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**NAVAL  
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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION  
ARMY'S MODERNIZATION FOR THE REPUBLIC OF  
KOREA'S SECURITY POLICY**

by

Sangmin Kim

December 2009

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Alice Miller  
Mark Chakwin

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**THE IMPLICATION OF THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY'S  
MODERNIZATION FOR THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA'S SECURITY POLICY**

Sangmin Kim  
Lieutenant, Republic of Korea Navy  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(FAR EAST, SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE PACIFIC)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

South Korean security has been threatened by North Korea since the Korean War. The collapse of the Soviet Union has required Northeast Asian regional security to be reconfigured. North Korea remains as South Korea's primary threat. China is emerging rapidly and creating several issues directly and indirectly that are related to South Korea. Especially, China's PLA modernization has been remarkable in its capability and ambition. Therefore, threats imposed by China to South Korea may seem significant. Directly, dispute in Socotra Rock and the Northeast Project impose threats to South Korea. The Taiwan issue and the South China Sea dispute indirectly affect South Korean security due to the involvement of the United States forces in the Northeast Asian region. This thesis will reveal that China's PLA modernization coerces South Korea to confront dilemmas in its security policy. In other words, such modernization is a threat to South Korean security.



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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. PURPOSE

The area of investigation of this thesis is the impact of the modernization of military capabilities and doctrine of the People's Republic of China (hereafter China) People's Liberation Army (hereafter PLA), on the Republic of Korea's (hereafter South Korea) security policy. First, it will provide an overview and assess PLA modernization, where it is and where its modernizations suggest it is heading. Second, it will examine the security interests of major players in the region and the relationships of South Korea to others. Third, it will argue that PLA modernization does pose a threat to South Korea's security, directly and indirectly. China's territorial disputes, and interpretation of history, on top of enhancement of military capability may become direct threats to South Korea, and China's conflicts and flashpoints with other nations in the region, which involves the United States, may become indirect threats to South Korea.

## B. IMPORTANCE

Before the Korean War, the Korean peninsula was divided into two nations: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter the DPRK) and the Republic of Korea. The separation was a result of the interests of global powers' ideological differences and the pursuit of legitimacy by two competing domestic political elites.<sup>1</sup> That separation has lasted more than five decades, and each side still considers the other as the main threat to its security.

There is no doubt that South Korea considers the DPRK its primary security threat. The numbers and power of the military forces stationed along the border at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel are conclusive evidence of that reality. Despite South Korea's economic

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<sup>1</sup> Han S. Park, "The Nature and Evolution of the Inter-Korean Legitimacy War." In Park and Kim, *Korean Security Dynamics in Transition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 14–15.

support and the “sunshine” policy initiated by President Kim Dae Jung, the DPRK still continues to provoke South Korea both militarily and diplomatically.<sup>2</sup>

In 1985, China, a geographical neighbor to both the DPRK and South Korea, re-evaluated its own security perspective. The preceding conditions on the Korean peninsula, followed shortly thereafter in 1991 by the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (hereafter Soviet Union), transformed the northeast Asian regional security environment in several ways. For purposes of this thesis, the most notable development was the significant reduction of Chinese assistance and support to the DPRK.

An important question for South Korean security decision makers, therefore, is whether China’s emerging power in the Northeast Asian region and its military modernization threaten Korea. Considering the rapprochement between China and South Korea in 1992, their continuous economic trade relationship, and China’s role between South Korea, the DPRK, and China, it is tempting to believe that China is not a significant threat to South Korea.

One consequence of the development of China’s security capabilities, including PLA modernization, is that any potential conflict in Northeast Asia would involve sophisticated forces and potentially large numbers of forces. This potentiality, remote as it may seem, may cause changes in the security policies of the United States, Japan, and Taiwan. These potential changes in policy, in turn, may have the potential to undermine South Korean security. Therefore, the indirect threat to South Korean security is a real consideration, and considering both the potential and degree of this threat is important, perhaps as important a mission as the analysis of any direct threat.

This thesis investigates and assesses whether PLA modernization presents a direct or indirect threat to the peninsula. Additionally, it investigates the logic underlying South Korea’s security policy to ascertain how and why PLA modernization is an important factor in that policy.

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<sup>2</sup> Sang-Hun Choe, “South Korea’s Sunshine Policy Dims,” *The New York Times*, January 17, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/17/world/asia/17korea.html?scp=1&sq=South Korea%27s Sunshine Policy Dims&st=cse> (accessed May 9, 2009).

### C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

Developing an appropriate frame of reference for the major questions that support this research requires analysis of the following aspects:

- First, analysis of the four elements of national power (diplomatic, informational, military, and economic) to determine how relevant they are to South Korean security policy vis-à-vis the DPRK.
- Second, analysis of the PLA, including investigating the chronology, overarching goals and the rationale for PLA modernization. In addition, PLA current capabilities and the prospects for PLA power projection and doctrine for the PLA Army, Navy, Air Force and strategic arsenals are also points of approach for this element.
- Third a major area is the analysis of the possible direct and indirect threats to South Korea caused by PLA modernization. Direct threats are analyzed regarding four elements of national power and through examination of illustrative examples of conflicts and cooperation between China and South Korea. These include: the Socotra Rock dispute, China's Northeast Project, and the DPRK nuclear crisis and Six-Party Talks. The indirect threat will be examined through consideration of other potential conflicts in Northeast Asia, such as in the Taiwan Strait and the Senkaku Islands dispute, and the potential "second order effects" on South Korea.

The relevant hypotheses in this thesis do not include any analytical focus on the domestic factors for security policy either in South Korea's or China's domestic issues with the PLA. Additionally, to ensure the focus of this research remains fixed on the South Korean security aspect of these issues, PLA modernization is assumed to continue into the near future as it has been accomplished by China up to the present. (For example, the range or potential variations in PLA developments are not reconsidered against the range of assessments on China's potential for economic development in the future.)

Based on current world conditions and commonly known facts, any research on South Korea security focuses on the DPRK. Even today, the DPRK remains the major threat to South Korean security. China, which provided hundreds of thousands of troops in support of the DPRK attack of South Korea in 1950, today is not assessed by any strategic analysts on the peninsula as significant a direct security threat to South Korea as the DPRK. Based on current China-South Korea relations and recent experience, even in territorial disputes and frictions on the veracity and interpretation of historical issues,



leaders in both South Korea and China would prefer to decrease tensions and resolve any conflicts peacefully in order to promote positive bilateral economic interests. Additionally, China's interest in maintaining its position as one of the few nations possessing a positive relationship with both the DPRK and South Korea serves to reduce the threatening role of China in South Korean security.

The indirect security threat posed by China, however, may be more significant. Since the end of the Second World War, and particularly after the Korean War Armistice, South Korea's security has relied on a significant U.S. presence on the peninsula, including military forces, equipment and agreements. Any potential security crisis that might influence the United States—and its tangible and symbolic presence in South Korea, might evolve into a threat to South Korean security.

More to the point, potential Chinese sovereignty disputes might involve the United States, or a de facto U.S. ally such as Taiwan. This condition might include the possibility of U.S. intervention into that dispute. Were this to occur, it could have a second order effect, creating a dilemma for South Korea. South Korea, a treaty ally of the United States, may have to consider the effects of these disputes on its own interests or security. For this reason, South Korean security policy decision makers will still think it important to consider PLA capabilities, since PLA actions may wind up indirectly or possibly directly influencing South Korea security conditions.

This thesis suggests as its working hypothesis that given the conditions defined and explained in the thesis, South Korean security policy decision makers should continue to develop South Korean military capabilities and to continue to strengthen the overall alliance with the United States. In addition, the thesis concludes that additional measures to build deterrence by increasing economic relations and cooperative diplomacy with China also are essential to the successful security policy for South Korea, due to the indirect threat.

## C. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. The South Korean Perspective on the DPRK

Not surprisingly, most of the literature on South Korean security has focused on the threat from the North. Paul French states that the DPRK still maintains a “Stalinist-style command economy.”<sup>3</sup> David Shambaugh notes that the DPRK is constantly using a brinkmanship strategy against international society, particularly through its deliberate ambiguity in its strategic arsenal capability. These, and other factors, make the DPRK more isolated in international society and created negative perceptions of the DPRK by others.<sup>4</sup>

Avery Goldstein concludes that the DPRK has been isolated and has isolated itself from most of the world community since the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup> Samuel S. Kim notes that, in addition, after China changed its approach to the Peninsula in favor of a “Two Korea policy,” the DPRK has taken more irrational decisions.<sup>6</sup>

In an article from the *New York Times*, Choe Sang-Hun comments that in the recent past, South Korea adopted a moderate policy—the “sunshine policy”—to open the DPRK to international society. This approach later was regarded by others as “being too soft on the Communist government there.” It sought to mediate tension created by the DPRK by providing compensation.<sup>7</sup>

When the DPRK “played its nuclear program card” in 1994, South Korea could not afford to have another Korean War on the peninsula. At the same time, China was not willing to face South Korea or allow the United States directly to take over a

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<sup>3</sup> Paul French, *North Korea the Paranoid Peninsula* (New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2005), 1.

<sup>4</sup> David Shambaugh, “China and the Korean Peninsula: Playing for the Long Term.” *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 43–56.

<sup>5</sup> Avery Goldstein, “Across the Yalu: China’s interests and the Korean peninsula in a changing world.” In Alasair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross eds., *New Directions in the Study of China’s Foreign Policy* (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2006), 132–139.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel S. Kim, “The Making of china’s Korea Policy in the Era of Reform.” In David Lampton eds., *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform* (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 374–381.

<sup>7</sup> Sang-Hun Choe, “South Korea’s Sunshine Policy Dims,” *The New York times*, January 17, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/17/world/asia/17korea.html?scp=1&sq=South Korea%27s Sunshine Policy Dims&st=cse> (accessed May 9, 2009).

collapsed DPRK. Furthermore, according to Andrew Scobell, China was also concerned about chaos and the influx of refugees along its border with the DPRK. Therefore, China and South Korea were opposed to any economic and military coercive sanctions on the DPRK by the United States.<sup>8</sup>

Yong Jeong Lee notes that recently the DPRK conducted a nuclear experiment of a large scale, right after its test of a long-range ballistic missile or rocket.<sup>9</sup> Such actions caused South Korea to declare support for full-scale PSI (Proliferation Security Initiative). In addition, Myung Bok Bae, Hyung Kyu Choi, and Sae Jeong Jang note that China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs commented that China is firmly against the DPRK's actions.<sup>10</sup>

For all these reasons, the DPRK remains South Korea's primary security threat. The DPRK maintains a "military first" strategy and stations massive military forces along the DMZ (De-Militarized Zone) facing South Korea. Moreover, it continues to utilize its nuclear program and missile tests in violation of a UN resolution. Therefore, South Korea cannot stop considering the DPRK as the primary threat to its security.

Jungsup Kim explores other aspects of the DPRK's approach and notes that there is a debate over whether the tensions between South Korea and the DPRK are driven by other reasons.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of motivations, however, given the objective reality of forces arrayed on the DPRK border against South Korea, and the continuing history of provocations, South Korea's leaders have concluded that their security requirements cannot rely on varying interpretations or assumptions; a preventive capability must be

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Scobell, *China and North Korea: From comrades-in-arms to allies at arm's length* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 2004), 29–33.

<sup>9</sup> Yong Jeong Lee, "Bukhan 2cha haeksilheum Eui Ryuk 1cha Ddaeboda 5Bae Saejeotda [North Korea's 2nd Nuclear experiment is five times greater than 1st experiment]," *JoongAng Ilbo*, May 26, 2009, [http://article.joins.com/article/article.asp?ctg=10&Total\\_ID=3622502](http://article.joins.com/article/article.asp?ctg=10&Total_ID=3622502) (accessed May 27, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Myung Bok Bae, Hyung Kyu Choi, and Sae Jeong Jang, "Bulkoehan Jungguk 'Bihaekhwa Yaksok Jikigo 6Jahoedameuro Bokguihaeya' [Discomforted China 'Keep Free Nuclear promise and must comeback to Six-party Talk'," *JoongAng Ilbo*, May 26, 2009, [http://article.joins.com/article/article.asp?ctg=10&Total\\_ID=3622494](http://article.joins.com/article/article.asp?ctg=10&Total_ID=3622494) (accessed May 28, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Jungsup Kim, *International politics and Security in Korea* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2007), 1–18.

prepared before it is necessary. By actions, by general analytical assessment, and even by planning, it is conclusive that the DPRK is South Korea's primary security threat and South Korea must act accordingly.

## 2. The South Korean Perspective on China

The emergence of China in Northeast Asia is not news. It is generally considered as fact. Ever since the Deng Xiaoping era, China has started to transform and begun to open up. Mel Gurtov and Byong-moo Hwang note that especially after 1985, China has re-evaluated its security conditions and modernized the People's Liberation Army (PLA) accordingly.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Tae Hwan Lee mentions that in the 2000s, China once again changed its way of approaching problems.<sup>13</sup> In the Taiwan Strait problem, China started to take aggressive actions in the 1990s. However, it seemed to switch to a more moderate and peaceful position, along with its "new security strategy in mid-1990."<sup>14</sup>

David Shambaugh comments that the changes in China's security policy reduced the potential for total war in Northeast Asia, but they also created other concerns for South Korea. China's security re-evaluation caused China to alter its military goals, from defending China under total war to defending China under conditions of a regional conflict.<sup>15</sup> This change reduced the threat of major war, but also forced South Korea to become concerned simultaneously both with the DPRK threat and with China's military modernization because China is defending its security in new and different ways. Put in other words, South Korea's new concern is that China's security policy of "active defense"<sup>16</sup> raises the (new) possibility of a regional conflict, which may more easily occur than a total war. This possibility may pose concerns to South Korea.

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<sup>12</sup> Mel Gurtov and Byong-moo Hwang, *China's Security: The New Roles of the Military* Boulder (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 63; David Shambaugh. *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2003), 64–65.

<sup>13</sup> Tae Hwan Lee, "U.S., China, and Peace Building on the Korean Peninsula," *Sejong Policy Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2009): 6–7.

<sup>14</sup> Ling Xing-guang, "China's New Peace Strategy," *The Japan Times*, November 18, 2002, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/eo20021118a1.html> (accessed May 13, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> David Shambaugh. *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2003), 66–69.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 62–63.

Also, in Taeho Kim's argument, if a regional conflict occurs with U.S. intervention, then South Korea has to pick a side. This creates a loss for South Korea when making any choice. Additionally, if the United States seeks to use U.S. forces stationed on the Korean peninsula for other conflicts, then the DPRK threat to South Korea would become more significant.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, China's security strategy change may be interpreted as seeking peaceful resolution of disputes and reducing the probability of military conflict in the region. This would also mean that China may not create conflicts that would draw United States' intervention. However, this is uncertain and the possibility of conflict between China and the United States still exists.

Bill Gertz suggests that there are reasons why, in the long run, conflict is more likely to occur.<sup>18</sup> The decrease of United States influence in Northeast Asia, accompanying the emergence of China is one such factor that has been emphasized.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the possibility of a Sino-U.S. conflict, despite economic relations, still exists in the longer term, and South Korea should be prepared and factor the possibility of conflict into its security policy.

### **3. The South Korean Perspective on the United States**

The United States has contributed a great deal to the present status of South Korea. At the end of World War II, the independence of the Korean peninsula from Japanese colonization was an outcome of the Allied victory over Japan. After independence, however, the creation of the North and South Korean states on the Korean peninsula was also the product of the Cold War between Moscow and Washington.

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<sup>17</sup> Taeho Kim, "The Costs of China's Military Conflict: The Korean and Japanese Dimensions," in Andrew Scobell ed., *The costs of conflict: The impact on China of a Future War* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, October, 2001), 63–75.

<sup>18</sup> Bill Gertz, *The China Threat: How the People's Republic Targets America* (New York: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2000), 184.

<sup>19</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2004 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission* (One Hundred Eighth Congress, Second Session, June 2004), 28–34, [http://www.uscc.gov/annual\\_report/2004/04annual\\_report.pdf](http://www.uscc.gov/annual_report/2004/04annual_report.pdf) (accessed May 10, 2009).

