

## THE CHINA QUESTION: A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

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The twenty-first century presents a new atmosphere of maritime security issues in East Asia focusing on the “China Question”. With a huge population base and an emerging middle class, China is becoming a nation with enormous economic potential. However, much like western powers such as Britain and the United States, economic success requires regional influence and the protection of national interests. This paper will consider the manner by which China adapts to its new realities through the use of its maritime forces.

China has an active naval modernization program within its armed forces.<sup>1</sup> This is being implemented with a greater focus on domestic shipbuilding projects and the continued reliance on Russian arms acquisitions. It is possible that China will become the most powerful, diversified, and largest maritime force in the East Asian region. As long as this course of technological self-innovation and foreign purchasing continues, China could achieve regional hegemony and become capable of exerting its dominance over the disputed areas in the South China Sea. A window of opportunity will appear for China in the next 7-10 years. Thus, *if* China is willing to assert regional hegemony and its territorial claims, it could potentially do so soon.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is not the paper's intention to claim whether China's naval ambitions are just or unjust, but rather to reveal the evidence that China is extremely capable of expanding its naval arsenal in order to protect its declared national interests.

<sup>2</sup> Again, it is necessary to reiterate that this paper does not wish to antagonize China. Though there will be a critique of China's foreign policy, it is necessary to emphasize that it is crucial within this paper because as one will note, the United States possesses a significant navy in order to protect its own interests and one can only assume that a growing power such as China is inclined to do the same.

A Chinese ability to assert such power, however, is not solely dependant upon the modernization of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) navy via continued Russian arms transfers and increased domestic shipbuilding. It is also necessary to consider the following factors: American littoral/green water strategy and intelligence gathering, the new security environment in the post September 11<sup>th</sup> world, and American economic engagement policy with the PRC. It is also necessary to consider Chinese activity in South East Asia (SEA) including its relations with Myanmar as well as its resource exploration in the South China Sea (SCS). Given these factors, China could find itself in an ideal position to safely protect its present and future national interests.

### **PRC Naval Activity:**

Beijing announced in March 2001 that it was increasing defense expenditures by over 17.7%, the largest increase in over two decades.<sup>3</sup> The People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) modernization program is the most significant variable that reinforces its upcoming window of opportunity. Historically, China's navy has been weak and out-dated. However, the PRC has actively begun to increase the PLAN's capabilities by developing new projects domestically and continuing its notable arms acquisitions from Russia. There are three primary objectives behind the PRC's modernization program. The first can be attributed to the escalating animosities within the Taiwan Strait. The second is the perception of an increased threat posed by the Japanese Self Defense

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<sup>3</sup> "United States-China: Competing for Regional Influence," <http://www.stratfor.com/asia/commentary/0104172215.htm>, (April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2001).

Forces (JSDF) with its potential amendment of Article Nine. The third factor is the desirability to develop a blue water fleet.<sup>4</sup>

To accommodate these goals, the PLAN has strengthened the three following categories: Antisubmarine Warfare (ASW); Antisurface Warfare (ASUW);, and missile delivery systems. Primarily through the acquisitions of Russian military equipment through its \$10 billion (USD) Foreign Military Sales program, the PLAN is in midst of developing state-of-the-art ASW, ASUW programs. This is being accomplished through the incorporation of Russian *Sovremenny* destroyers, second generation (G2) Russian diesel submarines, Russian made anti-ship missiles, domestically built fast patrol boats (FPB), ASW destroyers, and third generation (G3) new nuclear attack submarines (NSSN). With this modern arsenal, the PLAN will be in strong position to achieve its major maritime objectives.

### **Sovremenny Destroyers:**

China received the first two of four Russian-built *Sovremenny* destroyers in February 2000 with the next two due to arrive in mid-2004. The *Sovremenny* class vessels are the most advanced within the PLAN arsenal, displacing 7,500 tons<sup>5</sup> and are capable of playing both ASW and ASUW roles. They are designed to help protect the PLAN's nuclear submarine (SSN) and future NSSN fleets. The *Sovremenny* destroyer contains a balanced armament that consists of anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles, long-

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<sup>4</sup> This paper is in agreement with specialists that claim that the JSDF is not intending to amend Article 9 for imperialistic purposes, however, the PRC continues to view Japan as a threat. (Jiang, Wanran, "The Chinese Assessment of the Japan Threat," *Canadian Consortium on Asia-Pacific Security 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference- China's Regional Relations Panel*. (Vancouver, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2001). It could also be believed that the PRC is attempting to build a credible deterrent against the United States.

