

CONFERENCE PAPERS

DECISIVE DECADE

PRC GLOBAL STRATEGY
and the
PLA AS A PACING CHALLENGE

2023 PLA CONFERENCE
Updated and Expanded

George R. Shatzer and
Joshua M. Arostegui
Editors



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**Decisive Decade:
PRC Global Strategy and the PLA
as a Pacing Challenge**

2023 PLA Conference

Updated and Expanded

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Editors

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Foreword

The People's Republic of China launched its "Go Global Strategy" in 2000 during Jiang Zemin's tenure as paramount leader to advance China's economic development through encouraging Chinese investment in foreign markets. Nearly a quarter of a century later, Xi Jinping announced his own vision to promote global security and development through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Complementing the BRI are Xi's Global Civilization Initiative, Global Development Initiative, and Global Security Initiative. Together, they are designed to position the PRC to compete and counter US dominance in worldwide development, security, and culture. As a result, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), is preparing to take on a more global posture while continuing to focus on regional security issues in the Indo-Pacific, especially Taiwan.

The 2023 Carlisle Conference on the PLA brought together a unique mix of PLA and PRC watchers to discuss how Beijing is employing its elements of national power across the globe. Keynote speakers presented conference participants with case studies of how China is pursuing regional hegemony in the Indo-Pacific, while also concentrating on dividing the US-led coalition forming against it. Regionally focused panels made up of military officials, diplomats, academics, and journalists provided thought-provoking discourse on PRC and PLA strategies to expand its influence on every continent. These global security challenges posed by the PRC, connected by intent and means, will only continue to grow over the next decade.

One of those challenges, the PRC's acceleration of PLA modernization to improve its use as a tool of national power, served as a major unifying theme during the conference. As observed during the large-scale military response following US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022, the PLA is quickly improving its reach and will remain the US military's pacing threat in the Indo-Pacific and across the globe in the coming years. The papers from this conference will inform US policymakers and warfighters on what to expect as we compete internationally and prepare for possible conflict in the Indo-Pacific.

Carol V. Evans

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Executive Summary

The Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College held its annual conference on the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) February 22–24, 2023, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The conference, entitled “Decisive Decade: PRC Global Strategy and the PLA as a Pacing Challenge,” featured presentations on People's Republic of China (PRC) global and regional strategy and the PLA's enabling role by experts from a wide range of agencies and institutions including: the National Ground Intelligence Center, National Defense University, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Indiana University Bloomington, the Office of Naval Intelligence, Florida International University, the China Aerospace Studies Institute, and many others.

This conference intended to better define the notion of the PLA as a pacing challenge as evidenced by PRC strategies and activities in various regions and to build a much stronger appreciation of how PLA operations in these locations matter to each other and the whole of the PRC's broader national strategy. The event also occurred six months after US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan and the PLA's large-scale response to her visit, leading to a spirited discussion on Chinese military deterrence and potential justifications for a cross-Strait conflict.

The panel members who participated in the 2023 “Carlisle Conference on the PLA,” coming from several think tanks, the State Department, media, academia, and Department of Defense, introduced a broad range of expertise to discuss and debate the PRC's regional strategies. Key takeaways from the conference's panels and papers include:

- The PRC has accelerated its military reforms, enabling it to extend the PLA's reach. The “Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis” that occurred after Pelosi's visit to Taiwan gave the PRC a prime opportunity to demonstrate many of its newest and most powerful capabilities. Such crises could lead to the PRC using it as a pretext for military action.

- The United States must continue strengthening its relationships with Northeast Asian allies in the face of growing Chinese military strength, while also improving intelligence sharing, Joint operations, and nuclear deterrence capacity in the region.
- The PRC continues to increase commercial, political, and security engagement in Latin America, which lays the groundwork for contesting US security influence and access in the region.
- The PRC's investment in Africa as its "second continent" using a heavy-handed pursuit of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, in addition to increasing its military presence, is fueling Chinese economic growth, and outpacing American influence in the region.
- The PRC is growing increasingly confident in its economic and military power relative to that of India, while also remaining determined to prevent India's threat to its own security.
- Europe remains critical to the PRC's growth despite the West souring on the PRC's support of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and problematic BRI projects. Although NATO looks at China as a hybrid threat in Europe, the PRC continues to push its influence in the region to maintain access to the economic benefits.
- Despite the growing reliance the PRC and Russia have on each other for economic and security issues, competition between the two in Central and East Asia introduces friction into the burgeoning relationship.

Introduction

As the Department of Defense's pacing challenge, the People's Republic of China (PRC) remains America's main global competitor. The PRC uses myriad strategies to improve its economic and military stature on different continents while modernizing the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to support and protect those global initiatives. Given that China's strategies regularly conflict with US international engagement and military force posture, the US Joint Force must understand the threat it faces from growing Chinese power not only in the Indo-Pacific, but also in the global arena.

The Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College held its annual conference on the PLA from February 22–24, 2023, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The conference focused on the PRC's global and regional engagement strategies and how the PRC employs the PLA to accomplish those strategies. The conference consisted of two days of unclassified paper presentations and discussions followed by one day of classified presentations. A summary of the classified discussions is available to those with the proper clearance.

The PRC recognizes that if it is to achieve the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation by 2049, it must also become a “pioneering global influence” with a “world-class military.” As part of its long-term efforts to accomplish this lofty goal, the PRC is using all its elements of national power to secure regional hegemony in the Indo-Pacific. These efforts include the modernization of the PLA to operate on all continents while also deterring Taiwanese independence and US action within the First Island Chain. Beijing's strategies to strengthen and revise regional and global security governance will provide the United States with its most difficult challenge over the next decade. This conference was important to PRC and PLA watchers who wished to understand China's methods in shifting the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and around the world.

In the first chapter, James Fanell outlines the PLA Navy's modernization and operations around Taiwan over the past decade. He details how the Chinese Communist Party has transformed the military balance of power in the cross-Strait environment by enabling the PLA to create a new normal, where the increased tempo and pattern of operations could enable the invasion of Taiwan as soon as late 2024. Fanell warns that the PLA's restructure in 2015 and 2017 has transformed it into a meaner, leaner fighting force that the United States must prepare to defeat sooner rather than later.

Lisa Curtis and Šumit Ganguly, in the second chapter, argue that India likely lacks the military capabilities to counter periodic PLA probes along the line of actual control (or LAC) and that China now poses the principal, long-term security concern to New Delhi. They contend that the strategic partnership India has been forging with the United States for the past two decades is the best option to counter Chinese aggression along India's periphery. Curtis and Ganguly note that security cooperation between the United States and India continues to increase, as their strategic interests have converged; ensuring a closer relationship between the two could counter the PRC's emergent threat to their shared interest in South Asia and beyond.

In chapter three, Christopher Colley argues that even though China has expanded its interest in South Asia, it is only a secondary strategic concern and not a critical security challenge for the PLA. According to Colley, US and Indian policymakers need to remain aware of the PLA's rapidly enhancing ability to conduct military operations along the LAC and in the Indian Ocean that could provide Beijing with multiple options in a war against India.

In chapter four, Connor Donahue and Travis Dolney examine how the PLA Navy may turn future military facilities in East Africa into operational bases during a time of war, especially as part of a counterblockade strategy. According to Donahue and Dolney, military facilities in East Africa could enable China to dispute sea control in the western Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea while also enabling the PLA to establish parity of force in the region, extend blockading lines, and employ legal warfare (lawfare) against adversaries' blockades that could be considered legitimate under international law.

In line with the legality of warfare, Ron Gurantz examines a host of ways the PRC could justify an invasion of Taiwan in chapter five. Using the PRC's case studies of its twentieth-century conflicts and other international historical precedents for justifying a war, Gurantz explores two categories of pretext—military incidents and threats to the status quo—and determines how China could use them. He argues that denying the PRC a pretext for invasion would allow the United States and its allies to buy more preparation time and influence allies and partners in the region.

The volume's sixth chapter, from Paul Nantulya, outlines the PRC's strategic intentions in Africa and the PLA's role in supporting

those intentions. Nantulya contrasts the PLA's engagement in Africa with that of the US military, where the PRC outpaces the United States in professional military education exchanges, weapons sales, and peacekeeping. The chapter ends with recommendations for US policymakers on competing militarily against the PRC in Africa through improved two-way interactions.

Elizabeth Wishnick contributes the final chapter with research on how the Sino-Russian relationship has political, economic, military, and geopolitical consequences for the Indo-Pacific. According to Wishnick, the threat of a closer Sino-Russian relationship is leading US allies and partners to increase their defense spending, military buildup, and reliance on US protection. While the strategically ambiguous Sino-Russian partnership contributes a deterrent effect toward potential adversaries, Wishnick argues that it may also limit mutual support for China's or Russia's ongoing or future military conflicts.

The conference findings show that the PLA has established a new peacetime standard for normal operations around Taiwan that could lead to even stronger reactions in the face of provocative US and partner actions in the region. Additionally, the PRC has emphasized that the PLA is not just a military organization but a political tool for the Chinese Communist Party that can be used to accomplish the PRC's strategic objectives globally. The US military should expect a stronger PLA presence abroad in the coming decade as it strives to meet Xi Jinping's objectives for national rejuvenation.

The People’s Republic of China’s Maritime Sovereignty Campaign: Danger in the Taiwan Strait

James E. Fanell
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Following the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) exercise that occurred August 4–7, 2022, in which the PLA Rocket Force fired almost a dozen ballistic missiles that “bracketed” Taiwan, the world has entered a period in which the chances of the People’s Republic of China invading Taiwan are greater than at any time in history.¹ Taiwan is now facing a “new normal” wherein a war may be coming much more quickly than predicted over the past two decades, and such a war would have a devastating impact on the lives of those across the Indo-Pacific, the United States, and the entire world.

Statements from Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping and commensurate actions to modernize the People’s Liberation Army—especially its naval forces—contribute to the assessment the military is preparing to invade Taiwan sometime in the “decade of concern” (so termed by the author): the period between 2020 and 2030. Given recent developments since August 2022, a PLA invasion is increasingly likely to occur even as early as mid-decade.

Those who have been following military events in the Taiwan Strait for the past two decades are tempted to view the August 4–7 PLA exercise as just another salami-slicing effort by the People’s Republic of China to reunify Taiwan. But considering so-called “China Hands” assessments of the People’s Republic of China over the past 20 years—an invasion of Taiwan is not likely—policymakers should ask themselves how the

United States has allowed this situation to get to this point and how the country has allowed itself to be so unprepared.

The events the world witnessed from the People’s Liberation Army on August 4–7, 2022, were a dress rehearsal for a PLA invasion of Taiwan.

The August 2022 exercise was the largest PLA air-missile maritime exercise around Taiwan witnessed thus far.² This exercise tested PLA joint force operations by employing coordinated use of space, cyber, air, army, and naval forces. The main element of this “joint fire strike” rehearsal was the firing of 11 ballistic missiles surrounding Taiwan.³ The unprecedented firing of these missiles—the joint fire strike—was designed to isolate key military and political positions to minimize Taiwan’s ability to resist follow-on invasion forces.⁴ (The author presented this paper to the 2023 PLA Conference before China’s latest Joint Sword exercises against Taiwan, which occurred in April 2023.)

How can the People’s Republic of China be on the verge of invading Taiwan while the United States and the world seem so unprepared? An image taken by a Royal Australian Navy officer from inside a PLA Navy (PLAN) frigate during the frigate’s port call in Port Jackson, which is in Sydney Harbour, in December 2012 may offer a clue (see figure 1-1).