The Korean War was certainly a major war of the Cold War era as well. In fact, that war technically continues to this day. Technically, the Korean War is not over yet—there is only an armistice. The armistice was set up with the agreement of China, the Soviet Union, the DPRK, and the United States under the Military Armistice Commission.

The current South Korean prosperity could not have been achieved without the support of the United States in economic and military aid. Therefore, U.S. strategic interests and security policy are very important factors in South Korean security policy. Jae Ho Chung notes, on the other hand, that the support of the United States to South Korea also may pose a dilemma for South Korea when the interests of the two nations are not the same, especially when considering China.<sup>20</sup> This conclusion has many aspects to consider.

James Goodby states that the strategic purpose of the United States on the Korean peninsula is the denuclearization, or elimination of the North Korean nuclear proliferation threat and construction of peaceful stability in the region without conflicts in the peninsula.<sup>21</sup> Along with increase of Japanese security and the strengthening of South Korean-United States alliances, Christopher R. Hill notes that the United States intends to use a cooperative relationship through Six-Party Talks on Northeast Asia peace and security mechanisms.<sup>22</sup> However, the interests and the role of China in such a situation have not been described, nor has consideration been given to China's capability and influence on the Korean peninsula.

China's intentions regarding how and to what extent it will pursue its own interests in the region regarding this issue are muted, or not explicitly declared.

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<sup>20</sup> Jae Ho Chung, *Between Ally and Partner: Korea-China Relations and the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 92–102.

<sup>21</sup> Donald Gross and James Goodby, "A Framework for Peace and Security in Korea and Northeast Asia: Report of the Atlantic Council Working Group on North Korea," *The Atlantic Council of the United States*, Policy Paper (April 2007), 11–12, <http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/07032ACNKR.pdf> (accessed October 29, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "Status of the Six-Party Talks for the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," February 6, 2008, <http://foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2008/HillTestimony080206a.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2009).

Therefore, the possibility of collapse of the cooperative form of work between the United States and China on the Korean peninsula exists. Taeho Kim mentions that, additionally, other potential conflicts between the United States and China in the Taiwan Strait, the Senkaku Islands, or the South China Sea may undermine cooperation on the Korean peninsula.<sup>23</sup>

Considering the economic role of China in the South Korean economy and also the importance of the United States in South Korea, Taeho Kim concludes that the above conditions may present hard choices for South Korea to make.<sup>24</sup>

#### **4. Recent PLA Modernization**

The possibility of China challenging the United States in a manner that undermines the security of South Korea is plausible in light of PLA modernization. According to a 2004 report to Congress, the United States security policy in Northeast Asia region is to maintain its influences; in contrast to this, China's intention in the long term, is to negate the influence of the United States in the region.<sup>25</sup>

The PLA modernization in recent years has certain trends: high-tech, efficient, power projection capability, and rapid action. These are core evidences of a developing military capable of being used in a power projection role in peripheral regional conflicts in order to protect its national interests. Even if China does not have any intention to use its military to coerce neighboring nations, as Avery Goldstein argues,<sup>26</sup> China's strategy is not transparent and its military developments can create doubts of China's intentions toward other nations. Additionally, its national interests could change or shift in favor of a forceful policy, especially if the military is capable enough to execute the missions.

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<sup>23</sup> Taeho Kim, "The Costs of China's Military Conflict: The Korean and Japanese Dimensions," in Andrew Scobell ed., *The costs of conflict: The impact on China of a Future War* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, October, 2001), 66.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 64–74.

<sup>25</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2004 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review commission* (One Hundred Eighth Congress, Second Session, June 2004), 1–2, [http://www.uscc.gov/annual\\_report/2004/04annual\\_report.pdf](http://www.uscc.gov/annual_report/2004/04annual_report.pdf) (accessed May 10, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Avery Goldstein, "An emerging China's emerging Grand Strategy: A Neo-Bismarckian Turn." in G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno ed., *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 72–73.

Over the years, China has steadily reduced its forces, however, that reduction in the size of the PLA is not necessarily related to China's claims of peaceful intentions. The reduction was implemented mainly in the PLA Army and was approximately 20 percent over three years.<sup>27</sup> The reduction in the PLA Army, on one hand, may be interpreted as a peaceful action, but additional, more detailed, information on the modernization of the PLA Navy and Air Force, suggests that such a view might be hasty. Bates Gill notes that the PLA Navy and Air Force, in fact, are not reducing. They are modernizing with a focus or an effort to increase their capabilities and develop independent technology.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Jane's Defense Weekly, "Army Seeks Mobility in Force Cuts," vol. 30, issue 24, December 16, 1998 (accessed October 11, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Bates Gill, "Chinese Military Modernization and Arms Proliferation in the Asia-Pacific". In Pollack, Jonathan and Yang, Richard H. ed., *Conference Proceedings In China's Shadow: Regional Perspectives on Chinese Foreign Policy and Military Development* (Washington, D.C.: RAND, 1998), 24.



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## II. PLA MODERNIZATION

Since the leadership and reform era of Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, there has been no doubt among professional China watchers that China has been trying to reshape and reform its military weapons and equipment and other areas.<sup>29</sup> This chapter will overview what has changed and what goals China could be trying to achieve through the reform. Reviewing such changes might provide answers or clues or identifying the implications of PLA modernization and the security of other neighboring nations.

This paper will start by evaluating the domestic political and external security context for the changes in doctrine of the PLA ground, maritime, and air forces. Accumulation of various aspects of military modernization in these areas may provide the goal of where China is headed, or what could be its intent.

This question does not center on whether China has attempted to acquire a greater offensive capability or new defensive capability. If neighboring nations feel threatened and interpret such modernizations as offensive posturing, then the original intention of the PRC loses much of its significance. Therefore, the proper question might be whether or not PLA modernization, as a whole, may be interpreted as offensive **to others**. One of the military aspects that stands out in this regard is the capability to execute offensive operations or power projection.

Among analysts of China, there is consensus that the PLA ground force is reducing its numbers, while acquiring modernized military equipment, assets, and developing an operational doctrine capable of not only rapid and effective reaction to a conflict, but also the ability to project into a regional battle theater near its borders, despite the vast size of China's mainland. The PLA maritime force seeks to obtain power projection capability through new assets such as (an) aircraft carrier, plus blue ocean naval assets with longer operational ranges. The PLA Air Force also is working to

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<sup>29</sup> Ellis Joffe, *The Chinese Army After Mao* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 47–148.

extend its operational range by using aerial refueling aircraft. The PLA's modernization seems to heading conclusively toward a more aggressive or even threatening position to neighboring nations.

## **A. DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES**

Prosperity of a nation depends on its goals and national interests. These national interests may depend, in turn, upon on that nation's long-term vision and even its national security and strategy. Security and strategy objectives for a nation may be influenced or even formed by threat(s) that are external and imposed by external condition upon the country. In addition, the perception of threats also can shape a nation's security and strategy. Its National Defense Policy, to deal with threats and protect the security of that nation, should be related to these factors. Although these factors are important, actual decisions by national leaders are seldom so focused. National security assessments and actions are made by leaders, by people who work inside of a national framework that includes a process with systemic procedures and politics. Therefore, defense modernization is deeply correlated with domestic politics as well as external security threats.

### **1. Domestic Influence**

From the beginning of the PRC, Mao had to struggle for legitimacy of the Communist Party in China and had to manage economic development under socialist ideology after the establishment of the Communist Party. Throughout his leadership, at least part of Mao's motivation was his need to maintain his agenda and authority in China by formulating a revolutionary society. Therefore, the PLA's underlying or foundational concept is its struggle with deficiencies and its focus on the human factor rather than weaponry or equipment. Under this approach, changes or modernizations to China's defense capability were not only viewed as a burden, and with constraints; but also were seen as a generally unfavorable solution. In considering the capability of China during Mao's era, the "people's war" concept may be understood in that context—that is, it was the only option for Mao to legitimize and justify his authority.

At the end of Mao's leadership and the beginning of Deng's period, the transition period itself made it harder for the PLA to modernize. This was due in part to the radical leaders' intervention in military affairs for domestic political reasons. Joffe writes, for example, that "the 'gang of four' was similarly condemned for undermining the combat readiness of the armed forces."<sup>30</sup> In other words, radical political leaders were against defense modernization. These political struggles created a lag in modernization and coerced the PLA to retain Mao's thoughts. Therefore, now the PLA had to confront not only a financial struggle but also political struggles and justification for military modernization.

Later, of necessity, defense modernization started to gain support. Joffe uses Su Yu's new term by providing evidence of movement in the PRC, "Which introduced the term 'people's war under modern conditions.' " Although ostensibly an exposition of 'people's war', the ulterior motive of the article was clearly to stress the need for modern strategy and tactics."<sup>31</sup> However, Deng mitigated such political struggles and circumspection. Deng's argument, "seek truth from facts," allowed him and military leaders to resolve the issue ingeniously. As illustrated by Joffe: "Deng thus sanctioned the revision of Maoist doctrine without repudiating Mao, a sanction which gained added force after he consolidated his supremacy at the Third Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee in December 1978."<sup>32</sup>

Deng's successors maintained Mao's legacy as well as promoted defense modernization. Moreover, there is no doubt that the PLA continues modernizing even today. However, the problem was not so much in domestic political justification or power struggles. Mainly it was the lack of a defense industry and infrastructure, and economic limitations. However, there are many other important factors that have influenced PLA modernization, positively and negatively.

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<sup>30</sup> Ellis Joffe, *The Chinese Army After Mao* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 75.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Domestic influences, mainly in the political realm, made it hard for Mao's successors to react effectively to the development of modern militaries internationally. Economic capabilities and constraints, of course, were a major excuse, but disregard for domestic political struggles along with maintaining the legacy of Mao did have a severely negative influence on the timing of the PLA's modernization. Mao's successor, Deng, and his successors, have been focusing on economics and China's defense capabilities. The effort has been slow, but to be sure, the modernization is moving forward, or at least looking forward to certain goals.

## **2. External Influence**

It is a tit-for-tat and rational reaction that states to prepare an adequate capability to counterbalance any threat to which that the state is exposed. With the same logic, considering or correlating China's defense modernization to a potential external security threat is quite convincing. In the previous section, domestic changes fostered by the political leaders of China were discussed. In this section, external influences will be considered. This section will provide the underlying purpose for why China is modernizing its defense sector.

In the early stages of China under Mao, the country enjoyed relatively vast amounts of aid from the Soviet Union. As the relationship and the interests of the two nations changed, so did subsequent security threat analyses by China. It had to confront both the Soviet Union and the United States. Therefore, in spite of the withdrawal of Soviet aid on its nuclear program, China focused even harder to acquire a nuclear arsenal. Initially, China's nuclear possession was to deter a Soviet attack on the mainland by massive numbers of conventional forces or even by a possible nuclear attack.

In the 1970s, these conditions shifted and there was a decrease in the possibility of using massive force total war. Especially, the possibility of using nuclear weapons in any Sino-Soviet confrontation, and moreover, the prospect for any battle seemed to grow more unlikely. As a result, China reevaluated its security threat, shifting from an imminent Soviet attack on its border with a massive attack to a local war threatened by varying opponents.

In the 1980s, the relationship between the Soviet Union and China experienced a rapprochement. As a result, the possibility of conflict on the Soviet-Sino border was greatly reduced. Additionally, the Soviet Union's support on technology and arms sales was reinvigorated, at least when compared to the "frozen time" in the relationship. In addition, after the Tiananmen crisis, China lost many Western partners, but the Soviet Union maintained the relationship. In other words, the Soviet Union became China's only (or at least best) major power "friend" again, for quite some time. Throughout the Post-Cold War era, China even maintained a positive relationship with The Russian Federation, successor to the Soviet Union. This relationship with the Soviet Union and its successor caused both restrictions and support for China. The PLA became noticeably dependent on Soviet defense technology and military doctrine. This dependency ultimately caused China to alter its defense modernization approach again after the Gulf War.

In the Gulf War, the United States demonstrated high tech weaponry and equipment used as assets for implementing information warfare based operations and strategy. Such war was swift and decisive. China was stunned and felt the necessity for even an even more and better "leapfrog" of its defense modernization.

The overarching problem of China on its defense modernization is the lack of budget and antiquated human resources, weapons, equipment, and doctrine that require to modernization. The relationships and threats posed by the Soviet Union and the United States first let China, under Mao, adhere to an obsolete military. Later, Soviet aid also lacking in cutting edge stage military performance, demonstrated by the United States in the Gulf War, led China to change its goal once again. Therefore, China's defense modernization has been taking much longer than expected due to other factors of limitations.

## **B. CHANGE IN DOCTRINE**

It is constructive to review exactly what the goals or purposes of doctrine are—to understand how doctrine might be changed, and what effect that might have. Dr. Paul H. B. Godwin defines doctrine by stating, "Doctrine consists of the fundamental principles

guiding those who plan the use of military forces.” In his article, Godwin argues that doctrine, strategy, and operation are closely linked and influence each other. Therefore, he says, “Operational doctrine consists of the principles guiding the use of military forces to conduct the operations. For the past two decades, Chinese military journals have focused primarily on analyses of operational doctrine.”<sup>33</sup>

## 1. People’s War

The PLA has confronted the requirement for changes in military doctrine to (strategic and operational doctrine), as well as in weapons and in equipment since the founding of China’s Communist Government in 1949.<sup>34</sup> According to Ellis Joffe, the political nature of retirements during the people’s war period “obviated the need for urgent preparations to defend the mainland against an impending invasion by a greatly superior force. ... It saw little utility in retaining principles and practices which were designed to counterbalance technological inferiority.”<sup>35</sup> Mao’s military doctrine with the “people’s war” in simple terms, was human power before material. At the same time, this approach sought to fit the reality of China’s situation at that time. Without sufficient financial support, technical and material resources notably, modernization was hard to accomplish. Additionally, the security context at that time did not let China’s military doctrine evolve from a focus on preparations for a full-scale war, to a different, or, next strategic stage. Therefore, the “people’s war,” with the focus on human power and the objective of luring an enemy to fight (if a fight were inevitable) on the mainland, provided China with certain advantages and might even have been the best option that Mao could implement.

Mao Tse Dong, his legacy, and even the PLA military doctrine he promulgated, evolved as Deng Xiaoping finally emerged as Mao’s successor. Gao, Guozhen wrote; “After the mid-1980s, as the international strategic situation evolved and changed, the

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<sup>33</sup> Paul Godwin, “Compensating for Deficiencies: Doctrinal Evolution in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army,” in James C. Mulvenon, Andrew N. D. Yang, *Seeking Truth From Facts: A Retrospective on Chinese Military Studies in the Post-Mao Era* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2001), 89.

<sup>34</sup> Ellis Joffe, *The Chinese Army After Mao* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 71.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

CPC Central Committee came up with a new assessment of war and peace. China adjusted its military strategy and operational doctrine research also shifted from total warfare to limited warfare.”<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Godwin articulates that “in the fall of 1979, ... the PLA’s poor performance in Vietnam earlier that year”<sup>37</sup> stimulated the necessity of a new assessment. The new doctrine was ‘People’s war under modern conditions’ and ‘Limited and local war.’

## 2. People’s War under Modern Conditions

Domestically, or internally speaking, China’s ‘People’s war under modern conditions’ dealt with regime legitimacy. The justification of the new assessment would ensure Mao’s legacy being embedded in the Central Military Commission and Chinese policy yet bring modern conditions of war into the PLA’s consideration. More importantly, however, it was a rational decision and movement to change the PLA to make it better able to deal with the changing contemporary security conditions. In this regard, Burles and Shulsky specify that the “‘people’s war under modern conditions’ was intended to address the security challenges posed by the possibility of a Soviet attack across China’s northern border.”<sup>38</sup> They also note “ ‘People’s war under modern conditions’ was also intended to provide the PLA with an alternative method for dealing with future security threats that fell short of a general invasion.”<sup>39</sup> An additional reason for the “People’s war under modern conditions,” cited by Burles and Shulsky, was the necessity to protect key economic and industrial specialized areas against possible enemy, (i.e., Soviet) attacks. Therefore, preparing to defend such areas against possible enemies with faster, longer, and more destructive weapons and tactics was essential for the PLA. The PLA, at least, had to invest in catching up with modern conditions.

