



The Hague Centre  
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# China's Military Rise

## and the Implications for European Security

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# Executive Summary

## Understanding China's military rise

It is increasingly difficult to have a dispassionate understanding of Chinese military power. For many, China is already an ideologically incompatible and unstoppable juggernaut; for others, it is unlikely to ever entirely match Western military capabilities. Also, China's ability to project power within the South China Sea, East China Sea, and Taiwan Strait has been the focus of most analyses. As a result, we lack a comprehensive assessment of the overall development of China's military capabilities and what these will mean outside of the Western Pacific, especially for European states.

By developing a typology based on historical examples of other rising powers, this report moves beyond the hype and the tendency to reflexively view China as either intrinsically benign or nefarious. This process yields a two-part framework, delineating motivations and manifestations, for assessing the extent of China's rise. This includes the current state of China's military power, an analysis of how it arrived at current capabilities, and the trajectory through 2035. The ultimate objective of this approach is the development of an evidence-based foundation for thinking about the potential consequences of China's military rise and European and Dutch policy options to address it.

The main finding of the report is that China exhibits almost all of the factors that characteristically drive great power expansion outside of the region. It is following a typical rising great power trajectory in almost all respects, although it is still on an upward path, and is implementing a long-term strategy to be able to project power extra-regionally, which it is expected to be increasingly able to between now and 2035.

## Framework: the military rise of great powers throughout history

Historically, great powers have emerged through multifaceted and multi-decade trajectories that fuel competition with other states. They are responsible for the majority of interstate conflict, both between great powers and with lower-level powers. Great powers pursue military expansion to augment security, maintain access to or obtain resources, satisfy domestic interest groups, and bolster prestige. These drivers are not always rational from the perspective of outside observers.

Small or middle powers tend to think of security in terms of territorial defense or extended defense; in contrast, great powers, by virtue of the outsize role they play in the system, are concerned with the global balance of power. A great power's military rise manifests itself in extra-regional power projection capabilities, developing and maintaining sound infrastructure, establishing bases, fostering alliances, transferring arms to other states, engaging in military operations and in military assistance and cooperation.

Great powers pursue military expansion to augment security, maintain access to or obtain resources, to satisfy domestic interest groups, and to bolster prestige.

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## China's motivations

Our report finds that China is following a typical trajectory for rising great powers in terms of its increasing willingness and ability to project power outside its region. This can be seen in three of the four factors that typically drive rising states to project power: security, access to resources, and status and prestige. Analysis of the fourth factor, domestic pressure groups, was outside the research parameters for this report. China's objective of being able to project power beyond the Western Pacific is closely linked to the domestic political agenda of President Xi Jinping and the security concerns of the Chinese Communist Party, both of which will remain powerful influences on Chinese strategic thinking for the foreseeable future. China increasingly treats the South China Sea as its own territory; this will be a drain on Chinese defense resources, but it will also provide a foundation for projecting power outside the region.

Chinese strategic planning assumes that China needs to project power beyond the Western Pacific to protect its economic, political, and military interests in the Indian Ocean, Middle East, and Africa. Chinese policymakers believe that what they view as a declining West, led by the United States, will not be able to prevent China from projecting power in the South China Sea and beyond the Western Pacific already by 2027, at which point they believe China will already possess a world-class military.

In response to two events after the end of the Cold War, namely the US victory in the 1991 Gulf War and the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996, China undertook a rapid and ambitious modernization and expansion of its military, which has accelerated over the last decade. This project has been, by any measure, successful. Today, China is the dominant force in its own backyard, gradually pushing US power projection capabilities away from its coast.

## China's military capabilities: an assessment

China has developed almost all capabilities necessary for regional power projection and is currently in the process of developing extra-regional capabilities. China is on the verge of a breakthrough and will be able to effectively project power extra-regionally within the next ten years. China will not necessarily be able to go toe-to-toe with the US and its allies in all contingencies, but it should be able to mount missions to intimidate and coerce small and medium-sized powers through offshore threatening and protect supply chains in the Indian Ocean, Middle East, and Africa, certainly if not challenged by a peer competitor.

China possesses a world-class missile arsenal and fleet of surface support ships with which it can pressure its neighbors and states operating in its vicinity, but still trails the most advanced Western militaries in terms of the number and sophistication of aircraft carriers and the capabilities of its carrier strike groups (CSGs), specifically in areas such as jet fighters and anti-submarine warfare needed to operate further from its territory. China is undertaking enormous efforts to remedy the shortcomings in its CSGs and will narrow the gap with the most advanced Western militaries – though by how much remains a matter of debate – by 2035. Towards 2035, demographic, economic, political, technological and security developments may impede the continued development and maintenance of especially China's far seas military capabilities and, to a lesser extent, its near seas capabilities.

Today China is the dominant force in its own backyard, gradually pushing US power projection capabilities away from its coast.

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Though China faces severe hurdles in its efforts to sustain power projection beyond the Western Pacific, it commands enormous resources and is following a long-term strategy designed to support long-term power projection capabilities outside its region. Efforts to overcome shortcomings in its ability to sustain power projection are boosted by China's enormous industrial resources, including by far the largest ship-building capacity in the world. These resources give the PLA a distinct advantage in a protracted conflict. It also has a large and modern defense industry, is the world's fifth largest arms exporter, and has a quasi-monopoly on critical raw materials. The relatively small number of supply ships it has to support military operations abroad could be, when necessary, supplemented by a massive reserve fleet of vessels controlled by Chinese State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs).

China lacks (in) formal alliances but instead has established a large number of strategic partnerships. These partnerships, which are attractive to many non-democratic regimes in Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean region, may pose a challenge to American and European alliances and serve as the foundation upon which a future alliance system can be built. China is in the process of supplementing its strategically-located base in Djibouti – in East Africa, near the Middle East – with access to and influence over sites in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka that may in the long run be used for military purposes. China has sought to limit the downsides of its dependence on oil supplies from the Middle East by forming constructive relationships with Iran, Saudi Arabia and other oil-producing states; over which it wields influence through its mass procurement of energy whilst avoiding entanglement in the region's political problems and military conflicts.

Table 1 on the next page summarizes the extent to which the various aspects of China's ability to project military power have increased between 1996 and 2021 and are expected to increase between 2021 and 2035 – within each of the six aspects that make up the military dimension of (extra-)regional influence individually. The table rates China's capabilities along these six aspects on a scale from one-to-five. Simply put, while a score of one refers to a state that is not able to project any real military power (e.g. China in 1996), a score of five refers to a militarily fully developed great power, or "a super power" (e.g. the United States throughout the 1990s).

Our assessment is that China has made enormous strides in its stated goal of developing a world-class military, though it stills falls short in some key areas. In short, it is following a typical trajectory for a rising great power. Even though for now it lacks behind in some key aspects that enable the use of military capabilities far from home, it is implementing a long-term strategy to be able to sustainably project power outside its region.

The PLA now ranks among the most powerful militaries in the world. China's overall progress on the six aspects that together make up the military dimension of extra-regional influence over the last 25 years has been impressive but unevenly distributed. China has developed almost all capabilities necessary for regional power projection and is in the process of developing extra-regional capabilities. China is on the verge of a breakthrough and will be able to effectively project power extra-regionally within the next ten years: China will not necessarily be able to go toe-to-toe with the US and its allies, but it should be able to mount missions to intimidate and coerce small and medium-sized states through offshore threatening and protect supply chains in the Indian Ocean, Middle East, and Africa, certainly if not challenged by a peer competitor.

China lacks (in) formal alliances but instead has established a large number of strategic partnerships.

Dimensions of power projection		1996	2006	2016	2021	2026 <sup>1</sup>	2035
Near and far seas military capabilities	Near Seas Defense <sup>2</sup> (Within the first island chain)	+	+	+++	++++	++++	++++/ ++++
	Far seas Protection (ERPP and Long range strike capability)	+	+	+	++	++	++++
Overseas and overland Bases		+	+	+	++	++/ +++	++/ ++++
Infrastructure	Overall	+	+	++	+++	++++	++++
	<i>Resources to sustain: Access to oil</i>	++	+	++	++	+++	+++
	<i>Resources to sustain: Supply ships</i>	+	+	++	+++	++++/ ++++	++++/ ++++
	<i>Resources to repair and expand: Industrial resources: shipbuilding and repair and defense industry</i>	+	++	+++	++++	++++	++++
Alliances (formal; and informal)	+	+	+	+	+/ +++	+/ ++++	
Arms transfers	+	+	++	+++	+++/ ++++	+++/ ++++	
Operational experience; Military cooperation and assistance	Peacekeeping; anti-piracy missions; exercises; port calls	+	+	++	++	++/ ++++	++/ ++++

Table 1: China's ability to project military power between from 1996 to 2035.

## Policy implications of China's military rise

The report identifies security implications related to China's rise and develops potential responses for Dutch and European policymakers to consider. A more extensive and detailed overview of all policy recommendations is provided in Chapter Six.

- 1** In response to the risk of an outbreak of Sino-US conflict in the near seas, European governments are recommended to:

→ **Minimize the risk of wars fought close to China's shore and of nuclear escalation**

- It is recommended to promote confidence-building measures, focusing on great power dialogue and the assessment of the possibility for new forms of détente between the US and China in which the EU could take a mediatory role.
- In order to ensure that a Chinese conventional missile launch is not mistaken for a missile carrying a nuclear warhead, European states should implore upon China the importance of disentangling its conventional and nuclear missile arsenal.

1 A forward slash is used to indicate a range of possibility (e.g. ++/++++) in order to appreciate the many uncertain variables that together determine the future development of the dimensions of China's ability to project power.

2 Officially, Chinese naval strategists also include enforcing sovereignty over Taiwan as a key part of Near Seas Defense. In this rating, only defense of the mainland and enforcing "sovereignty" over large swaths of the ESC and SCS is considered.



→ **Develop national policy positions in European states long before US requests for military support in East Asia. Then, coordinate these positions on a European level.**

- In arriving at that position, high level political and public discussions need to address Europe's place in the world.
- The Netherlands is recommended to initiate a discussion, behind closed doors, with the leaders of France and Germany to coordinate a response to any US request for military support.
- Public broadcasters could initiate round table discussions featuring experts with divergent views on whether or not to military intervene if a conflict between China and the United States breaks out.

→ **Strengthen European defense capabilities.**

- European states should develop additional capabilities and strategic enablers necessary for their own defense, which are mostly still provided by the US military in Europe.
- European states should do this in cooperation with Washington so as to avoid temporary deterrence gaps in Europe.

→ **Prepare for preemptive and retaliatory kinetic and cyberattacks against military and civilian targets.**

- It is recommended to prepare contingency plans to deal with the possibility of informatized and kinetic warfare, especially where European forces are deployed in close proximity to Chinese capabilities, but also over longer distances where cyber warfare can still be utilized. European governments could produce a classified overview of places around the world where its military assets are in combat range of PLAN vessels and additional PLA troop deployments. European governments should require private companies and local or regional governments that are responsible for critical infrastructure to maintain minimal cyber security standards.

→ **Assess which dependencies China could exploit in a scenario of conflict and which dependencies Europe can (threaten to) exploit to prevent coercion.**

- As European support for US military efforts in the near seas risks a Chinese economic and technological embargo, the Dutch and other European governments should assess which areas of dependence on China can be exploited in a scenario of conflict and mitigate these – and which areas of dependence are innocuous today and in the future. Considerations of price and individual choice of corporations and universities will increasingly have to play second fiddle to considerations of national security.
- European governments should, internally, assess the areas in which China has strategic dependencies on Europe such as on semi-conductor production and share such overviews on a European level.
- In addition, European governments and the EU should engage with Indo-Pacific partners to diversify trade and economic relations, focusing on supply chain resilience, in line with the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy, to prevent deliberate and unintentional supply chain shocks.

→ **Consider the crucial role that space assets play in modern warfare and mitigate their weaknesses.**

- Policymakers should explore ways to improve the defenses of space-based ISR assets, focusing on countering “cheap, easy-to-deploy” offensive measures such as

“earth-based jamming devices, cyberattacks, [or] satellite-mounted lasers” that can disable the sensors of satellites.<sup>3</sup>

- At the same time, when it comes to space assets, the EU should consider lowering its dependence on third countries, including the United States.<sup>4</sup>
- At the European policy-level, space should be included in the Strategic Compass.<sup>5</sup>

→ **Put arms control on the agenda of high-level EU-China meetings.**

- European Union engagement can help put thinking about arms control on the agenda of China's top leadership.

→ **Initiate an EU-mediated track-two dialogue on the role of new technologies in arms control between all major military powers if a moment of détente occurs.**

- The EU should bring academics and think-tankers from China, Russia and the US together to discuss arms control.

2

In response to the use that China can make of its vast industrial resources in a protracted conflict, European governments are recommended to:

→ **Improve access to shipbuilding and repair capabilities.**

- To deter China from starting a protracted, conventional conflict and to be prepared in the event of hostilities, European governments need to consider investing in shipbuilding capabilities, prioritizing domestic industries for civilian and military shipbuilding tenders.

→ **National security may trump economic considerations when developing strategic assets such as vessels.**

- The development of vessels and other strategic assets is better not left to Chinese shipyards but instead to Dutch or European partners, or if need be by likeminded countries such as South-Korea and Japan.

→ **Expand cooperation initiatives and create synergies between defense R&D and the private sector.**

- Expand military research and development and meet the European Defense Agency's (EDA) two percent norm. Participation in military procurement initiatives is also encouraged.<sup>6</sup>

3

In response to China's hybrid actions in its near seas that erode international norms, European governments are recommended to:

→ **Continue to bolster respect for international law and freedom of navigation with like-minded countries.**

- European states should continue to strengthen respect for international law and freedom of navigation through multilateral, regional fora.

3 Hugo van Manen, Tim Sweijs, and Patrick Bolder, “Strategic Alert: Towards a Space Security Strategy,” *HCSS* March 31, 2021, 30, <https://hcss.nl/report/strategic-alert-towards-a-space-security-strategy/>.

4 Policy Department for External Relations - Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, “The European Space Sector as an Enabler of EU Strategic Autonomy,” December 2020, 39, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/653620/EXPO\\_IDA\(2020\)653620\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/653620/EXPO_IDA(2020)653620_EN.pdf).

5 van Manen, Sweijs, and Bolder, “Strategic Alert,” 1.

6 Hugo van Manen et al., “Taming Techno-Nationalism: A Policy Agenda” (The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS), September 2021), XIV, <https://hcss.nl/report/taming-techno-nationalism/>.

- European states should continue to impress on China the interest Beijing has in maintaining Freedom of Navigation.<sup>7</sup>
- European states should also press the United States to ratify UNCLOS, as its unwillingness to do so weakens the UNCLOS.
- European states and the European Union should especially focus on (individual member-states of) ASEAN in order to together express regional and extra-regional broad support among small and mid-sized (e.g. Indonesia) powers for the application of UNCLOS to the South China Sea.
- European states, China and the United States could attempt to build trust in dealing with maritime issues by starting to find common ground in the non-traditional security sphere also including ASEAN.

**4** In response to China's expanding ability to project power in the far seas, European governments are recommended to:

→ **Block the transfer of (especially dual-use) critical Dutch and European technologies to China.**

- Considerations of national security will more often have to receive priority over the interests of individual corporations and universities that develop dual-use technologies.
- European governments should map which European companies and universities develop or sell the specific technologies that could be leveraged to help the PLA overcome the key capability gaps (see Table 29 and Chapter 3) that impede its ability to protect power in the far seas.
- European governments must assess which specific fields of the current technological revolution are likely to determine the future of warfare and limit China's access to leading research within these fields conducted in European universities and companies.
- Targeted investment screening and export control measures should be expanded within member-states focusing on these key technologies and then coordinated and harmonized within the European Union.
- The Dutch and other European governments should intensify visa-screening for students from "unfree" countries, especially at the PhD-level in these aforementioned fields.
- Universities, supported by the intelligence services and governmental expertise and knowledge centers for security in academic cooperation, should conduct due-diligence research before engaging in cooperation in these sensitive fields.
- These efforts should be coordinated with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada in order to ensure that these technologies are not "leaked" from other states. It is encouraged to expand and accelerate the work of the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) on technology and economic security, involving Canada, South-Korea and Japan in this process where possible.

→ **Expand maritime capabilities suitable to perform freedom of navigation operations in the Indo-Pacific.**

- The Dutch and European navies should invest in self-defence measures against missile attacks and in ASW, given the PLA(N)s ongoing investments in these capability categories. European states should maintain their relative advantage vis-à-vis China of having access to overseas bases in the Indian Ocean.

<sup>7</sup> Siniša Vuković and Riccardo Alfieri, "Halting and Reversing Escalation in the South China Sea: A Bargaining Framework," *Global Policy* 11, no. 5 (November 2020): 598–610, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12868>.

→ **Distribute development funding in Indo-Pacific in line with strategic interests.**

- The Netherlands and other European states should consider competing with the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by deepening their ties to the region, for instance, through investment in strategic infrastructure such as ports. However, in the first place these funds should focus on projects closer to home such as in NATO's treaty area and in the second place on projects in the areas bordering Europe.
- The EU can use its European Green Deal to help third countries in their transition, which is one of the goals of the European Green Deal.
- It is further recommended that the EU pursue the partnership and trade proposals outlined in the EU Indo-Pacific strategy.

→ **Assess on a case-by-case basis whether future Chinese overseas military missions pose a threat to European deployments and commercial activities.**

→ **Expand ability to cooperate effectively with a Chinese UN peacekeeping contingent.**

5

In response to China's command of critical resources, European governments are recommended to:

→ **Expand access to critical raw materials and rare earth metals that are essential for military power projection.**

- European states should consider reopening mines at home to improve access to critical raw materials and rare earth metals.
- European states should intensify their efforts to obtain these materials in third countries.
- Implement additional actions outlined in the European Commission's 2020 strategy *Critical Raw Materials Resilience: Charting a Path towards greater Security and Sustainability* focusing on recycling.

6

In response to China's expanding economic & digital influence in the Indo-Pacific region, European governments are recommended to:

→ **Compete with China's digitalization initiatives in states around the Indian Ocean.**

- EU connectivity partnerships should be expanded. In addition, it is encouraged to expand digital partnerships with countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

→ **Assess whether arms can still be exported to states with growing ties to China.**

- Ensure that states in the Indo-Pacific region are not the "go-between" through which China acquires European defense technologies that will help it overcome key capability gaps in their far sees military capabilities, such as ASW and jet fighter technology.

→ **Safeguard European oil imports by offsetting China's influence over oil producers when necessary.**

- Working with alternative oil importers like India, Japan and South-Korea can offset China's influence as the dominant oil importer in the world when necessary.

7

In response to China's expanding arms exports, European governments are recommended to:

→ **Foster international talks and confidence building measures on export regimes with China.** China must be invited to join non-proliferation bodies and regimes such as the MTCR but European states should ensure that these are not politicized.

Security implication	Policy implication
<b>1. The outbreak of Sino-US conflict in the near seas</b>	1.1 Minimize the risk of wars fought close to China's shore and of nuclear escalation.
	1.2 Develop national policy positions in European states long before US requests for military support in East Asia. Then, coordinate these positions on a European level.
	1.3 Strengthen European defense capabilities
	1.4 Prepare for preemptive and retaliatory kinetic and cyberattacks against military and civilian targets.
	1.5 Assess which dependencies China could exploit in a scenario of conflict and which dependencies Europe can (threaten to) exploit to prevent coercion.
	1.6 Consider the crucial role that space assets play in modern warfare and mitigate their weaknesses.
	1.7 Put arms control on the agenda of high-level EU-China meetings.
	1.8 Initiate a EU-mediated track-two dialogue on the role of new technologies in arms control between all major military powers, if a moment of détente occurs.
<b>2. China's industrial resources could provide an advantage in a protracted conflict</b>	2.1 Improve access to shipbuilding and repair capacities.
	2.2 National security may trump economic considerations when developing strategic assets such as vessels.
	2.3 Expand cooperation initiatives and create synergies between defense R&D and the private sector.
<b>3. China's hybrid actions in its near seas erode international norms</b>	3.1 Continue to bolster respect for international law and freedom of navigation with like-minded countries.
<b>4. China's expanding ability to project power in the far seas</b>	4.1 Block the transfer of (especially dual-use) Dutch and European critical technologies to China.
	4.2 Expand maritime capabilities suitable to perform freedom of navigation operations in the Indo-Pacific.
	4.3 Distribute development funding in Indo-Pacific in line with strategic interests.
	4.4 Assess on a case-by-case basis whether future Chinese overseas military missions pose a threat to European deployments and commercial activities.
	4.5 Expand ability to cooperate effectively with a Chinese UN peacekeeping contingent.
<b>5. China's command of critical resources</b>	5.1 Expand access to critical raw materials and rare earth metals that are essential for military power projection.
<b>6. China's expanding economic &amp; digital influence in the Indo-Pacific region</b>	6.1 Compete with China's digitalization initiatives in states around the Indian Ocean.
	6.2 Assess whether arms can still be exported to states with growing ties to China.
	6.3 Safeguard European oil imports by offsetting China's influence over oil producers when necessary.
<b>7. China's expanding arms exports</b>	7.1 Foster international talks and confidence building measures on export regimes with China.

Table 2: Overview of policy recommendations.

## The time to act is now

These policy implications and recommendations can complement the existing policy frameworks of NATO, the EU, and individual member states, which identify China as an ascending great power but generally fall short on policy measures that specifically address China's military rise. Chinese President Xi Jinping is open about the central role he seeks for China in the world and what this means for Europe, the US and the global order: he declares that "the East is rising and the West is declining" and foresees profound changes to the international system "unseen in 100-years". It is in the interest of the Netherlands and other European states to take such pronouncements at face value and to start preparing accordingly.

# Lexicon

A2/AD	Anti-Access Area Denial	ERPP	Extra-Regional Power Projection
AAW	Anti-Aircraft Warfare	EU	European Union
ACP	(Partnership Agreement with the) African, Caribbean and Pacific	EW	Electronic Warfare
ACS	Amphibious Combat Ship	EZK	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate of the Netherlands
ACSM	Anti-Ship Cruise Missile	FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
ADIZ	Air Defense Identification Zone	GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
AEW	Airborne Early Warning	GDP	Gross Domestic Product
AEW-C	Airborne Early Warning and Control	GLBM	Ground-Launched Ballistic Missile
AI	Artificial Intelligence	GLCMs	Ground-Launched Cruise Missile
ALBM	Air-Launched Ballistic Missile	GMLS	Guided Missile Launch System
ALCM	Air-Launched Cruise Missile	GNP	Gross National Power
ASAT	Anti-Satellite	HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)
AShM	Anti-Ship Missile	HF/DF	High-Frequency Direction Finding
AShBM	Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile	HGV	Hyper-Boost Glide Vehicle
AShCM	Anti-Ship Cruise Missile	ICBMs	Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles
ASUW	Anti-Surface Warfare	IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
ASW	Anti-Submarine Warfare	IRBM	Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile
BM	Ballistic Missile	ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative	LAC	Line of Actual Control
C4ISR	Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance	LOC	Lines of Communication
CCCCPC	Central Committee of the Communist Party of China	LSM	Landing Ship Medium
CCD	Critical Discourse Analysis	LST	Landing Ship Tank
CCP	Chinese Communist Party	LWT	Light Weight Torpedo
CCTT	Certain Critical Technology Transactions	MCF	Military-Civil Fusion
CEP	Circular Error Probability	MENA	Middle East and North Africa
CFIUS	Committee on Foreign Investment	MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
CM	Cruise Missile	MoD	Ministry of Defense
CMC	Central Military Commission	MRBMs	Medium-Range Ballistic Missile
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor	MTCR	Missile Technology Control Regime
CSG	Carrier Strike Group	NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
DOC	Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea	NCTV	Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid
ECS	East China Sea	NEOs	Non-Combat Evacuation Operations
EDA	European Defense Agency	OTH	Over-the-Horizon
EDPIP	European Defense Industrial Development Program	OTH-B	Over-the-Horizon Backscatter
EDT	Emerging Disruptive Technology	PADR	Preparatory Action on Defense Research
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone	PAFMM	People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia
		PAP	People's Armed Police
		PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation	SSGN	Nuclear-Powered Cruise Missile Submarines
PLA	People's Liberation Army	SSK	Diesel-Electric Attack Submarine
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy	SSN	Nuclear-Powered Submarines
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force	SSR	Security Sector Reform
PLARF	People's Liberation Army Rocket Force	TTC	Trade and Technology Council
PMS	Preparation for Military Struggle	UAE	United Arab Emirates
R&D	Research and Development	UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile	UK	United Kingdom
SBBNs	Nuclear-Powered Strategic Submarine	UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas
SCS	South China Sea	UNSC	United Nations Security Council
SLBMs	Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles	US	United States
SLOCs	Sea Lines of Communication	USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
SOA	School of the Americas	UUV	Unmanned Underwater Vehicle
SOEs	State-Owned Enterprises	VLS	Vertical Launch System
SSA	Space Situational Awareness	VTOL	Vertical Take-Off and Landing
SSF	Strategic Support Force		

# Introduction

The most important development within the international system during the first and second decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been the rise of the People's Republic of China to the number two position. In challenging the long-standing primacy of the United States, China has played a key role in sparking a new era of great power competition.

The consequences of these developments for Europe can be grouped into two categories. The indirect consequences of China's rise include a shift in US grand strategy toward Asia and away from Europe. This is a long-term trend in US grand strategy since the turn of the century, preceding not only the Joseph Biden and Donald Trump administrations but also preceding Barack Obama's so-called Pacific Pivot.<sup>8</sup> After centuries of being the central players in international politics, then at least being the primary theater during the Cold War and its aftermath, Europeans will have to become used to being the secondary theater.<sup>9</sup> US resources and political attention will be drawn elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

This report focuses on the second category of issues related to China's rise: the direct consequences of China's growing conventional, or so-called traditional, military capabilities. It pays some attention to the indirect consequences. The report aims to provide policymakers with a framework for understanding the implications of China's rise for global and regional security by illuminating China's intentions (current and planned), military capabilities and activities, and how these affects vital Dutch and European security interests.

For now, China's policies are focused on the Western Pacific. In particular, it is concerned with Taiwan and the expansion of influence in the South China Sea, an objective it is pursuing through the construction of artificial islands with military infrastructure and the deployment of paramilitary maritime militias. Though it has built naval capabilities that can operate outside of the Western Pacific, as we discuss in chapters 3 and 4, its most impressive accomplishments involve raising the costs for US power projection into its vicinity through combining missiles, sensors, and command and control systems into so-called Anti-Access Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities.<sup>11</sup>

The report investigates the effect of China's growing military power on European security by comparing China's rise to that of other great powers throughout history and extrapolating lessons for the present day. In particular, the report analyzes the motives of other great

8 Declassified documents and interviews with key policymakers underlined that the Bush administration in its second term pursued engagement with China, while changing the U.S. force posture in Asia and strengthening U.S. alliances in the region. Nina Silove, "The Pivot before the Pivot: US Strategy to Preserve the Power Balance in Asia," *International Security* 40, no. 4 (2016): 45–88.

9 Luis Simón, Linde Desmaele, and Jordan Becker, "Europe as a Secondary Theater? Competition with China and the Future of America's European Strategy," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (2021): 90–115; Hal Brands and Evan Braden Montgomery, "One War Is Not Enough: Strategy and Force Planning for Great Power Competition," *Texas National Security Review* 2, no. 3 (2020).

10 Paul Van Hooft, "The United States May Be Willing, but No Longer Always Able: The Need for Transatlantic Burden Sharing in the Pacific Century," in *The Future of European Strategy in a Changing Geopolitical Environment: Challenges and Prospects*, ed. Michiel Foulon and Jack Thompson (The Hague, Netherlands: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2021).

11 Andrew S. Erickson, "Chinese Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile Development and Counter-Intervention Efforts. Testimony before Hearing on China's Advanced Weapons Panel I: China's Hypersonic and Maneuverable Re-Entry Vehicle Programs U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission," February 23, 2017, [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Erickson\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Erickson_Testimony.pdf); Stephen Biddle and Ivan Oelrich, "Future Warfare in the Western Pacific: Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, US AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia," *International Security*, 2016; Sam Tangredi, *Anti-Access Warfare: Countering Anti-Access and Area-Denial Strategies* (Naval Institute Press, 2013).

The indirect consequences of China's rise include a shift in U.S. grand strategy toward Asia and away from Europe.



powers for operating outside of their region and the ways in which their military capabilities were manifested outside their region. This is a useful approach for several reasons. It allows us to evaluate China's intentions and capabilities unencumbered by ideological or cultural presuppositions about China's authoritarian regime or, conversely, by apprehensions about US expansionism and unilateralism. The report treats China like other historical great powers and assumes that its elites are acting according to similar motives.

In addition, Chinese leaders themselves have sought to learn from the examples of Western imperialist powers and the United States as they consider how to project power outside their own region. They have assessed the importance of overseas bases and sealines of communication. For example, in 2006, as the Chinese economy grew rapidly, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) commissioned a study of the rise of the European great powers, Russia, Japan, and the United States. This report discussed trade competitiveness versus military-technological competitiveness and the risks of becoming entangled in costly foreign adventures. It noted the importance of naval capabilities – or lack thereof – for the relative success of these historical great powers, underlining that it is a necessary but not a sufficient factor.<sup>12</sup> CCP General-Secretary Xi Jinping, who is also the Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), echoed this sentiment in April 2018 when he declared that the development of a strong navy “has never been more urgent”.<sup>13</sup>

This report is structured as follows. Chapter One develops the theoretical framework used in the rest of the report to assess China's rise as a military power. It identifies two types of patterns among historical great powers, namely the motivations that shaped their power projection strategies and the ways in which their military power was manifested. The resulting typology is used to assess the extent of China's rise, including both the current state of China's military power and the anticipated trajectory through 2035. More specifically, it evaluates:

- Chinese domestic political debates
- China's ability to project power
- The resources that China can rely on to sustain power projection and expand it

Hence Chapter Two, written by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in partnership with Taiwan's Institute for National Defense and Research (INDSR), examines the internal debates within the CCP on the uses of Chinese military capabilities for their immediate and more distant perceived security interests within and outside of the Western Pacific.

Next, Chapter Three assesses China's ability to project power outside of its own region, focusing on the Indian Ocean and adjacent waters. It compiles an inventory of China's conventional military capabilities, with a focus on those that can be used at the edges of the Western Pacific and beyond, including China's carrier strike groups (CSGs): its aircraft-carriers and systems such as fighter jets, surface support ships, and submarines; its missile arsenal; and command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities. It briefly touches on non-kinetic capabilities, like cyber capabilities and space-based assets. This chapter includes a comparison between China's capabilities and that of its main potential adversaries in the far seas, the United States and India, and its additional potential adversaries, Australia, Japan, the UK and France. It also traces how China has expanded these since 1996.

12 The Chinese government study was entitled “The Rise of Great Powers” [Daguo Yueqi]. It examined the causes of success for nine nations (Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, and the United States) to become great powers. Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein, “Studying History to Guide China's Rise as a Maritime Great Power,” *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 12, no. 3–4 (2010): 31–38.

13 “China Focus: President Xi Reviews Navy in South China Sea,” Xinhuanet, April 13, 2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/13/c\\_137106984.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/13/c_137106984.htm).

Chinese leaders themselves have sought to learn from the examples of Western imperialist powers and the United States as they consider how to project power outside their own region.

Chapter Four evaluates China's ability to sustain power projection outside of its own region and the means it has to expand its power projection capabilities. It takes stock of overseas bases and ports to which China has access, its ability to supply military forces abroad, its access to resources, its industrial capacity, its network of strategic partners, its role as an arms exporter, and its experience in deploying military forces abroad as well as its military cooperation and assistance. The focus of this chapter is the development of support structures in the 30 countries bordering the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters and the waters themselves, as this is the region in which China seeks to sustain power projection efforts.

Chapter Five provides a general assessment of China's rise as a military great power. It synthesizes the key findings of Chapter Two, Three and Four. It uses the theoretical framework presented in Chapter One to assess China's military upward rise for the period 1996-2035. In examining motivations and manifestations of China's military rise, it evaluates where China was (1996-2020), where it is now (2021) and where it is projected to be (2021-2035).

Finally, Chapter Six outlines the key security implications of China's military rise. These range from the risks associated with kinetic conflict in the near seas, to increasingly frequent hybrid operations, to a future People Liberation Army's (PLA) ability to project power in the far seas, to China's world-leading industrial resources and to China's expanding influence over third states. Based on these implications, Chapter Six provides recommendations for European policymakers that are designed to address the security consequences of China's military rise.

## Reader's guide

Chapter	Title	Main questions
1	How Great Powers Rise: Extra-regional Dynamics, Motives and Manifestations	What are the motivations that drive the military rise of great powers? What are the manifestations of the military rise of great powers? What is the extra-regional impact?
2	The PLA's Role under Xi's Core Interests in Great Rejuvenation: Global Power Beyond the Western Pacific	Who and what drives China's security policy? What are the regional and global implications of China's ambitions?
3	China Outside the Western Pacific: Military Capabilities for Power Projection	How has China expanded its capabilities to project power outside of its own region, first and foremost in the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters, between 1996 and 2021? Which factors may impede the further development of China's military capabilities?
4	China Outside the Western Pacific: Resources to Sustain Power Projection	How has China expanded its means to sustain power projection, for instance through overseas bases, port investments, infrastructure, alliances, arms transfers and operational experiences, outside of its own region? What means does China have to further expand its power projection capabilities?
5	An Assessment of China's Military Rise	How can China's rise as a military great power 1996 and 2021 be assessed? What will be its likely trajectory between now and 2035?
6	The Consequences and Implications for European Security	What are the direct and indirect consequences for European security of China's rise as a military great power? What are the policy implications of China's rise as a military great power for European foreign and security policies?

### Textbox 1: Reader's Guide.

# Chapter One.

# **How Great Powers Rise: Motives, Manifestations, Extra-regional Dynamics**

Lotje Boswinkel, Tim Sweijjs, Paul van Hooft

# Key Takeaways

- Historically, great powers have emerged through multifaceted and multi-decade trajectories that fuel competition with other states. They are responsible for the majority of interstate conflict, both between great powers and with lower-level powers.
- Great powers pursue military expansion to augment security, maintain access to or obtain resources, to satisfy domestic interest groups, and to bolster prestige. These drivers are not always rational from the perspective of outside observers.
- Small or middle powers tend to think of security in terms of territorial defense or extended defense; in contrast, great powers, by virtue of the outsize role they play in the system, are concerned with the global balance of power.
- Great power extra-regional influence consists of projection capabilities, developing and maintaining sound infrastructure, establishing bases, fostering alliances, transferring arms to other states, or engaging in military-to-military cooperation.

Great power competition has once again become the most important consideration for Western security policy.

Great power competition has once again become the most important consideration for Western security policy. The 2015 UK National Security Strategy warned of the “resurgence of state-based threats,” a 2016 German white paper underscored the “renaissance of traditional power politics,” in 2017 the French government expressed concern about “the emergence of intensified military competition between major powers,” and in 2018 the US National Defense Strategy left no doubt about the shift away from concern about the Middle East and Islamic extremism: “Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security.”<sup>14</sup> The behavior of a number of states are of concern for Western policymaker, including Russia. However, today the focus is on China.

Aiming to be a “world-class military” that is “ready to fight and win wars” by mid-century,<sup>15</sup> the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)’s modernization drive has borne fruit since it commenced under President Jiang Zemin in the 1990s. Transforming from a traditional, land-based power into a high-tech one able to compete in all domains, the PLA’s budget has over the past decade nearly doubled military spending, from \$137 to \$261 billion.<sup>16</sup> Qualitatively, it has developed an indigenous high-tech defense industry that produces advanced systems such as hypersonic and submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles, domestically-developed aircraft carriers, long-range stealth bombers and modern fighter jets.<sup>17</sup> It has become the world’s second-largest arms producer and the fifth largest exporter of military equipment.<sup>18</sup> This expansion is laying the foundation for China’s ability to project power beyond the First and Second Island Chains and move toward developing a blue-water navy.

As of yet, there is limited understanding of the specific motivations behind this profound expansion of China’s military capabilities. There is no consensus as to whether China’s military rise has been propelled by concerns about the large presence of US forces in the region, a desire to safeguard access to resources and supply lines, or domestic nationalist sentiment.

By providing a comparative historical analysis of the rise of great powers, this chapter lays the groundwork for the subsequent empirical chapters. It seeks to identify broader patterns in motives and manifestations when it comes to the deployment of military power outside the home regions of great powers. Though the rise of great powers has been amply documented

14 Van Manen, H., & Sweijjs. (2020). *Military Competition in Perspective: Trends in Major Powers’ Postures and Perceptions* (Strategic Monitor 2019-2020), <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/strategic-monitor-2019-2020/military-competition-in-perspective/>; ‘The 2016 German White Paper: Strategic Review and Way Ahead’ (German Federal Ministry of Defence, 2017), <http://issat.dcaf.ch/Learn/Resource-Library/Other-Documents/The-2016-German-White-Paper-Strategic-Review-and-Way-Ahead>; Jon Lunn and Eleanor Scarnell, ‘The 2015 UK National Security Strategy’ (House of Commons Library, 14 December 2015), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7431/>; Defence and National Security: Strategic Review 2017 (Paris, France: La Délégation à l’information et à la communication de la défense, 2017); ‘What Is the National Defense Strategy?’ (US Department of Defense, 2018), <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Features/Story/Article/1656414/what-is-the-national-defense-strategy/>.

15 Xinhua News Agency, “China Focus: “Be ready to win wars,” China’s Xi orders reshaped PLA,” August 1, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-08/01/c\\_136491455.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-08/01/c_136491455.htm)

16 SIPRI, “Military Expenditure by Country, in Constant (2018)” (SIPRI, 2020), <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932019%20in%20constant%20%282018%29%20USD.pdf>.

17 Justin Bronk, “Russian and Chinese Combat Air Trends: Current Capabilities and Future Threat Outlook,” Whitehall Reports (RUSI, October 30, 2020), [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/russian\\_and\\_chinese\\_combat\\_air\\_trends\\_whr\\_final\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/russian_and_chinese_combat_air_trends_whr_final_web_version.pdf); Ian Williams and Masao Dahlgren, “More Than Missiles: China Previews Its New Way of War,” CSIS Series (Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 2019); “What Do We Know so Far about China’s Second Aircraft Carrier?,” China Power, June 15, 2021, <http://chinapower.csis.org/china-aircraft-carrier-type-001a/>.

18 SIPRI, “New SIPRI Data Reveals Scale of Chinese Arms Industry” (SIPRI, January 27, 2020), <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/new-sipri-data-reveals-scale-chinese-arms-industry>; Pieter D. Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimova, and Siemon T. Wezeman, “Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020” (SIPRI, March 2021), [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/fs\\_2103\\_at\\_2020\\_v2.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/fs_2103_at_2020_v2.pdf).

in scholarly literature,<sup>19</sup> this chapter goes further by theorizing how a rising power's military apparatus and the maintenance of that apparatus can be understood in light of expeditionary capabilities deployed beyond its immediate region.<sup>20</sup>

## 1.1 Great powers, competition and conflict

Definitions of great power status tend to focus on military capabilities. One study of more than 300 wars in the period 1480-1964 shows that great powers were involved in approximately seventy percent.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, as a whole, the scholarship on great powers suggests that shifts in global and regional distributions of power increase the odds of conflict because of competition over leadership and power (See Table 3).<sup>22</sup> Graham Allison's work on the so-called Thucydides Trap facing China and the United States offers a case study of this phenomenon.<sup>23</sup> However, when it comes to the relationship between power transition and war, there is disagreement about causality and degree. While some studies suggest that there is a one in two chance of power transitions leading to war,<sup>24</sup> others have found the relationship to be less direct.<sup>25</sup>

Author(s)	Cases of power transition followed by the outbreak of a war	Timespan	How is power measured?
Organski & Kugler (1980)	5 out of 10; Odds of major wars when power parity is accompanied by a challenger overtaking a dominant nation	1860-1980	Gross National Power (GNP)
Thompson (1983)	4 out of 9; global wars/regional global power transition	1490-1945	Naval capability
Houweling and Siccama (1988)	8 out of 17; 'overtaking' major power dyads resulted in successive outbreak of war	1816-1975	Demographic and military variables, including iron and steel production, population, size of armed forces, energy use (coal production), urbanization levels
Graham Allison (2017)	12 out of 16;	1500- present	National power metrics plus subjective assessment
Lemke and Werner (1996)	4 out of 19; contender dyads	1820-1980	The number of military personnel and military expenditures
Richard Ned Lebow; Benjamin Valentino (2009)	0; Almost all major power transitions appear to be the result of war, not a cause of it	1648 to 2000	GDP x Total Population
Doran and Parsons (1980)	26 out of 77 instances of war initiation fall in the critical period (point of inflection)	1816-1975	Relative capabilities including GNP, territory, armed forces, military spending, and population; and per capita income, urbanization, and technological sophistication

Table 3: Do power transitions lead to war?

19 See e.g., Bobbitt, P. (2003). *The shield of Achilles: War, peace, and the course of history*. Anchor; Kennedy, P. (1989). *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict 1500-2000* (1st ed.). Random House.

20 On the stopping power of water and the geographic limitations of hegemonic aspirations see Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.

21 Quincy Wright, *A Study of War*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Jack S Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System: 1495-1975*, 1st ed. (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1983).

22 George Modelski, *Long Cycles in World Politics*, 1st ed. 1987 edition (Place of publication not identified: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987); A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

23 "Thucydides Trap," Harvard Kennedy School, <https://www.belfercenter.org/thucydides-trap/case-file>.

24 Organski and Kugler, *The War Ledger*; W.R. Thompson, "Succession Crises in the Global Political System: A Test of the Transition Model," in *Crisis in the World-System*, by A Bergesen, 1st ed. (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1983), 93-116; Henk Houweling and Jan G. Siccama, "Power Transitions as a Cause of War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 32, no. 1 (1988): 87-102, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002788032001004>.

25 See e.g. Doran and Wes Parsons "War and the Cycle of Relative Power," *The American Political Science Review* 74, no. 4 (1980): 947-65, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1954315>; Douglas Lemke and Suzanne Werner "Power Parity, Commitment to Change, and War," *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1996): 235-60, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600958>.

### 1.1.1 Hierarchy and role conception

In the international system, hierarchy offers a meaningful substitute for the sovereign authority we are familiar with within states. At its core, international hierarchy can be defined as an order in which states share an understanding of the prevailing rules, while accepting and respecting each other's roles in the order. Whereas an international system is characterized by multiple hierarchical relationships, a stable hierarchy is based upon a series of international regimes that are underpinned by the distribution of power.<sup>26</sup>

Shifts in the distribution of power in a system affect the foundations of an existing hierarchy, as expanding states would like a larger role in determining the rules set by the established power.<sup>27</sup> This revisionist behavior vis-à-vis the norms and rules of the existing order leads to friction with the status quo power. Rising states tend to be impatient with the speed at which recognition, status and responsibilities are yielded to them. In turn, dominant states are often reluctant to share power with newcomers.<sup>28</sup>

### 1.1.2 Military power

If the emerging power feels threatened and/or perceives a closing window of opportunity to carve out its position,<sup>29</sup> war may come to be seen as an expedient way to protect its growing number of (overseas) interests and accelerate its ascent.<sup>30</sup> For example, in the first half of the twentieth century, the rising powers Germany, Italy, and Japan all attacked the dominant nation or its allies before they reached parity with them.<sup>31</sup>

The temptation to wage war can be even stronger for the declining state, which sees its military advantages progressively wane. A preventive attack could be viewed as the last opportunity to turn the tables.<sup>32</sup> As Robert Gilpin writes, "when the choice ahead has appeared to be to decline or to fight, statesmen have most generally fought."<sup>33</sup> Robert Jervis argues that the spiral into overt conflict usually develops over a longer period of time amidst intensifying military competition.<sup>34</sup> This was the case with contested colonial holdings in the period prior to World War I, which is the most apt parallel with the contemporary Sino-American rivalry.

26 Stephen D. Krasner, "Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables," *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982): 185–205; see also Robert Owen Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2001).

27 Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 24, 34, 187.

28 Charles F. Doran, "Confronting the Principles of the Power Cycle: Changing Systems Structure, Expectations and War," in *Handbook of War Studies II*, by Manus I. Midlarsky, 1st ed. (The University Press of Michigan, 2000), 348, <http://slantchev.ucsd.edu/courses/pdf/doran-power-cycle.pdf>.

29 T. V. Paul, "Time Pressure and War Initiation: Some Linkages," *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 28, no. 2 (1995): 261–67.

30 Douglas Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Michael David Wallace, *War and Rank Among Nations*, 1st ed. (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1973).

31 A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 371.

32 Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict 1500–2000*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1989); Jack S. Levy, "Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War," *World Politics* 40, no. 1 (1987): 82–107, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010195>; Alan J. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954).

33 Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 191.

34 Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 62–76.

The temptation to wage war can be even stronger for the declining state, which sees its military advantages progressively wane.

## 1.2 Motives for extra-regional great power influence

Whether states strive for power as an end in itself, as a means to achieve security, or to impose ideas and ideologies, the development of military power is instrumental.<sup>35</sup> Rising powers find that their accumulating economic interests need to be protected by military means. With their own region secured, their attention shifts further afield.<sup>36</sup>

Great powers, as Levy puts it, “think of their interests as continental or global rather than local or regional.”<sup>37</sup> Whereas small or middle powers think of security in terms of territorial defense or extended defense, great powers, by virtue of the outsize role they play in the system, need to be concerned with the global balance of power. There are four principal motivations for great powers’ development of military capabilities and engagement in extra-regional military activities: security, access to resources, domestic commercial interests, and the quest for prestige and status at home (see Table 4).

### 1.2.1 Security

For scholars in the realist school, the projection of military power beyond a state’s borders and neighborhood is the ultimate way to guarantee survival of the state.<sup>38</sup> Great powers, however, tend to strive for regional or even extra-regional hegemony to balance against a rival hegemon and prevent it from becoming a threat.<sup>39</sup> Historical examples abound: in preventing Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany from achieving regional hegemony, the US projected military power outside its own region to protect its national security.

There are theoretical and empirical indications from the nuclear era that motivations to project power extra-regionally persist. Despite campaign promises to the contrary, the Trump administration continued to bear the cost of the US global forward-deployed presence, with a priority on maintaining strategic primacy in the Western Pacific.<sup>40</sup> Even the Biden administration, which has repudiated much of the foreign policy legacy of its predecessor, seeks “a favorable distribution of power to deter and prevent adversaries from directly threatening the United States and our allies, inhibiting access to the global commons, or dominating key regions.”<sup>41</sup>

### 1.2.2 Access to resources

Beyond an immediate quest for physical security, rising great powers find themselves increasingly dependent on the importation of resources. Seeking to protect the uninterrupted

35 Azar Gat, *The Causes of War and the Spread of Peace* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

36 Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict 1500-2000*.

37 Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System*, 16.

38 According to both classic and modern realist thinking. See, principally, Waltz (1959, p. 160).

39 Christopher Layne, “The ‘Poster Child for Offensive Realism’: America as a Global Hegemon,” *Security Studies* 12, no. 2 (2002): 120–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0963-640291906816>; John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 2001), 34.

40 “U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific,” USNI News, January 15, 2021, <https://news.usni.org/2021/01/15/u-s-strategic-framework-for-the-indo-pacific>.

41 The White House, “Interim National Security Strategic Guidance” (Washington D.C., March 3, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/03/interim-national-security-strategic-guidance/>.

Rising powers find that their accumulating economic interests need to be protected by military means.



flow of these resources, and maintaining access to export markets, is a natural goal for rising powers. The means employed to do this – besides diplomatic goodwill – include formal alliances (to protect clients from third powers); military-to-military cooperation and military aid (such as security agreements, basing, and arms transfers); or maintaining the presence of military forces.<sup>42</sup>

There are many historical examples of great powers pursuing expansionist policies in order to guarantee access to resources. When the industrial revolution spurred an ever-increasing demand for rubber, steel, oil, and food products, the incentives for the great powers of Europe to establish direct control over large swaths of territory grew correspondingly. Colonial powers, including Great Britain and the Netherlands, tightened their administrative control over occupied regions after a first period of hybrid private-state endeavors. In its bid for great power status, Imperial Japan rushed to ensure access to oil, rubber, and steel to fuel its burgeoning industrial expansion. It fought China in 1894–95 and Russia in 1904–05, expanded its presence in East Asia and eventually invaded Korea, China, French Indochina, and the Dutch East Indies. This culminated in the Pacific War with the US during World War II. In the wake of World War II, the United States discarded its previous unilateralist and relatively limited geostrategic ambitions in favor of a global military presence. This strategy was designed to protect its allies, secure access to resources in the Middle East, and guarantee the free flow of trade and capital across international borders.

### 1.2.3 Domestic pressure groups

Corporations eager to gain access to natural resources, low-cost labor, or (a monopoly on) export and investment markets can put pressure on their governments to establish direct or indirect control. While the logic of imperial expansion was first emphasized by Marxist scholars, other theorists have recognized the importance of domestic pressure groups.<sup>43</sup>

During the first modern phase of globalization in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, London City's financial elites played a significant role in promoting British imperial expansionism in Africa and Asia.<sup>44</sup> Scholars have highlighted the influence of domestic pressure groups, including arms manufacturers, in modern US foreign policy.<sup>45</sup>

Domestic influence is not limited to business elites. In Japan during the 1930s, the highly bureaucratized and fragmented state apparatus struggled to control the leadership of its armed forces, exemplified by the latter's decision to occupy Manchuria in 1931 without official approval.<sup>46</sup> Absent a firmly centralized authority, the military expanded "in all directions, exhausting Japan's limited resources and creating enemies everywhere."<sup>47</sup>

42 Rosemary A. Kelanic, "The Petroleum Paradox: Oil, Coercive Vulnerability, and Great Power Behavior," *Security Studies* 25, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 181–213, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2016.1171966>.

