomatic, economic and military exchanges. With China's economic and military rise it is extremely relevant in today's global environment, as we find that in almost every corner of the world China is making its presence known. I chose to study the modernization of the Peoples Republic of China because of personal interest in the region, and the belief that its growing strength in all powers of the DIME will be the main competing interest for the US. The Chinese way of thinking and the differences in the eastern and western culture was surprising to me as I conducted my research, and what came clear was that nothing is clear in regards to what the future holds with China's rapid rise in power. The key is to respect and maintain engagement in the peaceful rise they claim to be making in the region and world, but stay always vigilant to be prepared when and where the interests collide.

I would like to thank Dr. O'Dowd, LtCol Woodbridge and Dr. Bechtol for their excellent leadership in the China Seminar which was a great assistance with this paper. I would also like to thank LtCol Yeager for his mentorship as Conference Group 1's fearless leader, and for his constructive input and editing of this paper. Lastly, thanks to my wife Jennifer and my three great kids, Cassidee, Greyson, and Allyssa, as they tolerated the many nights I was held up behind my computer and research material.

Introduction

To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.

-Sun Tzu

In the last fifteen years, China has made economic and diplomatic progress that has been viewed by many as a positive step towards being a responsible partner in the developing global economy. China is also transforming and modernizing its military in order to support its rapid economic growth, and to “keep up with the new trends in the global revolution and development in military affairs.”¹ As with all nations, China’s priorities are its own survival, prosperity, and for the People’s Republic of China (PRC) the global recognition of being a world power. Though the priority of the national strategy for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over the last decade has been economic development, it appears that in the last five years that the modernization and transformation of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is now considered equal in importance, and essential to its continued economic rise. What remains to be debated is China’s global intentions with regards to its aggressive modernization and transformation of the PLA. The appearance is one that it is developing into a force focused on enabling its reach to go outside of its borders and beyond the Pacific Asian region. From a western point of view this is contradictory to the claim of the PRC national defense strategy which maintains it “is purely defensive in nature.”² The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze the increasing capabilities and goals of the PLA, and show that the focus of the CCP national strategy is to obtain a near mirror image military capability with the United States (US) within the next decade. This desire, from a Chinese perspective, is not to modernize and transform the PLA in order to provoke military conflict with the US, but to have a deterrence capability to maintain its economic and diplomatic progress in areas where US and Chinese interests have potential to conflict.

The debate that will continue for at least the next decade as the transformation of the PLA continues, is whether China's desires are to be a partner with the United States or to dethrone the United States as the hegemony of the Asian-Pacific region. A pessimistic view would suggest that the CCP at minimum wants to dominate the region and ultimately, to be recognized as the world leading power. Though there are some potential indications and warnings of the Chinese desire for global domination, as witnessed through their expansion in diplomatic relationships across the globe, it is unlikely, given their historical philosophy and posture, that this intent truly expands beyond the Asian-Pacific region, and more specifically beyond geography that they perceive to be part of their sovereign nation.

Mutual Areas of Interest of US and China

Currently China is using the soft powers of diplomacy and economics to gain or maintain a foothold in global regions that are rich or are potentially rich in the natural resources that its growing economy demands. "China consumes roughly one-third of total global output of steel, 40 percent of cement, and 26 percent of the world's copper, leading to fears of scarcity and resource competition. China is now the second largest global consumer of oil, with its overall share of world energy consumption rising from 9 percent to 12 percent in a decade. Because available natural resources and raw materials are largely located in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, Beijing has placed increasing attention in recent years on its relations with nations in these regions."³

The primary regional objective of China's leadership is to be the hegemonic power of the Asian Pacific. Not that they want to necessarily keep the US out of the region, but the CCP wants to have the final say about what goes on in China's extended neighborhood. "More

important to Beijing is what, from China's standpoint, should not be permitted to go on, which is the strategic alliances between countries in the region and the United States."⁴

Among these alliances, the one that concerns Beijing the most is of course that of US and Japan. Not forgetting the atrocities that its one time ruthless enemy had conducted on its homeland only a little over a half a century ago (Nanjing Massacre), the PLA is closely watching the evolving capabilities of the Japanese "Self-Defense Force" as it supports the US in Iraq and Afghanistan with troop and cargo planes, as well as destroyer and refueling ships in the Indian Ocean. The idea of Japan being set up to be the Asian Pacific deputy sheriff for the US only increases Sino-Japanese tensions over the territorial disputes in the Senkaku Islands which contain natural gas deposits.