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<sup>36</sup> Guozhen Gao & Zheng Ye, “PLA operational doctrine since 1980s,” *中国军事科学* (*Chinese Military Science*), 20 Nov 1996.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Godwin, “Compensating for Deficiencies: Doctrinal Evolution in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army,” in James C. Mulvenon, Andrew N. D. Yang, *Seeking Truth From Facts: A Retrospective on Chinese Military Studies in the Post-Mao Era* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2001), 91.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Burles and Abram N. Shulsky, *Patterns in China’s Use of Force: Evidence from History and Doctrinal Writings* (Washington D.C.: RAND, 2000), 26, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/2007/MR1160.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/2007/MR1160.pdf) (accessed October 12, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.



Finally, Burles and Shulsky mention the importance of the initial stage of conflict, since on the tactical level, modernized weapons make the initial stage of war far more critical and decisive when compared with the past.<sup>40</sup>

### 3. Limited and Local War

The limited war doctrine was driven by external security threat changes and the actual conditions or capabilities of the PLA. Nan Li states “The assumption of an inevitable global war that would pit China against the Soviet Union had remained constant from the late 1960s to the first half of the 1980s. This assumption, however, was jettisoned in 1985 with the adoption of a new strategic calculus by the Central Military Commission (CMC).”<sup>41</sup> Deficiencies in technology and defense industry infrastructure, as well as budget constraints, were still retarding conditions for modernization. Therefore, the second phase of China’s military doctrine and concepts of operation was revised, based on a limited war concept.

The limited war strategy shifted the PLA thinking from “‘early war, major war and nuclear war’ to the track of ‘peacetime army building.’”<sup>42</sup> For the PLA, this change meant a change in the “nature of war”<sup>43</sup> with dramatic and distinctive changes in the content of war viewed using the “local war” concept. “Local war,” in Nan Li’s perspective, focused first on political and diplomatic factors such as mediation and possible constraints to military actions. Second, was the introduction of the idea of limited objectives in war, not simply the complete annihilation of an adversary, but rather, “enhancing diplomatic initiatives, intimidating the enemy psychology and acquiring economic resources.” Concurrently, local war generally would be conducted in a controlled area and for a limited duration. Under this strategy, the use of force or

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<sup>40</sup> Mark Burles and Abram N. Shulsky, *Patterns in China’s Use of Force: Evidence from History and Doctrinal Writings* (Washington D.C.: RAND, 2000), 28–29, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/2007/MR1160.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/2007/MR1160.pdf) (accessed October 12, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Nan Li, “The PLA’s Evolving Warfighting Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics, 1985–1995: A Chinese Perspective,” in David Shambaugh and Richard Yang, ed., *China’s Military in Transition* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1997), 181.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

military operations may be limited further by consideration or influences of the international community and by other domestic political decisions; therefore, it sought to avoid escalation of a military action into a bigger or a larger scale conflict.

Nan Li notes that the strategic perspective for the strategy of “Limited and local war,” included the concepts of “strategic frontier,” “strategic deterrence,” “winning a victory through elite troops,” “gaining the initiative by striking first,” and “fight a quick battle to force a quick solution.”<sup>44</sup> Such strategic principles presuppose or include assumptions that the PLA will seek to have military forces concentrated in more valuable or higher risk areas, and it will seek to develop more professional and better equipped military officers and soldiers, and that it will extend its active defense with troops capable of quick and decisive action. In the scope of battlefield tactics, Nan Li uses “offensive verses offensive,” “defensive with offensive,” and “all in-depth” concepts.<sup>45</sup>

Such concepts at the tactical level explains how the PLA is aiming for a military capability that is more offence-capable and includes tactics to cover the overall area of conflict without discriminating, particularly between the front and the rear areas of combat. Godwin also verifies “limited and local war” with several kinds of evidence. He mentions five types of war listed in Jia Wenxian’s article, “Border Wars, conflicts over maritime territorial seas and territories, surprise air attacks, deliberately limited attacks into Chinese territory, and ‘punitive counter-attacks’ launched by China to ‘oppose invasion, protect sovereignty, or to uphold justice and dispel threats.’ ”<sup>46</sup> The evidence Godwin mentions is four field exercises in 1988 that explain the PLA’s perspective on targeting its combat readiness. “Three focused on the USSR as the potential adversary with exercises located in the Lanzhou, Beijing, and Shenyang MRs. The fourth was

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<sup>44</sup> Nan Li, “The PLA’s Evolving Warfighting Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics, 1985–1995: A Chinese Perspective,” in David Shambaugh and Richard Yang, ed., *China’s Military in Transition* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1997), 186–188.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 190–191.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Godwin, “Compensating for Deficiencies: Doctrinal Evolution in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army,” in James C. Mulvenon, Andrew N. D. Yang, *Seeking Truth From Facts: A Retrospective on Chinese Military Studies in the Post-Mao Era* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2001), 98.

conducted in the Guangzhou MR, where the adversary was presumably Vietnam. ... The exercise directed at Vietnam focused on both coastal defense and the protection of China's territory in the South China Sea."<sup>47</sup>

By using forces titled as "fists" and "rapid response," and by ordering operating responsibilities as "door openers," scalpels, "steel hammers," and "booster," Godwin argues that the "PLA's moving toward using elite units in the opening phase of a conflict. Such units would be small, but better trained and equipped than the majority of the PLA. Another indicator of PLA planners' move toward more flexible, quick-reacting forces and away from mass armies as the source of military power."<sup>48</sup> The local and limited war concept has conclusively realigned PLA goals to become a more concentrated, offensive, quick, and destructive force.

On the other hand, Gurtov's and Hwang's description of the PLA's "limited and local war" is rather toned down. Their main argument supposes "Chinese analysts insist that their theory of modern limited war is based on the strategic guidance of active defense, in particular, the strategic guidance that in a limited war, one adheres to the principle of 'gaining mastery by striking only after the enemy has struck.' ... Thus, say Chinese analysts, the strategy is reasonable and restrained, a backup for and instrument of the PRC's peaceful foreign policy."<sup>49</sup> Later, they write "Indeed, what the Chinese leadership mostly seems to desire is to be free from outside pressure and blackmail and to ensure that if China is ever again subjected to subversion and invasion, it will be able to strike back with devastating effectiveness."<sup>50</sup> Gurtov's and Hwang's argument discounts the fact that limited and local war, with faster, flexible, and more destructive weapons, requires only a short period of time to shift from the original "people's war" doctrine and can adapt to real-time tactical and strategic condition changes.

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Godwin, "Compensating for Deficiencies: Doctrinal Evolution in the Chinese People's Liberation Army," in James C. Mulvenon, Andrew N. D. Yang, *Seeking Truth From Facts: A Retrospective on Chinese Military Studies in the Post-Mao Era* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2001), 98-99.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>49</sup> Mel Gurtov and Byong-moo Hwang, *China's Security: The New Roles of the Military Boulder* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 99.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

The PLA's modernization may be interpreted as a reasonable development of a military capability to match its neighboring nations capabilities, as suggested by Gurtov's and Hwang, but contrary points of view, with less benign interpretations, also should be considered in any evaluation of PLA modernization.

#### **4. Limited and Local War under High-tech Conditions**

Military doctrine and operations demonstrated by the United States during the Gulf War opened China's eyes to modern high-tech based military action; countless Chinese and Western military analysts acknowledge that this inspired the concept of "local war under high tech conditions." Such stimulation and awakening have encouraged the PLA to integrate multi-service combined-arms operations' tactics and to pursue an extended active defense doctrine of military actions. Furthermore, it accelerated the acquisition of more advanced weapons and equipment and generated leadership support for information and effects-based operations capability. Such new capabilities would enhance the elements introduced earlier under limited and local war concepts: concentrated, offensive, quick, and destructive capability that would allow the PLA to take decisive and initiative actions when the use of military is required.

In "Lessons of the Gulf War" Nan Li writes, "The Gulf War of 1991 served to eliminate the lingering doubts among the Chinese strategic planners on introducing the new limited war doctrine, principles and tactics, and has reinforced and accelerated China's push to modernize its military.... to involve 'new fighting styles,' to be high-tech, non-nuclear (but under nuclear deterrence), and resolved quickly."<sup>51</sup> As a result, Nan Li argues that the Gulf war forced the PLA to recognize element of modern, local war. In strategic principle, Nan Li argues that the Gulf War validated the principles of "victory through elite troops," "victory over inferiority through superiority," and "fighting a quick battle to gain quick solution," for the PLA.<sup>52</sup> The Gulf War further promoted a re-evaluation of "a strike only after the enemy has struck" perspective and

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<sup>51</sup> Nan Li, "The PLA's Evolving Warfighting Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics, 1985-1995: A Chinese Perspective," in David Shambaugh and Richard Yang, ed., *China's Military in Transition* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1997), 192.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-193.

resulted in a change to “gaining initiative by striking first,” in other words, “pre-emptive strike.”<sup>53</sup> Additionally, Li identifies the PLA’s development, and the de-valuation of the earlier approach of the importance of manpower-based hardware; he states that this was due to the recognition of importance of high-tech weapon systems which include intelligence, air defense, multi-function air combat arms, early warning, C3I system, satellites, precision guided munitions, and modern logistics.<sup>54</sup> Nan Li sums up the result of the Gulf War on the PLA as follows; “lessons learned from the Gulf War have largely eliminated the lingering doubts among the Chinese strategic planners over the introduction of the new doctrine, strategic principles and operational tactics, and has reinforced the current trend for more comprehensive defense modernization.”<sup>55</sup>

An additional lesson that the PLA learned from Gulf War was the effectiveness of high-tech joint operations. Godwin discusses that “The role of high-technology arms and supporting systems in Operation Desert Storm essentially confirmed earlier conclusions drawn by Chinese analysts evaluating the history of military operations in local, limited wars. What stunned ... was the effectiveness of high-technology joint operations.” This effectiveness in joint operations was identified in two aspects in particular, first in air operations and second in synergic multi-service actions synchronized with the ground war resulting in rapid and decisive outcomes. In other words, the Gulf War led the PLA to realize that not only were its weapons and equipment aspects outdated, but also its operational doctrine was antiquated as well.<sup>56</sup>

The PLA’s main conclusion from its analyses of limited war before the Gulf War was its realization of a need to change to a modern war concept. The subsequent conclusions that the PLA made, post Gulf War, moved far beyond this basic concept with the realization of the details and concepts they needed to emphasize in the future.

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<sup>53</sup> Nan Li, “The PLA’s Evolving Warfighting Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics, 1985–1995: A Chinese Perspective,” in David Shambaugh and Richard Yang, ed., *China’s Military in Transition* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1997), 192–193.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Godwin, “Compensating for Deficiencies: Doctrinal Evolution in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army,” in James C. Mulvenon, Andrew N. D. Yang, *Seeking Truth From Facts: A Retrospective on Chinese Military Studies in the Post-Mao Era* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2001), 101.

Godwin adds, “PLA researchers paid considerable attention to air operations.” Additionally, he notes (PLA General) Liu’s comment stating, “General Liu, however, did set priorities. Resources were focused on air and naval forces because war on land and sea can no longer be won without effective air power and because China’s extensive coastline and maritime territories required an effective navy.”<sup>57</sup> Godwin’s arguments underscore the point that the PLA was intent on developing a more capable Navy that would be capable of projecting its power in support of extended active defense. In his conclusion, Godwin, notes that the PLA realized its deficiencies and aimed at acquiring a better military, which would be capable of power projection in an extended operational area, all this to be done within local and limited war aspect.

## 5. Conclusion

Doctrinal change in the PLA argued by the professional literature confirms that the PLA opened its eyes to cutting-edge concepts of warfighting as executed by the world’s great power and advanced nations. The PLA also realized what it required to bridge the gap and to catch-up. Details of such efforts will follow in the next section. Today, China, even while facing many obstacles, continues the process of acquiring necessary military elements to narrowing this gap. There are some significant or relevant concepts that may be inferred from such a progressive processes including that as long as domestic politics and economic conditions are sufficient, the PLA will possess an effective military that is capable of ensuring China’s national interests with a more aggressive concept of military actions. A nation that has overwhelming military capability may be interpreted as being a potential threat to other nations, especially those with less capable militaries. One possible condition that may mitigate such tensions or threats could be extensive security building measures and third party participation to balance these conditions, possibly as suggested in pivotal deterrence theory.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Paul Godwin, “Compensating for Deficiencies: Doctrinal Evolution in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army,” in James C. Mulvenon, Andrew N. D. Yang, *Seeking Truth From Facts: A Retrospective on Chinese Military Studies in the Post-Mao Era* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2001), 103.

<sup>58</sup> Timothy W. Crawford, *Pivotal Deterrence Third-Party Statecraft and the Pursuit of Peace* (Cornell University Press, 2003), 187–201.

## **C. PLA-GROUND, PLA-MARITIME, AND PLA-AIR FORCE**

This section will outline the scope of possible threats by considering the quality and quantity of PLA forces. The current capability of the PLA will also be considered and the likely or possible range of PLA operations will be inferred from the development of these forces. The nominal premise in this part of the thesis is that, for the PLA in general, the number of its forces have been reduced but the quality of the remaining forces has either been improved, or is in the process of being improved. Such a comprehensive force change for the PLA, drives a logical or inescapable conclusion that security planners in Northeast Asia must consider that an aggressive military policy could now be implemented—especially if a coercive solution would be required for the best interest of China.

### **1. PLA Ground Force**

#### ***a. Strategic Paradigm***

The PLA Ground Forces' overall change in strategic paradigm coincides with a PLA doctrinal change of PLA modernization. Ground forces have improved in quality and been reduced in quantity, and are quicker, more effective, more decisive, and more capable of conducting information-based operations with high technology weapons. They are better versed in operations with joint services, even while their operational doctrine remains focused on ground operations. This strong force on ground operations, even while working with air assets, may let analysts conclude that relative to PLAN and PLAAF, the changes in ground forces may seem limited.

#### ***b. Size***

Godwin depicts the change in quantity for the PLA ground forces. The quantity of manpower has been reduced from 2,973,000 in 1985 to 2,200,000 in 1995. Field Armies disappeared and Group Armies were re-organized. The difference between the Field Army and the Group Army, according to Godwin, is that the Group Army is increasingly mechanized and has anti-air capability, in particular. Furthermore, the PLA had seven helicopter groups organized by 1995. An airborne division was maintained,

but nine Rapid Response Units also were established by 1995. In other words, PRC Ground Forces were modified to be faster and a stronger force by mechanization, but also better trained to recognize the effectiveness of air strikes.<sup>59</sup>

*c. Capability*

Although PLA ground forces did not have significant change relative to maritime and air forces. The ground force has improved its quality in accordance with PLA modernization policy. Paul H. B. Godwin suggests that with examples of the “‘fist and the ‘fifth arm’ of the navy” the main effort of the PLA’s ground forces is concentrated on creating ‘fist’ and rapid response units (RRU).” Due to the purpose represented in the name of the unit (RRU), airborne forces are especially important. Credible evidence presented by Godwin is “the 15<sup>th</sup> Group Army (Airborne) selected for training as ‘fist’ and rapid response units capable of being deployed anywhere in China within 24 hours..., and there are certainly additional units being prepared.” His second evidence is in the area of amphibious warfare: [It is the] “fifth arm of the navy.” The PLA Marine Corps were established in the early 1950s, disbanded once, but re-built again in 1980. Godwin notes how the PLA Marine Corps has the mission for amphibious operations in the South China Sea region. Additionally, they now have a regular army force structure that has expanded to the size of three divisions. The PLA Marines still face a constraint on their operations in the area of mobility and delivery of assets.<sup>60</sup>

*d. Conclusion*

The modernization of PLA Ground Forces is focused on shaping a force that will acquire a fast and decisive capability while expanding its capability to uses aviation assets while it can provide a defense for aviation assets. In other words, the

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<sup>59</sup> Paul H. B. Godwin, “From Continent to Periphery: PLA Doctrine, Strategy and Capabilities towards 2000,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 146, Special Issue: *China’s Military in Transition* (Cambridge University Press, Jun. 1996), 483, table 4: PRC Ground Forces, 1985–95, <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/pdfplus/655477.pdf> or <http://www.jstor.org/stable/655477> (accessed October 2, 2009).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 482.



forces are pursuing a three-dimensional operational capability to succeed in achieving quick, decisive tactical goals. On the strategic level, Mel Gurtov and Byong-moo Hwang suggest that the creation of such fast-acting, deployable forces may be interpreted as “the creation of China’s RRF (Rapid-Reaction Forces) and RDF (Rapid-Deployment Forces)” [and this] “may increase China’s ability to carry out active defense in such foreign environments as the Korean peninsula, the Indochina peninsula, the South Asian subcontinent, and Taiwan.”<sup>61</sup> The enhanced amphibious capability, in particular, may represent a more active and perceived offensive capability for pre-emptive purposes.