Figure 1-1. Image of attack vectors found on the bulkhead of a PLAN frigate

The image depicts a dragon’s head coming off the Chinese mainland; devouring Taiwan; and extending attack vectors into the South China Sea, the Sea of Japan, and the mid- and south Pacific Ocean. The image was placed on the bulkhead of the PLAN frigate to motivate sailors to achieve

their historic mission to return the People's Republic of China to its former state of greatness.⁵

One often hears the problems the United States is having today with the People's Republic of China are the result of one man: Xi Jinping. But worth noting is the image of the Chinese dragon on the PLAN frigate in Sydney Harbor had been prepared sometime in 2010, if not earlier.⁶ The PLAN frigate had just completed three months of anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden and, before that, had sailed from mainland China.⁷ Therefore, when one talks about the People's Republic of China and the Chinese Communist Party, one should understand between each paramount leader, from Mao Zedong to Xi, is a continuity of strategic thinking and effort—not just the work of a single strongman, but the consistent work of a totalitarian, one-party state.⁸

The People's Republic of China is like all nations in that strategic and economic interests drive it, and nationalistic-historic viewpoints influence it. But the Marxist ideology of the Chinese Communist Party—one that seeks to achieve the China Dream of the country's "great rejuvenation," an ideology that stands against the post-World War II liberal international norms—sets the People's Republic of China apart.⁹

To achieve its long-term strategic goals, the Chinese Communist Party uses "Comprehensive National Power" along four lines of operation: strategic communication, economic investment, lawfare, and military expansion.¹⁰ These levers of national power range from soft power to hard power (see figure 1-2).

Broadly speaking, although Xi has continued the strategic goals of all previous paramount leaders, he has made a clean break from Deng Xiaoping's "hide and bide" strategy.¹¹

For instance, in 2015, Xi initiated a major reorganization of the People's Liberation Army for the first time since Mao's changes of the 1950s, eliminating 300,000 noncombat members of the People's Liberation Army; reorganizing seven military regions into five theater commands, which are joint warfighting command structures similar to the United States' own geographic combatant commands; and reorganizing the Central Military Commission by placing the PLA Army in the same stature as the PLA Navy and PLA Air Force and creating the Strategic Support Force and Joint Logistic Support Force.¹² All these changes are now eight years into their implementation and have transformed the People's Liberation Army into a much meaner and leaner fighting force.



Figure 1-2. Elements of the Chinese Communist Party's Comprehensive National Power

Another way of measuring the People’s Republic of China’s continuity and commitment to achieving the Great Rejuvenation is by looking at its purchases. For the past 30 years, the Chinese Communist Party has increased spending on the People’s Liberation Army each year, even after the 2007–09 Great Recession and the People’s Republic of China’s economic soft landing in 2012. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic occurring in 2020 and 2021, the Chinese Communist Party was able to announce the People’s Liberation Army’s budget would grow by 6.6 and 6.8 percent, respectively, though for the first time in 28 years, the party was unable to predict its gross domestic product growth rate.¹³ Even as the People’s Republic of China’s 2022 gross domestic product growth rate was publicly announced to be around 3 percent, the People’s Liberation Army’s budget grew by 7.1 percent.¹⁴

These numbers do not address the fact the People’s Republic of China does not include research and development funding or the factor of purchasing power parity, reminding military planners what matters most is not the dollars spent, but what you get for those dollars.

Over the course of the past 20 years, the People’s Liberation Army went from being a coastal navy, army-centric, and inadequately equipped military force to arguably the strongest regional power in Asia today.

The Chinese Communist Party has prioritized spending on the People's Liberation Army for the past 25 years and unleashed PLA operations through the Pacific and Indian oceans. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the PLA Navy was operating and exercising in the Mediterranean Sea and even the Baltic Sea.

Unique to General Secretary Xi's worldview is his unprecedented emphasis on the idea the China Dream is founded upon the People's Republic of China being a maritime power. Chairman Xi exemplified this emphasis to the world in 2018, when he presided over the largest naval parade in Chinese history in the waters off Hainan Island, wherein more than 46 warships and submarines displayed the largest amount of naval power in the South China Sea since the Vietnam War.¹⁵ This display of naval power reiterated China's determination to build a world-class navy.

The growth of the PLA Navy over the past 22 years has been unprecedented in the post-World War II era and has resulted in the service now being the largest navy in the world.¹⁶ By my estimate, the PLA Navy will continue this growth for at least another decade. "How is this possible," you may ask. Although the problem is complex and took decades to manifest itself, one of the most basic answers is while the United States was divesting itself of industrial naval-ship construction facilities, the People's Republic of China was investing in them.

For example, today, as noted by the US Secretary of the Navy, the People's Republic of China has 13 major naval shipyards, compared to America's seven shipyards.¹⁷ Examining just one of the Chinese shipyards, Jiangnan Shipyard at the mouth of the Yangtze River near Shanghai, reveals a facility four times the size of Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia, the largest US naval shipyard.

Jiangnan has a capacity as large as all the rest of the US shipyards.¹⁸ The result: In 2021, the People's Republic of China commissioned 22 warships, compared to the US Navy's (USN's) three (two littoral combat ships and one guided-missile destroyer).¹⁹

The trend line of China's military growth has been consistent over the past decade, and I see no serious challenge to this trajectory, given the Chinese Communist Party's stated priorities for achieving the great rejuvenation.

Some commentators suggest the number of PLAN warships is an inadequate metric for measuring naval power because the metric does not

address the quality and capability of a navy. As such, an examination of the PLA Navy's Type 055 Renhai-class cruiser, which is over 12,000 tons, reveals a warship with 112 vertical launch system tubes that can fire an array of land-attack cruise missiles; surface-to-air missiles; and supersonic, anti-ship cruise missiles, like the YJ-18, with a range of 300 kilometers (see figure 1-3 for a picture of the cruiser).²⁰ Given its size, speed, phased-array radar, and other capabilities, this cruiser is arguably the most potent surface combatant on the planet. Today, the PLA Navy has eight operational Type 055 cruisers that primarily function as "shotguns" for the service's carrier and expeditionary strike groups (ESGs).²¹



Figure 1-3. PLA Navy's first Type 055 Renhai-class cruiser

Or consider the PLA Navy's 45,000-ton Type 075 Yushen-class amphibious assault ships. The first of the class, *Hainan*, reached initial operating capability in 2021.²² By October 2022, the PLA Navy had commissioned its third Type 075 in the space of 18 months, one every six months from a single shipyard. Based on these production timelines, the PLA Navy could have at least five Type 075s by the spring of 2025, and the service is expected to have a total of at least eight by the end of the decade. Each Type 075 will be joined by eight already-operational Type 071 amphibious transport dock ships. Both large-deck amphibious warships form the core of the PLA Navy's ESGs, the primary mission of which is to lead the People's Republic of China's invasion of Taiwan. Such an invasion is increasingly likely, given Xi's 2017 order to increase the size of the PLA Marine Corps from 20,000 to 100,000 personnel.²³

Another facet of the People's Republic of China's maritime sovereignty campaign is dual-use platforms, such as civilian roll-on/roll-off car ferries that were observed launching PLAN amphibious assault craft on August 31, 2022

(see figure 1-4). Defense analyst Tom Shugart tracked seven of these civilian dual-use, amphibious, roll-on/roll-off ferries during the August 2022 exercise and noted these 15,000-ton ferries have internal parking lanes 1.6 miles long and three meters wide, spread across three decks.²⁴ This feature translates into a vehicle-cargo capacity almost three times that of a USN San Antonio-class amphibious warship.²⁵ The practice of augmenting amphibious warfare ships with civilian vessels is not new; the PLA Navy has been practicing using civilian vessels for years. Additionally, as noted by Shugart, “civilian vessel augmentation will be essential” and should be expected to provide most of the required sealift capacity—something that has not been fully appreciated or assessed.²⁶



Figure 1-4. An August 31, 2022, satellite image of a PLAN amphibious exercise with a civilian ferry

H. I. Sutton illustration for *US Naval Institute (USNI) News* satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies. This image reproduced with permission from *USNI News*.

Another PLAN capability and quality area of interest is sustainability of operations. Since 2009, the PLA Navy has deployed naval task forces to the Gulf of Aden. Each three-ship naval task force includes 25,000-ton Type 903 and 903A Fuchi-class resupply ships that provide underway replenishment for the other two combatants. Now, due to the forethought of former PLAN Chief Admiral Wu Shengli from almost 20 years ago, the PLA Navy has expanded its resupply capabilities with the new 45,000-ton, Type 901, Fuyu-class, fast-combat resupply ships.²⁷ The Type 901 will provide resupply services for the PLA Navy’s carrier strike groups and ESGs, just as the USN Henry J. Kaiser-class resupply ships provide USN carrier strike groups and ESGs’ global operations with food, fuel, and ammunition. Worth noting is the Type 901

is an example of stolen technology because it is a mirror image of the USN Henry J. Kaiser-class resupply ship.

Since December 2021, two PLAN aircraft carriers, the Liaoning class and Shandong class, have conducted training evolutions east of Taiwan and extending toward Guam. For instance, in May 2022, the Liaoning and a seven-ship surface-action group constituted the largest and most ambitious deployment yet made by a PLAN aircraft carrier task force. The carrier's air wing conducted more than 20 days of flight operations and over 300 sorties.²⁸ Although not on par with a USN aircraft carrier's air wing, these deployments represent another unique threat vector to Taiwan's east coast.

Or one can consider the PLAN's latest aircraft carrier, the Fujian class, and its three electromagnetic aircraft launch system catapults, another leapfrog in stolen technology that puts this 80,000-ton carrier in the same class as one of the original USN Nimitz-class carriers, minus nuclear propulsion (see figure 1-5). Although they do not possess the same capability as the USN aircraft carriers, these three Chinese flattops are important because they are in the theater and can be brought to bear immediately. Meanwhile, most US carriers are weeks, if not months, away from the Taiwan theater of operations.



Figure 1-5. The PLA Navy's latest aircraft carrier, the *Fujian*

The PLAN submarine force rounds out the scope of threats the PLA Navy presents to Taiwan and the US Navy. In addition to the 55 diesel and air-independent propulsion submarines in the PLAN order of battle, over the past five years, the PLA Navy has conducted a major expansion

of the Huludao shipyard on the Bohai Sea in northern China to accommodate the expanded production of nuclear submarines.

The Huludao shipyard is currently associated with the construction of Type 094 Jin-class ballistic-missile submarines and Type 093 *Shang*-class attack submarines.²⁹ Future construction will focus on improved *Shang*-class boats as well as next-generation Type 095 attack submarines and Type 096 ballistic-missile submarines.³⁰ The expansion of the PLA Navy's nuclear submarine force is an indicator the People's Republic of China's strategic goals extend beyond the Taiwan Strait.

Finally, over the past 20 years, the PLA Rocket Force has been working on, and has now fielded, an operational anticarrier, ballistic-missile system. Of note, in August 2020, the PLA Rocket Force launched a salvo of shore-based DF-21Ds and DF-26 anticarrier ballistic missiles at a moving target in the South China Sea.³¹ By all reports, the launch was a success.

This capability, combined with October 2021 commercial imagery of PLA Rocket Force test ranges in central China (see figure 1-6) depicting a mock USN aircraft carrier on a rail line, indicates the People's Liberation Army continues to test anticarrier ballistic missiles that target moving American and allied, big-deck naval forces.³²



Figure 1-6. An October 20, 2021, satellite image of a target in the shape of a US aircraft carrier in the Takla Makan Desert in central China

H. I. Sutton illustration for *USNI News* satellite image ©2021 Maxar Technologies.

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In other words, the Chinese Communist Party has spent the past 25 years building up a “counter-intervention” military force designed to, when ordered to do so, take Taiwan and keep US and allied forces

to conduct a grand ceremony celebrating its national restoration in 2049. The People's Republic of China's goal is for the rest of the world to come to Beijing in this decade to acknowledge the great accomplishments of the Chinese Communist Party, much like the world did at the opening ceremony of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, just 19 years after condemning China for its barbarism at Tiananmen Square in 1989.