Relative to the CCP concerns of the firm relationship between US and Japan is the future of the Korean Peninsula. China, along with its historical ties to Korea, has a vested security interest in ensuring that relationships with the North and South remain stable, as the prospect of conflict will most likely end up with a mass of North Korean refugees attempting to cross its borders. This is a scenario that for both security and economic reasons remains a national strategic focus for China.

China will also continue to pursue enhanced political ties with South Korea in its quest to gradually edge out the advantage that the US has currently in the region, having strong ties with both Japan and South Korea. As its relations with Korea are historically better, and Japan's tarnished past does not provide confidence with either country, the building of a political and economical relationship is the tangible path towards China's pursuit to be recognized as a leading power in the region.⁵

China and the US will continue in the unforeseeable future to engage together in the security threat posed by Kim Jong Il in North Korea. China's inclusion in the six party talks gives them some regional clout that they desire, as well as influence on the future of a possible re-unification that they need to happen peacefully to avoid their own economic and security issues. "Its fundamental objective is to avoid a situation on the Korean peninsula whereby war might break out and American intervention close to its doorstep is almost certain."⁶

Another region of historic contention is the Spratly Islands, located in the South China Sea. The Geology and Mineral Resources Ministry of the PRC has estimated that the Spratly area holds oil and natural gas reserves of 17.7 billion tons. This does not leave any wonder as to why the CCP are willing to dispute the territory with Vietnam and the Phillipines. Additionally the waters are claimed to be some of the most productive commercial fishing grounds, which adds to the value when considering the diet of the Asian culture. The tensions over the Spratly Islands has been contained for the time being as the mulilateral talks with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), China and the US have been successful. This could quickly change however, especially if exploration discovers the estimated amount of natural resources and this prediction becomes a reality. If this was to occur not only would the obvious dispute over reserve rights prevail, but the potential for disputes of the much traveled sea lanes in the region could become a point of contention.

The nations of Africa are already beginning to voice concern of the future prospect of their continent becoming the future battle ground for US and China. This is not just a case of paranoia in consideration of the historic colonial dominance that was a major contributor to the unstable conditon of the continent. Any African nation would be naïve not to be concerned as China continues its economic and diplomatic pursuit throughout the region, and the US has now

established the dedicated African Command (AFRICOM) to provide a dedicated focus there.

Since implementations from Deng Xiaoping, "China's development has adopted an active posture in international society, in order to acquire more energy for development through international exchanges. When he thought of the problem of development, he thought of opposing hegemonism and power politics and safeguarding world peace."⁷ This cunning but obvious statement made by Deng Xiaoping that expresses an element of his strategic modernization thinking, is why the US needs to be particularly wary of China's current and future exploration on the continent of Africa. "Opposing hegemonism" can now only apply to the US, and though the PLA does not have the ability to project power to protect its interest in Africa at this time, it certainly appears that they are not planning on relying on external sources to protect the gains they have made in the long term. The transformation and modernization of the PLA, to include "informatization," is the last building block in the national developmental strategy of the PRC that would enable it to be self sufficient in the protection of its investment in Africa, particularly if its interests collides with those of the US.

The PRC has a substantial head start on the US in its diplomatic and economic achievements in dealing with the resource rich nations of Africa. It has the formalized platform of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum that was established in 2000. It has been very successful in pushing through its economic and developmental initiative and has gained credibility as the peaceful power to bring Africa the stability and development it desires. It has been equally successful in portraying the US as an undesirable hegemony, as was indicated in the 2003 comments at the second ministerial meeting of the China-Africa Cooperation by the Forum Premier Wen Jiabo when he said "the people of the world share the aspirations for peace, stability and development. But hegemonism is raising its ugly head."⁸