43 Jan Hogendorn and Anthony Brewer, "Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15, no. 3 (1982): 554, <https://doi.org/10.2307/218184>; Jack L. Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*, 2nd ed., Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

44 P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: 1688-2015*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015); E.H.H. Green, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Economic Policy, 1880-1914: The Debate Over Bimetallism and Protectionism," in *Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Imperialism: The New Debate on Empire* (Routledge, 1999), 44–67.

45 Shana Marshall, "The Defense Industry's Role in Militarizing US Foreign Policy," MERIP, June 15, 2020, <https://merip.org/2020/06/the-defense-industrys-role-in-militarizing-us-foreign-policy/>.

46 See e.g., Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1991).

47 James Fulcher, "The Bureaucratization of the State and the Rise of Japan," *The British Journal of Sociology* 39, no. 2 (1988): 239–40, <https://doi.org/10.2307/590782>.

Corporations eager to gain access to natural resources, low-cost labor, or (a monopoly on) export and investment markets can put pressure on their governments to establish direct or indirect control.

For rising powers, accruing status and prestige through expansionist policies can bolster domestic support.

### 1.2.4 Status and prestige

Finally, according to role theory, it is not just material power and interests that shape state behavior; another important factor is a state's conception of its role in the international arena.<sup>48</sup> For rising powers, accruing status and prestige through expansionist policies can bolster domestic support. Support can be increased by developing capabilities that policymakers can portray as befitting the status of a great power.<sup>49</sup> Naval nationalism is a good example of this phenomenon.<sup>50</sup> This includes France under Louis-Napoléon in the 1850s and 1860s, the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and Germany under Kaiser Wilhelm II in the early 1900s.<sup>51</sup> These policies can be viewed, at least in part, as having served the domestic political interests of policymakers.

The pursuit of prestige has also prompted aspiring great powers to expand territorially. French elites' quest for prestige fueled the conquest of Algiers in 1830. This impulse was intensified following France's humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, in 1871.<sup>52</sup> France's imperial policy in West-Africa focused on the expansion of territory, not expanding access to resources or profiting commercially.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Germany's colonization of Africa was spurred by a desire to secure its own "place in the sun," viewing such holdings as the key to obtaining great power status.<sup>54</sup>

Motivations	Description	(Historical) Example
<b>Security</b>	As great powers find their national security threatened, they invest in extra-regional military capabilities to prevent peer competitors from projecting extra-regional power	The US vis-à-vis Imperial Japan & Nazi Germany (1940s) and the Soviet Union (1945-1991)
<b>Resources</b>	(Extra-regional) power projection capabilities ensure that great powers can meet an ever-growing demand for resources (spurred by economic, demographic, and technological developments)	Imperial Japan (the late 19th and first half of 20th century); Germany (1930s and 1940s); the US in the Middle East (since the post Second World War era)
<b>Domestic pressure groups</b>	Pressured by domestic groups concerned with commercial or financial profits, states develop and deploy military power to exert control over foreign markets, labor, or resources	Britain's industrialists pushed for more aggressive expansion in Africa and Asia (late 1800s)
<b>Status &amp; Prestige</b>	A drive for prestige has prompted aspiring great powers to develop military capabilities, both as a symbol of power and as a tool to expand territorially	France's "prestige fleet" (second half of the 19th century); Germany's quest for colonies in Africa (late 1800s)

Table 4: Sources of military expansion.

- 48 Marijke Breuning, "Role Theory in Politics and International Relations," *The Oxford Handbook of Behavioral Political Science*, 2019, 23; K. J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1 September 1970): 233–309; Naomi Bailin Wish, "Foreign Policy Makers and Their National Role Conceptions," *International Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1 December 1980): 532–54.
- 49 Lilach Gilady, *The Price of Prestige: Conspicuous Waste in International Relations*, 1st ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226433349.001.0001>.
- 50 Robert S Ross, "Nationalism, Geopolitics, and Naval Expansionism from the Nineteenth Century to the Rise of China," *Naval War College Review* 71, no. 4 (2018): 10–44.
- 51 Ross, 12.
- 52 José de Sousa and Julie Lochard, "Trade and Colonial Status," *Journal of African Economies* 21, no. 3 (2012): 409–39, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jae/ejs001>.
- 53 Daniel Oto-Peralías and Diego Romero-Ávila, *Colonial Theories of Institutional Development: Towards a Model of Styles of Imperialism*, Contributions to Economics (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54127-3>.
- 54 Hugues Canuel, "From a Prestige Fleet to Jeune École: French Naval Policy and Strategy under the Second Empire and the Early Third Republic (1852–1914)," *Naval War College Review* 71, no. 1 (2018): 93–118.

## 1.3 Military manifestations of extra-regional great power influence

There are six aspects of the military dimension of extra-regional influence: the development of extra-regional power projection capabilities, the maintenance of sound infrastructure, the establishment of overseas and overland bases, the conclusion of formal and informal alliance relationships with other states within multilateral or bilateral frameworks, the transfer of arms and other military equipment, and the extension of military aid through various forms of military-to-military cooperation (see Table 5). These criteria have been developed based on an extensive review of the academic and policy literature related to the study of empires, military power, alliances, and interstate influence.

### 1.3.1 Extra-regional power projection capabilities

Extra-regional military power falls into two categories. Expeditionary military power can be defined as the “proven ability to deploy limited capabilities at strategic range.” Today, this applies to France, the UK, China, and Russia.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast, global military power refers to the ability to deploy capabilities at strategic range for extended periods of time. Historically, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands led the way in developing extra-regional naval capabilities, but they were overtaken after 1715 by the major expeditionary forces developed by Great Britain and, to a lesser extent, France.<sup>56</sup>

Today, only the US is considered a global military power, with its “ability to plan, deploy, sustain and fight at distance – and at scale – from the homeland across the land, sea, air and space domains and in the electromagnetic spectrum.”<sup>57</sup> US command of the maritime commons based upon its military preponderance is a cornerstone of its extra-regional influence.<sup>58</sup> The US long demanded its military be able to fight a protracted war in two theaters at the same time. However, in response to the shifting geopolitical landscape – especially China's military rise and the resurgence of Russia's military – the United States began to rethink this principle in 2010.<sup>59</sup>

### 1.3.2 Infrastructure

Sound infrastructure is crucial for the effective deployment of extra-regional military capabilities. For overland power projection, railways, pipelines, inland waterways, and ground supply routes, including bridges, constitute a military's Lines of Communication (LOC). LOCs can be defined as “all the land, water, and air routes that connect an operating military force with one or more bases of operations, and along which supplies and reinforcements move”.<sup>60</sup>

55 Bastian Giegerich, Nick Childs, and James Hackett, “Military Capability and International Status,” IISS, July 4, 2018, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2018/07/military-capability-and-international-status>.

56 William Hardy McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society Since A.D. 1000*, 1st ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 149.

57 Childs, “Military Capability and International Status.”

58 Barry R. Posen, “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony,” *International Security* 28, no. 1 (2003): 5–46, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228803322427965>.

59 Robert Farley, “Can the U.S. Military Still Fight a Two Front War and Win?,” *The National Interest*, January 22, 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/can-us-military-still-fight-two-front-war-and-win-176799>.

60 NATO, “AJP-3, Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations,” February 2019, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/797323/doctrine\\_nato\\_conduct\\_of\\_ops\\_ajp\\_3.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/797323/doctrine_nato_conduct_of_ops_ajp_3.pdf).

Expeditionary military power can be defined as the “proven ability to deploy limited capabilities at strategic range.”

Without secure LOCs, timely repositioning, resupply, and reinforcement of military forces becomes challenging.

Maintaining sound infrastructure also helps great powers safeguard their economic interests. The British Empire's ambitious railroad plan in India, for instance, promoted economic interests and the transmission of culture.<sup>61</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Russia and the United States constructed railroads to exert control over their newly acquired lands.<sup>62</sup> Recent efforts to increase military mobility by NATO and the EU have highlighted the importance of LOCs.<sup>63</sup> Whereas sea lines of communication (SLOCs) connect overseas military assets, space and cyberinfrastructure, including satellites and ground-based space infrastructure, have increasingly become central in the conduct of extra-regional operations.<sup>64</sup>

### 1.3.3 Overseas and overland bases

In an age when distances are shortened by longer-range weapons and communication technologies, geography – and hence overseas and overland bases – still matters.<sup>65</sup> Forward-based military personnel and equipment allow for swifter responses to crises; secure trade, investment, and access to resources; and a reaffirmation of alliance commitments.<sup>66</sup> A great power's security commitment to a distant ally is not always evident, both to the state that needs to be deterred and the ally that may serve an important role in return for a security guarantee. Stationing troops on an ally's territory serves as a "tripwire," making it more likely that the great power will come to the aid of its ally. Indeed, the stationing of US troops in Europe during the Cold War made it much more credible, both to the USSR and Western European allies, that the US would stick to its collective defense promise.<sup>67</sup> Bases also serve as a way to increase control over allies' foreign and security policies. For example, if military bases are used to launch attacks, as was the case with Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War of 1990-1991, the host country is automatically involved in the conflict.

Bases have long served great power interests. From the late sixteenth century onwards, bases became crucial in the Spanish, Portuguese, British, French, and Dutch overseas empire-building endeavors. Garrisons not only served British direct rule over India, but also enabled expeditions beyond India's borders. The Falkland Islands were vital for naval trade with South America; Hong Kong served as a base for the Royal Navy's China Station; and Egypt, Aden, Cape Town, Ceylon, and Singapore all formed critical nodes in Britain's naval routes.<sup>68</sup>

61 Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 182.

62 David B. Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415-1980*, 1st ed. (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000).

63 Curtis M. Scaparrotti and Colleen B. Bell, "Moving Out: A Comprehensive Assessment of European Military Mobility" (Atlantic Council, April 22, 2020), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/moving-out-a-comprehensive-assessment-of-european-military-mobility/>; European Commission, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: On the Action Plan on Military Mobility" (European Commission, March 28, 2018), [https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/2018-military\\_mobility\\_action\\_plan.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/2018-military_mobility_action_plan.pdf).

64 Linda Dawson, *War in Space: The Science and Technology Behind Our Next Theater of Conflict*, 1st ed. (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2019).

65 Patrick Porter, *The Global Village Myth: Distance, War, and the Limits of Power* (Georgetown University Press, 2015); Paul van Hoof, "All-In or All-Out: Why Insularity Pushes and Pulls American Grand Strategy to Extremes," *Security Studies* 29, no. 4 (August 7, 2020): 701-29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1811461>.

66 Stacie L. Pettyjohn, *U.S. Global Defense Posture, 1783/2011*, 1st ed. (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2012).

67 Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963*, vol. 79 (Princeton University Press, 1999), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv10qqznh>.

68 Avner Offer, "The British Empire, 1870-1914: A Waste of Money?," *The Economic History Review* 46, no. 2 (1993): 215-38, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2598015>.

Access to bases became arguably even more crucial as steam-powered vessels replaced sailing ships. They provided fuel and supplies to the enlarged navy supporting the merchant fleet and guaranteed open lines of communication between the United States and new markets.

### 1.3.4 Alliances

Alliances are typically defined as formal, written agreements between recognized states that delineate each party's obligations for a specified period of time.<sup>69</sup> Great powers have sought alliances to enhance security by counterbalancing dangerous shifts in power capabilities, competing against other states, boosting their status and prestige, or securing the position of domestic elites.<sup>70</sup> They serve to contain potentially revisionist states outside the alliance, as well as within.<sup>71</sup> Military alliances are either formed in response to a particular threat, or based on a shared sense of history or common values.<sup>72</sup> While focused on security, military alliances are often linked to economic agreements and hence play a role in bolstering the economic influence of great powers.<sup>73</sup>

In the earliest days of empire-building, European powers sought alliances with local elites in the periphery to safeguard trade relations and compete against other great powers. In the late sixteenth century, for instance, the Dutch shipped guns to the coastal areas of the Gold Coast in Africa and sought alliances in an attempt to break the Portuguese monopoly. Access to trade or resources constitutes a powerful rationale for great powers to engage in military alliances, as demonstrated by the US-Saudi Alliance. This alliance was first formed in 1945 when Saudi Arabia guaranteed a steady supply of oil to world markets in exchange for long-term security guarantees.

### 1.3.5 Arms transfers

Less costly than overseas bases, the transfer of arms is an alternative means to enhance the military capabilities of other states, tilting local or regional balances of power in favor of the recipient state while avoiding the risk of entrapment that come with an overseas presence or formal alliances.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, arms transfers can also enhance interoperability in joint military operations. Arms transfers also create dependencies between the exporting and importing state.<sup>75</sup> This gives great powers additional influence over a recipient state's foreign

69 J. David Singer and Melvin Small, "Formal Alliances, 1815–1939: A Quantitative Description," *Journal of Peace Research* 3, no. 1 (March 1, 1966): 1–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336600300101>.

70 Jack S. Levy, "Alliance Formation and War Behavior: An Analysis of the Great Powers, 1495–1975," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 25, no. 4 (1981): 581–613; Edward V. Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power: A Case History of Theory and Practice of One of the Great Concepts of European Statecraft*, 1st ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliance*, 1st ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt32b5fc>.

71 Philip Pomper, "The History and Theory of Empires," *History and Theory* 44, no. 4 (2005): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2005.00340.x>; George Liska, *Nations in Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968).

72 Jeremy Ghez, "Alliances in the 21st Century: Implications for the US-European Partnership," Occasional Papers (RAND Corporation, 2011), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional\\_papers/OP340.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP340.html).

73 Jonathan D Moyer et al., "Appendix to: Interdependence and Power in a Globalized World" (Denver: Josef Korbel School of International Studies, 2017).

74 Keren Yarhi-Milo, Alexander Lanoszka, and Zack Cooper, "To Arm or to Ally? The Patron's Dilemma and the Strategic Logic of Arms Transfers and Alliances," *International Security* 41, no. 2 (2016): 90–139, [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00250](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00250); Tongfi Kim, "Why Alliances Entangle but Seldom Entrap States," *Security Studies* 20, no. 3 (2011): 350–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2011.599201>.

75 Moyer et al., "Appendix to: Interdependence and Power in a Globalized World"; T. V. Paul, "Influence Through Arms Transfers: Lessons from the U.S.–Pakistani Relationship," *Asian Survey* 32, no. 12 (1992): 1078–92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645039>.

While focused on security, military alliances are often linked to economic agreements and hence play a role in bolstering the economic influence of great powers.

policy, though some have argued that this dependency works in both directions.<sup>76</sup> In addition to these strategic calculations, motivations for great powers to engage in arms transfers include commercial interests, domestic political pressures, or a combination of the various motives.<sup>77</sup> Finally, arms transfers can be status-related, as they signal a great power's level of technological sophistication and military strength.<sup>78</sup>

Arms transfers have long served the interests of rising great powers. For instance, during the Eighty Years War (1568-1648) the arms trade boosted the economic rise of the Netherlands; the arms trade accounted for an estimated five percent of Dutch GDP during the seventeenth century.<sup>79</sup> However, arms transfers only reached their heyday during the period of expansion in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, spurred by great power competition and the industrial revolution.<sup>80</sup> Another historical example of a rising great power spreading its influence via arms transfers is the Soviet Union's sales to the Middle East during the Cold War.<sup>81</sup>

### 1.3.6 Operational experience; military cooperation and assistance

Operational experience; military cooperation and assistance arrangements vary considerably in nature and include joint military exercises, education and training, the transfer of knowledge and intelligence sharing, senior-level meetings, defense industry cooperation, arms control efforts, and the provision of military equipment and financial aid to buy arms.<sup>82</sup> Military cooperation serves to establish and maintain spheres of influence, can be aimed at deterring or counterbalancing adversaries, strengthens alliances, and forges dependencies. After the Cold War, military cooperation has also been used to engage with potential adversaries, to promote liberal democracy and good governance – for instance, through security sector reform (SSR) – and to contribute to peacekeeping operations.<sup>83</sup>

76 David Kinsella, "Arms Transfer Dependence and Foreign Policy Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 35, no. 1 (January 1998): 7–23, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343398035001002>; Christian Catrina, *Arms Transfers and Dependence* (UNIDIR, 1988); Patricia L. Sullivan, Brock F. Tessman, and Xiaojun Li, "US Military Aid and Recipient State Cooperation: US Military Aid and Recipient State Cooperation," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7, no. 3 (2011): 275–94, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2011.00138.x>.

77 Lawrence Freedman, "British Foreign Policy to 1985. IV: Britain and the Arms Trade," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 54, no. 3 (1978): 377–92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2616147>; Robert H. Trice, *Interest Groups and the Foreign Policy Process: U.S. Policy in the Middle East* (Sage Publications, 1976); Edward A. Kolodziej, "France and the Arms Trade," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 56, no. 1 (1980): 54–72, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2615719>.

78 Jennifer L. Erickson, *Dangerous Trade: Arms Exports, Human Rights, and International Reputation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.7312/eric17096>.

79 Hans Vogel, "Arms Production and Exports in the Dutch Republic, 1600-1650," in *Exercise of Arms: Warfare in the Netherlands, 1568-1648*, ed. Marco van der Hoeven (BRILL, 1997).

80 Keith Krause, "The Political Economy of the International Arms Transfer System: The Diffusion of Military Technique Via Arms Transfers," *International Journal* 45, no. 3 (1990): 687–722, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40202695>.

81 Alexander J. Bennett, "Arms Transfer as an Instrument of Soviet Policy in the Middle East," *Middle East Journal* 39, no. 4 (1985): 747.

82 Lech Drab, "Defence Diplomacy – an Important Tool for the Implementation of Foreign Policy and Security of the State," *Security and Defence Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (2018): 57–71, <https://doi.org/doi:10.5604/01.3001.0012.5152>; Kenneth Allen, Phillip C Saunders, and John Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," *China Strategic Perspectives* (Institute for National Strategic Studies, November 2014), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-11.pdf>.

83 Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, *Reshaping Defence Diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance*, 1st ed., Adelphi Paper 365 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Despite controversy concerning its effects, military cooperation and assistance offered by great powers have been eagerly sought by other states.<sup>84</sup> In 2019 alone, the US offered foreign military training in 137 countries and provided security assistance to 147.<sup>85</sup> Although these relationships are usually between a powerful and a less powerful country, Russian-Chinese military cooperation has made headlines in the past half-decade.<sup>86</sup> European imperial powers also used military cooperation, both in relations among each other and vis-à-vis their colonies. Defense attachés were dispatched, local officers invited to attend military academies, foreign troops enlisted, and military equipment shared. In China, the British Army took command of the Ever Victorious Army, trained Chinese troops in Tianjin, Shanghai, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Guangzhou in the 1860s, and deployed technicians to arsenals and shipyards in modernization programs. While important to protect British commercial interests, military assistance also gave the British government leverage over Chinese affairs.<sup>87</sup>

Manifestations	Description	Historical Examples
<b>Extra-regional power projection capabilities</b>	Capabilities that allow for power projection beyond territorial and regional defense, e.g., blue water navy, long range air or sea transport	US command of the maritime commons (since 1945 on a global scale); Britain and France (present); Netherlands (until 1949)
<b>Infrastructure</b>	LOCs including railways, pipelines, inland waterways, and ground supply routes, as well as SLOCs and space and cyberspace infrastructure	Japan's construction of the Burma Railway (1941-1944)
<b>Overseas and overland bases</b>	Bases, troops, and military equipment on the territory outside the home country	The British Royal Navy's command of maritime bases along key SLOCs and chokepoints including Scapa Flow, Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, Suez, Simon's Town (Cape of Good Hope), Aden, Diego Garcia, Singapore (during the heyday of the British Empire)
<b>Alliances, (formal &amp; informal)</b>	Formalized security relationships with allies, in the form of a defense-pact, a non-aggression pact, or an entente	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1949-present); Franco-Russian Alliance prior to and during World War I
<b>Arms transfers</b>	Weapon exports to other states (allies, friendly states, and sometimes also rivals and enemies)	The Soviet Union's military equipment trade (mid-1950s to late 1980s)
<b>Military cooperation and assistance</b>	Joint military exercises; education and training; the transfer of knowledge and intelligence sharing; senior-level meetings; defense industry cooperation; arms control efforts; assistance in buying weapons	US Army's School of the Americas (SOA) training Latin American militaries (1940-1980s)

Table 5: Manifestations of military power projection.

84 Johnathan Helton, "Military Aid: Financing Foreign Conflict," *The Strategy Bridge*, August 19, 2019, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2019/8/19/military-aid-financing-foreign-conflict>.

85 Center for International Policy, "Security Assistance Monitor: Security Assistance Database," Center for International Policy, 2019, <https://securityassistance.org/security-sector-assistance/>; Center for International Policy, "Security Assistance Monitor: Foreign Military Training," Center for International Policy, 2019, <https://securityassistance.org/foreign-military-training/>.

86 See for instance Michael Kofman, "The Emperors League: Understanding Sino-Russian Defense Cooperation," *War on the Rocks*, 6 August 2020, <http://warontherocks.com/2020/08/the-emperors-league-understanding-sino-russian-defense-cooperation/>.

87 Britten Dean, "British Informal Empire: The Case of China," *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 14, no. 1 (March 1976): 64–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662047608447250>.

## 1.4 Lessons from the past, insights for the future

Great powers do not rise overnight, but through multifaceted and multi-decade trajectories that fuel competition between states. This process can, in turn, generate conflict. Two sets of lessons can be drawn from the historical review in this chapter.

First, rising great powers are incentivized by multiple, sometimes overlapping motivations to develop military capabilities to project power both within and outside of their region. The most important among these drivers are security, resources, domestic pressure groups, and status and prestige. Extra-regional power projection capabilities and activities help protect national security to deter peer competitors from outside interference. It also ensures supply of an ever-growing demand for the resources required for uninterrupted growth. Domestic interest groups, encouraged by a rising power's growth, may pressure the state to develop and deploy military power to ensure access to and exert control over foreign markets, labor, and resources. Finally, the accumulation of power may spur the desire for status and offer a way to solve the perceived disjunction between accumulated power and international recognition.

Second, the rise of great powers manifests itself along multiple dimensions outside of their own region. These include extra-regional power projection capabilities, infrastructure, overseas and overland bases, alliance relationships, arms transfers, and various forms of military-to-military cooperation. Importantly, this investment in extra-regional power projection fuels competition and conflict, both among great powers and among smaller powers, and occurs both at high and low intensity. The nineteenth century competition of European empires for military bases; great powers' arms sales to regional and smaller powers; and the arms races that follow investments in extra-regional military capabilities are illustrative of this phenomenon.

The taxonomy developed in this chapter offers a first step toward assessing, in a dispassionate manner, the political and strategic implications of China's rise. The taxonomy of motivations can serve as a framework for examining the various perspectives in domestic Chinese foreign and security policy discourses, as the following chapter will do.

Great powers do not rise overnight, but through multifaceted and multi-decade trajectories that fuel competition between states.

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# Chapter Two.

# **The PLA's Role under Xi's Core Interests in Great Rejuvenation: Global Power Beyond the Western Pacific**

**Michael Shoebridge (ASPI) and Ming Shih Shen (INDSR)**

# Key Takeaways

- China is following a typical trajectory for rising great powers in terms of its increasingly willingness and ability to project power outside its region.
- China's objective of being able to project power beyond the Western Pacific is closely linked to the domestic political agenda of President Xi Jinping and the security concerns of the Chinese Communist Party, both of which will remain powerful influences on Chinese strategic thinking for the foreseeable future.
- China increasingly treats the South China Sea as its own territory; this will be a drain on Chinese defense resources, but it will also provide a foundation for projecting power outside the region.
- Chinese strategic planning assumes that China needs to project power beyond the Western Pacific to protect its economic, political, and military interests in the Indian Ocean, Middle East, and Africa.
- Chinese policymakers believe that what they view as a declining West, led by the United States, will not be able to prevent China from projecting power in the South China Sea and beyond the Western Pacific already by 2027, at which point they believe China will possess a world-class military.

This chapter analyzes the core interests that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has outlined in recent decades and which the CCP has been acting to secure since Xi has taken power. It examines the focal points of bureaucratic debates between the Party and the Chinese government as well as the role that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) may play in upholding the Party's articulated – and growing – 'core interests'.

It assesses that the CCP's *Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese People* is Beijing's national goal, with military power being a means to this end. This national goal of power and influence is not limited to the Western Pacific, although success in that geographic area is a foundation for China to project broader global power that supports its economic and political engagement and enmeshment across the Indian Ocean, into Africa and the Middle East. In addition to these geographic areas, Beijing's plans are creating a PLA with increased power projection and presence in space, cyber space, and the electromagnetic spectrum, areas unconstrained by geography which provide options for exerting Chinese power globally – to 'safeguard China's security interests' and to 'safeguard China's overseas interests'. The PLA power projection is also likely to have uses 'safeguarding' its 'overseas Chinese' diaspora who are citizens of other states during times of crisis or natural disaster. The intended main use of the PLA is as a background element providing intimidatory power, helping advance and protect Beijing's political and economic interests as part of broadening China's comprehensive national power.

The chapter assesses the priorities among Xi, the Party, bureaucrats and the PLA of these 'core interests' as well as the expectation flowing from these for the PLA's role and its functions. Methodologically, this article uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), focusing its observation on historical materials such as CCP's official documents, periodicals and newspapers related to the core interests in the name of the *Great Rejuvenation of Chinese People*. This article also scrutinizes the differences between interpretations from the outside world and those from inside China. The goal of this in-depth comparative analysis is to identify the root cause of the differences in policy directions and implementation within China.

Ever since Xi Jinping became the paramount leader of the PRC, there have been a series of nationalist campaigns in place. Discourses such as the over-arching *Chinese Dream*, along with the accompanying *Strong Military Dream* and *World Dream*, as well as the *Great Rejuvenation of Chinese People*, sow the complementary, interlocking themes. The themes denote Xi's deliberate intent to reassert Chinese status and power regionally and globally, wrapped in language intended to convey China as a benign power internationally. His international strategy has been accompanied by the so-called *Three-step Strategy* domestically. In his speech delivered in the 19<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress, CCP, in 2017, Xi publicized his blueprint to move Chinese families into the middle-class by 2020, achieve an initial stage of socialist modernization by 2035 and transform into a modernized leading power in comprehensive strength and with international influence by 2050. All these have also been inked into the *Constitution of the Communist Party of China*, which stipulates that the state government must continue with its modernization effort as well as its three historic missions—national unification, world peace and co-development with a view to successfully achieving the *Two-Hundred years Goals* and *Chinese Dream*, paving the way for *Rejuvenation of Chinese People*.<sup>88</sup>

The so-called Two-Hundred Years Goals refer to a hundred years of building a communist party and a hundred years of building a state government. They are signposts of Beijing in pursuit of near, medium, and long-range targets. The near-term timeframe was 1 July 2021,

88 "Authorized to publish: Constitution of the Communist Party of China," (授權發佈：中國共產黨章程), *Xinhua* (新華網), October 28, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/28/c\\_1121870794.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/28/c_1121870794.htm).

The CCP's *Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese People* is Beijing's national goal, with military power being a means to this end.

## The importance of China becoming the leading power in the world, including militarily, is obvious and is profoundly consistent with the Rejuvenation of Chinese People.

celebrated as the CCP's centenary, the medium-term timeframe is 2035, and the longer-term is 2049 – the centenary of the CCP seizing power.

Directed by the *Three-step Strategy*, the Chinese defense establishment and military sector also set their goals over these three timeframes, nested within the national goals and targets. That said, the PLA planned to achieve a 'rudimentary level of mechanization' and have a modernized version of military theories, organizations, personnel and weaponry by 2020. It expects to cross the threshold to a force with modernized defense capabilities and reformed military affairs by 2035, seeking to identify itself as a first-rate armed service among the leading powers of the world.<sup>89</sup> What deserves attention here is that the issues of territorial sovereignty were not mentioned in the *Three-step Strategy* when it came to the pragmatic part of military defense, nor a timetable to address the issues like Taiwan, despite such issues being highlighted in the *Strong Military Dream*.

Similarly, there was no hardline policy declared in Xi's speeches made in the 19<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress. Xi instead pointed out the need to refresh foreign relations among leading powers and seek a 'community of common destiny'. However, as we have seen with Xi's recent speech in Tiananmen Square on the occasion of the CCP's centenary celebrations, there is considerable fervor and stridency about Chinese power and being in a position where that power can be used to make others act in China's interests and reverse the sense of historical grievance the Party has stoked so strongly over recent years. The importance of China becoming the leading power in the world, including militarily, is obvious and is profoundly consistent with the *Rejuvenation of Chinese People*.

Despite the benign tone expressed above, the October 2020 *Communiqué of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China* (CCCPC) unveiled a forthright new ambition that, in addition to the broader national goals for 2035 and 2049, 2027 would be the year to reach the 'centennial goal of army building'. In this *Communiqué*, the CCCPC proposed:

*...dutifully following Xi Jinping's thoughts on strengthening the army, strictly implementing the new era military strategy and policy guidelines, firmly proclaiming Party's absolute control of the People's Army, and insisting on political building and streamlined capabilities of the army via reforms, science and technologies, quality personnel and law-based governance. In order to ensure the achievement of the goal of this century-old army by 2027, we should accelerate the integration of mechanization, informationization and intellectualization, and should strengthen the training for readiness, thereby enhancing strategic capabilities with a view to protecting national sovereignty, social interests and economic development.*<sup>90</sup>

89 Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era---Political Report at the CPC's 19th National Congress," (決勝全面建成小康社會 奪取新時代中國特色社會主義偉大勝利—在中國共產黨第十九次全國代表大會上的報告), *Xinhua* (新華社), October 27, 2017, [http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content\\_5234876.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm).

90 Shi Guanghui (石光輝), ed., "Communiqué of 5th Plenary Session of 19th CPC Central Committee" (中國共產黨第十九屆中央委員會第五次全體會議公報), *Communist Party Member Network* (共產黨員網), October 29, 2020, <http://www.12371.cn/2020/10/29/ART11603964233795881.shtml>.

The CCP has long been determined to strengthen military training and improving defense capabilities in the name of ensuring sovereignty, given its primary focus on the confrontation for power with the United States. However, to declare 2027 as the milestone for the hundred years goal of the PLA came as a bolt from the blue. One rationale for this new shorter-term goal is that it is a benchmark to be able to settle the so-called Taiwan issue. We can find the argument in the PLA Daily.<sup>91</sup> This assessment might be amongst the factors leading Admiral Phil Davidson, then Commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command, to remark that China might solve the Taiwan issue within a six-year period.<sup>92</sup>

Chen Daoqin, a scholar at Fudan University in China, believes China will no longer care about the US factor, notably as it relates to Taiwan, when the Chinese military reaches the world-class level in 2027. And a PLA that is no longer in fear of the US military will enable Chinese power projection well beyond the Western Pacific, into the Indian Ocean and as part of Chinese power and influence globally – most likely with early focuses in Africa and the Middle East, given growing Chinese economic and commercial interests there.

2027 will also be the 21st Party Congress of the Communist Party of China. Xi Jinping might use this occasion to strengthen his authority and strive for continuing power.<sup>93</sup>

The above-mentioned goals are broad ones and so they can be used as guidelines to understand Beijing's grand strategy. Achieving these goals involves political, diplomatic, economic and military aspects, as well as concrete and feasible policies being brought forth containing these elements.

Turning to grand strategy, ends, ways and means have to be balanced (see Figure 1).<sup>94</sup> Although Beijing is a one-party totalitarian regime with a history of strategic thought and action quite different to that of the United States, Beijing's judgment on strategic interests is neither unpragmatic nor irrational and can be related to the strategic elements set out in the US framework. If there is a difference from the US formulation of strategy, its essence is that China's 'national interests' are essentially the interests of the Party (Party security is state security). And it is the Party's highest leader or the group with actual power and a vested interest in maintaining it, that determines the priority of national interests. As Xi reminded his fellow Party members and the world on 1 July, it is the Party who controls the gun.

While we might be able to glean the broad aspects of policy and strategy set out above from documentation and speeches, the CCP's strategic decision-making is closed to the outside world. Many of the CCP's important strategic decisions remain puzzling to most analysts and there are still debates about the exact impetus of the CCP's decision-making chain.

91 People's Liberation Army Daily Commentor(解放軍報評論員), "Accurately Grasp The New Development Stage: Earnestly Studying and Implementing Chairman Xi's Important Speech at the Provincial and Ministerial Seminars(準確把握新發展階段：論認真學習貫徹習主席在省部級專題研討班上重要講話)," *People's Liberation Army Daily*, January 23, 2021, [http://www.mod.gov.cn/jmsd/2021-01/13/content\\_4876988.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/jmsd/2021-01/13/content_4876988.htm).

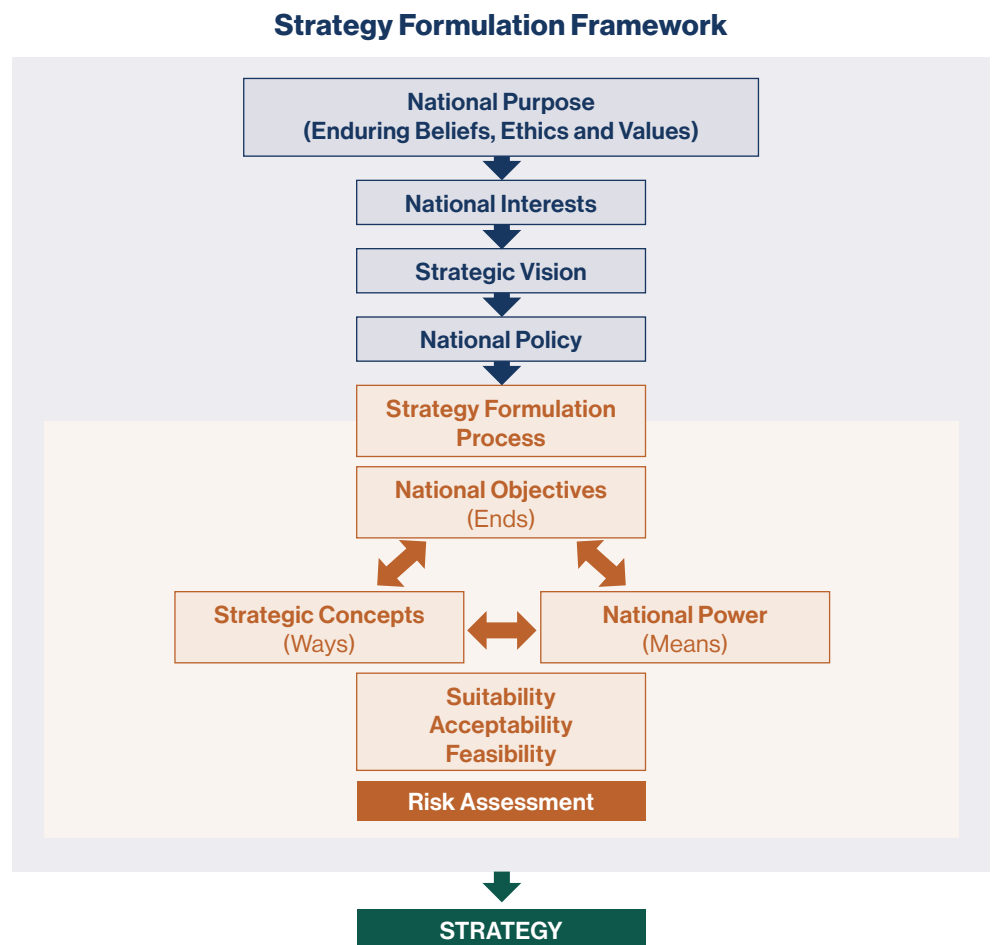
92 Mallory Shelbourne, "Davidson: China Could Try to Take Control of Taiwan in 'Next Six Years'," *USNI News*, March 9, 2021, <https://news.usni.org/2021/03/09/davidson-china-could-try-to-take-control-of-taiwan-in-next-six-years>.

93 Chen Miaoling(陳妙玲), "A Mainland Scholar Saying That The Timetable for Reuniting Taiwan The Set by Achieving the 2027 Goal of Strong Military(內地學者稱2027年達強軍目標或為武統台灣時間表)," *RTHK*, October 29, 2020, <https://news.rthk.hk/rthk/ch/component/k2/1557357-20201029.htm>.

94 J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr., ed., "Guidelines for Strategy Formulation," *The U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues Volume II: National Security Policy and Strategy* (Carlisle, PA : Army War College, 2010), 397.

Many of the CCP's important strategic decisions remain puzzling to most analysts and there are still debates about the exact impetus of the CCP's decision-making chain.

Figure 1: Strategy Formulation Framework.



Xi's assertive foreign policy requires a positive attitude and firm support from the military—and Xi has taken clear steps to consolidate his control over the PLA to ensure they develop and operate in ways that support his vision of China's global power.

In order to consolidate his authoritarian rule at the center, Xi has been clearly conscious of the need to strengthen the Party's tradition that the key to survival is its command of the gun. On the one hand, we have seen Xi uphold "anti-corruption, integrity, and law-based governance of the army" to purge the darker sides of the PLA while also advancing his personnel choices. On the other hand, the ideology of "all subject to the command of the party" is being re-instilled in the PLA. The modus operandi of 'the military first and the party second' is clearly reflective of Xi's conscious effort of firmly controlling military power, which also proved effective in precluding other competitors from sharing the military means. Even if the newly appointed General Secretary still had opponents that controlled the State Council, they could not enjoy the separate power status within the Party when Xi was backed by the loyalty from the military. This modus operandi, mentioned above, partially explains why Xi could stabilize the regime so soon after coming into the office and why he found no objection to extend his term of office by amending the Constitution.

Under the leadership of Chairman Xi, Central Military Commission (CMC) and the PLA today are aware that the *Great Rejuvenation of Chinese People* is the national goal and—let us suppose at this moment—ready to fulfil the phased outcomes cited in the *Three-step Strategy* noted above. The following discussion takes this as the foundational directions for what Xi expects from the PLA.

## 2.1 Core interests: the PLA's goals nested within the Party's

*China's National Defense in the New Era* published in 2019 was taken as the defense white paper that reflected Xi's strategic guidance on the development of Chinese defense. In the risk-assessment part of the national security, this report emphasized that China was challenged by myriad and complex security threats. Among them, the primary one came from the trends and activities of Taiwanese independence. It identified Taiwan independence activities as the biggest obstacle to China's 'peaceful reunification'. In addition, the vibrant activities of what the document describes as separatist forces, such as East Turkistan, also posed a threat to China's national security and social stability. Viewed in this light, a ground reality is that the CCP regards the Taiwan, Xinjiang and Tibet issues as its core interests. Meanwhile, this report also identified the US, NATO, Russia, and the European Union as international strategic competitors, which the PLA must have capabilities to engage with, and deter from acting against China's interests well beyond the South China Sea, the Taiwan Straits, and the Western Pacific. Combined with a demonstrated ability to project power at long range, PLA power growth is an essential element in China's grand narrative of its rise to global dominance against a declining West, centered on the US.

Although joint exercises had been held between China and Russia for several times on the record, Beijing still has its precautions against Russia.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, China and Russia have very close relations in military science and technology cooperation and military exchanges and cooperation. China sends troops to participate Russia's annual large-scale military exercises and Red Square parade. China-Russia joint naval exercises are regularly implemented, sometimes even inviting Iran to join, just like the anti-American alliance. In June 2021, on the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Sino-Russian Treaty of Good-Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation (中俄睦邻友好合作条约), Xi Jinping and Putin issued a statement to extend the treaty and deepen the strategic partnership between the two countries.<sup>96</sup> As the two countries face pressure from the United States and Western countries, the two countries have room for strategic cooperation to contain the United States from both the Indo-Pacific and Eastern Europe. However, to avoid becoming overt, direct enemies of the United States and so intensify competition for geostrategic interests, the two countries will not form a formal military alliance.

In addition, this white paper took note of China's homeland security threats that included the current border disputes (the Sino-Indian territorial issues), sovereignty over the islets (China-Japan Diaoyutai islands) and a different interpretation of maritime delimitation (sovereignty in the South China Sea). The 2019 defense white paper also mentioned that the aircraft and ships 'of some country' frequently spied on China's border areas and repeatedly broke into what China claims as its territorial waters as well as adjacent airspaces of islands and reefs. It complained that, despite 'some country' (the US) being outside this region, its frequent spying activities had jeopardized China's national security. Non-traditional security also entered the

95 The PRC MND (中國國防部), *China's Defensive National Defense Policy in the New Era* (新時代的中國國防) (Beijing: The PRC State Council Information Office, 2019), <http://www.scio.gov.cn/ztk/dtzt/39912/41132/41134/Document/1660318/1660318.htm>.

96 China believes that Russia will not cooperate with the United States against China jointly. Under the strong pressure from the United States, Russia will not help China rashly. See Lia (莉雅), "Putin and Xi Jinping Met Online to Extend Cooperation Treaty between Russia and China" (普京与习近平视频会晤 俄中延长合作条约), June 29, 2021, <https://www.voachinese.com/a/Putin-xi-jinping-friendship-treaty-Biden-20210628/5946342.html>.

agenda in this white paper. It did call attention to some increasingly significant threats such as terrorism, piracy, electromagnetic spectrum, space and cybersecurity, as well as natural disasters and recurrent epidemics.<sup>97</sup>

To drive the point home, the main objectives of Beijing's national defense policy cited by the *China's National Defense in the New Era*, 2019, can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. to deter and resist aggression;
2. to safeguard national political security (the Party's security in power), the people's security and social stability;
3. to oppose and contain "Taiwan independence";
4. to crack down on proponents of separatist movements such as "Tibet independence" and the creation of "East Turkistan";
5. to safeguard national sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security;
6. to safeguard China's maritime rights and interests;
7. to safeguard China's security interests in outer space, electromagnetic space and cyber-space;
8. to safeguard China's overseas interests; and
9. to support the sustainable development of the country.<sup>98</sup>

Both Xi's public talks and official reports on many key occasions have shown that his expectations of the military are mainly focused on military capabilities (see Table 6). Strongly driven by the call to achieve Xi's *Strong Military Dream*, the PLA are constantly reminded of the need to comply with "strategic guidance for China's national defense in the new era". They are directed to respond to the Party's command, repeatedly strengthen training, earnestly hasten the reforms, effectively improve the combat skills, and readily position themselves to be the strategic support for the *Great Rejuvenation of Chinese People*. Xi's line of thought is straightforward: in order to achieve the national strategic goal of the *Great Rejuvenation of Chinese People*, the military must accelerate its readiness to safeguard the 'core interests' of this nation.

Two main themes underpinned this line of thought. First, Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan could be crisis spots, where Beijing will inevitably face interference from the West. Second, the progress towards the *Great Rejuvenation of Chinese People* could be countered with checks from the West. All these uncertainties called for the need to reduce the gap in the PLA's military capabilities when compared with those of the US and other leading powers.

According to the timetable declared by the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress, CCP, the PLA after achieving its rudimentary level of mechanization in 2020, is committed to the next stage goal, which would be a modernized version of military theories, organizations, personnel, and weaponry by 2035. Based on these claims, the PLA at this present period could be inferred that, although it may be able to execute mechanized warfare, it could be still incompetent in the conduct of digital or informationized warfare.

97 The PRC MND (中國國防部), *China's Defensive National Defense Policy in the New Era*(新時代的中國國防) (Beijing: The PRC State Council Information Office, 2019), <http://www.scio.gov.cn/ztk/dtzt/39912/41132/41134/Document/1660318/1660318.htm>.

98 The PRC MND (中國國防部), *China's Defensive National Defense Policy in the New Era*(新時代的中國國防) (Beijing: The PRC State Council Information Office, 2019), <http://www.scio.gov.cn/ztk/dtzt/39912/41132/41134/Document/1660318/1660318.htm>.



## Xi's thinking on the PLA has hardened over his tenure, with a greater sense of the PLA being used in the 'struggle' against opposing powers.

Even if General Secretary Xi renews his term to extend his tenure, it remains less likely that he can extend his term to 2035. That said, there are still fifteen years until then, during which period uncertainties will abound. Xi almost certainly has the view that without him as the driving force, the PLA may go astray and be unable to achieve the publicly declared goal in the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress, CCP. This partially explains why on March 9, 2021, Xi publicized the *Three-step Strategy* for the PLA in 2027, setting a new short-term goal. In the name of marking the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the army coming into being, it actually helped the military build-up strategy sound more sensible and gave the PLA a clear message about priorities and urgency.<sup>99</sup>

Xi's thinking on the PLA has hardened over his tenure, with a greater sense of the PLA being used in the 'struggle' against opposing powers. His confidence in China's growing power and influence and assertion of a parallel deterioration in US and broader Western power is also evident over this period.

No	Date	Occasion	Context
1	2015.9.3	Commemoration of 70th Anniversary of Victory of Chinese People's Resistance against Japanese Aggression and World Anti-Fascist War	In the interest of peace, China will remain committed to peaceful development. We Chinese love peace. No matter how much stronger it may become, China will never seek hegemony or expansion. It will never inflict its past suffering on any other nation...All its officers, men and women must bear in mind their responsibility of serving the people whole-heartedly, faithfully fulfill the sacred duty of protecting the nation's security and people's well-being and carry out the noble mission of upholding world peace. <sup>100</sup>
2	2017.7.30	Zhurihe Base military parade speech on the 90th anniversary of the founding of the army	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unswervingly adhere to the fundamental principles and system of the party's absolute leadership over the army;</li> <li>2. Unswervingly adhere to the fundamental purpose of serving the people wholeheartedly;</li> <li>3. Unswervingly adhere to the only fundamental standard of combat effectiveness, focus on preparing for war, and forging a force of elite soldiers called upon, can fight when they come, and wins when they come;</li> <li>4. Unswervingly adhere to politically building the army, reforming the army, rejuvenating the army with science and technology, and governing the army according to law.<sup>101</sup></li> </ol>
3	2017.10.18	Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era--- Xi's Political Report at the CCP's 19th National Congress	<p>Upholding absolute Party leadership over the people's armed forces.</p> <p>Building people's forces that obey the Party's command, can fight and win, and maintain excellent conduct is strategically important to achieving the two centenary goals and national rejuvenation. To realize the Party's goal of building a powerful military in the new era, we must fully implement the fundamental principles and systems of Party leadership over the military and see that Party strategy on strengthening military capabilities for the new era guides work to build national defense and the armed forces. We must continue to enhance the political loyalty of the armed forces, strengthen them through reform and technology, and run them in accordance with law. We must place greater focus on combat, encourage innovation, build systems, increase efficacy and efficiency, and further military-civilian integration.</p> <p>We will adapt to the trend of a new global military revolution and to national security needs; we will upgrade our military capabilities, and see that, by the year 2020, mechanization is basically achieved, IT application has come a long way, and strategic capabilities have seen a big improvement. In step with our country's modernization process, we will modernize our military across the board in terms of theory, organizational structure, service personnel, and weaponry. We will make it our mission to see that by 2035, the modernization of our national defense and our forces is basically completed; and that by the 2050 our people's armed forces have been fully transformed into world-class forces.<sup>102</sup></p>

99 Brian Hart, Bonnie S. Glaser, Matthew P. Funaiolo, "China's 2027 Goal Marks the PLA's Centennial, Not an Expedited Military Modernization," *China Brief*, Vol. 21, No. 6, March 26, 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-2027-goal-marks-the-plas-centennial-not-an-expedited-military-modernization/>.

100 "Commemoration of 70th Anniversary of Victory of Chinese People's Resistance against Japanese Aggression and World Anti-Fascist War," (習近平在紀念中國人民抗日戰爭暨世界反法西斯戰爭勝利70周年大會上的講話), *Xinhua*(新華社), September 3, 2015, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-09/03/c\\_1116456504.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-09/03/c_1116456504.htm).

101 Wang Shibin (王士彬), "Xi Jinping Inspected the Troops at Zhurihe Base and Delivered an Important Speech," (習近平在朱日和訓練基地檢閱部隊並發表重要講話), *Xinhua*(新華社), July 30, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-07/30/c\\_1121403719.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-07/30/c_1121403719.htm).

102 Xi Jinping(習近平), "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era--- The Political Report at the CPC's 19th National Congress," (決勝全面建成小康社會 奪取新時代中國特色社會主義偉大勝利—在中國共產黨第十九次全國代表大會上的報告), *Xinhua*(新華社), October 27, 2017, [http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content\\_5234876.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm).

