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# The Chinese Navy's Offshore Active Defense Strategy

## Conceptualization and Implications

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Alexander Chieh-cheng Huang

ON 25 FEBRUARY 1992, THE NATIONAL People's Congress, China's nominal legislative body, passed the Law of the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone and formally legalized the People's Republic of China's maritime territorial claims.<sup>1</sup> Article 2 of the Law listed a number of unsettled archipelagos in the western Pacific as China's inherited maritime territories.<sup>2</sup> Three months later, the PRC announced that it had signed a joint contract with the Crestone Energy Corporation of the United States for oil exploration in an offshore block contiguous to a Vietnamese oil field. In the same announcement, the PRC stated that it would use naval force when necessary to protect the China-Crestone operations in the South China Sea.<sup>3</sup> In addition, in mid-1992 numerous reports revealed that the PRC was negotiating with the Ukrainian government on the possible purchase of the ex-Soviet (and still incomplete) aircraft carrier *Varyag* (though many analysts believe the deal has been called off).<sup>4</sup> Occurring in the post-Cold War era, these events undoubtedly triggered tensions between the PRC and its neighboring states.<sup>5</sup> The Chinese moves were

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This article applies the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet (Pinyin) System in transliterating names and terms. For analytical convenience, in this article "China" refers to the "People's Republic of China," while "Taiwan" refers to the "Republic of China." This usage should not be ascribed to the author's political orientation.

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by no means coincidental; instead, they could be viewed as inevitable consequences of China's decade-long effort to transform itself from a traditional land-bound empire into a continental nation with maritime power.

When Deng Xiaoping initiated his "socialist modernization program" in the late 1970s, China began to redirect its national development from closed self-reliance toward an open, maritime orientation. In the economic dimension, China opened to foreign investors and markets five "special economic zones," fourteen "coastal open cities," and five "economic deltas" along its 18,000-kilometer coastline. Between 1979 and 1989, the Chinese merchant marine doubled its capacity in tonnage as well as in numbers of ships. As part of its general policy of economic opening, China has also begun to pay attention to the exploitation of its offshore petroleum and mineral resources.

In the military dimension, China has reassessed its international environment, given higher priority to its naval modernization, and gradually formulated plans to develop a "blue-water" naval force. In the past decade, China has upgraded its surface and submarine fleets and its naval air force and has created a marine corps. Chinese naval units now conduct long-distance exercises and make diplomatic calls in foreign ports. The Chinese navy has also succeeded in developing a submarine-launched ballistic missile capability and, as noted, has expressed great interest in acquiring an aircraft carrier.

In China's maritime-oriented national development of the past fifteen years, the Navy's modernization program has played a cardinal role, not only because a stronger navy can protect China's flourishing coastal economy and growing offshore interests but also because a modernized navy can serve as the principal instrument for realizing China's aspiration to be an independent international power. However, the core of Chinese naval modernization is an emerging blue-water naval strategy by which all naval construction and activities are directed. This article focuses primarily on the conceptualization of that emerging naval strategy—its roots, essence, and implications.

### The PLA Navy in the Chinese Defense System

The Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (or PLAN, *Renmin Jiefangjun Haijun*), was established on 23 April 1949—the day communist forces captured the Presidential Building of the Nationalist government in Nanjing.<sup>6</sup> Since its creation, the PLA Navy has been considered a coastal defense force. In the Mao Zedong era, neither the objectives laid out by the Chinese military leadership nor its own capabilities had ever brought the PLA Navy beyond Chinese coastal waters. There appear to be two major reasons. First, the early PRC naval establishment was composed largely of defected Nationalist naval personnel and commanded by communist army generals. The Navy, by any standard, could

not have had the prestige and power the Army enjoyed in the defense policy process. Second, the continental-defense concept dominating Chinese military tradition and the coastal-defense view introduced by Soviet naval doctrine defined the Navy as an extended maritime arm of the PLA ground forces.<sup>7</sup> The PLA Navy became a *de facto* independent service in 1977, when its submarines for the first time sailed into the Pacific and the South China Sea.<sup>8</sup> Since then, the Navy has gradually developed its own agenda, expanded its operational radius, and promoted "maritime thinking" in China's military strategy.

From an organizational perspective, the rank of the PLA Navy high command in the PRC national defense and military command structure is equal to that of the ground forces military regions, all falling under the three "departments" of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the party (see figure 1).<sup>9</sup> From a budgetary perspective, the position of the PLA Navy is apparent from its share of China's defense budget. Chinese military specialist Wang Shichang indicated in 1989 that whereas the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force receives 25 percent of Japan's total defense budget, the PLA Navy's expenditure is one-fourth of the Japanese navy's.<sup>10</sup> Notwithstanding, and using Wang's account, we can project that the PLA Navy receives about a third of China's total defense budget (see table 1).<sup>11</sup>

Table 1

**Navy Budgets of the PRC and Japan, 1991**  
(in millions of dollars U.S.)

	PRC	Japan
Government budget	84,010*	558,500*
Defense budget	6,721*	35,186*
Navy expenditure	2,199**	8,769**
Navy as % of defense budget	32.7%**	25.0%**

\* "Far Eastern Economic Review," *Asia Yearbook, 1993*

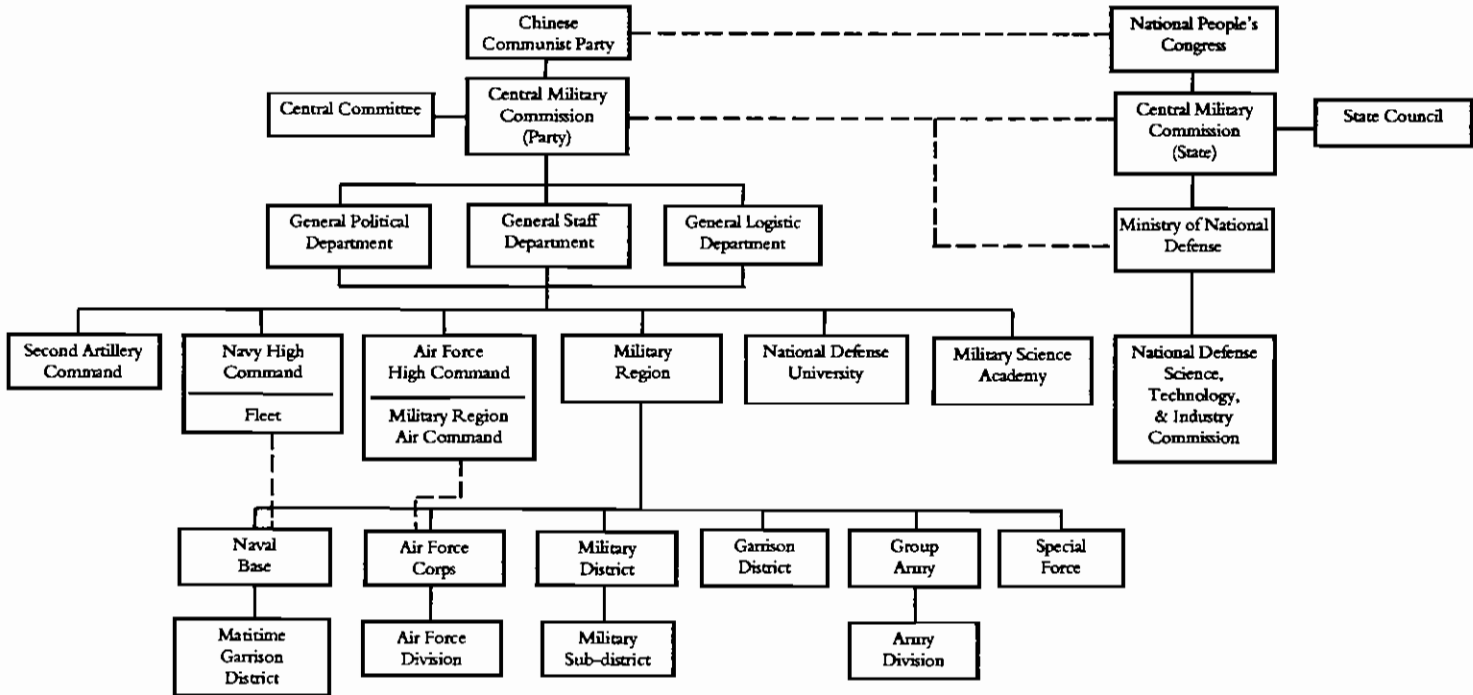
\*\* Wang Shichang, "Face the Ocean, Challenge the Giant Waves," *Tiao Zhan: Yanhai Fazhan yu Guofang Jianshe* (Challenge: coastal development and defense construction) (Beijing: The Guangming Daily Publisher, 1989), p. 186.

### Military Doctrine and Strategy

The Chinese naval strategy is subordinated, as a single-service strategy, to the Chinese military doctrine and military strategy.<sup>12</sup> (See figure 2.) Although China's military doctrine and strategy were mainly formulated for ground forces, their predominance as guides to the development of the armed forces inevitably affected China's naval strategy.<sup>13</sup> In order to understand the origins and attributes

Figure 1

The PLA Navy in China's National Defense System



of this naval strategy, therefore, it is necessary to discuss first the evolution of China's military doctrine and military strategy.