<sup>5</sup> Moore, Frank. "China's Military Forces," <http://www.comw.org/cmp/fulltext/iddschina.html>, (June 2000).

range guns, and ASW capabilities with a helicopter accompaniment.<sup>6</sup> Its most lethal weapon is the SS-N-22 anti-ship missile. With its present force of two and expected delivery of two more by 2004, the *Sovremenny* is becoming the new flagship for the PLAN.<sup>7</sup>

### **SS-N-22 Anti-Ship Missile:**

The SS-N-22 missile alarms both the United States Navy (USN) and Japanese Maritime Self Defense Forces (JMSDF) because it was built to counter the Aegis missile defense system carried by the USN and JMSDF. Traveling more than twice the speed of sound, it skims 23 feet above the surface, decreasing radar detection due to line of sight. Approaching its selected target, the SS-N-22 can execute pre-programmed evasive maneuvers to confuse defending phalanx systems. The SS-N-22 carries a 660-pound conventional warhead (and can also be armed with a nuclear warhead) and with a range of 260-mile, can threaten any US naval vessel including its aircraft carriers.<sup>8</sup> Though the information is classified, it is estimated that the PLAN possesses large numbers of SS-N-22s.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Order of Battle," <http://www.rand.org/nsrd/capp/pubs.html>, The Rand Corporation.

<sup>8</sup> Moore, Frank. "China's Military Forces," <http://www.comw.org/cmp/fulltext/iddschina.html>, (June 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Fisher, Richard, "Dangerous Moves: Russia's Sale of Missile Destroyers to China," <http://www.heritage.org/library/categories/forpol/asc146.html>, ASC Backgrounder, (No.146, February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1997).

## **Diesel Submarines:**

China also possesses 4 G2 Kilo class submarines from Russia and will receive purchases of Kilos or the newer 'Amur' class from Russia, depending on the progress of the *Song* class boat (a Chinese hybrid developed from the Soviet version of the Romeo class).<sup>10</sup> Reports suggest that the next order of Kilos will be an advanced version, which the US Naval Office of Intelligence (ONI) rates about as quiet as the US 6881, an improved *Los Angeles* class SSN.<sup>11</sup> The PLAN will receive the advanced version by 2005.<sup>12</sup>

## **Squall Torpedo:**

The squall torpedo specifications and delivery capabilities for the most part are unknown. However, it is known that this rocket powered torpedo travels underwater at speeds of 500 km/h, which is five or six times the speed of all other torpedoes. Its cutting edge technology coats the weapon in bubbles so water never touches the torpedo itself.<sup>13</sup> It is believed that this new torpedo is capable of destroying any ship within USN and Allied fleets.<sup>14</sup> It is thought that the reason American and Allied intelligence agencies were so well informed about the *Kursk*<sup>15</sup> disaster was because it

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<sup>10</sup> Moore, Frank. "China's Military Forces," <http://www.comw.org/cmp/fulltext/iddschina.html>, (June 2000).

<sup>11</sup> "Order of Battle," <http://www.rand.org/nsrd/capp/pubs.html>, The Rand Corporation.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Canadian Military Trying to Buy Secret Russian Torpedo," [http://cbc.ca/cgi-bin/templates/view.cgi?news/2001/01/04/squall\\_010104](http://cbc.ca/cgi-bin/templates/view.cgi?news/2001/01/04/squall_010104), Jan 4, 2001

<sup>14</sup> Huebert, Robert. "After September 11<sup>th</sup>, Implications for the Canadian Navy," Canadian Consortium on Asia-Pacific Security 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference- Maritime Security Panel, (Vancouver, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> The Kursk disaster occurred in August 2000, when one of Russia's most sophisticated NSSNs sank due to an explosion. The squall torpedo may have been the cause for the explosion.

was carrying squall torpedos.<sup>16</sup> Given Russia's history in selling technology and arms to the PRC, it is an source of potential concern for American and regional navies that the mysterious squall could eventually fall into the PLAN's hands.