## 2. **PLA Maritime Force: PLAN (PLA Navy)**

The PLAN, like the ground force, has changed its quality and quantity, to conform with the PLA modernization policy. The new strategy has been applied to China’s strategic paradigm on where and how to use the PLAN. Under the guidance or higher-level goals to become more aggressive and have a more capable military, China has been reforming the PLAN and transforming it from a costal force (“brown water”) to an offshore (“blue water”) capable military.

### *a. Strategic Paradigm*

The context for PLAN modernization is the strategic paradigm of “Offshore Defense.”<sup>62</sup> “Offshore Defense” is a component of the PLA’s “Active Defense” strategic guidelines. Such defense follows several basic principles. The noteworthy aspect of this principle is that it asserts “‘Overall, our military strategy is defensive. We attack only after being attacked. *But our operations are offensive,*’ ‘Space or time will not limit our counter-offensives,’ ‘We will not put boundaries on the limits of our offensives.’”<sup>63</sup> Those principles, despite the premise stating that the PLA would attack only when attacked, shows the potential and possibilities for the PLAN to execute extended operations for an unclear period of time and with offensive actions. In

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<sup>61</sup> Mel Gurtov and Byong-moo Hwang, *China’s Security: The New Roles of the Military* Boulder (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 109.

<sup>62</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, *China’s Navy 2007*, Ch 4, 23–30, <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/oni/chinanavy2007.pdf> (accessed September 10, 2009).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

other words, it does not constrain the PLAN's potential projection of power. A report by the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence notes that the PLAN's "Offshore Defense" extends its "operational reach" up to the "two island chain," or 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).<sup>64</sup>

Another important link suggesting insights into the PLAN's intent is public PLAN writings about its campaign types. According to the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence, one of six key types of PLAN campaigns is the Sea-to-Land Attack Campaign.<sup>65</sup> Based on the type of ships and forces in the Chinese Naval inventory, it is unlikely and unfeasible for the PLAN to conduct sea-to-land attack on targets in Europe, Africa, or the American continents, now and for the foreseeable future. Therefore campaigns of the type mentioned in this strategy are likely to be targeted objectives in close vicinity of China. These could include: Southeast Asian nations, Taiwan, the Korean peninsula, and Japan. It is particularly applicable to the island chains and archipelago in Northeast Asia that includes Japan, and also may relate to other areas including South Korea, Taiwan, and even the Philippines. It is clear that the PLAN's shift in its strategic paradigm and its development of naval campaign plans of this type suggest a potential security threat to China's neighboring nations.

***b. Size and Capability***

The total number of personnel in PLAN was reduced from 350,000 in 1985 to 260,000 in 1995.<sup>66</sup> However, the number of PLAN ships has been increased, especially those which are high-tech based, or with extended operational capabilities, and supportive of (at least) regional power projection. At the same time, old PLAN assets have been retired and replaced with newer ones. The PLAN overall "has focused on

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<sup>64</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, *China's Navy 2007*, Ch 4, 26, <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/oni/chinanavy2007.pdf> (accessed September 10, 2009).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 23–30, 27.

<sup>66</sup> Paul H. B. Godwin, "From Continent to Periphery: PLA Doctrine, Strategy and Capabilities towards 2000," *The China Quarterly*, no. 146, Special Issue: *China's Military in Transition* (Cambridge University Press, Jun. 1996), Table 1. PRC Naval Forces 1985–95 (Major Combatants) and Focused Modernization Naval forces section, 474–478, <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/pdfplus/655477.pdf> or <http://www.jstor.org/stable/655477> (accessed October 2, 2009).

amphibious warfare and naval operations requiring replenishment-at-sea (RAS). Both types of operations illustrate Beijing's desire to extend its navy's combat capabilities beyond coastal defense. As Table 1 demonstrates, China's naval programs have focused on extending their operational range beyond coastal defense, including amphibious and submarine warfare."

Godwin offers some tangible evidence of PLAN modernization including: "two new classes of surface combatants, the 4,500-ton Luh-class (type 052) guided missile destroyer (DDG) and the 2,750-ton Jiangwei-class (type 055) guided missile frigate (FFG), replenishment-at-sea capabilities, amphibious warfare ships, and improving submarine warfare capabilities through the purchase of Kilo-class diesel-electric submarines (SSK) from Russia and developing a new Chinese designed SSK—the Song-class now undergoing sea-trials."<sup>67</sup> Acquisition of a French *Crotale* surface-to-air missile (SAM) system, French *Exocet*-based C801 ship-to-ship missile (SSM), Italian torpedo launchers and French *Dauphin-2*-based Z-9A helicopters shows the intention of enhancing PLAN surface and anti-subsurface combat operational capability.

The PLAN increased its number of Oilers (AO) and store ships (AK) in order to enhance RAS. The following data backed Godwin's argument, "new 11,000-ton *Dayun-class* AK carrying two *Super Frelon* SA-321 helicopters for vertical replenishment" acquired by PLAN in 1995.<sup>68</sup>

For amphibious warfare, Godwin also stated, "new classes of troop transport and amphibious landing vessels have been constructed in the last decade in an effort to enhance the PLA's capabilities within China's immediate waters and the South China Sea."<sup>69</sup> Evidence of newer amphibious warfare capability in Godwin's argument is *Yukan* and *Yuting-class* LST.

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<sup>67</sup> Paul H. B. Godwin, "From Continent to Periphery: PLA Doctrine, Strategy and Capabilities towards 2000," *The China Quarterly*, no. 146, Special Issue: *China's Military in Transition* (Cambridge University Press, Jun. 1996), 474, <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/pdfplus/655477.pdf> or <http://www.jstor.org/stable/655477> (accessed October 2, 2009).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 475.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 475.

Change in the submarine force in PLAN also follows this trend. As noted by Godwin, the PLAN has decommissioned 50 percent of its forces and a modernized process has been implemented on the remaining forces. According to Godwin, PLAN initially put its efforts into the development of nuclear powered submarines. However, he expects that PLAN has encountered many difficulties in technology and budgets; therefore, current PLAN is focusing on diesel-powered submarines that also provide significant enough sea power.<sup>70</sup>

Ellis Joffe states that, “the number of ships is estimated to have increased enormously since about 1970.”<sup>71</sup> The conventional submarine force has tripled from thirty-five to 100 vessels; over thirty-five guided-missile destroyers and frigates have been commissioned; at least one nuclear powered missile submarine and two nuclear-powered attack submarines have been placed in service; various auxiliary vessels, including long-range supply ships, have been built.” Joffe also identifies the purpose of such an increase of PLAN in an interview with Liu Huaqing, the assistant chief of staff of the PLA, who has significantly influenced the modernization of the navy. At the time (in 1985) Liu Huaqing’s stated, “China has a coastline of more than 18,000 kilometers, more than 6,000 islands and an expanse of ocean spanning 3.5 million square kilometers. To protect its coast and maritime interests, China attaches great importance to developing the navy, and this ‘includes the emphatic development of its submarine force’, whose essential characteristics are concealment, endurance, self-supporting capability, and striking strength....submarine operations were limited to coastal water, but now they extend to the sea areas of the western Pacific and the far-off islands.”

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<sup>70</sup> Paul H. B. Godwin, “From Continent to Periphery: PLA Doctrine, Strategy and Capabilities towards 2000,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 146, Special Issue: *China’s Military in Transition* (Cambridge University Press, Jun. 1996), 478, <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/pdfplus/655477.pdf> or <http://www.jstor.org/stable/655477> (accessed October 2, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> Ellis Joffe, *The Chinese Army After Mao* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 110–111.

c. *Aircraft Carrier*

In addition to the naval assets described above, PLAN's process of acquiring an aircraft carrier has been a "hot" issue.<sup>72</sup> Regarding aircraft carrier(s), Liu Huaqing also played a great role. According to Liu (as reiterated by Ian Storey and You Ji), PLAN doctrine will be upgraded through two conceptual phases. The first was "green-water active defense" and the second is "blue water navy" where the PLAN will be capable of projecting China's power to the Western Pacific. Storey and You write, "Liu believed that in order to fulfill a blue-water capability, the PLAN had to obtain aircraft carriers." Liu's argument that aircraft carriers are essential to protect China's sovereignty as related to the Taiwan issue and for maritime interests that mainly are resources and sea line of communication (SLOC) related territorial security issues. In order to maintain and secure such interests, the PLAN should work to gain a decisive edge in future naval warfare, and an aircraft carrier would play a significant role in this (according to Liu in Storey and You).

Currently the PLAN is focusing on "two combat models: the first is the independent employment of naval power, and the second is that of joint operations with other services, particularly the army."<sup>73</sup> Storey and You conclude, "Ultimately, though, the (PLAN) goal is to fulfill the first model," which is "the independent employment of naval power."<sup>74</sup> Storey and You argue that, in detail the objectives of PLAN (in accordance with previously discussed two combat models) are "sea control and sea denial." Furthermore, those objectives, in order to defend China—"the Bohai Sea Strait, the Taiwan Strait, and the Qiongzhou Strait" as the inner line of defense and the two island chains that span from "Japan to the Liuqi Islands, then to Taiwan and the Philippines" and "Japan's Ogasawara-gunto Islands to the Marianas" as the outer layer of China's maritime defense line.

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<sup>72</sup> Ian Storey & You Ji, "China's Aircraft Carrier Ambitions-Seeking Truth From Rumors," *Naval War College Review*, vol. LVII, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 77-93, <http://www.usnwc.edu/Publications/Naval-War-College-Review/2004---Winter.aspx> (accessed November 1, 2009).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-93.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

Based on the preceding intentions, the PLAN has made owning an aircraft carrier a priority. Efforts and processes to that end are still under way; however, these plans have altered the main effort of PLAN development a bit. Since China's primary security concern has focused on Taiwan independence, concerns and efforts to acquire an aircraft carrier have been moderated.<sup>75</sup> While an aircraft carrier is considered an essential means to project PLAN power at great distance from China's coast, Taiwan is relatively close and possible operations concerning Taiwan would be conducted within China's inner defense line. If the United States were to intervene, it could do so with forces of the U.S. Navy with aircraft carriers that wield enormous firepower. For this reason, PLAN's defense policy has shifted (or broadened) to focus on building a submarine force that is less vulnerable to enemy attack and less costly to maintain, and under certain conditions, even more cost effective in combat than an aircraft carrier with its support ships.

China's aircraft carrier development has been a big issue for the PLAN, but it has slipped in priority due to practical force-and-security considerations. Additionally, it suggests that PLAN leaders and strategists have calculated that directly opposing the U.S. Navy's aircraft carrier battle group in the short term with its own nascent carrier force might not be effective and may border on an irrational approach. However, budget, time, and proper technologies plus continued PLAN leader interest in maritime power projection suggest that the PLAN is unlikely to abandon its decision to develop an aircraft carrier. This is constantly reinforced by the continued PLA emphasis on amphibious operations and air force capability. Abolishing the goal of having an aircraft carrier that would be the peak asset for projecting power under these conditions seems unlikely.

#### *d. Conclusion*

Despite difficulties, the PLAN has focused on abandoning old and unnecessary assets and has focused on building stronger surface ships, anti-submarine

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<sup>75</sup> Ian Storey & You Ji, "China's Aircraft Carrier Ambitions-Seeking Truth From Rumors," *Naval War College Review*, vol. LVII, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 77-93, <http://www.usnwc.edu/Publications/Naval-War-College-Review/2004---Winter.aspx> (accessed November 1, 2009).

naval air assets, amphibious ships, and RAS capable ships and helicopters. Such efforts provide better power projection, capability and range. Even though, the current PLAN is more focused on its submarine force vice developing an aircraft carrier, its intentions are still in projecting its power at a distance from China's mainland coastal line in the active defense concept. Emphasis on amphibious assets, along with high-tech naval vessels and sea-based missiles shows the intentions or ambitions of China. Additionally, since China's military doctrine has included pre-emptive attack, the general assessment of the overall effect of PLAN modernization can logically appear threatening to other nations in the region. Accordingly, Gurtov and Hwang state that "Nevertheless, the Beijing leadership probably considers a strengthened navy to be the ultimate guarantor of its claims. Of particular importance is that China's offshore active defense strategy bears directly on its behavior in the two unresolved sovereignty issues ... Taiwan unification and the Spratly Islands."<sup>76</sup>

### **3. PLA Air Force (PLAAF)**

#### ***a. Doctrine***

China's PLA Air Force (PLAAF)'s formal air defense strategy has not been openly or publicly stated. Its missions are generally believed to be to conduct air defense and to support army and naval operations. According to Kenneth W. Allen, "Although the PLAAF has conducted its primary mission of air defense for 45 years, the air force still does not have a formalized air defense strategy and probably will not have one in the foreseeable future."<sup>77</sup> The particular expression used by Gurtov and Hwang to describe the PLAAF's strategy is "comprehensive strike in-depth strategy. ... If an enemy's aircraft intrudes into Chinese airspace, PLAAF will not only use all its air defense assets; it will carry out a counterattack deep inside the enemy's territory."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Mel Gurtov and Byong-moo Hwang, *China's Security: The New Roles of the Military* Boulder (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 120.

<sup>77</sup> Kenneth W. Allen, Glenn Krumeel, and Jonathan Pollack, *China's Air Force Enters the 21st Century* (Santa Monica CA: RAND, 1995), 109, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR580/MR580.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR580/MR580.pdf) (accessed November 1, 2009).

<sup>78</sup> Mel Gurtov and Byong-moo Hwang, *China's Security: The New Roles of the Military* Boulder (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 120.

Gurtov and Hwang also state that “A second view calls for crafting a rapid-reaction strategy. ... The primary military requirements for rapid-reaction strategy are to strengthen intelligence and command and communications, and to organize rapid-reaction units equivalent to those of foreign countries for coping with sudden, high-intensity warfare” and “limited-space flexible response (*youxian kongjian linghuo fanying*).”<sup>79</sup> Gurtov provides a third PLAAF strategy that is to be active within a certain operational area and to conform military actions to the political and strategic objectives decided by China's leaders.<sup>80</sup>

**b. Quantity and Quality**

As regards quantity, the PLAAF did not change as significantly as either the PLAN or the PLA Ground Force. Comparing PLAAF manpower in 1985 and 1995, Godwin shows that the quantity reduced by only 20,000 men. However, the number of newer fighters increased—especially SU-27s. Military reconnaissance aircraft including the JZ-5 and the JG-6 (MiG-17 and Mig-19 variants) were added. Military lift or transport aircraft also were increased. The acquisition of aerial tankers and the Chinese version of AWACS were not identified and were left unknown.<sup>81</sup>

According to Allen, PLAAF documents published in 2000 show the changes in fighter platforms for the in PLAAF. “By 2010, the PLAAF’s fighter force will most likely consist of between 1,500 and 2,000 aircraft, with almost the entire J-6s and early models J-7s retired. The remaining force will consist of modified J-7s and J-8s. These aircraft will initially be complemented by and then replaced by the J-11 (Su-27), J-10, and Su-30.”<sup>82</sup> However, Godwin argues that the PLAAF’s efforts to obtain next level

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<sup>79</sup> Mel Gurtov and Byong-moo Hwang, *China’s Security: The New Roles of the Military* Boulder (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 121.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>81</sup> Paul H. B. Godwin, “From Continent to Periphery: PLA Doctrine, Strategy and Capabilities towards 2000,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 146, Special Issue: *China’s Military in Transition* (Cambridge University Press, Jun. 1996), 478–480, <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/pdfplus/655477.pdf> or <http://www.jstor.org/stable/655477> (accessed October 2, 2009).