The establishment of AFRICOM and its devised plan to be less militarily oriented and better structured to assist in the development of nations to become prosperous, might be the answer to strike a balance with the decade plus of progress that China has obtained. Additionally if the pursuit of resources does become a source of contention, the need to use military power could be inevitable. It will be advantageous to know the ground and form the right relationships with indigenous forces if the future potential of resource scarcity become a reality in the already tapped middle east region, and Africa becomes the center of gravity for national survival. The recent trip by President Bush to Africa was, among other things, to dispel rumors that the intention of AFRICOM was solely for the establishment of a large military base. It was also an opportunity to utilize the power of diplomacy to convince African leaders that the United States is the better and kinder partner, because the US aims to improve African lives while nations like China focus on commercial opportunity to the exclusion of almost everything else.⁹

China relations with countries in South America have grown substantially in the last ten years. This is not surprising as the PRC's need for natural resources and lack of arable lands makes Latin America a logical source for trading partners. As the CCP's diplomatic and economic efforts promote improvement in infrastructure and increased export revenues in African nations, the same factors are taking place in countries like Argentina, Peru, and most recently with Venezuela. The latter which provides around thirty percent of US oil import, is growing to be a larger point of contention as President Hugo Chávez continues to increase his anti-US posturing. The US, at this time, has mostly ignored the seemingly empty threats as the economic relationship between the US and Venezuela is much more important to the survival of Venezuela. The concern now though, as China is putting monies toward Venezuela and other Latin American countries, is whether the reliance of the US economy will be undermined by

China's support, and whether this will enable loose cannons like President Chávez to coerce adjacent nations to join in his anti-US posture. He tried this and failed in January when he called for a military alliance against the US with Nicaragua and Bolivia.

Though South America, in comparison to Africa, is a second tier effort, the PLA has stepped up its military to military exchanges there, while the US has decreased them since the beginning of the long war. "The traditional U.S. military links with sister armed forces in the region have deteriorated over the past six years, making room for the PLA's involvement more visible and effective. PLA diplomacy in Latin America may not in fact be an absolute zero-sum equation for the United States, but reveals the deteriorating US understanding of fundamental global shifts that appears to be growing systematically."¹⁰

The geography with the most potential to bring the US military forces and PLA into conflict in the short term is Taiwan. China stands firm on its position that Taiwan is part of the country, and in the last two years has become more vocal on its intent to use force against Taiwan if it claims its independence. China is not deterred by the US military strength, insofar as it claims it will not tolerate intervention from the US in support of Taiwanese Liberation. "The US challenge in a Taiwan conflict scenario also affects some of the other external security challenges facing the PRC. In particular, the United States could possibly try to disrupt Chinese shipping through the critical sea lanes of the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca, hampering Chinese trade and especially oil imports. This would economically harm the PRC and undermine the CCP rule."¹¹

China has been very successful in preventing Taiwan's attempt at independence by isolating Taiwan from the national arena through its use of its diplomatic and economic powers. This includes countries both in Africa and South America who previously recognized Taiwan as

the legitimate China so long as the economic incentives were more lucrative than those offered by the PRC.

The likelihood of conflict between the PRC and Taiwan is not high mostly due to the need to keep Taiwan's developed economy and modernized infrastructure intact, which the CCP would eventually like to absorb for its own economic and developmental gain.¹² Additionally if the US maintains its ambiguous position and is unwilling to openly support Taiwan's independence, it is unlikely that Taiwan will cross that threshold with the CCP. Rather, it will likely defer statements of independence to maintain its current stability and peace with the PRC. As the PRC continues to develop rapidly under its Communist capitalist platform, there is the potential that the party will have to adjust its policies and politics in the future to resemble more democratic governing to sustain the continued growth. Though this is undoubtedly a long time in the future, Taiwanese patience may result in ultimate victory if the two can reunite as a Chinese democratic nation under peaceful means.

In the realm of areas of interest, and potential conflict, space is becoming an area of contention for between the US and China, as both in the last year have shown the capability to shoot down satellites. The concern first is the negative effects that space debris creates on the multitude of other satellites in orbit from destroyed satellites. The second and more obvious concern stems from the dependency of satellite communication for global military operations, along with the fear that anti-satellite technology is just a stepping stone to offensive weapons capability being put into space. The latter concern is highlighted by the proposed Chinese/Russian treaty banning weapons of any kind into space. Space is most definitely the ocean of tomorrow, the ultimate high ground, and whoever dominates it will have a great advantage along the national powers of military, economics, and information.