No	Date	Occasion	Context
4	2019.1.2	Working Together to Realize Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation and Advance China's Peaceful Reunification — Speech at the Meeting Marking the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan	The principles of “peaceful reunification” and “one country, two systems” are the best approach to realizing national reunification. We are willing to strive for the prospect of peaceful reunification with the utmost sincerity and best efforts. We make no promise to renounce the use of force and reserve the option of taking all necessary means. This does not target compatriots in Taiwan, but the interference of external forces and the very small number of “Taiwan independence” separatists and their activities. <sup>103</sup>
5	2019.7.24	China's Defensive National Defense Policy in the New Era	Adhere to the path of peaceful development, adhere to a defensive national defense policy, never seek hegemony, never expand, never seek spheres of influence, and insist on an active defense military strategy <sup>104</sup>
6	2019.10.1	Speech by General Secretary Xi at the Reception in Celebration of the 70th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China	We will continue to fully and faithfully implement the principles of “One Country, Two Systems”, “Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong”, “Macao people administering Macao” and a high degree of autonomy...Promote the peaceful development of cross-strait relations, unite all Chinese people, and continue to strive for the complete reunification of the motherland. The Chinese People's Liberation Army and the People's Armed Police Forces (PAP) must always preserve the nature, purpose, and true qualities of the People's Army, resolutely safeguard national sovereignty, security, and development interests, and resolutely safeguard world peace. <sup>105</sup>
7	2020.1.2	Central Military Commission (CMC) Mobilization Order for the Training of the Armed Forces	Guided by Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, implement Xi Jinping's thinking on strengthening the army, implement the military strategy of the new era, strengthen the thinking of serving as soldiers, leading soldiers in war, and training soldiers to fight wars, keep an eye on strong opponents, and focus on actual military training. Maintain a high level of alertness to ensure the mobilization in no time and readiness in all time, and victory in all battle. <sup>106</sup>
8	2020.10.13	Xi Jinping Inspects the PLA Marine Corps	The Marine Corps is an elite amphibious combat force and shoulders important responsibilities in safeguarding national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, safeguarding national maritime rights and interests, and safeguarding national overseas interests. Grasp the characteristics and laws of the Marine Corps construction management and combat application, accelerate the transformation and construction, accelerate the improvement of combat capabilities, and forge a strong force that combines multiple capabilities, rapid response, and all-domain facilitation. <sup>107</sup>
9	2020.10.29	Communique of 5th Plenary Session of 19th CCP Central Committee	Our development environment is facing profound and complex changes and we are opening a window of strategic opportunities. The world is undergoing major changes unseen in a century. Peace and development are still the themes of the times. The international environment is becoming increasingly complex and instability and uncertainty have increased significantly. Speed up the modernization of national defense and the armed forces, and realize the unity of a prosperous country and a strong army. Implement Xi Jinping's Thought on strengthening the army, implement the military strategy of the new era, adhere to the party's absolute leadership over the People's Army, adhere to the political building of the army, reform and strengthening of the army, science and technology strengthening the army, talent strengthening the army, governing the army according to law, and accelerating the integration of mechanization, informatization, and intelligence. Comprehensively strengthen military training and preparations, improve the strategic ability to defend national sovereignty, security, and development interests, and ensure that the centennial goal of the struggle can be achieved by 2027. <sup>108</sup>

103 “Working Together to Realize Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation and Advance China's Peaceful Reunification----Speech at the Meeting Marking the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan,” (「告臺灣同胞書」發表40周年紀念會在京隆重舉行習近平出席紀念會並發表重要講話), *Xinhua* (新華社), January 2, 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-01/02/c\\_1123937723.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-01/02/c_1123937723.htm).

104 The PRC MND (中國國防部), *China's Defensive National Defense Policy in the New Era* (新時代的中國國防) (Beijing: The PRC State Council Information Office, 2019), <http://www.scio.gov.cn/ztk/dtzt/39912/41132/41134/Document/1660318/1660318.htm>.

105 “Commemoration of 70th Anniversary of Victory of Chinese People's Resistance against Japanese Aggression and World Anti-Fascist War,” (習近平在紀念中國人民抗日戰爭暨世界反法西斯戰爭勝利70周年大會上的講話), *Xinhua* (新華社), September 3, 2015, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-09/03/c\\_1116456504.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-09/03/c_1116456504.htm).

106 Zhang Shimeng (張詩夢), “CMC Mobilization Order for the Training of the Armed Forces,” (中央軍委2020年開訓動員令) *Xinhua* (新華社), January 2, 2020, [http://www.mod.gov.cn/big5/shouye/2020-01/02/content\\_4857907.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/big5/shouye/2020-01/02/content_4857907.htm).

107 Wang Shibin (王士彬), “Xi Jinping Inspects the PLA Marine Corps,” (習近平視察海軍陸戰隊並發表重要講話), *People's Liberation Army Daily* (解放軍報), October 13, 2020, [http://www.mod.gov.cn/big5/shouye/2020-10/13/content\\_4872647.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/big5/shouye/2020-10/13/content_4872647.htm).

108 Shi Guanghui (石光輝) ed., “Communique of 5th Plenary Session of 19th CPC Central Committee,” (中國共產黨第十九屆中央委員會第五次全體會議公報), *Communist Party Member Network* (共產黨員網), October 29, 2020, <http://www.12371.cn/2020/10/29/ART11603964233795881.shtml>.

No	Date	Occasion	Context
10	2020.11.26	Xi's Speech at the military training meeting of the Central Military Commission	New changes have taken place in our country's security environment, the situation of military struggles, our military's missions, modern warfare, our military's organizational form, national defense and military modernization goals and tasks, and our military's military training has entered a new stage of comprehensive reform and overall improvement. It is necessary to grasp the new era, new situation, new tasks, and new requirements, increase the awareness of danger, strengthen mission responsibility, and accelerate the transformation and upgrading of military training. <sup>109</sup>
11	2021.1.4	Xi Jinping's Central Military Commission Order No. 1 of 2021 to start training the mobilized Forces	Deepen actual combat training, joint combat training, enhance training by science and technology, and form the training according to law; resolutely complete the mission and tasks assigned by the party and the people in the new era, and greet the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China with outstanding achievements. <sup>110</sup>
12	2021.3.9	Xi Jinping's Speech at plenary meeting of delegation of PLA and Armed Police Force.	The 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP is the beginning of the 14th Five-Year Plan and the beginning of a new journey of building a modern socialist country in an all-around way. It is also the year when the New Three Steps of modernization of national defense and the military started. The security situation is unstable and uncertain. The entire military must coordinate the construction and preparation of the relationship, be prepared to respond to various complex and difficult situations at any time, and resolutely safeguard the national sovereignty, security, and development interests, to provide strong support for the comprehensive construction of a modern socialist country. <sup>111</sup>
13	2021.2.7	Xi Jinping inspected a certain division of the Air Force on the eve of the Spring Festival	In modern wars, the control of information has become the key to victory in the war. It is necessary to accelerate the development of advanced equipment, intensify the training of professional talents, strengthen targeted confrontation training, and promote the accelerated improvement of new-quality combat effectiveness.  For the army, it is vital to do a good job in military training. It is necessary to implement the spirit of the Military Training Meeting of the Central Military Commission, combine with the actual conditions of the Air Force, pay close attention to actual combat military training, and continuously improve the training level and the ability to win. <sup>112</sup>
14	2021.3.27	Xi inspects the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Mobile Corps of the Armed Police Force in Fujian	Carry out the Party's idea of strengthening the army in the new era, implement the military strategic policy of the new era, do a good job of normalizing epidemic prevention and control, comprehensively strengthen military preparations, comprehensively improve the ability to perform missions and tasks, strive to create a new situation in army building, and welcome the establishment of the CCP with excellent results 100th anniversary. <sup>113</sup>
15	2021.7.1	Xi Jinping's Speech at a Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China	We Chinese are a people who uphold justice and are not intimidated by threats of force. As a nation, we have a strong sense of pride and confidence. We have never bullied, oppressed, or subjugated the people of any other country, and we never will. By the same token, we will never allow any foreign force to bully, oppress, or subjugate us. Anyone who would attempt to do so will find themselves end up with heads cracked and bloodshed before the great wall of steel forged by the flesh and blood from over 1.4 billion Chinese people. <sup>114</sup>

Table 6: The Main Points of Xi Jinping's Speeches to the PLA on the National Security and Defense Strategy.

109 "Xi Jinping Emphasizing at the Military Training Meeting of the Central Military Commission to Comprehensively Strengthen Actual Combat Military Training, Comprehensively Improve the Training Level and the Ability to Win," 〈习近平在中央军委军事训练会议上强调全面加强实战化军事训练全面提高训练水平和打赢能力〉 *People's Daily*, 《人民日报》, November 26, 2020, [http://www.mod.gov.cn/big5/topnews/2020-11/25/content\\_4874581.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/big5/topnews/2020-11/25/content_4874581.htm).

110 "Xi Jinping Signed the Central Military Commission Order No. 1 of 2021 to Issue a Training Mobilization Order to the Entire Army," 〈习近平签署中央军委2021年1号命令向全军发布开训动员令〉, *Xinhua*, 《新华社》 January 4, 2021, [http://www.mod.gov.cn/big5/shouye/2021-01/04/content\\_4876468.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/big5/shouye/2021-01/04/content_4876468.htm).

111 "Xi Jinping Emphasized the Achievement of a Good Start to the Construction of National Defense and the Armed Forces during the 14th Five-Year Plan Period When Attending the Plenary Meeting of the Delegation of the People's Liberation Army and the Armed Police Forces. (习近平在出席解放军和武警部队代表团全体会议时强调 实现十四五时期国防和军队建设良好开局以优异成绩迎接中国共产党建党100周年), *Xinhua*(新华网), March 9, 2021, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-03/09/c\\_1127191057.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-03/09/c_1127191057.htm).

112 "To All the Officers and Soldiers of the People's Liberation Army, the Armed Police Force, the Civilian Personnel, the Militia and the Reserve Personnel of the People's Liberation Army" (向全体人民解放军指战员武警部队官兵军队文职人员民兵预备役人员致以新春祝福), *People's Daily*(人民日报), February 7, 2021, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0207/c64094-32024555.html>.

113 "When Inspecting the Second Mobile Corps of the Armed Police Force, Xi Jinping Emphasized the Comprehensive Strengthening of Troop Training and Preparation, and the Comprehensive Improvement of the Ability to Perform Missions and Tasks," (习近平在视察武警第二机动总队时强调全面加强练兵备战 全面提高履行使命任务能力), *People's Daily*(人民日报), March 27, 2021, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0327/c1024-32062504.html>.

114 "Xi Jinping's Speech at a Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China," (习近平庆祝中国共产党成立100周年大会上的讲话), *Xinhuanet*(新华网), July 2, 2021, <https://language.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202107/02/WS60de676ca310efatbd65f4fe.html>.

### 2.1.1 Different interpretation of the core interests in the Party

Despite waves of frustration experienced, Xi has eventually succeeded in concentrating military power in his capacity as Chairman, CMC, enacting his policy at the state level in the name of national security. On the one hand, Xi is a standing member and General Secretary in the Political Bureau. On the other hand, as the Chairman, CMC, Xi commands the military police, to which maritime-police units are attached. In practical terms, all the directives and commands in terms of military strategy and operation are dictated by Xi at this moment. Other standing members in charge of economics, propaganda and united fronts in the Political Bureau are answerable to Xi. Their assignments are not so much relevant to national defense nor military issues, let alone foreign policy towards the US. This partially explains why there are few significant discords on core interests when it comes to the above agenda.

### 2.1.2 The First Island Chain as a foundation for broader power projection

Beijing used to emphasize the need to “shelving the differences and seeking joint development” on the issue of sovereignty in the South China Sea, where neighboring countries were urged to respect *Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, (DOC)*. Judging from Beijing's increasingly assertive behavior, Beijing nowadays seems to take the South China Sea as a domestic sea with multi-purpose military bases strengthened by long-range runways, air defense positions, airports, and anti-ship missiles. The entire South China Sea somehow will be within a reachable range of Chinese power projection and become a quasi-Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) controlled by PLA naval and air forces. The scale of power projection and control this requires will be an abiding consumer of PLA resources, but also a foundation for PLA power projection beyond its ‘first island chain’.

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## 2.2 Priorities beyond the Western Pacific and First Island Chain

### 2.2.1 Security analysis on the Sino-Indian border.

The historical dispute between India and China has involved periodic skirmishes on the eastern, middle, and western section along the borderlines. Recent records include the one on the western section at Ladakh in 2014, another near the border with Bhutan in 2017, and another again in Ladakh in 2020. Although there were not severe casualties, they caused tremendous impact on Sino-Indian relations as the result of tension on the borders. In *China's National Defense in the New Era*, published in 2019, only the US, EU, and Russia were mentioned in the “international security” chapter. Even when discussing security issues in the Asia Pacific, the defense white paper only mentioned it with the wording that the general situation of South Asia was stable except for occasional Indian-Pakistan conflicts. It did not mention the Doklam standoff happening in 2017,<sup>115</sup> nor the intractable border dispute between India and China. In fact, after India withdrew the autonomous status of Ladakh and Kashmir and placed them directly under a central state, New Delhi needs to give more realist concern and provide Ladakh more securities from further molestation.

115 The PRC MND (中國國防部), *China's Defensive National Defense Policy in the New Era* (新時代的中國國防) (Beijing: The PRC State Council Information Office, 2019), <http://www.scio.gov.cn/ztk/dtzt/39912/41132/41134/Document/1660318/1660318.htm>.

The year 2014 witnessed border conflicts in Ladakh. Subsequent skirmishes were frequent in the area, despite the fact that they were kept at a low intensity without escalation. Since then, to maintain the status quo, the two sides have been improving infrastructure and logistical arrangements, readjusting their force deployments and pre-positioning advanced fighters and supplies. They are keen to prevent unexpected moves from the other side, given the fact that both publicly express their intention to retake lost territories. In April 2018, General Secretary Xi and Prime Minister Modi held non-official dialogue in Wuhan city, China. Perhaps predictably, General Secretary Xi reiterated his line about building a 'new type of international relations' that insist on non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect, equal status and upholding justice.<sup>116</sup> This set of ideas does not appear to be affecting PLA preparations and deployments on the India-China border, however.

If we use the substance of 'core interest' as a metric to compare border issues between India and China with those across the Strait, in the East China Sea and South China Sea, we may arrive at a tentative conclusion that resolving the India-China border does not constitute itself as a core interest, nor an issue that attracts the same level of priority and resourcing. Nevertheless, the risk of conflict and escalation is real. On the one hand, India claims that Aksai Chin near Ladakh is part of Indian territory. On the other hand, China asserts that the region of South Tibet, called Arunachal Pradesh on the Indian side, belongs to China. The disputed borders extend more than 130,000 square kilometers.

Given that the international strategic environment is unfavorable to China, and territorial sovereignty on the Sino-Indian borders is not of any urgency, the priority for the PLA to resolve the disputed border by force is low. However, China's Wolf Warrior Diplomacy and strong demands that India should respect the "One China Principle," along with the impact of COVID-19 and border conflicts, has aroused indignation among the Indian people and reinforced Indian government determination to have effective defense capabilities available in the disputed border regions. Even so, these developments are not the main prerequisites for the outbreak of the Sino-Indian border war. No matter how powerful the military is, the use of force to resolve border issues comes with the highest risk and has no guarantee of victory.

In terms of strategic intent, India hopes to ensure the Line of Actual Control (LAC) without attempting to seize more highlands or territories. While maintaining the stability of the border, both sides restrain the conflict. Judging from the combat preparations and military balance of China and India, in the unlikely event of a misfire or accident, neither country seems assured to gain an absolute advantage. A protracted war in the mountains is likely to absorb both sides military power and be inconclusive.<sup>117</sup> In such a conflict, China is in isolation, and even Russia may not be on China's side. India's strategic cooperation with the United States, Japan, Australia, and other countries based on its strategic interests is actually accumulating combat advantages and strengthening its own bargaining power in handling the Sino-Indian border.

After the military reform, the number of Chinese military forces around the border has decreased, but they are part of broader PLA modernization and are also more familiar with joint operations than the Indian forces. India has a large border force, but it is not as powerful as China's maneuverability and firepower. India is strengthening the formation and training of

116 "Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Modi Held an Informal Meeting in Wuhan," (習近平同印度總理莫迪在武漢舉行非正式會晤), *People's Daily*(人民網), April 29, 2018, <http://politics.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2018/0429/c1024-29957632.html>.

117 Lai Yizhong(賴怡忠), "The Impact of the Indo-China Border Conflict on the Indo-Pacific Situation," (印中邊界衝突對印太情勢的影響), *Voicetank*(想想論壇), June 23, 2020, <https://www.voicetank.org/single-post/2020/06/23/062301>.

India is strengthening the formation and training of synthetic battle groups but at present cannot keep up with China and the United States.

synthetic battle groups but at present cannot keep up with China and the United States. This makes India likely to adopt traditional methods of war of attrition on the border to hold back China and seek US assistance. If a conflict occurred that China did win quickly, not only would this make the Sino-Indian border even more difficult to resolve, it would also reduce China's perceived power in resolving the Taiwan and South China Sea issues.

### 2.2.2 The Indian Ocean

Beyond the India-China land border, China has a growing interest and growing capabilities to advance those interests in the Indian Ocean. China started counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden in 2008 and started sending Chinese warships to the Indian Ocean, similar to long-distance navigation to expand the size and capabilities of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) for developing into a blue water navy. In the national defense white paper issued by China, the Indian Ocean is mainly related to China's dispatch of escort fleets to the Gulf of Aden and the waters of Somalia and cooperation with other countries in escort according to United Nations resolutions. Moreover, there are also Joint exercises of the Chinese navy and the Pakistani navy in the Indian Ocean.<sup>118</sup> Obviously, combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden is a non-traditional security task. Without overseas military bases, humanitarian aid motivations can be used to call at ports in countries along the route for supply, such as Gwadar Port in Pakistan and Chittagong Port in Bangladesh.

### 2.2.3 Broader maritime power goals

China has already proposed the goal of becoming a maritime power. The North Sea Fleet headed north, just crossing the Arctic into the Atlantic Ocean; the East China Sea Fleet crossed the first island chain into the Western Pacific but was blocked by the US and Australian navies, and its development was restricted; the South China Sea Fleet headed south across the Strait of Malacca or Indonesia and entered the Indian Ocean. As the northward route is not yet mature, and the United States and Australia restrict the eastward route to the Pacific, the Indian Ocean will become the pillar of China's maritime strategy. It will become the focus of China's long-range projection capabilities in the future.

For China to expand the PLAN to become an ocean-going navy, it must hold overseas military bases. Now that China has already established its first overseas military base in Djibouti, it will move to established military bases, or 'strategic support bases', in the east, north, and west of the Indian Ocean. This will enable the PLAN to carry out long-range force projection here, threaten India's rear and economic lifeline from the sea and protect Chinese economic interests in Africa and the Middle East.

### 2.2.4 National Interests – a PLA to protect overseas Chinese and Chinese economic interests in times of tension, disaster, and crisis

After China's economic reform (reform and opening-up), overseas trade has been developed through overseas corporate mergers, acquisitions, and foreign direct investment (FDI), in addition to export-oriented development. Since then, the number of PRC expatriates overseas ('overseas Chinese') has been rising due to creating an emigrant population who follows outbound Chinese companies to engage in trade or State Own Enterprises (SOEs) projects.

118 Zhao Gancheng (趙干城), "The Indian Ocean: Motivations for Re-Defining China's Maritime Strategy," (印度洋：中國海洋戰略再定義的動因), *South Asian Studies* (南亞研究), Vol.1 2013, 24-35.

China has already proposed the goal of becoming a maritime power.

In the past, China was unable to defend the interests of overseas Chinese. When turmoil occurred in a foreign country, China had to arrange civil aircraft, ships, and vehicles to evacuate the expatriates (See Table 7). When the Solomon Islands had a military coup in June 2000, it was Australia to assist China in evacuation with their naval vessels. It was not until the 2011 Jasmine Revolution in Libya that China used heavy transport aircraft and warships to execute the evacuation for the first time. The two vessels had been reassigned this mission from their duty of combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden at the time.

During the 2015 Yemen Civil War, China again dispatched two naval vessels originally in charge of combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden to carry out evacuation missions and assisted in the evacuation of 225 foreign nationals. Judging from the evacuation areas in the last two decades, most of them are concentrated in the Middle East and Africa. The objects of protection mainly focus on construction employees sent by Chinese SOEs. Their work involves infrastructure construction related to minerals, petroleum, and traditional industries.

Although these overseas industries have not affected China's performance in economic development profoundly, should Beijing emphasize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and claim China a great power there will be more and more evacuation operations with heavy transport aircraft and warships.

No.	Year	Country	Region	Reason for Evacuation	Vehicle	No. Evacuated
1	1965	Indonesia	Southeast Asia	anti-Chinese unrest	ferry	60,000
2	2003	Liberia	Africa	turmoil	automobile	36
3	2006	Tonga	Oceania	turmoil	civil aircraft	193
4	2006	Lebanon	Middle East	Israel-Lebanon conflict	automobile	167
5	2006	East Timor	Southeast Asia	turmoil	civil aircraft	243
6	2006	The Solomon Islands	Oceania	turmoil	civil aircraft	310
7	2008	Chad	Africa	turmoil	automobile	411
8	2008	Thailand	Southeast Asia	anti-governmental protest	civil aircraft	3,346
9	2009	Haiti	Caribbean Sea	earthquakes	civil aircraft	48
10	2010	Kyrgyzstan	Central Asia	turmoil	civil aircraft	1,299
11	2011	Egypt	Africa	turmoil	civil aircraft	2,500
12	2011	Libya	Africa	civil war (Jasmine Revolution)	military & civil aircraft; naval vessel & ferry (utilizing military for evacuation the first time)	36,580
13	2014	Iraq	Middle East	Islamic State	ferry	10,000
14	2015	Yemen	Middle East	civil war	two naval vessels to Gulf of Aden	449 PRC citizens; 225 non-PRC

Table 7: Chinese Overseas Evacuation Operations.

In general, military capabilities are mainly considered to achieve military missions and contribute to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) purposes once the country or the people are in an emergency. Because of foreign aid and construction cooperation, China has signed many major projects with various countries. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has sent many engineering companies to take charge of infrastructure construction

in the local states. When a major disturbance occurs in the region or country, an evacuation operation must be carried out. After evacuating overseas Chinese from Libya in 2011 and Yemen in 2015, China has testified its capabilities to evacuate overseas nationals with heavy transport aircraft and warships.

So far, the number of IL-76 transport aircraft that China has purchased from Russia is insufficient to evacuation demands. In the Libyan evacuation operation, only four military aircraft were dispatched to perform twelve voyage missions in cooperation with civil aircraft. Although China does not have an overseas airbase, out of the humanitarian assistance, its military aircraft can land at the airports of countries along the route or fly directly to the destination by air refueling.

Regarding naval vessels, whether it is Libya or Yemen's evacuation of overseas Chinese, China uses warships that perform the anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden to conduct evacuation missions. In fact, anti-piracy success by multinational forces has reduced the looting behavior of pirates in the Gulf of Aden, and the demand for sending warships to escort has decreased as a result. However, China can use the mission in the Gulf of Aden to train its naval ships and talents for long-distance voyages and maritime operations. Therefore, the Chinese navy will not stop its six-month-term escort missions. In addition to combating piracy, these warships can also execute long-sea navigation training, military diplomacy and international joint training. If there is a temporary need to implement evacuation, large auxiliaries or amphibious landing ships can also be deployed from the South Sea Fleet to the Middle East or Africa to perform rescue missions.

Based on the overseas deployment model of the US Marine Corps, China used the latest 075 amphibious assault ship to carry the Chinese version of the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). The deployment of these forces overseas serves multiple purposes, including performing exercises, patrolling missions, joint exercises with China's regional allies, international rescue missions and combat readiness. The People's Liberation Army 075 amphibious assault ships can carry 900 PLA marines along with their equipment and weapons - on top of landing craft, hovercraft, and amphibious assault vehicles - all while carrying 30 helicopters. China can use these strategic resources to strengthen security cooperation with other neighboring countries under the nominal claim of carrying out maritime rescue and humanitarian rescue joint exercises at the same time.<sup>119</sup>

In addition to heavy transport aircraft and naval vessels, relay bases or overseas military bases are also significant. Beijing recognizes that Djibouti is the only overseas military base that China has. However, those important infrastructures and oil pipelines built under China's BRI need to be maintained by security personnel. If a major change occurs, a force is required.

In the future, China will expand the establishment of overseas military bases, or set up military facilities in those ports under de facto control by China - such as Colombo or Hambantota in Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean, Gwadar Port in Pakistan, and Chittagong in Bangladesh - so that warships can be berthed for logistics and supply.<sup>120</sup> Such naval bases may also appear in those Pacific island states in Oceanian adjacent to Australia and become China's forward base for power projection the southern Pacific Ocean.

119 Grant Newsham, "Chinese Marines May Be Operating in IOR in Five Years," *Sunday Guardian*, April 18, 2020 <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/news/chinese-marines-may-operating-ior-five-years>.

120 Можете да прочетете текста и на български, "The Chinese String of Pearls or How Beijing is Conquering the Sea," *De Re Militari*, August 26, 2019, <https://drjournal.org/2019/08/26/the-chinese-string-of-pearls-or-how-beijing-is-conquering-the-sea/>.

So far, the number of IL-76 transport aircraft that China has purchased from Russia is insufficient to evacuation demands.



In addition, China has also sent troops to Tajikistan since 2016 to prevent Xinjiang Uyghurs from entering Afghanistan. In 2019, a joint counter-terrorism center was established as a permanent facility and actually turned into a small military base on the ground.<sup>121</sup> Given the US and NATO force withdrawals from Afghanistan, China may strengthen its military facilities in this region, although the likely level of internal violence in Afghanistan reduces the likelihood in the short and medium term. China may also establish land-based military bases in Central Asia to safeguard Beijing's geostrategic interests of Central Asia.

## 2.3 Conclusion

In terms of China's judgment of core interests, the authority of CCP's top leader Xi Jinping has not been challenged in the party nor the PLA because of his centralized power. Judging from Xi's Political Report at the CCP's 19th National Congress and the 2019 *China's Defensive National Defense Policy in the New Era*, the Taiwan issue is undoubtedly the most important core interest due to its connection to national unification and rejuvenation.

China's military development goals are to achieve mechanization first, then achieve the goal of informatization and *intellectualization*, and finally become a global military power according to the near-medium and long-range plan. If the US in the 1990 Gulf War era is regarded as a model of mechanized warfare, today's PLA already has same level capability in technical terms, such as stealth fighters, stealth bombers, armed helicopters as well as aircraft carriers, cruise missiles, and medium-range missiles. Nevertheless, the question of whether China has created a culture of high-tech joint operations, with all the processes and behaviors involved in this, remains unknown.

The spokesperson of PRC's Ministry of National Defense put forward the four goals for PLA's centennial establishment by 2027, and these must be assessed and understood carefully. The goals themselves are no guarantee that China can successfully achieve mechanization, informatization and artificial *intelligence* in military affairs over this timeframe. China claims it will build three aircraft carrier strike groups by 2027 and six by 2035. As China already has two aircraft carrier strike groups, the third will need to be completed by 2027. Therefore, it appears progress is somewhat delayed - Beijing has taken seven years to build individual aircraft carriers, so completing three carriers in the next eight years looks difficult. Moreover, after the successive updates of US aircraft carriers, the technology of aircraft carriers has surpassed that of China, and growing deployment of US, Japanese, Taiwanese, and other US partner and ally anti-ship missiles and submarines can seriously threaten Chinese aircraft carrier strike groups. This balance of forces may continue to make Beijing's use of force against Taiwan too costly a move for Beijing's leadership to direct. Instead, China will try to divide US-Taiwan relations or strengthen its political control over Taiwan.

China requires the military to accelerate the integration and development of mechanization, informatization, and intellectualization. However, the US-China trade war and the technological war have exposed China's backwardness in areas like semiconductor and chip technology. Many intelligent weapon systems rely on chip technology. Should Chinese development of its own chips stagnate or lag, the design and manufacture of cutting-edge weapon

<sup>121</sup> Gerry Shih, "In Central Asia's Forbidding Highlands, a Quiet Newcomer: Chinese Troops," *The Washington Post*, February 18, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/in-central-asias-forbidding-highlands-a-quiet-newcomer-chinese-troops/2019/02/18/78d4a8d0-1e62-11e9-a759-2b8541bbb20\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-central-asias-forbidding-highlands-a-quiet-newcomer-chinese-troops/2019/02/18/78d4a8d0-1e62-11e9-a759-2b8541bbb20_story.html).

China claims it will build three aircraft carrier strike groups by 2027 and six by 2035.

systems will also be delayed, which may further complicate achievement of the goals for PLA's centennial establishment by 2027.

China's current military power would have difficulties competing with the United States. It may not have the advantage even if facing Japan, Australia, and India. It will inevitably accelerate the speed of military modernization to increase its bargaining and intimidatory presence in regional territorial sovereignty issues. China has surpassed the US in some military technologies, such as anti-ballistic missiles and density of missile threat in its periphery, through its Anti-Access Area Denial Strategy. Its development of stealth fighters, hypersonic missiles, and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) is also catching up. However, if a war breaks out with the US due to a conflict in the Taiwan Strait, it may not be sure of victory, which remains the primary restraint that matters to the leadership in Beijing.

The new short-term goal of building Chinese military power for conflict by 2027 does seem to align with Xi's desire to resolve the Taiwan issue during his tenure. It also might reflect the fact that the balance of capabilities around Taiwan may begin to shift away from Beijing as US, partner and allied deterrent capabilities grow, even given the trajectory of PLA capability development. China also understands the military power gap between the United States and China. In addition to actively catching up with the US military capabilities with the three-step strategy, Xi Jinping's speech to the PLA has constantly demanded "the mission of daring to fight well and be determined to win" (敢战善战、矢志打赢的使命担当).<sup>122</sup> It reveals the hope of using spiritual mobilization and combat power to make up for the gap. But in this scenario, the most positive window for the use of force to unify Taiwan with the mainland would be before decisions to increase US and allied deterrent power can take effect.

This paper sets out the Chinese government's goals for developing and using the PLA within the broader Party and national strategy of returning China to the center of the international system as a political, economic, and military power that surpasses and displaces the United States – first regionally and then globally. It assesses that China's priorities for the PLA build on each other, with the earlier highest priorities establishing foundations for greater power projection and influence. Taiwan is central to the CCP's political objective of demonstrating it has achieved national unification. But Taiwan being absorbed into mainland China also then provides a platform to exert military power more easily through and outside China's 'First Island Chain' and so reinforces Beijing's drive to establish de facto sovereign and military control in the area defined by its Nine Dash Line. Consolidating this control would damage – and perhaps even destroy – the US alliance network in Asia.

Before such control is achieved, the CCP is unlikely to seek to escalate conflicts with Japan in disputed areas of the East China Sea or its longstanding border disputes with India, but instead is likely to continue to raise tensions in both areas to demonstrate its continued claims and to absorb and distract the Japanese and Indian militaries.

The paper also describes the dynamic internal tensions and debates that occur in the CCP leadership, between the Party leadership and the PLA and within factions and groups inside the PLA and the Party. These dynamics are opaque to the external world – and probably also to many of the internal Chinese participants – but do appear to result in discordant actions between national leadership intent and elements of the PLA. While Xi has consolidated control over the PLA more effectively than his predecessor Hu, this is not a one-off event and

<sup>122</sup> People's Liberation Army Daily Commentor (解放軍報評論員), "Sing the Heroic Song and Fight Hard to Win" (唱響英雄壯歌 奮力強軍打贏), *People's Liberation Army Daily* (解放軍報), February 19, 2021, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/2021-02/19/c\\_1127113833.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/2021-02/19/c_1127113833.htm).

China's current military power would have difficulties competing with the United States.

is likely to require continued leadership shifts, reforms, and anti-corruption-induced dismissal, all of which create drivers for this to continue. Assessment of PLA leadership figures and close analysis of PLA activities is required to understand some of the gaps and fissures and avoid incorrect assessments that every action is part of a larger strategic plan.

One key implication of the paper is that the 'core interests' that the PLA is a key element in protecting have expanded as Chinese economic, political and military power have grown. The core purpose of the PLA remains to maintain the Party in power within China, and this continues to have real implications for PLA focus and activity, even given the scale and capability of non-PLA internal security forces like the People's Armed Police.

However, the trajectory of Chinese interests into and across the Indian Ocean, connecting to the Middle East and to Africa is already creating momentum for greater global power projection by the PLA, and early moves to establish overseas basing and long-range sustainment capacity have been demonstrated in the Gulf of Aden and across the Indian Ocean.

This PLA role is likely to expand, particularly if Beijing's relations with sub-continental, Middle Eastern and African states deepen economically in response to growing complications in relations with the US, Japan, India, and European states. Individual Chinese offshore investments and business operations – like resource extraction activities in Africa and the deep China-Pakistan economic cooperation - are likely to be the beginning of this growing international security role for the PLA. Added to the dynamics that are leading the CCP to invest in a PLA with greater global power projection is the political objective of a world class military as part of a returned Great China at the center of world power, combined with the notion that all people of Chinese ethnicity living in other nations are connected to the Chinese state through their status as 'Overseas Chinese'.

Overall, though, Chinese ambitions for the PLA are also affected by external conditions, with CCP and PLA leaders and strategists continually assessing balances of power and the political will and capabilities of others, most particularly the US, to obstruct or oppose Chinese interests and action. This complicates any net assessment but is essential for assessments and policies relating to China and its military.

This PLA role is likely to expand, particularly if Beijing's relations with sub-continental, Middle Eastern and African states deepen economically in response to growing complications in relations with the US, Japan, India, and European states.

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# Chapter Three. **China Outside the Western Pacific: Military Capabilities for Power Projection**

Joris Teer, Juliëtte Eijkelkamp, Paul van Hooft

# Key Takeaways

- In response to the end of the Cold War and demonstrations of unmatched US power in the 1990s, China undertook a rapid and ambitious modernization and expansion of its military and accelerated progress in the last decade. This project has been, by any measure, successful. Today China is the dominant force in its own backyard, gradually pushing US power projection capabilities away from its coast.
- China has developed almost all capabilities necessary for regional power projection and is in the process of developing extra-regional capabilities. China is on the verge of a breakthrough and will be able to effectively project power extra-regionally within the next ten years: China will not necessarily be able to go toe-to-toe with the US and its allies in all contingencies, but it should be able to mount missions to intimidate and coerce small and medium-sized states through offshore threatening and to protect supply chains in the Indian Ocean, Middle East, and Africa, certainly if not challenged by a peer competitor.
- China possesses a world-class missile arsenal and fleet of surface support ships, but still trails the most advanced Western militaries in terms of the number and sophistication of aircraft carriers and the capabilities of its carrier strike groups (CSGs), specifically in areas such as jet fighters and anti-submarine warfare.
- China is undertaking enormous efforts to remedy the shortcomings in its CSGs and will narrow the gap with the most advanced Western militaries – though by how much remains a matter of debate – by 2035.
- Towards 2035, demographic, economic, political, technological and security developments may impede the continued development and maintenance of especially China's far seas military capabilities and to a lesser extent its near seas capabilities.

This chapter analyzes China's defense spending to illustrate how and why it has chosen to develop various military capabilities. In order to discern trends, the assessment starts in 1996, continues to the present day and projects trends to 2035. The emphasis is on China's capacity to project military power outside of East Asia and the Western Pacific and, crucially, to sustain such projection in the long run. For now, Europe remains largely on the sidelines in the intensifying Sino-American competition within the Western Pacific. Though strategic perceptions of China are changing in Europe, leading European military powers remain limited, materially and geographically, in their ability to influence the strategic situation in the region. It is more likely that Europeans will be involved in developments affecting the Indian Ocean, its adjacent waters and the 30 countries surrounding these waters. This is a region where China has laid the foundation to project power in another five to ten years.

This chapter is devoted to the broad spectrum of China's military capabilities relevant to its ability to influence events in the Indian Ocean: China's far seas military capabilities such as its extra-regional power projection capabilities and long-range strike capabilities; command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR); and additional capabilities. The chapter examines both the numbers and the relative quality of these capabilities, as well as their projected trajectory over the next decade-and-a-half. It concludes by returning to the typology developed in Chapter One, which evaluates China's ability to project military power outside its region.

This chapter concludes that China's ability to project power outside the Western Pacific is growing, and it could achieve a breakthrough within the ten five years. It has achieved parity with, or even surpassed, the United States and its allies in some areas, though it still lags in some categories. In sum, the significant military advances it has made since 1996 make it a formidable opponent within its own region, and it is developing the ability to project power into the Indian Ocean.

The starting point for this chapter is 1996, when the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis unfolded because this event had a significant impact on Chinese thinking. After China threatened Taiwan with missiles, the US sailed two Carrier Strike Groups (CSGs) into the Strait as a show of force. China felt impotent faced with US naval might. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) were still at an early stage of technological development.<sup>123</sup> China's inability to deter US forces from operating close to their economic heartland – as well as the extent of US military power on display during the Gulf War in 1991 – galvanized China's military modernization. Specifically, it led to China's focus on developing its so-called Anti-Access Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities and its naval capabilities. China is now capable of significantly raising the cost for US power projection within the First and Second Island Chain, but its ability to project power outside of the region is less well-charted.<sup>124</sup>

123 The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), "East Asia and Australasia," in *The Military Balance 1996*, vol. 96, 1996, 170–201, 10.1080/04597229608460097.

124 The US is today much less assured that it can deter a Chinese attack on Taiwan. See e.g. Stephen Biddle and Ivan Oelrich, "Future Warfare in the Western Pacific: Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, US AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia," *International Security*, 2016; Paul van Hooft, "All-In or All-Out: Why Insularity Pushes and Pulls American Grand Strategy to Extremes," *Security Studies* 29, no. 4 (2020): 701–729.; Bonnie Glaser, "Bonnie Glaser's Testimony: Chinese Maritime Coercion in East Asia: What Tools Can Be Used to Respond?," The German Marshall Fund of the United States, May 13, 2021, <https://www.gmfus.org/publications/bonnie-glasers-testimony-chinese-maritime-coercion-east-asia-what-tools-can-be-used/>; Amti Vorndick, "China's Reach Has Grown; So Should the Island Chains," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, October 22, 2018, <https://amti.csis.org/chinas-reach-grown-island-chains/>.

For now, Europe remains largely on the sidelines in the intensifying Sino-American competition within the Western Pacific.

### 3.1 Chinese military force projection

A state's military power does not automatically translate into the means needed to deter, compel, or achieve other political ends. For China to be able to exercise influence outside of its own region, it needs long-distance power projection capabilities and the capacity to not only transport and deploy forces for military operations but also to sustain them.<sup>125</sup> The term “expeditionary power projection” can be defined as “the strategy of stationing the bulk of the joint force [in the home country] and deploying them to distant locales to decisively defeat aggression,” and provides insight into the operational aspects of the predominant approach.<sup>126</sup>

This report uses the following definition of extra-regional power projection:

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The ability to “win decisively in major combat” in order to “influence events” through the deployment of military assets outside of a state's own region.

Many recent and commonly used definitions of power projection are tailored to US conditions, as from the end of the Cold War onward, the US has been the only “global military power”, meaning the only power with the ability to “plan, deploy, sustain and fight at distance – and at scale – from the [...] homeland [...] in a way currently possible for no other nation.”<sup>127</sup> However, other powers – Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China – maintain some ability to project power outside their region, even if not on a global scale, as they can “deploy limited capabilities at strategic range.”<sup>128</sup>

Three constituent parts of power projection can be distinguished on the basis of these definitions, namely the *actions* a state should be able to perform to project power, a description of the political *aims* that the action seeks to achieve and, as per Paul Kennedy,<sup>129</sup> the specific *sources* of national power that make power projection possible. All definitions clearly articulate the sequence of *action(s)*, which in essence is the large-scale transportation, deployment, and sustainment of forces in an extra-regional theater.

Whereas *aims* have generally been centered on either domination or the prevention of domination by others,<sup>130</sup> *actions* pertain to the rapid and effective deployment as well as

125 See further Toshi Yoshihara and Jack Bianchi, “Seizing on Weakness: Allied Strategy for Competing With China's Globalizing Military,” 2021, 52, <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/seizing-on-weakness-allied-strategy-for-competing-with-chinas-globalizing-military>.

126 Effective deployment and sustainment rests directly on a state's military and informational power and indirectly on its economic and political power. The examples of “far-off places” that Mazarr mentions are Taiwan, Korea, and the Baltics, as he specifically speaks of “long-distance power projection” in the US context. Michael J. Mazarr, “Toward a New Theory of Power Projection,” *War on the Rocks*, April 15, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/04/toward-a-new-theory-of-power-projection/>.

127 Giegerich, Childs, and Hackett, “Military Capability and International Status.”

128 Giegerich, “Military Capability and International Status.”

129 Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, xv-xvii.

130 The US Department of Defense (DoD) lists crisis response, a contribution to deterrence, and the enhancement of regional stability. Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (As Amended Through 31 August 2005)” (The Pentagon, Washington, DC, April 12, 2001), 417, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA439918.pdf>.

the sustainment of forces, requiring not one act of force at a singular moment in time but a protracted one. Even for the US, rapid deployment requires quick means of transportation on a scale that enables the moving of large-scale forces and equipment over long distances.<sup>131</sup>

The ability to “win decisively in major combat” and to “influence events” heavily depends on the dynamic interaction of intentions and capabilities of both the state and its adversaries. Like the US with its many obligations around the globe,<sup>132</sup> Beijing has to make strategic choices as to force distribution. This report therefore considers whom China is projecting power against – and the commitment of that rival to a particular region – in order to assess the PLAN's ability to project power.

Contemporary PLAN strategy stresses the need to provide “far seas protection” (*yuanhai fangwei*) in addition to its traditional “near seas defense” (*jinhai fangyu*) within the First Island Chain.<sup>133</sup> The latter focuses on protecting the Chinese mainland from attack and the safeguarding of “maritime rights and interests” and “national sovereignty,”<sup>134</sup> which includes territorial claims over Taiwan, large swaths of the East China Sea and almost all of the South China Sea. As touched on in the previous chapter, the former is largely “a function of the country's growing national interests” and relates to “ensuring access to supplies of crude oil [...] to protect the nation's energy security, defending China's growing expatriate community [...], and protecting overseas investments”,<sup>135</sup> for which China relies on some critical choke points along the SLOCs (see Figure 2). Despite these expressed aspirations, Chinese naval strategists have concluded that, at this moment, the PLAN is not yet able to provide far seas protection, as it is unable to protect its strategic interests in a scenario of conflict outside of its region with its current force structure.<sup>136</sup>

Who then are the parties that might oppose Chinese attempts to “influence events” through power projection in the Indian Ocean? The US and India are China's main potential adversaries in this region, which they dominate. Australia, Japan, who join the US and India in the quad, the United Kingdom and France are additional potential adversaries for China in the Indian Ocean. The UK and Australia joined the United States in the recently announced AUKUS defense pact. France has considerable interests and naval capabilities and also operates in the Indo-Pacific (see Table 8).<sup>137</sup>

131 Mazarr, “Toward a New Theory of Power Projection.” For a general history of U.S. defense posture please see: Stacie L. Pettyjohn, “U.S. Global Defense Posture, 1783–2011,” January 14, 2013, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1244.html>.

132 United States Naval Institute, “USNI News Fleet and Marine Tracker: April 26, 2021,” *USNI News*, April 26, 2021, sec. Fleet Tracker, <https://news.usni.org/2021/04/26/usni-news-fleet-and-marine-tracker-april-26-2021>.

133 The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, “China's Military Strategy - Chapter IV. Building and Development of China's Armed Forces,” Ministry of National Defense - The People's Republic of China, May 2015, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/2015-05/26/content\\_4586713.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/2015-05/26/content_4586713.htm).

134 Jennifer Rice and Erik Robb, “China Maritime Report No. 13: The Origins of ‘Near Seas Defense and Far Seas Protection,’” *CMSI China Maritime Reports*, February 1, 2021, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/13>.

135 Jeffrey Becker, “China Maritime Report No. 11: Securing China's Lifelines across the Indian Ocean,” December 2020, 2.

136 Rice and Robb, “China Maritime Report No. 13.”

137 The Netherlands has sent the Zr. Ms. Evertsen as part of the British Carrier Strike Group led by the HMS Queen Elizabeth to the SCS. France and Germany, too, have sent vessels to East Asia. Ma Saya Kato, “European Navies Build Indo-Pacific Presence as China Concerns Mount,” *Nikkei Asia*, March 4, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/European-navies-build-Indo-Pacific-presence-as-China-concerns-mount>.

Like the US with its many obligations around the globe, Beijing has to make strategic choices as to force distribution.



## China and the central sea lines of communication and straits on which it relies



Figure 2: China and the key SLOCs on which it depends.

As GDP growth has slowed in recent years, China's defense budget has increased with single-digit percentages rather than double digits (but from a much higher base).

### 3.2 Trends in Chinese defense spending

Developing military capabilities, especially power projection capabilities requires significant resources. Although the exact size of Chinese defense expenditures and their allocation remains unclear due to the opaqueness of China and the sensitivity of the topic,<sup>138</sup> the general trend, in absolute terms, is that China's defense spending has vastly increased. In 1996, China spent just 14,3 \$bn, in 2006 51,4 \$bn, in 2016 198,5 \$bn, in 2020 252,3 \$bn: an increase by an order of nearly 18 times.<sup>139</sup>

The rapid rise in Chinese spending on the military is in part a reflection of the rapid growth of the Chinese economy - defense spending as a percentage of its GDP has consistently fluctuated between 1,7% and 2,1% since 1996. As GDP growth has slowed in recent years, China's defense budget has increased with single-digit percentages rather than double digits (but from a much higher base).<sup>140</sup>

<sup>138</sup> This section considers both the PLA's own figures and two additional authoritative sources: The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). The latter two consistently conclude that China's defense spending is higher than the PRC's official figures, as the PLA's official figures determined China's defense spending was only \$151 billion in 2017 whereas SIPRI estimated the total budget at \$228 billion; a difference larger than \$70 billion.

<sup>139</sup> The Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database," 2021, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

<sup>140</sup> "What Does China Really Spend on Its Military?," ChinaPower, December 28, 2015, <http://chinapower.csis.org/military-spending/>.

Besides costly internal security chipping away at the defense budget,<sup>141</sup> defense of the near seas, the PLAN's principal objective, also requires substantial defense spending (see Table 8). The recent completion of six hyper-modern amphibious assault ships (Type 071) with an expeditionary capability;<sup>142</sup> the large-scale procurement of medium-range ballistic missiles (i.e. the DF-21) throughout the past two decades; as well as cruise missiles (i.e. the CJ-100) in the past two years; and a large number of smaller vessels such as corvettes<sup>143</sup> in the past five years (that in a scenario of war will be mostly of use in China's near seas) are a case in point.

PLA Responsibilities	Potential adversaries	Potential additional adversaries	Most relevant actor	Most relevant capabilities	Cost estimate: total (%) / average per unit cost
<b>Domestic stability</b>	Internal opposition		PAP	Armed police	20% <sup>144</sup>
<b>Border security</b>	India, Vietnam	N/A	PLA; PAP	Land, air, and rocket capabilities; armed police	15% <sup>145</sup>
<b>Near Seas Defense (1): protecting mainland</b>	US		People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF); People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF)	Conventional missiles; aircraft; submarines	Low; missiles and aircraft are cheaper per unit than large vessels
<b>Near Seas Defense (2): enforcing "sovereignty" over/invading Taiwan</b>	Taiwan, US	Japan	PLAN; PLARF; PLAAF	Amphibious combat ships; expeditionary forces; conventional missiles; air force aircraft	High; the vessels required for an invasion of Taiwan – such as helicopter carriers – are more expensive than missiles, but less expensive than aircraft carriers
<b>Near Seas Defense (3): enforcing "sovereignty" over South China Sea (SCS); East China Sea (ECS)</b>	Taiwan, Japan, South-Korea, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, US	Australia	PLAN; PAFMM; <sup>146</sup> PLARF; PLAAF	Patrol and coastal combatants, primarily corvettes; principal surface combatants, primarily frigates; conventional missiles; air force aircraft; naval aviation;	Medium; the vessels required for asserting "sovereignty" in the ESC and SCS – such as frigates – are more expensive than missiles, but less expensive than aircraft carriers
<b>Far Seas Protection: safeguarding SLOCs; protecting diaspora and overseas investment</b>	US; India	Australia, Japan, UK, France	PLAN	Principal surface combatants such as aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, and frigates; carrier-based aircraft; and attack submarines	Very high; the vessels required to patrol the far seas – such as aircraft carriers and cruisers – are among the most expensive weapon systems

Table 8: The responsibilities, capabilities, and financial burdens of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 2021.

141 See on this "domestic drag" Peter E. Robertson and Adrian Sin, "Measuring Hard Power: China's Economic Growth and Military Capacity," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 2015), Table 1, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2586915>; Andrew Scobell and Andrew J. Nathan, "China's Overstretched Military," *The Washington Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (October 1, 2012): 135–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2012.726438>.

142 Matthew Funaiole and Joseph S. Bermudez jr., "China's New Amphibious Assault Ship Sails into the South China Sea," CSIS, November 24, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-new-amphibious-assault-ship-sails-south-china-sea>.

143 See appendixes 3 and 4.

144 Michael Beckley, "The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia: How China's Neighbors Can Check Chinese Naval Expansion," *International Security* 42, no. 2 (November 2017): 116, [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00294](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00294).

145 Robertson and Sin, "Measuring Hard Power," Table 1.

146 The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) conducts grey zone operations in the South China Sea, as recent pictures released by the Philippine Coast Guard show. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, "Manila's Images Are Revealing the Secrets of China's Maritime Militia," *Foreign Policy*, April 19, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/19/manilas-images-are-revealing-the-secrets-of-chinas-maritime-militia/>.