<sup>82</sup> Kenneth W. Allen, “PLA Air Force Operations and Modernization,” in Susan M. Puska, ed., *People’s Liberation Army After Next* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, August 2000), 215–218, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=67> (accessed November 5, 2009).



fighter capability (enhanced third and new fourth generation fighters) is evidence of the PLA's ambitious intent. "When combined with the PLAN's efforts to improve its long-range operational capabilities, the Su-27 is a clear indicator of Beijing's intent."<sup>83</sup> However, regarding the PLAAF's modernization (especially in acquiring Su-27s), Gurtov and Hwang add the caveat that "only gradually is it likely to emerge as a decisive factor in the regional airpower equation."<sup>84</sup>

For aerial transports assets, it is generally believed by China watchers that the PLAAF is not fully equipped, but to some degree has been procuring aerial lift to support the PLA's increased tempo and concepts of a rapid reaction strategy.<sup>85</sup> The growing amphibious forces and airborne forces would require such lift in order to be brought into operations.

An Airborne Early Warning (AEW) asset in PLAAF is yet another area in which the PLA is investing. Regardless of how the PLAAF ultimately acquires its AEW assets, its intention is to add AEW into the PLAAF inventory. The AEW is essential in modern air combat in order to promote the most effective use of fighter assets against enemies, especially without a significant air-air refueling tanker fleet, and considering the potential long distances from fighter bases to possible combat zones. Intelligence collection aircraft (ICA) is a complementary aspect or area of growing emphasis for the PLAAF. The ICA is related to Signals Intelligence (SIGINT), Electronic Warfare (EW), Communications Intelligence (COMINT), and Electronic Intelligence (ELINT). Kenneth Allen argues that the PLAAF is bent upon acquiring such assets by purchasing and copying Israeli and Soviet platforms of these types. Moreover, the PLAAF also is trying

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<sup>83</sup> Paul H. B. Godwin, "From Continent to Periphery: PLA Doctrine, Strategy and Capabilities towards 2000," *The China Quarterly*, no. 146, Special Issue: *China's Military in Transition* (Cambridge University Press, Jun. 1996), 478–480, <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/pdfplus/655477.pdf> or <http://www.jstor.org/stable/655477> (accessed October 2, 2009).

<sup>84</sup> Mel Gurtov and Byong-moo Hwang, *China's Security: The New Roles of the Military* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 124.

<sup>85</sup> Kenneth W. Allen, "PLA Air Force Operations and Modernization," in Susan M. Puska, ed., *People's Liberation Army After Next* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, August 2000), 219, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=67> (accessed November 5, 2009).

to modify its existing assets to adopt such capabilities.<sup>86</sup> These capabilities were demonstrated by the United States in Iraq and proved the value and importance of their role in modern combat.

In addition to the variety of existing constraints in the development of PLAAF, there also is another internal aspect, namely the resource competition with the PLAN's goal of acquiring an aircraft carrier. One of the PLAAF's missions is to support PLAN operations. Aerial support in naval operation is extremely valuable, and debates continue over whether having an aircraft carrier that could replace PLAAF assets would be a viable alternative course of action for PLA leadership. According to Godwin, however, the cost of acquiring and maintaining an aircraft carrier and assets required to protect such a large and vulnerable platform is not reasonable (in comparison with PLAAF costs to capabilities).<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the prospect of continued PLAAF modernization at a fast pace remains more likely than a large diversion of PLAAF resources to support the aircraft carrier project.

### *c. Conclusion*

The PLAAF is facing many constraints in its modernization and expansion of future combat capabilities. More germane to this thesis is understanding what kind of assets with which capabilities the PLAAF is trying or expected to procure, rather than focusing on whether or not the PLAAF actually can acquire a certain capability.

The PLAAF is adding late-generation high-capability fighters, as well as those resources that extend its operational capabilities such as tankers, information gathering assets, command and control assets, and electronic warfare assets as well. This PLAAF process and the PLA leadership decisions supporting this extensive modernization may be interpreted, when taken in conjunction with the PLA ground and

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<sup>86</sup> Kenneth W. Allen, "PLA Air Force Operations and Modernization," in Susan M. Puska, ed., *People's Liberation Army After Next* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, August 2000), 219, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=67> (accessed November 5, 2009).

<sup>87</sup> Paul H. B. Godwin, "From Continent to Periphery: PLA Doctrine, Strategy and Capabilities towards 2000," *The China Quarterly*, no. 146, Special Issue: *China's Military in Transition* (Cambridge University Press, Jun. 1996), 482, <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/pdfplus/655477.pdf> or <http://www.jstor.org/stable/655477> (accessed October 2, 2009).

maritime force modernizations, as an indicator that the PLA, including its Air Forces, is intent upon becoming the most capable and powerful military in the region, just as Gurtov argues.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The PLA modernization has been the result of conscious leadership decisions to insulate or protect China against any threats that could be posed by internal and external elements. China's force modernization has adapted or changed in its international and regional dynamic or context. The PLA doctrine has been the starting point for modernizations, and PLA doctrine has been transformed or reformed from "people's war" to "local and limited war under high-tech modern condition." The concept in this evolution or change was the realization that massive mobilization for a total war to annihilate one's enemy is obsolete. Effective, efficient, and concise war has become the trend. In order to implement these revised, modern concepts of war, the PLA needs to be high-tech-based, more precise, more lethal, capable of rapid, joint-service operations based on new command and control, and information-gathering assets.

The PLA's ground, maritime and air forces have been modernized in accordance with these changes in doctrine. Although all PLA services have struggled with budget constraints and adopting new technologies, all three services have been moving forward. The Ground Force has pursued rapid reaction forces, more mechanized and more lethal forces. Maritime forces have been obtaining required assets to project power further out from China's coastline. In terms of power projection, even the concept of an aircraft carrier has been seriously and deeply considered by the PLA. PLA air forces also have constantly evolved and acquired new precision weapons and more lethal platforms while simultaneously working to extend the operational range and information management assets of its force.

Conclusively, the scope and direction of the PLA ground, maritime, and air force modernizations are providing enough evidence to conclude that the PLA is intent upon obtaining pre-emptive operations, aggressive and active defense capabilities for its new military forces. Such modernizations are greatly extending the PLA's capability to

project military power and to promote China's national interests as well as to protect its security. In a realistic assessment, Nan Li briefly describes PLA modernization as follows: "The consequences of these changes on the security of China's neighbors has already been felt. For this reason, the PLA requires more careful scrutiny, and China's defense policy and posture more serious rethinking."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Nan Li, "The PLA's Evolving Warfighting Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics, 1985–1995: A Chinese Perspective," in David Shambaugh and Richard Yang, ed., *China's Military in Transition* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1997), 199.

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### **III. RELATIONSHIPS OF SOUTH KOREA, CHINA, AND THE UNITED STATES**

The previous chapter has shown where PLA modernization is heading and what kind of capability the PLA will have to promote or secure China's perceived national interests. China's intention has been to reshape its military into a force capable of projecting power further away from its territory and operate under a doctrine in which its capabilities might be used in pre-emptive actions. The PLAN, in particular, is focused on securing and supporting China's interests in the South China Sea and its actions and developments have signaled China's intent to extend its military reach toward its neighbors. If China's strategic arsenal of nuclear weapons is considered as well, the dangers posed to the neighboring nations are even greater, even as China claims it has such forces only for deterrence purposes.

This chapter will investigate security relations between South Korea, China, and the United States. Since the purpose of this thesis is to identify the effect of PLA modernization on South Korean security, an examination of security relations between South Korea and China will initiate this section. It is obvious, but still needs stating, that this review needs to include an examination of the United States' role in Northeast Asia because of the significant U.S. influence and presence there—especially regarding Korean security. The three relationships of South Korea-China, South Korea-the United States, and China-the United States may provide insights into the question of how and what the present security conditions are among these three nations in the region; it also may explain several “hot issues” that those three nations are confronting.

All of the elements of national power influence relations among nations. The traditional construct or analysis generally considers four elements of national power including: diplomacy, informational power, military power, and economic power. Diplomacy represents the governmental official standpoint. Information includes the culture and the historical aspects. The military deals with pragmatic security-related issues (vice the limited force-on-force considerations). Finally, economic aspects provide the national purpose of commercial or welfare interests.

## A. SOUTH KROEA—CHINA RELATIONSHIP

From ancient history, relations between Korea and China have vacillated between friend and foe.<sup>89</sup> The relationship has varied depending on both domestic and international conditions. After World War II, with the emergence of the Cold War, China was occupied by a communist regime and Korea was divided into two different regimes: communist in the North and democratic in the South. During that period, both South Korea and China faced each other as an enemy's ally. As the Cold War evolved, that relationship hardened, and remained so until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. In 1992, South Korea and China finally reestablished official diplomatic relations. One immediate side effect of this change was that this reestablishment forced South Korea to terminate its official diplomatic relationship with Taiwan. Since both China's and Korea's governments were established after World War II, and experienced a mutually adversarial relationship until the end of Cold War, any sudden move toward friendly trust was not easy, nor to be expected.

However, since China's reform era, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the economic development of China became a central goal for China; and under these new conditions, cooperating with South Korea was now beneficial to China, and vice versa. Kornberg and Faust note that "However, security issues may conflict with these economic goals. China's leaders will have to assess if and when security goals will necessarily supersede economic goals. Their decisions will have a profound effect on East Asia and the world."<sup>90</sup> In other words, the economic goals, so far in China, have superseded other interests. More precisely, Jae Ho Chung describes Sino-South Korean relations as follows:<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Historical data in this paragraph is from National Archives of Korea, <http://www.archives.go.kr/english/index.jsp> (accessed October 29, 2009).

<sup>90</sup> Judith F. Kornberg and John R. Faust, *China in World Politics: Policies, Processes, Prospects*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 19.

<sup>91</sup> Jae Ho Chung, "South Korea-China Economic Relations: The current Situation and Its Implications," *University of California Press*, vol. 28, no. 10 (October 1988), 1045. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/2644705.pdf> (accessed November 12, 2009).

First, China needs a peaceful international environment in which first, China needs a peaceful international environment in which it can devote itself fully to modernization. Second, China needs capital and technology from the outside, without which the modernization plan cannot be achieved. Third, the open-door policy, the logical consequence of the desire for external assistance, requires flexibility rather than the dogmatism of the Mao era. These three characteristics at work in Chinese policy toward Korea mean that: (1) China seeks peace and stability on the peninsula, any disruption of which will lead Beijing to an agonizing dilemma between supporting North Korea and antagonizing the United States and Japan, or standing by idly and losing North Korea completely to the Soviet Union; (2) China sees benefit in economic contacts with South Korea, which can help China gain foreign currency and medium-level technology through trade and joint ventures; and (3) the opening and the maintenance of the contacts require abandonment of China's antagonistic and dogmatic posture toward South Korea.

Therefore, the South Korea-China relationship will be dealt with in several aspects.

### **1. Diplomatic Aspect**

Diplomacy is implemented in accordance with national strategic policy. Taeho Kim provides insight into China's strategic goals on the Korean peninsula, which he states are: "a) stability and tension reduction; b) economic cooperation with South Korea and traditional ties with North Korea; c) its own role and influence, which often come at the expense of the ubiquitous United States; and d) harmonization of its peninsular interests with its global and regional ones—most notably its own unification agenda for Taiwan."<sup>92</sup>

For stability purposes, China has been actively involved in organizing Six-Party Talks regarding North Korean nuclear issues. In tension reduction, China maintains diplomatic relations with both North and South Korea, so that its relations may stand at the center of tension; and China's decisions or actions may influence the tension in accordance with its (China's) national interests. Since China's national interests center on economic prosperity, its diplomatic relations stimulate other elements to support the

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<sup>92</sup> Taeho Kim, "Sino-ROK Relations at a Crossroads: Looming Tensions amid Growing Interdependence," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XVII, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 133.



economic element. In other words, diplomatic relations endeavor to form favorable conditions for China to enhance its economic interests. Such actions are correlated to “its own role and influence.”

Indeed, since the Sino-South Korea diplomatic reestablishment, both nations have enhanced diplomatic interactions. Regarding this situation, Taeho Kim comments “In short, the generational turnover in the Chinese leadership, in tandem with its need to maintain political and social stability, would likely reinforce its current pragmatic policy orientation toward the Korean peninsula.... [I]t will continue to put an emphasis on the importance of growing ties with Seoul.”<sup>93</sup> Diplomacy on the issue of unification on the Korean peninsula also may provide a favorable standpoint for China in the international context. Suggesting peaceful, but independent and gradual unification on the Korean peninsula may let China represent its peaceful intention, independent from United States intervention, and provide enough time to prepare for an unaffected unification. Therefore, China’s diplomatic relations with South Korea are well calculated and based on its own self-interest, vice any notion of promoting prosperity of the region. The corollary to this observation is that there is a possibility that any time when China’s interests are no longer being met, it is (at best) uncertain that China will maintain its current posture. China may need more credible confidence building measures.

North Korea and Taiwan play similar roles in China- South Korea diplomatic relations. However, South Korea discontinued formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan when it reestablished its relationship with China. On the other hand, China continues to maintain diplomatic relations with North Korea. Maintenance or discontinuance of a state’s diplomatic relations with another nation is not a simple matter, and other states are, by definition or situation, involved in the issue. A sudden collapse of North Korea may or may not be beneficial to China. Such uncertainty may have been a reason for China’s constant diplomatic relationship with North Korea. Conversely, the discontinuation of diplomatic relations with Taiwan for South Korea would not affect either state critically in the important area of economics or trade. Throughout the period

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<sup>93</sup> Taeho Kim, “Sino-ROK Relations at a Crossroads: Looming Tensions amid Growing Interdependence,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XVII, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 137.

of that change, the United States has served as a Sino–Taiwan stabilizer, or performed a pivotal security role. Therefore, even though China maintains diplomatic relations with North Korea, it could re-establish relations with South Korea.

## **2. Information Aspect**

On the informational aspect, both China and South Korea conduct significant amounts of cultural information sharing. Information in areas vital to national security such as nuclear, military high technology, and information warfare are not in the scope of this effort. However cultural and academic aspects are widely shared between the two countries.

Taeho Kim, according to an interview with ROK’s ambassador to the PRC, describes the trend as follows, “The frequency of contacts between the two sides is evidenced by over 20,000 Korean companies in operation throughout China, 380 passenger flights per week (i.e., about 54 flights per day), and by about 38,000 Korean students in China. Which means that as there are altogether over 85,000 foreign students in China, two out of five foreign students in China come from South Korea!” and “An array of other impressive statistics abounds in the area of tourism, educational and cultural ties—most notably the co-called ‘Korean wave’ (Hanliu) and ‘China fever’—boosting cultural ties between the two countries. This positive trend—which is likely to continue for the foreseeable future—will undoubtedly contribute to the ROK’s economic development.”<sup>94</sup>

This increasing social-informational activity may not always result in a positive end-state. The more interaction between the two cultures, the more conflicts may arise. Historical reevaluations that are related to territorial issues, violations of regulations due to the differences in culture, and discontent stemming from economic activities between the two may rise as double-edged sword.

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<sup>94</sup> Taeho Kim, “Sino-ROK Relations at a Crossroads: Looming Tensions amid Growing Interdependence,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XVII, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 134.

### 3. Military Aspect

In the military arena, which is the final and critical element in protecting national security, relations have not been considered or as actively pursued between the two, although there is general military diplomacy to promote positive military relations. Superficially, China and South Korea have exchanged interactions of high military officials and naval ship visits to each other's ports. However, pragmatic military actions and combined exercises have yet to be considered or conducted.

In Taeho Kim's article, Sino-South Korea relations are described as follows, "Between South Korea and China, on the other hand, there have been more frequent, more regular, and higher-level visits in recent years in the so-called 'military exchanges and cooperation' field."<sup>95</sup> And, "[T]heir militaries have gradually but steadily increased the scope of military-to-military exchanges and cooperation. It should be noted, however, that compared with the other nonmilitary aspects of their bilateral ties the 'military exchanges and cooperation' have yet to be balanced and institutionalized."<sup>96</sup>

Relatively speaking, the United States and South Korea share a significant amount of military cooperation including combined exercises. Moreover, Japan and the United States also conduct combined military exercises, especially combined naval exercises in Hawaii: the Rim of Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise, held biannually with all three nations included. Of course, relations of U.S.—South Korea and Japan are not like the relationship of Sino-South Korea. If the diplomatic, information, and economic areas of Sino-South Korean relations prosper, then military aspects will follow with a closer connection as well. In fact, however, there has never been a combined military operation other than a humanitarian assistance exercise conducted between China and South Korea within the region.