Considering the logic of this timeline—especially, combined with the People's Republic of China's own demographic challenges and domestic US politics—the Chinese Communist Party will likely use military force to restore the People's Republic of China's perceived territory physically as late as 2030, if not sooner. This timing would then allow for a 20-year cooling-off period before Beijing would conduct a grand ceremony to memorialize the “second centenary goal.”³⁸ Finally, regardless of the likelihood of an invasion, since the August 2022 PLA military-power demonstration against Taiwan, this new normal has changed in the Taiwan theater of operations. First is the dramatic change in the status quo as it relates to the centerline between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan. Although not a legal demarcation, we know from the centerline's inception in 1954 to 2020, PLA aircraft only crossed the centerline four times.³⁹ Yet, from August 2–21, 2022, the People's Liberation Army obliterated any notion of a centerline, aligning with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China's warnings the country does not recognize the centerline.⁴⁰ The People's Liberation Army's centerline crossings are now a routine, near-daily occurrence.

Secondly, this new normal is now being displayed as PLAN warships and aircraft operate on a nearly daily basis off the east coast of Taiwan.⁴¹ These operations are a stark reminder of the meaning of the new normal for the cross-Strait balance of power. Unfortunately, China Hands never envisioned a day when PLAN warships would be routinely operating on the east coast of Taiwan, but they are now.

Finally, a Chinese invasion of Taiwan cannot be discussed without observing the fact since spring 2021, the People's Republic of China has built some 350 intercontinental ballistic-missile silos in central and western China. If each is equipped with a DF-41 intercontinental ballistic missile with just three multiple independent reentry vehicles, then the People's Republic of China's nuclear arsenal has jumped from an estimated 400 warheads to over 1,500 warheads.⁴² Indeed, the then commander of United States Strategic Command Admiral Charles A. Richard characterized this growth as a “strategic breakout” in which the

People's Republic of China can use its capability as nuclear blackmail, much like Vladimir Putin has done to NATO since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.⁴³

Conclusion

The scale and pace of the PLA Navy's modernization and operations around Taiwan over the past decade, along with Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party's repeated warnings about their interpretation of the One China principle, have transformed the military balance of power in the cross-Strait environment. Given this new normal, Chairman Xi may make the call to invade Taiwan as early as fall 2024. Thus, US and Taiwanese military leaders must prepare now for the coming danger in the Strait.

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Sino-Indian Border Tensions and China's Strategic Calculus

Lisa Curtis and Šumit Ganguly
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The deadly border clash between the Indian Army and Chinese People's Liberation Army forces in June 2020 led to a significant downturn in Sino-Indian relations and brought to the world's attention the dangerous potential for border friction between the two nuclear-armed Asian giants to escalate into open conflict. In its border disputes with India since 2013, shortly after Xi Jinping took the helm of the Communist Party of China, China has been upping the ante. But the 2020 situation was unique because China deployed some 30,000 soldiers at five different points along the line of actual control (LAC), including on territory India claims, while the COVID-19 pandemic was unfolding and forcing most countries—including India—into lockdown. After 17 rounds of corps commander talks between June 2020 and December 2022, the two sides disengaged from three out of the five areas where the Chinese military buildup occurred. But New Delhi has been clear it will not agree to normalize overall ties with Beijing until China returns to pre-May 2020 force positions at all points along the LAC.¹

The threat New Delhi faces is undoubtedly its principal, long-term security concern. Accordingly, New Delhi has no choice but to come to terms with this concern forthrightly. Unfortunately, the Sino-Indian relationship is increasingly asymmetric. The People's Republic of China's economy is more than five times that of India, China spends about three times as much on its defense budget, and the size of the Chinese diplomatic service is several times that of India.² (The precise numbers

remain classified). Under these circumstances, India, as international relations scholars argue, has two options. India can engage in self-help, which would involve building up the country's military capabilities, or seek to balance Chinese power with external assistance (or both). India has, albeit fitfully, sought to build up its internal military capabilities. But sclerotic military acquisition processes, an anemic industrial base, and slothful decision-making procedures have hobbled this endeavor.

In the short term, given the intractability of these problems, no Indian government can undertake the necessary reforms with dispatch. Accordingly, boosting the strategic partnership India has been forging with the United States for the past couple of decades is in the former's best interest.³ The current, right-of-center Bharatiya Janata Party does not carry much of the ideological baggage with which the party's predecessors were sandbagged. Nevertheless, the party still shares a commitment to "strategic autonomy" (the term Indian leadership uses), which inhibits them from fashioning a formal alliance with the United States.⁴ Given these inhibitions, which are rooted in the country's strategic culture, in the foreseeable future, India will remain, at best, a partial strategic partner of the United States. Accordingly, as the United States attempts to court India both bilaterally and within the context of the Quad (made up of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States) the former will have to bear in mind these idiosyncratic features of India's domestic political landscape.

China's Goals

China's increased border aggression against India in recent years appears aimed at achieving several strategic domestic and geopolitical goals. Domestically, increased Chinese border activity in the eastern sector, where the disputed border separates the state of Arunachal Pradesh in India and the Tibet autonomous region (TAR) in China, has been linked to China's efforts to consolidate control over the TAR. Chinese territorial assertions—either in the form of statements or military activity—in the eastern sector have often correlated with periods of unrest in the TAR or in the run-up to major historical events in China, like the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. For instance, in late 2006, Chinese officials and media started to refer to the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as "South Tibet," which likely represented a warning to India not to take advantage of unrest inside the

TAR and global Tibetan protests that were being planned to coincide with the 2008 Olympics.

China also is likely using the disputed border issue to pressure India on its foreign policy choices in the same way the former uses gray-zone activity and economic coercion in other parts of the world. The Chinese military buildup along the LAC in the Ladakh region in 2020 was viewed by several Indian and international observers as Beijing's way of signaling that India getting too close to the United States or cozying up with the Quad would come with costs.⁵ Chinese academics, on the other hand, claim the Chinese military moves along the LAC in early 2020 were a tactical response to India's completion of a road from the capital of Ladakh to an Indian military base close to the LAC.⁶ But these claims ring somewhat hollow given the road had been under construction for 18 years.⁷

Another major contributing factor to the increased Sino-Indian border friction is simply China's enhanced military capabilities and economic progress relative to India's. These factors make asserting its territorial claims and managing the LAC in a way that is favorable to its own objectives easier for Beijing. Indian experts point to the People's Republic of China's growing global power and confidence due to its rapid economic progress in the last 15 years as leading to China's more forceful assertions of both its maritime and territorial claims.⁸ Ultimately, China seeks to contain India's power by keeping the latter's forces tied down simultaneously on both its eastern flank with China and along the latter's western frontier with Pakistan to sap the latter's political will to challenge Chinese ambitions for regional hegemony.

The Role of the People's Liberation Army

Three years after the People's Republic of China's military buildup in the Ladakh region, Beijing has bolstered its power projection in the area by enhancing China's military capacity near the LAC—especially, in the Aksai Chin region (a vast, barren plateau Beijing captured from Indian control during the 1962 Sino-Indian War). In the Depsang Plains region, where Indian and Chinese forces continue to face off, Beijing has constructed infantry shelters and ammunition storage facilities, and it maintains tanks and artillery systems in the region as well. Even in areas where disengagement of forces has occurred, such as the Galwan Valley and the Hot Springs campsite, China has established large military

bases adjacent to roads for quick resupply.⁹ With an estimated 50,000 troops deployed near the LAC in the Ladakh region, China is bolstering its integrated air and missile defense capabilities along the border, and the country reportedly deployed Xian H-6K long-range strategic bombers to the region in late 2021.¹⁰ The People's Liberation Army's advanced military capabilities—in the cyber, space, electronic warfare, and hypersonic domains—far outstrip those of India, whose defense budget is less than one-third of China's.¹¹

Assisting India in Deterring China

The United States would benefit from assisting India in deterring further Chinese territorial aggression along the disputed Sino-Indian border. The Biden-Harris administration's Indo-Pacific strategy says, "We will drive initiatives that reinforce deterrence and counter coercion, such as opposing efforts to alter territorial boundaries."¹² Washington can collaborate with New Delhi in several different ways to help to convince China building up forces along its disputed border with India and seeking to "nibble away" at Indian territory would yield more disadvantages than advantages.

First, Washington can offer India the sophisticated military technology the latter requires to defend its borders. One of India's biggest problems is its military technology gap with China. The recent decision by the Biden-Harris administration to coproduce jet-engine technology with India is encouraging.¹³ But a lack of resources and tight defense budgets will continue to pose challenges for India in making the kinds of large-scale and technologically sophisticated defense acquisitions it needs to counter Beijing.¹⁴ The newly launched Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology dialogue between the US and Indian national security advisers offers an opportunity to enhance discussions on cooperating on advanced military capabilities.

Second, in a related vein, India may not be able to rely on Russia to sustain a range of defense supplies in the wake of the latter's disastrous military misadventure in Ukraine. Already, Russia's ability to provide India with the S-400 missile battery is at question—in part, due to fears of US sanctions.¹⁵ Given Russia's reliability as a key weapon supplier may be in question, turning to the United States to address a range of crucial defense needs might behoove India.

Third, Washington and New Delhi can enhance information and intelligence sharing to monitor Chinese force positions, logistics,

construction, and technical capabilities along the LAC to develop a common operational picture of the Chinese military posture. The United States and India also should compare analyses of Chinese plans and intentions vis-à-vis the Sino-Indian border and how they relate to Chinese activities in other parts of the world to gain a deeper understanding of China's global strategic calculus as well as potential points of vulnerability or opportunity for influencing Beijing's military decision making. Such joint analyses, along with wargaming activity, could help elucidate where India has the largest capability gaps that can potentially be filled before conflict erupts.

As matters stand, India's capabilities in these areas have glaring limitations. Fortunately, since India has signed key "foundational agreements" with the United States, cooperation in these arenas is now more practical and feasible than in the past.¹⁶ But these matters must be handled with skill and delicacy because Indian interlocutors may be reticent about any public discussion of these issues for fear of provoking the People's Republic of China.

Fourth, Washington, in close consultation with New Delhi, could highlight commercially available satellite imagery that shows how China is adopting a more assertive military posture along the LAC to "name and shame" Beijing for its aggressive behavior. Highlighting the imagery could be helpful in cases in which US officials would like foreign governments or the public to be aware of China's actions without sharing classified imagery. For example, the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies uses commercially available satellite imagery to highlight Chinese maritime dispute activities.¹⁷

Fifth, the United States and India could expand the scope of their military-to-military exchanges. Given US military academies' substantial expertise on the People's Liberation Army, Indian officers could benefit significantly through suitable exposure to such knowledge. Although it has improved in recent years, military education in India remains woefully inadequate for its present needs.¹⁸

On its own, India almost certainly lacks the requisite military, intelligence, and other capabilities to cope with the periodic probes the People's Liberation Army has launched along the LAC. Nor are these incursions likely to abate anytime soon.¹⁹ The United States, for understandable reasons, is concerned about the unrelenting

aggressiveness of the People's Republic of China across various parts of Asia under the leadership of Xi Jinping. Security cooperation between the United States and India has increased dramatically over the past two decades as their strategic interests have converged and India's political leadership has managed to shed much of their Cold War-era misgivings about the United States. Both Washington, DC, and New Delhi would benefit from deepening these links to contend with the emergent threat the People's Republic of China poses to the partners' shared interests in South Asia and beyond.

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Pacing the Dragon in South Asia

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Over the past decade China has made enormous inroads in South Asia. Chinese activities have included announcements of massive loans, port construction, and increases in military diplomacy.¹ Two central questions emerge from China's activity. First, what is Beijing's strategy in the region, and second, how does China's strategy impact US and Indian strategic interests? Are New Delhi and Washington keeping pace with Beijing, or has China pulled ahead in the rapidly evolving triangular rivalry in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region (IOR)? This chapter argues, though the Chinese have expanded their interests in the region, South Asia is not a critical security challenge for the People's Liberation Army and China best sees South Asia as a secondary strategic concern. But US and Indian leaders need to be cognizant the People's Liberation Army is rapidly enhancing its ability to conduct military operations, both along the disputed Sino-Indian border, and in the maritime domain in the northern Indian Ocean, thus providing Beijing with multiple options in the event of a war with India.