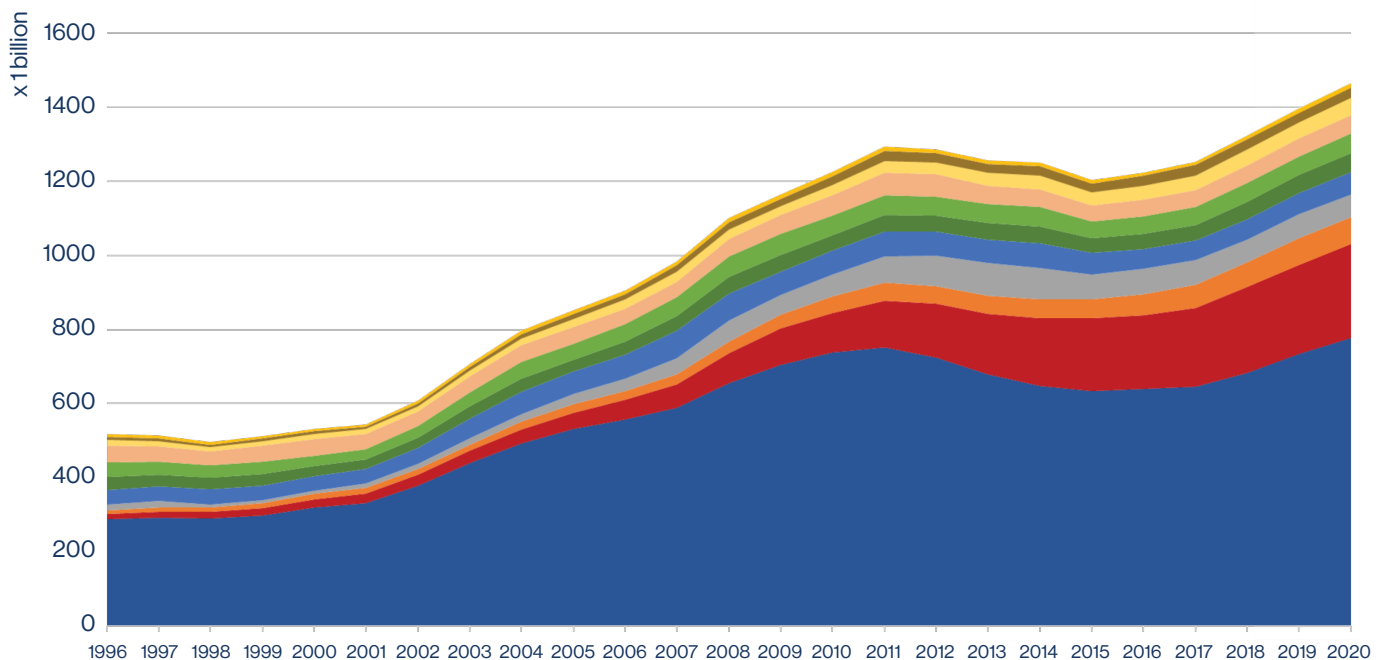
China has adopted an A2/AD strategy ostensibly able to “dissuade, deter, or, if ordered, defeat” US power projection near China’s coast, perhaps as far out as 500 miles away from said coast.<sup>147</sup> The development of “long-range ballistic missiles, swarms of multiple drones [...], and cruise missiles and eventually hypersonic missiles” only strengthens this ability.<sup>148</sup> Given the suggestion that we have entered a so-called defense-dominant era in military technology, China’s mainland defense can be regarded as having the advantage.<sup>149</sup>

## Defense expenditure per country between 1996-2020, in USD

2020 prices



United States China India Russia United Kingdom Germany  
France Japan South Korea Australia Netherlands



Source SIPRI Military Expenditure Database

Figure 3: Defense expenditures.

China’s defense spending is by far the highest of any country in its region, but in relative terms some of its regional rivals outspend China, whose spending is still dwarfed by that of its primary global rival, the United States (See Figure 3). China was responsible for 42.2% of total defense spending in Asia in 2020 – excluding North Korea and Laos but including India.<sup>150</sup> The

147 Erickson, “Chinese Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile Development and Counter-Intervention Efforts. Testimony before Hearing on China’s Advanced Weapons Panel I: China’s Hypersonic and Maneuverable Re-Entry Vehicle Programs U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.”; Office of the Secretary of Defense, “Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2020,” Annual Report to Congress (Washington DC: Department of Defense (DoD), September 1, 2020), 72, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

148 Jonathan D. Caverley and Peter Dombrowski, “Cruising for a Bruising: Maritime Competition in an Anti-Access Age,” *Security Studies* 29, no. 4 (August 7, 2020): 676, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1811460>.

149 Stephen van Evera, “Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War,” *International Security* 22, no. 4 (1998): 5–43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539239>.

150 James Hackett and International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2021*, 224.

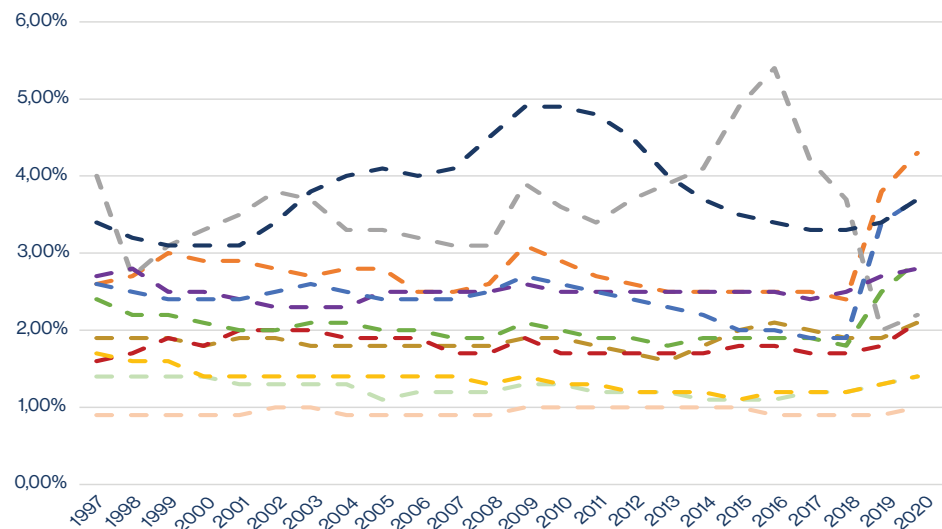
United States spends 1.5 times more on defense than all Asian countries combined, though it also has a military presence and commitments in multiple regions.<sup>151</sup> As a percentage of GDP, China spends less on defense than the US, South Korea, or India, but more than Japan and the same percentage as Australia (see Figure 4).<sup>152</sup>

## Defense expenditure by country 1996-2020

Share of GDP (%)



— Australia — China — France — Germany  
 — India — Japan — Netherlands — Russia  
 — South Korea — United Kingdom — United States



Source SIPRI Military Expenditure Database

Figure 4: Defense expenditure as share of GDP.

Future Chinese defense spending is clouded with uncertainties. For 2021, China's Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced that China's defense spending would rise by 6.8%,<sup>153</sup> slightly above its 6% GDP target.<sup>154</sup> Importantly, though, the maintenance and operational costs of large vessels such as aircraft carriers over their lifespans – growing year-by-year – are often higher than “research and development, procurement and disposal costs.”<sup>155</sup> China's defense spending is thus not likely to fall below levels of around ten or even five years ago. As assets get older, the cost of maintenance rises. Merely paying for existing capabilities will necessitate that China maintain defense budgets significantly higher than those of a decade ago.

In the upcoming fifteen years, a range of demographic, economic, political, technological, and security developments will put pressure on the continued development and maintenance of especially China's relatively expensive far seas military capabilities and, to a lesser extent, its near seas capabilities (See Table 9). China's defense spending has so far consistently

<sup>151</sup> Hackett and International Institute for Strategic Studies, 218.

<sup>152</sup> The Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), “SIPRI Military Expenditure Database.”

<sup>153</sup> Panyue Huang, “China's Annual Defense Budget in 2021 Will Increase by 6.8% - China Military,” China Military Online, March 8, 2021, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-03/08/content\\_9998617.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-03/08/content_9998617.htm).

<sup>154</sup> China MFA, “Premier Li Keqiang Meets the Press: Full Transcript of Questions and Answers,” accessed April 29, 2021, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1860396.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1860396.shtml).

<sup>155</sup> Yoshihara and Bianchi, “Seizing on Weakness,” 63.

Future Chinese defense spending is clouded with uncertainties.

covered approximately 2% of its GDP, but has fallen as a share of government spending from 15% in 1997 to just over 10% in 2006 and to just under 5% in 2020. Compensating for the strains on China's defense spending (see below) likely involves breaking with this tradition, in other words, raising defense expenditure above current relative levels.

<b>Demographic</b>	China's population is rapidly shrinking, facing the most severe ageing in world history <sup>156</sup> and suffers from a gender imbalance. The size of its working population is decreasing, as a result, putting an increasing burden on China's finances and funds available for defense.
<b>Economic</b>	China faces a declining GDP growth-rate, unsustainable debt levels, <sup>157</sup> increasingly extensive and expensive social programs and risks a decline in exports as Chinese labor becomes more expensive. At the same time, China faces an international environment that grows more wary of Chinese policies like 'Made in China 2025' and 'Dual Circulation' and may be less willing to invest in China's future. Beijing's Zero tolerance-COVID policy leads to disruptions of international supply chains, for instance because of the closure of major ports, <sup>158</sup> which may lead states to diversify their imports.
<b>Political</b>	Xi's succession is marred with uncertainty and may be characterized by an unpeaceful, disorderly transition of power, as his abolishment of leadership term limits cancelled the institutional mechanism the CCP found after the death of Mao to ensure an orderly transition of power. <sup>159</sup> Meanwhile, rising nationalism may well impede social stability in the upcoming decade and a half.
<b>Technological</b>	China will find it more difficult to fuel its military modernization with foreign technologies. Industrialized Western democracies are putting up new obstacles to Chinese acquisition of high technologies – such as investment screening and export controls – at a rapid pace. <sup>160</sup> High-tech companies, for instance in the chip industry, face increasing pressures from governments not to sell their products to China. <sup>161</sup> Incorporating foreign technology becomes more difficult in general, as weapon systems have grown ever more complex. <sup>162</sup>
<b>Military</b>	Land-based military threats – at China's borders and along the BRI – may demand a larger share of Chinese defense spending. China's increasing tensions with India, best evidenced by the fatal border clashes along the Line of Control in the Himalayas in 2020, are likely to demand greater resources and attention in its on-land theater. Meanwhile, Russia and China still have border disputes and a long history of animosity (pre-World War II and 1960s-1990) and even small-scale armed conflict that in the future might sour relations, in spite of current cooperation between China and Russia. Finally, the mass-incarceration of Uighurs in China's far-Western Xinjiang province may inspire Islamist and jihadist groups to pose a security risk to Chinese investment across the greater Middle East and pressure from local populations may force governments of Muslim-majority states along the BRI to take a harder diplomatic line against China.

Table 9: Constraints impeding the development of especially far seas but also near seas capabilities towards 2035.

156 Fang Cai and Yang Lu, "Population Change and Resulting Slowdown in Potential GDP Growth in China," *China & World Economy* 21, no. 2 (March 2013): 13–14, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-124X.2013.12012.x>.

157 Michael Pettis, *Avoiding the Fall: China's Economic Restructuring* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013). ; Fenghua Pan et al., "Developing by Borrowing? Inter-Jurisdictional Competition, Land Finance and Local Debt Accumulation in China," *Urban Studies* 54, no. 4 (March 2017): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098015624838>.

158 Reuters, "Chinese Ports Choke over 'zero Tolerance' COVID-19 Policy | Reuters," August 20, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinese-ports-choke-over-zero-tolerance-covid-19-policy-2021-08-17/>.

159 Richard McGregor and Jude Blanchette, "After Xi - Future Scenarios for Leadership Succession in Post-Xi Jinping Era" (Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) and Lowy Institute, April 2021), [https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/McGregor%20%26%20Blanchette%2C%20After%20Xi%2C%20CSIS-Lowy%20Institute%2C%20230421%20%28AUversion%20REVISED%29\\_0.pdf](https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/McGregor%20%26%20Blanchette%2C%20After%20Xi%2C%20CSIS-Lowy%20Institute%2C%20230421%20%28AUversion%20REVISED%29_0.pdf).

160 Manisha Reuter, "Responding to the China Challenge: The State of Play on Investment Screening in Europe – European Council on Foreign Relations," *ECFR*, November 27, 2020, <https://ecfr.eu/article/responding-to-the-china-challenge-the-state-of-play-on-investment-screening-in-europe/>.

161 Stu Woo and Yang Jie, "China Wants a Chip Machine From the Dutch. The U.S. Said No. - WSJ," July 17, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-wants-a-chip-machine-from-the-dutch-the-u-s-said-no-11626514513>.

162 Andrea Gilli and Mauro Gilli, "Why China Has Not Caught Up Yet: Military-Technological Superiority and the Limits of Imitation, Reverse Engineering, and Cyber Espionage," *International Security* 43, no. 3 (February 2019): 141–89, [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00337](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00337).

### 3.3 Far seas military capabilities

Despite significant leaps in military and informational capabilities development, the results are mixed. In some areas, China has developed and deployed capabilities equal to the US and its allies, while in other areas, it either lags behind other great powers or there is not enough information to make a confident evaluation. For instance, essential components of Chinese Carrier Strike Groups (CSGs), such as the carrier itself, its carrier-based fighter, and the People's Liberation Army Force's (PLAAF) ostensibly "next-generation"<sup>163</sup> fighter jet, have serious technological short-comings (most detrimentally its engine).

Other parts, such as China's destroyers and frigates, are in a much more mature state and even appear to have some advantages over US and European counterparts, particularly in terms of anti-ship and anti-air missiles launched with Vertical Launch Systems (VLS). China has improved its attack submarines, but they are not yet as capable as American submarines in terms of silencing.<sup>164</sup> As China also struggles to develop Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) capabilities, this presents it with a problem. While China has also developed a larger number of corvettes that could be employed against lesser states, or for anti-piracy missions, they are not likely to be as effective against a peer or near-peer competitor.

China's highly developed and world-leading conventional long-range strike capabilities complement China's traditional resources, and progress in C4ISR makes a cohesive offense more likely. Three trends are fully established: the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF) is increasing the average range, speed, and anti-ship capabilities of its long-range arsenal. Even though the Malacca Strait and swaths of the Indian Ocean are in range of its most advanced missiles, it remains highly unlikely that China's C4ISR capabilities are able to target and help the missile hit mobile targets in the far seas at this moment.

China has improved its attack submarines, but they are not yet as capable as American submarines in terms of silencing.

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<sup>163</sup> "Jet fighter with extreme stealth; efficient in all flight regimes (subsonic to multi-Mach); possible "morphing" capability; smart skins; highly networked; extremely sensitive sensors; optionally manned; directed energy weapons" John A Tirpak, "The Sixth Generation Fighter," 2009, 41.

<sup>164</sup> Congressional Research Service, "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress" (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, March 2021), 8, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33153.pdf>. China has also greatly reduced the noise its strategic nuclear-power ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) produce – specifically since the introduction of the, as is described in the section: 3.5 Long range strike capability. Franz-Stefan Gady, "China Resumes Production of Its Quietest Attack Submarine," January 6, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/china-resumes-production-of-its-quietest-attack-submarine/>.

## 3.4 Extra-regional power projection capabilities

Extra-regional power projection capabilities are formed by blue-water naval capabilities, alongside long-range aircraft and missiles, supported by C4ISR, and cyber (see Table 10).<sup>165</sup>

Section	Domain	Capabilities
Extra-regional power projection capabilities	Sea	Far seas high-intensity conflict capabilities, i.e.: Carrier Strike Groups (CSG) including Aircraft carriers Cruisers Destroyers Frigates Attack submarines  Far seas low-intensity/near seas high-intensity capabilities, i.e.: Amphibious combat ships Corvettes Transport ships (roll-on, roll-off)
	Land	Expeditionary forces such as Armored Warfare Capabilities
	Air	Fighters/Ground Attack (N-Generation fighters) Long-range bombers Long range heavy/medium transport aircraft
Long range strike capability	Missile (conventional)	Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) Ground-Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs)
	Missile (nuclear)	Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs)
Command, control, communications, computers intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR)	Informational (in-space)	Military satellites
	Informational (air)	Reconnaissance aircraft (manned and unmanned)
Disruptive technology capabilities	Cyber	Comprehensive
	Space	Anti-satellite weapons

Table 10: Relevant Chinese far seas military capabilities in 2021.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>165</sup> Naval power has historically been central to power projection for great powers, a view made famous by the father of modern naval strategy, Alfred Thayer Mahan. For a good discussion of Mahan's thinking and its impact on modern naval strategy, see Reynolds B. Peele, "Maritime Chokepoints: Key Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and Strategy," US Army War College, 1997.

<sup>166</sup> This table is an updated and more elaborate version of one devised in Richard J. Stoll, "In the Way? Chinese Power Projection in Historical Perspective," James A. Baker III Institute of Public Policy of Rice University, May 2000.

The PLAN today consists of more ships than any other navy in the world, growing from 255 battle force ships in 2015 to 360 today and projected to grow to 425 in 2030.

At present, driven by reasons both military-strategic and prestige, the primary expression of blue water naval power over long-distances is still CSGs – as it has been since the Second World War. China's navy is enormous. The PLAN today consists of more ships than any other navy in the world,<sup>167</sup> growing from 255 battle force ships in 2015 to 360 today and projected to grow to 425 in 2030.<sup>168</sup> China has by far the largest navy in Asia – accounting for almost 30% of total Asia's total naval tonnage, as a result.<sup>169</sup>

Still, there are significant shortcomings when the different categories of ships are considered, as well as pressing technological shortcomings, uneven organizational quality and the gaps in aerial support. Limiting its ability to project power in the Indian Ocean, for instance, China's fleet still consists of a large amount of "small service combatants" mostly able to protect the near seas. In addition, the PLAN's total number of VLS cells, the foremost way to launch missiles against the adversary, was nine times smaller than the total number of American VLS cells in 2020 (see Table 11).

Surface ships, VLS cells	China		Potential adversaries		Potential additional adversaries		
	China	USA	India	Australia	Japan	UK	France
Surface ships with multi-mission VLS	15	90	6	11	30	6	9
<b>Total VLS Cells</b>	<b>1.008</b>	<b>9.044</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>1.164</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>320</b>

Table 11: Projecting power in the far seas: Total VLS cells of the major powers in 2020.<sup>170</sup>

### 3.4.1 Peer-to-(near) peer conflict: Carrier Strike Group and battlegroup development

#### Aircraft carriers and carrier-based fighters

Though in possession of two aircraft carriers, the PLAN has not yet fulfilled all the requirements needed to effectively deploy carrier strike groups (CSGs) to project power. First, it lacks a sufficient number of aircraft carriers available to project power, especially when considering maintenance and training time. Second, China's two carriers have serious qualitative constraints, especially compared to American and even the most sophisticated French and UK carriers. Third, the PLAN – in general – lacks the "tribal knowledge" required to operate CSGs as its first carrier only became operational in 2016.<sup>171</sup> Chinese aircraft carriers would be "highly vulnerable" facing US ships and aircraft as a result but could "impress or

167 The United States navy consisted of 296 ships in the same year. Brad Lendon, "Analysis: China Has Built the World's Largest Navy. Now What's Beijing Going to Do with It?" CNN, March 6, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/05/china/china-world-biggest-navy-intl-hnk-ml-dst/index.html>.

168 Department of the Navy, "China: Naval Construction Trends Vis-à-Vis U.S. Navy Shipbuilding Plans, 2020-2030" (Office of Naval Intelligence, Farragut Technical Analysis Center Naval Platforms Department, February 6, 2021), 1, <https://fas.org/irp/agency/oni/plan-trends.pdf>.

169 Beckley, "The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia," 81.

170 As of 2020., Hackett and International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2021*, 27.

171 The term "Tribal Knowledge" is used by Andrew Erickson in an interview with the Economist and captures the immaterial dimensions of being able to use a carrier very well. The Economist, "China's First Aircraft-Carrier Bares Its Teeth," *The Economist*, January 19, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/china/2017/01/19/chinas-first-aircraft-carrier-bares-its-teeth>.



intimidate” if the US is not involved.<sup>172</sup> Looking forward toward the 2030s, however, many of these difficulties may be overcome.

The Shandong, China's second aircraft carrier, which was entirely manufactured by China, has become operational as it concluded its first exercises – together with supporting vessels – in the South China Sea in May 2021.<sup>173</sup> China's aircraft carrier capability is likely to grow substantially in the near future, as its third, larger carrier is about to be completed.<sup>174</sup> Assembly of the fourth, which PLA sources claim is likely to be nuclear-powered, has commenced,<sup>175</sup> plans for a fifth are on hold<sup>176</sup> (see Table 12).

Name <sup>177</sup>	Specifics	Status	Operational (expected)
<b>1. Liaoning Type001</b>	Based on Soviet carrier – including large-scale Soviet parts (e.g., the hull) used 60,000-66,000 tons 40-44 fixed and rotary wing aircraft Unable to launch fully fueled/fully loaded fighters (ski-jump ramp) Unable to carry airborne early warning and control aircraft Conventionally (diesel-)powered (necessitating frequent refueling; six days at sea max)	In use	2016
<b>2. Shandong Type002</b>	Based on Soviet carrier model – fully indigenously built by China 66,000-70,000 tons 44-52 fixed and rotary wing aircraft Unable to launch fully fueled/loaded fighters (ski-jump ramp) Unable to carry airborne early warning and control aircraft Conventionally (diesel-)powered (necessitating frequent refueling; six days at sea max)	In use	2021
<b>3. Type003</b>	85-85,000 tons Able to launch heavier aircraft and fully fueled/loaded smaller aircraft (through electromagnetic catapults; no ski-jump ramp) Conventionally (diesel-)powered necessitating frequent refueling)	Construction phase near-completion	Mid-decade (2020s)
<b>4. Type003 (or Type004)</b>	80-85,000 tons Able to launch heavier aircraft and fully fueled/loaded smaller aircraft (through electromagnetic catapults; no ski-jump ramp) Either nuclear or conventionally powered (conflicting reports)	Assembly started	Late-2020s; Post-2030
<b>5. Type004 (or Type003)</b>	(Expected) first nuclear powered PLA surface-ship	Postponed	Post-2030

Table 12: Chinese in use, nearly completed and under construction aircraft carriers.

172 Congressional Research Service, “China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress,” 17.

173 Kirstin Huang, “Shandong Carrier Group Finishes South China Sea Exercise,” *South China Morning Post*, May 2, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3131977/shandong-aircraft-carrier-group-concludes-south-china-sea>.

174 Steven Stashwick, “Third Chinese Aircraft Carrier Nears Completion Amid Shipyard Expansion,” *The Diplomat*, January 6, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/01/third-chinese-aircraft-carrier-nears-completion-amid-shipyard-expansion/>.

175 Minnie Chan, “China's Fourth Aircraft Carrier Likely to Be Nuclear Powered, Sources Say,” *South China Morning Post*, March 13, 2021, sec. News, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3125224/chinese-military-fourth-aircraft-carrier-likely-be-nuclear>.

176 Minnie Chan, “China Plans Fourth Aircraft Carrier, but Further Plans Are on Hold,” *South China Morning Post*, November 28, 2019, sec. News, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3039653/chinese-navy-set-build-fourth-aircraft-carrier-plans-more>.

177 Yoshihara and Bianchi, “Seizing on Weakness,” 67.; On the Liaoning and the Shandong please find: “What Do We Know so Far about China's Second Aircraft Carrier?”

Another reservation here is that the Liaoning, China's first carrier, and the Shandong require long durations away from deployment, as carriers require "continuous and regularly scheduled maintenance", and its crew requires "a great deal of training to attain and sustain readiness levels" since they are among the most complex weapon systems in history. To elucidate, the US' eleven notional carriers were deployed only 19 percent of the time during a 32-month cycle – requiring in depot maintenance 24 percent of the time.<sup>178</sup>

	United States	United Kingdom	France	China	India <sup>179</sup>
<b>In-use carriers</b>	Eleven	Two	One	Two	One
<b>Most sophisticated carrier</b>	<i>USS Gerald R. Ford</i>	<i>HMS Queen Elizabeth</i> <sup>180</sup>	<i>Charles de Gaulle</i> <sup>181</sup>	<i>Shandong</i>	<i>INS Vikramaditya</i>
<b>Year operational</b>	2022	2017	2001	2021	2013
<b>Propulsion</b>	Nuclear	Conventional	Nuclear	Conventional	Conventional
<b>Tonnage</b>	110.000	65.000	42.000	66-70.000	45.000
<b>Launch/recovery system</b>	CATOBAR	STOVL/Ski-jump	CATOBAR	STOBAR/Ski-jump	STOBAR/Ski-jump
<b>Ability to launch heavy, propeller-aircraft (e.g., for EW)</b>	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
<b>Aircraft</b>	75+	40	24 +/-	44-52	30
<b>Indigenously built</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Table 13: Roaming the Indo-Pacific: US, UK, French, Chinese and Indian Aircraft Carriers.

China's current in-use carriers and carrier-based fighters have severe qualitative constraints, which the carriers of the United States do not (see Table 13). First, they are relatively small – and therefore, they can only house respectively 40-44 or 44-52 fixed and rotary-wing aircraft, whereas the largest US carrier, the USS Gerald R. Ford, can house over 75.<sup>182</sup> The Chinese carriers can only launch its fixed-wing carrier-based aircraft – the J-15 – if its fuel tank is half empty or if it only carries four missiles (two anti-ship and two air-to-air missiles), as it uses a ski-jump to get them in the air.<sup>183</sup> This severely impedes the J-15's fighting ability (especially at long-range) and durability. Propeller-driven aircraft – such as early warning and control aircraft – simply cannot be launched safely from a ski-jump, limiting the C4ISR capabilities of China's current CSGs.<sup>184</sup> Finally, the Liaoning and Shandong are diesel-fueled and therefore will likely need to refuel (for instance at friendly-ports when operating in the far seas) on a regular basis.<sup>185</sup>

178 The remaining 55 percent of the time these notional carriers were able to "surge" or – in other words – "able to provide additional forward presence as requested by theater commanders." Specifically, they were able to surge within 30 days 46 percent of the time and 30-90 days eleven percent of the time. Roland J. Yardley et al., "Aircraft Carrier Maintenance Cycles and Their Effects" (RAND Corporation, April 8, 2008), 1, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9316.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9316.html).

179 Shamseer Mambra, "INS Vikramaditya – The New Air Craft Carrier of Indian Navy," Marine Insight, February 28, 2019, <https://www.marineinsight.com/types-of-ships/ins-vikramaditya—the-new-air-craft-carrier-of-indian-navy/>.

180 Michael John Williams, "New British Carriers Can Transform Europe's NATO Naval Capabilities," Atlantic Council, April 7, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/new-british-carriers-can-transform-europes-nato-naval-capabilities/>.

181 Christina Mackenzie, "Macron Kicks off French Race to Build a New Nuclear-Powered Aircraft Carrier," Defense News, December 8, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2020/12/08/macron-kicks-off-french-race-to-build-a-new-nuclear-powered-aircraft-carrier/>.

182 "What Do We Know so Far about China's Second Aircraft Carrier?" June 15, 2021.

183 David Cenciotti, "No Match for a U.S. Hornet: 'China's Navy J-15 More a Flopping Fish than a Flying Shark' Chinese Media Say," The Aviationist, September 30, 2013, <https://theaviationist.com/2013/09/30/j-15-critics/>; Gilli and Gilli, "Why China Has Not Caught Up Yet," 185.

184 Yoshihara and Bianchi, "Seizing on Weakness," 66.

185 "What Do We Know so Far about China's Second Aircraft Carrier?"

The US still has three times as many cruisers in use as China has launched and two-and-a-half-times the number of PLAN destroyers, in spite of the PLAN's progress.

### Support Ships

#### *Principal surface combatants: Cruisers, Destroyers and Frigates*

Qualitatively, PLAN support (surface) ships are approaching “a level commensurate with, and in some cases exceeding, that of other modern navies,” greatly improving air defense, anti-ship, and anti-submarine capabilities (see Table 14).<sup>186</sup> As advances in guided missile technology have been applied to PLAN cruisers, destroyers and frigates, they have become forces to be reckoned with.<sup>187</sup> Through the integration of HHQ-9 Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAMs) (for the destroyers and cruisers) and HHQ-16 SAMs (for the frigates) with “powerful, modern radars”, they became “mobile Integrated Air Missile Defense systems in and of themselves.”<sup>188</sup> These ships also have both towed array sonar and variable-depth sonar systems, enhancing the support ships' ASW capabilities. Nevertheless, as the helicopters that are supposed to further expand these capabilities still have serious shortcomings, ASW remains a serious weakness.<sup>189</sup>

At the time of writing, the US still has three times as many cruisers in use as China has launched<sup>190</sup> and two-and-a-half-times the number of PLAN destroyers, in spite of the PLAN's progress (see Table 18).<sup>191</sup> If current build rates are sustained, however, the PLAN will have sufficient principal surface combatants necessary to both protect its (by then four or five if current plans are carried out) aircraft carriers, which would be one key step in order to execute global power protection missions by 2030 or 2035.<sup>192</sup> In light of European concern for the Indian Ocean and future European procurement, this is an important finding.

Surface Support Ships	Cruiser	Destroyer	Frigate
Newest type	<i>Renhai</i> Type055	<i>Luyang-III</i> Type052D	<i>Jiangkai-II</i> Type054A
Total	3	14	30
Tonnage	11.000	7.500	4.100
<b>Vertical Launch System (VLS)</b>	14x8-cell	8x8-cell	4x8-cell
Anti-ship missile (AShM)	YJ-18A	YJ-18A	None
Surface-to-air missile (SAM)/Air-defense	HHQ-9B	HHQ-9B	HHQ-16
Anti-submarine (A/s msl)	Yu-8	Yu-8	Yu-8

186 Defense Intelligence Agency, “China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win” (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019), 80, [https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China\\_Military\\_Power\\_FINAL\\_5MB\\_20190103.pdf](https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China_Military_Power_FINAL_5MB_20190103.pdf); Office of the Secretary of Defense, “Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Development Involving the People’s Republic of China 2017” (Washington DC: Department of Defense (DoD), 2017), [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017\\_China\\_Military\\_Power\\_Report.PDF](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017_China_Military_Power_Report.PDF).

187 As a definition, we use “an unmanned vehicle moving above the surface of the Earth whose trajectory or flight path is capable of being altered by an external or internal mechanism.” Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms,” 231.

188 This is an accomplishment that Russia has not yet achieved. Justin Bronk, “Modern Russian and Chinese Integrated Air Defence Systems” (London, United Kingdom: Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), January 2020), 23, [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/20191118\\_iads\\_bronk\\_web\\_final.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/20191118_iads_bronk_web_final.pdf).

189 Yoshihara and Bianchi, “Seizing on Weakness,” 68.; Rick Joe, “The Chinese Navy’s Growing Anti-Submarine Warfare Capabilities,” *The Diplomat*, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/09/the-chinese-surface-fleets-growing-anti-submarine-warfare-capabilities/>.

190 “Launched” means put into the water for the final stages of its construction.

191 “How Is China Modernizing Its Navy?,” *ChinaPower*, August 25, 2020, <http://chinapower.csis.org/china-naval-modernization/>.

192 Yoshihara and Bianchi, “Seizing on Weakness,” 68.

Surface Support Ships	Cruiser	Destroyer	Frigate
<b>Quad launcher (quad Inchr)</b>	None	None	2
AShM	None	None	YJ-83
<b>Guided missile launch system (GMLS)</b>	1x 24cell	1x24 cell	None
SAM/Air-defense	HQQ-10	HQQ-10	None
<b>Torpedo Tubes</b>	2 triple 324mm	2 triple 324mm	2 triple 324mm
Light Weight Torpedos (LWT)	Yu-7	Yu-7	Yu-7
<b>Rotary Aircraft</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
ASW helicopters	Z-9/KA-28	Z-9/KA-28	Z-9/KA-28
<b>Radars</b>	Type 346B	Type 346A	Type 344/345

Table 14: PLA support ship modernization in February 2021 – Expanding anti-ship, anti-submarine, and anti-air capabilities.

China commissioned its first-ever cruiser, the modern *Renhai*-class Type055, only in early-2020, commissioning two more in the first half of 2021.

Two key strengths in the PLAN support ships are first its hyper-modern Type055 cruiser, which is a “potent offensive strike platform in its own right” but is expected to accompany the carriers, and its Type052D destroyer. Both wield considerably powerful anti-ship and surface-to-air-missiles as they carry the supersonic YJ-18 anti-ship cruise missile (ASCM), of which the range is estimated at 220-540km,<sup>193</sup> and HHQ-9B and HHQ-10 surface-to-air missiles (SAM) to bring down aircraft, such as aerial drones.<sup>194</sup> China’s Type055 and Type052D have a relatively large number of VLS cells that can launch these anti-ship missiles (AShM) and the HHQ9-B as well as long-range Yu-8 torpedoes against submarines. Together, the Type52D and the Type055 form the core of China’s carrier strike groups and battlegroups of the near future.<sup>195</sup>

Cruisers	Year						
	1996	2006	2016	2020	2021 (Feb)	2021 (May)	2021+ Launched
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Renhai</i> Type055 (Newest)	0	0	0	1	1	3	8
Older	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 15: PLAN modernization – Cruisers.

China commissioned its first-ever cruiser, the modern *Renhai*-class Type055, only in early-2020, commissioning two more in the first half of 2021. Five additional Type055 cruisers have been launched but not yet commissioned (see Table 15).<sup>196</sup> The Type055’s large volume enables an integrated sensor mast, likely enhancing guided missile precision and enlarged VLS tubes. Its Type 346B AESA dual-band radars can spot threats hundreds of kilometers

193 CSIS Missile Defense Project, “YJ-18,” Missile Threat, June 25, 2020, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/yj-18/>.

194 See appendixes 3 and 4.

195 Franz-Stefan Gady, “China’s Navy Commissions First-of-Class Type 055 Guided Missile Destroyer,” January 13, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/chinas-navy-commissions-first-of-class-type-055-guided-missile-destroyer/>.

196 Minnie Chan, “Chinese Navy May Launch Eighth Stealth Destroyer Later This Year,” South China Morning Post, August 20, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3098205/chinese-navy-may-launch-eighth-type-055-stealth-destroyer-later>. See appendixes 3 and 4.

away while it can also coordinate with weapons and sensors of friendly ships.<sup>197</sup> As a result, this cruiser can carry even more YJ-18 missiles. In addition, the Type055 can house two ASW helicopters in a hangar, “making dramatic improvements in PLAN anti-submarine warfare,”<sup>198</sup> especially in conjunction with its long-range torpedoes.<sup>199</sup> This cruiser is both “the largest surface combatant currently built in the world” and “one of the most advanced and powerful ships in the world, boasting a wide array of advanced-capability weapons and sensors developed domestically”.<sup>200</sup>

Since 1996, China has improved both the quality and quantity of its destroyers, modernizing its older vessels and commissioning the new Luyang-III Type-052D on a large scale, accelerating its efforts in the last five years (see Table 16). The Type52D also enhances ASW capabilities, as it employs the slightly older Type 346A radars.<sup>201</sup>

The PLAN has more frigates that can accompany aircraft carriers than any other country in the world.

Destroyers	Year						
	1996	2006	2016	2020	2021 (Feb)	2021+ Launched	2025/2026
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>39/40</b>
<i>Luyang III</i> Type-052D (Newest)	0	0	2	11	14	25	N/A
Older	18	21	17	17	17	N/A	N/A

Table 16: PLAN Modernization – Destroyers.

The PLAN has more frigates that can accompany aircraft carriers than any other country in the world. The *Jiangkai II* Type054A frigate wields similar weaponry as the PLAN's cruisers and destroyers, except for its VLS cells, which do not fire anti-ship missiles (such as the powerful YJ-18 missile). Instead, its quad launcher can fire the YJ-83 AShM, which has a shorter range and subsonic top-level speed.<sup>202</sup> The Type054A is capable of over the horizon targeting, as it employs a “Type 382 phased-array radar system and Type 344 and Type 345 multifunctional fire control radar systems”.<sup>203</sup> China's expanding number of frigates are already actively used in China's naval operations (see Table 17), as they are both central to China's anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden and to the PLAN's SCS operations.<sup>204</sup>

197 Sebastien Roblin, “Patrol By Chinese Carrier Reveals Beijing’s Modern Surface Fleet,” *Forbes*, April 20, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sebastienroblin/2021/04/20/patrol-by-chinese-carrier-reveals-beijings-modern-surface-fleet/>.

198 Daniel Caldwell, Joseph Freda, and Lyle Goldstein, “China Maritime Report No. 5: China's Dreadnought? The PLA Navy's Type 055 Cruiser and Its Implications for the Future Maritime Security Environment,” *CMSI China Maritime Reports*, February 1, 2020, 23–24, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/5>.

199 Rotary aircrafts are essential elements to engage in successful anti-submarine warfare when carriers and support ships sail in the blue waters.

200 Caldwell, Freda, and Goldstein, “China Maritime Report No. 5,” 23. Xavier Vavasseur, “Shipyard in China Launched The 25th Type 052D and 8th Type 055 Destroyers For PLAN,” *Naval News*, August 30, 2020, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/08/shipyard-in-china-launched-the-25th-type-052d-and-8th-type-055-destroyers-for-plan/>; Defense Intelligence Agency, “China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win,” 80.

201 Roblin, “Patrol By Chinese Carrier Reveals Beijing’s Modern Surface Fleet.”

202 See appendixes 3 and 4.

203 Franz-Stefan Gady, “China Launches New Type 054A Guided-Missile Stealth Frigate,” *The Diplomat*, December 20, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/china-launches-new-type-054a-guided-missile-stealth-frigate/>.

204 “How Is China Modernizing Its Navy?”

Frigates	Year				
	1996	2006	2016	2020	2021 (Feb)
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>46</b>
<i>Jiangkai II</i> Type054A (Newest)	0	0	20	30	30
Older	36	42	34	22	16

Table 17: PLAN Modernization – Frigates.

Notably, in 2020, the PLAN had far fewer destroyers and cruisers than the US Navy. At the same time, China’s surface support ship capabilities far exceed those of India and all other navies that might challenge the PLAN in the Indian Ocean except for Japan.<sup>205</sup> Especially its modern and broadly introduced Type054A frigates can likely still achieve considerable success meeting any other challenger than the US navy in the open.

	China	Potential adversaries			Additional potential adversaries		
	China	USA	India	Australia	Japan	UK	France
Cruisers	1	24	0	0	2	0	0
Destroyers	28	67	13	2	34	6	11
Frigates	52	19	13	8	11	13	11

Table 18: PLAN principal surface combatants modernization (early-2020) – Matching up to adversaries in the far seas.<sup>206</sup>

**Attack Submarines**

The number of attack submarines the PLAN uses has remained more or less the same. However, it has modernized the boats in use – allegedly reducing detectability – and has started to deploy them in the far seas, including the Indian Ocean (see Table 19).<sup>207</sup> The PLAN’s newer submarines are far more capable compared to China’s earlier submarines, yet less capable than Russian ones<sup>208</sup>, let alone American nuclear-powered submarines. Its new Type093 nuclear-powered (SSN) and its Type039 diesel-electric submarines (SSK) make up more than half of the PLAN submarine fleet. In 2021, these are equipped with the YJ-18 cruise missiles and carry the Yu-3 and Yu-6 heavyweight torpedoes.<sup>209</sup>

ASW is best understood as “a game of hide-and-seek”, adopting emerging technologies in stealth and detection to achieve a strategic edge. Overall, it is easier “to hide a submarine than to detect one”.<sup>210</sup> Expanding its acoustic stealth, the diesel-electric Type039 (Yuan-class) is ostensibly one of the PLAN’s quietest submarine-classes.<sup>211</sup> The nuclear-powered

205 “How Is China Modernizing Its Navy?”

206 See appendixes 3 and 4; “How Is China Modernizing Its Navy?”

207 Rice and Robb, “China Maritime Report No. 13,” 13.

208 Congressional Research Service, “China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress,” 8.

209 See appendixes 3 and 4.

210 Sebastian Brixey-Williams, “Prospects for Game-Changers in Submarine-Detection Technology,” ASPI | The Strategist, August 21, 2020, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/prospects-for-game-changers-in-submarine-detection-technology/>.

211 Gady, “China Resumes Production of Its Quietest Attack Submarine.”

Overall, it is easier “to hide a submarine than to detect one”.

Type-093A is the PLA's most powerful attack submarine, partially because its larger volume grants space for "noise-reducing features." This led one analyst to conclude that China's SSN's are becoming increasingly stealthy.<sup>212</sup>

Attack Submarines	Year				
	1996	2006	2016	2020	2021 (Feb)
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>52</b>
Type093(A) Shang I/II Newest (nuclear-powered)	0	0	2	3	6
Type039 Newest (diesel-electric powered)	0	0	27	30	30
Older (nuclear-powered)	5	5	3	0 (3 in reserve)	0 (3 in reserve)
Older (diesel-powered)	55	61	24	18	16

Table 19: PLAN Modernization – Attack Submarines.

Trumping Chinese submarine capabilities, the US has almost as many combined SSGNs, SSNs, and SSKs as the PLAN – and is the only state that employs (a large number of) nuclear-powered cruise missile submarines. Even though this presents a problem for China due to its subpar Anti-Submarine Warfare capabilities, the PLAN's submarine capabilities far exceed those of its other potential challengers in the Indian Ocean, as it employs as many attack submarines as India, Japan, Australia, France, and the United Kingdom combined as of early-2020 (see Table 20).<sup>213</sup>

In addition to China's 100+ ground-based Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) carrying nuclear warheads, the PLAN's new nuclear-powered strategic submarine (SBBNs), the Type-094 (Jin-class), and the 12 JL-2 submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) carry J-L2 ballistic missiles (soon to be replaced by the next generation Type-096 submarine with the new, solid-fuel JL-3), strengthening China's "second-strike capability" in the event that its entire land-based nuclear arsenal is taken out by an adversary. This development is not without consequence as "[these] four operational JIN-class SSBNs represent China's first credible sea-based nuclear deterrent".<sup>214</sup>

212 H. I. Sutton, "The Chinese Navy's Most Powerful Attack Submarine: The Type-093A," Naval News, November 15, 2020, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/11/the-chinese-navys-most-powerful-attack-submarine-the-type-093a/>.

213 "How Is China Modernizing Its Navy?" See also appendixes 3 and 4.

214 See appendixes 3 and 4; Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Development Involving the People's Republic of China 2017," 29.; Ankit Panda, "China Conducts First Test of New JL-3 Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile," December 20, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/12/china-conducts-first-test-of-new-jl-3-submarine-launched-ballistic-missile/>. Finally, its new H-6N bomber is reportedly capable of carrying a ballistic missile that can carry a nuclear warhead. Mike Yeo, "Video Reveals Chinese H-6N Bomber Carrying Suspected Hypersonic Weapon," Defense News, October 19, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2020/10/19/video-reveals-chinese-h-6n-bomber-carrying-suspected-hypersonic-weapon/>.

"[These] four operational JIN-class SSBNs represent China's first credible sea-based nuclear deterrent".

Submarines	China	Potential adversaries			Potential additional adversaries		
	China	USA	India	Australia	Japan	UK	France
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>
Nuclear-Powered Cruise Missile Submarines (SSGN)	0	50	0	0	0	0	0
Nuclear-Powered Attack Submarines (SSN)	6	3	1	0	0	6	5
Diesel-Electric Attack Submarines (SSK)	48	0	15	6	21	0	0

Table 20: PLAN submarine modernization (early-2020) – Matching up to adversaries in the far seas | Source: IISS/China Power.

### 3.4.2 Peacetime and low-intensity far seas military capabilities

#### Amphibious Combat Ships and Corvettes<sup>215</sup>

In times of peace or against weaker adversaries, amphibious assault capabilities, or the means necessary to execute a sea-land invasion, such as amphibious combat ships (ACS),<sup>216</sup> landing ships and armored warfare capabilities, and smaller naval units such as corvettes can also make appearances in the far seas. China currently has two types: the Yuzhao I-Type071 and the newer Yushen-Type075, which has the size of a small aircraft carrier, can launch armored assault vessels, and can carry up to 900 marines (see Table 21 and Table 22).<sup>217</sup> The PLAN's lack of Vertical Take-off and Landing (VTOL) fixed-wing aircraft, however, limits the ability of the Type075 to take part in high-intensity combat situations in the far seas as the helicopter carrier at this point cannot be protected by carrier-based fixed-wing aircraft and China has insufficient forward-deployed aerial capabilities to protect the Type075 with land-based aerial assets in the Indian Ocean. Reportedly, the PLAN works on a Type076 that includes a catapult system “of a type currently only employed on the most advanced aircraft carriers”,<sup>218</sup> which would make the ship able to launch drones<sup>219</sup> and possibly fixed-wing aircraft.<sup>220</sup> If China's future fighter jets are capable of VTOL, the Type075 and Type076 may come to serve as capable small aircraft carriers in the far seas,<sup>221</sup> greatly expanding its carrier fleet.

Mainly understood as the means to take Taiwan, there are other missions that the Type071 and Type075 can (help) execute in the far seas. They can contribute to anti-piracy operations, provide humanitarian aid and evacuation operations for nationals, or execute political missions such as naval diplomacy through port calls and engagement activities or to

<sup>215</sup> “smallest warship among the frigates and destroyers. Has similar functions to the frigate and destroyer, although the corvette is suitable for Arctic patrol, which frigates and corvettes are not.” Peter Haydon, “Choosing the Right Fleet Mix: Lessons from the Canadian Patrol Frigate Selection Process,” *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no. 1 (2008): 73.

<sup>216</sup> Also known as “helicopter carriers.”

<sup>217</sup> David Lague, “China Expands Its Amphibious Forces in Challenge to U.S. beyond Asia,” Reuters Special Report, July 20, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-military-amphibious/>.

<sup>218</sup> Minnie Chan, “China Planning Advanced Amphibious Assault Ship,” *South China Morning Post*, July 27, 2020, sec. News, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3094912/chinese-shipbuilder-planning-advanced-amphibious-assault-ship>.

<sup>219</sup> Chan, “China Planning Advanced Amphibious Assault Ship.”

<sup>220</sup> Congressional Research Service, “China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress,” 26.

<sup>221</sup> Lague, “China Expands Its Amphibious Forces in Challenge to U.S. beyond Asia.”



intimidate and impress smaller states.<sup>222</sup> Finally, the Type071 and Type075 are likely to achieve considerable success against weaker navies without carrier-based aerial capabilities.

Amphibious Assault Capabilities	Year						
	1996	2006	2016	2020	2021 (Feb)	2021 (April)	Current + Launched
<b>Total ACSs</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>
Yushen-Type075 (Newest)	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Yuzhao-Type071 (Second newest)	0	0	3	6	6	6	6
Older	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Transport Ships<sup>223</sup></b>	<b>56</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Landing ship tank (LST)	24	19	16	28	28	N/A	N/A
Landing ship medium (LSM)	32	31	31	21	21	N/A	N/A

Table 21: PLAN Modernization: Amphibious Combat Ships (1).

Amphibious Combat Ships (Helicopter carriers)	Yuzhao-Type071 (2 <sup>nd</sup> newest)	Yushen-Type075 (newest)	Type076 (Reported)
Tonnage	20.000+	40.000	Slightly larger than Type075
Rotary-wing aircraft	16 <sup>224</sup>	30	30+
Can carry marines, vehicles, landing craft and helicopters.	Yes	900	Yes, even greater numbers.
Electromagnetic catapults to launch drones and possibly fixed-wing aircraft	No	No	Yes

Table 22: PLAN Modernization – Amphibious Combat Ships (2).

The PLAN's employment of a large number of small-surface combatants highlights the importance of Near Seas Defense and coastguard enforcement in disputed waters. Its Jiangdao-II Type-056A stealth corvette has been commissioned on a large scale (See Table 23). Like the ACS, however, these corvettes first and foremost serve a function in the South China Sea and East China Sea for purposes such as "patrol, escort, search-and-rescue, surveillance, exclusive economic zone (EEZ) protection, electronic warfare (EW), fishery resources protection, anti-aircraft warfare (AAW), anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and anti-surface warfare (ASUW) operations."<sup>225</sup> Nevertheless, the corvettes can be of use against weaker adversaries, in light-intensity conflict and for other sorts of (e.g. political) missions in the far seas.

<sup>222</sup> Congressional Research Service, "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress," 20.

<sup>223</sup> This table does not consider the smaller transport ships (i.e., landing crafts) that the PLAN and other PLA department also employ.

<sup>224</sup> Xavier Vavasseur, "China: End of the Type 071 LPD Program, Start of the Type 075 LHD One ?," Naval News, August 5, 2019, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2019/08/china-end-of-the-type-071-lpd-program-start-of-the-type-075-lhd-one/>.

<sup>225</sup> Naval Technology, "Jiangdao Class (Type 056) Corvette, China," accessed May 17, 2021, <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/jiangdao-class-type-056-corvette/>.

Corvettes	Year				
	1996	2006	2016	2020	2021 (Feb)
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>55</b>
Jiangdao-II Type-056A (Newest)	0	0	4	22	33
Older	0	0	18	21	22

Table 23: PLAN Naval Modernization – Corvettes.