The Sino-South Korea relationship seems based on the national interests of the two nations, which seek aversion, and opportunism, as any other nations in the world. The guiding aspect or point for this relationship is that it may be fragile because the

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<sup>95</sup> Taeho Kim, "Sino-ROK Relations at a Crossroads: Looming Tensions amid Growing Interdependence," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XVII, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 139.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

common interests China and South Korea share may not be strong enough to maintain in a positive manner when they face problems or issues in their relationship. Economic prosperity is a goal for both nations, but it is difficult to limit national satisfaction or contacts to economics, even if there is shared economic prosperity. It is likely that under current conditions, the current positive relations could be undermined if other factors rise between the commercial contacts. Therefore, the current connection may be interpreted as not being a security-building factor that would promote mutual understanding or trust between the two nations.

Taeho Kim says of Sino-South Korea relations, “In short, the current state of the Sino-South Korean relationship can be likened to standing right in the eye of the typhoon without knowing where the shelter is, or to what Chairman Mao Zedong opined in the late 1950s in the middle of the disastrous ‘Great Leap Forward’—‘dizzy with success,’ which claimed the lives of 30 million people.”<sup>97</sup> Therefore, in order to strengthen mutual bonds and anticipate positive and productive relations for the prosperity in the region, enhancing military relations seems to be the effective answer.

In conclusion, historically, China and South Korea have experienced both positive and negative relations. Even after diplomatic normalization, the relationship remains based on limited factors such as economic interests or an aversion to North Korean instability. It is not grounded in a wider, or deeper shared vision of regional interests. The two nations have not and still are not building credibility between their two militaries except on a limited, perhaps superficial level. Therefore, current conditions between the two states may still be considered as fragile, and additional efforts would be required to create credible trust and stability in the region.

#### **4. Economic Aspect**

Sino-South Korean economic relations is a most remarkable area. Data from South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade show that in 2004, total trade (including Hong Kong) with China was U.S.\$99.8 billion and in 2004 it was

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<sup>97</sup> Taeho Kim, “Sino-ROK Relations at a Crossroads: Looming Tensions amid Growing Interdependence,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XVII, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 131.

U.S.\$222.3 billion. South Korea's total trade in 2008 was U.S.\$877 billion and the amount of trade with China in 2008 was U.S.\$222 billion. China trade is more than 25 percent of South Korea's total trade. Furthermore, the trade surplus with China, including Hong Kong, was U.S.\$32 billion, which is South Korea's largest trade surplus. For example, the relative trade surplus with the United States was (only) U.S.\$8 billion.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, considering China's potential market, the total amount of trade has the possibility of growing even further.

However, Taeho Kim warns "At the same time, however, it should be borne in mind that Korea's increasing economic dependency on China is a double-edged sword which could restrain the ROK's diplomatic options by allowing China to enhance its position and influence on the peninsula."<sup>99</sup>

In sum, it is quite obvious that the economic relationship between China and South Korea has taken off and is still growing. Also, there are no doubts that such a relationship is contributing to each side's national interests. However relying too much on one aspect is not a healthy structure for the long term, otherwise constant credit-building measures should be implemented. Economic relations with China are contributing to the prosperity of South Korea, but it also may simultaneously be fostering too much reliance on and fostering new constraints or limits to South Korea's national strategic decisions in other aspects.

## 5. Conclusion

The overall Sino-South Korea relationship seems positive, but it has several vulnerable points, which may be causes of fragility in the relationship. The Sino-South Korean relationship is enjoying shared benefits. However, South Korean leaders should be mindful that the current relationship is fragile and additional confidence building

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<sup>98</sup> Data was accumulated from Republic of Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <http://www.mofat.go.kr/english/econtrade/bilateral/issues/index.jsp>, (Korea-China Trade and Investment (2006) (accessed October 28, 2009), and <http://www.mofat.go.kr/economic/economicdata/statistics/index.jsp>, (Eurinara Gyungjetongsang Tongjiye (2009.9) [South Korean economic commerce statistics(2009.9)], (accessed October 28, 2009).

<sup>99</sup> Taeho Kim, "Sino-ROK Relations at a Crossroads: Looming Tensions amid Growing Interdependence," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XVII, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 134.

measures should be followed. Even if such measures are implemented, it will take quite a long time to build the credibility. Therefore, relations with China should be cautiously monitored and constant efforts to enhance the relationship should be followed. Taeho Kim illustrates this by saying, “In the long and often tortuous path to Korean security and unification, China will be no substitute for the United States for the foreseeable future.... [I]t is necessary to understand correctly that the ongoing trends and developments in South Korea’s interactions with the United States and China could be of a fundamental and lasting nature, to warrant cooler thinking on the unfolding strategic configuration for the Korean peninsula and beyond.”<sup>100</sup>

## **B. SOUTH KOREA--THE UNITED STATES RELATIONSHIP**

The recurring question by leaders and analysts in both countries is whether or not the South Korea-United States relationship is strong or weak. This question will be considered here through the four aspects of national power.

The background of the relationship between the two nations is as follows. Korea obtained its independence as the result of Japan’s unconditional surrender at the end of WW II. The method to resolve the question of how to manage the process of establishing or liberating the newly-independent nations post WW II was discussed in the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in 1945. The decision or result for the Korean Peninsula was to execute trusteeship, with the Soviets in North Korea and the United States in South Korea. In 1950, the Korean War started, and the United States intervened as the United Nations’ force, and People’s Republic of China intervened as the Chinese People’s Voluntary force in support of the DPRK. Since then, for half a century, the United States’ forces have been stationed in South Korea. Despite many debates about United States’ forces being stationed in South Korea, there is no doubt that the forces have been defending South Korea from a North Korean attack on South. Especially, the United States forces in South Korea deterred the possibility of the PRC’s support or

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<sup>100</sup> Taeho Kim, “Sino-ROK Relations at a Crossroads: Looming Tensions amid Growing Interdependence,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XVII, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 134.

intervention in case of a North Korean coercive military action toward South Korea. Therefore, the relationship between South Korea and the United States may be considered concrete, overall.

### **1. Diplomatic Aspect**

The South Korea-the United States diplomatic relationship originated in the Cold War as part of the United States' containment policy. The United States' support for South Korea can be understood in the same perspective. The support was not only in military issues, but also in economic and information areas. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the South Korea-the United States diplomatic relationship faced a new security context. South Korea's primary enemy, North Korea, was a rogue state, and it started to threaten its neighboring countries. Also, the DPRK's nuclear program was to become a concern for South Korea and the United States, along with the United States' anti-terror policy.

A wider consideration of security issues in the region also reveals that northeast Asia's flashpoints for possible conflicts are not confined to the North Korean situation, but also have the potential to involve China, Russia, and Japan, whose territorial issues remain unresolved and among which are historical disputes that originate from cultural pride, or resources interests.

Woosang Kim and Tae-hyo Kim, therefore, suggest "The ROK-U.S. alliance has been a cornerstone of peace and security on the Korean Peninsula, and it will continue to play a central role in the peaceful unification process. A robust ROK-U.S. alliance not only contributes to deter North Korean military adventurism, but it also restrains potential regional power competition among China, Russia and Japan....The alliance should also look beyond the Korean Peninsula and contribute to facilitating peace and prosperity in East Asia."<sup>101</sup> Jae-Chang Kim also addresses his argument on the reasons for enhancing the South Korea –United States alliance, "For the alliance, there are, logically three choices open to South Korea: The first is to maintain the current U.S.-ROK alliance; the

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<sup>101</sup> Woosang Kim and Tae-hyo Kim, "A Candle in the Wind: Korean Perceptions of ROK—U.S. Security Relations," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XVI, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 116–118.

second is to establish an alliance with one of its neighboring countries instead of the United States.; and the third is to adopt a stance of neutrality in international relations....Thus, realistically, there is no better alternative to the U.S.-ROK alliance for South Korea.”<sup>102</sup> Jae-Chang Kim also mentions the United States’ further decision regarding its relationship with South Korea, “It is important for the United States to maintain a strong alliance with South Korea, considering its democracy, economic vitality, and its geopolitical location. Thus, the United States wants to prepare for the U.S.-ROK alliance to make contributions to the broader stability of the region over the longer term.”<sup>103</sup> To enhance the diplomatic relations which may stand still for a long period, Woosang Kim and Jae-Chang Kim argue that “it is entirely up to the wisdom and leadership of the South Korean administration,”<sup>104</sup> and “Rather than inspired leadership of the U.S.-ROK alliance, we need a better system for the alliance—in which the United States and ROK share the same threat perceptions, the same strategic goals, and the same strategic concepts, which can induce North Korea to adopt meaningful change. This would pave the road to long-term collaboration, creating a better world for all.”<sup>105</sup>

In sum, the diplomatic relationship between South Korea and the United States is robust, but requires further efforts by both sides to maintain such robustness. However, other elements and states may influence or limit and constrain this relationship. In other words, it is not in a shatterproof condition. Therefore, a constant effort to promote peaceful security in the region by the leaders of South Korea and the United States to work toward a systematic alliance is still required.

## **2. Information Aspect**

Information, including cultural and historical elements in South Korea, has been influenced by the United States. The influence was grounded in aid and support from the

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<sup>102</sup> Jae-Chang Kim, “The New International Order and the U.S.—ROK Alliance,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XV, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 70–71.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>104</sup> Woosang Kim and Tae-hyo Kim, “A Candle in the Wind: Korean Perceptions of ROK—U.S. Security Relations,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XVI, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 118.

<sup>105</sup> Jae-Chang Kim, “The New International Order and the U.S.—ROK Alliance,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XV, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 75.



United States as a result of the Cold War. However, South Korean democratization has changed South Korea's perspective on support and aid. This new attitude has mainly been driven by the cultivation of self-pride and a nationalistic movement. Such a movement has caused anti-American sentiment. Another possible element that stimulates anti-American sentiment may be the indifferent United States posture on territorial disputes (Dokdo Island) between South Korea and Japan. The United States' position on this issue is not easy since it would need to choose a side between South Korea and Japan. However, South Korean public opinion is, in general, in favor of the United States' South Korea friendly support and policy on the issue. So far, the United States' decision has been not to intervene. Other issues that have created anti-American sentiment have been mentioned in Woosang Kim and Tae-hyo Kim's article, and include the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the United States and South Korea, violent acts and toxic waste disposal by military personnel of the United States Forces Korea.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, South Korean anti-American sentiment may have eroded mutual relations in a visible or possibly significant manner. This issue of anti-American sentiment could grow from a concern to a problem when other nations, such as North Korea or China, seek to use such sentiments, in favor of their interests.

Considering the fact that there are many issues remaining that may worsen the anti-American sentiment of the South Korean public, it is both governments' roles and missions to resolve such issues wisely in order to strengthen the alliance that has lasted for more than half a decade. South Korea is heavily reliant for its security on the United States. Therefore, the United States may have to intervene actively, independently of its own national interest. Otherwise, the different perceptions and expectations of the South Korean government and its public regarding the United States' action may become a cornerstone of unfavorable anti-American sentiment, which may become a vulnerability to the alliance.

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<sup>106</sup> Woosang Kim and Tae-hyo Kim, "A Candle in the Wind: Korean Perceptions of ROK—U.S. Security Relations," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XVI, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 100–108.

### 3. Military Aspect

The military aspect of South Korea and the United States' relationship goes back to post WWII times and the Korean War. The year 2003 was the 50th anniversary of ROK—U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT). The military alliance not only deterred South Korea's major threat, North Korea, but also prevented North Korean attempts to proliferate weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Also, it has prevented the arms race among the nations in the Northeast Asia region.<sup>107</sup> However, Seong Ryoul Cho argues, "Changes in the ROK-U.S. Alliance have always been initiated by the unilateral strategies devised by the United States, and South Korea has been faced with the dilemma posed by the alliance, so it could do nothing but react to U.S.-initiated strategic changes."<sup>108</sup> Therefore, he argues that "[I]n the new circumstances in which the former Soviet Union collapsed, thus removing the major external threat to U.S. supremacy, the ROK-U.S. alliance formed in the Cold War had to be redefined in accordance with the changing strategic environment of the 21st century."<sup>109</sup>

Despite a long and confident military relationship for South Korea and the United States, the challenge will be that the relationship must change in accordance with the new security circumstances of the region. Furthermore, the change should also consider South Korean domestic anti-American sentiment as well. However, in this process, there does not appear to be a clear or easy to pursue course of action. The direction of change should prevent rise of new regional hegemonic power, competition in the arms races, and execution of military conflict. Seong Ryoul Cho articulates the possible threats and issues that South Korea confronts as follows, "This kind of nuclear brinkmanship by North Korea shows that there still exists a clear military threat from that country," and "These deterrence strategies by the United States against China will have a great impact on the direction of the 'redefinition' that the ROK-U.S. alliance will take in the 21st century.... This 'China factor' is most likely to be a significant factor in 'redefining' the

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<sup>107</sup> Seong Ryoul Cho, "The ROK-U.S. Alliance and the Future of U.S. Forces in South Korea," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XV, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 78.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

ROK-U.S. alliance in the 21st century.”<sup>110</sup> Therefore, the challenge in the relationship is how to avoid such problems. Limiting factors are, first, the security threat posed by North Korea; second, the reaction of China; and third, South Korean domestic sentiment. These limiting factors may form the weakest link of the relationship.

North Korea and the unification of the Korean peninsula addresses the dilemma that if the military relationship of South Korea and the United States is strengthened, along with the USFK’s size, then North Korea would continue to maintain a tense relationship with South Korea. However, due to the role that the USFK is providing on the Korean peninsula, its existence alone may deter the possibility of North Korean military coercive actions. Therefore, if the USFK is withdrawn or reduced, considering the close distance between North and South Korea, such a reduction of the deterrence capability may be interpreted as a weakening of South Korean security.

China’s reaction to the enhancement of the South Korea-United States military relationship may actually be a motivation or a PLA justification and point of legitimacy for its modernization and strengthening. So far, China has argued that the PLA’s modernization is adequate for the size and stand of China’s international status. On the contrary, if the USFK is reduced, China will likely maintain the scope and direction of the PLA modernization. Despite any enhancement of the USFK, China already has initiated PLA modernization and strengthening. A reduction in the USFK would not impose any corresponding positive reaction by China. Therefore, South Korea and the United States military relations should consider their significance on the active, friendly posture of other nations in the region.

The last factor to consider in the relationship between the U.S. and South Korea is South Korean domestic anti-American sentiment. In addition to the United States’ policy, the USFK has been a major issue for anti-American sentiment among the South Korean public. Reasons previously mentioned in informational aspects should be

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<sup>110</sup> Seong Ryoul Cho, “The ROK-U.S. Alliance and the Future of U.S. Forces in South Korea,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, vol. XV, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 80–85.

analyzed as well as the need to maintain the presence of U.S. forces effectively enough to deter North Korean irrational decisions and the further possibility of a regional hegemonic appearance.

In conclusion, the military relationship of South Korea and the United States addresses where and how to manage the new security context in the region. So far, the relocation and re-adjustment of the USFK, combined with the return of wartime operational control from (U.S.-lead) Combined Forces Command to the South Korean government, has been planned and initiated. Such processes, however, have pros and cons for South Korean security. Scaling down the USFK can result in a rise of North Korean confidence and may undermine the deterrence effect; however, it also may satisfy the South Korean public's sentiment against the United States and reduce the legitimacy of PLA assertions of its need to build capability and implement a doctrine of expansion. However, maintaining the status quo, or preserving the middle ground, while not triggering any conflict or spotlighting United States' interests in the region is not an easy task.

One obvious answer is that under any circumstances, the United States and South Korean military relations should not be unilateral, but bilateral, considering both nations' interests and promotion of peace in the region. Otherwise, the relationship would not be suitable for the longer term of peace.