***Military Doctrine: People's War under Modern Conditions.***

Military doctrine is a body of published principles concerning the employment of force and the nature of warfare.<sup>14</sup> In the Chinese context, military doctrine, which is determined at the highest level of political and military leadership, provides both the political vision of the nature of war and the military guidance for the armed forces to follow.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, military doctrine is modified to meet changes in the strategic and political environment. In Maoist China, "people's war" was the doctrine for the PLA. Under Deng Xiaoping's modernization programs, doctrine has been adjusted to many new conditions and is called "people's war under modern conditions."

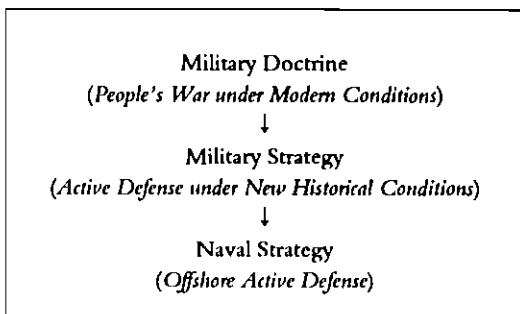
The *people's war* doctrine was developed through the war experience of the Chinese Communist Party (or CCP) and was flavored by Mao Zedong's personal vision of the political nature of revolutionary warfare. As a form of warfare, people's war stresses the mobilization of the masses to fight protracted war against invasion;<sup>16</sup> as a military doctrine, it emphasizes the primacy of politics and the primacy of men over weapons.<sup>17</sup> The key characteristics of the doctrine of people's war are:

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- *Weak force against strong force.* The concept of people's war sees the CCP weak in relation to its adversaries—the Kuomintang in the civil war, the United States in the Korean War, and the Soviet Union in the Sino-Soviet border clashes. Therefore, the PLA should fight its enemies with, if less advanced equipment, more maneuverability and higher morale.

- *Political mobilization of the masses.* In order to win a war against a stronger invading enemy, people's war requires the CCP to rely upon China's huge land and population. For that purpose, the Party and the PLA are to organize militias, mobilize the masses, "trade space for time," "lure (the) enemy deep," then "drown him in a sea of people."

- *Multi-mission armed forces.* The PLA is designed as a highly politicized armed force. People's war doctrine defines the PLA as not only a fighting force but also a work force and a production force under the absolute leadership of the CCP.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 2**

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Accordingly, the PLA is required to be both “red” and “expert” in order to carry out its political and military duties.

The slogan of “people’s war *under modern conditions*” was developed after the death of Mao Zedong.<sup>19</sup> It aims at fitting the old Maoist military doctrine into new strategic and technological environments.<sup>20</sup> Since the late 1970s, Chinese political and military leaders have recognized that with the advancement of military technologies, the forms of modern warfare have undergone great changes and China can no longer fight a war with a people’s war doctrine like that of Lin Biao (who was the defense minister until his death in 1971). Accordingly, the PLA has had to modernize its military doctrine in order to direct its military construction and achieve the fighting capabilities necessary for future war. Three specific modern conditions require people’s war to depart from Maoist doctrine.

- *Defense modernization.* The objectives of China’s defense modernization are to upgrade the quality of the PLA’s personnel and equipment, increase the efficiency of organizational and command structures, and improve force projection and combat capabilities. To achieve all these goals, the new military doctrine focuses on the improvement of the PLA’s command, control, communication, and intelligence (C<sup>3</sup>I) and logistics systems, combined arms training, and rapid-response task forces.

- *Local war instead of total war.* The centerpiece of the doctrine of people’s war in the late Mao era was that China would fight “a war of early engagement, in large scale, with nuclear weapons.” Yet by the mid-1980s, the Chinese political and military leaders had reached a consensus that China was facing a relatively peaceful environment and that total war against China was not likely to occur. Under these “new conditions,” the leadership now considers that armed conflict which China might encounter in the future will be low-intensity conflict or local war.<sup>21</sup>

- *Professional armed forces.* In order to make the PLA a modern armed force, the Chinese leaders realize that it is necessary on one hand to simplify the Army’s societal duties and limit it to the military ones. On the other hand, for the PLA, the old doctrine emphasizing the “human factor over weapon factor” has had to be modified. Defense modernization calling for institutionalization and professionalization requires the PLA to focus more on being “expert” than “red” and to build a military establishment that no longer relies on the masses for logistical and combat duties.

***Military Strategy: Active Defense under New Historical Conditions.*** Military strategy is the art and science of mastering the use of military force in war and peace to achieve military as well as national objectives. In the Chinese context, military strategy is derived not only from military objectives but also from the party’s long-held military doctrine and military line. For the PLA, “active defense strategy” is the cardinal military strategy; it was developed from and coordinated with the military doctrine of “people’s war.”<sup>22</sup> As “people’s war” has adjusted

to “modern conditions,” Chinese military leadership has reinvented its strategy accordingly and termed it “active defense strategy under new historical conditions.”

According to Mao, *active defense* is “also known as offensive defense, or defense through decisive engagements.” It is a defense “for the purpose of counter-attacking and taking the offensive.”<sup>23</sup> As a military strategy, active defense embraces two concepts: first, strategic defensive and tactical offensive; and second, strategic protraction and tactical quick decision. Strategically, in a war against invasion China would place itself in the “inner line” defense, lure the enemy deep inland, wear down his strength by attrition, and finally change the strategic balance. Tactically, in campaigns or operations, the PLA would concentrate its force, seize local superiority, engage the enemy force in specific areas, take the “external line” offense, and finally destroy the enemy piecemeal.<sup>24</sup> The active defense strategy has three major attributes.

- *Strategic defense.* Mao Zedong indicated that in a protracted war, strategy comprises three stages. “The first stage covers the period of the enemy’s strategic offensive and our strategic defensive. The second stage will be the period of the enemy’s strategic consolidation and our preparation for the counter offensive. The third stage will be the period of our strategic counter offensive and the enemy’s strategic retreat.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, active defense is the strategy to be used in a war against invasion. It is also active in essence, which means that the PLA will take the initiative and engage enemy forces in decisive battles.

- *Defense in depth.* Strategic depth is vital for Maoist protracted war. The execution of active defense strategy relies heavily on the Chinese advantage of a large landmass and huge population. In the first stage of war, the Chinese, as a relatively weak force, would conduct a strategic retreat and give up territory in order to lure the enemy inland where the PLA enjoys geographical, combat, and logistical advantages.

- *Triadic warfare.* Active defense strategy is supported by a “triad” of operations: guerrilla warfare, mobile warfare, and positional warfare.<sup>26</sup> They supplement and coordinate closely with each other.<sup>27</sup> Prioritization among the three forms changes in different wars and in different stages of each war. The combined use of the triad is best expressed in Mao Zedong’s “ten major military principles” and “sixteen-character formula.”<sup>28</sup>

The term *new historical conditions* is actually synonymous with “modern conditions” for people’s war. Like other modernization programs under Deng Xiaoping, “seeking truth from facts” has been the centerpiece of China’s current military strategy. “New historical conditions” require the PLA to abandon the original essence, if not the name, of the active defense strategy developed more than fifty years ago. Today’s Chinese military strategy of active defense embraces the spirit of “seeking truth from facts” and adjusts itself to the requirements of



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modern warfare under the doctrine of “people’s war under modern conditions.” There are three key elements of active defense strategy under new historical conditions.

- *Initial phase of war.* Traditional strategic defense in the first stage of war is no longer a viable option for China. The special economic zones and many large economically open cities have become the new economic, financial, and strategic centers, and all are located along the Chinese coast or frontier. A strategic retreat would mean giving up China’s most productive areas to its enemy, resulting in the loss of the logistical ability to sustain prolonged warfare. Accordingly, active defense under new historical conditions distinctly emphasizes “resolute defense” to hold key defense positions and prevent them from being occupied by the enemy.

- *Extended strategic depth.* To defend important industrial areas effectively and preserve the productivity needed to support a protracted war, China would need to establish a tri-dimensional defense system of great depth and keep the battleground distant from those economic centers (at least in the initial phase of war).<sup>29</sup> Although active defense under new historical conditions is not necessarily equivalent to the Western concept of “forward defense,” it does emphasize multi-layered defense lines or zones that can be extended beyond China’s territorial and maritime borders when the situation warrants.<sup>30</sup>

- *Modernized military forces.* The “new” strategy of active defense would require the PLA to engage the enemy force (which employs modern C3I and equipment) decisively at the forward defense lines in the initial phase of war. To meet that requirement, China needs to modernize fundamentally: to upgrade its weaponry and equipment, improve its education and training system, cultivate a qualified officer corps, and emphasize the study of military sciences.<sup>31</sup>

**A “Strategic Transformation.”** Since 1978, China has continued to adjust its military policies on the basis of its perception of the international strategic balance and the domestic politico-economic environment. Various domestic and international events have shaped the military doctrine of “people’s war under modern conditions” and also the “active defense strategy” in post-Mao China. They are: the initiation of the Four Modernizations program and the lesson China learned from its war with Vietnam in the late 1970s;<sup>32</sup> the decision to undertake a “strategic transformation” in Chinese national defense and the beginning of Sino-Soviet détente in the mid-1980s; and the Tiananmen incident, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, and the Persian Gulf wars of the 1980s and 1991.

China’s unsuccessful “punitive” war against Vietnam in 1979 vividly exposed the weakness of the PLA and gave a strong boost to the decision made for defense modernization in the Chinese Communist Party’s 1978 Third Plenum.<sup>33</sup>

However, China's perception of the threat remained centered on a massive Soviet invasion. The new doctrine of people's war under modern conditions did not move away from the concept of "digging shelter deep," "storing grain everywhere," and "fighting a war of early engagement, in large scale, with nuclear weapons."