### 3.4.3 Airforce capabilities: “Next-Generation” and older fighters and bombers

A key PLA weakness is in the aerospace realm. The technological problems with its indigenously built fixed-wing aircraft are plentiful; for instance, whether China's J-20 is really a fifth-generation fighter is disputed.<sup>226</sup> In addition, the Indian Ocean is not within combat range of China's fighters, as China lacks forward-deployed bases (discussed below), and it lacks the number of carriers and hence capacity to deploy carrier-based J-15s to the region. In theory, two classes of adjusted H-6 bombers are however capable of carrying a ballistic missile, which does extend the PLAAF's range over part of the Indian Ocean (see Table 24).

In spite of progress in aerial capabilities, China has run into persistent problems plaguing the development of any fighter – especially its attempts to successfully develop a fifth-generation fighter. First, it has failed to develop advanced jet engines – impeding the “reliability, performance and stealthiness of the aircraft.”<sup>227</sup> The J-20 Black Eagle, supposedly the equal of the US F-22, failed to live up to expectations as it lacks “powerful and reliable thrust-vectoring turbofan engines capable of supercruise.”<sup>228</sup> China has looked for compromises by importing a Russian engine and using an older indigenously-manufactured one, but both are of inferior quality compared to the American F-22.<sup>229</sup> On avionics, moreover, the software for flight control in fighter jets is becoming “endlessly more complex.” Given China's failures to successfully copy US fighter engines, China is unlikely to have achieved more success “in this more challenging realm”.<sup>230</sup> Finally, features of its design suggest the J-20 is far easier to detect with radar and thermal sensors.<sup>231</sup>

These failings have persisted despite enormous investment in research and design.<sup>232</sup> Andrea and Mauro Gilli advance more reasons for skepticism, pointing out that China has enjoyed extensive access to: American aircraft designs both through industrial cyber and

226 In fact, according to China's official classification the J-20 is a fourth-generation fighter. The US F-22 and F-35 are considered fifth-generation fighters. “Does China's J-20 Rival Other Stealth Fighters?,” ChinaPower, August 2020, 2, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-chengdu-j-20/>.

227 Yoshihara and Bianchi, “Seizing on Weakness,” 67. and Zhen Liu, “Could China's Unwanted FC-31 Gyrfalcon Stealth Fighter Finally Land a Role in the Navy?,” *South China Morning Post*, July 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3091563/could-chinas-unwanted-fc-31-gyrfalcon-stealth-fighter-finally>.

228 Gilli and Gilli, “Why China Has Not Caught Up Yet,” 182.

229 Gilli and Gilli, 182. and Andrew S. Erickson and Gabe Collins, “The ‘Long Pole in the Tent’: China's Military Jet Engines,” 2012, <https://thediplomat.com/2012/12/the-long-pole-in-the-tent-chinas-military-jet-engines/>.

230 Gilli and Gilli, “Why China Has Not Caught Up Yet,” 184.

231 Michael J Pelosi and Carlo Kopp, “A Preliminary Assessment of Specular Radar Cross Section Performance in the Chengdu J-20 Prototype,” July 4, 2011, <http://www.usairpower.net/APA-2011-03.html>. and Gilli and Gilli, “Why China Has Not Caught Up Yet,” 181.

232 In 2010, 33.3 percent of total military spending went toward equipment. By 2017, that figure stood at 41.1 percent.” ChinaPower, “How Developed Is China's Arms Industry?,” ChinaPower Project, February 18, 2021, <http://chinapower.csis.org/arms-companies/>.

traditional espionage;<sup>233</sup> the study of an American fighter with stealth features (F-117) downed in Serbia in 1999; access to an American F-16 via Pakistan; as well as technology transfers from other countries.<sup>234</sup>

In case of conflict in the Indian Ocean, the J-20's combat range is still insufficient for the fighter to be used effectively against vessels there.

Aerial Capabilities		Year				
		1996	2006	2016	2020	2021
<b>Naval Aviation (PLAN)</b>						
Fighter/Ground Attack	<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>153</b>
	J-15 <i>Flanker</i> (Newest/carrier-based fighter)	0	0	14	20	34
	Older	40	274	240	119	119
Bomber	<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>45</b>
	H-6G/G mod (provides target data to GLCMs)	0	0	30	27	27
<b>Airforce (PLAAF)</b>						
Fighter/Ground Attack	<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>1169</b>	<b>626</b>	<b>794</b>	<b>866</b>
	J-20A <i>Flanker</i> (Next-Generation Fighter/Newest)	0	0	0	22+	24+
	J-10A <i>Firebird</i> (Most-generic)	0	0	144	220	220+
Bomber	<b>Total</b>	<b>420+</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>176</b>
	H-6A (Nuclear bomber)	0	0	0	12	12
	H-6K (Most generic/ carries YJ-12 anti-ship missiles or 6x CJ-10/CJ-20 CMs)	0	0	50	100	100
	H-6N (Newest/ believed to carry ballistic missile)	0	0	0	4+	4+

Table 24: PLA Modernization – PLAAF and PLAN aerial capabilities.

In case of conflict in the Indian Ocean, the J-20's combat range is still insufficient for the fighter to be used effectively against vessels there. Only the PLAAF tasked with "homeland air defense" is in possession of J-20 fighter jets, not the PLAN, which is responsible for "fleet air defense and defending the territorial waters and coastline of China."<sup>235</sup> The Chinese mainland and Hainan Island are simply too far away, even though island-building efforts in the South China Sea bring the PLAAF in closer reach of the Malacca Strait. Even if China in the future could station a version of the J-20 on carriers or on bases around the Indian Ocean, the PLAAF has, for now, an insufficient number of J-20s (estimated at 24+ in 2021) to compete with the superior (e.g., F-35) fighter jets of the US and its allies in the Indian Ocean.

233 For cyber, see: David Axe, "Was China's Stealth Tech Made in America?," *Wired*, January 24, 2011, <https://www.wired.com/2011/01/was-chinas-stealth-tech-made-in-america/>. For traditional espionage see: "Foreign Spies Stealing US Economic Secrets in Cyber Space: Report to Congress on Foreign Economic Collection and Industrial Espionage, 2009-2011," in *Homeland Security Digital Library* (United States. Office of the National Counterintelligence Executive; United States. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2011), <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=>.

234 Gilli and Gilli, "Why China Has Not Caught Up Yet," 180.

235 Reports differ on the J-20's range from 1,200 kilometers on the one hand and 2,700 kilometers on the other, which would put (part of) the Indian Ocean in striking distance. "Does China's J-20 Rival Other Stealth Fighters?"

The PLAAF and PLAN combined hold 200+ H-6 bombers – all with lineage to the Russian Tupolev Tu-16 bomber – and may be used to effect in the near seas, particularly in a Taiwan contingency against US carriers.<sup>236</sup> At a longer distance, the H-6K, making up approximately half of China's bombers, can strike by using its YJ-12 anti-ship missiles and CJ-10 or CJ-20 air-launched cruise missiles.<sup>237</sup> Its combat range is “around two thousand miles, or even 3,500 miles with inflight refueling”.<sup>238</sup> The newer Chinese H-6N is believed to carry a ballistic missile that “appears to be a hypersonic warhead boosted by a conventional rocket”, resembling the DF-17 ground-launched hypersonic missile.<sup>239</sup> If the air-launched version of the DF-17 (which the H-6N presumably carries) has the same range of 2000+ kilometers, and this is added to the plane's flight range, then the H6-N strike capability also covers the entire Indian Ocean.<sup>240</sup>

Finally, China is developing the H-20, a next-generation strategic bomber that will “feature a longer range and perhaps nuclear delivery capability”. It can contribute to “strike missions” and “strategic deterrence”.<sup>241</sup> The PLAAF can be “increasingly confident” to threaten American targets as far out as Hawaii, and also American allies such as Australia have reason to feel “increasingly threatened” by the additional capabilities the H-20 will provide China with.<sup>242</sup> The H-20 – in combination with Air-launched Cruise Missiles (ALCMs) and Air-launched Ballistic Missiles (ALBMs) – is hence likely to have a range that easily covers the Indian Ocean. Currently, however, using these airborne missiles effectively at such long distances would depend on striking while undetected or at least unchallenged, as the H-6K and H-6N are both “slow” and “not at all stealthy,” as a result of which they are easy targets for fighters and SAMs.<sup>243</sup>

236 David Axe, “China Needs A Hundred Bombers To Punch Through An American Flattop's Defenses,” *Forbes*, January 27, 2021, sec. Aerospace & Defense, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2021/01/27/china-needs-a-hundred-bombers-to-punch-through-an-american-flattops-defenses/>.

237 The anti-land CJ-10's range is estimated to be 1,500+ kilometers. The anti-ship YJ-12's range is estimated to be 400 kilometers. CSIS, “Missiles of China,” *Missile Threat*, July 16, 2020, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/country/china/>.

238 This equals an extended combat range of about 3,250 km to 5,630 kilometers.

239 Yeo, “Video Reveals Chinese H-6N Bomber Carrying Suspected Hypersonic Weapon.”

240 CSIS, “Missiles of China.”

241 Derek Grossman et al., “China's Long-Range Bomber Flights: Drivers and Implications,” November 14, 2018, 50, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2567.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2567.html).

242 Grossman et al., 54.

243 Sebastien Roblin, “China's H-6 Bomber: Everything You Want to Know about Beijing's 'B-52' Circling Taiwan,” Text, *The National Interest* (The Center for the National Interest, December 18, 2016), <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/chinas-h-6-bomber-everything-you-want-know-about-beijings-b-18772>.

### 3.5 Long-range strike capability

The greatest relative advantage vis-à-vis the US, Russia and leading European states has long come from China's quantitative and qualitative expansion of its missile arsenal (See Table 25 and Table 26).<sup>244</sup> Missiles are effective, long-range, low-cost, and increasingly precise.<sup>245</sup> The PLARF is continuously increasing the average range, speed, and anti-ship capabilities of its long-range arsenal. In fact, these missiles – together with the improvements in sensing and other technologies – effectively call into question the military dominance that CSGs have had for almost a century and on which the United States' ability to project power globally relies on China's near seas.<sup>246</sup> Their precision in use over long-distances, however, is far less accurate and involves greater risks.

The range of China's medium-range missiles puts it in a position to hit the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and perhaps the Malacca Strait, while its IRBMs cover large swaths of the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait. The precision of China's most notorious MRBMs and IRBMs over long distances remains unclear, as assessments of the precision of the conventional ballistic and cruise missiles vary, e.g., the land attack DF-21C MRBM, the anti-ship DF-21D MRBM, the dual-capable DF-26 IRBM, the DF-17 Hyper-boost Glide Vehicle (HGV), and the supersonic CJ-100 GLCM.

The land-attack DF-17 HGV and the anti-ship CJ-100 may just put the Malacca Strait in reach as well as limited parts of the adjacent waters, such as the Bay of Bengal. China's DF-21C land attack missile can just cover the Malacca Strait and only those waters closest to China's Mainland. The DF-21D, the world's first anti-ship ballistic missile dubbed "carrier-killer", cannot reach the Malacca Strait, but likely only the Bay of Bengal. China's pre-eminent IRBM, the DF-26, likely extends China's precision strike to fixed targets around the chokepoints and bases in Guam,<sup>247</sup> reaching almost the whole Indian Ocean and adjacent waters up to Australia in the south and Eastern Africa in the west.<sup>248</sup> The lauding of the development of the DF-26B suggests that an anti-ship variant has been built that is "prepared for US aircraft carriers."<sup>249</sup>

244 One of the reasons that China has been capable of this enormous expansion is that it is not a signatory to the INF-treaty while its competitors in terms of military capabilities, Russia and the US, put far-reaching limitations on their conventional missile development. In fact, the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (ING) Treaty prohibited the development as well as deployment of land-based missiles that have a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers from its signing in 1987 to the Trump Administration's withdrawal from the treaty in 2019. "Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty)" (U.S. Department of State, December 8, 1987), //2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102360.htm. See also Harry B. Admiral Harris jr., "Statement Of Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr., U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. Pacific Command Before The Senate Armed Services Committee On U.S. Pacific Command Posture" (Senate Armed Services Committee, April 27, 2017), 7, [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Harris\\_04-27-17.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Harris_04-27-17.pdf).

245 Especially compared to principal surface naval combatants required to project power in the far seas.

246 The Congressional Research Service has stated: "The U.S. Navy has not previously faced a threat from highly accurate ballistic missiles capable of hitting moving ships at sea. For this reason, some observers have referred to ASBMs as a "game-changing" weapon. [...] The relative long ranges of certain Chinese ASCMs have led to concerns among some observers that the U.S. Navy is not moving quickly enough to arm U.S. Navy surface ships with similarly ranged ASCMs." Congressional Research Service, "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities — Background and Issues for Congress," 6.

247 Jordan Wilson, "China's Expanding Ability to Conduct Conventional Missile Strikes on Guam," Center for International Maritime Security, August 16, 2016, <https://cimsec.org/chinas-expanding-ability-conduct-conventional-missile-strikes-guam/>.

248 CSIS, "Missiles of China."

249 The DF-26 is the intermediate-range version of the DF-21-class MRBM, which has an anti-ship variant. Global Times, "Hopefully, 'Carrier Killer' Missiles Would Never Be Used in the South China Sea: Global Times Editorial - Global Times," Global Times, August 28, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1199208.shtml>.

Name	Type	Purpose	Delivery	Estimated range (km)	In Range	
					Malacca Strait	Indian Ocean/Adjacent waters and countries
CJ-100*	GLCM, Supersonic; Hypersonic according to Chinese state media	Anti-ship	Conventional; Nuclear capability unknown	Unknown; 2,000 according to IISS; 2,000-3,000 according to "military insider" cited in SCMP, a Chinese newspaper	Maybe	Likely only limited parts (e.g., Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea)
DF-17*	Ballistic Missile (BM) with hypersonic boost-glide vehicle (HGV)	Land attack: Anti-ship version under development says PLA	Only conventional (Likely)	1,800-2,500	Almost/Just	Likely only limited parts (e.g., Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea)
DF-21C	Ground-launched Ballistic Missile (GLBM)	Land attack	Conventional	2,150	Just	No, only some sections (e.g., Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea)
DF-21D ("Carrier-killer")	GLBM	Anti-ship	Conventional	1,450-1,550	No	No, only minor sections (e.g., Bay of Bengal)
DF-26 ("Guam express")	GLBM	Land attack/ (Anti-ship unconfirmed)	Dual capable	4,000	Yes	Yes, large swaths (e.g., Suez, Gulf of Aden, North-Australia)
H-6K with CJ-10 (or CJ-20)	Bomber carrying Cruise Missile (CM)	Land attack	Conventional	H-6K range including in-air refuel: 3,250-5,630 CJ-10 Range: 1,500	Yes	Yes, likely the majority (e.g., the Eastern Mediterranean, East Africa, Northern Australia)
H-6K with YJ-12	Bomber carrying CM	Anti-ship	Conventional	H-6K range including in-air refuel: 3,250-5,630 Y-12 range: 500-540	Yes	Yes, likely large swaths (e.g., Suez, Gulf of Aden, Northern Australia)
<b>Unconfirmed</b>						
H6-N with version of DF-17	Bomber carrying BMs/HVG	Land Attack	Only conventional (Likely)	H-6N range: unknown DF-17 range: 2,000+	Yes	Yes, likely entirely

\*Debuted at China's 2019 National Day Parade, celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the People's Republic of China

Table 25: Extending sea denial – the PLA's pursuit of conventional missiles to put the far seas in range.<sup>250</sup>

Large-scale procurement of these advanced missiles potentially compromises traditional missile defense systems meant to intercept them. Whereas China had no IRBMs in 2015, in 2020 IRBMs took up over 40% of China's total conventional and dual-capable MRBM and IRBM arsenal (see Table 26).<sup>251</sup> China's IRBMs consist of an estimated 110+ DF-26s in 2021.<sup>252</sup> Notably, the US Department of Defense (DoD) puts the number of Chinese ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles at an approximately 50% higher rate than the International

250 'Missile Threat', CSIS, accessed 3 September 2021, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/>. For estimated range see CSIS, "Missiles of China.": according to international observers, the speed of the CJ-100 is likely supersonic but was announced as "hypersonic" by CGTN in 2019. Williams and Dahlgren, "More Than Missiles: China Previews Its New Way of War.": Sebastien Roblin, "The DF-100 Is China's Biggest Threat To The U.S. Navy," Text, The National Interest (The Center for the National Interest, April 17, 2020), <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/df-100-chinas-biggest-threat-us-navy-145172/>, DF 17, DF 100 & DF 41 Make Debuts at National Day Parade (CGTN, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMUbpMTfZtE&t=183s>.

251 Moving the bulk of China's IRBMs further West is another condition for China to put the Indian Ocean and its Adjacent waters properly in range, as today the majority of China's missiles are still located in its Central, Eastern, South-Eastern and Southern regions with a primary focus on the near seas. "How Are China's Land-Based Conventional Missile Forces Evolving?," China Power Centre for Strategic and International Studies, ChinaPower, September 21, 2020, <http://chinapower.csis.org/conventional-missiles/>.

252 See appendixes 3 and 4.

Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) does, stacking up the IRBMs at 200, MRBMs at 150, and GLCMs at 100 in 2020.<sup>253</sup>

Class	Range	Type	IISS Estimate				
			1996	2006	2016	2020	2021
IRBM	3.000-5.500km	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>110+</b>
		DF-26 (dual-cap)	0	0	16	72	110+
MRBM	1.000-3.000km	<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>106</b>
		DF-21C (land attack)	N/A	N/A	36	24	24
		DF-21D (anti-ship)	0	0	18	30	30
		DF-17 (land attack; HGV)	0	0	0	16	16
GLCM	>1.500km	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>108</b>
		CJ-100 (anti-ship)	0	0	0	16	54

Table 26: China expands mid-range and intermediate-range ballistic missiles and swaps land attack for anti-ship missiles | Source IISS *The Military Balance*.

Despite stated improvements in Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) and maneuvering reentry vehicle development,<sup>254</sup> the DF-26 at its maximum distance of 4000km was in 2015 and 2016 described as “far from accurate” as its Circular Error Probability (CEP) was estimated between 150 and 450 meters, making it unlikely that it is able to hit ships at long-distances.<sup>255</sup> Since 2013, the PLARF has struck vessel-like fixed objects in the Gobi Desert, some of them emulating ships in harbors.<sup>256</sup> Yet on 26 August 2020, China ostensibly conducted a successful test strike against a large moving target ship in the South China Sea using the (both road-mobile<sup>257</sup>) DF-26(B) IRBM from far into China’s interior (its Northwestern Qinghai province), which would likely be over 2,800km away from the target, and a DF-21D MRBM from its coastal Zhejiang province, likely over 1,500km away from the target.<sup>258</sup>

There are additional caveats to China’s use of missiles against other powers in the far seas. Besides the obvious domestic incentive to overstate targeting ability, China “seeks to overawe audiences limited in access to technical details [...] to generate deterrence it has not earned operationally.”<sup>259</sup> Moreover, from a nuclear crisis stability point of view, in case of land-based launches from Southern China, China must shoot over the territories of other countries. The pivotal question here is what happens if China launches a conventional missile over

253 Office of the Secretary of Defense, “Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2020.”

254 CSIS, “Missiles of China.”

255 Wilson, “China’s Expanding Ability to Conduct Conventional Missile Strikes on Guam,” 11. citing IHS, Jane’s Strategic Weapons Systems: Offensive Weapons, China, DF-26, September 11, 2015, 2.

256 Joseph Trevithick, “Chinese Long-Range Ballistic Missiles Struck Moving Ship In South China Sea: Report,” The Drive, November 16, 2020, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/37662/chinese-long-range-ballistic-missiles-struck-moving-ship-in-south-china-sea-report>.

257 Another way to overcome the problem of ensuring accuracy in strikes further away from the mainland is to deploy missiles in overseas bases on territory of allies. That said, these would be easily found and acted against in case of conflict.

258 Huang, “China Fires ‘Aircraft-Carrier Killer’ Missile in ‘Warning to US,’” South China Morning Post, August 26, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3098972/chinese-military-launches-two-missiles-south-china-sea-warning>.

259 Andrew S. Erickson, “China’s DF-21D And DF-26B ASBMs: Is The U.S. Military Ready?,” Andrew S. Erickson, November 15, 2020, <https://www.andrewerickson.com/2020/11/chinas-df-21d-and-df-26b-asbms-is-the-u-s-military-ready/>.

nuclear-armed India that, in a short time window, has to decide whether to launch what New Delhi's leaders would think is a retaliatory nuclear strike? Since China has both a large stockpile of nuclear weapons as well as an increasingly potent second-strike capability, such a scenario can play out disastrously.

Targeting moving vessels and readjusting in flight, a combination of an "expanding network of sky wave and surface wave over-the-horizon (OTH) systems" supports China's long-range strike capability,<sup>260</sup> while its expanding fleet of unmanned aircraft, maritime patrol and surveillance aircraft, new principal surface combatants, "long-range sensors" on its man-made islands in the South China Sea, and space-based sensors improve China's warning and targeting capabilities.<sup>261</sup>

### 3.6 C4ISR

C4ISR is a necessary condition for modern armies, navies, air forces, and rocket forces to operate effectively.<sup>262</sup> PLA military strategies have attributed a greater role to C4ISR over time, as the PLA's "basic point for preparation for military struggle (PMS)" moved toward "winning local wars under conditions of informationization, highlighting maritime military struggle and maritime PMS".<sup>263</sup> Winning such wars requires networked, technologically-advanced naval, aerial, and missile forces with robust ISR capabilities. Hence, China has invested in expanding its C4ISR capabilities. This includes all-around command and control, in particular, focusing on Emerging Disruptive Technology (EDT) and maritime Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities as deployed in the SCS.

On the cusp of a military-technological revolution driven by AI and autonomy,<sup>264</sup> China's CSGs, including carrier-based fighters, a wide range of surface support ships, and attack submarines, all carry their own complex sensors and radars.<sup>265</sup> Disruptive technologies can improve the effectiveness of such groups as they help decision-makers strike with "superior speed and precision" across the 21<sup>st</sup> century domains, providing enhanced situational

260 "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China: Annual Report to Congress 2020," 59.

261 Trevithick, "Chinese Long-Range Ballistic Missiles Struck Moving Ship In South China Sea."

262 The fusion of technologically advanced offensive weapons through C4ISR make them "greater than the sum of their parts." In fact, "without adequate C4ISR systems, aircraft cannot be safely launched, employed, or recovered; Tomahawk cruise missile strikes cannot be coordinated; and defensive capabilities can be degraded so significantly as to allow and even invite the hostile engagement of friendly vessels or aircraft." Kevin MacG. Adams and Thomas J. Meyers, "The US Navy Carrier Strike Group as a System of Systems," *International Journal of System of Systems Engineering* 2, no. 2/3 (2011): 95, <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSSE.2011.040547>; James S. Johnson, "China's Vision of the Future Network-Centric Battlefield: Cyber, Space and Electromagnetic Asymmetric Challenges to the United States," *Comparative Strategy* 37, no. 5 (October 20, 2018): 373–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2018.1526563>.

263 The State Council of the People's Republic of China, "China's Military Strategy - Strategic Guideline of Active Defense," May 2015, [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2015/05/27/content\\_281475115610833.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm).

264 Some observers have argued, however, that this technological change will be of an evolutionary nature. See e.g. Jeremy Stöhs, "How High? The Future of European Naval Power and the High-End Challenge," Centre for Military Studies (University of Copenhagen, February 18, 2021), 44, <https://cms.polsci.ku.dk/english/publications/how-high-the-future-of-european-naval-power-and-the-high-end-challenge/>. F. Hoffman, "Will War's Nature Change in the Seventh Military Revolution?," *Undefined*, 2017, 19–31, /paper/Will-War%27s-Nature-Change-in-the-Seventh-Military-Hoffman/0cf9a738fb94d77972aeb62bb1074c398e61e642.

265 These systems will become more complex as China swaps its current carrier-based fighter for a new version of the J-20.

C4ISR is a necessary condition for modern armies, navies, air forces, and rocket forces to operate effectively.



awareness through sea, air, land, as well as space-based sensors and cyber.<sup>266</sup> Beijing's "Made in China 2025" ten-year plan, China's 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan and its dual circulation policy, all target dual-use technologies that can build up its EDT capacity, drawing on SOE-private innovation at home and acquisitions of high-tech abroad.<sup>267</sup>

China has also expanded its ISR capabilities by investing in high-frequency direction finding (HF/DF); (military) satellites;<sup>268</sup> and land-based, sea-based, and air-based radars.<sup>269</sup> At the same time, the bulk of China's ISR components are centered on the mainland or around the SCS, as it attempts to further solidify its overview of, control over, and A2/AD capabilities in its direct environment.<sup>270</sup> The aforementioned weaknesses of China's power projection capabilities, namely its aircraft carriers' inability to launch early-warning aircraft, further limits the PLAN's current ISR capabilities in the far seas.

China has also expanded its ISR capabilities by investing in high-frequency direction finding (HF/DF); (military) satellites; and land-based, sea-based, and air-based radars.

	2016	2020	2021
Military Satellites (Total)	77	117	132
Communications	5	9	9
Navigation/positioning timing	18	34	45
Meteorology/Oceanography	N/A	8	8
ISR <sup>271</sup>	39	25	29
ELINT/SIGINT	15	41	41

Table 27: Charting the oceans – The expansion of China's military satellite capabilities.<sup>272</sup>

Dramatically increasing the number of military satellites,<sup>273</sup> the PLA requires "low-earth orbit satellites" for weapon guidance, which is what China has attempted to accomplish as it put (at least) 15 ISR satellites into low-earth orbit between 2017 and 2019 (see Table 28).

266 Stöhs, "How High?," 45.; Franz-Stefan Gady, "What Does AI Mean for the Future of Manoeuvre Warfare?," IISS, May 5, 2020, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/05/csfc-ai-manoevure-warfare>.

267 See for the fourth industrial revolution high-tech industries targeted James McBride and Andrew Chatzky, "Is 'Made in China 2025' a Threat to Global Trade?," Council on Foreign Relations, May 13, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/made-china-2025-threat-global-trade>.; see also Elsa B. Kania and Lorand Laskai, "Myths and Realities of China's Military-Civil Fusion Strategy," Center for a New American Security (CNAS), January 28, 2021, 2, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/myths-and-realities-of-chinas-military-civil-fusion-strategy>.

268 A military satellite is "an orbiting vehicle, which relays signals between communications stations used for military purposes." Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms," 107.

269 Felix K. Chang, "China's Maritime Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Capability in the South China Sea," Foreign Policy Research Institute, May 5, 2021, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/05/chinas-maritime-intelligence-surveillance-and-reconnaissance-capability-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

270 An additional reason might be to create a naval-bastion to protect its sea-based nuclear strike capability. Advances in the PLA's ISR can create the conditions necessary for precision launches of AShBMs to strike – or perhaps even to deter from entering the SCS – enemy combatants. Felix K. Chang, "China's Nuclear Interest in the South China Sea," FPRI, April 17, 2017, <https://www.fpri.org/2017/04/chinas-nuclear-interest-south-china-sea/>. What is certain is that the concentration of ISR capabilities aimed at capturing developments on the SCS highlights China's continued focus on the near seas. Chang, "China's Maritime Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Capability in the South China Sea."

271 None of the 39 ISR satellites that China had in use in 2016, namely the 1 Haiyang 2a; the 36 Yaogan Weixing (remote sensing); The 2 Zhangguo Ziyuan (ZY-2 remote sensing) are still listed as part of the 29 ISR-satellites active in 2021, which are the 2 Jianbing-5; 4 Jianbing-6; 3 Jianbing-7; 5 Jianbing-9; 4 Jianbing-10; 3 Jianbing-11/-12; 4 LKW; 2 Tianhui-2; 2 ZY-1; 2 Jianbing-10; 3 Jianbing-11/-12; 4 LKW; and 2 Tianhui-2; 1 ZY-1. See appendixes 3 and 4.

272 See appendixes 3 and 4.

273 See appendixes 3 and 4.

Furthermore, it added a remote-sensing satellite, with nine more intended to follow to ensure “uninterrupted observation” of the SCS.<sup>274</sup> The United States is the only country that has more military satellites in-use while China’s other challengers remain far behind (see Table 28).

	China	Potential adversaries			Potential additional adversaries		
	China	USA	India	Australia	Japan	UK	France
<b>Military Satellites (Total)</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>
Communications	9	46	2	1	2	8	3
Navigation/positioning timing	45	31	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Meteorology/Oceanography	8	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
ISR	29	17	11	N/A	9	N/A	4
ELINT/SIGINT <sup>275</sup>	41	27	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Space Surveillance	N/A	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Early Warning	N/A	8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 28: Military Satellites – Who can see where?<sup>276</sup>

China has one of the largest radar networks in the world – and employs both land-based Over-the-Horizon Backscatter (OTH-B) radar sites that can detect ships such as aircraft carriers thousands of kilometers away (albeit with limited precision), and coastal radars, which are more precise but have challenges “peering beyond 200 to 250km offshore.”<sup>277</sup> Their presence on Mainland China, Hainan Island, and its artificial islands in the SCS does not put the far seas in reach.<sup>278</sup>

Large-scale breakthroughs in the development and deployment of autonomous, unmanned vehicles, which would then also connect to the aforementioned networked C4 systems, and in “digitally fused sensors” will simplify surveillance of the seas, including of submarines.<sup>279</sup> Investment in these capabilities can help the PLAN overcome its ASW deficiencies, e.g. through cultivated undersea artificial intelligence (AI) and “highly capable Unmanned Underwater Vehicles (UUVs).”<sup>280</sup> Toward an “Underwater Great Wall”,<sup>281</sup> in 2018 the existence of two underwater sensors between the SCS and the Island of Guam were revealed,

274 Chang, “China’s Maritime Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Capability in the South China Sea.”

275 ELINT means “Electronic Intelligence”. SIGINT stands for “Signals Intelligence”.

276 See appendixes 3 and 4.

277 Chang, “China’s Maritime Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Capability in the South China Sea.”

278 See Chun Han Wong, “China Appears to Have Built Radar Facilities on Disputed South China Sea Islands,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 23, 2016, sec. World, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-appears-to-have-built-radar-gear-in-disputed-waters-1456198634>.

279 Traditionally, “costly manned-platforms” such as attack submarines, frigates, and patrol aircraft shouldered this burden. Due to advances in technology a clear trend has emerged towards USVs, UAVs, and UUVs adopting these tasks. As a result, smaller, “more expandable”, and less expensive “to develop, produce, modify and deploy at scale” pieces of military hardware will come to perform an important ISR activity. Brixey-Williams, “Prospects for Game-Changers in Submarine-Detection Technology.”

280 Lyle J. Goldstein, “China Hopes UUVs Will Submerge Its Undersea Warfare Problem,” Text, *The National Interest* (The Center for the National Interest, March 28, 2020), <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/china-hopes-uuv-will-submerge-its-undersea-warfare-problem-138597>.

281 Catherine Wong, “‘Underwater Great Wall’: Chinese Firm Proposes Building Network of Submarine Detectors to Boost Nation’s Defence,” *South China Morning Post*, May 19, 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1947212/underwater-great-wall-chinese-firm-proposes-building>.

strengthening deep-sea surveillance capabilities and likely fulfilling an intelligence gathering and early warning role.<sup>282</sup>

Potentially rolled out along the Maritime Silk Road by 2035,<sup>283</sup> China has deployed “a network of (both fixed and floating) sensors and communications capabilities” on surface-level serving in the Northern South China Sea, specifically between Hainan Island and the Paracel Islands, as part of the “Blue Ocean Information Network” (*lanhai xinxi wangluo*) pilot.

The KJ-500, China's newest Airborne Early Warning (AEW) aircraft, has a phased array radar that is capable of simultaneously tracking 60-100 airborne targets up to a distance of 470 km.<sup>284</sup> Yet with ski-jump ramp carriers and lack of foreign bases there is only one KJ-500s that contains an aerial refueling probe allowing it to “provide persistent AEW&C” (airborne early warning and control) coverage beyond the First Island Chain.<sup>285</sup> Nevertheless, a range of Chinese vessels, such as its two aircraft carriers and the Type055-cruiser, have potent radars that China can make use of in the far seas.

### 3.7 Non-kinetic capabilities

Acknowledging the importance of the cyber domain,<sup>286</sup> the PLA established the Strategic Support Force (SSF) in 2016 to put under one banner China's “space, cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare” capabilities.<sup>287</sup> PLA documents highlight the effectiveness of cyber warfare in targeting “C2 and logistic networks” to disable an adversary from operating in the early stages of a conflict.<sup>288</sup>

In a conflict scenario, China could use its cyber capabilities against non-military targets, including parts of the economy that help sustain power projection, such as ports and energy facilities. Their fragile cyber-defenses have become all too apparent over the last years. Maersk, a shipping company that handles one out of seven containers globally, was hit by a cyber-attack in 2017, causing a breakdown that affected all of its business “including container shipping, port and tug boat operations, oil and gas production, drilling services, and

282 Joseph Trevithick, “China Reveals It Has Two Underwater Listening Devices Within Range of Guam,” The Drive, January 21, 2018, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/17903/china-reveals-it-has-two-underwater-listening-devices-within-range-of-guam>.

283 J. Michael Dahm, “Exploring China's Unmanned Ocean Network,” Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, June 16, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/exploring-chinas-unmanned-ocean-network/>. A PLA daily article described the sensors of having the purpose “to defend islands and reefs in the SCS.”; Zhuo Chen, “China Launches New System to Defend Islands and Reefs in South China Sea - China Military,” China Military Online, April 1, 2019, [http://english.pladaily.com.cn/view/2019-04/01/content\\_9464939.htm](http://english.pladaily.com.cn/view/2019-04/01/content_9464939.htm).

284 In addition, China's new ISR-capable high-altitude long-endurance reconnaissance UAVs, the BZK-005 and WZ-7, have shorter radar range but can hover overhead for long-time periods providing “persistent surveillance.” Chang, “China's Maritime Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Capability in the South China Sea.”

285 Office of the Secretary of Defense, “Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020,” 52.

286 Here defined as “involv[ing] units organized along nation-state boundaries, in offensive and defensive operations, using computers to attack other computers or networks through electronic means.” Charles Billo and Welton Chang, “Cyber Warfare: An Analysis of the Means and Motivations of Selected Nation States” (Institute for Security Technology Studies, November 2004), 3, <https://cryptome.wikileaks.org/2013/07/cyber-war-racket-0003.pdf>.

287 In fact, China has publicly identified cyberspace as critical for its national security. Office of the Secretary of Defense, “Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020,” 61, 83.

288 “Military and Security Involving the People's Republic of China: Annual Report to Congress 2020,” 83.

In a conflict scenario, China could use its cyber capabilities against non-military targets, including parts of the economy that help sustain power projection, such as ports and energy facilities.

oil tankers.<sup>289</sup> The 2021 attack on the US Colonial Pipeline led to disrupted energy supply and led gasoline prices to reach “its highest levels in six-and-a-half years”. Ostensibly carried out by a Russian non-state actor, the question here is what (escalation) ensues in case of a sizable attack against key European infrastructure power projection resources.<sup>290</sup> The US Department of Defense warns that Chinese cyberattacks can disrupt the use of a natural gas pipeline in the United States “for days to weeks.”<sup>291</sup>

Like the cyber capabilities, space capabilities are playing an increasingly important role in China's military capabilities. China developed space and counter-space capabilities and developed an anti-satellite (ASAT) weapon, the SC-19. This missile is believed to have been “operationally deployed” to some units and started operational training for its use. The SC-19 is likely a variant of the road-mobile DF-21C MRBM.<sup>292</sup> China's space program creates synergies with its Anti-ship Ballistic Missile (AShBM) program, “including [in the area of] the missile's supporting architecture.”<sup>293</sup>

## 3.8 Conclusion

Determining that China has made impressive progress in all the capability categories that together make up far-seas military capabilities, China's ability to project power outside the Western Pacific is growing and should achieve a breakthrough within the next ten years. It has achieved parity with, or even surpassed, the United States and its allies in some areas, including missiles and surface support ships, though it still lags in some categories. In sum, the significant military advances it has made since 1996 make it a formidable opponent in its own region, and it is closing in on the ability to project power into the Indian Ocean.

In response to the end of the Cold War and demonstrations of unmatched US power in the 1990s, China undertook the rapid and ambitious modernization and expansion of its military, accelerating its pace over the last decade. This project that been, by any measure, successful. Today China is the dominant force in its own backyard, gradually pushing US power projection capabilities away from its coast.

China has developed almost all capabilities necessary for regional power projection and is in the process of developing extra-regional capabilities. China is on the verge of a breakthrough and will be able to effectively project power extra-regionally within the next ten years. China will not necessarily be able to go toe-to-toe with the US and its allies in all contingencies, but it should be able to mount missions to intimidate and coerce small and medium-sized

289 Jacob Gronholt-Pedersen, “Maersk Says Global IT Breakdown Caused by Cyber Attack,” *Reuters*, June 28, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cyber-attack-maersk-idUSKBN1911NO>; Scott Jasper, “Assessing Russia's Role and Responsibility in the Colonial Pipeline Attack,” Atlantic Council, June 1, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/assessing-russias-role-and-responsibility-in-the-colonial-pipeline-attack/>. & Andy Greenberg, “The Untold Story of NotPetya, the Most Devastating Cyberattack in History,” *Wired*, August 22, 2018, <https://www.wired.com/story/notpetya-cyberattack-ukraine-russia-code-crashed-the-world>.

290 The US DoD's annual assessment of China's military and security capabilities specifically mentions China's “ability to [...] disrupt [...] a natural gas pipeline for days or weeks in the United States.”. See Office of the Secretary of Defense, “Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020,” 83.

291 Office of the Secretary of Defense, 83.

292 Brian Weeden, “Current and Future Trends in Chinese Counterspace Capabilities,” November 2020, abstract, 24-25.

293 Andrew S. Erickson, *Chinese Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile (ASBM) Development: Drivers, Trajectories, and Strategic Implications* (Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt1dgn67n>.

Today China is the dominant force in its own backyard, gradually pushing US power projection capabilities away from its coast.

states through offshore threatening and to protect supply chains in the Indian Ocean, Middle East, and Africa, certainly if not challenged by a peer competitor. China possesses a world-class missile arsenal and fleet of surface support ships but still trails the most advanced Western militaries in terms of the number and sophistication of aircraft carriers and the capabilities of its carrier strike groups (CSGs), specifically in areas such as jet fighters and anti-submarine warfare.

China undertakes enormous efforts to remedy these profound shortcomings still standing in the way of effectively deploying its military capabilities extra-regionally (for a summary of the current shortcomings, see Table 29) and will narrow the gap with the most advanced Western militaries – though by how much remains a matter of debate – by 2035. Towards 2035, demographic, economic, political, technological and security developments may impede the continued development and maintenance of especially China's far seas military capabilities and, to a lesser extent, its near seas capabilities.

Realm	Capability	Kind	Shortcoming
Air	Next-generation fighter (J-20)	Technological	Cannot be used to protect sea-faring naval assets, as it cannot land on aircraft carriers and helicopter carriers; No Vertical Take-Off and Landing (VTOL) ability
Air	Fixed-wing aircraft (J-15 and J-20)	Technological	Limited air fighting capabilities; Even the newest Chinese fighter/ground attack aircraft (J-15 and J-20) suffer engine issues
Air	Helicopters	Technological	CSGs are vulnerable to submarine warfare; As PLA helicopters have limited Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) capabilities
Sea	Carrier-strike group	Numerical	Lacks the number of aircraft carriers and cruisers required to project power extra-regionally; as it (as of May 2021) only has two (Liaoning and Shandong) carriers and three commissioned cruisers (with five on the way)
Sea	Aircraft carrier	Technological	Carriers have limited sea-faring range before refueling is required; the PLAN's first two carriers and the third one (on the way) are diesel-fueled, putting severe limitations on how far they can sail without refueling
Sea	Aircraft carrier	Technological	PLAN's current aircraft carriers have limitations in force projection; as they are relatively small as compared to American carriers
Sea	Aircraft carrier	Technological	Carriers have limited situational awareness or "ISR capabilities", as they cannot launch Airborne Early Warning & Control Aircraft; have ski-jump ramps/lack CATOBAR launch systems
Sea	Aircraft carrier	Technological	Limited naval aviation offense and defense as it cannot launch fully fueled aircraft or only with a limited amount of missiles; Has a ski jump ramp; lacks a CATOBAR launch system
Sea; Air	Aircraft carrier	Technological	Limited naval aviation offense and defense; as the PLAN's carriers are protected by the older J-15 and not by China's newest J-20
Sea; Air	Combined	Operational	The PLAN lacks the operational experience (or "tribal knowledge") necessary to operate highly complex Carrier Strike Groups and battle groups even in situations of peace/low-intensity combat – let alone during high-intensity conflict
Missile	Ballistic Missile	Technological	Cannot be used with sufficient precision and safely over long distances; No anti-ship application over longer distances/using ballistic missiles against ships or bases in the Indian Ocean and adjacent waters to shoot over (nuclear-armed) countries

Table 29: Overview of impediments to the PLA's ability to effectively use its Far Seas military capabilities

# Chapter Four. **China Outside the Western Pacific: Resources to Sustain Power Projection**

Joris Teer, Juliëtte Eijkelkamp, Paul van Hooft

# Key Takeaways

- Though China faces severe hurdles in its efforts to sustain power projection beyond the Western Pacific, it commands enormous resources and is following a long-term strategy designed to support long-term power projection capabilities outside its region.
- Efforts to overcome shortcomings in its ability to sustain power projection are boosted by China's enormous industrial resources, including by far the largest ship-building capacity in the world giving the PLA a distinct advantage in a protracted conflict. It also has a large and modern defense industry, is the world's fifth-largest arms exporter, and has a quasi-monopoly on critical raw materials. The relatively small number of supply ships it has to support military operations abroad could be, when necessary, supplemented by a massive reserve fleet of vessels controlled by Chinese SOEs.
- China lacks (in)formal alliances but instead has initiated a large number of business-first strategic partnerships. The deep and broad apolitical commercial relationships it has created, which are attractive to many non-democratic regimes in Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean region, may challenge European and American alliances and serve as the foundation upon which a future alliance system can be built.
- China is in the process of supplementing its strategically located base in Djibouti – in East Africa, near the Middle East – with access to and influence over sites in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka that may, in the long run, be used for military purposes.
- China has sought to limit the downsides of its dependence on oil supplies from the Middle East by forming constructive relationships with Iran, Saudi Arabia and other oil-producing states; over which it wields influence through its mass procurement of energy whilst avoiding entanglement in the region's political problems and military conflicts.

This chapter examines the resources that underpin power projection outside of China's own region in the Western Pacific, including defense spending, concrete capabilities and procurement. It also analyzes the diplomatic and defense activities that support extra-regional military engagement.

Recalling the theoretical and historical foundations articulated in the first chapter, the supply and replenishment of troops and access to fuel for military capabilities lie at the heart of deploying and sustaining extra-regional power projection capabilities. This, in turn, depends on access to overseas and overland bases, replenishment ships and natural resources such as oil via inland routes and infrastructure such as railways, pipelines, waterways, and protected sea lines of communication (SLOCs). Ports of access such as overland and overseas military bases serve as hubs to project extra-regional power, as these fortified strongpoints away from the homeland can shelter, resupply, and refuel defense capabilities. Replenishment ships can use the SLOCs to resupply forward-deployed forces over water. China needs forward-deployed assets to escape its "claustrophobic nautical setting",<sup>294</sup> as China lacks unfettered access – especially in a scenario of conflict or naval blockade – to the Indian Ocean.

A large economic surplus to produce military capabilities, such as shipyards and a defense industry with access to critical raw materials, are pivotal in expanding China's far seas military capabilities over time or to repair and expand capabilities deployed in the case of protracted conflict. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the military-industrial base is deeply intertwined with the nation's high-tech sector through Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) initiatives.

This chapter finds that the resources that China has to sustain power projection beyond the Western Pacific, and specifically in the Indian Ocean, remain limited. However, China can already draw upon an enormous collection of assets and is following a long-term strategy that, on current trends, may soon allow it to sustain power projection capabilities outside its region.

The chapter starts off with a survey of the material resources tied to the power projection capabilities described in the previous chapter. This includes not only the ports China currently has access to but also China's broader military-industrial production and shipbuilding potential. Second, it looks at aspects of Chinese diplomacy such as alliances and strategic partnerships, its defense diplomacy, and arms transfers that can strengthen its influence and lever (further) facilitation of extra-regional projection. Third, the chapter examines China's current regional activities and the extent to which China has employed its defense capabilities.

## 4.1 Overseas bases and port investments

China has made incremental steps in facilitating power projection. There is Hainan Island, China's furthest southern point that holds a naval base where, satellite images reveal, a dry dock is being constructed large enough to accommodate China's soon to be launched third, and much larger, aircraft carrier.<sup>295</sup> Then there are China's artificial islands in the SCS that ostensibly aid PLAN power projection toward the Malacca Strait, its entrance to the Indian

294 Yoshihara and Bianchi, "Seizing on Weakness," 62.

295 H. I. Sutton, "Chinese Navy Expanding Bases Near South China Sea," *USNI News*, December 29, 2020, sec. News & Analysis, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/12/beijing-upgrading-naval-bases-to-strengthen-grip-on-south-china-sea/>.

This chapter finds that the resources that China has to sustain power projection beyond the Western Pacific, and specifically in the Indian Ocean, remain limited.



China would need to establish additional bases to be able to project power outside its own region. There are four potential sites: Ream Naval Base in Cambodia, the Port of Gwadar in Pakistan, Kyauk Phyu in Myanmar, and Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka

Ocean, and its adjacent waters, as its ships and aircraft can respond much more rapidly operating from basing on the Spratly Islands.<sup>296</sup> In addition, it is reported that China has deployed YJ-12B anti-ship cruise missiles (AShCMs) and HQ-9B surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) on Fiery Cross Reef, Mischief Reef and Subi Reef.<sup>297</sup>

To date, China's only base beyond the First Island Chain is located in Djibouti. From Djibouti, the PLAN can support "counter-piracy, intelligence collection, non-combat evacuation operations (NEOs), peacekeeping operations, and counterterrorism operations." Its base there is strategically located near the Gulf Region and Strait of Hormuz, and the Suez Canal, through which 20% of the transport in global commercial goods travels, and 10% of the world's oil exports.<sup>298</sup> Building three of Djibouti's largest infrastructure projects around 2017,<sup>299</sup> China is expanding the capabilities at the Djibouti port through the completion of a pier in April 2021 that can host an aircraft carrier.<sup>300</sup>

China would need to establish additional bases to be able to project power outside its own region. There are four potential sites, all of which are linked to the Belt and Road Initiative: Ream Naval Base in Cambodia, the Port of Gwadar in Pakistan, Kyauk Phyu in Myanmar, and Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka.<sup>301</sup> The geostrategic relevance of an expanded Chinese presence at the Ream Naval Base is not fully clear, as the waters there are too shallow and therefore not adequate to facilitate major naval assets, though Chinese companies have begun what appears to be extensive work on the port.<sup>302</sup> Moreover, these limited resupply opportunities, and perhaps prestige, ought to be weighed against the heightened regional fears that a Chinese base would elicit in, for example, Vietnam and Thailand that as a result could be drawn to rival US. The only reason why such a base would benefit China is because of the potential construction of the Kra canal, a costly project that is unlikely to be continued.<sup>303</sup>

Potentially "cracking" China's Malacca Dilemma, China has eyed neighbor Pakistan's Port of Gwadar long before the rhetorical launch of the BRI. Strategically located on the Arabian Sea and adjacent to the Indian Ocean, it is part of the 15-year 62 billion USD China-Pakistan

296 Becker, "China Maritime Report No. 11: Securing China's Lifelines across the Indian Ocean," 10. These islands have been dubbed "permanent aircraft carriers".

297 Joseph Trevithick, "SAMs And Anti-Ship Missiles Are Now Guarding China's Man-Made South China Sea Islands," *The Drive*, May 3, 2018, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/20616/sams-and-anti-ship-missiles-are-now-guarding-chinas-man-made-south-china-sea-islands>.

298 Jeong-Ho Lee, "How Tiny Djibouti Became the Linchpin in China's Belt and Road Plan," *South China Morning Post*, April 28, 2019, sec. News, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3007924/how-tiny-african-nation-djibouti-became-linchpin-chinas-belt>.

299 E. Downs, Jeffrey J. Becker, and Patrick deGateno, "China's Military Support Facility in Djibouti: The Economic and Security Dimensions of China's First Overseas Base," *Undefined*, 2017, vi, */paper/China%27s-Military-Support-Facility-in-Djibouti%3A-The-Downs-Becker/2d772ff15b26bd20d4edffd-15d61523c56d94209*.

300 Tsukasa Hadano, "China Adds Carrier Pier to Djibouti Base, Extending Indian Ocean Reach," *Nikkei Asia*, April 27, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/China-adds-carrier-pier-to-Djibouti-base-extending-Indian-Ocean-reach>.

301 The US DoD says China has likely considered establishing military logistics facilities in "Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, Angola, and Tajikistan." Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020," x. Other experts have mentioned the following countries as most likely to host China's second overseas naval base: Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles, Kenya and Tanzania. Jeffrey Becker et al., "China's Presence in the Middle East and Western Indian Ocean: Beyond Belt and Road" (Center for Naval Analysis, February 1, 2019), vi, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/AD1069216>.

302 Shaun Turton and Mech Dara, "Cambodia Naval Base Set to Undergo China-Led Expansion," *Nikkei Asia*, October 3, 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Cambodia-naval-base-set-to-undergo-China-led-expansion>.

303 Chen Heang, "Would Access to Cambodia's Ream Naval Base Really Benefit China?," *The Diplomat*, April 7, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/would-access-to-cambodias-ream-naval-base-really-benefit-china/>.