PLA Current Capability

The main focus of the CCP National Strategy has changed in the last five years, with the number one priority being prevention of Taiwan from declaring its independence. This, along with its observation and study of the military might demonstrated by the two previous US military campaigns in Southwest Asia, is the main catalyst that has driven China to modernize and transform the PLA. It is necessary to look at China's military strategy, not just as an aggressive US threat, but from their perspective, which is to defend their national interests against what is obviously the most capable force preventing them from global recognition as a superpower, or at the very least the dominant power in the Asian-Pacific region.

"The current modernization rate of the PLA Navy (PLAN) "indicates that by 2016 the PLAN will allow Beijing to exert hegemonic leverage in maritime East Asia, and offer a very serious challenge to the U.S. Navy."¹³ China is assembling a blue-water navy which is aimed at being able to compete with the US in both freedom of navigation and forcible entry capabilities. The PLAN has dedicated its efforts to combining a mixture of both foreign-bought equipment with that which is organically made. This strategy enables the PLAN to modernize faster by using already available advanced foreign technology, and enables them to use the technology to create the Chinese made equipment. The ability to increase its industrial capability by producing military equipment also mutually supports its economic growth, but more importantly increases the industrial base that is a crucial foundation in a nation's ability to support a global military power. An example of this mixture is the "current submarine fleet of twenty-nine modern boats, which includes thirteen super-quiet Russian-made Kilo class submarines and fourteen Chinese-made Song and Yuan class diesel electric submarines that are reportedly improved versions of

the Kilos. At least ten more of these submarines are in China's shipyards, together with five new nuclear ballistic missile and attack boats.”¹⁴ The most notable quest for power projection and the use of foreign technology to expedite the modernization and transformation of the PLAN to obtain a power projection capability was the purchase of the Russian aircraft carrier *Varyag* from the Ukraine. The carrier has been in dry dock since its recovery from the Black Sea in 2001, and it appears from recent pictures (illustration 1) that the speculation of using it for parts or just to exploit technology to build a Chinese duplicate is not the intention. With this potential capability added to its fleet, the PLAN would have all the means to deploy an aircraft carrier battle group by 2010. This will be an impressive leap forward, though it will take a substantial amount of years to ready a crew on a single aircraft carrier let alone coordinate efforts amongst a full carrier battle group.¹⁵

The Peoples Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), like the PLAN, are rapidly transforming and modernizing through implementing a mix of foreign acquisitions and building up its industrial base capabilities. “The acquisition of platforms such as Su-27 and J-10 fighters, modernized H-6 bombers and AWACS platforms are the start towards a power projection capability. It could use these systems to carry out both strategic and tactical missions in a manner that has been referred to as offensive airpower with Chinese characteristics.”¹⁶ The PLAAF offensive capabilities are currently limited to regional operations, but its long-range focus is to improve to the point it can protect within its borders and periphery, as well as support its national interests globally, specifically to areas that provide the much-needed natural resources to sustain Chinese economic and industrial expansion. “The acquisition of platforms such as aerial tankers and the upgraded H-6 bomber suggests that China hopes to increase its

long-range offensive capabilities. A key component of such development would involve acquisition of a long-range bomber along with the acquisition of aerial-refueling platforms.”¹⁷

As the Chinese have historically demonstrated patience in the development of their strategic interests, along with the decade of relative peace it has experienced, it is most likely that the PLAAF will continue to modernize at a slower pace with a combination of foreign bought and indigenously developed technology. Because the focus is on “informationization,” and the desire to build external partners in the region, the continued procurement of Russian fighters fits into the construct of overall PRC National Security.

The downsizing of the PLA has primarily been done in support of modernizing equipment, and developing a better trained, more capable, and more technologically advanced force. Though some of the allocation went to the much needed improvements in the PLAN and the PLAAF, the PLA itself has also been reaping the benefits of improved armor, artillery, and communications equipment, although it is being distributed in small quantities across the total force.