This article is organized into three sections. The first part focuses on Beijing's strategy in South Asia and how the strategy relates to the People's Liberation Army. The first section also examines both how Beijing supports the People's Liberation Army in South Asia and how the People's Liberation Army is able to project power in the region. The second part of the essay relates to the United States and assesses how close the People's Liberation Army is to achieving its goals and how the status of China's goals is relevant to Washington. The second part also addresses what Washington is doing, and more importantly, what Washington needs

to do to respond to Chinese activities in the IOR. The final section offers policy recommendations for Washington.

The Dragon in South Asia: Strategy and Security

Although South Asia is increasing in strategic importance and is fast becoming an arena of great-power competition, China still views South Asia as a region of secondary strategic importance.² Chinese strategists and security analysts are aware of India's potential and see it through the lens of great-power relations, but they still do not accord India the same level of attention as East Asia, or the United States.³ Beijing's South Asia strategy is best viewed as a combination of multiple goals and strategies that are closely related, but not always well coordinated. China's stated focus on "peripheral diplomacy" is one such goal. Since Hu Jintao's 2009 speech called for greater attention to China's neighbors, China has elevated the importance of peripheral diplomacy in its grand strategy.⁴ At the 2014 Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs, President Xi Jinping placed peripheral diplomacy over relations with the United States.⁵ Although how much of Beijing's emphasis translates to reality is questionable, the fact peripheral diplomacy has been endorsed at the highest level of decision making in China means policymakers need to be aware of its stated importance.

The second and related driver of China's South Asia strategy is Chinese investment and lending in the region. Although the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has garnered great attention since its inauguration in 2013, China had been investing for years before crafting the BRI. Furthermore, though when viewed from the outside, the BRI may appear to be a well-oiled strategic endeavor, in reality the initiative is poorly planned, lacks basic coordination, and is characterized by bureaucratic infighting among multiple levels of the Chinese government.⁶ Many of the projects are not well planned, lack proper risk assessment, and are not economically viable. In fact, many of the announced BRI projects in South Asia have not even broken ground years after their announcement.⁷ Although the driving forces behind the BRI are many, and thus are beyond the scope of this paper, the key elements are economic and geostrategic.⁸

A Coherent Military Strategy for South Asia?

Although Chinese military modernization is now a common feature of discussion in Washington, with regular reports of sophisticated new Chinese weapons coming online or being tested, China has yet to define a clear global military strategy.⁹ China lacks a clear strategy despite the

fact Chinese scholars and analysts frequently discuss what they think the People's Liberation Army should do and how the People's Liberation Army should respond to great powers like the United States and, to a lesser extent, India.¹⁰ Although these scholarly discussions make for interesting reading, they are not official stances codified in white papers, or top leaders' speeches. Chinese government white papers can be helpful. For example, the 2019 white paper on China's national defense touches on a more international strategy by stating, "in line with the strategic requirements of near seas defense and far seas protection, the People's Liberation Army's Navy (PLAN) is speeding up the transition of its tasks from defense on the near seas to protection missions on the far seas." The white paper's statement is of keen interest to analysts of Chinese security, but does not articulate a well-thought-out strategy.¹¹ Stating far-seas protection is important, Beijing's language is still purposely vague and does not lay out a concrete strategy for the People's Liberation Army.

Even though a comprehensive strategy is absent, the People's Liberation Army does play a role in Beijing's strategy toward South Asia. From Beijing's perspective, China has multiple security concerns in South Asia. Although the security concerns differ, they overlap and directly impact Beijing's ties with New Delhi. Concern about Chinese separatists using Pakistan as a home for anti-Chinese Communist Party militants is a major (and arguably the primary) driver of Chinese investment in Pakistan.¹² On the domestic-security side, Beijing's massive state-building projects in Tibet and Xinjiang are heavily influenced by fears of domestic unrest in these historically unstable provinces. As discussed below, Chinese state building in the form of infrastructure along the Sino-Indian border and in the IOR has direct implications for security. Improvements in Beijing's logistical capacity have a profound influence on the combat readiness of the People's Liberation Army in the event of a war with India.

Support for the People's Liberation Army on Land: State Building in Tibet

According to the Xinhua News Agency, under Beijing's current 14th five-year plan from 2021–25, the central government plans to invest 190 billion renminbi, or 29.3 billion US dollars, in infrastructure development in Tibet. By 2025 the goal is to have over 120,000 kilometers of highways in Tibet. Road construction on the plateau took off during the last decade and the road network's length expanded by 50 percent from 2015–20 to 118,000 kilometers.¹³ Chinese investments have transformed the landscape and have provided the People's Liberation Army with the

ability to mobilize forces rapidly in the event of a militarized conflict with India. Rail lines have also transformed the People's Liberation Army's ability to mobilize in Tibet. With the current road system, traveling from Chengdu to Lhasa takes at least 40 hours. Once China completes the Sichuan-Tibet railway, the journey from Chengdu to Lhasa is expected to take 15 hours.¹⁴

Strategic infrastructure projects are not just confined to land routes into and out of Tibet. Over the past seven years, Beijing has made massive investments in airfields and border communities close to the disputed border. Since 2017, Beijing has upgraded or built at least 36 airfields in Xinjiang and Tibet. Nearly two-thirds of China's airfield projects are considered to be dual-use facilities and most of the new airfields are located close to the border with India.¹⁵ Furthermore, the local government in Tibet's Shigatse city is constructing 354 villages along the sensitive borders with Nepal, Bhutan, and the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.¹⁶ These facilities enable the People's Liberation Army to reinforce existing military personnel rapidly in the event of hostilities with India. China's increased reinforcement capabilities must not be underestimated considering less than five percent of the entire People's Liberation Army is located in close proximity to the Indian border, whereas 18 percent of the Indian army is stationed close to the border.¹⁷ The massive infrastructure investment in Tibet has profound implications for India. In one critical example of how building railways into Tibet has dramatically altered the security dynamic vis-à-vis India, consider before China officially opened the Qinghai-Tibet railway in 2006, the People's Liberation Army took 90 days to mobilize two divisions in Tibet. After 2006, the time required to mobilize two divisions was shortened to 20 days.¹⁸ The continuing progress in logistical capacity on the plateau has reduced the time needed to mobilize divisions.

Dragon on the High Seas

In terms of Indian security, Chinese infrastructural improvements in Tibet must be coupled with the expanding power of the People's Liberation Army Navy. The People's Liberation Army Navy is now the largest navy in the world and over the past two decades has made massive improvements in its ability to conduct both surface and undersea warfare.¹⁹ A potential war with India along the Himalayan border is highly likely, if not guaranteed, to expand to the IOR. Although most of the People's Liberation Army Navy's major surface combatants are modern, Beijing has not adequately invested in the infrastructure and logistics to enable the People's Liberation Army Navy to conduct a meaningful blue-water naval campaign for any extended duration of time.²⁰

A “Chinese string of pearls” in the IOR is often discussed, wherein Beijing is building a series of dual-use ports that would allow the People’s Liberation Army Navy to use facilities in the event of a war with a rival power, likely India.²¹ With the exception of the Chinese military base at Djibouti, (which would not be very relevant in a war with India, due to the base’s geographic location) the People’s Liberation Army Navy would struggle to make port calls in a friendly country. Any People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) warship seeking refuge in Pakistan would have to pass through waters patrolled by the Indian Navy, which Washington would likely support. Washington has assisted India with intelligence in regard to China.²² Any future Chinese base in Sri Lanka (highly unlikely) would be within range of Indian land-based fighter aircraft, not to mention Indian naval vessels. India was able to have Sri Lanka agree to not allowing a Chinese military base in Hambantota.²³ In the absence of reliable ports at which to seek supplies and refuge, the People’s Liberation Army Navy would be forced to rely on replenishment on the high seas. Although replenishing on the high seas is not an impossible task, in a combat situation where enemy warships and submarines are actively hunting PLAN warships, relying on high-seas replenishment is a severe liability. When combined with a very limited (but slowly increasing) ability to provide air cover from aircraft carriers, the People’s Liberation Army Navy would struggle to win a maritime confrontation against India’s home field advantage.²⁴

Beijing is clearly cognizant of the People’s Liberation Army Navy’s logistical shortfalls in blue-water operations. The development of the Type 901 Fuyu-class replenishment ship specifically designed to accompany Chinese aircraft carriers is an attempt to fill the critical gap in blue-water operations.²⁵ At present the People’s Liberation Army Navy has two operational 901s, and nine smaller and slower 903s.²⁶ Beijing will produce more 901s but, as of now, any Chinese naval flotilla that would venture into the IOR to engage in naval warfare with India would only be able to conduct combat operations for two to three weeks before running out of critical supplies.²⁷

A Two-Front War?

Fortunately, the violence between India and China that recently erupted along the disputed border has been localized and has not led to any mass mobilizations by either side. But if events were to spiral out of control, the prospect for a two-front war, with one in the Himalayas and the other in the Indian Ocean, is high. Any meaningful, mechanized military actions along the border would likely lead to calls for the Indian Navy to cut Chinese sea lines of communication, which would almost certainly cause Beijing

to dispatch significant naval forces into the IOR both to protect its sea lines of communication and to conduct operations against the Indian Navy.

At present, Beijing is not well prepared to fight such a conflict. Although China is both rapidly improving its position in Tibet and modernizing the People's Liberation Army Navy, a two-front war with the possibility of US assistance to New Delhi is a strategic nightmare for Chinese leaders. East Asia and Taiwan are by far Beijing's greatest security concerns. Having to redirect the main thrust of the Chinese military to support combat operations against India would leave the People's Liberation Army vulnerable along China's east coast, which is the reason Beijing will likely not allow a localized violent confrontation on land to escalate to a mechanized war. Regarding India, Chinese leaders have achieved some of their goals. Chinese leaders have rapidly modernized the infrastructure in Tibet and have constructed a powerful navy, which, though lacking the ability to win a naval war in the IOR, can make the cost of war with India unacceptably high. China's infrastructure and naval capabilities may not completely prevent an all-out war, but will likely serve as a substantial break in escalation.

Is Washington Doing What It Needs to Do?

A key question confronting US leaders is how close is the People's Liberation Army to achieving its goals in the IOR? The challenge is the People's Liberation Army does not yet have a clear strategy. If US strategists see China as fixated on a long game of becoming a global hegemonic power, then US leaders need to act quickly to shore up support in IOR and South Asian states. But if China is more focused on regional dominance, primarily in East Asia, then Washington can take a different approach.

Dragon on the Prowl?

Chinese ambitions under Xi Jinping appear at times to be limitless. The BRI and other initiatives, such as the Global Development Initiative, are viewed as counters to US and Western influence.²⁸ According to such a view, People's Liberation Army activities in South Asia and the IOR are opening salvos in the contest of the century between China and the United States. If China's undeclared grand strategy is to replace the United States as the global rule maker, and China's military activities in South Asia are just the beginning, Washington needs to shore up its alliances and partnerships in the IOR. From a worst-case-scenario planning perspective, Chinese developments in South Asia are striving

to meet Beijing's goals. China is already the first- or second-largest trade partner of most South Asian states.²⁹ Chinese port projects in the IOR are reinforcing Beijing's influence and, when coupled with infrastructure projects in Tibet, the situation appears to favor an aggressive and assertive China. Increases in PLAN activities in the IOR and discussions of where Beijing will set up its next military base feed the realist perspective. A scenario in which China attempts to replace the United States as the global rule maker is of deep concern to New Delhi and provides fodder to the narrative China is trying to encircle and contain India.³⁰

Dragon Overstretched?