The Enlarged Meeting of the Party Central Military Commission in 1985 marked a drastic shift in China's threat perception, and the decision made at that meeting was regarded as a "strategic transformation."<sup>34</sup> It included recognition of the relatively peaceful environment in which China now finds itself;<sup>35</sup> the regrouping and reduction of military regions from eleven to seven;<sup>36</sup> a cut of PLA personnel by one million; and the acceleration of the defense modernization program. At that point the military doctrine of people's war truly began to fit the so-called "modern conditions." Interestingly, the Commission meeting took place only three months after Mikhail Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and it boldly expressed a willingness to normalize the relationship between the USSR and the PRC.

The progress of Chinese defense modernization has been undoubtedly affected by the PLA's involvement in the 1989 Tiananmen incident and the resulting international military and technological sanctions against China. Since then, the decline of communism in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union has made the outlook for China's overall military reform full of uncertainty. Nevertheless, these political events may not lead directly to a further change of military doctrine in China. What really matters to the Chinese military leadership is the Gulf War of 1991. The performance of high-technology weapon systems used by the U.S.-led forces, combined with the manner in which the Western powers conducted that modern local war, made a strong impression (to the point of shock) on advocates in Beijing of "people's war under modern conditions."<sup>37</sup>

Why has the Chinese leadership decided to preserve the Maoist terms of "people's war" and "active defense" even though their interpretation and application have so greatly changed? The answer may be related to a mismatch between intention and reality. First, people's war under modern conditions and active defense under new historical conditions are the by-products of Deng Xiaoping's theory of "seeking truth from fact." Only that theory can cope with the dilemma facing the post-Mao leadership: the need to retain the link to Maoist ideology for reasons of legitimacy while departing from it for practical purposes.<sup>38</sup> Secondly, the gap between the requirements of the "modern" military doctrine and strategy and China's current military and industrial capabilities remains very wide. Keeping the names "people's war" and "active defense" while applying certain Maoist military principles can offer China and the PLA a

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linguistic way out of this dilemma.<sup>39</sup> After all, the goal is to develop the technological capabilities and the professional skills required to make the emerging concepts of strategy and military operations more feasible.<sup>40</sup>

### Naval Strategy: Offshore Active Defense

The PLA Navy strategy, subordinate to the military strategy of active defense, has long been that of “active defense, offshore operations,” otherwise known as the “offshore active defense strategy.”<sup>41</sup> In the Maoist concept of strategic defense, in which “lure the enemy deep” and “trade space for time” were the dominant rules, the PLA Navy’s roles and functions in war were marginal. Strategically, the Navy was not to wage a decisive battle in coastal waters in the initial phase of an enemy’s “massive invasion”; operationally, it did not have the combat and logistic capability to execute an effective forward defense.<sup>42</sup> The depoliticization of the PLA after the Cultural Revolution and the national policy under Deng Xiaoping of opening up to the outside world provided the Navy an opportunity to inaugurate its own development agenda.

Chinese naval modernization was evidently initiated as early as 1975, when the PLA Navy’s “ocean-going navy proposal” was endorsed by Mao Zedong.<sup>43</sup> Ellis Joffe, a Jerusalem-based specialist in Chinese military affairs, indicates that there were four reasons behind the Navy’s proposal. “First was the growing Soviet naval threat close to China’s shores, exemplified by the massive worldwide Soviet naval exercise, known in the West as ‘*Okean 75*,’ which clearly unnerved the Chinese. The second reason was the rapid development of China’s merchant marine and the consequent need to protect sea lanes. The third was China’s growing interest in offshore oil resources and its claims over disputed islands and ocean spaces—interests which could not be backed by a coastal defense navy. The fourth reason was the ascendance, fleeting as it turned out, of moderate leaders in China’s power structure who recognized the need for military modernization and building up the navy.”<sup>44</sup>

The present commander in chief (CinC) of the PLA Navy is Admiral Zhang Lianzhong, a submarine officer long identified with modernization and long-distance training. However, the foremost promoter of Chinese naval modernization is Admiral Zhang’s former commander in operations in the Spratlys against the Vietnamese, Admiral Liu Huaqing. Admiral Liu, the vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, is the senior naval officer in the nation and the only military member of the Party’s Politburo Standing Committee, under the CCP General Secretary and CMC chairman, Jian Zemin.<sup>45</sup> The PLA Navy’s blue-water ambitions gradually surfaced during Liu’s term as CinC of the PLA

Navy, from August 1982 to November 1987. His advocacy of new interpretations of “offshore operations” and “active defense” at sea had significant influence on China’s naval modernization.

When Admiral Liu Huaqing became the CinC, China’s primary security concern was the strategic encirclement of China by the Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, its military buildup in the Asia-Pacific region (especially of the Soviet Pacific Fleet), and the Sino-Soviet competition for influence in Indochina deepened Chinese leaders’ anxiety over a possible Soviet invasion. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, despite growing consensus on a wider geopolitical perspective and the necessity of building an ocean-going naval force, the Navy’s traditional concept of coastal defense against Soviet naval assault from the sea remained. Three principles describe the objectives of the PLA Navy’s offshore active defense concept of that period:

- Preserving combat capability and preventing early engagement with the Soviet Pacific Fleet in decisive sea battles, in order to endure a protracted war;
- Dividing the PLA Navy into small groups, utilizing fast attack craft and emphasizing maneuverability of “fast attack, fast retreat” in order to destroy the Soviet naval force piecemeal; and,
- Reliance on inshore and harbor minelaying, land-based artillery, missiles, and the Naval Air Force in order to interdict the Soviet sea lines of communication and prevent a Soviet amphibious offensive.<sup>46</sup>

The PLA Navy’s offshore active defense strategy was not fully adopted until the mid-1980s, when Sino-Soviet rapprochement became increasingly conceivable. The CMC’s “Strategic Transformation” of 1985, which downplayed the possibility of large-scale war, relieved the PLA Navy of the anti-Soviet contingency and allowed Chinese admirals, on one hand, to envision a number of potential, but less virulent, naval rivalries in the western Pacific and, on the other, to feel more comfortable about projecting Chinese naval forces even further into the high seas. Since then, professional naval personnel as well as many civilian advocates of Chinese maritime power have generated discussion and enriched the content of the offshore active defense strategy. The reconceptualization of naval strategy has occurred under two headings: the changing definition of the “offshore” concept; and the naval application of the military doctrine of “people’s war under modern conditions” and “active defense strategy under new historical conditions.”

***Redefining the “Offshore” Perimeter.*** What is the role of the Navy within the framework of “active defense strategy under new historical conditions”? How “active” is enough for the defense of China’s prospering coastal provinces and the offshore islands and economic zones it has claimed? How far should the Navy go beyond the Chinese coastline to achieve a “sufficient” strategic depth? As

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with the people's-war doctrine, the term "offshore active defense" was preserved by the Navy but took on significantly different meaning in the 1980s to account for "modern conditions."<sup>47</sup> Discussions within the PLA Navy over a new interpretation of the "offshore active defense" strategy began in the early 1980s, flourished after the 1985 "Strategic Transformation," and peaked around 1988; they have cooled down, however, since the 1989 Tiananmen incident.<sup>48</sup>

No conclusive definition has been given by the Chinese navy regarding the precise distance implied by "offshore"; however, the concept has been elaborated by a number of officials. Admiral Liu Huaqing, when he was commander in chief of the PLA Navy, gave his authoritative interpretation of the "offshore" concept, asserting that "the Chinese Navy should exert *effective control* of the seas within the first island chain."<sup>49</sup> "Offshore' [*jinhai*] should not be interpreted as 'coastal' [*jinhai*] as we used to know it. 'Offshore' is a concept relative to the 'high seas.' It means the vast sea waters within the second island chain."<sup>50</sup> By Admiral Liu's account, the "first island chain" comprises the Aleutians, the Kurils, the Japanese archipelago, the Ryukyus, Taiwan, the Philippine archipelago, and the Greater Sunda Islands.<sup>51</sup> The "second island chain" is composed of the Bonins, the Marianas, Guam, and the Palau group.<sup>52</sup> (See map.)

The "offshore" concept has been quantified in two different ways. The official *Military Terms of the PLA* defines "offshore" as the sea area from the Chinese coastline out to two hundred nautical miles.<sup>53</sup> Li Qianyuan defines "offshore" as the sea area of the "Exclusive Economic Zone [EEZ] and continental shelf," which extend between 12 and 350 nautical miles from the coast (see table 2).<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps, however, the precise extent of "offshore" sea areas in nautical miles is not very important; PRC political and military leaders have yet to endorse unanimously any specific distance within which naval operations would be justified. In light of the other naval forces that exist in the western Pacific region, the real issue is how much sea area the PLA Navy's physical strength will allow Beijing to define as China's "offshore" zone. The current consensus within the PRC leadership is that the offshore concept should be perceived in relative terms. In other words, the PLA Navy's offshore active defense can be viewed as falling between China's traditional homeland, or coastal, defense and the U.S. Navy's concept of forward defense. Judging from their statements, the vast majority of Chinese naval leaders envision "four large sea areas" (i.e. the Bohai, the Yellow, East China, and South China seas), plus the continental shelf out to the "first island chain," as the PLA Navy's "offshore" area.