As of 2007 the PLA main ground force, which has been transforming into a smaller, better-equipped and better-trained organization, is composed of eighteen group armies along with a number of independent units (divisions, brigades, and regiments /groups). “Maneuver forces (infantry and armored units) consist of approximately 35 divisions and about 44 brigades. These forces are supported by roughly 40 artillery, surface-to-surface missile, air defense, and anti-aircraft artillery divisions and brigades and include various special operations forces, reconnaissance, army aviation, engineer, communications, chemical defense, electronic warfare, and “high technology” units.”¹⁸

The transformation of the ground forces over the last decade has many resemblances to the structure of the U.S. military. With the close fight being the unification of Taiwan, there has been much focus on “training and equipping task organized brigades and divisions to fight an island landing campaign.”¹⁹ The PRC has taken advantage of the diplomatic and training benefits of participating in multilateral exercises as well as participating in United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Operations. The PLA stated that it has conducted sixteen joint exercises since 2002, and currently is serving in nine different UN mission areas with 1,487 peace keepers, the majority being in Africa. This opportunity not only provides them good faith points with the international community, but also provides the force with real world operational experience, and an opportunity to learn from other UN partnered nations including the US. The PLA’s current capability nearly resembles a regionally expeditionary capable force that can task organize to meet its mission requirements, at least within its borders and just outside its periphery. With the increase of China’s industrial capabilities and the modernization and transformation of its sister services, the possibility to project a force outside of its region could be plausible within the next decade.

“Another critical theme, and one that cuts across all service programs, is the growing importance of the human dimensions of the PLA. As modernization continues and systems become more complex, the human element of education, training, personnel management, etc. will be increasingly critical to the development of the armed forces. The might of a military, after all, is only as strong as the people running it and the strategies these leaders devise. Coincidentally, the key theme of the 2007 PLA conference will be the PLA’s “human dimension.”²⁰ The PLA modernization and transformation model has predominantly been based upon the US, as is the development of the human element. The desire to increase the non-

commissioned officer (NCO) corps backbone, both by empowering them and by increasing the knowledge foundation, can be directly identified with how the U.S. Marine Corps operates. Additionally the transformation complements the CCP's other National Strategic goal of building the economy, for which a middle class is crucial to its success. The challenge that they face and are concerned about is two fold. First, the basic education requirement and on the job training requirement to mirror the SNCO and NCO Corps that the US possesses is a lengthy process and will require a minimum of a generation of soldiers to build a capable force with this design. With the given patience of the Chinese culture, this hurdle should not be a hindrance as long as they continue to enjoy the conditions of relative peace in the region while going through this transformation. The larger problem is the potential threat to the CCP that a better educated more independently thinking military force could be to the party survival.

The Defense Industrial Base

Since major industrial reforms in 1998, most notably the divestiture of some 20,000 PLA-run commercial enterprises, the PLA has benefited by an impressive increase in production quality and expediency. "Other key factors include increased government expenditures on research, development, and procurement; increased imports of foreign equipment, capital and know-how; and the "spin-on" effects of commercial business operations. In particular, those industries with robust and rational commercial activities, especially those linked to international markets, have shown the greatest improvements in capabilities."²¹ Though the ability to sustain its military with its own organic industry is not likely to occur in the foreseeable future, it is taking full strides to use the acquired foreign technology while applying economic power to pursue this strongly desired capability for its future.

China's missile industry falls under the control of two large state-owned companies; China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC) and China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation (CASIC). The industry has made progress and could be competitive with other world powers in the next ten years. However, its potential is hampered by the fact that it has not gone to the civilian sector that has shown greater progress with the generation of competition and economic incentives. Its progress has, like all its other sectors, been derived from a combination of applying sufficient funds to organic research and development (R&D), and leveraging off foreign bought or acquired technology. "By the end of this decade, China's military is expected to field indigenously produced mobile, solid-fuel ballistic missiles; land-attack cruise missiles; modern, long-range surface-to-air missiles; beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles; and anti-radiation missiles. This array of systems, if successfully deployed, would enable China to equip its military with missile capabilities comparable to those of all but the most advanced militaries in the world."²²