#### **4. Economic Aspect**

The economic relationship between South Korea and the United States was originally fostered by the United States' intention to contain the Soviet Union and China during the Cold War. The U.S. supported and aided South Korea so that South Korea could grow enough to sustain and protect itself. However, the current South Korean economy is now a developed economy. According to the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the GDP has constantly increased. For example, in 1997 South Korea's GDP was South Korean (Won) 484,102.8 billion and in 2007, the GDP increased to South Korean (Won) 1,023,937.7 billion. The size of South Korean trade increased remarkably from U.S. \$ 1,068 million in 1971 to U.S.\$ 150,653 million in

2007. The South Korean world trade rank was twelfth in 2008. South Korean trade with the United States constantly increased. In 2003, it reached a mark of U.S.\$ 34,219 million.<sup>111</sup> The data show just how much South Korea's economy relies on the United States. However, frictions remain between South Korea and the United States. South Korea has benefited from friendly support, and South Korea's economy, but such economic benefits actually are decreasing under the concept of free trade. This change also fosters creates public dislike toward the United States.

The present South Korean economy has shifted from relying on the United States to evolving into a multiple counterpart trade mechanism. In 2003, the records show that the top trade partner shifted from the United States to China. This diversifying progress relieves both nations from dependency and pressure to support one. A possible vulnerable point, however, may yet appear as anti-American sentiment lingers due to reforms of the South Korea-United States trade relationship. Currently, the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States is being processed, and when implemented, it may create public opposition as well.

In conclusion, the South Korea –United States economic relationship is stable and at the mature stage. However, South Korean public antagonism lingers and must still be considered. Leaders must convince the public that sensibly enhancing the relationship will benefit both nations in the long run. Letting unfavorable sentiments exist unchecked in South Korea, may undermine the overall South Korea-United States alliance.

## **5. Conclusion**

Major problems in the South Korean-United States relationship are a reaction by neighboring nations to the South Korea-United States relationship. Second, a major problem for the relationship is South Korea's domestic anti-American sentiment. Therefore, the relationship is now confronting a difficult stage where it must change from

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<sup>111</sup> Data was accumulated from Republic of Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <http://www.mofat.go.kr/economic/economicdata/statistics/index.jsp>, Eurinara Gyungjetongsang Tonggye (2002 – 2008) [South Korean economic commerce statistics (2002–2008)], (accessed October 28, 2009).

an obsolete structure to a future oriented structure. If this change fails, the result may seriously affect not only the relationship between the two nations, but also the region as a whole.

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## IV. PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Previous chapters have identified the PLA's modernization and its objectives, as well as South Korean relations with China and with the United States in diplomatic, informational, military, and economic aspects. The combination of these factors and conclusions offered in the preceding sections suggest that the PLA modernization may be expected to impose threatening conditions not only for South Korea but also for the entire Northeast Asia region. The relationships of South Korea in several aspects show that both relations (China-South Korea and U.S.-South Korea) contain vulnerable elements with the potential to undermine South Korean security.

This chapter will integrate the connection of South Korean security and PLA modernization in several regional "hot issue" cases. First, these cases will be separated into two different categories: direct and indirect threats to South Korea. Each issue will be reviewed as regards the pros and cons of the four elements that have been considered in the previous chapter. Additionally, the link or connection of the modernized PLA with enhanced capabilities will also be factored.

As a frame of reference, there are several core security issues in the region. These issues seem to be motivated by efforts to protect maritime resources by preserving or securing maritime territory. In general, when the conflict issue is territorial in nature, then the "offensive side" tends to publicize the issue and the "defending" side tends to stay quiet, unless severely provoked or offended, since in this case the "defendant" already dominates the disputed territory. Finally, if these are not resource-related issues, then they typically link back to sovereignty.



## A. DIRECT THREAT TO SOUTH KOREAN SECURITY

### 1. The Socotra Rock Dispute

The Socotra Rock case still holds the potential for conflict between South Korea and China. Guo's book describes the history of the Socotra Rock dispute.<sup>112</sup> The problem of the Socotra Rock is that South Korea and China agreed that the issue was to be agreed on in accordance with the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) concept, but a clear regulatory line was never drawn. Therefore, the possibility of a lingering or rising dispute still exists. Without mutual agreement about the rock, the site may become a flashpoint, which may lead to a possible threat because the two sides' public sentiment is strong. However, on the other hand, the economic and strategic benefits of a solution are valuable enough for both governments to turn their policies toward a more cooperative solution, even if it is superficial policy.<sup>113</sup>

#### a. *Diplomatic Aspect of the Socotra Rock Dispute*

The diplomatic aspect of the Socotra Rock dispute is that agreement was reached in a mutual diplomatic process, however, the solution was never clearly defined. Only the method for concluding was agreed upon, namely that it would be regarded as an EEZ issue, not a territorial matter. South Korea, in fact, officially no longer claims the rock as its territory. The rock lies in an area of overlap for both side's EEZ, where the South Korean government has restrained its maritime ore development (inside

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<sup>112</sup> Guo, Rongxing, *TERRITORIAL DISPUTES and RESOURCE MANAGEMENT A Global Handbook* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2007), 226–277. Guo explains that Socotra Rock is rock below sea level at low tide. It is “located 149 km southwest from Marado island, South Korea and 245 km northeast from Haijiao islands in the northeast corner of Zhoushan archipelago, China.” Republic of Korea refers to it as Ieodo or Parangdo, and PRC refers to it as Suyan Rock. “In 1900 Socotra Rock was discovered by the British merchant vessel Socotra.” “From 1995 to 2001, South Korea built the Ieodo Ocean Research Station on Socotra Rock despite Chinese objection.” “According to the UNCLOS, a submerged reef cannot be claimed as territory by any country. However, China and South Korea claim it as part of their respective EEZs. “On Marado there is an ancient stele carved ‘the southmost of Korea.’” “The Chinese insist that Socotra Rock is not Korea's territory since its location is further south to South Korea's southmost island, Marado. If this is true, Marado, as a starting point of Korean marginal sea, affects the Korean EEZ.”

<sup>113</sup> Yong Gu Kim, “Legal Appraisal in View of the Law of the Sea: China's Jurisdictional Assertions and Other Maneuvering in relating to the title of Socotra Rock (Yieo-do),” *Northeast Asian History Foundation Research Series*, no. 28 (Seoul Korea: Northeast Asian History Foundation, 2008), 17–19.

overlapping areas). However, in 2006, China initiated a research and development program that was very close to the borderline at its most extended line of its EEZ.<sup>114</sup>

The results and official posture are still ambiguous and vulnerable. Also, China seems to have provoked South Korea without actively seeking to solve the dispute diplomatically. There is the strong factor of public sentiment on the issue. China, unlike South Korea, seems to allow public sentiment to consider the issue as a territorial issue and to claim sovereignty of the rock.<sup>115</sup> Maritime territorial issues do not simply get argued and resolved by geographical distance from coast lines, but are also considered in terms of other factors.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, the rock issue needs to be dealt with in a peaceful, diplomatic manner. However, the process has stagnated and even has been engendering unfavorable public sentiment that may undermine not only the issue but also the overall relation of the two nations.

#### ***b. Informational Aspect of Socotra Rock Dispute***

The informational aspect of this dispute is more vulnerable because this may be used as the stimulus factor to escalating the issue to an undesirable destructive path. Yong Gu Kim highlights this in the beginning of his article, namely that the Chinese government's policy toward the Socotra rock dispute and the policy to deal with China's public sentiment may be understood as China's Northeast Project, which is re-interpreting ancient history between China and Korea. History may provide the basis for public sentiment and government policy. Also, such formations of public opinion may legitimize China's further actions to manage Socotra rock as a sovereign issue. In sum, constant provocative actions and a "loose" Chinese governmental policy may undermine

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<sup>114</sup> This source was from Hwang, Jun Sik's, who is in international law department South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, paper on national policy briefing posted 2.6.2007, respond to South Korean TV SBS Tracking News, 1.24.2007, "Jeodo project—China, their goal?"

<sup>115</sup> Yong Gu Kim, "Legal Appraisal in View of the Law of the Sea: China's Jurisdictional Assertions and Other Maneuvering in relating to the title of Socotra Rock (Yieo-do)," *Northeast Asian History Foundation Research Series*, no. 28 (Seoul Korea: Northeast Asian History Foundation, 2008), 17–19.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–49.

the overall relationship between the two countries. In addition, this issue has the potential to fragment the sentiment of the nations in the region to obstruct formation of credible peaceful security in the region.

*c. Economic Aspect of Socotra Rock Dispute*

Economics is also a basis of the Socotra rock dispute.<sup>117</sup> Jeodo is located in the middle of the East China Sea continental shelf where vast amount of maritime ore is embedded. For any developing or expanding national economy, such a resource is critical. Therefore, the continental shelf has been a competitive site among nations in the region. Some posit that this is a reason why China is risking its diplomatic relations and re-interpreting history. There is incentive to gain an advantage in mineral development, which could contribute to the growth of a powerful nation and foster economic development as well. However, such ambition and interest applies not only to China but other nations in the region. Therefore, such dispute and conflict is inevitable

*d. Military Aspect of Socotra Rock Dispute*

The military aspect is also an important strategic aspect. Areas around the rock are located in the major Sea Line Of Communication (SLOC) to China and South Korea, in other words, the rock is strategically important to both countries. In conjunction with China's military modernization (with a long, extended coastline), the area in the vicinity of Socotra Rock is a critical sea route for the PLAN to proceed to the Pacific Ocean.

In military operations, therefore, the South Korean Navy, and possibly even the United States Navy, or even the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) Navy may at some point be charged by their governments with preserving the freedom of navigation for their ships unimpeded progress near the rock. These forces could impose limits or constrain any PLAN operations near the rock.

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<sup>117</sup> Yong Gu Kim, "Legal Appraisal in View of the Law of the Sea: China's Jurisdictional Assertions and Other Maneuvering in relating to the title of Socotra Rock (Yieo-do)," *Northeast Asian History Foundation Research Series*, no. 28 (Seoul Korea: Northeast Asian History Foundation, 2008), 19–22.

On the other hand, it would become important for the PLAN to ensure its own (complete) freedom of naval operations in that area. In addition, South Korea may seek to rely significantly on the United States naval forces that are current providing security to the Korean Peninsula. From China's perspective, the presence of the United States naval forces near the rock may limit China's offensive actions (if needed). Furthermore, China has shown its coercive problem-solving approach in other maritime territorial disputes such as military coercion with Vietnam on the Paracel Islands and the Spratly Islands, or even seizing an atoll (Mischief Reef) from the Philippines.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, in order to mitigate the tension and problems, China must show strong evidence of its peaceful intentions on the issue of Socotra Rock.

Chapter II identified the purpose and capability of the PLA. The Socotra Rock dispute is related primarily to maritime forces. The PLAN has been acquiring assets to project its force at ever-increasing distances from its coastal line. As part of this effort, the PLA also has maintained its intent to build (at least) one aircraft carrier, as well. Given such PRC policies and intentions, it is unwise to disregard the possibility of China's use of force, if it is deemed necessary. Along with public sentiment on historical and territorial approaches, the desperate necessity of natural resources may provide the atmosphere and justification for the use of its military.

The PLAN modernization started in early 1980 along with PLA modernization. Power projection capability was also acquired in the 1990s. The South Korean Navy has started to recognize the PLAN's modernization and enhancement of its capability. The South Korean National Defense White Paper, in 1988, describes the intention of China as trying to reassert its traditional influence in the region, and to pursuing the blue-water navy concept by building the largest naval base in the Far East. Later, in 1989, the South Korean National Defense White Paper, for the first time,

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<sup>118</sup> Tae Jun Kim, "Conflicts of Sovereign Rights over the Controversial Islands and Chinese Countermeasures," *Defense Policy Study*, vol. 78, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 216.

mentioned the naval maritime supremacy of the South Korean Navy. From 1991 forward, the White Paper has constantly mentioned the need to acquire and preserve Sea Line of Communication (SLOC) security.<sup>119</sup>

*e. Conclusion*

In conclusion, the Socotra Rock is an unresolved dispute and regardless of the current position of the two nation's officials and their public, unless there is closer, more precise cooperation that could satisfy both nations, it may remain a possible flashpoint and evolve into a conflict between the two, or even into an extended conflict. Additionally, the evidence, found in a South Korean National Defense White Paper, that the South Korean naval objective symmetrically developed as the PLAN changed toward a extended power projection capable force, underscores the assertion that South Korean military leaders view China's position on the Socotra Rock dispute as an indirect security threat to South Korea, if not the possibility of a direct security threat.

**2. The Northeast Project**

The Northeast Project is a research project on the geography and the history of Northeast China. Briefly, the project includes the old *Joseon*, *Gogureyo*, and *Balhae* history as China. The problem to this approach is that Korea also claims for the histories of ancient kingdoms as part of its past. The project was supervised by the Center for the Study of Borderland History and Geography (CBHG). They combined with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) to start the Northeast Project in February 2002. The original title of the project was "Studies of the History and Geography of the Northeast Borderland and a Series of Phenomena." Hee Ok Lee summarizes the facts of the project stats that "The Northeast Project, a five-year (2002-2006) government project, is intended to collect data and conduct research on ancient Chinese territories and societies, mostly in Manchuria."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Republic of Korean Ministry of National Defence, National Defense White Paper, 1988, 1989, 1991, [http://www.mnd.go.kr/mndInfo/publication/policyDataBook/policyDataBook\\_1/index.jsp](http://www.mnd.go.kr/mndInfo/publication/policyDataBook/policyDataBook_1/index.jsp) (accessed October 15 2009).

<sup>120</sup> Lee, Hee Ok, "China's Northeast Project and South Korean-Chinese Relations," Korea journal, vol. 45, issue 2 (2005): 239-264.

Academic scholars and provincial institutions initially conducted the Northeast Project. Despite excuses that the regional provinces needed the central government's attention, the central government policy and China's Communist Party's policy guided or was embedded in the project. In other words, "China's concentrated studies of Korean ancient history were conducted through the central government's confirmation of research projects proposed by provincial governments and scholars."<sup>121</sup>

The project is superficially an academic and scholarly field of study, whose main content belongs to the informational aspect of national power. However, considering the specific context of the material, it involves the diplomatic aspect between China and the two Koreas. Also, there is a military aspect, which may be considered, as well as an economic aspect.

*a. Diplomatic Aspect of the Northeast Project*

Diplomatically, since the project deals with a history that is believed to be Korean, a collision of the two sides was inevitable. Through the ongoing project, the diplomatic relationship between the two sides is likely to be irritated. However, there is a more important factor that China has to protect than simply focusing on the relationship with South Korea: internal security. Details of the internal security threat will be discussed later. However, the point is that diplomatically, such governmental decisions that Beijing made on the project were disastrous, but solved eventually only in the context of the diplomatic relationship. The South Korean MOFAT website describes the status of the diplomatic issue raised by the project. Currently, both governments have mutually agreed to ceasing the distortion of Korean history and to correct any materials that are continuing to distort history. Additionally, the two nations have agreed to hold a bilateral academic conference.<sup>122</sup> However, despite such efforts, distorted information has already been distributed and nationalistic sentiments about the history have been

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<sup>121</sup> Lee, Hee Ok, "China's Northeast Project and South Korean-Chinese Relations." *Korea journal*, vol. 45, issue 2 (2005): 252.

<sup>122</sup> This data was acquired from South Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, [www.mofat.go.kr/press/hotissue/koguryo/index.jsp](http://www.mofat.go.kr/press/hotissue/koguryo/index.jsp), number 2 Goguryeosa oeigok munje hyunhwang [the status of Goguryeo history distortion problem], 10.8.2007, (accessed October 28, 2009).

seeded. In sum, the problem has been diplomatically settled. However, it has initiated nationalistic public sentiment in both nations that may undermine the overall relationship of two nations.

***b. Informational Aspect of the Northeast Project***

The informational aspect is the most significant factor of the Northeast Project. The definition of a nation, by Stalin, in Yoon Hwy-Tak's article, is "a historically stable community of people, which shares a common vernacular language, occupies a single territory, has an integrated, coherent economy, and possesses a shared psychological make-up." In other words, the concept of nation is understood as a historical category and it is believed that individual nations have their own histories "from birth, to formation, to development, and to dissolution."<sup>123</sup> Additionally, "multicultural unity of Chinese nation" defined by China itself contains a self-vulnerability by containing the possibility of separatism movement.