A counterperspective questions whether Beijing and the People's Liberation Army have accomplished their goals in South Asia. Yes, China has enormously expanded its influence in the region, but many South Asian states that are seen as possible Chinese partners are keen to avoid drifting too close to Beijing. Nepal, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh distance themselves from Beijing and, with varying levels of success, are attempting to play China, India, and the United States against each other.³¹ Of greater strategic importance is, of the three great powers mentioned above, only India sees South Asia as its primary security zone. China is much more concerned with East Asia, and with the Russia-Ukraine War and friction over Taiwan in the Pacific, South Asia does not occupy even a secondary level of strategic importance in Washington.

China's goals, though vague, are to be able to protect its economic interests in the IOR and to deter India from seizing Chinese territory along the disputed border. Importantly, China is consumed with internal challenges ranging from a shrinking and aging population to jump-starting its economy after the disastrous effects of zero-COVID in 2022.³² Any US strategy that seeks to counter China in the region needs to take China's current focuses into account. More importantly, US strategy in the IOR should not be simply reactive to what Beijing is doing or what the United States perceives Beijing as doing. Chinese naval forays into the IOR may be of concern to Washington, but US decisionmakers need to realize many regional states see China as an opportunity to free themselves from what they feel has been over a half century of Indian hegemony.³³

Beijing is currently constructing a self-fulfilling prophecy of being surrounded by the United States, and Chinese behavior toward India has caused New Delhi to reach out to Washington. The numerous defense cooperation agreements India and the United States have signed are testimony.³⁴

Beijing appears unable to understand how its assertive and aggressive behavior is pushing a once-reticent India into American arms. The largest impediment to Washington countering China and the Chinese military in South Asia is working with an Indian partner that, though cautiously partnering with the Americans, is still hesitant to engage fully and become an openly committed partner determined to thwart Chinese advances in the IOR. This reluctance serves as a critical hurdle to deeper defense ties, despite the meaningful improvements in military-to-military relations over the past decade.³⁵

Recommendations

1. By Indian standards, New Delhi has made enormous progress in its military-to-military relationship with Washington. But the realm of interoperability between the two militaries holds significant room for improvement. Many of India's Russian-built combat systems are not very compatible with American hardware and US leaders need to push harder for more meaningful interoperability in joint exercises. Reports of combat systems not even being turned on during joint exercises point to exercises that are more about optics than substance.³⁶
2. Considering the structural challenge China presents to US interests, Washington needs to enhance and reinforce its ties to New Delhi. Confirming a US ambassador to New Delhi took 26 months, which is not good for the optics of bilateral ties and sends a message India is not a priority to the United States.³⁷ Washington needs to continue to deepen its partnership with New Delhi and expand the partnership into other areas, such as trade and investment.
3. The US Navy should resurrect the 1st Fleet for the Indian Ocean. The Navy disbanded the former fleet in the 1970s.³⁸ Considering the rapidly evolving nature of the People's Liberation Army Navy, and the possibility of a future Chinese Indian Ocean fleet, Washington should base a new fleet either in the Indian Ocean, or in a friendly partner or ally nation such as Singapore or Australia.³⁹

4. Washington must understand Indian sensitivities vis-à-vis the United States and not push too hard or expect too much from New Delhi in the near term. Instead, US leaders should allow China to continue its aggressive behavior, thus continuing to drive New Delhi closer to Washington. As China continues to flex its muscles and reinforces its military positions along India's northern border, New Delhi will likely be compelled to deepen its ties with the US military.

Conclusion: Pacing the Dragon?

The People's Liberation Army is making rapid progress in its ability to conduct kinetic operations in South Asia and the IOR. Although China has not officially articulated a precise People's Liberation Army strategy for the region, Beijing increasingly has the capacity, at least along the disputed Sino-Indian border, to conduct substantial combat operations. China's ability will continue to grow in the years ahead as China integrates new weapons systems into specific services and further enhances the People's Liberation Army's logistical capability through massive state-building projects on the Tibetan Plateau. The situation in the Indian Ocean is also improving for the People's Liberation Army Navy. But with an absence of fully operational military bases, a limited ability to resupply on the high seas, and the inability (for now) to guarantee meaningful air cover, PLAN capabilities in the Indian Ocean would struggle against an Indian Navy operating in India's own backyard.

American planners need to be aware of the secondary importance of the IOR to Chinese decisionmakers. Chinese security goals in the region are small compared to China's concerns in East Asia. But Washington would be well advised to continue deepening its strategic engagement with New Delhi, while at the same time reinforcing the United States' ability to interdict Chinese sea lines of communication in the event of a war with China. The United States could greatly enhance such strategic engagement through strengthened partnerships with regional countries and an increase in US power-projection capabilities in the Indian Ocean.

In terms of keeping pace with the People's Liberation Army, in the maritime theater, the People's Liberation Army Navy is trying to catch up with and keep pace with the US Navy. The US force structure in the IOR, which includes the Middle East, is vastly superior to what Beijing can bring to the region.⁴⁰ In fact, if China has a military strategy

for the Indian Ocean, the strategy is to be able to defend Chinese interests from the US military. On land, keeping pace with the People's Liberation Army is more in the hands of New Delhi. In the land domain, Washington can play the role of a backstop that serves as a source of intelligence and, if necessary, logistical support. Overall, the People's Liberation Army must deal with some significant geographic and logistical hurdles if the People's Liberation Army is to match the United States and India in South Asia. A key question for future research is how will the increasing internal challenges in China influence the future of China's international security strategy?

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East Africa's Role in the People's Republic of China's Naval Strategy: Contesting Sea Control in the Indian Ocean

Connor Donahue and Travis Dolney

Introduction

This chapter contributes to the understanding of China's doctrine on the use of the country's overseas military facilities during wartime. Beijing's efforts to establish military facilities in East Africa are in part rooted in military objectives—specifically, a desire to contest US or allied sea control in the Indian Ocean during a conflict in the western Pacific Ocean. China aims to degrade adversaries' ability to establish distant blockades along the country's critical regional supply lines by developing the operational capabilities to dispute sea control in the Indian Ocean. Establishing overseas People's Liberation Army (PLA) military facilities would enable Beijing to project power and maintain the security of strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs).¹ During a wartime blockade, China could use prepositioned naval and air assets equipped with missiles to degrade an adversary's blockading forces and regional support facilities to such a degree that some Chinese commercial vessels may be able to break through the blockading line to transport critical energy cargoes back to China.² This chapter builds on a body of literature that has examined the peacetime objectives of China's overseas basing strategy, which include conducting naval diplomacy, participating in international peacekeeping efforts, and extracting resources. But this chapter does not examine the wartime implications of China's overseas basing efforts.³

Once established, PLA facilities in East Africa would have the potential to shape the prewar battlespace in the Indian Ocean in a way that would enable the People's Republic of China (PRC) to deter or contest blockade operations. East African military facilities may support PLA counterblockade efforts in several ways, including by:

- establishing parity of force;
- extending the blockading line; and
- employing lawfare.

Background

The People's Republic of China's goal is to establish a global network of military facilities. In addition to establishing its first overseas military facility in Djibouti in 2017, the People's Liberation Army is currently working to develop an Indo-Pacific military facility at Ream Naval Base in Cambodia.⁴ According to the Department of Defense's *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2022*, the People's Republic of China is very likely seeking to establish additional military facilities near the SLOCs that extend from China across the Indian Ocean to the Strait of Hormuz and Africa.⁵ The Department of Defense assesses the Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Indonesia, Kenya, Myanmar, Pakistan, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, and the United Arab Emirates, and China has "probably already made overtures to Namibia, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands."⁶ Chinese doctrinal writings state the wartime function of overseas military facilities is to support PLA forces. Specifically, PRC military installations abroad are intended to support PLA Navy efforts to protect SLOCs. During a war, PLA Navy efforts to degrade a US-led blockade would be crucial to ensuring China's access to critical resources, such as oil.

Chinese Naval Strategy and SLOC Protection

The PLA Navy currently operates under a naval strategy called "Near Seas Defense and Far Seas Protection."⁷ The first part of the strategy, Near Seas Defense, reflects China's long-standing commitment to controlling the country's near seas: the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and the Yellow Sea.⁸ In 2015, Beijing introduced Far Seas Protection as an addition to the PLA Navy's Near Seas Defense mission, reinforcing the PLA Navy's shift toward a blue-water navy.⁹ This shift toward the

far seas was accompanied by PRC efforts to establish an overseas support infrastructure to sustain military operations abroad.

In addition to defining the role of foreign military facilities in providing peacetime support for naval operations, Chinese strategy documents outline the need and reason to project combat power in the far seas: to establish forward presence. For example, the 2020 edition of *Science of Military Strategy* states in accordance with the strategic requirements of Near Seas Defense and Far Seas Protection and “in order to ensure the formation of long-sea combat capabilities as soon as possible, it is necessary to vigorously strengthen the construction of comprehensive long-sea support capabilities . . . and improve the construction of naval bases.”¹⁰ The same document clarifies the role the combat capabilities mentioned above play in defending critical SLOCs as well as highlights the need to “continuously improve the defense capabilities of the far sea” and to “push the strategic defense frontier from the offshore to the open sea” to “ensure the safety of maritime oil and trade and shipping channels.”¹¹

The People's Republic of China's 2019 defense white paper reiterates the importance of defending these maritime shipping channels by stating that maintaining the security of strategic SLOCs is a key reason the People's Liberation Army “builds far seas forces, develops overseas logistical facilities, and enhances capabilities for accomplishing diversified military tasks.”¹² Additionally, the People's Republic of China's 2006 “Science of Campaigns” outlines how the People's Liberation Army intends to conduct “sea-line guarding campaigns” or convoy operations for defending seaborne cargoes that have “strategic significance” during wartime.¹³ Although this white paper was written before the PLA Navy's contemporary far-seas capabilities were developed, the paper shows China has long considered military operations as a means of defending SLOCs during war. Safeguarding SLOCs is at the core of the PLA's far-seas strategy because the People's Republic of China relies so heavily on seaborne oil imports.

The Significance of Oil Imports for the People's Republic of China

Since at least 2004, Chinese military white papers have expressed concern about the country's energy security.¹⁴ The People's Republic of China is concerned that during a conflict, the United States would deny China access to Indian Ocean commerce and the critical oil supplies China imports from the Middle East.¹⁵ China's fears are not unfounded. Since at least 2013, scholars and other experts in the United States have argued targeting

China's economy and seaborne crude-oil lifeline would be an effective alternative to (or addition to) direct military conflict.¹⁶

China's transportation and industrial sectors rely to a great extent on seaborne crude-oil imports. In 2021, China imported 72 percent of its crude-oil consumption, or about 10.3 million barrels per day, half of which came from the Middle East.¹⁷ In the same year, about 76 percent of China's crude-oil imports were shipped by sea to China via the Strait of Malacca.¹⁸ As a result, the People's Republic of China fears that in a conflict or crisis, an adversary may blockade oil-transit routes and cut off China's access to this critical commodity.¹⁹ Former PRC President Hu Jintao expressed China's anxiety about this vital chokepoint in 2003 when he described the problem as Beijing's "Malacca dilemma."²⁰

The United States defines a blockade as "a belligerent operation to prevent vessels and/or aircraft of all nations, enemy as well as neutral, from entering or exiting specified ports, airfields, or coastal areas belonging to, occupied by, or under the control of an enemy nation."²¹ This definition expresses what is commonly referred to as a "total blockade," which entails establishing complete control over a swath of closed sea territory. By closing a critical sea area via blockade, allied forces would aim to deny China materiel—such as petroleum and other critical industrial resources—necessary for the country to sustain the war effort.