The greatest success story for the PRC industrial reforms is arguably the ship building industry which recently took over as the world's leader in output of commercial shipping. PRC shipbuilding success can mostly be attributed to the commercialization of the shipyards, which generate the needed competition and economic incentives that come when capitalism is left to operate unimpeded. The second order effect of this is the benefit the PLAN has received from this rapid industrial development. The warships that are being built now are of better quality, and can be produced more rapidly as the ship manufacturing technology has moved into the 21st century and are building the ships modularly. The only downside in the short term is these new platforms "lack the advanced weapons, electronics, and propulsion subsystems needed to be properly outfitted vessels. It is these technologies (and their integration) that will ultimately

determine the PLAN's military efficacy. There are signs, however, that China is beginning to acquire the capability to produce some of these critical subsystems, especially with regard to air defense systems."²³

The Aviation industry has made substantial progress beginning in the last decade of the 20th century. The real push to modernize did not begin until after the Gulf War, when the US demonstrated the potential of a technologically advanced Air force. The industry however is highly dependent on foreign technology. The technology is mostly Russian, since the western countries are not willing to give up advanced military technologies to China. Even with the foreign support of equipment and knowledge the PLAAF will not be able to compete with the US's far advanced aviation technology in the near future. "The gap will probably remain significant unless China makes fundamental changes in contracting and enterprise management. One such change would be the introduction of true competition in the form of open bidding for R&D and production contracts. Another would be the integration of design institutes with production enterprises. A third would be the privatization of China's major military airframe and component manufacturers or, short of that, their listing on stock markets."²⁴

Intentions with a Modernized Transformed PLA

In 2005 a new phrase began to appear in Chinese pronouncements, proclaiming that China must strive to build "a military force that is commensurate with China's... international status." The apparent significance of this new phrase is that an advance went toward the status of a military great power—however gradual and far off—has become a long term objective of the Chinese leadership.²⁵ In the past five years there appears to be a shift of priority in the CCP strategy to become recognized as a world power. In 2000, the Defense White Paper expressed "economic developments as the center focus and subordinates the PLA and dictates its service to

the overall economic construction.”²⁶ In 2005 economic development and military modification became co-equals in the pursuit of Asian hegemony, and the PLA’s modification and transformation was deemed to be a required dynamic to ensure continued economic growth.

It is the ever expanding need to tap into natural resources outside of its borders that has also created the need to more quickly modernize and transform the PLAN. The central Naval contribution will be protect its sea lines of communication. This capability will also enable it to be accepted as a world power, while it protects its national interest at home and abroad.

The need for force projection is going to be crucial in the future to protect the diplomatic and economic agreements China has made with nations in Africa. A naval force with amphibious capability and forcible entry will not only be necessary to deter competing nations, but more importantly to deter the host nations from attempting to back out of their agreements, particularly access to high demand natural resources at the negotiated price. A second order effect of this dynamic will be the price increase to all other nations. This too will be a source of contention, and will require the PLA to be capable of protecting its interests well outside its current sphere of influence.

Because China has expanded so far, so fast both economically and diplomatically, they will have to rely on the US and U.N. members to protect their interest abroad in the short term, particularly in Africa and South America. This reliance of course is not guaranteed, which brings about the rationale that the PLAN has to become more than a regional defense force. The indications are there, especially with the pursuit of an Aircraft Carrier Battle group on the horizon that the PLAN will be striving to protect its interests abroad. The threat to the US Navy appears unlikely at this time, but with US focus and monies being allocated heavily to the ground forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is possible that if the US does not stay proactive in maintaining

key capabilities and alliances in East Asia, it may need to learn how to share naval dominance in the Pacific with the PLAN.