The underlying reasons or motivations for China's Northeast project are both internal and external.<sup>124</sup> An unfavorable division movement in China is an internal problem. China's corresponding strategy in respect to the political climate of South and North Korea in the Korean peninsula, however, is an external problem.

Hwy-Tak Yoon summarizes the background of the Northeast Project in her article as follows.<sup>125</sup>

First, China implemented the project in order to lessen the consequences of future changes in the political climate of the Korean peninsula on the stability of northeast China, and to actively respond to the changed East Asian international order, ... Second, the purpose of the Northeast Project is to apply the theory of 'a multicultural unity of Chinese nation,' stressing the notion of national unity, to the northeast region, thus completing Chinese historical identity, ... Third, while spreading the perception that Manchuria is Chinese territory, not Korean and Goguryeo and

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<sup>123</sup> Yoon Hwy-Tak, "China's Northeast Project and Korean History," *Korea Journal*, vol. 45, issue 1 (2005): 145.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 158–159.

Balhae belong to Chinese rather than Korean history, China strives to deny the connections between the Korean peninsula and the Chinese northeast region, ... Fourth, if the theory that Old Joseon, Goguryeo, and Balhae all fall under Korean history is maintained, then the Uighur or other Central Asian countries can claim the history of the Western Regions as their own, and Vietnam will be able to place Baiyue and Nanyue Kingdom during the period of Qin-Han China under the rubric of their own history, ... Fifth, China attempted to hinder North Korea in its efforts to register Goguryeo cultural remains as a UNESCO World Heritage site in order to eliminate any domestic or international opposition to the theory that Goguryeo history falls under China's history.

Those five reasons effectively explain the reasons for China's Northeast Project. In other words, the Northeast Project may be perceived as a preemptive measure to secure domestic and regional international stability of China. Others argue that China's ambitions are that since Jiang Zemin assumed authority, China has pursued a fundamental hegemonic structure to assume the sovereignty over Taiwan and the South China sea, intends to expand its territory up to the size of the old Qing dynasty; with China's intent on becoming a hegemonic power to replace the current Pan-Americanism spread out to the international community with a Pan-Chinese structure.<sup>126</sup>

Regardless of China's ambitious intent and the follow-on reactions of the government toward South Korea's official complaints, China's government already has executed and completed the project. Public sentiment already has formed and initiated nationalistic approaches. Therefore, the project was initially a threat-causing issue that created vulnerability between the two nations' informational relationships, in the public-sentiment perspective. The solution for the issue has already been started in a diplomatic relationship by agreeing to a mutual understanding. However, constant efforts to form a cooperative and harmonious public sentiment must be followed. Additionally, a concrete understanding and detailed administrative policy would be beneficial to resolve the ambiguous intent of both nations for the future. For example, agreement on the separation of sovereignty in history from one's territorial issues should be achieved.

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<sup>126</sup> Steven W. Mosher, *Hegemony: China's Plan to Dominate Asia and The World* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), 61–95.



*c. Military Aspect of the Northeast Project*

The military aspect provides yet another, more threatening aspect related to the Northeast Project. The PLA Ground Forces have been changed to lighter, more mobile and effective forces. Additionally, large numbers of forces still are located in the Northeast area that is the core region for the Northeast Project: Manchuria. It may be considered a rationale for China to have those troops assigned there, but for South and North Korea it may be viewed as a signal of intent for possible future coercive action. South Korea has an alternative or option, which is to strengthen the alliance with the United States so as to deter possible Chinese coercive solutions. But, the impact of this might be a shift in the United States Forces Korea mission from defending South Korea from a North Korean invasion to confronting other possible threats in Asia.<sup>127</sup>

Currently, North Korea and China may share an ideological identity. However the two nations have not conducted any combined military exercises regarding refugees or borderline security. If such military exercises were to be implemented they would threaten South Korea, Japan and other neighbors. Therefore, it may not be the best option. If military factors have no other options other than to station vast numbers of forces in the area, China should become more active in implementing a mitigating solution in other aspects of its relationship with South Korea. Otherwise, the credibility of, and the relationship itself may be undermined.

*d. Economic Aspect of the Northeast Project*

Economically, the Northeast Project has delivered a negative effect to the relationship with South Korea. But, in spite of grievances created in public sentiment, data from South Korean MOFAT, in the year 2004 to 2006, show that total trade still increased.<sup>128</sup> In other words, the Northeast Project did not greatly affect the economic relationship between the two nations. These data are not sufficient enough counter argue

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<sup>127</sup> Richard Halloran, "U.S. changing its mission in Korea," *The Washington Times*, March 5, 2009, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/mar/05/mission-changing-for-us-troops-in-korea/> (accessed November 21, 2009).

<sup>128</sup> Data was accumulated from Republic of Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <http://www.mofat.go.kr/english/econtrade/bilateral/issues/index.jsp>, (Korea-China Trade and Investment (2006) (accessed October 28, 2009), (accessed October 28, 2009).

that the Northeast Project did not affect South Korean national security. However, the project still contains a possibility of cleavage in the relationship of the two, or at least an aggravation to the overall relationship, by allowing an unfavorable prejudice in China's policy.<sup>129</sup> This argument shows how the Northeast Project may affect the two nations' relationship in sentiment.

*e. Conclusion*

In conclusion, China's Northeast Project, despite its peaceful resolution, created a diplomatic collision, prolonged public mistrust and grievances, and indirectly affected the possibility of cleavage. Furthermore, PLA modernization and relocation may pose a threat, not immediately but in the longer term, especially for a (future) unified Korean peninsula, because relocating modernized PLA ground forces from current locations to other areas seems unlikely.

**3. Conclusion**

The Socotra Rock dispute and the Northeast Project have, in the main, created negative public sentiment. Especially since the Korean public has observed that the nominal policy approach has been to distort history and use public sentiment in lieu of seeking a precise diplomatic resolution, this has not resulted in a positive or productive solution. It may have provided short-term interest for China's national security, but it has created long-term prejudice and mistrust between the two states. Furthermore, PLA modernization and increased capabilities creates ambiguity about China's future action regarding security issues. This fuels mistrust.

Given these conditions today, South Korea has one option that is strengthening its alliance with the United States to reaffirm South Korean security while prevent and avoiding conflicts with its neighboring nations. This may mandates United States

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<sup>129</sup> Korea Institute for Future Strategies website articulates in major issues and alternatives "North Korea would become China's satellite country?" that there is conservative perspective that China have shown the ambition of depriving the history of northern part of Korean peninsula and now China is trying to take economy as well. Deok Min Yun, "Bukhaneun Junggukkei Euisseonggukgaga Deogo Mal Geotinga? [North Korea would become China's satellite country?]" Korea Institute for Future Strategies, [http://www.kifs.org/contents/sub3/life.php?method=info&searchKey=s\\_title&searchWord=%C0%A7%BC%BA%B1%B9%B0%A1&offset=&sId=1840](http://www.kifs.org/contents/sub3/life.php?method=info&searchKey=s_title&searchWord=%C0%A7%BC%BA%B1%B9%B0%A1&offset=&sId=1840) (accessed November 28, 2009).

participation. If this mistrust and reduced credibility toward China exists over the long run (more than five years) an effective resolution would be more complex.

Even though the PLA continues to modernize and the probability of China assuming a global role as a world power is likely in the future, such changes will still take years. So, too, building a multi-service military capability for power-projection and promoting national power at a distance also requires time. Therefore, the PLA modernization that is developing China's capability to impose or even coerce China's national strategic interest toward South Korea may be interpreted as a possible direct threat to long-term South Korean security.

Unless China and South Korea develop a remarkable, peaceful relationship and build security credibility between their two forces, South Korea should be prepared for a possible collision with China to protect its (South Korea's) sovereignty. Ideally more active and constant confidence and security building measures will be undertaken by both states to resolve issues and form a productive and cooperative relationship for the common prosperity of the region. Since the problem includes informational aspects and public sentiment, it is essential, in addition to enhancing the top leadership's relationships, that practical level people-to-people relationships to be enhanced as well. This process of resolution may take a long time.

## **B. INDIRECT THREAT TO SOUTH KOREAN SECURITY**

The previous section investigated direct threats to South Korea by China, using two cases as examples of the concept. In this section, indirect threats will be considered. The Taiwan issue will be examined as an indirect threat case for South Korea. It is likely that the conditions and conclusion will suggest that South Korean security is affected by the relationship of China to other nations in the region.

### **1. Taiwan and South China Sea Issue**

The Taiwan issue has been a constant issue between Mainland China's government and the government of the Republic of China on Taiwan. To summarize the issue, China pursues a one China policy that includes Taiwan and its ROC government.

However, the ROC government maintains its de-facto independence and clings to its claim of being the legitimate government of China. Moreover, the United States seeks to ensure that conflict does not escalate on this issue and strives to deter escalation by either side.<sup>130</sup>

Any military conflict over the Taiwan issue may conclude in a disastrous result between the PRC and the ROC. However, the PRC's cost of pursuing a military conflict with Taiwan may be significant, especially with regard to South Korea, Japan, and the United States. The most likely aspects to be affected by military actions in the Taiwan Strait might be the economic relations and prosperity that China enjoys with South Korea, Japan, and even the United States. All of these states are major sources of capital, markets and other essential elements for China's economic development. However, the focus for this thesis is on the possible consequences for South Korean security if such a disastrous condition were to occur.

Currently, China's military capability is strong enough to execute joint operations on Taiwan. Furthermore, the PLAN is striving to become a blue-water navy, both to deter threats and actively to defend national strategic interests further away from its coastline. Additionally, the PLAAF is pursuing extended operational range activities as well. All of this allows China to defend its national strategy at a greater distance from its coastal line, including a possible Taiwan conflict, which may be interpreted as China's efforts to hinder a United States quick-response, or involvement by military forces in a conflict on the Taiwan issue. Furthermore, PLA modernizations of information warfare and high-tech military assets that allow rapid and decisive military operational capability also may hinder the United States' effectiveness and involvement in the possible crisis.

If Beijing imposes coercive military policy on Taipei, several conditions may develop. First, South Korea may be pressured to choose sides—either to support Taipei, or at least to stay neutral. Considering the economic relationship between South Korea and China, either choosing a side or staying neutral could create a dilemma. This is because choosing Mainland China's side, or even staying neutral might contradict the

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<sup>130</sup> Robert S. Ross, "Navigating the Taiwan Strait: Deterrence, Escalation Dominance, and U.S.–China Relations." *International Security*, vol. 27, no. 2, (Fall 2002): 50–53.

United States' course of action or response. Conversely, choosing Taiwan, along with the United States, might force South Korea to forsake economic interests or benefits it is enjoying from the China relationship. In addition to the economic aspect, South Korea may have to assess any potential military help to Taiwan as well. Providing any military support, including logistical support, might legitimize Chinese actions to support North Korea with military aid as well as forces or supplies. In the worst case, it might support some approach to North Korea's military for an action against South Korea.

If South Korea were to decide not to intervene by any means, would be likely to be contradicting the United States' approach, and North Korea might use such conditions to grow anti-American sentiment in the South Korean public. Second, if United States forces in the region change missions from the defense of South Korea against the North Korean threat to a wider Asian regional security mission, and decide to intervene in the possible military conflict between China and Taiwan, then a power vacuum, or vulnerability may be created due to the United States forces' deployment off the peninsula into the conflict area. Under such conditions, the North might seek to take advantage.<sup>131</sup>

In any case, military conflict between China and Taiwan, and probably the United States, would undermine South Korea's security in diplomacy, information, military, and economy. Therefore, without any capability and authority, and just as third party, South Korea's security might be undermined due to the decision by China on the Taiwan issue. In other words, China represents an indirect security threat to South Korea.

A South China Sea dispute involving several Southeast Asian nations could follow the same logic as the Taiwan issue. Therefore, it could be another flashpoint to undermine the security of South Korea.

Another element or aspect for South Korean security is that South Korea must constantly develop or improve its military capability. First, given the possibility of a power vacuum on the peninsula, South Korea must be able to rely on its own military

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<sup>131</sup> Taeho Kim, "The Costs of China's Military Conflict: The Korean and Japanese Dimensions," in Andrew Scobell ed., *The costs of conflict: The impact on China of a Future War* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, October, 2001), 65-78.

assets to deter and defend against a North Korean attack, especially in face of United States forces possible attention to a Taiwan conflict. Second, the South China Sea is a major SLOC for South Korea. It also is a major route for South Korean petro resource supply routes. Creating any unsafe conditions on the sea line may cause severe damage to the South Korean economy. Therefore, the Taiwan and South China Sea issues embody the possibility of indirect security threats to South Korea.

## **2. Conclusion**

Taiwan and the South China Seas directly relate to China, Taiwan, Vietnam, other Southeast Asian nations, and the United States, as long as the United States intends to intervene. A possible effect of a Taiwan and South China Sea crises on South Korea is the concern to preserve its secure maritime transportation routes for trade and natural resources: its economy. On the other hand, the greatest impact of such conflicts may be their indirect effect due to the political and economic relationships with other nations. The PLA's focus on aggressive and extensive modernization does relate to South Korea's security. This is so first, because of the PLA's ambiguous posture and its lack of transparency for intent or usage; second, because of the PLA's pursuit of advanced capabilities that effectively create a de facto coercive military policy in the region and one, which could be triggered by a Taiwan conflict, despite the existence and intentions of the United States.

Therefore, if or when the PLA acquires sufficient capability or national power in the region, it is possible that China might implement or allow a crisis to escalate into a military conflict to support its own purposes. This possibility suggests that the PLA can, or inevitably, will become an indirect security threat to South Korea.

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## V. CONCLUSION

The PLA modernization and its way forward is likely to continue to develop and its military to acquire more rapid, effective, and decisive capabilities. The development of PLA Ground Forces to be projected faster, with more capability, plus PLAN and PLAAF extended operational ranges and capabilities, plus the effective integration of PLA Ground, PLAN, and PLAAF as joint forces continues. China is building a regional force with effective power projection capability.

The relationship of South Korea and China and with the United States shows that there are many cleavages between South Korea and China, and even with the United States. The most significant aspect is that South Korea's economic dependency on China has grown, just as South Korea's military dependency on the United States remains. However, such dependencies are inevitable for the security and prosperity of South Korea. However, there remains an underlying vulnerability first visible in information aspects that are related to public sentiments.

Understanding the relationships of South Korea, China, and the United States, also highlighted several issues, which support the conclusion that China's military development and modernization creates both direct and indirect threats to South Korean security.

In spite of the informational and economic aspects of South Korea and China's relationship, the Socotra Rock dispute and the Northeast Project may be considered as direct threats imposed by China on South Korean security. The Socotra Rock incident included the possibility of escalation of the issue into a territorial dispute, however diplomatic resolution was properly implemented. However, the informational problem related to negative public sentiment still exists. The Northeast Project also has been officially resolved diplomatically. However, there is deep negative public sentiment on both sides, which lingers even now. Therefore, both nations require proactive efforts to ease such sentiments.



The indirect aspect or threat is a serious consideration for South Korea. In spite of China's economic relationship with Taiwan, vulnerability still exists, because of lingering issues of sovereignty and territorial disputes between Beijing and Taipei. China's use of military force in a Taiwan dispute is quite possible. In the South China Sea, it is also possible today and in the future that China will again resort to the use of its military force for conflict resolution. Burles and Shulsky argue that "[T]he goal has been to control islands and construct infrastructure (for the ultimate purpose of vindicating its territorial claims) rather than to achieve an objective by psychological or political means."<sup>132</sup> Additionally, natural resource and territorial arguments are embedded in the issue. In other words, it is possible that China may impose coercive military resolution in a South China Sea dispute.

The major difference between direct and indirect security threat imposed by China toward South Korea is the existence of sovereignty and territorial disputes, because China has signaled its strong intent not to tolerate threats or disputes on these issues. Direct threats, according to the cases, were resolved, but still require further efforts. Indirect threats have not been resolved but instead have been postponed with higher possibilities of military threat to South Korea. Therefore, indirect threats may be considered as more significant threats to South Korea.

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<sup>132</sup> Mark Burles, and Abram N. Shulsky, *Patterns in China's Use of Force: Evidence from History and Doctrinal Writings* (Washington D.C.: RAND, 2000), 79–93, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/2007/MR1160.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/2007/MR1160.pdf) (accessed October 12, 2009).

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