**Doctrinal Change Goes to Sea.** The PLA's new interpretations of the people's war doctrine and active defense strategy required the Navy simultaneously to modernize its forces and redefine its strategy.<sup>55</sup> Energetic development of naval strategy in the second half of the 1980s has made offshore active defense a set of

Table 2

## The "Offshore" Concept in Chinese Naval Strategy

	1949–1979		1980–2000	2001–beyond	
Strategic Concept	Active Defense (Maoist)		Active Defense (modern)	Forward Defense	
Term	coastal	inshore	offshore	mid-distance	far-distance
Other Name	inshore	coastal near shore	near-distance		long-distance, high seas, blue-water
Chinese Name	<i>yanhai haian</i>	<i>binhai jinan</i>	<i>jinhai</i>	<i>zhonghai</i>	<i>yuanghai yuanyang</i>
Definition 1			0 → 200nm	200 → 600nm	600+ nm
Definition 2	-100km → 12nm		12 → 350nm		350+ nm
Definition 3	territorial sea		EEZ + continental shelf		beyond
Definition 4			inside the 1st island chain	between the 1st and 2nd island chains	beyond

Definition 1 from *Military Terms of the PLA*, p. 430.

Definitions 2 and 3 from Li Qianyuan (see note 54, below).

Definition 4 is a summary of Adm. Liu Huaqing's statement and *A History of the PLA Navy*.

EEZ: Exclusive Economic Zone

strategic concepts distinct from those of the past. Four factors arising from China's overall defense modernization program for "modern conditions" have had the most significant impact: the defense concept of extended strategic depth; the emerging perception of local war as the main form of armed conflict in the future; the justification of offensive operations under the rubric of active defense; and the emphasis of the "expertise" and technology over the "red" dimension and political indoctrination.

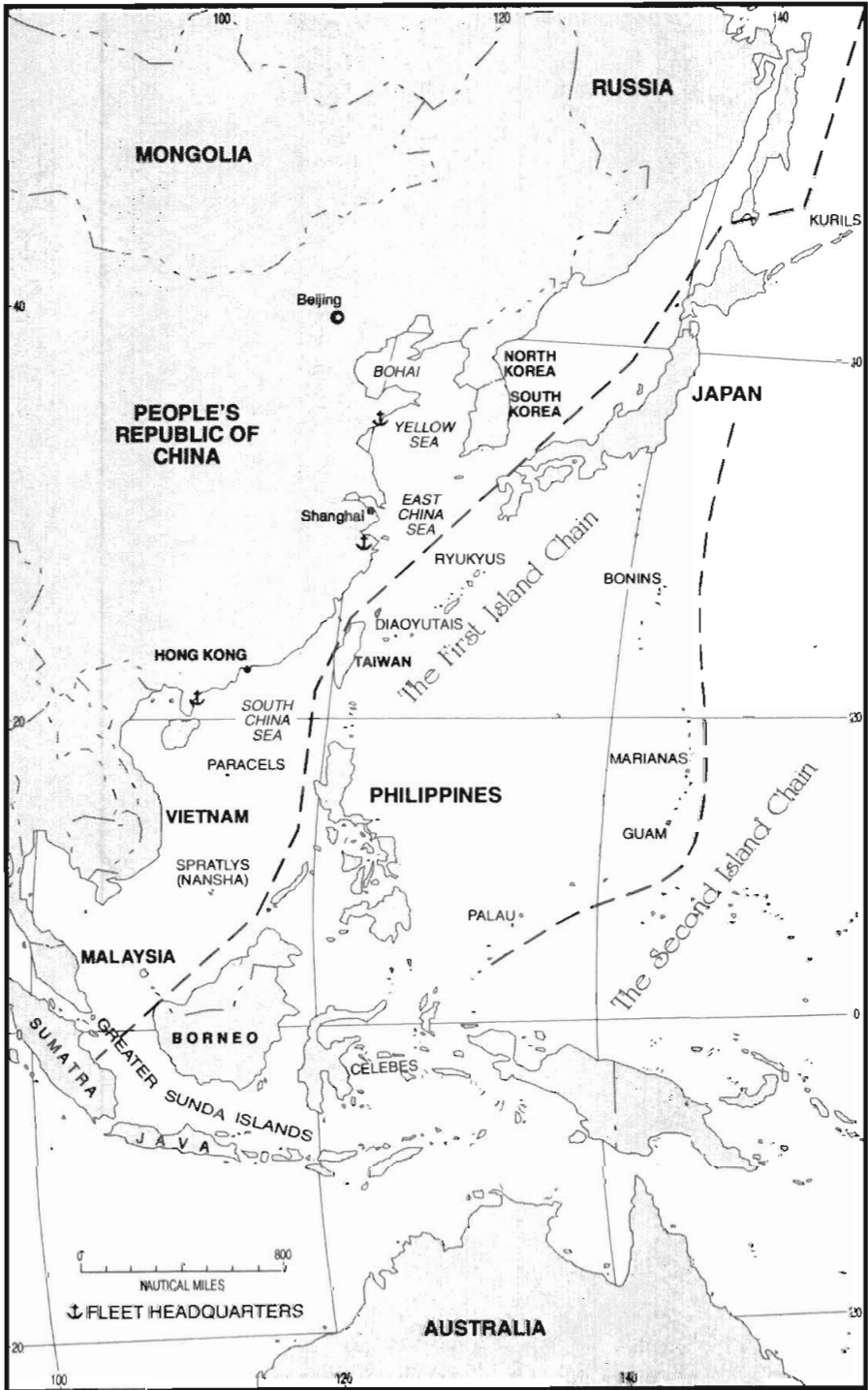
*Extended strategic depth.* The PLA Navy's role in Chinese defense dispositions has become increasingly important. Active defense under new historical conditions, which emphasized resolute defense of key areas such as the prosperous coastal cities, aimed at transforming the maritime provinces from the defensive front line to the strategic rear. Accordingly, strategic depth was achieved by extending the defense forward into the China seas and the western Pacific.<sup>56</sup> This concept of active defense envisioned the PLA Navy as not only a tactical force but also a strategic force and the spearhead of the PRC's national defense.<sup>57</sup>

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*Local warfare at sea.* Since the “strategic transformation of 1985,” the potential threat to China has been perceived as one of “modern [anti-aggression] local war.”<sup>58</sup> The strategy of active defense under new historical conditions has therefore been developed to cope with “conflicting hot spots” on the land and sea peripheries.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, in recent years Chinese defense planners have begun to pay more attention to such issues as the naval balance of power and the possibility of local war or conflict at sea in the China seas and the western Pacific. This change of strategic focus from land borders to the maritime frontier may have been the product of two interrelated factors. First, the land threat to China decreased after the PRC improved its relations with the Soviet Union (and now Russia), India, and Vietnam in the past decade. Second, disputes over maritime territorial claims in the South China Sea between the PRC and several Southeast Asian states have come to loom large since the late 1980s. Consequently, under the new strategic concept of active defense, the PLA Navy has gained more weight in Chinese defense policy planning than it possessed before the defense modernization program.

*Offensive operations.* An inevitable issue connected with the military strategy of “active defense under new historical conditions” is whether active defense makes the PLA in effect more offensive than before. As applied to the PLA Navy, the question is whether the strategic concept of offshore active defense sets the stage for an expansionist naval buildup or offensive military actions at sea. Will the PLA Navy merely take a defensive position, responding to assault from the sea? Or would it undertake preemptive offensives against remote maritime threats it perceives? The answers are unclear. Theoretically, the PLA Navy’s offshore active defense strategy is “defensive”; however, on the operational and tactical levels, the PLA Navy would be required to carry out offensive missions in order to guarantee the fulfillment of strategic objectives set by the Chinese national defense authority.<sup>60</sup> The defense-offense ambiguity lies within any military strategy; yet this conceptual vagueness is probably the “artistic” dimension of all military strategies, its purpose being to maximize the flexibility of the use of force. Hence, it would be misleading to distinguish (or so at least Chinese authorities would contend) the PLA Navy’s offshore active defense as an essentially aggressive or expansionist strategic concept.<sup>61</sup>

*“Expertise” over “red-ness.”* Underlying China’s defense modernization and its modification of military doctrine and strategy in the wake of the failed 1979 punitive war against Vietnam has been the PLA’s pressing need to turn away from Lin Biao’s “politics in command” and toward an emphasis on expertise, science, and technology. In 1987, Admiral Xiao Jinguang, former CinC of the PLA Navy, gave “three orientations”—to face the modernization, face the world, and face the future—as the Navy’s guidelines for meeting the new requirement of “technology as priority.”<sup>62</sup> A navy is a high-technology military



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service, and Chinese admirals have stressed the need for advanced equipment and modern warships. Without these, it is impossible for the Navy to compete in naval rivalries in the western Pacific or carry out missions such as supporting Chinese claims in the Diaoyutai (Senkaku) and the Nansha (Spratly) archipelagos.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, in order to implement the offshore active defense strategy effectively, the PLA Navy needs well trained officers and sailors with sufficient knowledge in modern science and technology *and* specialized expertise in modern weapon systems.<sup>64</sup>

In sum, the PLA Navy's contemporary "offshore active defense strategy" can be conceptualized as the art and science of employing the Navy, in war and peace, to establish and maintain strategic depth for national defense and safeguard the PRC's maritime interests, economic and military, by effectively defending the offshore waters—the China seas from the Chinese coastline to the first island chain in the western Pacific.