During an oil blockade, the People's Republic of China would have a limited amount of time to counter the blockade and restore imports before the country's industrial sector and ability to sustain conflict would be negatively affected. China has a total oil storage capacity of more than 1.3 billion barrels, 400 million barrels of which come from government strategic petroleum reserve sites.²² According to Gabriel Collins, in 2022, China's total crude-oil inventory was about 950 million barrels, which could sustain the country for about three months at 2021 consumption rates.²³ But Collins notes if rationing is instituted, reducing domestic consumption by 35 percent could extend the capacity of oil reserves for up to 10 months.²⁴

The People's Republic of China has attempted to mitigate this risk by reducing domestic dependence on petroleum imports, which in turn would be achieved by cultivating redundancy in petroleum supply lines.²⁵ But switching to overland oil transport would not provide sufficient import capacity to reduce China's dependency on seaborne imports. According to Collins, if the three currently established inbound crude-oil pipelines were operating at full capacity, they would be able to transport

only 70 million tons of oil per year or about 14 percent of China's total 2021 crude imports.²⁶

Even if pipeline capacity were greater, the fixed transit line of oil pipelines is more susceptible to system-wide disruption than a network of seaborne oil tankers is.²⁷ A seaborne oil supply network is characterized by interchangeable supply and offloading points at the beginning and end of a tanker's journey. The terminal points are relatively few but far more numerous than the fixed beginning and end of an oil pipeline, making the seaborne network more redundant and thus more resistant to disruption. Similarly, once an oil tanker is loaded and embarks, it is a single entity moving through a diffuse network of SLOCs. Although the global network of SLOCs is punctuated by geographic chokepoints, destroying a single tanker, or even a group of tankers, does not disrupt the overall SLOC transport structure in the same way destroying oil pipeline infrastructure does. Clearly, the People's Republic of China should bolster its defense of the more resilient seaborne network. The only way for China to protect seaborne energy imports from enemy blockade during war is to marshal sufficient forces to contest adversarial control of the Indian Ocean effectively where critical PRC maritime supply routes are located.²⁸

East Africa's Role in the People's Republic of China's Protection of SLOCs

During a war, the primary threat to China's flow of critical seaborne imports would be a blockade of Indian Ocean SLOCs. Given a scenario in which a conflict breaks out in the western Pacific—for example, if China were to attempt to unify Taiwan forcefully in the late 2020s, and the United States and its allies were to intervene against China—the Indian Ocean would almost certainly be a secondary theater of conflict. Establishing military facilities in East Africa would enable China to shape this secondary theater in both peacetime and wartime and bolster the country's ability to protect crucial SLOCs.

Our examination of the ramifications East African PLA facilities may have on the conflict environment of the secondary Indian Ocean theater relies on multiple assumptions. First, we assume a western Pacific conflict will occur in the late 2020s that involves the United States and China. Second, we assume the Western coalition would attempt to prevent critical commodities and materiel of war from reaching the People's Republic of China by implementing a blockade in the Indian Ocean. Third, we assume

the People's Republic of China will successfully establish military facilities in East Africa that are both legally and materially capable of bolstering the People's Liberation Army's ability to sustain a military presence before the conflict. Last, we assume the conflict will be protracted and will not escalate to the strategic nuclear threshold. The validity of this final assumption is the most tenuous.

The only way for the People's Republic of China to protect cargoes of seaborne energy supplies transiting from the Middle East to China is to contest adversaries' sea control in the Arabian Sea and northern Indian Ocean credibly.²⁹ A Western blockade in the Indian Ocean exclusively centered around the Andaman Sea and the northern Strait of Malacca would both leave blockading naval forces exposed to Chinese land-based, anti-ship weapons, such as the DF-26 anti-ship ballistic missile, as well as leave the Sunda Strait and Lombok Strait open to Chinese shipping. Diverting Chinese tanker imports around Malacca would only incur slight disruptions and add "an additional cost of as little as one or two dollars per barrel," according to Collins.³⁰ Although wartime insurance rates and ship owners' risk aversion would likely curtail commercial vessel traffic moving into an active war zone, PRC commercial vessels are legally mandated to support the Chinese Communist Party in times of conflict or crisis.³¹ Therefore, some Chinese oil tankers would continue to make the perilous journey. By credibly contesting adversaries' sea control in the Arabian Sea and northern Indian Ocean, the PLA Navy can create an environment that deters adversaries from establishing a blockade, which would enable at least some oil convoy ships to cross the Indian Ocean toward China.

Establishing Parity of Force

A successful blockade depends foremost on sea control or the ability of a navy to "secure use of the maritime domain by one's own forces and to prevent its use by the enemy" within a temporally and geographically delimited area.³² Historically, sea control has been achieved by amassing a force capable of completely denying adversaries the use of a space while providing unfettered access for one's own operational needs.³³ But modern technology—such as aviation and anti-ship missiles—can prevent navies from establishing the ideal of total sea control.³⁴ Today, sea control is achieved when a navy obtains the necessary freedom of action to achieve operational objectives.³⁵ To establish a blockade, a state must have capabilities sufficient to deny transit along the enemy's key routes of supply.³⁶

Under these circumstances, a US-led blockading force would have to provide a significantly larger or more capable force than China's to establish sea control effectively. China, on the other hand, would only need to maintain a force sufficient to deny sea control and prevent enemy forces from establishing a blockade. Because the resource burden of establishing sea control is larger than the resource burden of denying sea control, China would be able to accomplish its objectives with relatively fewer resources. Therefore, the quantity of resources required for counterblockade operations is fundamentally asymmetric to the resources required for blockade operations.

Overseas military facilities enable the People's Liberation Army to preposition military assets in theater and ensure they can respond immediately to a conflict. Military facilities provide logistics support for refueling, resupplying weapons and provisions, and conducting repairs. The more military facilities the People's Liberation Army has in a region, the more resilient and robust the theater's logistical network is. The number of platforms that can be supported in theater is proportional to the capability of the theater's logistics network. By establishing military facilities in the western Indian Ocean, the People's Liberation Army can amass and sustain the resources necessary to achieve parity of force and counter adversaries' sea-control operations. But importantly, parity of force is not simply a balance in the number or tonnage of vessels in theater. Parity of force must also include elements such as the relative mobility of forces, training of personnel, quality of platforms employed, and asymmetric advantages.³⁷

By 2030, the PLA Navy is projected to have significantly more surface combatants than the US Navy. According to the Congressional Research Service, the PLA Navy's "overall battle force is expected to grow to 400 ships by 2025 and 440 ships by 2030," with most of the growth occurring in major surface combatants.³⁸ The US Navy, on the other hand, will have an estimated battle force of up to 290 ships by the end of 2030.³⁹ Although both sides would presumably want to devote the bulk of their military resources to the primary theater of conflict, the People's Republic of China's relative advantage in number of platforms may enable Beijing to devote vessels to the Indian Ocean more easily to contest sea-control and blockade operations. This PRC advantage would force the United States to choose between diverting its relatively scarce resources away from its primary political objective and abandoning blockade operations entirely.

When a state's forces achieve parity of capability in theater, the state gains the potential to deter an offensive force from attempting to establish a blockade, which, in turn, sends the message to other adversaries that establishing effective sea control would be impossible. This strategy has elements similar to those in Alfred von Tirpitz's broader risk theory during the period leading up to World War I; Tirpitz sought to increase the strength of the German Navy to deter aggression from the United Kingdom's preponderant naval force.⁴⁰ Although Tirpitz's plan hastened confrontation between the United Kingdom and Germany, his logic may find more success in the limited context of a secondary theater campaign in the Indian Ocean if an adversary's planners decide establishing an effective blockade in the secondary theater would take too many resources away from the primary theater of battle and jeopardize the adversary's fundamental strategic objectives because the resources either side can deploy in a secondary theater of conflict depend fundamentally on the political and military conditions of the primary theater.

Extending the Blockading Line

Scholars identify two types of blockades: close and distant.⁴¹ Close blockades require "placing warships within sight of the blockaded coast or port to ensure the immediate interception of any ship entering or leaving the area."⁴² Modern technologies such as air assets and anti-ship cruise missiles make this infeasible.⁴³ In contrast, a distant blockade or semidistant blockade "avoids the military hazards of close blockade by stationing the blockading force at a distance, albeit still astride the enemy's sea lanes."⁴⁴ The amount of space a blockading power is able to control is directly related to the degree of naval power the power possesses in theater relative to the naval strength of the opponent. Distant blockades require an overwhelming superiority of force relative to the opponent.⁴⁵

Geography is another variable that determines the level of forces necessary to implement or oppose a blockade. Geography can help facilitate a blockade when features such as chokepoints allow the blockading force to be distributed across a relatively small area. Conversely, expansive coastlines require forces to be scattered across a broader area, making establishing sea control harder.

Establishing military facilities in East Africa on the flank of allied blockading operations increases the size of the necessary blockading

line by preventing PRC vessels from being bottled up in the Arabian Sea. If the People's Liberation Army were able to gain a strategic location in East Africa, such as Kenya, the Seychelles, or Tanzania, where the military could deploy naval and air assets during times of war, China would effectively extend the necessary length of a blockade from the northwestern Arabian Sea to the western Indian Ocean. Increasing the size of the blockade line might again force an allied blockading force to divert proportionally more naval forces away from the primary strategic objective in the western Pacific to implement the blockade. By contesting sea control across a more expansive area, China would compel the US-led force to make challenging resource allocation choices, increasing the difficulty of achieving effective sea control.

Employing Lawfare

In addition to operational necessity, the ability of a US-led force to achieve effective sea control is important because under international law, the amount of territory deemed to be under blockade cannot exceed the ability of the belligerent to enforce the blockade. In other words, to be legitimate, blockades must be effective.⁴⁶ Blockades that exist only on paper and sweeping mandates about where maritime trade is not allowed to transit have been illegal under international law since the 1856 Declaration respecting Maritime Law, also known as the Declaration of Paris.⁴⁷ The 1994 *San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea*, the most recent codification of customary international law on how blockades are established and maintained, reaffirms the principle that blockades can “deny the enemy use of his own and neutral vessels or aircraft to transport personnel and goods to or from an enemy territory,” as long as the blockades are “enforced and maintained by a combination of legitimate methods and means of warfare.”⁴⁸ Therefore, “an effective blockade is plausible only in cases in which the blockading power maintains naval forces significantly larger than those of the navy being contained,” a condition that satisfies the larger burden of proof the international community requires of the blockading force.⁴⁹

Establishing PLA bases in East Africa and using them to create parity of force in the Indian Ocean region and, ultimately, to expand the geographic scope of a notional blockade may shape the prewar battlespace by undermining the ability of the United States to institute a legitimate blockade under accepted international law. *Lawfare* is defined as “a strategy for using—or misusing—law as a substitute for traditional

military means to achieve an operational objective.”⁵⁰ Chinese military theorists have promulgated a similar concept: cognitive warfare. In cognitive warfare, public opinion and psychological and legal means are used to achieve victory.⁵¹ By amassing a visible presence in the western Indian Ocean, the People’s Republic of China lays the groundwork to contest narratives that the United States is undertaking counter-PRC operations to uphold an international order predicated on the rule of law.

Overseas bases are necessary for the PLA Navy to employ lawfare or cognitive domain warfare to counter allied blockade operations in the Indian Ocean. The People’s Republic of China may be able to range US maritime platforms in the Indian Ocean from mainland China using the DF-26 road-mobile anti-ship ballistic missile, establishing a virtual presence. But a virtual presence would not be able to undermine the legitimacy of potential blockade operations under international law.⁵² Physical military facilities in the region and the assets they support lay the prewar conditions for countering a blockade by displaying a credible counterblockade force or “fleet in being.”

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined how the PLA Navy may operationalize future military facilities during times of war. Specifically, we have examined China’s pursuit of military facilities in East Africa as part of a counterblockade strategy. East African PLA facilities would be advantageous to the People’s Republic of China for many reasons. These facilities would enable China to dispute sea control credibly in the Arabian Sea and western Indian Ocean by extending the line of contact with adversaries’ blockading forces and preventing them from instituting internationally legal operations. The People’s Republic of China would also be able to undermine adversaries’ ability to establish a distant blockade of China’s critical petroleum supply chain. Overall, this strategy would enable the People’s Republic of China to shape the prewar battlespace and create the conditions necessary to contest a Western blockade viably.

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How Would China Justify a War with Taiwan?