Although China is increasingly purchasing ready-made weapons, it is also adapting technology from these weapons to incorporate into future Chinese-made weapons. This reinforces the domestic shipbuilding facilities modernization program China wants to develop to lessen its reliance on Russia. The recent episode involving the USN EP-3E reconnaissance plane may have been connected with the development of a new type of submarine.<sup>17</sup> Although unconfirmed by the Department of Defense (DOD), it possible that the EP-3E was searching along the SCS coast for radio signals released by PLAN submarines.

### **Type 093:**

The type 093 is a G3 NSSL submarine capable of firing a submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM) version of the SS-N-22 anti-ship missile. As a result the 093 is capable of deterring any USN aircraft carrier.<sup>18</sup> The 093 prototype is presently undergoing sea trials in order to establish sea-worthiness. Built in the northern port of Tianjin, the 093 was launched into the Yellow Sea. It was reported that the USS *Bowdich* (a USN research vessel) was conducting a monitoring and surveillance

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "Was America Hunting for a New, Killer Submarine?" <http://www.stratfor.com/asia/commentary/0104040100.htm>. April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> "Order of Battle," <http://www.rand.org/nsrd/capp/pubs.html>, The Rand Corporation.

mission in order to locate the 093.<sup>19</sup> The EP-3E then attempted to locate the 093 as it moved to the southern fleet headquarters in Hainan. It was there Chinese F-1 fighters engaged the aircraft.<sup>20</sup> . The 093's progress will continue to be of interest to the DOD. By early 2003, the first 093 will be put to sea and it is estimated that by 2008, the PLAN could have nearly a dozen 093.<sup>21</sup>

### **Fast Patrol Boats (FTB):**

The PLAN has also built twenty-four FPBs that it will use to bolster its SCS patrols including in the Spratly Islands area. The FPBs are approximately 100 meters long fitted with a twin 30mm primary gun . There are presently twenty-four in operation.<sup>22</sup> They are set for "important operational deployment," but "do not bear the PLAN flag in order to downplay the PLAN naval presence within the SCS."<sup>23</sup>

The PRC is advancing towards a fleet with capable blue water activities with the type 093 submarines and carrier project. The *Sovremenny* destroyer and Kilo class diesel attack submarines play a significant role in the ASW and ASUW departments. The new class of FPBs will be of maneuverable significance throughout the SCS. Finally, with the acquisition of the *Sovremenny* class vessels, the SS-N-22 anti-ship missile, and development of the type 093 NSSNs, the PLAN will present a credible deterrence against the USN. Hence, it is possible to conclude, given the PLAN's *order*

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<sup>19</sup> Was America Hunting for a New, Killer Submarine?" <http://www.stratfor.com/asia/commentary/0104040100.htm>, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Scott, Richard, "Nuclear Attack Submarines Cast off Cold War Mindset," *Jane's International Defense Review*. (January, 1999). pp.22.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> "Forward...From The Sea: Intelligence Support to Naval Expeditionary Forces," <http://www.fas.org/irp/eprint/baus.htm>.

*of battle*, and completion dates, that near the end of the decade, the PLAN may very well be in a regionally superior position. However, it is also necessary to examine the USN's *order of battle* in comparison to the modernization of the PLAN. This will be done in the next section.

### **Friendship With Russia:**

In 1989, tensions between the two powers (at that point in time, Russia was still the USSR) eased as the normalization of relations occurred. By 1996, the two countries signed an agreement of strategic partnership, based on shared domestic and international concerns. Summits have been held, joint statements have been released and over 100 agreements have been signed, including confidence building and demilitarization treaties concerning the Sino-Russian border.<sup>24</sup> The Sino-Russian strategic partnership was bolstered again when President Jiang Zemin, arrived in Moscow in July 2001 to sign a 20-year friendship treaty with Russian leader, Vladimir Putin

The Russians intend to continue their military trade, which is a very contentious issue for the United States. This trade earns Russia about an average of \$1 billion a year from the sale with to China of modern fighter aircraft, missiles, submarines and surface ships.<sup>25</sup> The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates that China imported arms worth a total of \$10.78 billion USD between 1990 and 2001 and more than 90% of these weapons were from Russia.<sup>26</sup> Both Russia and

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<sup>24</sup> "The Question of Hu: An Unknown Leader Meets the World."  
[http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story\\_id=843748](http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=843748). November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



China continue to flourish from their revitalized friendship and although China is attempting to modernize its own technological and ship building industries, it will continue to rely on Russia for its superior ASW/ASUW capabilities.