Economic Corridor (CPEC).<sup>304</sup> Giving credence to speculations over the port's dual-use potential, China recently built a "high-security compound" in Gwadar.<sup>305</sup> Today, Gwadar serves China's ends as a strong point and multi-purpose commercial center enabling direct transport over land to the Chinese mainland from the Indian Ocean and by extension the resource-rich Persian Gulf, albeit still relatively underutilized and underdeveloped.<sup>306</sup>

A naval facility complementing a deep-sea port in another one of China's direct neighbors, Myanmar, would connect China over land to the Bay of Bengal, reducing its economies dependence on trade via the Malacca Strait and its military and industry's dependence on oil through there. Myanmar's military junta, facing isolation by Western nations following its coup against the democratically elected government in January 2021,<sup>307</sup> may now also be more receptive to Chinese efforts to strengthen military ties. In fact, even before the coup, the construction of a deep-water port in Kyauk Phyu was announced.<sup>308</sup> Finally, China has held a "controlling equity stake" in the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, in the form of a 99-year lease, since December 2017 in spite of the port's lack of economic rationale for investment.<sup>309</sup>

The site in Sri Lanka provides obvious strategic advantages, given its proximity to India and various SLOCs. After the Hambantota project proved to be commercially unviable and Sri Lanka could not make payments to the state-owned China Harbor Engineering Company, in 2017, the Sri Lankan government ceded control to the Chinese government for 99 years. Though the lease prohibits military activity without Sri Lanka's permission, Chinese submarines docked at the port in 2014 and there have been reports of Chinese military personnel at the port.<sup>310</sup>

France, the UK and especially the US, can make use of an extensive network of overseas military bases around the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters (see Appendix 5). This enables a far greater ability to sustain power projection in the region than China currently has.

The commercial activities of China's SOEs play an indirect role at present and possibly a more overt, expansive one in the future. They are investing in Middle Eastern and Indian Ocean ports and are "required to have a CCP committee [...] ensuring that commercial strategies are aligned with party directives". China's SOEs have "concessions to develop and operate [...] shared with local partners, and foreign companies" in the Doraleh Port in Djibouti, Port Said in Egypt, Colombo Port, Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, Khalifa port in the United Arab Emirates,

304 Madiha Afzal, "At All Costs: How Pakistan and China Control the Narrative on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," Brookings, June 15, 2020, 1, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/at-all-costs-how-pakistan-and-china-control-the-narrative-on-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor/>.

305 H. I. Sutton, "China's New High-Security Compound In Pakistan May Indicate Naval Plans," Forbes, June 2, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2020/06/02/chinas-new-high-security-compound-in-pakistan-may-indicate-naval-plans/>.

306 A report argues that Gwadar will "not necessarily have utility as a base in a wartime scenario", citing a lack of political commitment on both China's and Pakistan's side to "provide mutual military support during times of crisis or conflict". See Isaac Kardon, Conor Kennedy, and Peter Dutton, "China Maritime Report No. 7: Gwadar: China's Potential Strategic Strongpoint in Pakistan," *CMSI China Maritime Reports*, August 1, 2020, 2, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/7>.

307 "West Condemns Myanmar Coup, China's Response Is More Muted," *Reuters*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-politics-reaction-idUSKBN2A11B0>.

308 Keith Johnson, "China Leaps Into Breach Between Myanmar and West," *Foreign Policy*, January 29, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/29/china-leaps-between-myanmar-west-india-xi-visit/>.

309 Jonathan E. Hillman, "Game of Loans: How China Bought Hambantota," April 2, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/game-loans-how-china-bought-hambantota>.

310 Maria Abi-Habib, 'How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port', *The New York Times*, 25 June 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/world/asia/china-sri-lanka-port.html>; 'Concern Over "Chinese Men In Military Uniform" At Sri Lanka Dredging Site', NDTV.com, accessed 1 September 2021, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/concern-over-chinese-men-in-military-uniform-at-sri-lanka-dredging-site-2479210>.

and Gwadar in Pakistan, the latter being the only port where China is the sole operator.<sup>311</sup> Saliiently, "important backbone SOEs" among them, such as the shipping companies COSCO and China Merchants, often have an in-house paramilitary capability."<sup>312</sup>

## 4.2. Sealines of communication and supply

Struggling to sustain SLOC protection activities in a scenario of conflict,<sup>313</sup> China has only twelve replenishment ships.<sup>314</sup> The two newest type 901 ships<sup>315</sup> are 240 meters in length and can hold more than 45,000 tons, which is twice as much as the older Type-903A that was extensively used in the Gulf of Aden anti-piracy mission. The new type has multiple cargo delivery stations able to transfer, for instance, food and spare parts, and includes five fueling stations enabling the ship to refuel a carrier ship, a carrier escort ship, and a frigate or destroyer on its starboard side at the same time.<sup>316</sup> The type 901 remains limited, however, in its capacity to transfer ordnance. The development of replenishment ships equipped with more dry transfer stations suggests that China seeks to enhance their long-distance power projection capacity.<sup>317</sup> Also important to mention is the enormous commercial fleet of China's SOEs, that is likely to "augment China's limited far seas auxiliary fleet" to support PLAN operations when the Party-state calls upon them.<sup>318</sup>

## 4.3 Access to vital resources

China lacks key infrastructure to maintain access to the resources that sustain deployed defense capabilities in a scenario of conflict, especially oil. As Kelanic observes, "because mobility in the age of mechanized warfare depends almost completely on oil, disruptions can also coerce by denial, which compels by destroying an adversary's physical capacity to resist."<sup>319</sup> With regard to economic pain, China has a large strategic dependence on the Persian Gulf oil quantities that its BRI infrastructure investments cannot mitigate.

The BRI land routes do not offset the conundrum of US supremacy at sea because options to transport large bulk of goods and resources over land are unavailable. Relying on a 'continent

311 Becker et al., "China's Presence in the Middle East and Western Indian Ocean," v.

312 Charlie Lyons Jones and Raphael Veit, "Leaping across the Ocean: The Port Operators behind China's Naval Expansion" (ASPI - Australian Strategic Policy Institute, February 2021), 4, <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/2021-02/Leaping%20across%20the%20ocean.pdf?mrEJH8QwypEHHxT0jxjtm-l8ucEeiZJfz>.

313 Becker, "China Maritime Report No. 11: Securing China's Lifelines across the Indian Ocean," 11.

314 Hackett and International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2021*, 253.

315 DefenseWorld.net, "Chinese PLA Navy Commissions First Fast Combat Supply Ship," September 6, 2017, [https://www.defenseworld.net/news/20520/Chinese\\_PLA\\_Navy\\_Commissions\\_First\\_Fast\\_Combat\\_Supply\\_Ship#.YLov-4VxdPZ](https://www.defenseworld.net/news/20520/Chinese_PLA_Navy_Commissions_First_Fast_Combat_Supply_Ship#.YLov-4VxdPZ).

316 Naval Technology, "Type 901 Class Fleet Replenishment Ship," Naval-Technology, accessed June 4, 2021, <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/type-901-class-fleet-replenishment-ship/>.

317 Andrew S. Erickson, "The Chinese Naval Shipbuilding Bookshelf," February 11, 2021, <https://www.andrewe Erickson.com/2021/02/the-chinese-naval-shipbuilding-bookshelf/>.

318 Becker, "China Maritime Report No. 11: Securing China's Lifelines across the Indian Ocean," 11.

319 Rosemary A. Kelanic, "The Petroleum Paradox: Oil, Coercive Vulnerability, and Great Power Behavior," *Security Studies* 25, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 187, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2016.1171966>.

Also important to mention is the enormous commercial fleet of China's SOEs, that is likely to "augment China's limited far seas auxiliary fleet" to support PLAN operations when the Party-state calls upon them.

first strategy' will – barring a revolution in overland transport – not enable China to safeguard its access to Eurasian supplies and markets in a comparable way as its connections over sea can.<sup>320</sup>

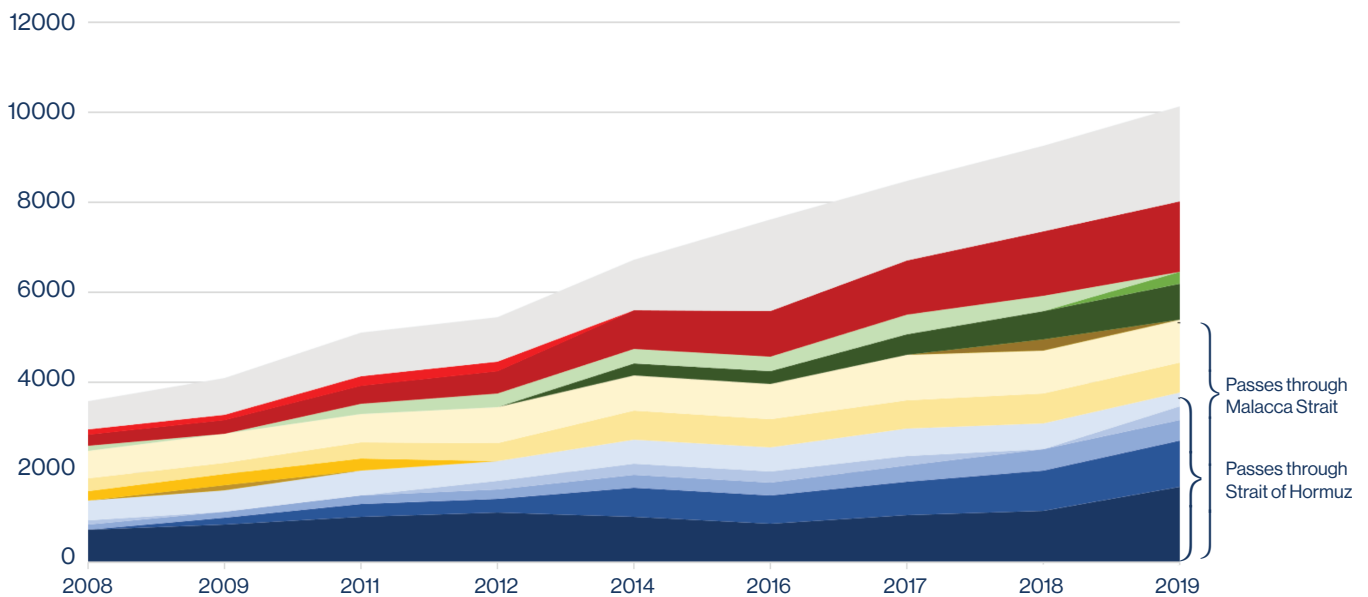
The numbers speak volumes. In 2018, China was the largest single-country importer of crude oil ever, importing roughly 9.3 million barrels of crude per day, about half being imported from the Middle East via the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). An even larger share of China's oil imports passes through the Malacca Strait, where China is highly vulnerable to a blockade of the Strait itself and/or additional waterways in Southeast Asia (see Figure 5 and Figure 6).<sup>321</sup>

### Chinese oil imports per country, 2008-2019

Barrels/day (x1000)



■ Saudi Arabia ■ Iraq ■ Kuwait ■ UAE ■ Iran\* ■ Libya ■ Sudan ■ Oman ■ Angola  
 ■ Congo (Brazzaville) ■ Brazil ■ Colombia ■ Venezuela ■ Russia ■ Kazakhstan ■ Others



Source Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China (2009-2020)

Figure 5: China oil imports per country<sup>321</sup>

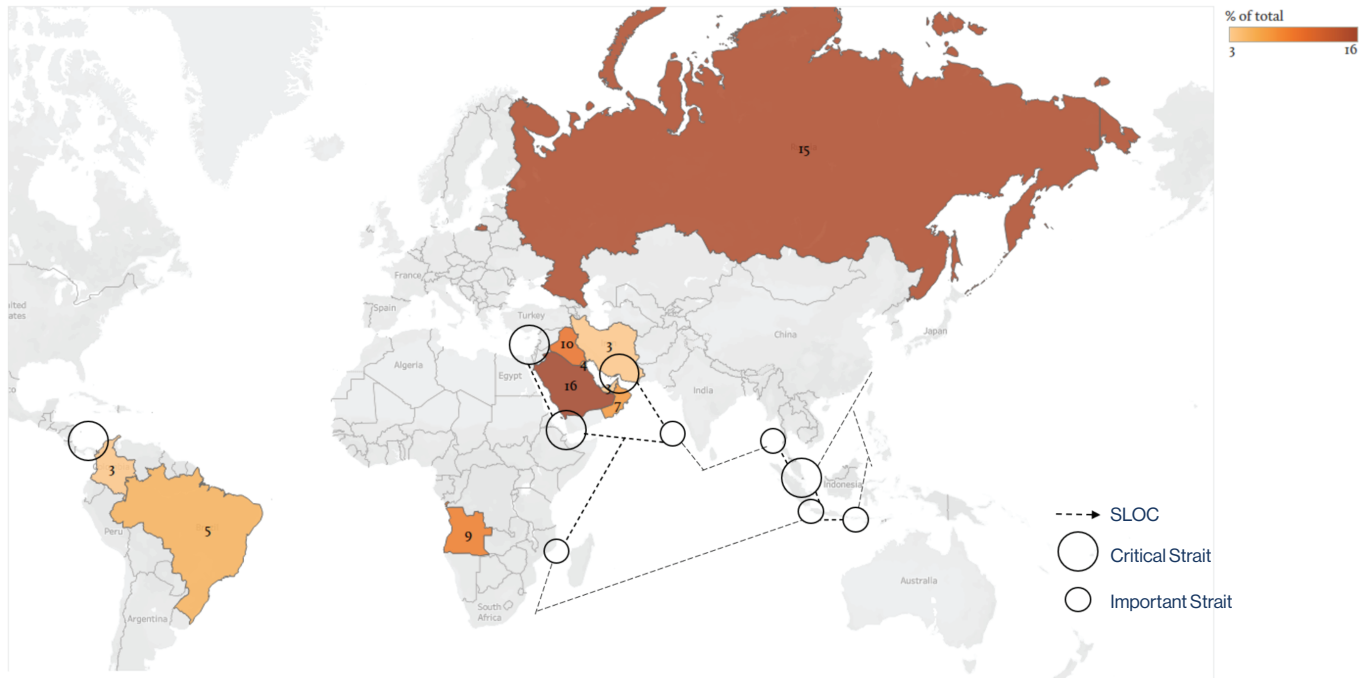
320 Shipping remains king. See Yoshihara and Bianchi, "Seizing on Weakness," 55.

321 In fact, military coercion in the form of an "interception-style blockade" specifically focused on minimizing the risk of escalation risks would be one military scenario the U.S. could employ that is least likely to end in nuclear threats or even a nuclear confrontation. Fiona S. Cunningham, "The Maritime Rung on the Escalation Ladder: Naval Blockades in a US-China Conflict," *Security Studies* 29, no. 4 (August 7, 2020): 730–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1811462>.

322 In reality, an even larger part of China's crude may pass through the Strait of Hormuz and the Malacca Strait than is indicated on the graph with "Passes through Strait of Hormuz" and "Passes through Malacca Strait", as more oil supplied to China, for instance by some countries listed in the category "other", depend on Malacca and Hormuz.

## Top 10 sources of Chinese crude oil imports in 2019

Share of total (%)



Source Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China, 2020

Figure 6: Chinese oil imports per country.

In 2020, China built 40% of all ships in the world whereas the United States and the three European lead-nations built less than 1%. The US, grouped together with potential additional Allied challengers in the Indian Ocean, collectively built 22.5 percent of total ships in 2020, as Japan is a major shipbuilder

## 4.4 Industrial resources

### 4.4.1 Shipbuilding and repair

China has the largest shipbuilding capacity in the world, which not only means that it can greatly expand the number of ships it produces in times of conflict in a relatively short time span, but also has a large capacity to repair ships. That numbers matter in a protracted conflict is perhaps best shown by the growth in the total size of the American navy from 394 in 1939 when Hitler invaded Poland, to 6,768 ships in 1945, when the Second World War ended.<sup>323</sup> In 2020, China built 40% of all ships in the world whereas the United States and the three European lead-nations built less than 1%. The US, grouped together with potential additional Allied challengers in the Indian Ocean, collectively built 22.5 percent of total ships in 2020, as Japan is a major shipbuilder (see Table 30). Put in military terms, the US and its allies ought to contemplate a China that is “willing to lose half or more of its surface fleet to secure its strategic goals”, as it has more shipbuilding capacity in Shanghai than the US has in its entirety.<sup>324</sup>

<sup>323</sup> Naval History and Heritage Command, “US Ship Force Levels - 1886-Present,” November 17, 2017, <http://public1.nhhcaws.local/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html>.

<sup>324</sup> Caldwell, Freda, and Goldstein, “China Maritime Report No. 5,” 24.

Rank <sup>325</sup>	Location	Output (Million Gross Tons)			Share of Total (%)
		2016	2018	2020	2020
	<b>Total</b>	66.8	58.0	57.7	100%
	<b>In Asia</b>	63.6	55.6	56.0	97.1%
	<b>CN potential adversaries: India &amp; United States</b>	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.17%
	<b>CN additional potential adversaries: Australia, Japan, UK, France</b>	13.6	14.6	12.9	22.3%
	<b>Country</b>				
1	China	22.3	23.3	23.2	40.0%
2	South Korea	25.5	14.6	18.2	31.1%
3	Japan	13.4	14.4	12.8	22.1%
4	Philippines	1.2	2.0	0.6	1.1%
5	Vietnam	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.9%
8	Germany	0.43	0.48	0.28	0.5%
11	France	0.2	0.17	0.132	0.23%
16	United States	0.35	0.2	0.07	0.03%
22	India	0.04	0.02	0.02	0%
24	Australia	0,0017	0,000.3	0.011	0%
30	United Kingdom	0.001.452	0.000.5	0.002	0%

Table 30: Top shipbuilders around the world in 2016, 2018 and 2020. Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

Military-Civil Fusion strengthens China's shipbuilding, extends beyond EDTs, and – in a globalized and economically interconnected world – is possibly making use of Western investments to do so. China is expanding Shanghai's Jiangnan shipyard in a three-year upgrade scheme.<sup>326</sup> Between 2018 and 2020 Jiangnan Shipyard received at least 24 orders to build commercial vessels for companies outside of China. Satellite images show, for instance, that an LNG-powered container ship, constructed for France's shipping giant CMA CGM, was constructed in the same dry dock where pre-manufactured parts of China's new carrier were assembled. CMA CGM ordered nine in total. Innovation achieved through synergies in the construction of foreign civil vessels may be applied to China's military modernization, and revenue generated from building China's commercial vessels may bolster China's naval modernization.<sup>327</sup>

#### 4.4.2 Defense industry

In addition to its shipbuilding industry, China built up a domestic defense industry consisting primarily of nine SOEs that partly absorb technologies from other states, "although questions persist over quality and reliability".<sup>328</sup> A 2019 PLA white paper phrases this uneven progress as "China's military security [being] confronted by [a] growing technological generation gap [...] the PLA still lags far behind the world's leading militaries."<sup>329</sup> Today, China is the

<sup>325</sup> Global rank as of 2020.

<sup>326</sup> See Minnie Chan, "China's Hi-Tech Warships Are Coming. Will Its Navy Be Ready?" South China Morning Post, January 5, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3116402/china-speeds-building-aircraft-carriers-will-pla-sailors-be>.

<sup>327</sup> Matthew P. Funaiole, Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., and Brian Hart, "China's Opaque Shipyards Should Raise Red Flags for Foreign Companies," February 26, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-opaque-shipyards-should-raise-red-flags-foreign-companies>.

<sup>328</sup> Hackett and International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2021*, 249.

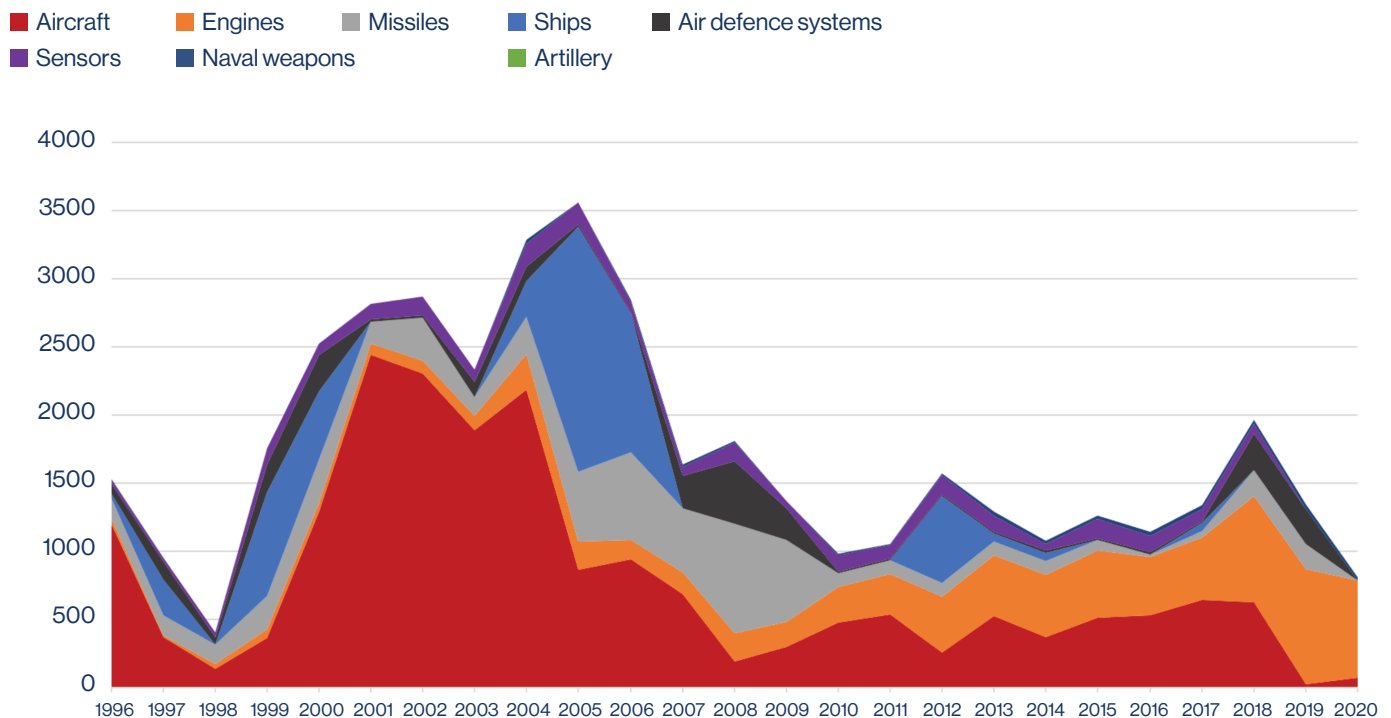
<sup>329</sup> "Full Text: China's National Defense in the New Era," Xinhuanet, July 24, 2019, 6, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c\\_138253389.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm).

second-largest arms producer after the US:<sup>330</sup> annual spending on military equipment rose from 33.3% of total military spending in 2010 to 41.1% in 2017.<sup>331</sup>

Evincing the industry's advances is the fact that while China imported (mostly from Russia) 22 billion USD worth of arms from 1996 to 2005, this number fell to 14.9 billion in the period 2006-2015 and to 6.6 billion between 2016 and 2020. Step by step, Beijing has shifted from low-cost mass production to developing expensive, high-quality weapons.<sup>332</sup> Having successfully indigenized shipbuilding and missile technologies by absorbing Russian models, China's remaining technological reliance on Russia pertains to its inability to produce engines and various other aerial features (see Figure 7). China's progress in developing its defense industry is perhaps best measured against the other rising power in Asia, India - a country with a similar population size and one of China's main challengers in the Indian Ocean. Long non-aligned, internally focused India has not developed a modern domestic defense industry, and instead continues its heavy reliance on across-the-board Russian defense imports (see Figure 8).<sup>333</sup>

## China defense import per category, 1996-2020

In USD (x1 million)



Source SIPRI Arms Transfers Database

Figure 7: Arms transfers to China per weapon category.

330 Nan Tian and Fei Su, "Estimating the Arms Sales of Chinese Companies," *SIPRI*, January 2020, 11.

331 ChinaPower, "How Developed Is China's Arms Industry?"

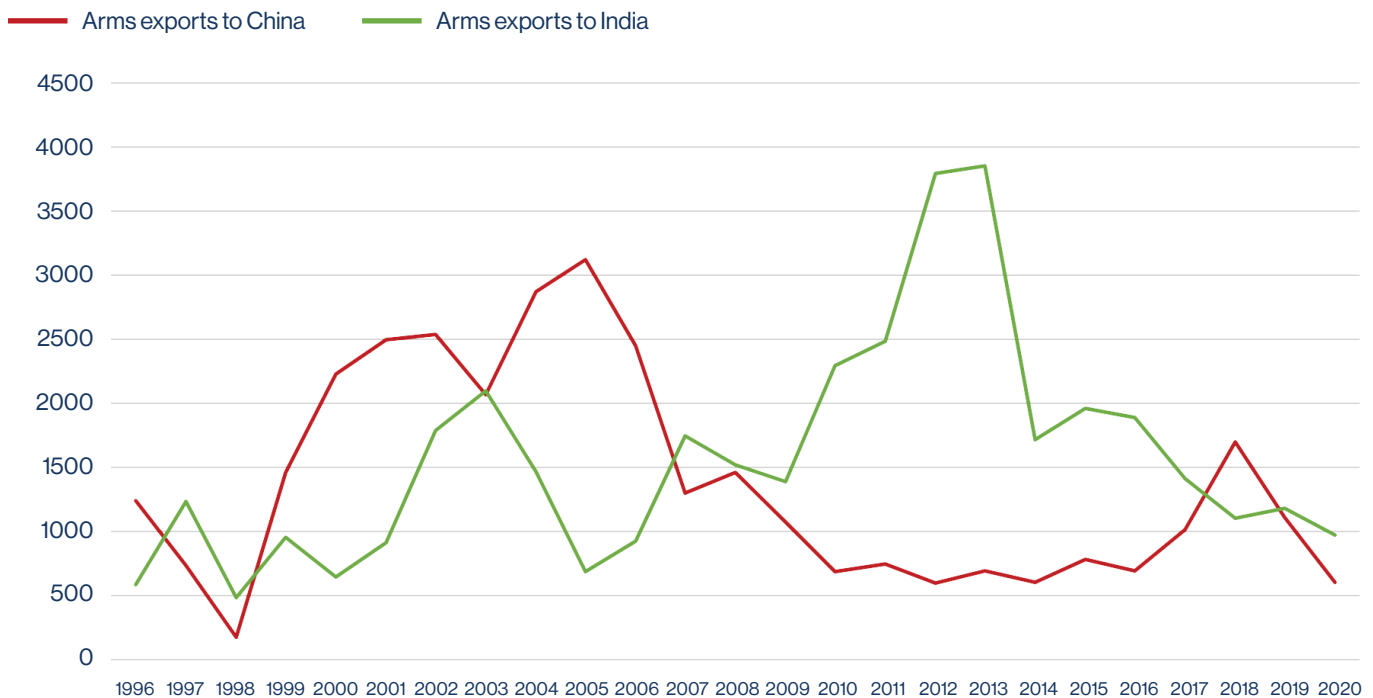
332 In fact, "In the 1990s, China purchased Russian Su-27 fighter jets and S-300 missile systems and reverse-engineered them to assist with designing its J-11 fighter jets and HQ-9 surface-to-air missiles. In 2019, Russia's Rostec accused China of illegally copying various equipment and technologies, including aircraft engines, planes, air defense systems, and missiles." See appendixes 3 and 4.

333 See appendixes 3 and 4.

Finally, China has guaranteed mostly domestic access to critical raw materials on which the manufacturing of high-tech weapons depends.<sup>334</sup> It holds a quasi-monopoly in the production of critical raw materials and has identified “standard-setting” as a central national policy objective, highlighted in its China Standards 2035 initiative.

## Russian arms transfers to China and India, 1996-2020

In USD (x1 million)



Source SIPRI Arms Transfers Database

Figure 8: China and Indian arms import from Russia

## 4.5 Strategic partnerships

For a great power, allying with smaller countries serves as a ‘force multiplier’, and can help project power over greater distances and in different regions. An alliance is generally considered to be “a formal agreement among independent states to cooperate militarily in the face of potential or realized military conflict.”<sup>335</sup> Too stringent guarantees to allies can lead to irresponsible behavior by the weaker partner and the patron feeling “entrapped” by its clients’ disputes. If alliances are too loose, however, the client state might seek alternative security arrangements with a patron’s rival, as it fears being abandoned.<sup>336</sup> Formal and informal alliances often come with arms transfers from the great power’s defense industry.

334 Irina Patrahau et al., “Securing Critical Materials for Critical Sectors - Policy Options for the Netherlands and the European Union,” December 2020, <https://mk0hc5snlsb22xc4fhr7.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Securing-Critical-Materials-for-Critical-Sectors.pdf>.

335 Brett Ashley Leeds, “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) - Codebook,” August 28, 2018, 6, <http://www.atopdata.org/uploads/6/9/1/3/69134503/atopcodebookv4.pdf>.

336 Glenn H. Snyder, “The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics,” *World Politics* 36, no. 4 (1984): 466, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010183>.



One of the greatest questions of the next decade-and-a-half is whether China will opt to become involved in the conflicts of the world by establishing alliances, or whether it will stick to its policy of merely closing “strategic partnerships”. At present, China does not have any formal alliances with (overseas) countries. Instead, it has built “strategic partnerships” around its narrow self-interest on various levels of ambition with a wide variety of nations (see and Table 31 and Table 32). These are different from alliances, says Beijing, as alliances are a hegemonic construct designed against third countries. Instead, China asserts that it does not form blocs against others and believes in a “Community of Shared Future Mankind.” China’s pragmatic commercial relations and aid schemes<sup>337</sup> paired with a non-interference policy<sup>338</sup> that exempts any normative stipulations like human rights and good governance forms a natural boon to autocratic states around the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters. China’s explosive economic growth and its ‘go-out’ policy of the last 20 years have, however, laid a strong economic and diplomatic foundation on the basis of which an alliance network of alliances among the 30 states around the Indian Oceans, and its adjacent waters, may be constructed later on.

One of the greatest questions of the next decade-and-a-half is whether China will opt to become involved in the conflicts of the world by establishing alliances, or whether it will stick to its policy of merely closing “strategic partnerships”.

	Country	Partnership	Year
1	Australia	Comprehensive strategic partnership	2014
2	Indonesia	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership	2013
3	Singapore	“All-Round Cooperative Partnership Progressing with the Times”	2015
4	Malaysia	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership	2013
5	Thailand	Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership	2012
6	Myanmar	Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership	2013
8	Pakistan	“All-weather strategic partnership”	
9	Sri Lanka	Comprehensive Partnership, Strategic Cooperative Partnership	2005; 2013
9	Iran	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership	2016
10	Iraq	Strategic Partnership	2015
11	Kuwait	Strategic Partnership	2018
12	Saudi Arabia	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership	2016
13	Qatar	Strategic Partnership	2014
14	UAE	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership	2018
15	Oman	Strategic Partnership	2014
16	Egypt	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership	2014
17	Sudan	Strategic Partnership	2015
18	Djibouti	Strategic Partnership	2017

Table 31: China’s loyalty ranking – A sample of partnerships around the Indian Ocean and adjacent waters.<sup>339</sup>

337 See e.g. Georg Strüver, “China’s Partnership Diplomacy: International Alignment Based on Interests or Ideology,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 10, no. 1 (March 1, 2017): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pow015>.

338 As per Enlai Zhou, “Main Speech by Premier Zhou Enlai, Head of the Delegation of the People’s Republic of China, Distributed at the Plenary Session of the Asian-African Conference” (Wilson Center, April 19, 1955), <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121623.pdf?v=e1cd06384e2e67bdf11f809ead78849>. China, unlike the US and European countries, does not have domestic pressure groups advocating policy changes in the Middle East for human rights abuses and undemocratic government. Instead, it emphasizes a particularistic definition of human rights, arguing that these are different depending on culture and level of development.

339 The colors represent regions around the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters. Green is Southeast Asia and Oceania, red is South Asia, Orange is the Middle East, blue is East-Africa.

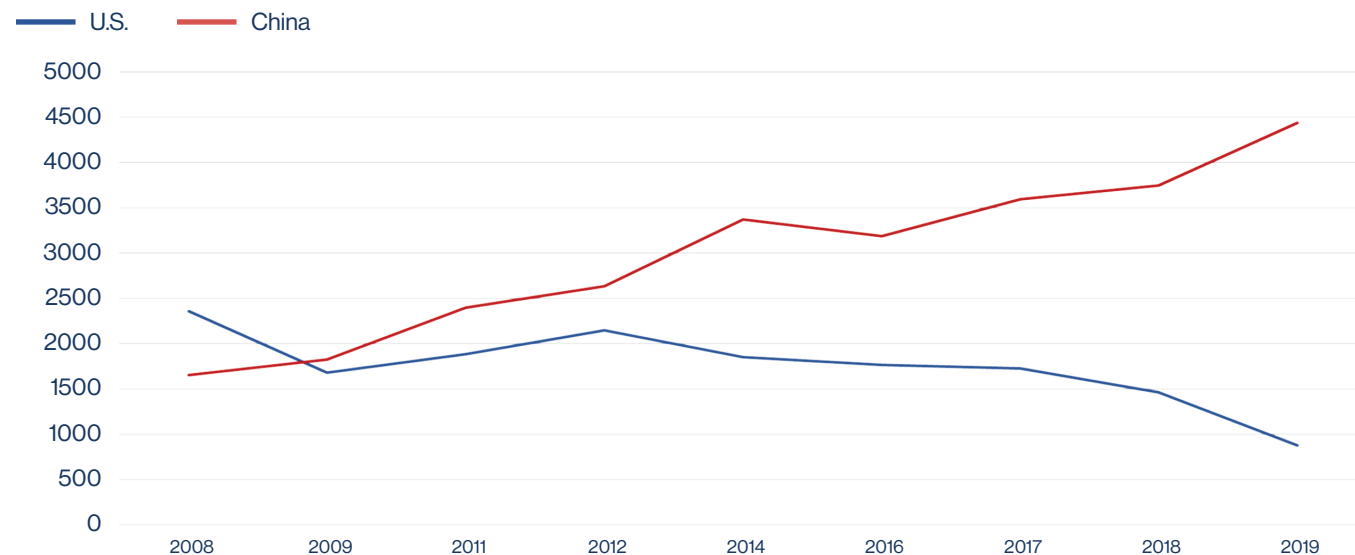
Partnership	Content
1. Comprehensive strategic co-operative partnership	Highest level of partnership with Pakistan having a status apart as an "all-weather" partner, likely due to proven, unbroken loyalty from the start of relations.
2. Comprehensive Strategic Partnership	Full pursuit of cooperation and development on regional and international affairs.
3. Strategic Partnership	Co-ordinate more closely on regional and international affairs, including military ones.
4. Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership	Maintain sound momentum of high-level exchanges, enhanced contacts at various levels, and increased mutual understanding.
5. Cooperative Partnership	Strengthen cooperation on bilateral issues, based on mutual respect and mutual benefit.

Table 32: Not "allies" but "partners" – an overview of China's levels in diplomatic relations.<sup>340</sup>

China's preference for open-ended strategic partnerships instead of alliances is perhaps best exemplified by China's relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on the one hand and Iran on the other. China is deeply integrated with the GCC economically as China-GCC trade grew from 10 billion USD in 2000 to 123 billion USD in 2016. China's approach to the Persian Gulf is best described as "amoral commercialism,"<sup>341</sup> as exemplified by its deep economic relationships with all of its states, especially the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, but also with Iran, their rival. China has become an indispensable source of revenue for both Saudi Arabia and Iran, at a time when the US has become *de facto* energy independent (see Figure 9), and global oil markets since the last decade – due to a technological revolution – have favored buyers over sellers.<sup>342</sup> China's BRI investments in states bordering the Indian Ocean and adjacent waters more broadly means that Beijing will be further and further weaved in with the politico-economic regional system.<sup>343</sup>

## China and U.S. oil imports from selected Persian Gulf countries\*, 2008-2019

Barrels/day (x1000)



\*Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates

Sources Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China, 2009-2020  
U.S. Energy Information Administration

Figure 9: Gulf oil imports.

340 SCMP Reporter, "Quick Guide to China's Diplomatic Levels," South China Morning Post, January 20, 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1903455/quick-guide-chinas-diplomatic-levels>; cited by Jonathan Fulton, "Friends with Benefits: China's Partnership Diplomacy in the Gulf," 2019. For a

341 Chaguan, "China Thinks It Can Avoid Middle Eastern Traps That Caught America," *The Economist*, April 8, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/china/2021/04/08/china-thinks-it-can-avoid-middle-eastern-traps-that-caught-america>.

342 Meghan L. O'Sullivan, *Windfall: How the New Energy Abundance Upends Global Politics and Strengthens America's Power*, 1st edition (New York; London: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

343 Benn Steil and Della Rocca, "Belt and Road Tracker | Council on Foreign Relations," Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), May 8, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/article/belt-and-road-tracker>.

However, China has sought to maintain a balance in its relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran, as it elevated its relationship with both regional powers to the level of “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” in 2016 and conducted naval exercises with both in 2019.<sup>344</sup> Iran, as a result, is asymmetrically dependent on China.<sup>345</sup> China has also sought to maintain stable relations with the regional security guarantor, the US, over issues in the Persian Gulf and avoid too close of an alignment with Iran. To adversarial moves enacted between the US or its allies and Teheran – including a hijacked British-flagged tanker in the summer of 2019, a drone strike against Saudi oil production facilities in September 2019,<sup>346</sup> and President Trump's killing of Qassam Suleimani in early 2020 – Beijing's response was mild, calling for “restraint” and “calm.”<sup>347</sup> After the second confrontation, China had much reason to complain as oil prices skyrocketed by nearly 20 percent with China reportedly paying nearly 100 million more USD per day for its energy imports.<sup>348</sup> Strikingly, Chinese restraint on Middle Eastern issues occurred during a period of heightened tensions in Sino-American relations over issues such as COVID-19, the trade war, and high-tech competition. A stable and prosperous Middle East with vital supply lines safeguarded by the US – i.e., Chinese “power and influence” in the region without becoming “entrapped” – is thus also decidedly in China's interest.<sup>349</sup>

There are signs that the US seeks to influence GCC relations with China, as one US official was reported to have said that the establishment of a Chinese military base in the UAE would “kill” the sale of the F-35 – its most advanced fighter jet – to the UAE.<sup>350</sup> The developments in China's relations with Middle Eastern states on security and defense in the near future, particularly whether it will intensify ties with Iran, a logical first ally, at the cost of its relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, will reveal much about whether China will pursue an alliance system or will maintain its interest in more ambiguous “partnerships”.<sup>351</sup> Some have argued that China's approach to Libya, Syria and Iran has already shown early signs of a more political approach to the region, as it resembles a strategy of ‘offshore balancing’. This means that it uses “diplomatic and economic means in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to undermine the position of the US, the strongest power there.”<sup>362</sup>

344 The Global Times, China's state tabloid, sought to downplay the significance of the Sino-Russian-Iranian naval drill, as it pointed out that China performs drills with “Middle Eastern countries including Saudi Arabia” too and said that China “has no intention to be involved in the disputes in the Middle East, let alone picking a side in the region.” Global Times, “No Need to Fear Joint Military Exercise,” *Global Times*, December 26, 2019, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1174957.shtml>. Arab News, “Saudi Arabia, China Conduct Drill to Improve Combat Readiness,” Arab News, November 17, 2019, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1585431/saudi-arabia>.

345 Joris Teer and Suolao Wang, “Sino-Iranian Asymmetrical Interdependence in Light of the Iran Nuclear Issue,” *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 167–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2018.1475607>.

346 Either executed by Iran or the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen.

347 Joris Teer, “Unequal Love - Iran Looks East for Help; Does China Answer?,” Clingendael, May 4, 2020, [https://spectator.clingendael.org/en/publication/unequal-love-iran-looks-east-help-does-china-answer](https://spectator.clingendael.org/en/publication/unequal-love-iran-looks-east-help-does-china-answer;); Ben Blanchard, “China Says Nobody Wants War after Tanker Attacks in Gulf of Oman,” *Reuters*, June 14, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-attacks-china-idUSKCN1TF0Q4>. Beijing's response was especially mild in comparison to its “Wolf Warrior diplomacy”, which really took-off around the same time, with Zhao Lijian suggesting that the U.S. Army might have brought COVID-19 to Wuhan.

348 Chriss Street, ‘China Losing \$97 Million a Day Due to Attacks on Saudi Arabia Oil Facilities’, [www.theepoch-times.com](http://www.theepoch-times.com), 18 September 2019.

349 Fulton, “Friends with Benefits,” 35.

350 Warren P. Strobel and Nancy A. Youssef, “WSJ News Exclusive | F-35 Sale to U.A.E. Imperiled Over U.S. Concerns About Ties to China,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 2021, sec. Politics, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/f-35-sale-to-u-a-e-imperiled-over-u-s-concerns-about-ties-to-china-11621949050>.

351 In fact, in the early-2000s John W. Garver argued that “a Chinese anchor in East Asia paired with an Iranian anchor in West Asia could well emerge as a central element of a post-unipolar, China-centered Asia circling the middle of the 21st century.” John W. Garver, *China and Iran: Ancient Partners in a Post-Imperial World* (University of Washington Press, 2006), 295, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvcwn64c>.

## 4.6 Arms exports

China's arms exports to countries bordering the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters have doubled since China started to modernize its defense industry from 1996 onwards, having become a net exporter of arms throughout the last 25 years (see Table 33). That said, these exports are focused on a limited number of countries without close relations with Europe and the US and pale in comparison to especially American and even to (decreased) Russian arms supply to the region. The majority of American arms transfers went to the Gulf Kingdoms,<sup>352</sup> Russian arms ended up in India; China's arms sales focused on three states in India's vicinity and Iran (see Table 34 and Figure 9).

Arms Transfers	Period 1.	Period 2.	Period 3.	Total
x1 billion (USD)	1996-2005	2006-2015	2016-2020	1996-2020
Imports	22.0	14.9	6.6	43.5
Exports	4.6	12.3	7.2	24.1

Table 33: Total Chinese arms transfers – Moving from being a net-customer to a net-supplier.

Since 1996, the vast majority of Chinese arms exports have gone to Pakistan (9.1 billion USD), its self-described 'iron brother,' to Bangladesh (2.9 billion USD), and to Myanmar (2.3 billion USD). Notably, Pakistan has hostile relations with India, one of China's main challengers in the Indian Ocean;<sup>353</sup> Bangladesh' relations with India are relatively poor as well; and Myanmar was a closed-off military dictatorship, under sanctions by Europe and the US, until the early 2010s and might again remain a military dictatorship after the 2021 coup. China exported 1.3 billion USD worth of arms to Iran (see Appendix 9 and Figure 10). Bordering the strategic commons in the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, Iran has been a primary rival of the US since its Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Southeast Asia/Oceania	South Asia	Middle East	East-Africa
Australia	India	Iran	Sudan
Indonesia	Bangladesh	Iraq	Eritrea
Singapore	Pakistan	Kuwait	Ethiopia
Malaysia	Sri Lanka	Saudi Arabia	Somalia
Thailand	Maldives	Qatar	Kenya
Myanmar		UAE	Tanzania
		Oman	Madagascar
		Yemen	Seychelles
		Egypt	Djibouti
		Bahrain	

Table 34: Recipients of the world's major powers' arms transfers in 30 bordering the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters.

<sup>352</sup> As did large portions of total UK and French arms exports to the region.

<sup>353</sup> For now, however, Gwadar Port in Pakistan will "not necessarily have utility as a base in a wartime scenario", as a result of a lack of political commitment on both China's and Pakistan's side to "provide mutual military support during times of crisis or conflict". Isaac Kardon, Conor Kennedy, and Peter Dutton, "China Maritime Report No. 7: Gwadar: China's Potential Strategic Strongpoint in Pakistan," CMSI China Maritime Reports, August 1, 2020, 2, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/7>.

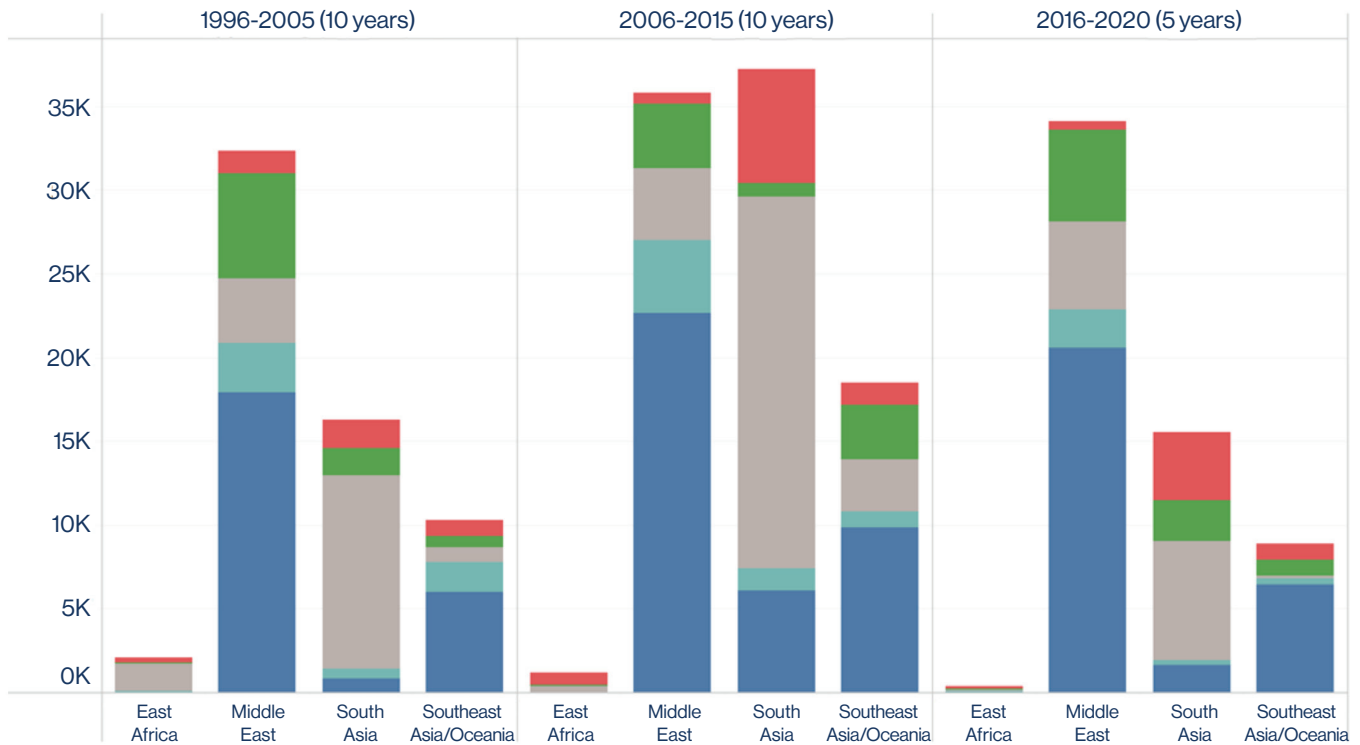
The majority of American arms transfers went to the Gulf Kingdoms; Russian arms ended up in India; China's arms sales focused on three states in India's vicinity and Iran

## Arms transfers: Major weapon exporters to 30 countries bordering the Indian Ocean and adjacent waters, 1996-2020



In USD (x 1 million)

Export ■ China ■ France ■ Russia ■ United Kingdom ■ United States



Source SIPRI Arms Transfer Database

Figure 10: Arms transfers to the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters.

### 4.7 Operational experience; military cooperation and assistance

Besides augmenting military credibility, high-intensity combat experience is an important indicator of military great power status. China, having fought its last war in 1979, does not have such experience

China engages in military deployments and exercises that help its personnel gain experience in deploying its new military capabilities, but the PLA lacks large-scale, recent combat experience. Besides augmenting military credibility, high-intensity combat experience is an important indicator of military great power status.<sup>354</sup> China, having fought its last war in 1979, does not have such experience.<sup>355</sup> Small-scale military deployments in multi-lateral settings against non-state actors are an alternative way for selected PLA forces to gain experience by which institutional learning is enhanced. China's contribution to Peace Keeping Missions in Africa and anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden, supported by its military base in Djibouti, have grown starkly.

<sup>354</sup> Giegerich, Childs, and Hackett, "Military Capability and International Status."