China's 2006 "White Paper" provides a new goal for the 21st century that is to build an "informationalized armed forces capable of winning informationalized wars."²⁷ This theme of informationalized modernization is intended to be part of the development in all services of the PLA. The theme of joint operations is also a prevalent part of the National Defense Strategy and an integral part of the informationalized force. Additionally it portrays an offensive stance, which will project power beyond its borders. "Army aims at long-distance maneuvers, rapid assaults and special operations. 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. The Air Force aims at speeding up its transition from territorial air defense to both offensive and defensive operations, and increasing its capabilities in the areas of air strike, air and missile defense, early warning and reconnaissance, and strategic projection. The Second Artillery Force aims at progressively improving its force structure of having both nuclear and conventional missiles, and raising its capabilities in strategic deterrence and conventional strike under conditions of informationalization."²⁸ In summation what it describes is a force that is equal in intelligence gathering and rapid dissemination to the US, in order to provide combined forces in an efficient decisive manner. This would equate to a force that is attempting to mirror the capabilities of the US military forces.

The posture and build-up of the current PLA forces "has been oriented toward capturing Taiwan and interdicting U.S. naval intervention."²⁹ The close fight for China is to deter Taiwan from making the bold attempt of declaring independence from the homeland. This deterrence also applies to the US as it is highly unlikely that Taiwan will assert its independence as long as

the US policy is to maintain the “status quo.” As the unification of Taiwan with the PRC touches on many areas of interest of national strategy; economic growth, resource availability, national security, and most important national pride, it is not surprising that the PLA is posturing to persuade Taiwan against declaring its independence. From the perception of the CCP, “Washington is building up forces and strengthening strategic alliances in east and Central Asia in order to prevent the unification of Taiwan with China and to block China’s rise to great power status in the region and beyond.”³⁰

With the CCP’s current perspective of US military intervention in Asia, along with a War on Terror that could be at least very long lasting, it makes sense that transformation and modernization of the PLA has become one of the highest priorities in its national strategy. The view of the US military machine is one that has grown in strength; economically, technologically, physically, and most notably in combat experience. Before 9/11 and the Bush administration’s aggressive foreign policy came into existence, the PRC was able to focus its priority on the economic growth of the civilian sector at the expense of PLA modernization. “From the Chinese perspective, the US uses the war on terror as a pretext to strengthen its global hegemony in the post-Cold War era; this concern about hegemony has its historical roots.”³¹ Because of fears that exist from its century of humiliation and the growing US military presence in the PRC backyard, the long-term planned transformation and modernization that was in existence was re-examined and accelerated due to this change in environmental factors.

Conclusion

The idealist view perceives China as a nation developing for the prosperity of its nation’s people, and the rise of its military as necessary to its security and survival of the Chinese sovereign communist nation. The need to modernize and transform the PLA is strategically

necessary to compete globally, particularly with the US, as a strong military mutually supports the other national powers that would otherwise be hollow. This view relies heavily on the historical reasoning that China has never been an offensive culture and therefore portrays its strategic intentions as ones of continuing their future development at home and abroad on the proud anti-aggressive platform that their intentions are peace and prosperity for the world.

The realist on the other hand sees that China is now the biggest threat to the US as economically the increased demand for resources, most notably oil, is affecting the US standard of living. This growing competition will escalate as China's technology and economy continues to grow and exhausts its limited internal resources. For example, the 13% arable land for agricultural use could quickly disappear as water shortages and industrial sprawl overcome it. This will additionally add to the dependence of resources outside China's borders that will increase its competition with the US and other western nations. This growing appetite should trigger great concern when coupled with China's diplomatic and economic maneuvers in regions such as South America, and more importantly Africa. The Chinese foothold in these resource rich regions is shaping actions for the future competition of high demand items and providing insurance for the CCP that they will have physical and economic control of the resources that are most crucial to the survival of any nation. This diplomatic and economic shaping is worthless if it cannot be backed by the strength of a capable military. The dependency of external resources will have to be secure, and the only way to ensure that their diplomatic and economic shaping efforts are protected is by the transformation of the PLA into a global force. The CCP potential to control the market price of fossil fuel cannot be overlooked. The economic impact alone could affect the standard of living of the US and its allies, which also poses a potential for military conflict if diplomacy fails.

The US and its allies need to be aware of the Chinese perception that western culture was a cause of the Chinese humiliation of the 19th and 20th century. This, and the strong US military presence in the Asian-Pacific region, give ample reason from their viewpoint to prepare the PLA to compete with the potentially most dangerous enemy that can affect their national survival both at home and abroad.