### **The American Littoral/Green Water Strategy:**

After the break up of the USSR, the US was faced with the task of re-evaluating the Department Of Defense, with specific reference to the USN, and had to choose which programs to emphasize and which to minimize. In an unwise<sup>27</sup> decision, the USN decided to focus on its SSN/NSSN and carrier fleets that project its blue waterpower.<sup>28</sup> To do so, it was forced to downgrade its smaller fleets such as destroyers, frigates, ASW capabilities,<sup>29</sup> and escort services.<sup>30</sup> However, there is a growing consensus that now its fleet of large aircraft carriers will be increasingly at risk to missile attack, which makes it likely that the Pentagon will seek to build smaller, more agile flattops. However, this will take at least a decade or more. Until then, it will have to work to minimize the risk to its fleet.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> This author believes the decision to be unwise because large-scale forces such as the SSN and carrier fleets cannot address the issues of modern-day maritime security. No one would chose to challenge the USN in the open sea, but rather attempt to focus maritime disputes within coastal areas and green waters. Furthermore, threats such as the bombing of the USS Cole, piracy and other forms of transnational criminal activity are the new threat to the twenty-first century that the new naval doctrine is incapable of addressing. Therefore, that particular policy decision (in the opinion of the author) was a poor one.

<sup>28</sup> Huebert, Robert, "After September 11<sup>th</sup>, Implications for the Canadian Navy," Canadian Consortium on Asia-Pacific Security 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference- Maritime Security Panel, (Vancouver, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> With the break up of the USSR, the world's largest submarine fleet was dissolving, which in turn led to the decision that the USN no longer needed to focus ASW capabilities.

<sup>30</sup> Stuart, Douglas & Tow, William, "A US Strategy for the Asia-Pacific," Adelphi Papers. (New York: Oxford University Press, No. 329, 1995). pp.7.

<sup>31</sup> "United States-China: Competing for Regional Influence," <http://www.stratfor.com/asia/commentary/0104172215.htm>, (April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2001).

Threat levels in littoral waters, specifically in East Asia and the SCS, are much higher than they used to be due to the proliferation of advanced anti-ship missiles (SS-N-22), fighter-bomber aircraft, and diesel electric submarines (PLAN Kilo class program).<sup>32</sup> To remedy this situation, the USN decided to embark on a program that would increase its fast attack craft (FAC) capabilities that could operate within littoral areas and green water environments. In areas of shipbuilding, The US is attempting to accelerate its shipbuilding modernization program. It is developing a new land-attack destroyer, the Zumwalt class, which will be stealthier than anything in the USN's current *order of battle*. However, the first ship in the new class will not be ready for active service until, at the earliest, the end of the decade.<sup>33</sup> The Zumwalt class, known as the DD(X) is thought to assure access to littoral areas and counter air and missile threats. Head of technology logistics, Pete Aldridge, claims that "the DD(X) program will be the technology driver of the future"<sup>34</sup> and it is hoped that the DD(X) program will provide a baseline for the future cruiser program, CG(X), that will also be used as a littoral combat ship.<sup>35</sup> These programs are still in the design phase and delivery dates are at least ten to fifteen years away.

Likewise there are increasing calls within the navy to resurrect smaller ships, such as frigates, that are more agile and better suited for littoral operations. The "Streetfighter" concept, as it is known, has yet to be approved and remains only in the

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<sup>32</sup> Lok, Joris, "Corvette Trends Turn the Tide," *Jane's International Defense Review*, (April, 1998). pp.26.

<sup>33</sup> United States Department of Defense, "Navy Announces DD(X) Program, Contact (703) 697-5131 (media), (No. 559-01, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

proposal stage.<sup>36</sup> Fast Attack Crafts, primarily in the form of corvettes, would be the ideal ship to counter the PLAN modernization program. However, the USN does not maintain a corvette class and relies on the outdated frigate, which does not have the agility in green and littoral waters.<sup>37</sup>