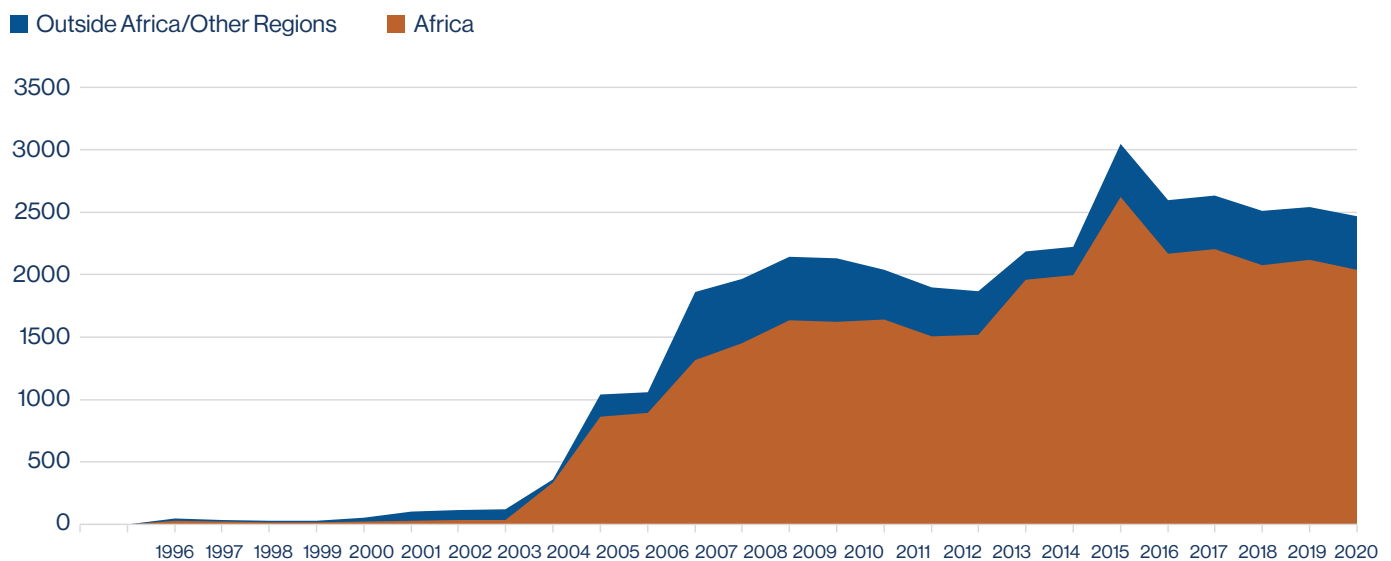
<sup>355</sup> James Maclaren, "The Sino-Vietnam War and China's Long Route to Winning," *The Diplomat*, May 24, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/05/the-sino-vietnam-war-and-chinas-long-route-to-winning/>. It is worth noting, however, that the US also has not engaged in large-scale peer-to-peer or peer-to-near-peer conflict since the Second World War. See e.g. Eric Heginbotham et al., "The Receding Frontier of U.S. Dominance," in *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard, Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996-2017* (RAND Corporation, 2015), 321, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt17rw5gb.21>.

As of January 2021, China is contributing to eight UN-peacekeeping missions in South Sudan, Mali, Lebanon, Darfur, the Democratic Republic Congo, the Western Sahara region, Cyprus, and Israel/the Palestinian territories, with the largest share of its contribution in the new state of South Sudan.<sup>356</sup> China is responsible for the deployment of 2,456 peacekeepers, constituting three percent of personnel around the world and making China the eighth-largest contributor to UN peacekeeping missions – and the largest among the Security Council's five permanent members.<sup>357</sup> China is the second-largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget, covering 15.21% in 2020-2021 (see Figure 11).<sup>358</sup>

The PLAN has expanded its conflict experience by taking part in anti-piracy missions. China's expanding number of frigates are already actively used in China's naval operations, as well as its predecessor replenishment ship, the Type-903A. Beginning in 2008, China began the process of deploying more than ten thousand navy personnel in nearly twenty task forces in the Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy missions<sup>359</sup> In the course of these deployments, Chinese naval forces escorted over six thousand Chinese and foreign commercial vessels. China's purpose in conducting these operations goes beyond fighting piracy and is intended, in large part, to give sailors valuable experience in long-distance operations and deployments. For instance, on some of the missions, Chinese submarines have accompanied the surface ships. These missions have helped the PLAN to obtain "far seas experience".<sup>360</sup>

## China's contribution to UN Peacekeeping Missions, 1996-2021

Number of peace-keepers



Source United Nations Peacekeeping Data: Troop and Police Contributors, Country Contributions Detailed by Mission

Figure 11: China's contribution to UN Peacekeeping.

356 United Nations Peacekeeping, "Troops and Police Contributors," United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>.

357 United Nations Peacekeeping, "Contributors to UN Peacekeeping Operations by Country and Post Police, UN Military Experts on Mission, Staff Officers and Troops," January 31, 2021, [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/01\\_summary\\_of\\_contributions\\_34\\_jan2021.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/01_summary_of_contributions_34_jan2021.pdf).

358 United Nations Peacekeeping, "How We Are Funded," United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/how-we-are-funded>.

359 Naval Technology, "Type 901 Class Fleet Replenishment Ship."

360 Jérôme Henry, "China's Military Deployments in the Gulf of Aden: Anti-Piracy and Beyond," Ifri, November 2016, 4, <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/notes-de-lifri/asie-visions/chinas-military-deployments-gulf-aden-anti-piracy-and>.

Another way in which the PLAN acclimates to the oceans is by conducting military exercises with partners but also with mature navies, such as the US navy, and by conducting naval port calls. Chinese military exercises can be divided into four categories: navy (PLAN), army (PLAA), air force (PLAAF), and joint military exercises. Chinese military exercises have largely increased from 2014 onward. Where China only conducted one international military exercise in 2002 (with Kazakhstan), this number increased to 45 in 2016, taking a considerable jump from the 30 military exercises in 2014.<sup>361</sup> With 47%, the PLAN has conducted the majority of the military exercises in the period of 2002-2016, followed by the PLA army with 26%.<sup>362</sup>

Port calls are an easy way to further routinize the navy, but it is also used to show off naval power, as Roosevelt's early 20<sup>th</sup> century Great White Fleet showed.<sup>363</sup> The PLAN completed over 2,700 port calls in the period from 1996 to 2016.<sup>364</sup>

## 4.8 Conclusion

According to the typology developed in Chapter One, the resources that China has to sustain power projection beyond the Western Pacific, and specifically in the Indian Ocean, remain limited. However, it can already draw upon an enormous collection of assets and is following a long-term strategy that, on current trends, will soon allow it to support power projection capabilities outside its region.

China has only one overseas military base, located in Djibouti, which is capable of hosting aircraft carriers. There are four other potential sites that China could utilize as military bases – Ream Naval Base in Cambodia, the Port of Gwadar in Pakistan, Kyauk Phyu in Myanmar, and Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka – but none of these are currently suitable for large-scale military use. The Port of Gwadar, Kyauk Phyu, and Hambantota are all located in strategically useful areas and could, theoretically, be used in the future for China's military; however, these would be long-term projects.

When it comes to protecting SLOCs and supplying military forces abroad, China has a relatively small number of supply ships (twelve), and these are limited in their ability to supply large amounts of ordinance. That said, China has a potentially massive reserve fleet, in the form of vessels controlled by Chinese SOEs.

China is vulnerable when it comes to accessing a crucial resource for military operations outside its own region: oil. China is highly dependent on oil from the Persian Gulf. Half of the oil it imports travels through the Indian Ocean, and even more travels through the Malacca Strait.

China's industrial resources are enormous. It has the largest shipbuilding capacity in the world. It can quickly build many new ships and repair its current fleet. It also has a large and modern defense industry. It is the world's second-largest arms exporter and produces expensive,

361 Kenneth Allen, Phillip C Saunders, and John Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," *China Strategic Perspectives* (Institute for National Strategic Studies, July 17, 2017), 29, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-11.pdf?ver=2017-07-17-153301-093>.

362 Allen, Saunders, and Chen, 32-33.

363 Theodore Roosevelt Center, "TR Center - Great White Fleet," accessed June 7, 2021, <https://www.theodore-rooseveltcenter.org/Learn-About-TR/TR-Encyclopedia/War-and-Military-Affairs/Great-White-Fleet.aspx>.

364 Allen, Saunders, and Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," July 17, 2017.

high-quality weapons. China has a quasi-monopoly on critical raw materials, which are essential for high-tech weapons.

China has no formal alliances to support its ability to project power. However, it has a large number of strategic partnerships based on commercial relationships and Chinese aid without intrusive good governance and human rights clauses. China's non-interference policy is attractive to many non-democratic regimes in the region of the Indian Ocean. For instance, China has close ties to Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. It has been careful to maintain a relatively low political profile in the Middle East so as to avoid endangering its SLOCs, which are protected by the United States.

China's arms exports to the Indian Ocean region have doubled since 1996 but still remain lower than those of the United States and Russia. Most of its exports are to Pakistan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.

China lacks experience when it comes to sending large numbers of military forces outside its own region. It has no familiarity with modern, large-scale combat operations (its last war was in 1979) and has been trying to address this problem by taking part in anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden since 2008, and by engaging in more military exercises and port calls.



# Chapter Five. **An Assessment of China's Military Rise**

Joris Teer, Tim Sweijis, Jack Thompson

This chapter synthesizes the key findings of Chapter Two, Three and Four. It uses the theoretical framework presented in Chapter One to assess China's military upward rise for the period 1996-2035. In examining motivations and manifestations of China's military rise, it evaluates where China was (1996-2020), where it is now (2021) and where it is projected to be (2021-2035). In so doing, the chapter first looks at China's motivations before turning to China's military capabilities to project power.

The chapter finds that China is exhibiting all of the factors that typically drive great power expansion outside of the region. It has shown signs of most of the motivations for expansion that great powers typically exhibit and has made enormous strides in its stated goal of developing a world-class military, though it still falls short in some key areas. In short, it is following a typical trajectory for a rising great power, even though it lacks behind in some key aspects that enable the use of military capabilities far from home, and is implementing a long-term strategy to be able to sustainably project power outside its region.

The six aspects of extra-regional military capabilities include the development of extra-regional power projection capabilities, the maintenance of sound infrastructure, the establishment of overseas and overland bases, the conclusion of formal and informal alliance relationships with other states within multilateral or bilateral frameworks, the transfer of arms and other military equipment, and the extension of military aid through various forms of military-to-military cooperation.

## 5.1 China's motivations for projecting power

China exhibits all of the drivers that have been typical of rising powers seeking to project power outside of their own region in the past.

### 5.1.1 Security

Typically, as great powers perceive that their national security is threatened, they invest in regional military capabilities and then in extra-regional military capabilities to prevent peer competitors from projecting extra-regional power. China is showing clear signs of this tendency. *China's National Defense in the New Era*, a defense white paper published in 2019, emphasized that China was challenged by myriad and complex security threats. Among them, the primary one came from the trends and activities of Taiwanese independence. The CCP regards enforcing "sovereignty" over the island along with maintaining control over Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong, as its core interests. Land-based threats, most realistically from India but – if relations worsen – also from Russia, with which China shares the world's longest border, are another key area of concern that is prioritized over sea-based threats. The report also identified the US, NATO, Russia, and the European Union as international strategic competitors, and argues the PLA must have the capabilities necessary to engage with, and deter from acting against China's interests in the far seas: beyond the South China Sea, the Taiwan Straits, and the Western Pacific. PLA power growth, combined with a demonstrated ability to project power at long range, most importantly in the Indian Ocean and adjacent waters, is an essential element in China's grand narrative of its rise to global dominance against a declining West, centered on the US.

### 5.1.2 Resources

Another reason rising powers seek to develop extra-regional power projection capabilities is to ensure they can meet a growing demand for resources, spurred by economic, demographic, and technological developments. In addition to its concerns about Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang, *China's National Defense in the New Era* makes clear that access to resources is another reason to bolster China's military power. China gets much of its oil supplies from the Middle East and Africa and depends on secure SLOCs to those regions. Furthermore, in addition to its need to protect extensive and growing investments in places such as Africa and the Middle East, China needs to protect the large number of PRC expatriates employed overseas by Chinese companies. In the past, China was unable to defend the interests of overseas Chinese and has prioritized developing capabilities in this regard.

### 5.1.3 Domestic pressure groups

Pressured by domestic constituencies, rising powers tend to develop power projection capabilities in order to exert control over foreign markets, labor, or resources. There is ample evidence that such constituencies are operating in China and exert some degree of influence over its foreign policy. However, given the nature of the research framework, this report was unable to evaluate this factor in a comprehensive fashion.

### 5.1.4 Status and prestige

Historically, a desire for prestige has prompted aspiring great powers to develop military capabilities, both as a symbol of power and as a tool to expand territorially. Through official pronouncements, President Xi has made clear that the overarching national goal is *Great Rejuvenation of Chinese People*, which includes overturning the last vestiges of humiliation the nation endured at the hands of Western powers and Japan during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and restoring what he sees as China's rightful place as the pre-eminent nation in Asia. Xi has emphasized that emerging as a world-class military power is vital to this goal.

## 5.2 Assessment of China's military capabilities

The PLA now ranks among the most powerful militaries in the world. China's overall progress on the six aspects that together make up the military dimension of extra-regional influence<sup>365</sup> over the last 25 years has been impressive but unevenly distributed.

The following section assesses China's progress within each of the six aspects that make up the military dimension of extra-regional influence individually by analyzing the progress China made between 1996 and 2020, zooming in on where it stands in 2021, and by making a projection on how its trajectory it is likely to develop between 2022 and 2035. Table 35 rates China's capabilities along these six aspects on a scale from one-to-five. Table 36 below provides more detailed descriptions of how each of these dimensions has been operationalized.

<sup>365</sup> These are [1.] the development of extra-regional power projection capabilities, [2.] the maintenance of sound infrastructure, [3.] the establishment of overseas and overland bases, [4.] the conclusion of formal and informal alliance relationships with other states within multilateral or bilateral frameworks, [5.] the transfer of arms and other military equipment, and [6.] the extension of military aid through various forms of military-to-military cooperation

In addition to its concerns about Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang, *China's National Defense in the New Era* makes clear that access to resources is another reason to bolster China's military power. “

Simply put, while a score of one refers to a state that is not able to project any real military power, a score of five refers to a militarily fully developed great power (“a super power”). To explain the logic behind the scale, two historical examples may be informative. The closest to a fully-fledged, five-star, military great power is the United States in the 1990s: completely in control of its own region; able to execute and sustain power projection operations in any region around the world, including the ability to dominate these regions; able to leverage a global network of overseas and overland bases around the world; having unhindered and unchallenged access to Middle Eastern oil; supported by a fleet of supply ships; owning – by a mile – the most sophisticated arms industry globally; standing at the head of the mightiest alliance network in history, including NATO and hub-and-spoke-alliances throughout the rest of the world; the definitive leader in global arms transfers and having the advantage of unrivaled operational and combat experience. A typical, one-star state starting out on its journey to achieve great power is China in 1996: Unable to deter a great power, the United States, from deploying military assets very close to its shores in order to hurt one of China’s key interests; not able to win in combat against any power nor influence events outside of own region; entirely lacking overland and overseas bases; not owning infrastructure to sustain power projection and owning only limited industrial resources to repair and expand them; without alliances; limited to exporting arms to a limited number of states (mostly outcasts that other states do not want to touch); and lacking the operational experience to send its forces into power projection missions.

Military resources	Military resources (2)	1996	2006	2016	2021	2026 <sup>366</sup>	2035
Near and far seas military capabilities	Near Seas Defense <sup>367</sup> (Within the first island chain)	+	+	+++	++++	++++	++++/ ++++
	Far seas Protection (ERPP and Long range strike capability)	+	+	+	++	++	+++/ ++++
Overseas and overland Bases		+	+	+	++	++/ +++	++/ ++++
Infrastructure	Overall	+	+	++	+++	+++/ ++++	++++
	<i>Resources to sustain: Access to oil</i>	++	+	++	++	+++	+++
	<i>Resources to sustain: Supply ships</i>	+	+	++	+++	++++/ ++++	++++/ ++++
	<i>Resources to repair and expand: Industrial resources: shipbuilding and repair and defense industry.</i>	+	++	+++	++++	++++	++++/ ++++
Alliances (formal; and informal)		+	+	+	+	+/ +++	+/ ++++
Arms transfers		+	+	++	+++	+++/ ++++	+++/ ++++
Operational experience; Military cooperation and assistance	Peace keeping; anti-piracy missions; exercises; port calls	+	+	++	++	++/ ++++	++/ ++++

Table 35: China's score on the six aspects of the military dimension of extra-regional influence

366 A forward slash is used to indicate a range of possibility (e.g. ++/++++) in order to appreciate the many uncertain variables that together determine the future development of the dimensions of China's ability to project power.

367 Officially, Chinese naval strategists also include enforcing sovereignty over Taiwan as a key part of National Defense. In this rating, only defense of the mainland and enforcing “sovereignty” over large swaths of the ESC and SCS is considered.

Military resources		+	++	+++	++++	+++++
<b>Military capability</b>	<b>Intra-regional</b>	Defenseless; major powers dominate; unable to safeguard interests	Inferior force; overshadowed by major powers; safeguards one or two prioritized interests	Substantial force; competes with major powers; safeguards some core interests	Dominant force; pushes out major powers; safeguards most core interests	Fully-fledged military great power; excludes major powers; safeguards all core and secondary interests
	<b>Extra-regional</b>	Cannot win in combat against any power nor influence events outside of own region	Can win in combat against one or two small powers and influence events in one outside region; cannot sustain operational requirements over extended periods of time	Can win decisively in combat against small and medium-sized powers and influence events in one outside region; can sustain operational requirements for some time	Can win decisively in combat against small, medium and large powers and influence events in two outside regions; can sustain operational requirements over extended periods of time	Can win decisively in major combat against other great powers and influence events in any outside region; can sustain operational requirements almost permanently
<b>Overseas and overland Bases</b>		Cannot help sustain power projection; zero or one in one outside region	Provides foundation for future sustainment of power projection; one or two bases in one outside region	Can sustain power projection in one region; multiple bases in one outside region	Can sustain power projection in multiple regions; multiple bases in more than one outside regions	Enables the possibility to sustain power projection globally; multiple bases in almost all regions
<b>Infrastructure: The ability to sustain, restore and expand power projection</b>		Access to vital resources easily blocked by major powers; does not own supply ships; does not command industrial resources	No guaranteed access to vital resources; owns supply ships; has some industrial resources	Can contest attempts to block access to vital resources; owns supply ships; commands industrial resources	Enjoys guaranteed access to vital resources; owns many supply ships; sophisticated and expansive industrial resources	Enjoys permanent access to vital resources; owns plenty supply ships; world-leading industrial resources
<b>Alliances: Agreement to cooperate in the face of potential or realized military conflict</b>		None	Enjoys one or several bilateral alliances (hub-and-spoke)	Takes part in a multilateral alliance network and enjoys many bilateral alliances (hub-and-spoke)	Is an important part of a multilateral alliance network and has many bilateral alliances (hub-and-spoke)	Stands at the head of a multilateral alliance network and enjoys many bilateral alliances (hub-and-spoke)
<b>Arms transfers</b>		Limited arms exporter; regular customer base in some countries; 0-2.0 percent of global arms trade;	Substantial arms exporter; regular customer base in several regions/a handful of countries; 2-6 percent of global arms trade.	Prominent arms exporter; regular customer base in multiple regions; 6-10 percent of global arms trade.	Leading arms exporter; regular customer base in most regions; 10-30 percent of global arms trade	Greatest arms exporter; worldwide regular customer base; 30+ percent of global arms trade; e.g. United States from 2016-2020
<b>Operational experience; Military cooperation and assistance</b>		No operational experience whatsoever	Some operational experience; some low-intensity combat experience; no high-intensity combat experience	Substantial operational experience; substantial low-intensity combat experience; some high-intensity combat experience	Plenty operational experience; substantial low-intensity combat experience; some high-intensity combat experience	Extensive operational experience; plenty low-intensity combat experience; substantial high-intensity combat experience

Table 36: Assessing great power military ability: Operationalisation of the six military dimensions of (extra-)regional influence<sup>368</sup>

The assessment concludes that in response to the end of the Cold War and demonstrations of unmatched US power in the 1990s, China undertook a rapid and ambitious modernization and expansion of its military, a project that has been, by any measure, successful, and one that has accelerated over the last decade. Today China is the dominant force in its own backyard, gradually pushing US power projection capabilities away from its coast. In its near seas, especially close to its shores like in the Taiwan Strait, the ECS and the Northern part of the SCS, China likely enjoys a military advantage over all its potential adversaries, including the United States.

<sup>368</sup> Wezeman, Kuimova, and Wezeman, "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020," 2.

The assessment concludes that in response to the end of the Cold War and demonstrations of unmatched US power in the 1990s, China undertook a rapid and ambitious modernization and expansion of its military, a project that has been, by any measure, successful, and one that has accelerated over the last decade.

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China has developed almost all capabilities necessary for regional power projection and is in the process of developing extra-regional capabilities. China is on the verge of a breakthrough and will be able to effectively project power extra-regionally within the next ten years: China will not necessarily be able to go toe-to-toe with the US and its allies, but it should be able to mount missions to intimidate and coerce small and medium-sized states through offshore threatening and protect supply chains in the Indian Ocean, Middle East, and Africa, certainly if not challenged by a peer competitor. China possesses a world-class missile arsenal and fleet of surface support ships, but still trails the most advanced Western militaries in terms of the number and sophistication of aircraft carriers and the capabilities of its carrier strike groups (CSGs), specifically in areas such as jet fighters and anti-submarine warfare. China is undertaking enormous efforts to remedy the shortcomings in its CSGs and will narrow the gap with the most advanced Western militaries – though by how much remains a matter of debate – by 2035. Within the same timeframe, a range of demographic, economic, political, technological and security developments are likely to put a strain on China's continued development and maintenance of especially relatively expensive China's far seas military capabilities and, to a lesser extent, on relatively cheap near seas capabilities.

Though China faces severe hurdles in its efforts to sustain power projection beyond the Western-Pacific, it commands enormous resources and is following a long-term strategy designed to support long-term power projection capabilities outside its region. Efforts to overcome shortcomings in its ability to sustain power projection are boosted by China's enormous industrial resources, including by far the largest ship-building capacity in the world, giving the PLA a distinct advantage in a protracted conflict. It also has a large and modern defense industry, is the world's fifth-largest arms exporter, and has a quasi-monopoly on critical raw materials. The relatively small number of supply ships it has to support military operations abroad could be, when necessary, supplemented by a massive reserve fleet of vessels controlled by Chinese SOEs.

China lacks (in)formal alliances but instead has initiated a large number of business-first strategic partnerships. The deep and broad apolitical commercial relationships it has created, which are attractive to many non-democratic regimes in Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean region, may challenge American and European alliances and serve as the foundation upon which a future alliance system can be built. China is in the process of supplementing its strategically located base in Djibouti – in East Africa, near the Middle East – with access to and influence over sites in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka that may, in the long run, be used for military purposes. China has sought to limit the downsides of its dependence on oil supplies from the Middle East by forming constructive relationships with Iran, Saudi Arabia and other oil-producing states; over which it wields influence through its mass procurement of energy whilst avoiding entanglement in the region's political problems and military conflicts.

## 5.2.1 Near and far seas military capabilities

### Near Seas Defense

Military resource	1996	2006	2016	2021	2026	2035
Near Seas Defense (Within the first island chain)	+	+	+++	++++	++++	++++/+++++

The modernization of the PLA), which began in the wake of the Taiwan Strait Crisis (1995-1996), has greatly improved the security of the Chinese Mainland and its ability to accomplish its goal of Near Seas Defense. China has shifted from being largely impotent in the face of US military power, in 1996, to being the dominant force in its own backyard in 2021, gradually pushing US power projection capabilities away from its coast. China has accomplished this feat by investing in military capabilities across domains (sea and air) and in those specific technology areas (missiles) best suited to deter US CSGs in order to create conditions of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD). In fact, US Admiral Davidson has concluded that China fields “advanced A2/AD systems, aircraft, ships, space and cyber capabilities [...] that threaten the US ability to project power in the region”, showing that China has successfully limited the reach of the world’s most powerful navy.<sup>369</sup>

### Far Seas Protection

Military resource	1996	2006	2016	2021	2026	2035
Far Seas Protection (ERPP and Long range strike capability)	+	+	+	++	++	+++/++++

The modernization of the PLA since 1996 has provided China with some ability to achieve its stated purpose of *Far Seas Protection*. These efforts have focused on ensuring China’s access to resources, defending its expatriate community, and protecting overseas investments. Whereas China had no modern, large-scale capabilities to project power extra-regionally and no conventional long-range strike capability from 1996 to 2006, it has modernized and expanded its naval capabilities. This provides some ability to project power extra-regionally, for instance, in the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters.

The development of China’s *far seas capabilities* only began in the 1990s, in the wake of China’s expanding international economic links, and lags behind the PLA’s ability to provide *Near Seas Defense*. Chinese policymakers have devoted fewer resources to *Far Seas Protection* and the capabilities required for *Far Seas Protection* are more expensive and complex. However, towards 2035, China will likely have greatly expanded its extra-regional power projection capabilities.

### 1996-2020

From 1996 to 2006, China mostly lacked the ability to project power into its far seas. Instead, it relied mostly on inferior Russian or Soviet materiel. It was hampered by a shortage of surface combatant ships and lacked aircraft carriers in general, which would have been necessary to challenge the United States extra-regionally. China also had insufficient conventional

<sup>369</sup> Philip S. Admiral Davidson, “STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL PHILIP S. DAVIDSON, U.S. NAVY COMMANDER, U.S. INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND BEFORE THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE ON U.S. INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND POSTURE” (Washington DC, March 9, 2021), 7, [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson\\_03-09-21.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_03-09-21.pdf).

China has shifted from being largely impotent in the face of US military power, in 1996, to being the dominant force in its own backyard in 2021, gradually pushing US power projection capabilities away from its coast.

long-range strike capability and fighter/ground-attack aircraft that could be deployed in the far seas, if China had had overseas bases.

## 2021

China is able to defend its near seas, but only has a limited ability to project power in the far seas. This discrepancy persists in spite of the PLAN's rapid expansion of military capabilities in terms of quality and quantity. There are three factors limiting China's ability to project power in the far seas:

- The PLAN has not mastered the traditional method of projection power extra-regionally – the deployment of multiple CSGs – and therefore cannot protect its interests in the Indian Ocean and nearby waters in a scenario of high-intensity conflict. China's CSGs face technological shortcomings in individual systems, such as the aircraft carriers and carrier-based fighters, that impede their ability to act as a networked “system of systems.” Currently, its two aircraft carriers are not protected by next-generation fighter-jets, lack proper ISR capabilities – due to its inability to launch airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft – and can only make use of lesser Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) capabilities. The PLAN lacks the operational experience (“tribal knowledge”<sup>370</sup>) to deploy a CSG effectively. It also has little experience when it comes to sending large numbers of military forces outside its own region to fight in high-intensity combat situations.
- China is not able to use its world-leading – in both qualitative and quantitative terms – conventional (ballistic) missile arsenal in the far seas as effectively as in the near seas. The ability of two classes of ballistic missiles to strike large vessels calls into question the traditional dominance of CSGs, specifically in China's near seas. However, these missiles are highly unlikely to have the precision to strike targets in the far seas, especially those on the move, and launching missiles over land involves additional risks for nuclear escalation.
- The assets of its potential adversaries in the far seas are more numerous and, in some respects – qualitatively superior. This includes the United States and India, which is able to use the advantages of geography in the Indian Ocean. Japan, Australia, the United Kingdom, and France also have maritime capabilities committed to the Indian Ocean and adjacent waters.

## 2022-2035

Between 2026 and 2035, China will likely have erased the quantitative capability gaps and have obtained considerable experience operating CSGs – it should operate five or six carriers by 2035 – in conditions of peace. However, it may not have overcome specific technological gaps, especially in the area of airpower. Attempts to improve the quality of Chinese capabilities through theft or acquisition of Western technologies may prove unsuccessful as technologies become more complex and more difficult to incorporate. However, if the gaps in airpower are overcome, then China is also likely to be able to effectively deploy its large helicopter carriers in the far seas, expanding its capabilities.

Between 2026 and 2035, its intermediate-range conventional missiles will have become:

- More numerous.
- More precise, possibly allowing China to strike moving objects further from home, perhaps even in the far seas.

<sup>370</sup> The term “Tribal Knowledge” is used by Andrew Erickson in an interview with the Economist and captures the immaterial dimensions of being able to use a carrier very well. The Economist, “China's First Aircraft-Carrier Bares Its Teeth.”

China is able to defend its near seas, but only has a limited ability to project power in the far seas.



- Likely able to travel at greater speed, though they will still have to be fired over other countries, such as nuclear-armed India. This would involve many security risks, limiting the likelihood that they will be employed.

Today, the US navy still guarantees freedom of navigation and open sea-lanes around the world. All other things being equal, China's ability to project power outside its region between 2026 and 2035 will increase if US naval power recedes.

However, it is possible that between 2026 and 2035, demographic decline, structural economic problems, and social and political challenges will limit China's capability development and production. This will disproportionately affect its far seas capabilities, as aircraft carriers are more expensive than conventional missiles, both in terms of development and production and maintenance. Growth in China's spending on near and far seas capabilities may decrease as China's GDP growth slows down and other military challenges, such as threats from land-based adversaries, require additional defense spending. China has consistently spent approximately two percent of its GDP on defense in recent decades. If it does not increase these spending levels, but also depending on its economic growth rate, China may also encounter additional challenges in continuing its expansion and improvement of near seas capabilities, such as conventional missiles and drones, which are among cheaper military assets both in terms of development and maintenance.

#### 5.2.2.1 Overseas and overland bases

Military resource	1996	2006	2016	2021	2026	2035
Overseas and overland bases	+	+	+	++	++/+++	++/++++

Traditionally, military bases have been essential to sustaining power projection. This is an area in which China has struggled, and one of the most pressing challenges facing it over the next fifteen years is whether it will be able to obtain access to additional foreign bases.

#### 1996 - 2020

From 1996 to 2016, China had no overseas and overland bases. It rejected the concept of establishing foreign bases, viewing them as hegemonic acts. By 2016, China had reversed course and established its first overseas military base in Djibouti.<sup>371</sup> However, the base did little to boost China's ability to project power extra-regionally, as it faced shortcomings in supply routes, capacity, and its ability to host large ships.

#### 2021

China has expanded the capacity of its military base in Djibouti. In April 2021, it constructed a pier that is able to host aircraft carriers. This is an important step in boosting its ability to project power outside its region, but more bases would be needed. Moreover, Chinese SOEs have made investments in a number of ports around the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters, potentially laying the groundwork for additional foreign bases.

#### 2022 - 2035

Between 2026 and 2035, additional foreign military bases will likely provide China with additional means to sustain power projection extra-regionally. China may have a second or even third base, most likely in the western part of the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters. There

<sup>371</sup> This base is considered the first overseas base by China, as Beijing insists that the military outposts on the artificial islands in the South China Sea are located within China's territory.

One of the most pressing challenges facing China over the next fifteen years is whether it will be able to obtain access to additional overseas bases.

are four potential sites, all of which are connected to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China wields political or economic influence over each:

- Ream Naval Base in Cambodia.
- The Port of Gwadar in Pakistan.
- Kyauk Phyu in Myanmar.
- Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka.

Each of these sites could serve as the location of an additional foreign military base. The ports in Pakistan and Myanmar would be especially useful, as they would provide Beijing with a land route to resupply its naval assets, thereby increasing its ability to safeguard Lines of Communications (LOCs) to the Persian Gulf.

## 5.2.2 Infrastructure

Sound infrastructure is crucial for the effective deployment of extra-regional military capabilities. For overland power projection, railways, pipelines, inland waterways, and ground supply routes, including bridges, constitute a military's Lines of Communication.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, great powers need to command sophisticated and expansive industrial resources in order to produce the military capabilities that enable them to project power. At present and in the foreseeable future, three particular aspects of infrastructure are essential to sustain, restore and expand power projection extra-regionally: access to oil; supply vessels and industrial resources such as shipbuilding and repair facilities and a sophisticated defense industry.

Infrastructure	1996	2006	2016	2021	2026	2035
Overall	+	+	++	+++	+++ /++++	++++
<i>Resources to sustain: Access to oil</i>	++	+	++	++	++	+++
<i>Resources to sustain: Supply ships</i>	+	+	++	+++	++++ /+++++	++++ /+++++
<i>Resources to repair and expand: Industrial resources: shipbuilding and repair and defense industry.</i>	+	++	+++	++++	++++	++++ /+++++

### 5.2.2.2 Access to Vital Resources

#### 1996-2020

As China's economy grew, so did its thirst for foreign oil – leading China to import 72 percent of its oil from abroad in 2019.<sup>372</sup> Becoming a net-importer of crude oil in 1993, China has been increasingly dependent on imports of crude oil from abroad. It hence relies on access to SLOCs, like the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca, for one necessary condition to project power extra-regionally: access to crude oil.

#### 2021

In 2021, China lacks the resources necessary to sustain power projection beyond the Western Pacific, making power projection in the Indian Ocean difficult. However, it has improved its access to vital resources, especially oil, of which it needs enormous amounts to fuel its economy. China remains vulnerable when it comes to accessing oil and is dependent on supplies from the Persian Gulf, the Middle East and Southern Africa. These supplies are

<sup>372</sup> Frank Tang and Orange Wang, "Is China Biggest Winner from the Oil Price War between Saudi Arabia, Russia?," South China Morning Post, March 11, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3074664/oil-price-war-between-saudi-arabia-russia-set-offer-chinas>.

In 2021, China lacks the resources necessary to sustain power projection beyond the Western Pacific, making power projection in the Indian Ocean difficult.

then shipped through the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca. The importance of China to oil-producing countries in the Middle East has increased: as a result of the tight oil and shale gas revolutions, the United States has achieved a larger degree of energy independence and the EU imports only a limited volume of oil from the Persian Gulf.<sup>373</sup> These technological developments – shifting the oil market from a seller's to a buyer's market – have improved its position somewhat: oil-producing countries are increasingly dependent on Chinese SOEs.

### 2022-2035

In spite of the progress, it will have made by 2035 in shifting away from fossil fuels in its civilian economy, China will still be dependent on crude oil resources from abroad for its military activities. This means that, as oil demand from other continents such as Europe is likely to decrease by 2035, China will have more leverage over oil-producing countries.

#### 5.2.2.3 Supply Ships

One additional resource is important to sustain power projection: supply ships, which can provide a temporary alternative for resupply via overseas bases. Between 1996 and 2020, China has become a dominant power in global maritime connectivity, positioning itself “at the nexus of global trade.”<sup>374</sup> In 2021, China has a relatively small number of supply ships to support military operations abroad, but it has a massive reserve fleet in the form of vessels controlled by Chinese SOEs. In fact, China owns the second-largest fleet in the world.<sup>375</sup>

Based on current trends, the expanding needs for (re)supply of its expanding naval capabilities and its continued lack of overseas military bases, China is likely to continue to expand its number of supply ships as well as maintaining its massive commercial SEO fleet as a back-up for a scenario of conflict between 2022 and 2035.

### 5.2.3 Industrial Resources

China has had enormous success in developing an industrial base – both in terms of shipbuilding and defense industry – necessary to rapidly expand and repair its military capabilities. As China became the factory of the world, a growing share of the world's shipbuilding and repair industry moved to China, making it the undisputed global leader in ship production capability. The PLAN has an enormous advantage over the United States and Europe in fighting a protracted conflict as a result. China has pursued an active policy to achieve synergies between its innovative civilian economy and its defense sector by initiating a process of Military Civil Fusion (MCF).

#### 1996-2020

In 2006, China had growing resources to expand and repair power projection capabilities, as more and more shipbuilding orders from the rest of the world were outsourced to China. At the same time, China still imported Russian military technology, such as vessels, engines and aircraft, on a large scale to indigenize (see Figure 7).

#### 2021

In 2021, China is the world leader when it comes to possession of the resources necessary to rapidly expand and repair extra-regional power projection capabilities. Its industrial resources

373 O'Sullivan, *Windfall*.

374 ChinaPower, “How Is China Influencing Global Maritime Connectivity?,” ChinaPower Project, April 30, 2021, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-ports-connectivity/>.

375 Hellenic Shipping News, “China-Owned Fleet Becomes World's Second Largest | Hellenic Shipping News Worldwide,” September 13, 2018, <https://www.hellenicshippingnews.com/china-owned-fleet-becomes-worlds-second-largest/>.

As China became the factory of the world, a growing share of the world's shipbuilding and repair industry moved to China, making it the undisputed global leader in ship production capability.

are formidable. This includes the largest shipbuilding capacity in the world, which is used for both civilian and military purposes. In 2020, China built 40% of all ships around the world; 97.1% of all ships were built in Asia; whereas the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Germany combined constructed less than 1% (see Table 30).<sup>376</sup> China has a large and modern defense industry. China has a quasi-monopoly on critical raw materials, which are necessary to produce military capabilities.

### 2022-2035

By 2035, China will have expanded its ability to expand and repair extra-regional power projection capabilities. Its defense industry will have grown in sophistication. It will still have a huge shipping industry – though competitors such as the United States might redevelop theirs.

## 5.2.4 Alliances

Military resource	1996	2006	2016	2021	2026	2035
Alliances (Formal and informal): Agreement to cooperate in the face of potential or realized military conflict	+	+	+	++	+ /+++	+ /++++

One of the greatest question marks of the upcoming decade and a half is whether China will opt to become involved in the conflicts of the world by establishing alliances, or whether it will stick to its policy of merely closing politically inconsequential “strategic partnerships”. Today, China’s “closest thing it has to an alliance is with North Korea; its closest relationship is with Pakistan.”<sup>377</sup> Alliances, Beijing claimed, are hegemonic in nature as they are focused against third parties. The strategy of maintaining open-ended strategic partnerships, directed against nobody, allowed China to establish deep commercial ties to the states around the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters during the unipolar moment and kept China free of alliance obligations to “client” states. China is far from establishing a network of alliances.

However, its deep economic and diplomatic ties and its disinterest in human rights and good governance clauses on which cooperation relies provides a foundation upon which Beijing may choose to develop an alliance system in the next fifteen years. China is developing deep commercial and diplomatic relations with all major states in the Gulf Region, which is important to China for its natural resource endowment, in spite of hostilities between Saudi Arabia and Iran. In short, China has used a “hedging approach” to lay a solid foundation of economic and diplomatic influence during the unipolar era, “taking advantage of US commitment to maintaining the Gulf status quo in order to develop relations with all states in the region.”<sup>378</sup> Some have argued that China’s approach to Libya, Syria and Iran has already shown early signs of a more political approach to the region, as it resembles a strategy of “offshore balancing”. This means that it uses “diplomatic and economic means in MENA to undermine the position of the US, the strongest power there.”<sup>379</sup>

376 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, “Beyond 20/20 WDS - Table View - Ships Built by Country of Building, Annual,” Unctadstat, 2021, <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/wds/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=89493>.

377 Peter Martin, *China's Civilian Army: The Making of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 9.

378 Fulton, “Friends with Benefits,” 33.

379 Andrea Ghiselli and Maria Grazia Erika Giuffrida, “China as an Offshore Balancer in the Middle East and North Africa,” April 28, 2021, 19–20, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/rusi-journal/china-offshore-balancer-middle-east-and-north-africa>.

One of the greatest question marks of the upcoming decade and a half is whether China will opt to become involved in the conflicts of the world by establishing alliances, or whether it will stick to its policy of merely closing politically inconsequential “strategic partnerships”.

**1996-2020**

In 2006, China had no network of alliances or clients to supplement its power projection capabilities (or function as a “force multiplier”) in the far seas.

**2021**

By 2021, China has entered into a large number of strategic partnerships, although none of these have the character of formal alliances. These strategic partnerships are the formal expression of its deepening economic ties that could be used as a foundation for the conclusion of tighter alliances in the future. For now, however, China still has no network of formal alliances that can supplement its power projection capabilities (or function as a “force multiplier”) in the far seas.

**2022-2035**

Towards 2035, the establishment of a system of alliances would be a radical break with tradition of Chinese foreign policy, but the possibility – especially as the United States puts larger demands on its own allies to limit dealings with China – of the establishment of an alliance system cannot be discarded. Based on current trends,<sup>380</sup> towards 2035 – the relative weight of China’s economic ties will have become of even importance to the 30 states around the Indian Ocean and adjacent waters, even though China will likely feel the brunt of economic structural issues and demographic decline.

**5.2.5 Arms Transfers**

Military resource	1996	2006	2016	2021	2026	2035
Arms transfers	+	+	++	+++	+++/++++	+++/++++

Even though it has experienced considerable growth in absolute terms, China’s total arms sales still trail those of the most prolific weapons exporters and have remained relatively modest, even trailing behind Germany’s in 2020. This is an underdeveloped area in China’s rise as a great power and could hinder China’s ability to project power outside its region, though the overall impact is difficult to quantify and might only be minor.

**1996-2020**

In the early 2000s, China was a net importer of weapons. Among the countries around the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters, Chinas’ only significant customers were a collection of underserved countries, namely Iran, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Pakistan. However, by 2020 China had become a major exporter of arms, trailing only the United States, Russia, France and Germany.<sup>381</sup>

**2021**

China is a significant exporter of weapons. Its arms exports to the 30 countries around the Indian Ocean region have doubled from the period between 1996 and 2005 to the period between 2005 to 2016 (See Appendix 9). However, they still remain lower than those of France and Russia and are dwarfed by those of the United States. China’s main customers in this region are still the same limited set of countries: Iran, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Pakistan. One potential explanation for its inability to match the leading arms exporters is that it entered

<sup>380</sup> See the graph and visualization in The Economist, “Joe Biden Is Determined That China Should Not Displace America,” *The Economist*, July 17, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2021/07/17/joe-biden-is-determined-that-china-should-not-displace-america>.

<sup>381</sup> Wezeman, Kuimova, and Wezeman, “Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020,” 2–3.

Towards 2035, the establishment of a system of alliances would be a radical break with tradition of Chinese foreign policy, but the possibility – especially as the United States puts larger demands on its own allies to limit dealings with China – of the establishment of an alliance system cannot be discarded.

the market much later than French, Russian, and especially US manufacturers. China, since 2019 the largest exporter of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), is not a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), an arms control treaty that strongly inhibits the sale of UAVs.<sup>382</sup>

### 2022-2035

Based on current trends, there is a strong possibility that China will have broadened and deepened its customer base by 2035 (See Appendix 9). Given its enormous industrial capacity, increasingly sophisticated command of military technology, and the strength of its economic relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific region, it could eat into the French, UK, US and Russian market shares.

## 5.2.6 Operational experience; overseas deployments, port calls, and exercises

Military resource	Military activities	1996	2006	2016	2021	2026	2035
Military cooperation and assistance	Peace keeping; anti-piracy missions; exercises; port calls	+	+	++	++	++/++++	++/++++

China is also behind the typical rising great power trajectory when it comes to the types of activities necessary to gain experience in high-intensity combat, such as deploying large numbers of troops outside its region. Having fought its last war in 1979, the PLA – with all of its brand-new materiel and personnel – entirely lacks such experience. China's large-scale participation in peacekeeping missions and execution of anti-piracy missions and military exercises and port calls enables it to gain experience in using its new vessels, aircraft and armed vehicles, albeit at in times of peace or in a situation of low-intensity conflict.

### 1996-2020

From 1996 to 2003, China made limited contributions to peacekeeping missions and lacked experience in deploying military personnel far from home. However, starting in 2004, China began to significantly increase the number of troops it contributed to UN peacekeeping missions. In 2004 it contributed 1036 troops to UN missions; by 2020, that number had reached 2534 police and military personnel.<sup>383</sup> In addition, beginning in 2008, China began the process of deploying more than ten thousand navy personnel in nearly twenty task forces in the Gulf of Aden. In the course of these deployments, Chinese naval forces escorted over six thousand Chinese and foreign commercial vessels. China's purpose in conducting these operations goes beyond fighting piracy and is intended, in large part, to give sailors valuable experience in long-distance operations and deployments. For instance, on some of the missions, Chinese submarines have accompanied the surface ships.<sup>384</sup>

382 Danny Pronk and Claire Korteweg, "Onder de Vleugels van de Draak - Hoe China's Nieuwe Zijderoute Vleugels Krijgt," *Atlantisch Perspectief*, May 2021, 24, [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/AP\\_2\\_Hoe\\_Chinas\\_Nieuwe\\_Zijderoute\\_vleugels\\_krijgt.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/AP_2_Hoe_Chinas_Nieuwe_Zijderoute_vleugels_krijgt.pdf).

383 Richard Gowan, "China's Pragmatic Approach to UN Peacekeeping," Brookings, September 14, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-pragmatic-approach-to-un-peacekeeping/>.

384 Bruce Elleman and S. C. M. Paine, 'Navies and Soft Power', *Newport Papers*, 1 June 2015, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/usnwc-newport-papers/42>, 163; Andrew S. Erickson, 'The China Anti-Piracy Bookshelf: Statistics & Implications from Ten Years' Deployment... & Counting', 2 January 2019, <https://www.andrewerickson.com/2019/01/the-china-anti-piracy-bookshelf-statistics-implications-from-ten-years-deployment-counting/>.

Of all the UN Security Council P5 states, China is the largest contributor to peacekeeping missions countries in terms of troops deployed.

### 2021

Of all the UN Security Council P5 states, China is the largest contributor to peacekeeping missions countries in terms of troops deployed. As of July 2021, it had contributed 2249 police and military personnel to UN peacekeeping missions, good for tenth overall.<sup>385</sup> China continues to contribute to anti-piracy missions, and does port calls and joint military exercises, yet still lacks experience in deploying a large number of troops, far from home, under conditions of high-intensity combat.

### 2022-2035

As the PLAN produces new vessels, aircraft and additional capabilities, expanding the need for specialized, experienced personnel, and China's military competition with the United States further increases, the need for the PLA to gain (high-intensity) combat experience or at least familiarity in operating its complex military capabilities grows. Overseas deployments, such as participation in peacekeeping and anti-piracy missions, port calls and military exercises, will continue to serve – perhaps to an even greater extent – as a means for the PLA to boost its combat readiness levels.

## 5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has assessed China's intentions and capability development in its rise as a military great power, which has been typical for a rising great power but has been more successful in some of the six aspects than in others. The specific circumstances that resulted from the successes and challenges China has encountered on its way to military great power status – and its trajectory to 2035 – will present specific challenges to Europe. Meanwhile, the European Union in 2019 conceived of China – and described Europe's multi-faceted political, economic, cultural relationship with China – in the following way: China is “a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance”.<sup>386</sup> Chapter 6 analysis the consequences of the military rise of China for the economic, political and defense policies of the Netherlands and other European states.

<sup>385</sup> 'Troop and Police Contributors', United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed 14 September 2021, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>.

<sup>386</sup> European Commission, “EU-China Strategic Outlook: Commission and HR/VP Contribution to the European Council (21-22 March 2019),” Text, European Commission - European Commission, March 21, 2019, 1, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/eu-china-strategic-outlook-commission-contribution-european-council-21-22-march-2019\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/eu-china-strategic-outlook-commission-contribution-european-council-21-22-march-2019_en).

# Chapter Six.

# **The Consequences and Implications for European Security and Policy**

Joris Teer, Tim Sweijis, Jack Thompson



China's emergence as a great power has had profound, and increasingly pressing, consequences for the security of European states, even though the focus of China's military rise on its near seas makes it seem a remote problem. The consequences include those that are direct, such as the risk of Sino-US conflict in China's near seas, to those that are indirect, such as growing Chinese economic influence over states that house European naval bases.

The final chapter in this report outlines the key security implications of China's military rise. These range from the risks associated with kinetic conflict, to increasingly frequent hybrid operations, to a future PLA ability to project power in the far seas, to China's world-leading industrial resources and to China's expanding influence over third states. Based on these implications, the final chapter also provides recommendations for European policymakers that are designed to mitigate the security consequences of China's military rise. Unlike during the Cold War, in our time, the world is characterized by a return of hard competition between great powers in a constellation of economic interdependence through globalized supply chains, technological networks and international communication methods. The policy implications, hence, go beyond merely the realm of defense.

The near seas, especially the areas close to China's coast, is the only area in the world where China is likely able to win a war against the United States.

## 6.1 The outbreak of Sino-US conflict in the near seas

It is increasingly possible that we will see an outbreak of a local war under informatized conditions between China and the United States in the near seas. In fact, the majority of interstate wars have been fought either between great powers or between a great power and a lesser power. The risk of a military conflict between China and the United States is highest in the near seas because this is where the PLAN, PLARF, and PLAAF's modernization achieved its greatest successes, including improved situational awareness. The near seas, especially the areas close to China's coast, is the only area in the world where China is likely to be able to win a war against the United States and its allies. Some of China's military capabilities – such as its world-leading conventional ground-launched missile arsenal – are focused on defeating US CSGs. The militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea provides Beijing with several fortified points that expand its ability to deny access over the near seas that cannot be bypassed and that cannot be dislodged without a full-on attack. The deployment of Ground-Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) and Surface-to-Air Missiles on its man-made islands in the South China Sea further contribute to, and most likely expand, China's A2/AD. Hence, if Beijing were to risk a confrontation with the United States, it would most likely be in this region.

There are several scenarios in which Chinese and US assets could collide on terms favorable to China with devastating consequences. PLA attempts to take over Taiwan or a maritime confrontation with Southeast Asian US allies in the South China Sea could draw US and perhaps Australian and British naval assets into a confrontation in the Taiwan Strait or further out. The risk of an inadvertent escalation due to misperceptions is also a real possibility. What happens if a faulty computer system indicates on a monitor that the PLARF has launched an IRBM to strike Guam when it has not? This is not without historical precedent. In 1983 during the Cold War, USSR early warning systems indicated multiple US missile launches. On-duty officer Stanislav Petrov may have saved the world, as he refused to report the alarm to his

superiors.<sup>387</sup> In the case of war already having started, the PLA could attempt to lure AUKUS forces into its near seas to make use of its local military advantage – overwhelming its challengers' naval assets. In the heat of battle, informatized warfare in China's near seas goes hand in hand with the risk of both inadvertent and advertent nuclear escalation between China and the United States.