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Introduction

Analysts have been drawing many lessons from the invasion of Ukraine for a possible future confrontation over Taiwan.¹ One lesson is that aggressors often expend a great deal of effort to generate excuses for war. In the months before the invasion, Russia was less interested in averting a war than finding a pretext for one. Moscow made exaggerated claims and unrealistic demands and attempted to provoke or fake incidents as an excuse for military action. These practices are common when countries are on the verge of war.

In this chapter, I ask whether China might engage in similar behavior if it intends military action against Taiwan and, if so, what this behavior might look like. I examine the historical record of these tactics and China's foreign policy behavior and rhetoric. Although it is not certain China would adopt these tactics, Beijing may find them useful to shape the responses of its domestic public and regional powers. I identify two categories of pretext—military incidents and threats to the status quo—and explore how China could use them. I conclude with a brief discussion of the challenge these activities could pose for the United States.

Before I begin the analysis, some caveats are in order. I do not write this paper to suggest a crisis or war is likely. Instead, I consider previously overlooked ways China could behave in a hypothetical—and far from inevitable—future crisis. I also do not mean to suggest that China's government is particularly prone to deception. Many governments have used these tactics, and many of the historical examples I draw from involve

deception by the United States. Finally, like most studies of deterrence, this analysis takes the perspective of a defender facing a potentially aggressive opponent. But I acknowledge these disputes are usually more complicated than having an easily identified aggressor and defender. Indeed, the tactic of generating pretexts for war often relies on this ambiguity.

Justifying War with Taiwan

How would China justify a war with Taiwan? One could argue China has spent the past 70 years justifying such a war. Beijing has made clear it considers Taiwan to be a breakaway province of China that should be reunited with the mainland.² The function, however, of a *casus belli* is usually not to explain why war is necessary but to explain why it has become necessary now. Regardless of the larger issues at stake, governments often feel the need to justify the decision to resort to violence. The complex, ambiguous, and long-term issues that govern decision making are often not viewed as compelling enough for domestic or international audiences. Governments usually prefer to remove any moral ambiguity by arguing that an opponent's actions left no choice but war. Common pretexts include enemy attacks, military incidents, diplomatic breakdowns, and political or social turmoil, and states will often seek to instigate these pretexts if they are not forthcoming.

It is far from certain that China would seek to justify war this way. The People's Republic of China has neither a legislature to authorize war nor a voting public to convince. Perhaps the Chinese government feels the *casus belli* has already been established and that simply declaring its patience has run out would be sufficient. More importantly, the People's Republic of China might not want to let its diplomatic strategy interfere with military strategy. Many analysts believe China would seek the quickest possible victory.³ An offensive could even include strikes against American bases and forces to prevent timely intervention. This strategy would benefit greatly from surprise and could be endangered if a manufactured crisis provided forewarning. China may be satisfied to explain its reasons afterward or to give a cursory justification right before launching an offensive.

Generating pretexts has not been a prominent part of China's historical playbook. Instead, many of China's previous military actions have been acts of "seizing the initiative," to quote Allen S. Whiting.⁴ China's intervention in Korea in 1950 achieved tactical surprise through a massive counteroffensive.⁵

A long period of diplomatic and military tension preceded the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979, but China concealed the immediate actions leading up to its invasion of Vietnam to introduce an element of surprise.⁶ China labeled both the Sino-Vietnamese War and the Sino-Indian War of 1962 as “defensive counterattacks” against repeated border encroachments but did not launch these offensives in reaction to specific incidents.⁷

Of course, China is not bound to its previous behavior. The political costs of striking first have frequently led states to reconsider surprise or preemptive attacks, or to seek ways to mitigate potential backlash.⁸ Rejecting recommendations to take military action against China during the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1954–55, President Dwight D. Eisenhower explained, “[I]t is oftentimes necessary to take heavy liabilities from a purely military standpoint in order to avoid being in the position of being an aggressor and the initiator of war.”⁹ Chairman Mao Zedong similarly spoke about the political value of a “second strike” and the danger of being labeled an aggressor.¹⁰

As a result, states will sometimes attempt to generate an excuse for war, orchestrating diplomacy, military operations, covert operations, and public statements over a long period leading up to war. Austria-Hungary decided to forego plans for immediate war against Serbia after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, instead opting for a month of diplomacy to build the case for war and issuing an ultimatum to Serbia that Vienna expected to be rejected.¹¹ If China decides the political costs of military surprise are too high but nevertheless decides on military action, Beijing may seek to use a prewar crisis period to generate pretexts for war.

Such a strategy would not be entirely out of character for the Chinese government. The People’s Republic of China has a long tradition of justifying foreign policy on moral grounds. In addition, China has long viewed “political mobilization” as integral to the country’s war efforts and has exploited foreign provocations to mobilize citizens in support of foreign policy objectives.¹² Moreover, the People’s Republic of China has declared a policy of peaceful unification and attempted to implement it through economic and cultural exchange with Taiwan. This declaration suggests China might also feel compelled to explain to the public and the world why the country decided to abandon these efforts and to shift—perhaps suddenly—to forcible unification.

China may also find a military strategy of surprise less effective than it seems at first. Although it may prefer surprise, China could face difficulties preparing for a cross-strait invasion without being noticed.¹³ As with Russia's military buildup before the invasion of Ukraine, there could be a period when China may have to explain its actions to the rest of the world. China may even prefer a long, drawn-out political crisis to probe international reaction or wear down Taiwan's will to resist. China has a history of using crises and military operations in more limited and probing ways.¹⁴

Most importantly, the People's Republic of China will be concerned about the reaction of other countries. Keeping as many states out of a war as possible will be an important political goal. China will want to prevent the territory, resources, and military forces of regional powers from being used in a war over Taiwan and to ensure combat does not occur in other theaters. If it can convince regional powers that war was caused by Taiwan's recklessness rather than its own ambitions, then Beijing will be able to argue its goals are limited to dealing with Taiwan and do not pose a threat to others. If China can convince regional powers that the United States or Taiwan is trying to drag them into war, it will confirm China's contention that neutrality is safer than alignment with the United States. Even the United States may be reluctant to get involved if Taiwan appears responsible.

Furthermore, China will also hope to convince as many countries as possible to continue economic and diplomatic relations, despite pressure from the United States. Shifting blame to the United States could help China to persuade reluctant governments or to help the governments to sell neutrality to their people. Thinking beyond the short-term reactions of regional powers, the People's Republic of China will also want to avoid international isolation as well as prevent the emergence of a countervailing alliance in the aftermath of a conflict. The circumstances that lead to war could determine whether regional powers see China as a threat that requires long-term containment.

Military Incidents as Pretexts for War

Arguably, the most common justification for war is self-defense, which has been used in nearly all historical crises (often, by both sides). Self-defense is the most important justification for the use of force in international law and just-war theory. The principle of fighting

on just grounds is also an important tenet of the Chinese Communist Party, with Chairman Mao himself having proclaimed, “We will not attack unless we are attacked; if we are attacked, we will certainly counterattack.”¹⁵ Regardless of other justifications, governments almost always portray war as forced upon them by enemy aggression. Such claims of self-defense often come down to the question of who shot first, so governments frequently try to manipulate the outbreak of a war.

China could use multiple different strategies to attempt to frame the United States or, more likely, Taiwan for starting a war. Exaggerating accidents and minor incidents is a common practice. President Lyndon B. Johnson seized upon reports of a torpedo attack in the Gulf of Tonkin to gain congressional authorization for the Vietnam War, later learning the attack may have never occurred.¹⁶ Given the increasing frequency of military patrols, exercises, and freedom of navigation operations near Taiwan and in the South China Sea, accidents or violations of territorial waters could easily be seized upon as aggressive acts. A repeat of the April 2001 EP-3 incident, which was caused by a collision between a Chinese fighter jet and an American spy plane near Hainan Island, could lead to demands for retaliation or provide an excuse for escalation.¹⁷

Exaggerating incidents does not necessarily lead directly to war. Instead, incidents are often an opportunity to engage in “counterfeit diplomacy”: the tactic of making unacceptable offers so the adversary gets blamed for rejecting diplomacy.¹⁸ Incidents could provide an excuse to press sovereignty claims about exclusive economic zones, air defense identification zones, or territorial waters that the United States and Taiwan will be unwilling to accept. In the past, China has demanded symbolic actions like investigations, apologies, punishments, and statements of principle.¹⁹ Declaring oneself unsatisfied with these types of subjective demands is easy. Despite American efforts to accommodate such demands after the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, the episode still ended with China rejecting American explanations and apologies.

If exaggerating incidents does not bear fruit, China could attempt to provoke an incident. The United States has done this repeatedly. President James K. Polk sent military forces into disputed territory with the apparent intent to cause an incident before the Mexican-American War. Although Polk was prepared to ask Congress to authorize war regardless of what happened, he simply declared, “[W]ar exists . . . by the act of Mexico” and asked Congress to “recognize the existence of the war”

when the military forces were attacked.²⁰ In another example, before World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had American ships follow and harass German submarines, resulting in several violent encounters. Winston Churchill reported that Roosevelt told him “[e]verything was to be done to force an ‘incident’” that would justify the United States in opening hostilities.²¹

China may have the advantage that it can put the United States or Taiwan in a position in which they have little choice but to react. Like the Soviet Union in the Berlin Blockade or the United States in the Cuban Missile Crisis, China could implement a blockade around Taiwan or offshore islands and dare the United States to break the blockade. In the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1958, Communist shelling made resupplying besieged Nationalist troops impossible, and the Eisenhower administration considered attacks on the mainland to suppress air and artillery attacks and make resupply possible.²² Although the People’s Republic of China was not trying to bait the United States into a fight in this instance, China put the Eisenhower administration into a bind and made the administration consider direct military action. Anticipating this possibility, Robert D. Blackwill and Philip Zelikow have proposed trying to break such a blockade in a way that would force China to fire first.²³

The People’s Republic of China could take many actions, such as increasing air and sea patrols, harassing and seizing ships, landing on disputed islands, or engaging in military exercises, to try to provoke an incident. The 2001 EP-3 incident occurred after the People’s Republic of China’s fighter jets began flying increasingly dangerous intercepts.²⁴ China might attempt actions about which it can maintain plausible deniability, such as using plain-clothes members of its maritime militia—known as the “little blue men”—to harass foreign vessels.²⁵ The People’s Republic of China may even take more provocative actions if it thinks it could provoke an overreaction or muddy the waters about who is responsible. Historians now believe a Chinese ambush that killed at least 30 Soviet soldiers started the 1969 Sino-Soviet border crisis.²⁶ It was unclear at the time, however, who started the shooting, and each side blamed the other.²⁷ Henry Kissinger, who was national security adviser at the time, even blamed the Soviet Union in his later account of the crisis.

If provocation does not work, China may even attempt to stage incidents via false-flag operations. For example, Japanese soldiers

triggered the 1931 invasion of Manchuria by planting dynamite on train tracks and blaming Chinese nationalists for the explosion.²⁸ Nazi Germany justified its invasion of Poland by staging an attack on a radio station, shooting a supposed collaborator, and showing the scene to journalists as evidence of a Polish assault.²⁹ More recently, Russia planned to infiltrate saboteurs into eastern Ukraine to stage and film a fake attack.³⁰ False-flag operations may be harder for the People's Republic of China given the long distance to Taiwan, but the possibility of China faking a naval or air attack, or even an attack on the mainland, should not be dismissed.

Threats to the Status Quo

Regardless of whether the People's Republic of China will try to blame the United States or Taiwan for starting a war, China would almost certainly claim military action was necessary to stop attempts by the United States and Taiwan to realize the latter's independence. China's Anti-Secession Law specifies that force can be used if independence is imminent or peaceful unification impossible, so the government would almost certainly try to argue that these conditions held.³¹ Moreover, blaming Taiwan or the United States for trying to change the current arrangement would help China portray itself as defending an unsatisfactory but tolerable peace, rather than violently overthrowing it.