In the Asia-Pacific Theater, not only do the US Pacific Command (PACOM), JMSDF, and South Korea's (ROK) navies lack the necessary ships to maneuver within littoral areas, they also lack effective anti-ship missiles to counter the PLAN's Sovremenny destroyers. The American variant of the SS-N-22 missile is the tomahawk. However, it does not break the sound barrier and it flies high enough to be detected by radar, making it an easy target for the Sovremenny and its sophisticated anti-missile systems.<sup>38</sup> Thus, PACOM has requested that DOD review the above shortcomings in order to counter the PLAN's modernization program.<sup>39</sup>

Due to the 1990 budget cuts that de-emphasized ASW, the USN is faced with the inability to counter the PLAN's modernizing submarine fleet.<sup>40</sup> The PLAN's diesel electric Kilos and the 093 will potentially be capable of maneuvering about freely with little threat from USN ASW capabilities. Although the USN's 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet remains the most powerful navy in the Asia-Pacific and the JMSDF is closely behind, their advantages

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<sup>36</sup> "Future Of New Destroyer In Peril,"

[http://www.military.com/Content/Printer\\_Friendly\\_Version/1,11491,,00.html?rb\\_GeneralOption=0&passfile=FL%5Fnewdestroyer%5F080601&page\\_url=%2FContent%2FMoreContent%2F1%2C12044%2CFL%5Fnewdestroyer%5F080601%2C00%2Ehtml](http://www.military.com/Content/Printer_Friendly_Version/1,11491,,00.html?rb_GeneralOption=0&passfile=FL%5Fnewdestroyer%5F080601&page_url=%2FContent%2FMoreContent%2F1%2C12044%2CFL%5Fnewdestroyer%5F080601%2C00%2Ehtml), (August 5th, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Lok, Joris, "Corvette Trends Turn the Tide," *Jane's International Defense Review*, (April, 1998). pp.28.

<sup>38</sup> Institute of International Relations, "Chinese Naval Power and East Asian Security," *Working Papers*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, No. 11, August 1995), pp.25.

<sup>39</sup> United States Pacific Command, "Forces in the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet and Areas of Operation," <http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/news/forces7th.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Department of National Defense, "US Security Strategy for the East Asia Pacific Region," <http://www.cscap.org/>.

such as Aegis, tomahawk anti-ship missiles, and the USN's blue water doctrines are becoming less credible as a curbing tool against the PLAN. Furthermore, the regional powers such as the JMSDF are restricted to Article 9, the ROK navy, although significant in size, also lacks the means and the will, and SEA nations are no match for the PLAN's potential mission creep.<sup>41</sup>

### **The American Shortcomings in Intelligence Gathering:**

The issue of intelligence must also be addressed when discussing the American shortcomings. Throughout the Cold War, and well into the new century, American intelligence continued to focus on the former Soviet Union. Even throughout the transformation of the PRC's identity, Russian based intelligence prevailed where more Russian-speaking agents and specialists existed than Chinese.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, seeing U.S. reliance on information as an Achilles' heel, China has embarked on a computer warfare program. The issue of intelligence, which initially was addressed at the beginning of the year, will have obviously taken another turn in lieu of the events that unfolded in the fall of 2001.

### **The Post-September 11<sup>th</sup> Atmosphere**

Hopes the U.S. would focus its intelligence resources on the PRC were dashed by the events of September 11, 2001. Previously, over the summer, the ONI and

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<sup>41</sup> Huxley, Tim & Willett Susan, "Arming East Asia," *Aldephi Papers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, No. 329 1999).

<sup>42</sup> United States Pacific Command, "Speech by Admiral Blair: Address to the Senate Armed Services Committee," <http://www.pacom.mil/speeches/sst2000/CINCTEST.htm>, (March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

special Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) units were to be reoriented to focus on America's perceived China-threat. However, September 11<sup>th</sup> has changed everything. Intelligence has been redirected, and FAC orders such as the Zumwalt and DDX programs will undoubtedly be delayed by at least five years. The new threat will be terrorist groups that could potentially attack American soil, and to accommodate these threats, intelligence gathering efforts will shift to a dominant specialization in counter terrorism. Fast Attack Crafts will be delayed and the majority of funds will be redirected away from the navy and whatever remains will focus on USN aircraft carriers that act as a launch platform for air campaigns and troop movements.<sup>43</sup> This newly assessed threat will completely distract the U.S. administration from the PRC and its potential regional hegemony. The redirected focus will result in production delays and delivery dates on necessary littoral ships such as the Zumwalt and other FACs. This will only widen China's window of opportunity because the PLAN will find itself fully prepared by 2008 while the USN's streetfighter ships will not be commissioned into service until 2015 at the earliest.<sup>44</sup> Hence the greater the gap widens, the more capable the PRC will be to exert its regional aspirations and territorial claims.