### Implications and Analysis

By promoting the offshore active defense strategy, Chinese political and naval leaders intend to achieve a number of comprehensive objectives. First, in the international political aspect, China wants to assert an image of regional maritime power in post-Cold War Asia. Second, in the economic aspect, China wants to improve its naval capability in order to protect its flourishing coastal economic regions and defend its maritime interests, such as offshore territorial claims and oil exploitation. Third, in the technological aspect, China wants to generate maritime technological development in both economic and military applications through the Navy's modernization program. Fourth, in the military aspect, China wants to maximize the Navy's strategic functions in national defense planning and establish a "sea-air-coast-island integrated defense system."<sup>65</sup>

Although the PLA Navy's strategic concept of "offshore active defense" proposed by the Chinese admirals and their civilian allies may inevitably contain a certain amount of wishful thinking and may take a long time to be implemented fully, the strategy itself has several merits. The first of these is that the strategy is "politically correct" for the times, being closely associated with reform and modernization on the political front and, on the economic front, with the policy of opening up to the outside world and developing the coastal provinces. In an era of national reform, the PLA Navy is probably the most useful of the Chinese armed forces, by virtue of its protection of financially important coastal areas. As long as reform-minded political leaders are in power and the policy of opening-up is not reversed, the Navy's offshore active defense strategy will continue to enjoy considerable political support.

Secondly, the strategy can serve the Navy well in budget battles with the other armed services. The PLA Navy can claim priority for building up its force on the basis of either the ideal of defense in extended depth or the actual need for protecting sea lines of communication. The offshore active defense strategy rationalizes the PLA Navy's case that its demand for high-technology, budget-consuming combat and logistical systems is more pressing than similar requests from other services.

Third, the strategy lays out the guidelines for naval modernization. In order to fulfill the objectives of offshore active defense, the strategy mandates the design, construction, procurement, and development of naval combat and logistic systems; the associated policy measures for recruitment, education, training, and exercises; and the extent and range of naval operations. In other words, the entire naval modernization program is to be aimed at the implementation of the offshore active defense strategy.

Fourth, the strategy plainly demonstrates China's ambition to assert itself as a regional maritime power in the Asia-Pacific region. Under the strategy, the PLA Navy becomes an instrument of Chinese foreign policy. The offshore active defense strategy gives notice that the PRC will no longer confine its military strength to the Asian continent and that it will enthusiastically display its naval flag to its maritime neighbors and the world.

In particular—and this is its fifth merit—the strategy supports China's territorial claims over remote islands and archipelagos. No matter how the “offshore” concept is defined, the disputed islands (e.g., the Diaoyutais, the Paracels, and the Spratlys) unquestionably fall on the charts of Chinese admirals. Disagreements over sovereignty of maritime territories may in the end be resolved peacefully, through political arrangements and diplomatic negotiations; nevertheless, the PRC leadership might consider that only the strength of the PLA Navy can be the ultimate guarantor of its claims. Indeed, some Chinese military officials have argued that a quick and decisive battle at sea can prevent horizontal escalation and therefore establish advantageous preconditions for diplomacy in the settlement of maritime territorial disputes.<sup>66</sup> Specifically, and most importantly, the strategy will have a significant impact on the unification issue between Beijing and Taipei.

In the naval realm, the strategy represents China's acknowledgment of maritime economic interest as an important element in national defense and as a potential stimulus for naval war in the western Pacific. Should war come, under the offshore active defense concept the PLA Navy will not only attempt to defend China's territorial integrity and destroy enemy naval forces but will also attempt to maintain China's defense depth at sea in order to protect the prosperous regions along the coastline. In addition, in peacetime the strategy requires the Navy to carry out missions such as protection of maritime shipping in Chinese

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coastal waters and naval presence in the South China Sea to support China's offshore territorial claims.

Seventh, and most generally, the strategy provides both freedom of choice for the Chinese leadership in national security policy-making and freedom of action for the PLA Navy in its operations in the future. The vague public definition of the extent of the "offshore" zone leaves great flexibility for the Chinese political and military leadership, as the strategic environment may allow, either to restrain the PLA Navy near home waters or to make it an instrument of gunboat diplomacy across more distant waters.

***The Strategy and Naval Programs.*** Since the late 1970s, the PLA Navy, in the conduct of its modernization program based on the offshore active defense strategic concept, has achieved considerable improvement.

- ***Force structure.*** In the ten years between 1979 and 1989, the Navy cut its force by 100,000 personnel, trimmed the number of its obsolete conventional submarines, doubled its destroyers and frigates, and increased missile and torpedo-armed fast attack craft by 134 percent.<sup>67</sup> In addition, in 1979 the Navy established its first marine brigade, under the South Sea Fleet. In 1988 the Navy also acquired its first *Xia*-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, presaging a Chinese strategic force at sea.

- ***Logistics.*** In the past decade the Navy has simplified its standard procedures for logistics and general supply, established the Equipment Repair Department in the Navy high command, centralized the repair and control management system, refitted various types of ships to carry out logistical missions, commissioned underway replenishment oilers and a hospital ship, and constructed a number of ports, naval air force bases, power plants, and fresh water supply facilities.

- ***Technological acquisition and improvement.*** Since the late 1970s the Navy has established various agencies (e.g., the Naval Equipment Verification and Research Center) to upgrade its shipbuilding and its shipboard electronic and weapon systems. It has also tried to acquire fleet air defense systems (the British Sea Dart surface-to-air missile), underwater weapons (the Italian Whitehead A-244 and U.S. Mk46 Mod 5 torpedoes), shipborne helicopters (the French Super Frelon and Dauphin), and aerial refuelling technology (from Iran) through foreign procurement. The PLA Navy is expected to procure more advanced technology and weapons systems from Russia than it did formerly from the Soviet Union.

- ***Education, training, and exercises.*** Since the mid-1980s the Navy has reformed its educational systems, reorganized its schools, reviewed personnel training and evaluation, and set up its first surface ship training center in the North Sea Fleet. The cadet training ship *Zhenghe* has visited Honolulu and various ports in

southeast Asia. In addition, the PLA Navy has emphasized submarine-surface-naval air joint exercises in the South China Sea and the northwestern and southern Pacific. (See table 3.)

Notwithstanding that the PLA Navy has greatly improved its hardware and support assets under the modernization program, its overall force structure and capability remain incompatible with its assigned duties under offshore active defense. One Navy official has admitted some of those problems in the following way (closely paraphrasing):<sup>68</sup> In terms of force structure, the small craft force constitutes 64 percent of the Navy's surface ships. Principal surface combatants are too few by the standard of a world-class naval power. Further, the Navy lacks modern fleet air defense and antisubmarine warfare capabilities. In addition, the two *Fuqing*-class underway replenishment oilers are inadequate to allow the Chinese fleet to operate regularly on the high seas. In terms of force deployment, two major problems can be observed. First, the naval forces are largely deployed along the coastline; therefore, the Navy cannot maintain sufficient defensive depth at sea. Second, there are more naval forces in the north than in the south. This unbalanced deployment is unable to cope with the increasing conflicts in the South China Sea.<sup>69</sup>

As a matter of fact, the critical problems of force structure, deployment, and capability are not independent issues but are associated with China's defense budget and the military's technological prowess. These issues, which the Chinese will continue to face through the 1990s, suggest that the PLA Navy still has a long journey ahead before it can achieve its objectives under the offshore active defense strategy.

**International Implications.** Does the offshore active defense strategic concept represent an expansionist military policy emerging in China? Will China's naval modernization program tilt the Asia-Pacific regional naval balance and destabilize international security? Is the "China Threat" not an illusion but a real phenomenon? Before a balanced observation as to the impact of the Chinese Navy's offshore active defense strategy on the Asia-Pacific strategic environment can be made, two factors have to be taken into consideration. First, the region has no multilateral security dialogue or arrangement. Although the Cold War officially ended in Europe three years ago, the legacy of historical distrust and territorial dispute among Asia-Pacific states remains. Second, China's maritime neighbors—Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and most of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—have all taken steps to upgrade their naval forces substantially in the past decade. Therefore, China's naval modernization drive might not be the only factor pointing toward a regional naval arms race.

Table 3

The PLA Navy's Major Training and Exercises (1977-1992)