The US strategy in dealing with China needs to keep both the realist and idealist perspectives as the ideological basis for determining how both countries use, or share, the national powers of diplomacy, information, military, and economics (DIME). Current Chinese open source documents such as the 2006 White Paper, give some sense that intentions are to avoid physical conflict. Along with gestures of trying to be more transparent on the strategic goals, after US voiced its perception and criticism of the CCP's lack of, it gives hope that a partnership could continue to grow along all elements of the DIME. What needs to be watched carefully is the global capability to supply the resources in highest demand, and more importantly those that are required for national survival. The increase of the human population and the potential future effects of pollution on needed resources could be the problem that diplomacy and economics cannot find a solution. When and if the demands for the basic needs of survival, i.e. water and food, bypass the available global supply, military power will be the only possible means to determine which nations will ultimately survive. It is up to all world powers to ensure the global environment does not force this scenario to come to reality. At this time however, it is the US that needs to take the lead for the global community and to ensure that the US way of life is not negatively affected by the growth and development of nations such as China.

Notes

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- ¹ Information Office of the State Council, People's Republic of China, "China's National Defense in 2006." Beijing, (Dec 2006), 2.
- ² Ibid, 6.
- ³ Joshua Eisenman, Eric Hegingotham, and Derek Mitchel, *China and the Developing World*, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc, (2007), xv.
- ⁴ Ellis Joffe, "Roundtable; Sizing the Chinese Military." Asia Policy 4, National Bureau of Asian Research, <http://asiapolicy.nbr.org/current.html>, (July 2007), 58-59.
- ⁵ Eisenman, 100.
- ⁶ Eisenman, 100.
- ⁷ Michael Pillsbury, *Chinese Views of Future Warfare*, National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, (1998), 7.
- ⁸ Eisenman, 34.
- ⁹ Jennifer Loven, "Bush assures Africa on US intentions." Associated Press, (20 Feb 08), 1.
- ¹⁰ Cynthia A. Watson, "The PLA in Latin America." The Jamestown Foundation China Brief, (Oct 2007), 8.
- ¹¹ Michael R. Chambers, "Roundtable; Sizing the Chinese Military." Asia Policy 4, National Bureau of Asian Research, <http://asiapolicy.nbr.org/current.html>, (July 2007), 58-59.
- ¹² Russell Ong, *China's Security Interests in the 21st Century*, Routledge, (2007) 58.
- ¹³ Bernard D. Cole, "Roundtable; Sizing the Chinese Military." Asia Policy 4, National Bureau of Asian Research, <http://asiapolicy.nbr.org/current.html>, (July 2007), 84.
- ¹⁴ Bill Gertz, "China expands sub fleet." The Washington Times, (March 2, 2007), A-01.
- ¹⁵ John J. Tkacik, Jr., "China's Quest for a Superpower Military." Background, (17 May 2007), 12.
- ¹⁶ Erik Lin-Greenberg, "Offensive Airpower with Chinese Characteristics: Development, Capabilities, and Intentions." *Air & Space Power Journal*, (1 September 2007), 69.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, 70.

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- ¹⁸ Dennis J. Basko, "Roundtable; Sizing the Chinese Military." Asia Policy 4, National Bureau of Asian Research, <http://asiapolicy.nbr.org/current.html>, (July 2007), 80.
- ¹⁹ Cortez A. Cooper III, "Roundtable; Sizing the Chinese Military." Asia Policy 4, National Bureau of Asian Research, <http://asiapolicy.nbr.org/current.html>, (July 2007), 75.
- ²⁰ Joffe, 56.
- ²¹ Keith Crane, "Modernizing China's Military: Opportunities and Constraints" RAND Project Airforce, 188.
- ²² Ibid, 187.
- ²³ Ibid, 182.
- ²⁴ Ibid, 180.
- ²⁵ Joffe, 58.
- ²⁶ Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today Tradition and transformation for the 21st century*, London and New York, Routledge, (2006), 7.
- ²⁷ Information Office of the State Council, People's Republic of China, 26.
- ²⁸ Information Office of the State Council, People's Republic of China, 27.
- ²⁹ Joffe, 59.
- ³⁰ Joffe, 60.
- ³¹ Ong, 45.

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