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<sup>43</sup> "Future Of New Destroyer In Peril,"

[http://www.military.com/Content/Printer\\_Friendly\\_Version/1,11491,,00.html?rb\\_GeneralOption=0&passfile=FL%5Fnewdestroyer%5F080601&page\\_url=%2FContent%2FMoreContent%2F1%2C12044%2CFL%5Fnewdestroyer%5F080601%2C00%2Ehtml](http://www.military.com/Content/Printer_Friendly_Version/1,11491,,00.html?rb_GeneralOption=0&passfile=FL%5Fnewdestroyer%5F080601&page_url=%2FContent%2FMoreContent%2F1%2C12044%2CFL%5Fnewdestroyer%5F080601%2C00%2Ehtml), (August 5th, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

## **Misconceptions in American Economic Engagement Policy:**

With specific reference to John Mearsheimer's<sup>45</sup> critique of US policy favouring the integration of the PRC into the global economic order, this section wishes to disprove the notion that if China is economically integrated into the world economy and bound by the terms of the World Trade Organization (WTO), it will liberalize and become the "big friendly giant." This assumption is far too simplistic and when examining the case of precedence, one will note that economically successful nations, such as the U.S. and the UK, required significant military capability to protect their national interests (given Mearsheimer's theory of power politics). Specifically, the most significant of all traded products is oil, which can only be transported (globally) within the maritime domain via the sea-lanes of communication (SLOC). Obviously a navy to protect such interests is absolutely necessary as evidenced by the USN and the strength of the United States economy.

Mearsheimer acknowledges that for the United States to endorse PRC economic growth, it will, based on its own threat perception, tilt the balance of power in favour of the PRC due to the size of its economic potential and population.<sup>46</sup> If the PRC's economy continues to expand over the next decade at the same rate it has been doing over the last two, the PRC could potentially surpass Japan as the wealthiest state within

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<sup>45</sup> . Mearsheimer is writing from an American perspective and therefore legitimizes the vocabulary of establishing the potential maritime growth of China as a threat. Again, it is necessary to state that from a universal perspective, China is merely following precedence in that previous powers relied heavily on a powerful navy. Thus, this paper wishes to respect Mearsheimer's argument, however, claim to differ in classifying China as a "threat."

<sup>46</sup> Mearsheimer, John, "The Future of the American Pacifier," *Foreign Affairs*, (V80, No.5, September/October 2001). pp.47.

the East Asian theatre. Furthermore because of its population size, the PRC has the potential to become even wealthier than the US.<sup>47</sup>

The PRC's potential economic wealth is best characterized the following way: Japan's population is one-tenth than that of the PRC and possesses a per capita gross national product (GNP) of \$32,350USD, which is forty times larger. If the PRC were to modernize and achieve the same per capita GNP as ROK were to have today at \$8,600USD China's economy would be 2.5 times larger than Japan's (currently) and 1.3 times larger than that of the US.<sup>48</sup> Not only would the PRC become wealthier than any of its Asian rivals, it could also, with its large population base and continued nationalistic migration flows, continue its tenacious modernization program within the armed forces and exert pressure on regional states. .

If the PRC is able to achieve this goal, it would naturally assert its claims for regional hegemony (similar to how the U.S. sought hegemony globally). Furthermore, the PRC would likely develop a PRC-type Monroe Doctrine that warns foreign powers that they are not allowed to engage within the designated hemisphere.<sup>49</sup> The PRC would most likely include within this doctrine that American involvement in Asia is intolerable. This doctrine would challenge the present US policy that engages the PRC than rather contains it as the PRC gains the potential to become a peer competitor on all levels. . Mearsheimer claims that a "wealthy China would not be a status quo power; it would be an aggressive one determined to achieve regional hegemony... because the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. pp.55.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. pp.57.