Time Frame	Forces/Units/Types	Area/Range	Major Events
24 Jan 77	SS 252	W. Pac./3,300 nm	Long-distance training
24-29 Jul 77	SS 296	S. China Sea	Deep diving test
20 May-19 Jun 79	-	Yellow/S. China seas	"795" exercise
30 Mar 80	SS 256	Pacific Ocean	Combat training
28 Apr-2 Jun 80	Task force	S. Pacific	ICBM flight test
19-28 Oct 80	DD 161, 162, FF 506, 509 ocean tug 154, Supply 950	W. Pacific	Long-distance training
8 Nov 80	2 H-6 aircraft	Spratlys	Patrol
29 Jul 81	SS 235	-	Torpedo launch
Mar 82	Ships	Bohai	Combined training
12 Oct 82	1 SSB	-	SLBM launch
12 Jun 83	Transport Y832, AOR X950	S. China Sea	Training
8 Apr 84	J 506	-	Support satellite launch
12 May 84	3 training ships	N. Pacific	Training
20 Nov 84-10 Apr 85	J 121	Antarctica	Expedition
16 Nov 85-19 Jan 86	DDG 132, AOR X615	Indian Ocean	Diplomatic port call
12 Jan 86	2 ships	S. China Sea	Exercise w/ US 7th Fleet
14 Jan-12 Feb 86	Yuan Wang I, II, III	-	Satellite launch
May 86	3 DD, 2 SS, 2 supply	W. Pacific	Combined arms
31 Dec 86	1 SSN	-	Long-distance training
4 May-7 Jun 87	9 DDG, FF, AOR	Pacific	Refueling
16 May-6 Jun 87	7 DDG, FFG, FF	Spratlys	Patrol
29 May 87	Supply ships	Pacific	Multiship supply
10 Aug 87	All	Yellow Sea	Laser/electronic simulation
12 Oct-late Nov 87	Ships	W. Pacific/S. China Sea	Combined arms
14 Mar 88	All	Spratlys	Armed conflict w/Vietnam
14 Sep-3 Oct 88	1 SSBN	E. China Sea	SLBM launch
25 Nov 88	1 DDG	Spratlys	Patrol
31 Mar-2 May 89	1 training ship	Hawaii	Diplomatic port call
3-8 May 89	All DDG, FFG, SS, air, marines	Hainandao/Xisha	"1988" exercise
Early May-18 Sep 89	All DDG, FFG, SS, AOR	S. China Sea	Blockade, underwater
12 Mar 90	Ships	East coast	"Cheng Gong I" exercise
5 Dec 90	1 training ship	Thailand	Diplomatic port call
10 Apr-4 May 91	All	E. China/Yellow seas	"Bei Fang 91" exercise
12 Apr 91	10+ DDG, FFG, SS	East coast	Live-fire training
18 Apr-19 Jun 91	1st Marine Brigade	Guangxi/Hainandao	Amphibious
12 Aug-15 Sep 91	All	Near Qingdao	"9107" exercise
2 Sep-2 Oct 91	All	E. China Sea	"Nan Jin III" exercise
10 May 92	All	Yellow Sea	Underway replenishment
1 Jnn 92	East Sea Fleet	E. China Sea	Combined arms

"Ships": Composite Ships Exercises (*Duojianzhong Lianhe Yanxi*) — more than one type of surface ship

"All": Combined Arms Exercises (*Duobingzhong Lianhe Yanxi*) — involving surface, underwater, and naval air forces

SS: Submarine (diesel)

SSB: Submarine (diesel-powered/ballistic missile)

SSBN: Submarine (nuclear-powered/ballistic missile)

DD: Destroyer

AOR: Replenishment oiler

FF: Frigate

FFG: Guided missile frigate

DDG: Guided missile destroyer

Bearing these two general factors in mind, one can view China's naval buildup under the offshore active defense strategy as a two-edged sword with respect to Asia-Pacific regional security. On the negative side, it could at least accelerate a regional naval arms race and further complicate the Asia-Pacific security environment. The most problematic issue may be the PRC's attempt to add an aircraft carrier battle group to its force projection capability; this move would certainly disturb the Japanese. On the positive side, the new Chinese strategy could draw the attention of all maritime Asia-Pacific states to the necessity of a regional security arrangement. Canada, Australia, the ASEAN states, South Korea, and Taiwan are at the forefront in advocating the establishment of a regional collective security regime.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, there is the impact of a Chinese naval buildup on U.S. interests in Asia. It is quite clear that China's naval modernization program is not in itself likely to pose any direct military threat to the United States. However, American interests will be jeopardized if China's naval expansion breaks the regional balance of power and causes tension among Asia-Pacific states. Given the close relationship between the United States and its Asian allies developed in the past four decades and the growing importance of Asian economies in the international marketplace, Washington will continue to have significant commercial as well as security concerns in the Asia-Pacific region. Accordingly, the United States' interests would seem to require that it not only reassure its allies of its security commitment to them and maintain a sufficient military presence in the Asia-Pacific area but also participate actively in the process of regional economic cooperation and security dialogue. The new Chinese view of its navy's role is indeed important to the United States.

**I**n the past fifteen years, the PLA Navy has extricated itself from the status of a coastal defense force and has enthusiastically shown its flag on the high seas. The key to all the Navy's modernization efforts has been the formulation of the offshore active defense strategy. On that basis the PLA Navy has become able to develop its own force-building agenda, to compete with other services in the budget battle, and to lay out the foundation for its blue-water ambitions for the twenty-first century. Through its modernization program, the Navy has made impressive progress in defense technology acquisition and logistical system reform. Naval education and training have been freed from political indoctrination and focused on professionalization and institutionalization. Moreover, the Navy's progress in its capabilities for waging war can no longer be ignored by the navies of the Asia-Pacific region.

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In the 1990s, the PLA Navy is in a good position to realize its oceanic ambitions. In strategic terms, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the cutback of the U.S. military presence in the western Pacific leave a naval power vacuum and a vast sea area within which the PLA Navy can exercise its forces. In political terms, the elevation of Admiral Liu Huaqing as the only military personnel representing the PLA in the Communist Party Politburo Standing Committee gives the PLA Navy an unprecedented advantage in China's defense policy process. In financial terms, China's double-digit economic growth rate and flourishing coastal enterprises provide considerable wealth to allocate to naval modernization. Although the offshore active defense strategy is a single-service strategy, its impact upon China's international relations, economic development, and technological advancement is remarkable. Therefore, to a large degree, the PLA Navy's offshore active defense strategy can be considered an integral part of China's national development outlook for the next century.

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### Notes

1. This law defined the range of China's territorial sea and contiguous zone as twenty-four nautical miles—twelve for the territorial sea and twelve for the contiguous zone—extending from the baseline of the territorial sea.
2. Article 2 states: "The territorial sea of the People's Republic of China is the sea areas adjacent to the PRC's land territories and internal waters. The land territories of the PRC include: the PRC mainland and coastal islands; Taiwan and nearby islets including the Diaoyutai [Senkaku Shoto]; Penghu Islands [Pescadores]; the Dongsha [Pratas], Xisha [Paracel], Zhongsha [Macclesfield Bank], and Nansha [Spratly] archipelagos; and all the islands belonging to the PRC." See *Central Daily (International Edition) (Zhongyang Ribao [Guojiban])*, 27 February 1992, p. 1.
3. "South China Sea: Treacherous Shoals," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (hereafter *FEER*), 13 August 1992, p. 15.
4. "Chinese Buy Russian Carrier," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, September 1992, p. 123. Neither the Chinese nor the Ukrainian government has confirmed the sale, despite international speculation.
5. "Testing the Waters," *FEER*, 12 March 1992, pp. 8–9. For a detailed analysis on the PRC law and reactions of neighboring countries, see "South China Sea: Treacherous Shoals," pp. 14–22.
6. Zhang Lianzhong et al., eds., *Haijun Shi* (A history of the PLA Navy) (Beijing: The People's Liberation Army Publishers, 1989), p. 15.
7. This doctrinal view, associated with what was known as the "Soviet Young School" of naval doctrine, contained three major components: submarines were to be the capital ships, surface ships were for near-coast patrol missions, and naval air was to be land-based. For detailed discussions of the Soviet Young School of naval strategy and doctrine, see Robert W. Herrick, "Roles and Missions of the Soviet Navy: Historical Evaluation, Current Priorities, and Future Prospects," James L. George, ed., *The Soviet and Other Communist Navies: The View from the Mid-1980s* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1986), pp. 9–36; Robert W. Herrick, *Soviet Naval Theory and Policy: Gorshkov's Inheritance* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1988); and Bryan Ranft and Geoffrey Till, *The Sea in Soviet Strategy*, 2nd ed. (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1989).
8. On 24 January 1977, the PLA Navy submarine SS 252 completed a training exercise in the western Pacific, a voyage of over 3,300 nautical miles. This event changed the Chinese navy's traditional coast-guard image and paved the way for distant-waters exercises since then.
9. The "three departments" are the General Staff Department, the General Political Department, and the General Logistics Department. In the PLA Navy's command structure, there are three fleets under the Navy high command: the North Sea Fleet (headquarters in Qingdao, Shandong Province), the East Sea Fleet (headquarters in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province), and the South Sea Fleet (headquarters in Zhanjiang, Guangdong Province). The commander of each fleet also serves as a deputy commander of the military region in which the fleet headquarters are located.

There are two central military affairs commissions in the PRC national defense establishment. One is the Chinese Communist Party Central Military Affairs Commission, which is the highest command entity of the PLA. Under the premise of the functional separation of Party and state affairs, a State Central Military Affairs Commission was created under the PRC Constitution of 1982. However, the two commissions share the same personnel, and the CCP leadership reaffirms its "absolute" control over the armed forces. For the relations between the two commissions, see figure 1.

10. Wang Shichang, "Face the Ocean, Challenge the Giant Waves," *Tiao Zhan: Yanhai Fazhan yu Guofang Jianshe* (Challenge: coastal development and defense construction) (Beijing: The Guangming Daily Publisher, 1989), p. 186.

11. Due to limited information and different calculation methods, the precise size of the PRC defense budget has long been debated among China watchers. Many specialists believe that the PRC's "real" defense budget is double or triple the figure officially disclosed. If true, the PLA Navy's share of the defense budget (if the figure given in table 1 is itself correct) would be, respectively, 16 or 11 percent.

12. In PRC military terms, "military doctrine" is rendered *junshi xueshuo*. However, in Chinese common language, *xueshuo* refers to "theory" or "school of thought" rather than "doctrine" or "guiding principle." Therefore *zhunze*, which means "standardized principle," is probably a better translation. Also, "military doctrine" and "military strategy" are overlapping but distinguishable concepts in themselves. Doctrine refers to principles, while strategy connotes instrumentality; the former is declaratory, the latter is operational. For further discussion, see Chong-pin Lin, *China's Nuclear Weapons Strategy: Tradition within Evolution* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1988), p. 3.