A deliberate Chinese-initiated near seas confrontation likely would be preceded by an attack in the space domain, as this could take out US and European “strategic enablers”. China has a robust anti-satellite capability, which may disrupt European (and US) space-based C4ISR “strategic enablers.”<sup>388</sup> Before the onset of a conflict with the United States in the near seas, the PLA may use its the SC-19, China's anti-satellite (ASAT) weapon, to disrupt US and European Intelligence, Reconnaissance and Surveillance (ISR) satellites. The US Navy “overwhelmingly relies” on space-based ISR, which may be in range of the PLA's SC-19.<sup>389</sup> European forces are also “increasingly dependent on earth observation...telecommunications...and PNT capacities to perform their duties”. In fact, the “destruction of EU space infrastructure could disable terrestrial defenses.”<sup>390</sup>

### Consequences for Europe of Sino-US conflict in the near seas

The first consequence for Europe of the outbreak of Sino-US conflict in the near seas is a strategic dilemma: it could either side with the US and balance against China, with all of the complications that such a decision would entail, or it could elect to remain uninvolved in the conflict and, in doing so, let down an important ally on which it relies for its own security (see Figure 12).

From the US perspective, the possibility that the PLAN could increase its control of the maritime commons within the First Island Chain up to the Strait of Malacca requires additional capabilities to balance against Chinese advances. In peacetime, the Biden Administration could request European navies to contribute to a maritime presence in the Western Pacific, for instance through participation in regular Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOP). In the event of conflict, Washington could request support from European states as well as from the AUKUS security pact to participate in the war effort,<sup>391</sup> for instance, calling on US allies to blockade the Malacca Strait, on which China depends for trade and energy.

This would force Europe to choose between alignment with the United States, the guarantor of Europe's security, or staying out of the Sino-US confrontation. The decisions Europe makes would determine its position in the EU-China-US geopolitical triangle for decades to come, with consequences beyond the defense realm and the Western-Pacific. Heeding a US request for military support in a conflict risks antagonizing China. This would include the potential for confrontation beyond the near seas, as Beijing would likely see European support for US intervention as an act of war. European support for a US intervention against

387 Pavel Aksenov, “Stanislav Petrov: The Man Who May Have Saved the World,” *BBC News*, September 26, 2013, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24280831>.

388 Policy Department for External Relations - Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, “The European Space Sector as an Enabler of EU Strategic Autonomy,” 34.

389 Larry R. Moore, “China's Antisatellite Program: Blocking the Assassin's Mace,” *Asian Perspective* 38, no. 1 (2014): 163, <https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2014.0006>.

390 Policy Department for External Relations - Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, “The European Space Sector as an Enabler of EU Strategic Autonomy,” 34.

391 The MS Evertsen, a Dutch Frigate, is conducting a maritime mission as part of a UK CSG crossing the SCS en route to Japan. The UK CSG is now part of the Aukus defense pact. “Aukus: UK, US and Australia Launch Pact to Counter China,” *BBC News*, September 16, 2021, sec. World, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-58564837>.

A US-China confrontation would force Europe to choose between alignment with the United States, the guarantor of European security, or staying out of confrontation.

China could very well lead to a military spillover effect to other regions, in which European military capabilities, as well as other assets, could be preemptively attacked by China. American, French and Italian military bases and naval assets in Djibouti are less than 30 kilometers away from China's first overseas base and naval assets.<sup>392</sup> Chinese military assets, especially frigates, destroyers and cruisers, will increasingly be in combat range of European naval assets and bases in the near future. Chinese military deployments aimed at engaging in low-intensity combat missions (e.g. anti-piracy and peacekeeping) or humanitarian missions in the far seas (e.g. Djibouti, Gulf of Aden, Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf and in Africa) are likely to increase, as the importance for the PLA to acclimate its new vessels and personnel to the seas grows. In cyberspace, where geography does not limit the PLA's offensive capabilities, PLA retribution may focus on vulnerable (civilian) critical infrastructure, like the Port of Rotterdam or European gas and oil supply.<sup>393</sup> European intervention in a Chinese-US conflict could well be followed by large scale cyberattacks against European resources on which its economy and perhaps also its military depends. Finally, Beijing will likely raise an economic embargo against Europe, including the supply of critical raw materials, and retaliate against European companies, citizens and representations operating in China.

Alternatively, choosing to ignore a US call for support in China's near seas would risk leaving a gaping hole in Europe's deterrence posture. Most notably, European refusal to support the US in a confrontation in the near seas would risk weakening US commitment to European security. This commitment is formalized under Article 5 of the NATO treaty, though according to the terms of the treaty European states are not obliged to provide support to the US in East Asia. Without the US security guarantee, Europe would face significant gaps in its security architecture, especially when it comes to deterring Russia. A US balancing effort against China in the near seas would reduce the focus and resources the United States is willing and able to commit to Europe, the Atlantic commons, and adjacent waters. At the same time, US elite and public opinion would shift against Europe, putting more pressure on the US government to prioritize the Pacific over the Atlantic. The result would be a gap in the deterrence of Russia in Europe, both on land and at sea, leaving Europe vulnerable to Russia creating *fait accomplis* on the ground, as it did with the Crimea annexation in 2014.

European refusal to support the US in a confrontation in the near seas would risk weakening US commitment to European security.

392 Abdi Latif Dahir, "How a Tiny African Country Became the World's Key Military Base," Quartz, August 18, 2017, <https://qz.com/africa/1056257/how-a-tiny-african-country-became-the-worlds-key-military-base/>.

393 The U.S. Department of Defense warns that Chinese cyberattacks can disrupt the use of a natural gas pipeline "for days to weeks." Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020," 83.

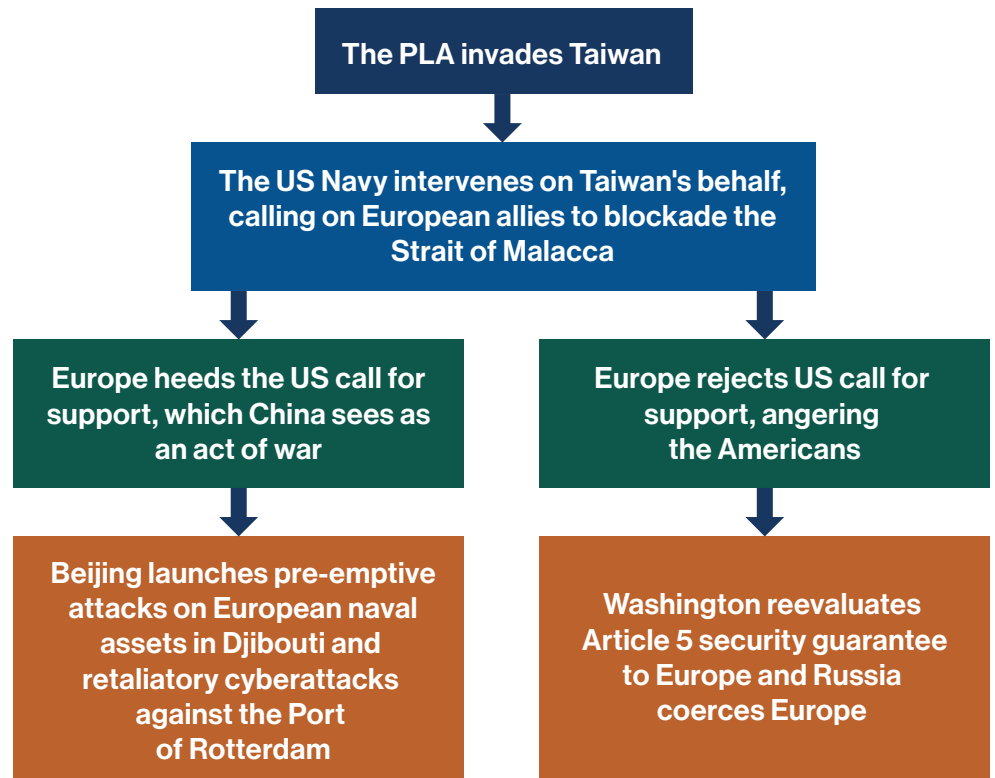


Figure 12 Chain reaction: an American-Chinese confrontation in the near seas presents Europe with a diabolical dilemma

## 1 Policy implications for Europe of Sino-US conflict in the near seas

### → Minimize the risk of wars fought close to China's shore and of nuclear escalation.

- It is recommended to initiate confidence-building measures, focusing on great power dialogue and the assessment of the possibility for new forms of détente between the US and China in which the EU could take a mediatory role. This should go hand in hand with US efforts to deter China from invading Taiwan.
- European states should continue to promote strengthening the commitment to the Defense Telephone Link between the US and Chinese militaries in meetings between the EU and the US and the EU and China in order to prevent first the outbreak of conventional war and then a nuclear escalation.
- European states should support expert dialogues with China on its dual-use MRBMs and IRBMs to limit the risks of nuclear escalation. Specifically, in order to ensure that a Chinese conventional missile launch is not mistaken for a missile carrying a nuclear warhead, European states should implore upon China the importance of disentangling its conventional and nuclear missile arsenal.

### → Develop national policy positions in European states long before US requests for military support in East Asia. Then, coordinate these positions on a European level.

- It is recommended to develop a policy position on US requests for military support in East Asia. In arriving at that position, high level political and public discussions need to address Europe's place in the world. Are European countries willing to project power in the Indian Ocean? What about the Pacific Ocean? Or are European capabilities better suited to strengthening defenses in Europe and guaranteeing freedom of navigation in the Atlantic, thereby freeing up US resources to focus on East-Asia? These are

fundamental questions to consider because the answers will shape Europe's geopolitical course for decades to come. These are questions that cannot be decided in the middle of a fast-moving crisis.

- The Netherlands is recommended to initiate a discussion, behind closed doors, with the leaders of France and Germany to coordinate a response to any US request for military support. The goal is to prevent another case of European disunity like the one that occurred after the 2003 Iraq War. In addition, a scenario of conflict between the US and China can be placed on the agenda of a summit of the European Council in which the views of states in Central and Eastern Europe that directly depend on the US security guarantee to Europe are particularly appreciated.
- Public broadcasters could initiate round table discussions featuring experts with divergent views on whether or not to military intervene if a conflict between China and the United States breaks out. Preferably this would feature a range of European, American and other experts posing a wide range of views. The discussion *War with China: Are we closer than we think?* on 60 Minutes Australia provides an example of how such a discussion can effectively be had.<sup>394</sup>

→ **Strengthen European defense capabilities.**

- European states should develop additional capabilities and strategic enablers necessary for their own defense, which are mostly still provided by the US military in Europe. This would necessitate spending more structurally and more intelligently on defense. To the extent possible, it would make sense for European states to do this in cooperation with Washington so as to avoid temporary deterrence gaps in Europe and to facilitate an orderly transfer of US resources to the Indo-Pacific. European governments, at the same time, should convey at the top-level to the US that expanding European military capabilities is not “anti-NATO” or “anti-American” in order to ensure an orderly transition.
- Specifically, the investment of European states should focus on expanding conventional deterrence, including increasing military preparedness of battalions, expanding and accelerating initiatives to increase unit mobility, the procurement of long-range artillery to counter Russian A2/AD bubbles and bolstering European command and coordination mechanisms in order to execute missions also without American involvement.

→ **Prepare for preemptive and retaliatory kinetic and cyberattacks against military and civilian targets.**

- It is recommended to prepare contingency plans to deal with the possibility of informatized and kinetic warfare, especially where European forces are deployed in close proximity to Chinese capabilities, but also over longer distances where cyber warfare can still be utilized. In a scenario of conflict breaking out in the near seas, European civilian vessels may equally be at risk of being targeted by units of the PLAN around the world. Timely decisions will need to be taken by European policymakers if they fear that Chinese assets may preemptively engage European assets. For example, this is the case in Djibouti, where China, France, Italy, and the United States have military bases and deploy naval assets within 30 kilometers of one another. In addition, critical infrastructure remains vulnerable to cyberattacks executed by non-state actors.

European states should develop additional capabilities and strategic enablers necessary for their own defense, which are mostly still provided by the US military in Europe.

<sup>394</sup> *War with China: Are We Closer than We Think?* | *Under Investigation* (60 Minutes Australia, 2021), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kA2KaEKs1LA>.

- European governments could produce a classified overview of places around the world where its military assets are in combat range of PLAN vessels and additional PLA troop deployments. In periods of high tension between China and the US, European ministries of foreign affairs can add warnings on their websites as part of their travel advice for destinations around the world, indicating what areas are in range of deployed PLA military assets.
- European governments should require private companies and local or regional governments that are responsible for critical infrastructure to maintain minimal cyber security standards. Specifically, European government should establish a government-initiated “certification process” for a “clear set of cybersecurity and counterespionage standards” that companies dealing in high technologies must comply with. Including requirements for high levels of cyber security standards in government procurement processes allows for the exclusion of those parties that fail to prove their cyber defenses are at sufficient levels.<sup>395</sup>

→ **Assess which dependencies China could exploit in a scenario of conflict and which dependencies Europe can (threaten to) exploit to prevent coercion.**

- As European support for US military efforts in the near seas risks a Chinese economic and technological embargo, the Dutch and other European governments should assess which areas of dependence on China can be exploited in a scenario of conflict (e.g. 5G and energy grids) and mitigate these – and which areas of dependence are innocuous (e.g. pants, hats and sofas) today and in the future. Considerations of price and individual choice of corporations and universities will increasingly have to play second fiddle to considerations of national security, especially in areas of critical infrastructure. The European Commission, as well as ministries of economic affairs working together with ministries of defense and foreign affairs, are recommended to further develop legislative policies regulating non-EU states involvement in critical infrastructure in Europe.
  - Concretely, this means adapting and broadening “lists of sensitive technologies” as well as formulating principles that define what exactly constitutes a “sensitive technology”;
  - updating and expanding the mandate of the Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid (NCTV's) and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate's (EZK's) “to mirror the US Committee on Foreign Investment's (CFIUS) Final Regulations Revising Declaration Requirement for Certain Critical Technology Transactions (CCTT)” and formulate guidelines on how to enforce their mandate;
  - advocating the introduction and expansion of mandates and knowledge-building efforts within the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to also focus on the challenges that the return of great power competition poses to economic security, for instance in the field of critical infrastructure;
  - and accelerating and expanding the work of the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) on technology and economic security, including Canada, South Korea and Japan in this process where possible.<sup>396</sup>
- European governments should assess the areas in which China is strategically dependent on Europe (e.g., in lithography and the semi-conductor supply chain) and share such overviews on a European level. In the event of (economic) coercion as a result of Sino-American and Sino-European conflict, European leaders would have a well-prepared tool of their own they can (threaten to) use to limit further coercion by China.

Considerations of price and individual choice of corporations and universities will increasingly have to play second fiddle to considerations of national security, especially in areas of critical infrastructure.

<sup>395</sup> Manen et al., “Taming Techno-Nationalism,” 72, 73.

<sup>396</sup> Manen et al., 71–75.

- In addition, European governments and the EU should engage with Indo-Pacific partners to diversify trade and economic relations, focusing on supply chain resilience, in line with the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy, to prevent intentional and unintentional supply chain shocks.<sup>397</sup> One approach to diversify supply chains away from places like China's far-western Xinjiang would be enacting additional good governance supply chain due diligence standards in which the burden of proof rests on the European company to show its supply chain does not depend on forced labor. A growing number of auditing companies will no longer inspect supply chains in Xinjiang due to the severe restrictions enacted by the Chinese government on their work there.<sup>398</sup>

→ **Consider the crucial role that space assets play in modern warfare and mitigate their weaknesses.**

- Policymakers should explore ways to improve the defenses of space-based ISR assets, focusing on countering “cheap, easy-to-deploy” offensive measures such as “earth-based jamming devices, cyberattacks, [or] satellite-mounted lasers” that can disable the sensors of satellites.<sup>399</sup> Non-space-based (back-up) ISR capabilities may be one way to reduce European and US vulnerabilities. If a moment of détente in US-China competition presents itself, European states – together with the United States – should initiate arms control negotiations with China, aiming to ban anti-satellite weapons.
- At the same time, when it comes to space assets, the EU should consider lowering its dependence on third countries, including the United States. Escalation between the US and China in the near seas could lead EU and US interests to diverge, an outcome that would require European states to maintain autonomy over the ISR of its military assets.<sup>400</sup>
- At the European policy-level, space should be included in the “Strategic Compass”. European Union member-states can co-develop space capabilities as well as founding a European Space Security Center “to boost space situational awareness (SSA)”.<sup>401</sup>

→ **Put arms control on the agenda of high-level EU-China meetings.**

- European Union engagement, considered more neutral than American engagement, can help put thinking about arms control on the agenda of China's top leadership.

→ **Initiate an EU-mediated track-two dialogue on the role of new technologies in arms control between all major military powers if a moment of détente occurs.**

- Russia and the United States have extensive experience in arms control negotiations. The EU, still considered by Beijing as a less partial actor than the US, could bring academics and think-tankers from China and the US together to discuss arms control.

When it comes to space assets, the EU should consider lowering its dependence on third countries, including the United States. Escalation between the US and China in the near seas could lead EU and US interests to diverge.

397 European Commission, “The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” September 16, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication\\_indo\\_pacific\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf).

398 Eva Xiao, “WSJ News Exclusive | Auditors to Stop Inspecting Factories in China's Xinjiang Despite Forced-Labor Concerns,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 21, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/auditors-say-they-no-longer-will-inspect-labor-conditions-at-xinjiang-factories-11600697706>.

399 Hugo van Manen, Tim Sweijs, and Patrick Bolder, “Strategic Alert: Towards a Space Security Strategy,” *HCSS* March 31, 2021, 30, <https://hcss.nl/report/strategic-alert-towards-a-space-security-strategy/>.

400 Policy Department for External Relations - Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, “The European Space Sector as an Enabler of EU Strategic Autonomy,” 39.

401 van Manen, Sweijs, and Bolder, “Strategic Alert,” 1.

In a protracted conflict, China will be able to rapidly and efficiently expand and repair its military capabilities thanks to its world-leading shipbuilding resources.

## 6.2 China's industrial resources in a protracted conflict

The prolongation of any conflict, either against the US or against both the US and European allies, risks giving the PLA a major advantage. In fact, in a protracted conflict, China will be able to rapidly and efficiently expand and repair its military capabilities thanks to its world-leading shipbuilding resources. European states and the US do not have the same repair and shipbuilding capabilities and are unlikely to match Chinese efficiency. In addition, Chinese Military-Civil Fusion programs and their economies of scale are likely to further improve the quality of its capabilities, increasing the confidence of the PLA in its capabilities.

### Consequences for Europe of China's industrial resources giving it an advantage in a protracted conflict

Fighting a protracted war against China would come at great cost in human lives and treasure. Losing a protracted conflict against China, and hence facing the destruction of European (and US) maritime capabilities, leads to a military balance of power in the Western-Pacific and the Indian Ocean unfavorable to Europe.<sup>402</sup> At the same time, a protracted conflict goes hand-in-hand with a constant risk of nuclear escalation, even after months or years of fighting.

### 2 Policy implications for Europe of China's industrial resources giving it an advantage in a protracted conflict

#### → Improve access to shipbuilding and repair capacities.

- To deter China from starting a protracted, conventional conflict and to be prepared in the event of hostilities, European governments need to consider investing in shipbuilding capabilities, prioritizing domestic industries for civilian and military shipbuilding tenders. Arrangements with Japan and South Korea, US allies in the Pacific, provide a second-best option, as these states are the only two states outside of China that currently have large shipbuilding capacity. Indeed, in the case of the outbreak of conflict, European and US navies would significantly benefit in the short-term from having access to Japanese and South Korean ship repair capabilities.

#### → National security may trump economic considerations when developing strategic assets such as vessels.

- The development of vessels and other strategic assets is better not left to Chinese shipyards but instead to Dutch or European partners, or if need be by likeminded countries such as South-Korea and Japan. Especially if this development concerns new technologies, such as LNG propulsion or the construction of large vessels, that may also produce synergies with the military sector.<sup>403</sup>

#### → Expand cooperation initiatives and create synergies between defense R&D and the private sector.

- Expand military research and development and meet the European Defense Agency's (EDA) two percent norm. Participation in military procurement initiatives, namely the

<sup>402</sup> Paul Van Hooft, "Don't Knock Yourself Out: How America Can Turn the Tables on China by Giving up the Fight for Command of the Seas," *War on the Rocks*, February 23, 2021.

<sup>403</sup> Funaiolo, Bermudez Jr., and Hart, "China's Opaque Shipyards Should Raise Red Flags for Foreign Companies."



“Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defense Industrial Development Program (EDPIP), the Preparatory Action on Defense Research (PADR) or NATO’s Defense Planning Process”, is also encouraged.<sup>404</sup>

## 6.3 China’s hybrid actions in its near seas erode international norms

It is probable that China will continue to engage in or even expand hybrid measures designed to further bolster its position in the near seas, using salami tactics, improving its position through incremental steps that stay below a threshold that invites a robust response. These actions all occur under the threshold of war and are difficult to deter as a result. In recent years, these tactics have included a wide range of following activities. The PLAAF regularly engages in operations around Taiwan, including frequent incursions into its air defense identification zone – outside its airspace but close enough that Taiwan scrambles its own aircraft – designed to exhaust the Taiwanese military.<sup>405</sup> The People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) is used to intimidate small and middle powers. For example, the PAFMM has conducted operations involving large number of ships – more than 200 – which China claims are civilian vessels in Whitsun Reef’s lagoon, starting in March 2021, close to the Philippine shores and in its Exclusive Economic Zone.<sup>406</sup> This comes on top of China’s creation of artificial islands, and the deployment of sensors in the SCS extend China’s military advantage in the near seas. The deployment of Ground-Launched Cruise Missiles and Surface-to-Air Missiles on its man-made islands in the SCS likely expand China’s A2/AD capabilities. Improvements in Chinese C4ISR, including the deployment of a network of fixed and floating sensors in the South China Sea, are likely to further expand the range at which these weapons can be used accurately. These activities are bolstering China’s position in the region and undermining international norms.

### Consequences for Europe of China’s hybrid actions in its near seas eroding international norms

States that are closer to the European continent may be emboldened by China’s actions and begin to behave similarly in the Atlantic Ocean or even closer to the European continent. China’s salami-tactics risk eroding the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) and international norms more broadly. The use of salami tactics contributes to gradually expanding China’s control of its direct environment, which may further embolden the PLA to act against US and European assets in the Western-Pacific.

404 Manen et al., “Taming Techno-Nationalism,” XIV.

405 Yimou Lee, David Lague, and Ben Blanchard, “China Launches ‘Gray-Zone’ Warfare to Subdue Taiwan,” *Reuters*, December 10, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/hongkong-taiwan-military/>.

406 Andrew S. Erickson, “China’s Secretive Maritime Militia May Be Gathering at Whitsun Reef,” *Foreign Policy*, March 22, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/22/china-philippines-militia-whitsun/>.

### 3 Policy implications for Europe of China's hybrid actions in its near seas eroding international norms

→ Continue to bolster respect for international law and freedom of navigation with like-minded countries.

- European states should continue to strengthen respect for international law and freedom of navigation through multilateral, regional fora. European governments can take on this role by training lawyers in UNCLOS, participating in fora like the South China Sea International Conference held annually in Vietnam and engage in other activities that help internationalize and multilateralize security in the Indo-Pacific.
- European states should continue to impress on China – as the foremost beneficiary of global maritime trade – the interest Beijing has in maintaining Freedom of Navigation.<sup>407</sup>
- European states should also press the United States to ratify UNCLOS, as its unwillingness to do so weakens the UNCLOS regime and strengthens the “perception that [the United States] abides by international norms only when they align with its national interests.”<sup>408</sup>
- European states and the European Union should especially focus on (individual member-states of) ASEAN in order to together express broad support among small and mid-sized (e.g. Indonesia) powers for UNCLOS.
- European states, China and the United States could attempt to build trust in dealing with maritime issues by starting to find common ground in the non-traditional security sphere also including ASEAN. In fact, tackling lower-level issues such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, piracy, and other forms of trans-national crime can help build trust between all the parties involved.

## 6.4 China's expanding ability to project power in the far seas

Around 2030 China should be able to mount missions to intimidate and coerce small and medium-sized states through offshore threatening and protect supply chains in the Indian Ocean, Middle East, and Africa, certainly if not prevented by a peer competitor. Beijing conceives its external environment to be increasingly hostile to its interests. It, therefore, seeks to complete its military modernization by 2035 in order to deter the US, Australia, Japan as well as European states from taking actions against China's interests such as its use of SLOCs, its investments in the region and the security of its diaspora. At the same time, China delivers the largest troop contribution out of the Permanent Five members of the UNSC to UN peacekeeping missions. Over 80% of them are deployed in Africa. European states are likely to continue to come into contact with – and perhaps even execute missions with – a Chinese peacekeeping contingent, in spite of tensions between the great powers leading to an increasingly ineffective United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

To achieve its far seas power projection ambitions, China will have to overcome its specific military weaknesses and capitalize on current strengths whilst expanding its infrastructure around the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters to sustain its forces. First, it has to overcome substantial qualitative (i.e. technological) capability gaps, such as its inability to manufacture top-level jet engines, that greatly impede its ability to project power extra-regionally. It is likely

<sup>407</sup> Vuković and Alfieri, “Halting and Reversing Escalation in the South China Sea.”

<sup>408</sup> Vuković and Alfieri, 605.

that the Chinese government, state owned-enterprises, and PLA will intensify their efforts to overcome key military-technological gaps in their military capabilities, including by leveraging foreign civilian and military technologies in line with proposed policies such as Made in China 2025, China's 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan and Dual Circulation as Beijing's threat perceptions increase. Second, efforts to improve the precision of China's world-leading long-range strike arsenal over the next fourteen years will increase the likelihood that the PLARF can strike moving objects in the Indian Ocean and adjacent waters by 2035. Third, China will likely expand its support structure with overseas and overland bases, as well as port investments and an additional number of supply ships. Indeed, China may establish a second and third base overseas close to India, which would allow for land connections to China's Mainland with resupply purposes, for instance, in Gwadar, Pakistan or Kyaupu, Myanmar.

### Consequences for Europe of China's expanding ability to project power in the far seas

China will likely continue to target European businesses and universities that do research on, develop, or own dual-use high technologies, to overcome the most persistent, pressing and fundamental gaps that impede its goal of military modernization by 2035, which are of a technological and qualitative nature. All great powers are further incentivized to engage in technology theft as hard competition between them intensifies.

If the PLA successfully concludes its modernization by 2035 and has access to bases in the Western part of the Indian Ocean, the consequences for European security in the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters are greater. China's significant build-up of conventional blue water and long-range strike capabilities may then provide it with a "sea denial" ability, or the ability to "[threaten] the operation of an opposing naval force in a given swath of the ocean."<sup>409</sup> This would give China the ability to exert sea denial over (parts of) the Indian Ocean and its adjacent water leading to a situation in which nobody is able to enact sea control. European states increasingly depend on trade, commercial maritime traffic to other regions and the supply of natural resources such as crude oil on this area. An increased PLAN presence in the Indian Ocean may also inflame tensions between China and India, threatening regional stability.

Finally, China may come to execute military missions also on land in Africa and the Middle East between 2030 and 2035 in order to protect its overseas diaspora and its overseas investments, two of the PLA's reasons to pursue its current far seas capability modernization. If such missions occur, they will likely take place in states also harboring European bases. China has gained experience in light intensity overseas on land missions through its peacekeeping operations. These missions will continue to bring Dutch and European personnel, both civilian and military, in closer and more regular contact with China's military peacekeeping contingent.

China will likely continue to target European businesses and universities that do research on, develop, or own dual-use high technologies, to overcome the most persistent, pressing and fundamental gaps that impede its goal of military modernization by 2035, which are of a technological and qualitative nature.

## 4 Policy implications for Europe of China's expanding ability to project power in the far seas

→ **Block the transfer of (especially dual-use) critical Dutch and European technologies to China.**

- Considerations of national security will more often have to receive priority over the interests of individual corporations and universities that develop dual-use technologies, outlawing the sale of these goods or R&D processes to Chinese counterparts.

<sup>409</sup>Caverley and Dombrowski, "Cruising for a Bruising," 676.

- First, European governments should map which European companies and universities develop or sell the specific technologies that could be leveraged to help the PLA overcome the key capability gaps that impede its ability to protect power in the far seas. These gaps are primarily in the realms of aerospace, avionics, and anti-submarine warfare. Additionally, European governments should prevent that the PLAN obtains technology that further expands the precision of its world-leading missile arsenal, which would put European naval assets in range of China's IRBMs (see Table 29 and Chapter 3).
- Second, European governments must assess which specific fields of the current technological revolution are likely to be relevant in future war and limit China's access to leading research within these fields conducted in European universities and companies. This includes big data, photonics, robotics and autonomous systems (RAS), semi-conductors and artificial intelligence.<sup>410</sup>
- Third, targeted investment screening and export control measures should be expanded within member-states focusing on these key technologies and then coordinated and harmonized within the European Union. Unfortunately, at present, the "EU screening framework represents only the lowest common denominator, wielding little to no central power."<sup>411</sup> At the same time, the Dutch government should intensify visa-screening for students from "unfree countries",<sup>412</sup> especially at the PhD-level in these aforementioned fields. Funding for a PhD position provided by the Chinese state creates a level of dependence of the PhD student on the state that may be followed by a demand to apply learned skills in favor of the state. Universities, supported by the intelligence services, other governmental agencies, and knowledge centers for security in academic cooperation, should conduct due-diligence research before engaging in cooperation in these sensitive fields.<sup>413</sup>
- Fourth, it is recommended to coordinate these efforts with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada in order to ensure that these technologies are not "leaked" from other states. As aforementioned, it is encouraged to expand and accelerate the work of the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) on technology and economic security, involving Canada, South-Korea and Japan in this process where possible. A possible outcome of these discussion may be the installment of a new multilateral export control regime similar to the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM) regime. 17 countries enacted COCOM at the beginning of the Cold War to ensure the USSR did not continue its military modernization by using Western technology.

→ **Expand maritime capabilities suitable to perform freedom of navigation operations in the Indo-Pacific.**

- The Dutch and European navies should invest in self-defence measures against missile attacks and in ASW, given the PLA(N)s ongoing investments in these capability

410 Manen et al., "Taming Techno-Nationalism," VII.

411 Manen et al., XIII.

412 Rathenau Instituut, "Kenniseveiligheid in Hoger Onderwijs En Wetenschap - Een Gedeelde Verantwoordelijkheid," January 11, 2021, 5, <https://www.rathenau.nl/nl/berichten-aan-het-parlement/kenniseveiligheid-hoger-onderwijs-en-wetenschap>.

413 The Rathenau Institute advocates the founding of a "review committee" for the security risks of knowledge cooperation – and encourages the founding of a "knowledge and expertise center for knowledge security" in order to make information on cooperation with "unfree countries" more accessible. Rathenau Instituut, 6. In a hearing in the Dutch parliament representatives of universities also expressed interest in access to knowledge of the intelligence services when considering research cooperation with "unfree countries". Committee for Education Tweede Kamer Culture and Science, *Wetenschappelijke Samenwerking Met Onvrije Landen | Debat Gemist* (Tweede Kamer, Den Haag, 2021), <https://debatgemist.tweedekamer.nl/debatten/wetenschappelijke-samenwerking-met-onvrije-landen>.

categories. European states should maintain their relative advantage vis-à-vis China of having access to overseas bases in the Indian Ocean.

→ **Distribute development funding in Indo-Pacific in line with strategic interests.**

- The Netherlands and other European states should consider competing with the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by deepening their ties to the region, for instance, through investment in strategic infrastructure such as ports. However, in the first place these funds should focus on projects closer to home in NATO's treaty area, for example in Montenegro, and in the second place on projects in the areas bordering Europe, for instance in reconstructing the Port of Beirut. In this way, European states can prevent China from laying the commercial foundations upon which military bases may be established in the future. The EU's Global Gateway initiative provides a good starting point to expand development initiatives as well as achieving strategic objectives.
- In addition, as states will transition away from the use of fossil fuel energy sources in the next three decades, the EU can use its European Green Deal to help third countries in their transition, which is one of the goals of the European Green Deal.<sup>414</sup> It could help developing countries develop clean energy infrastructure.
- Contributing to sustainable development is also one of the goals outlined in the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy. It is further encouraged to pursue the partnership and trade proposals outlined in the EU Indo-Pacific strategy, such as “concluding [of] Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with Malaysia and Thailand [...]; bringing the EU's upcoming Partnership Agreement with the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) to full fruition; completing EU trade negotiations with Australia, Indonesia and New Zealand [...]; and stepping up the implementation of the Connectivity Partnerships with Japan and India.”<sup>415</sup>

→ **Assess on a case-by-case basis whether future Chinese overseas military missions pose a threat to European deployments and commercial activities.**

- Chinese missions in the Middle East and Africa, if executed around 2030, will likely take place at a time of sustained American-Chinese and perhaps also European-Chinese tensions. Such an operation again puts China's military might in the vicinity of European activities, potentially threatening them if tensions spill-over elsewhere.

→ **Expand ability to cooperate effectively with a Chinese UN peacekeeping contingent.**

- European governments can prepare their military and civilian staff to work with Chinese personnel through language training, providing information about China's political system and by consistently monitoring tensions between China, Europe and the United States in order to ensure the safety and avoid tensions between the European and Chinese peacekeeping contingents.

414 European Commission, “Delivering the European Green Deal,” European Commission - European Commission, accessed September 15, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_en).

415 European Commission, “EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” Text (European Union, September 16, 2021), 2, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA\\_21\\_4709](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_21_4709).

## 6.5 China's command of critical resources

China holds a quasi-monopoly on critical raw materials, including those essential to the manufacturing of defense technologies. In 2016, the EU was almost entirely dependent on non-EU states for imports of 19 out of 39 categories of raw materials that are deemed important for the defense industry. China is the major producer of “one-third of the raw materials identified in defense applications.”<sup>416</sup> At the same time, China produced roughly “85 percent of the world's rare earth oxide and approximately 90 percent of rare earth metals, alloys and permanent magnets”.<sup>417</sup>

### Consequences for Europe of China's command of critical resources

China could try to leverage its quasi-monopoly on CRM and monopoly on rare earth metals to deny the building blocks that Europe (and its US-ally) need to manufacture military capabilities.

#### 5 Policy implications for Europe of China's command of critical resources

→ **Expand access to critical raw materials and rare earth metals that are essential for military power projection.**

- European states should consider reopening mines at home to improve access to critical raw materials and rare earth metals.
- European states should intensify their efforts to obtain these materials in third countries.<sup>418</sup> The European Commission may want to consider including access to raw materials in all trade agreements with third parties that own such resources.
- Implement additional actions outlined in the European Commission's 2020 strategy *Critical Raw Materials Resilience: Charting a Path towards greater Security and Sustainability* such as mapping “the potential supply of secondary critical raw materials from EU stocks and wastes.”<sup>419</sup> Taking both geopolitical and sustainability aims into account, the recycling of critical raw materials in appliances is an avenue worth exploring in the immediate future.

416 Claudiu Pavel and Evangelos Tzimas, “Raw Materials in the European Defence Industry.” (LU: European Commission; Joint Research Centre (JRC); Publications Office, 2016), 3, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2790/509931>.

417 China Power Team, “Does China Pose a Threat to Global Rare Earth Supply Chains?,” *ChinaPower Project* (blog), July 17, 2020, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-rare-earths/>.

418 Patrahau et al., “Securing Critical Materials for Critical Sectors - Policy Options for the Netherlands and the European Union.”

419 European Commission, “Critical Raw Materials Resilience: Charting a Path towards Greater Security and Sustainability” (Brussels: European Commission, September 3, 2020), 11, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0474&from=EN>.

## 6.6 China's expanding economic & digital influence in the Indo-Pacific region

China's economic rise, which has preceded its current military rise, has expanded its influence over third countries in which European states also have interests, in particular the 30 states around the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters. Beijing's current deep economic ties to the region, including its non-interference policy and omission of good governance and human rights concerns in its trade relations with autocratic leaders, could be fertile soil for the establishment of an eventual China-led alliance network. China's growing trade in both absolute and relative terms vis-à-vis Europe and the United States increases the dependence of third states on China.

As in the case of oil-producing states in the Persian Gulf states, at a time when the US forfeited most of its oil imports from the Middle East, China is likely to wield more leverage over oil producing-states, not only in the Middle East, but also in Africa, South America and North and Central Asia. Given the increased availability of crude oil due to the technological revolution in means to produce oil,<sup>383</sup> producers of this resource are prone to sell it in a market in which China would continue to be the protagonist and main buyer during this decade. The European Union, meanwhile, still depends for 61% of its energy needs on net imports; with 16.7 percent of its oil imports coming from Saudi Arabia and Iraq.<sup>420</sup>

Finally, the Digital Silk Road, including HuaWei's efforts to set up 5G networks in African, Middle Eastern, South Asian and Southeast Asian states, may come to set standards for the digitalization of the developing world, in spite of the fact that "eight of the world's ten largest economies, countries representing over 60% of the world's cellular equipment market, had either banned or restricted HuaWei from their 5G networks."<sup>421</sup> China, likely to continue large-scale (cyber) espionage and procurement of European dual-use technologies, may target third countries that bought European military equipment.

### Consequences for Europe of China's expanding economic & digital influence in the Indo-Pacific region

China's deepening commercial ties to the region could incentivize states to act against European interests, for instance, by refusing to host European bases. Trade without good governance and human rights conditions at the very least does not incentivize autocracies to respect human rights nor abide by democratic norms and good governance and may also propel the trend of global de-democratization and decline in freedom, which has characterized the world already for fifteen consecutive years.<sup>422</sup>

The security implications resulting from digitalization trends should not be underestimated either. The Digital Silk Road facilitates the spread of tools of digital authoritarianism such as smart cameras and face-recognition technology, and high-tech online surveillance technology to enable autocracies to achieve greater non-democratic control over societies.

420 Eurostat, "Shedding Light on Energy on the EU: From Where Do We Import Energy?," Shedding light on energy on the EU, 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/infographs/energy/bloc-2c.html>.

421 Hal Brands, "Huawei's Decline Shows Why China Will Struggle to Dominate," *Bloomberg.Com*, September 19, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-09-19/huawei-s-decline-shows-why-china-will-struggle-to-dominate>.

422 Sarah Repucci and Amy Slipowitz, "Democracy under Siege," Freedom House, 2021, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>.

China's economic rise, which has preceded its current military rise, has expanded its influence over third countries in which European states also have interests, in particular the 30 states around the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters.

States with close military relations to Western states and growing economic ties to China could be the go-between through which China might get hold of European and American military technology.

This pushes out European and American competitors through the creation of path dependencies and by contributing to China-led standard-setting practices while enabling greater PLA access to information in third countries.<sup>423</sup> Chinese-led digitalization hence risks putting European states in an information deficit and in their dealings with the thirty countries around the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters vis-à-vis China. Information asymmetry would be highly problematic; hence European states should boost their efforts to try and attract Indo-Pacific countries to the Western part of the “splinternet”.

States with close military relations to Western states and growing economic ties to China could be the go-between through which China might get hold of European and American military technology. China's deepening ties with the Gulf Kingdoms, the region's foremost purchasers of American, British and French arms, may specifically grant China access to advanced weaponry in the future. The US sale of the hyper-modern F-35 fighter jet to the UAE is, partially as a result of these concerns, on hold.<sup>424</sup> The PLAN, PLARF, and PLAAF would indeed benefit from receiving insights on European dual-use technologies in order for China to overcome its key capability and technological gaps.

## 6 Policy implications for Europe of China's expanding economic & digital influence in the Indo-Pacific region

### → Compete with China's digitalization initiatives in states around the Indian Ocean.

- EU connectivity partnerships, signed with Japan (2019) and India (2021), are intended to link the “digital infrastructures of the signatories, seeking synergies for projects in third countries”, and should be expanded.<sup>425</sup> In addition, it is encouraged to expand digital partnerships with countries in the Indo-Pacific region as also the EU Indo-Pacific strategy has advocated.<sup>426</sup>

### → Assess whether arms can still be exported to states with growing ties to China.

- Ensure that states in the Indo-Pacific region are not the “go-between” through which China acquires European defense technologies that will help it overcome key capability gaps in their far sees military capabilities, such as ASW and jet fighter technology.
- European Defense ministries should, on a country-by-country basis, assess China's economic and military relations with – and influence over – the thirty countries around the Indian Ocean and its adjacent waters and how these are likely to develop in the short and mid-term future. Pakistan, which has an *All-Weather Strategic Partnership* with China and Egypt, which has a *Comprehensive Strategic Partnership* with China both purchased advanced *Radar and C3 Systems* from the Netherlands. Decisions on the benefits of delivering such systems to states with close relations to China should be carefully assessed, weighed against the risks of the PLA expanding its capabilities and assessed in light of an importing-country's ability to obtain the same technology elsewhere.<sup>427</sup>

423 Brigitte Dekker and Maaïke Okano-Heijmans, “Unpacking China's Digital Silk Road,” Clingendael, July 27, 2020, 14–16, <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/unpacking-chinas-digital-silk-road>.

424 Youssef, “WSJ News Exclusive | F-35 Sale to U.A.E. Imperiled Over U.S. Concerns About Ties to China.”

425 Samuel Pleeck and Mikaela Gavas, “A New Global Connectivity Strategy: The EU's Response to the BRI,” Center For Global Development, August 4, 2021, <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/new-global-connectivity-strategy-eus-response-bri>.

426 European Commission, “The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” 2.

427 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Het Nederlandse Exportcontrolebeleid in 2020” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, September 9, 2021), 21, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/binaries/rijksoverheid/documenten/rapporten/2021/09/09/het-nederlandse-exportcontrolebeleid-in-2020/het-nederlandse-exportcontrolebeleid-2020.pdf>.



- Assess the cyber-security systems of third parties that import European military equipment for the PLA to overcome key gaps in its military capabilities via the cyber-domain.

→ **Safeguard European oil imports by offsetting China's influence over oil producers when necessary.**

- The Netherlands and other European states should safeguard their energy supplies from the Persian Gulf. China is the dominant oil importer in the world, giving it influence over oil-producing countries. Working with alternative oil importers can offset this influence when necessary. Enhance cooperation with oil importers such as India, which also imports vast and growing volumes of oil from the Persian Gulf, as well as traditional large crude oil importers like South Korea and Japan, as a counterweight to China's increasing influence.

## 6.7 China's expanding arms exports

China's arms exports, including the sale of relatively inexpensive Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), to countries like Pakistan with ties to Islamist and militant groups, which are often listed as terrorist organizations in the European Union, may have greater implications for Dutch and European security.<sup>428</sup> China, since 2019 the largest exporter of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), is not a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), an arms control treaty that strongly inhibits the sale of UAVs. During the years following the end of the Cold War, various arms control initiatives were relatively successful in curtailing the production and proliferation of various weapon systems. China's sophisticated defense industry now provides an alternative supplier for states shunned by European, American and Russian alternatives. This may lead European, American and Russian exporters to reconsider their unwillingness to supply arms to a particular party. For instance, whereas the United States in 2019 still prevented armed drone sales to the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, China did export drones such as the Wing Loong I and Wing Loong II to the Gulf – leading the US government to reconsider its export ban.<sup>429</sup>

### Consequences for Europe of China's expanding arms exports

China's arms transfers risk upending European-initiated arms control efforts, and Chinese military equipment may end up in the hands of state and non-state actors that are hostile to Europe.

## 7 Policy implications for Europe of China's expanding arms exports

- **Foster international talks and confidence building measures on export regimes with China.** Dutch and European policymakers could do this in order to encourage Beijing's adherence to such agreements, limiting the proliferation of Chinese weapons while reinforcing arms control measures. China must be invited to join non-proliferation bodies and regimes such as the MTCR but European states should ensure that these are not politicized.

428 Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "The China-Pakistan Partnership Continues to Deepen," ORF, July 10, 2020, 1, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-china-pakistan-partnership-continues-to-deepen/>.

429 Natasha Turak, "Pentagon Is Scrambling as China 'sells the Hell out of' Armed Drones to US Allies," CNBC, February 21, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/21/pentagon-is-scrambling-as-china-sells-the-hell-out-of-armed-drones-to-americas-allies.html>.

China must be invited to join non-proliferation bodies and regimes such as the MTCR but European states should ensure that these are not politicized.

Table 37 provides a summary of the policy recommendations for Dutch and European countries discussed in this Chapter.

Security implication	Policy implication
<b>1. The outbreak of Sino-US conflict in the near seas</b>	1.1 Minimize the risk of wars fought close to China's shore and of nuclear escalation.
	1.2 Develop national policy positions in European states long before US requests for military support in East Asia. Then, coordinate these positions on a European level.
	1.3 Strengthen European defense capabilities
	1.4 Prepare for preemptive and retaliatory kinetic and cyberattacks against military and civilian targets.
	1.5 Assess which dependencies China could exploit in a scenario of conflict and which dependencies Europe can (threaten to) exploit to prevent coercion.
	1.6 Consider the crucial role that space assets play in modern warfare and mitigate their weaknesses.
	1.7 Put arms control on the agenda of high-level EU-China meetings.
	1.8 Initiate a EU-mediated track-two dialogue on the role of new technologies in arms control between all major military powers, if a moment of détente occurs.
<b>2. China's industrial resources could provide an advantage in a protracted conflict</b>	2.1 Improve access to shipbuilding and repair capacities.
	2.2 National security may trump economic considerations when developing strategic assets such as vessels.
	2.3 Expand cooperation initiatives and create synergies between defense R&D and the private sector.
<b>3. China's hybrid actions in its near seas erode international norms</b>	3.1 Continue to bolster respect for international law and freedom of navigation with like-minded countries.
<b>4. China's expanding ability to project power in the far seas</b>	4.1 Block the transfer of (especially dual-use) Dutch and European critical technologies to China.
	4.2 Expand maritime capabilities suitable to perform freedom of navigation operations in the Indo-Pacific.
	4.3 Distribute development funding in Indo-Pacific in line with strategic interests.
	4.4 Assess on a case-by-case basis whether future Chinese overseas military missions pose a threat to European deployments and commercial activities.
	4.5 Expand ability to cooperate effectively with a Chinese UN peacekeeping contingent.
<b>5. China's command of critical resources</b>	5.1 Expand access to critical raw materials and rare earth metals that are essential for military power projection.
<b>6. China's expanding economic &amp; digital influence in the Indo-Pacific region</b>	6.1 Compete with China's digitalization initiatives in states around the Indian Ocean.
	6.2 Assess whether arms can still be exported to states with growing ties to China.
	6.3 Safeguard European oil imports by offsetting China's influence over oil producers when necessary.
<b>7. China's expanding arms exports</b>	7.1 Foster international talks and confidence building measures on export regimes with China.

Table 37: Overview of policy recommendations.

## Final thoughts

This report has assessed the development of China's intentions, capabilities and activities that together make up its military rise as a great power. The main finding of the report is that China exhibits almost all of the factors that characteristically drive great power expansion outside of the region. It is following a typical rising great power trajectory in almost all respects and is implementing a long-term strategy to be able to project power extra-regionally. The final chapter of the report argues that China's military rise has had profound and increasingly pressing consequences for the security of European states – including matters that are not directly related to defense. Unlike the Cold War, the current international system is characterized by geopolitical competition between a number of great powers, albeit within the context of considerable economic interdependence, including globalized supply chains, technological networks, and international communication methods.

This multipolar, interconnected landscape necessitates an approach that limits the ability of Europe's rivals to take advantage of the openness of our economies and political systems – especially when it comes to the private sector and research institutions – to bolster their own capabilities. Meanwhile, competition for influence in other regions is likely to intensify. European states should therefore develop more sophisticated strategies in the Middle East, Africa, and Central and South Asia that promote European interests and values.

NATO, the EU, and individual member states have started to recognize the profound implications of China's emergence as a great power but have thus far not developed comprehensive policies to deal with its military rise. In 2019, the European Union published "a Strategic Outlook on China", which described China as "a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance".<sup>430</sup> More recently, the June 2021 NATO Brussels Summit Communiqué stated that "China's stated ambitions and assertive behavior present systemic challenges to the rules-based order and to areas relevant to Alliance security" and called upon China to "uphold its international commitments and to act responsibly in the international system, including in the space, cyber, and maritime domain".<sup>431</sup> The policy implications and recommendations listed in Chapter 6 could serve as a complement to the existing policy frameworks of NATO, the EU, and individual member states, which identify China as an ascending great power but generally fall short on policy measures that specifically address the consequences of China's military rise for Europe.

It would be prudent for the Netherlands and other European states to begin preparing for the consequences of China's military rise, both those that are already discernable and those that will become increasingly apparent after 2026. Chinese President Xi Jinping is open about the central role he seeks for China in the world and what this means for US, Europe, and the global order: he declares that "the East is rising and the West is declining" and foresees profound changes to the international system "unseen in 100-years". Noting that relations between states can deteriorate rapidly and with relatively little warning, it is in the interest of the Netherlands and other European states to take Xi's pronouncements at face value and to start preparing accordingly.

<sup>430</sup> European Commission, "EU-China Strategic Outlook," 1.

<sup>431</sup> Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council, "Brussels Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 14 June 2021," NATO, June 14, 2021, 55, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_185000.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm).

President Xi declares that "the East is rising and the West declining". It is in the interest of the Netherlands and other European states to take Xi's pronouncements at face value and prepare accordingly.

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