best way to maximize its prospects for survival is to dominate its region of the world.”<sup>50</sup> Ironically, this is exactly how the U.S. continues to maintain its hegemonic grip on power. Based on precedence, the PRC is capable, by way of economic growth and population size, of achieving hegemony in the same manner that the U.S. did.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Mearsheimer acknowledges that the U.S. may not be willing to fight a major war in East Asia with the PRC just to continue economic prosperity. He cites America’s reluctance to use force against the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) during the 1970s oil crisis as evidence.<sup>52</sup>

America’s China-engagement policy that claims that the PRC if engaged, will grow, capitalize, liberalize, and become the “big friendly giant” in East Asia is far too simplistic. Although the above attributes to the policy may be true, if the PRC grows than so too will its interests and *if* the PRC wishes to exert its regional hegemony, then it can easily do so based on the rate at which its economy is growing, its vast population base, and the need to protect its national interests for continued growth. In conclusion, there are misconceptions in regards to U.S. expectations of the PRC and it is dangerous to assume that China will grow without protecting its growing interests.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. pp.58.

<sup>51</sup> Again, this paper does not feel comfortable in accusing the PRC of aggressive behaviour, yet, wishes to suggest (based on the evidence) that China does have the potential exert regional hegemony if it wishes to do so.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. pp.58. But please keep in mind that Mr. Mearsheimer presented this argument prior to September 11<sup>th</sup> and if the US were on a high note, they might very well challenge the PRC. However, given that the window of opportunity will not begin for another five years, the present terrorism crisis may be quelled by then.



## **The Quest for the South China Sea (SCS):**

The SCS is one of the highest volume maritime traffic areas in the world. Connected to the Straits of Malacca, the SCS is home to the SLOCs that connect Asia-Pacific with the Middle East and through which the majority of oil (among other shipments) is transported.

China's most contested territorial claims are the disputed Spratly Island chain and the Parcel Islands. The Spratly Islands sit approximately 450 miles from the PRC, well beyond the twelve-mile maritime boundary and 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The Parcels lie over 175 miles away, also beyond the maritime border, but within the EEZ legitimizing economic activity zone which allows such activities as fishing and possible resource expansion.

The Spratly Islands are contested by seven states and the Parcels by two. Along with the PRC, the Philippines, Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Taiwan have some form of claim to the Spratly chain, while the PRC and Vietnam contest the Parcels. China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam all occupy specific islands within the Spratly Islands with military forces where some islands barely rise above the surface and others are completely uninhabitable.<sup>53</sup> Tensions have risen in the past and there have been incidents of gunboat diplomacy and naval battles have been fought, primarily between the PRC and Vietnam over the Parcels, and the PRC and the Philippines over the Spratlys.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Cossa, Ralph, "Security Implications of Conflict in the South China Sea: Exploring Potential Triggers of Conflict," <http://www.csis.org/pacfor/opSChinaSea.pdf>, Pacific Forum Special Report.

<sup>54</sup> Valencia, Mark, "China and the South China Sea Disputes," *Adelphi Papers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, No. 298, 1995). pp. 17.

## **The Race for the SCS:**

The primary reason these states are pressing their claims to barren, uninhabitable shoals and reefs is due to the resources that lie below the surface of the SCS. Fishing stocks are abundant and, more importantly, the SCS sits on a shallow shelf embedded with copious amounts oil and gas reserves. Though only a minor amount of research has been carried out, statistics already reveal that the SCS contains 7.5 billion barrels in oil reserves, 145.5 trillion cubic feet in gas reserves, 1,367,000 extractable barrels of oil per day, and 2323 billion cubic feet in gas production.<sup>55</sup> With rising tensions in the Middle East, development in the SCS has become of great appeal to the seven claimants. For the PRC, a growing economy with simultaneous growing demand for oil and gas to feed its economy has made the resource rich SCS an area of vital interest.<sup>56</sup>

## **Possible Foreign Policy Motives:**

Furthermore, the PLAN has historically been restricted to green water capabilities. Green water entails the movement limited to coastal areas (shallower waters) with minimal days at sea. Though successful in the SCS, the green water capability will not fulfill the PLAN's future ambitions to initiate ocean going, long-term endeavors.<sup>57</sup> With its superiority in the SCS over SEA navies, the PRC has already begun establishing basing operations by improving the infrastructure on occupied

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<sup>55</sup> "China Makes Upgrades to Island Base," <http://www.freerepublic.com/forum/a39d5e6b85148.htm>.