13. Ellis G.H. Joffe, *The Chinese Army after Mao* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987), p. 89.

14. Chong-pin Lin, p. 3.

15. Georges Tan Eng Bok, "Strategic Doctrine," Gerald Segal and William T. Tow, eds., *Chinese Defense Policy* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 7. See also Paul H.B. Godwin, "Changing Concepts of Doctrine, Strategy and Operations in the Chinese People's Liberation Army 1978-1987," *China Quarterly*, December 1987, pp. 572-3.

16. For definitions of "people's war," see Rosita Dellios, *Modern Chinese Defense Strategy: Present Development, Future Directions* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), pp. 11-2; U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, *The Chinese Armed Forces Today: The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency Handbook on China's Army, Navy and Air Force* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979), p. 14; and Ngok Lee, *China's Defense Modernization and Military Leadership* (Sydney: Australian National Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 139-44. For the Chinese definitions, see Lin Biao, "Long Live the Victory of the People's War," *Peking Review*, 3 September 1965, pp. 19-29; Command Department, Nanjing Military Region, ed., *Junshi Lilun—Canmou Zaizhi Xunlian Jiaocai* (Military theory—textbook for the on-job training of staff officers) (Nanjing: Nanjing Military Region, 1983), pp. 27-35; Wang Shichun et al., eds., *Zhongguo Dabaikequanshu—Junshi: Junshi Sixiang Fence* (Grand encyclopedia of China—military affairs: military thought) (Beijing: Military Science Publishers, 1985), v. 2, s.v. "Renmin Zhanzheng" (People's war), Zhang Jiayu, pp. 35-9.

17. Mao Zedong, *Six Essays on Military Affairs* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1972), pp. 263-8.

18. Peng Fei et al., eds., *Zhongguo Dabaikequanshu—Junshi: Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Zhengzhi Gongzuo Fence* (Grand encyclopedia of China—military affairs: the PLA political works) (Beijing: Military Science Publishers, 1985), v. 8, s.v. "San Da Renwu" (Three major missions), Yan Jinsheng, pp. 19-23.

19. Rosita Dellios argues that the slogan "people's war under modern conditions" was first introduced during the Korean War (p. 36). However, Ngok Lee and Ellis Joffe consider that the slogan was first introduced by Su Yu in his article "The Great Victory of Chairman Mao's Guideline on Warfare," in *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), 6 August 1977, pp. 1-2.

20. For detailed discussions on "people's war under modern conditions," see Dellios, pp. 29-39; Paul H.B. Godwin, "The Chinese Defense Establishment in Transition: The Passing of a Revolutionary Army?" A. Doak Barnett and Ralph N. Clough, eds., *Modernizing China: Post-Mao Reform and Development* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1986), pp. 67-74; Paul H.B. Godwin, "People's War Revised: Military Doctrine, Strategy, and Operations," Charles D. Lovejoy and Bruce W. Watson, eds., *China's Military Reforms: International and Domestic Implications* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1986), pp. 2-4; Joffe, pp. 77-93; and Ngok Lee, pp. 144-9. For Chinese discussions, see Wang Chengbing, ed., *Deng Xiaoping Xiandai Junshi Lilun Yu Shijian* (Deng Xiaoping's modern military theory and practice) (Nanchang, Jiangxi: Jiangxi People's Publishers, 1991), pp. 272-319; Command Department, Nanjing Military Region, ed., *Junshi Lilun*, pp. 53-8.; Military Science Academy, ed., *Zhanluexue* (Study on strategy) (Beijing: Military Science Publishers, 1987), pp. 122-6.

21. *Jibu zhanzheng*, in Chinese, has connotations of "local war," "partial war," and "limited war." Such warfare involves the use of conventional weapons, and its battleground is limited to a certain area rather than the entire nation's territory. The term "limited war," commonly used in the West, is translated as *youxian*



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*zhanzheng*. The concept of *jubu zhanzheng* is antagonistic to the concept of "total war" or "general war" (*zongti zhan*), and "nuclear war" (*he zhan*).

22. Zhang Jing and Yao Yanjin, *Jiji Fangyu Zhanlue Qianshuo* (An introduction to the active defense strategy) (Beijing: The People's Liberation Army Publishers, 1985), pp. ii, 81.

23. Mao Zedong, *Six Essays on Military Affairs*, p. 50.

24. In PLA terminology, *zhanyi* means either "operations" or "campaign." However, another widely used term, *zuoazhan*, refers exclusively to "operations."

For further discussions on "active defense strategy," see Ngok Lee, pp. 149–52; Georges Tan Eng Bok, "Strategic Doctrine," pp. 9–10. For Chinese discussions, see Command Department, Nanjing Military Region, ed., *Junshi Lilun—Canmou Zaizhi Xunlian Jiaocai*, pp. 37–40.; Wang Shichun et al., eds., *Zhongguo Dabaike-quanshu—Junshi: Junshi Sixiang Fence*, s.v. "Renmin Zhanzheng de Zhanlue Zhanshu" (Strategy and tactics of people's war), Pan Shiyong, pp. 39–43; Zhang Jing and Yao Yanjin, *Jiji Fangyu Zhanlue Qianshuo*, pp. 25–8; Zhu Baoqing et al., *Mao Zedong Junshi Zhanlue Sixiang Shi* (A history of Mao Zedong's military philosophical thought) (Xian, Shaanxi: People's Xinhua Publishers, 1988), pp. 128–31.

25. Mao Zedong, *Six Essays on Military Affairs*, p. 237.

26. For a detailed discussion of the three forms of operations, see Jiang Renguang et al., eds., *Zhongguo Dabaikequanshu—Junshi: Zhanzheng, Zhanlue, Zhanyi Fence* (Grand encyclopedia of China—military affairs: warfare, strategy, operations) (Beijing: Military Science Publishers, 1985), v. 2, s.v. "Zhendizhan" (Positional warfare), Zhao Anran, pp. 69–70; "Yundongzhan" (Mobile warfare), Zhao Anran, pp. 70–2; and s.v. "Youjizhan" (Guerrilla warfare), Liao Hua, pp. 72–5.

27. Zhang Jing and Yao Yanjin, *Jiji Fangyu Zhanlue Qianshuo*, p. 111.

28. The ten major military principles were first presented in Mao Zedong's report to the Party's Central Committee on "The Present Situation and Our Tasks" (*Muqiande Xingshi he Womende Renwu*) on 25 December 1947. See Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Language press, 1969), v. 4, pp. 160–3.

The sixteen-character formula refers to *dijin wotui* (when the enemy advances, we retreat), *dizhu wotao* (when the enemy halts, we harass him), *dipi wodu* (when the enemy gets exhausted, we attack him), *ditui wozhui* (when the enemy retreats, we pursue him).

29. Wang Kefu, "To Establish the 'Shield' under Modern Conditions," *Jiefang Jun Bao* (hereafter *JJJB*) (Liberation Army Daily), 3 April 1981, p. 3.

30. Military Science Academy, ed., *Zhanluexue* (Study on strategy), pp. 220–2. *Zhanluexue* is believed to be the "first" and "standard" official Chinese assessment of its security and military environment after the "strategic transformation" decision of the 1985 Enlarged Meeting of the Central Military Commission.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 154–8.

32. The term "Four Modernizations" refers to the modernization of four sectors: agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology.

33. For details, see King C. Chen, *China's War with Vietnam, 1979: Issues, Decisions, and Implications* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1987).

34. The Enlarged Meeting of the CMC was held from 23 May to 6 June 1985. In this study, this meeting will hereafter be referred to as "the strategic transformation of 1985," due to its importance in China's defense modernization process.

35. China's recognition (or pursuit) of a relatively peaceful environment has three sources. First, China needed a peaceful setting for its economic reform and modernization. Second, China would better improve its defense capability on the basis of "peacetime military construction" than on the "status of war readiness." Third, China perceived that its future armed conflicts would be local ones and ruled out the possibility of total war.

36. The seven military regions (MRs) are: Shengyang, Beijing, Jinan, Nanjing, Guangzhou, Lanzhou, and Chengdu. Except for the Wuhan MR, which was disestablished, the former frontline military regions—the Urumqi, Kunming, and Fuzhou MRs facing, respectively, the Soviet Union to the north, Indochina to the south, and Taiwan in the east—were integrated into the Lanzhou, Chengdu, and Nanjing MRs.

37. For PLA views on the Persian Gulf War of 1990–91, see Liu Yichang, Wang Wenchang, and Wang Xiancheng, eds., *Haiwan Zhanzheng* (The gulf war) (Beijing: Military Science Publishers, 1991).

38. Joffe, *The Chinese Army after Mao*, pp. 77–8.

39. Ngok Lee, *China's Defense Modernization and Military Leadership*, p. 145.

40. Paul H.B. Godwin, "People's War Revised," p. 10.

41. Admiral Xiao Jinguang, former CinC of the PLA Navy, indicates that "offshore represents the Navy's operational radius; while *defense* spells out the characteristics of the Navy's strategy" (emphasis added). See Xiao Jinguang, "Construct a Modernized Strong Navy: Commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Liberation Army," *Haijun Zazhi* (The Navy Magazine) 25 June 1987, pp. 2–6.

42. Forward defense, as a (U.S.) maritime strategic concept, projects naval forces to a forward posture approaching the enemy's naval position or home ports in order in peacetime to execute deterrence and early warning functions and to engage enemy naval forces actively in the initial phase of war. The PRC perceives forward defense as a "far-distance sea offense strategy" which serves only superpower oceanic ambitions.