<sup>56</sup> "Report to United States Congress: China's Grand Strategy," <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2000/china06222000.htm>. FY 2000.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

islands within the SCS. Such improvements include the building of harbors that can accommodate PLAN submarines and lengthening airstrips that can extend the range of the People's Liberation Army Air Force's (PLAAF) aircraft well over the entire SCS region.<sup>58</sup> With increased port facilities, the Spratly Islands could potentially become a vantage point for eventual PRC blue water operations (long range oceanic regions).

Finally, the SCS and China's potential occupation of the Spratly Islands could be the key to the PRC's power projection in times of hostility. For example, if an international incident were to occur, the PLAN could easily secure the SCS and its SLOCs for purposes of blockade or monitoring and surveillance.<sup>59</sup> Given the serious reliance on the SLOCs through the Straits of Malacca, much control rests in the hands of the PRC with its increased capabilities.<sup>60</sup>

Hence, the quest for control over the SCS is of considerable significance. With the abundant fishing stockpiles, natural gas and oil deposits, combined with its strategic location in advancing blue water capabilities, and the potential for asserting green water control in the SCS, the PRC has a vital interest in pressing its territorial claims over the Spratly and Parcel Islands. As the most powerful permanent naval force in the region, the PLAN holds a distinct advantage over the other disputing states.

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<sup>58</sup> "China Makes Upgrades to Island Base," <http://www.freerepublic.com/forum/a39d5e6b85148.htm>.

<sup>59</sup> Again, it is necessary not claim that these are the PRC's intentions, but to merely reveal what the PLAN can potentially be capable of in terms of control over the SCS and SLOCs.

<sup>60</sup> "Report to United States Congress: China's Grand Strategy," <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2000/china06222000.htm>. FY 2000.

## **Friendship with Myanmar:**

China and Myanmar's relationship is becoming a mutually beneficial one. In desperate need of investment, Myanmar welcomes PRC capital with specific reference to the building of a new highway linking Yangon to the PRC.<sup>61</sup> In exchange for this, Myanmar is in negotiations to grant the PLAN access to Myanmar ports as potential forward deployment bases, giving the PLAN access to the Indian Ocean. Not only will this provide the PLAN with access to a port in the Andaman Sea, but it will also allow for the PLAN to boost its presence on both sides of the Straits of Malacca. This potential maneuver could prove extremely provocative to the Indian government, whose present animosities against the PRC include an historical imperative.<sup>62</sup> Having earlier established its emerging presence in the SCS, China could potentially now become an emergent naval power on the west side of the Straits of Malacca. If it wished to blockade the valuable SLOCs running through the straits in a time of hostility, it could do so easily via access to naval facilities in Myanmar. This power projection will unquestionably reinforce the PRC's territorial claims and regional desires.

## **Conclusions:**

This paper has examined the potential for the PRC to find itself in an ideal position to exert its regional ambitions and territorial claims if it so desires. A window of opportunity will exist for the PRC PLAN from approximately 2008-2016 where it could

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<sup>61</sup> "Myanmar: Where the Indian and Chinese Navies Meet," <http://www.stratfor.com/asia/commentary/m0001272141.htm>, (January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2001).

<sup>62</sup> "Moscow Courting Myanmar With MiG-29s," <http://www.stratfor.com/CIS/commentary/0108212130.htm>, (August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2001).

become the dominant regional naval figure in East Asia. Based on the information compiled above, delivery and arms manufacturing of key military hardware reveals that by the end of the decade, China will hold the advantage in green water naval superiority within the region. With a solid fleet consisting of ASW/ASUW destroyers, highly effective anti-ship missiles, advanced diesel electric and NSSN submarines capable of carrying the squall torpedo, and specialized FACs and FPBs fully acquired by 2008, it will possess a head start over the inept USN ASW program, delayed DD(X) and Streetfighter programs, which will not be in service until at least 2015.

Furthermore, American shortcomings in its littoral/green water strategy and intelligence gathering, the new security threat in the post September 11<sup>th</sup> atmosphere, and misconceptions in American economic engagement policy with the PRC will accentuate this window of opportunity. Activity in SEA such as China's relations with Myanmar and possible resource exploration in the SCS, means that it is possible that China can catch up to American and regional power projections. In conclusion, given the above prominent modernization motives in the military, political, economic, and foreign policy spheres, China will find itself with a window of opportunity to indisputably assert its identity and regional claims.