43. Joffe, p. 90. Talking with the Navy's Political Commissar, Su Zhenghua, Mao showed his little finger and said, "Our Navy is like this"; he then showed his thumb and said, "The Navy should be like this big so it can terrify the enemy." For this episode see Zhao Wei, "Admiral Liu Huaqing, the New Vice Chairman of the CMC," *Mingbao Yuekan* (Ming Pao Monthly) January 1990, p. 39. According to Bruce Swanson, this event took place on 3 May 1975. See Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon: A History of China's Quest for Seapower* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1982), p. 270.

44. Joffe, pp. 90-1.

45. Admiral Liu Huaqing, a Long March veteran, had served back in 1945 in the 2nd Field Army under the command of Liu Bocheng and Deng Xiaoping. He was transferred to the newly founded PLA Navy in 1950 and was sent to the Soviet Union to study at the Voroshilov General Staff Academy (Soviet Fleet Admiral Sergei Gorshkov being also a Voroshilov graduate) from 1954 to 1958. Liu is now the vice chairman of both the Military Affairs Commission and the CMC. For detailed personal information see Yung Tse, "A Biographical Sketch of Liu Hua-ching," *Zhonggong Yanjiu* (Studies on Chinese Communism Monthly), 15 March 1990, pp. 110-7; and Zhao Wei, "Admiral Liu Huaqing—The New Vice Chairman of the CMC," *Mingbao Yuekan*, January 1990, pp. 35-40.

46. Yang Shouqian, "Probing the Guiding Thought and Principles of Naval Operations in the Initial Phase of Future Anti-aggression Warfare," *Haijun Zazhi*, July 1980, pp. 12-5.

47. Tai Ming Cheung, *Growth of Chinese Naval Power: Priorities, Goals, Missions, and Regional Implications* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990), pp. 37-8.

48. It is noteworthy that the path of the discussion over naval strategy parallels China's course of reform. For example, in the wake of the 13th Congress of the CCP in 1988, the PLA Navy's flourishing promotion of the new "blue-water" naval strategy coincided with Zhao Ziyang's proposal of the "coastal development strategy" and Su Xiaokang's broadcast of the television series *River Elegy*.

49. Admiral Liu's remark is quoted in Ai Hongren, *Zhonggong Haijun Toudi: Maixiang Yuanyang De Tiaozhan* (An inside look into the Chinese Communist Navy: advancing toward the blue-water challenge) (Hong Kong: October 1988). For an English translation of Ai's work, see U.S. Information Service, *Joint Publication Research Service, China* (JPRS-CAR-90-052), 16 July 1990, p. 14.

50. JPRS-CAR-90-052, 16 July 1990, p. 27. (Emphasis added.)

51. Zhang Lianzhong et al., eds., *Haijun Shi*, p. 247. See also JPRS-CAR-90-052, 16 July 1990, pp. 14-5. The Greater Sunda Islands comprise Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Celebes, and small adjacent islands.

52. Zhang Lianzhong et al., eds., *Haijun Shi*, p. 247. *Haijun Shi* describes the second island chain as "a longitudinal, curve-like group of archipelagos located at the east flank of the first island chain." The islands indicated here reflect the author's own assessment.

53. Military Science Academy, *Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Junyu* (Military terms of the PLA) (Beijing: The PLA Warrior Publishers, 1982), p. 430. In this volume, the sea area from two hundred to six hundred nautical miles from the Chinese coastline is defined as the "mid-distance sea," and the open ocean beyond six hundred nautical miles is defined as the "far-distance sea." It should be noted that the range of effective air cover provided by the land-based Naval Air Force is about two hundred miles from the Chinese coast.

54. Li Qianyuan, "Strategy for the Defense of Exclusive Zone and Continental Shelf: Thinking on National Defense Development Strategy," *Xueshu Yanjiu* (Academic studies), no. 8, 1988, pp. 7-9. Li defines the land area one hundred kilometers inward from the Chinese coastline together with the twelve-mile territorial waters as "inshore," and the open sea beyond 350 nautical miles from Chinese mainland as "far-distance sea." Li argues that China's actual frontier is not the coastline of the mainland or the twelve-mile territorial waters but the two-hundred-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone and the 350-mile perimeter of the continental shelf. It is noteworthy that Li, an army general, was a commander of the 1st Group Army in the Nanjing Military Region when his article was published. Li is now the deputy chief of staff of the Guangzhou Military Region.

55. Ma Wenxian provides four reasons why a new naval strategy was desired in the wake of the 1985 strategic transformation: that the Navy's improving capability required a new set of strategies; the increasing strategic importance of the northwestern Pacific region; that in conjunction with economic reform, there was a need for a peacetime naval strategy; and that the sea served as extended depth for territorial defense and as the area for nuclear deterrence. See Ma Wenxian, "The Necessity of Proposing Our Naval Strategy," *Haijun Zazhi*, October 1986, pp. 5-6.

56. Shen Shungen, "The August 1st Color [of the PLA Navy] on the Blue Sea: An Interview with the Commander-in-Chief of the PLA Navy [Admiral Zhang Lianzhong] and Two Department Chiefs in the Naval High Command," *Jionchuan Zhishi* (Naval and Merchant Ships), no. 8, 1988, p. 2.

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57. Liu Bi-room, "PRC's Strategic concept toward Sea Power: A Talk with Rear Admiral Li Dingwen, the Superintendent of the PLA Naval Command College," *Zhongguo Shibao* (China Times), 24 April 1992, p. 10.

58. Pan Bingyao, "Possible Trends of Future Sea Wars," *Haijun Zazhi*, no. 6, 1987, pp. 6-7. See also Wang Shijun, "Some Issues on the Use of Naval Force in Local Warfare," *Haijun Zazhi*, no. 2, 1987, pp. 12-5. Wang was then the deputy superintendent of the Naval Command College.

59. Fang Yukang, "On Local Warfare at Sea," *Haijun Zazhi*, no. 7, 1987, pp. 9-10. See also Ren Qimin, "Probing the Characteristics of Local Warfare at Sea," *Haijun Zazhi*, no. 4, 1987, pp. 8-10.

60. "If the enemy does not provoke me, I shall not attack the enemy; however, if the enemy does attack me, I shall definitely fight back." This popular slogan of the PLA Navy's code of engagement spells out the offensive nature of naval force in war at sea. Nevertheless, there is still a plenty of room for the PRC to interpret the extent and degree of the enemy's "provocations." Admiral Zhang Lianzhong, the present CinC of the PLA Navy, has indicated: "Offshore defense should contain broader meaning. In order to effectively protect China from the attack and offense from the sea, it is necessary to expand the defense depth toward the open sea and to acquire the capability to intercept and destroy enemy forces at sea." See Shungen, p. 2.

61. The CinC, Admiral Zhang, responded to international speculation regarding China's blue-water ambitions as follows: "In the past, we did not go that far and they did not see our flag on the high seas. Today, when they see us, it's normal to be curious. But international waters is for public usage, every country's navy can be there." See Shungen, p. 3.

62. Xiao Jinguang, "Construct a Modernized Strong Navy: Commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Liberation Army," *Haijun Zazhi*, 25 June 1987, p. 5.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5. See also Chen Zeluan, "The Naval Construction Should Be Transformed from 'Coastal' toward 'Offshore,'" *Junshi Xueshu*, July 1988, pp. 26-7. The PRC, the Republic of China on Taiwan, and Japan all claim sovereignty over the Diaoyutais. As for the Spratlys, the PRC, the Republic of China, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines all have permanently occupied islets and reefs of the archipelago.

For further discussion, see Captain Lee G. Corder, AM, RAN, "Regional Resilience: The Imperative for Maritime Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia," *Naval War College Review*, Spring 1994.

64. Zhang Xusan, "Strengthening the Macro-instruction of Naval Development," *Junshi Xueshu* (Military studies), no. 8, 1987. Zhang was deputy CinC of the PLA Navy.

65. Li Qianyuan, "Strategy for the Defense of Exclusive Economic Zone."

66. Yang Shouqian, "Guiding Principles of the Strategic Usage of Naval Forces in Local War at Sea," *Haijun Zazhi*, no. 6, 1987, p. 9. See also Ren Kaiguo, "China's Maritime Environment and Naval Defense Construction," *Xueshu Yanjiu*, no. 2, 1989, pp. 15-6. Ren was then a major general in the Army and the deputy commander of the Fujian Military District.

67. Tai Ming Cheung, *Growth of Chinese Naval Power*, pp. 62-3.

68. Zeluan, pp. 26-7.

69. Emphasis added. Of the PLA Navy's principal surface combatants, more than half of the DDGs are deployed in the North Sea Fleet, and about 60 percent of the FFGs are under the East Sea Fleet Command. Moreover, advanced conventional submarines and all nuclear-powered submarines are in the North Sea Fleet. See Tai Ming Cheung, *Growth of Chinese Naval Power*, pp. 58-9.

70. David Youtz and Paul Midford, *A Northeast Asian Security Regime: Prospects after the Cold War* (New York: Institute for EastWest Studies, 1992), pp. 11-8. See also Corder.



Art . . . may be learned but it cannot be taught. This is particularly true of the Art of War. It cannot be taught, excepting in so far as one may teach oneself; and it is to offer to every officer the opportunity of teaching himself that the [Naval War] College doors are open.

Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce, USN (1827-1917)  
(whose birthday was observed on 25 March 1994)