Such claims would not be entirely contrived. The People's Republic of China genuinely worries about Taiwan declaring independence or peaceful unification becoming impossible, and observers believe war would become more likely if China's leadership were to become convinced peaceful unification was no longer possible. Rhetorically, the People's Republic of China would have no shortage of material to draw on to make such an argument, and Beijing could make this argument at any time. But China may wait for or instigate a provocative event before abandoning its policy of peaceful reunification. Such timing would allow the People's Republic of China to justify its change in policy as a response to some outrage committed by the country's adversaries and to shift blame for the war.

The events do not have to be unusual for China to seize upon them. Visits by political officials have sparked crises in the past because they appear to suggest formal recognition of Taiwan by the United States. The then President Lee Teng-hui's visit to the United States led to the

1995–96 Taiwan Strait Crisis, and the then Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi’s 2022 visit to Taiwan led to a more recent crisis.³² Indeed, American officials warned against China using Pelosi’s visit as a “pretext” to change the status quo.³³ China could also represent regular occurrences such as arms sales to Taiwan or American military exercises in Asia as provocations.

Changes in actual or declared policy, such as the recently announced decision to increase the US training of Taiwanese forces or President Joe Biden’s repeated promise to defend Taiwan from attack, could form a pretext for crisis or war.³⁴ The 1954–55 Taiwan Strait Crisis occurred in part due to the signing of a mutual defense treaty.³⁵ China may see elections as moments at which policy change is imminent. Military exercises in 1996 were meant to intimidate Taiwanese voters in the lead-up to Taiwan’s first presidential election.³⁶ China broke contact with Taiwan over President Tsai Ing-wen’s refusal to endorse the One China principle after her election in 2016.³⁷ Former Secretary of State Michael Pompeo has called for recognizing Taiwan’s independence, and his potential return to public office could be portrayed as a threat to the status quo.³⁸

China could instigate a crisis over Taiwanese independence in other ways if no events occur on which to seize. States sometimes claim to have uncovered nefarious plots. Roosevelt attempted a repeat performance of the Zimmerman Telegram by claiming to possess a “secret map” of Nazi plans to conquer South America, but the map was later shown to be a British forgery.³⁹ The uncovering of plots may involve claims about the provision of arms, like Russia’s recent claims that the United States was plotting a chemical attack in Ukraine.⁴⁰

To make independence seem imminent or the status quo unsustainable, the Chinese government could adopt measures to encourage Taiwanese calls for independence. Information operations could include amplifying, paying for, or faking pro-independence voices in the media. The People’s Republic of China could also attempt to encourage or stage protests, riots, or other unrest in Taiwan itself. Adolf Hitler engineered the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland by stoking unrest among Nazi sympathizers and intervening to restore order and protect German allies.⁴¹ Beijing regularly refers to “patriots” in Taiwan who desire reunification.⁴²

“Counterfeit diplomacy” rather than immediate war may follow these events. China could demand reassurances about Taiwanese independence or a plan for peaceful reunification. The United States was willing to reaffirm publicly its commitment to the One China policy following the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait Crisis and make other adjustments to reassure China, but a wholesale change in US policy is unlikely.⁴³ Demands that compromise Taiwan’s security or violate the island’s de facto sovereignty would be unacceptable, but China could present these demands as reasonable and necessary. The People’s Republic of China would likely combine the demands with accusations that the United States has violated diplomatic arrangements and taken advantage of Chinese goodwill, as Russia has claimed about the expansion of NATO.

Beyond military incidents and threats to the status quo, China could claim justification for war in many other ways, including allegations of a direct military threat to the mainland from the United States or Taiwan or that US economic measures constitute an act of war. The People’s Republic of China could also use a humanitarian crisis in Taiwan or overseas events to claim intervention is necessary. Mao explained the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1958 as an opportunity to divert American forces from the Middle East during the Lebanon crisis and to help the Arabs in their anti-imperialist struggle.⁴⁴ Indeed, Mao’s move is probably the clearest instance of China relying on a transparent pretext for military action. Many other possibilities have not been considered here.

Conclusion

A major question for the United States is not just whether or how China could employ these tactics but how concerned it should be. I do not claim that efforts to generate pretexts are likely to be a critical influence on China’s decision to wage war. States usually cook up pretexts after their decision to go to war; they are excuses rather than real reasons. The real reasons are more likely to be related to long-term issues like the military balance and political trends. But the United States should not be unconcerned. A successful pretext could help the People’s Republic of China to influence allies in an ensuing war. Denying China a pretext could also buy time to prepare for war. For instance, Hitler ordered his Navy to avoid being drawn into an incident in the fall of 1941 so Roosevelt would not have an excuse for war before Germany was ready.⁴⁵ In rare cases, states may even forego aggression for lack of justification.

The other major question is how the United States should react. The United States seemed to be successful in pushing back on Vladimir Putin's efforts to justify the invasion of Ukraine. Washington declassified intelligence to expose Russia's schemes and deception, continued diplomacy with Russia to demonstrate a desire for peaceful resolution, and was careful to be unprovocative in its military deployments. These measures provide a good model for future use. But the Ukraine case may have presented more favorable circumstances. The United States had good intelligence, a long lead time, and no intent for direct military intervention.

The United States may not have all these luxuries against Taiwan. Indeed, avoiding being provocative presents its own dangers. Mobilizing and deploying forces may be necessary to deter or defeat a military offensive. Even if war does not occur, China could take advantage of American restraint to make piecemeal military and political gains at Taiwan's expense. Ultimately, national leaders will have to decide based on the circumstances how important controlling the narrative is versus achieving other objectives. But military leaders should anticipate political decisionmakers will exercise tighter control than expected for political reasons, and the military will have to conduct operations with an eye toward shaping the narrative.

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“Developing Countries [Are] the Foundation”: China’s People’s Liberation Army Reaches Out to Africa

Paul Nantulya

How Africa Fits into PRC Foreign Policy Priorities

The title of this chapter comes from the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) guiding foreign policy statement, “China’s periphery [is] the priority, developing countries the foundation, and multilateral platforms the stage” (大国是关键, 周边是首要, 发展中国家是基础, 多边是重要舞台).¹ This statement conceptualizes the PRC’s foreign policy priorities and Africa’s place therein. African countries have indeed offered China a foundation to pursue its global ambitions. Since the 1970s, they have used their representational strength as the single largest regional bloc at the United Nations and other global bodies to support PRC positions and interests. This support is often on a reciprocal basis or in exchange for economic and other incentives.²

African countries have also been a crucial bulwark for the PRC’s efforts to construct alternative international arrangements. They are the largest bloc in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with 52 out of 54 countries signing on as of 2023—the highest participation rate of any region, with more than \$91 billion in BRI-related financing between 2013 and 2022.³ Apart from one holdout (Eswatini), all African countries recognize Beijing over Taipei. African countries have also consistently defended China at the UN Human Rights Council over alleged abuses in Xinjiang. Since 2017, they have voted to pass Chinese-sponsored resolutions that have introduced Chinese Communist Party (CCP) language into UN texts, such as the concept of a “community of common destiny” which articulates the PRC’s vision on international topics like human rights.⁴

Africa was the first region to endorse China's Global Security Initiative (GSI) and its twin concept, the Global Development Initiative (GDI).⁵ The third China-Africa Defense and Security Forum (CADSF) on September 6, 2023, focused on integrating GSI concepts into defense and security cooperation. The GSI rests on six principles, including noninterference in internal affairs and common, comprehensive, and cooperative security between China and its partners. It could also promote new Chinese platforms for security cooperation, including the CADSF, Beijing Xiangshan Forum, and Global Public Security Cooperation Forum (Lianyungang Forum).⁶

This chapter discusses China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Africa within the evolving context of ever-expanding China-Africa relations. It delineates the PRC's strategic intentions in Africa and the PLA's role in supporting those intentions. It then examines how well-postured China is relative to the United States in achieving its aims in Africa and concludes with broad policy recommendations.

The People's Republic of China's Strategic Intentions in Africa

China's overriding goal is to restore itself as a "great power" (世界强国) and achieve "national rejuvenation" (中华民族伟大复兴). At the international level, this goal entails carving a new global architecture out of the existing global order through a two-pronged strategy: 1) quadrupling China's representation, participation, and leadership in existing global institutions and 2) creating new parallel international institutions.⁷ The goal is to create a global system conducive to China's rise. Challenging Western dominance of the post-World War II global order is intrinsic to this strategy. Africa is critical to all of these intentions, explaining why China is not only intently focused on cultivating African solidarity for its visions of international order but also wants African countries to side with it as it works toward isolating its adversaries and rivals.

African states remain amenable to China's interpretations of world order. Africans view China as one of their most steadfast supporters in their armed struggles against colonialism and apartheid. This perception, among other factors, explains why China's image in Africa has remained largely positive. According to the latest Afrobarometer surveys (released in 2021), three in five Africans in 34 countries would welcome China's influence as positive.⁸ Similarly, the latest Pew Research Center

survey (released in July 2023) found that China is viewed generally more favorably in some African and Latin American countries and less so in much of North America, Europe, and Asia.⁹

Furthermore, African countries tend to view China as an ally in creating a more multipolar world that advances their interests and those of the Global South. In 1971, they tipped the scales in the crucial UN General Assembly vote that restored China's seat at the UN. China has always felt a sense of indebtedness to Africa for this gesture. "It is our African brothers who carried the PRC into the UN," said Mao Zedong, a statement that Chinese leaders repeat during annual commemorations on China's return to the world body.¹⁰ Many African leaders, in turn, say they owe China gratitude for helping them win independence and for contributing to their development.¹¹

Securing Africa's legitimization of China's ambitious and expanding institution-building efforts at the multilateral level is a major element of the PRC's strategic intentions in Africa. African countries have responded enthusiastically to China's invitations to join or participate in the dozens of multilateral organizations it has created over the past two decades.

These organizations include the BRICS (Brazil, India, China, Russia, and South Africa) grouping, which invited two more African countries in August 2023, the Multilateral Cooperation Center for Development Finance (MCDF), New Development Bank (NDB), and Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The latter two are often positioned as alternatives to the World Bank.¹²

Notably, more African leaders attend the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit—the world's largest summit—than the UN General Assembly, making it the most important item on Africa's diplomatic calendar.¹³ FOCAC is yet another Chinese multilateral institution, created in 2000 as a permanent mechanism for cooperation between China and African countries.¹⁴ African states also regularly attend other Chinese-led forums, like the annual Xiangshan Forum created by the PLA Academy of Military Sciences as a venue for China to forge common concepts of security with its partners around the world.

Policy coordination is another key element of the China-Africa partnership.¹⁵ After securing China's return to the UN in 1971, African and Chinese leaders have closely coordinated their positions on international issues. This coordination is spelled out concretely in bilateral agreements and in treaties between China, the African Union

(AU), and the continent's regional economic and security communities. Recent examples include the emerging common African and Chinese positions on Taiwan, the South China Sea disputes, Xinjiang, international system reform, the Russia-Ukraine War, and the Israel-Hamas War of 2023.¹⁶

Strengthening and expanding FOCAC is another front and center element of China's strategic intentions in Africa. When FOCAC was launched in August 2000, China had no cultural institutes in Africa, educated fewer than 2,000 African students, and received fewer than 200 African military professionals into its military academies annually.¹⁷

China also lagged behind other major powers in trade with Africa at \$10 billion.¹⁸ By the seventh FOCAC summit in 2018, China was Africa's largest trading partner, reaching \$200 billion annually.¹⁹ Today, Africa hosts over 70 Confucius Institutes in 40 countries. China is second only to France in terms of the number of foreign cultural institutions in Africa.²⁰

By 2020, China was educating 81,500 African students annually—more than a forty fourfold increase from 2000.²¹ By 2019, more than 2,000 African police and law enforcement forces had trained in Chinese police academies.²² China's military academies, meanwhile, were receiving roughly 2,000 military professionals annually.²³ The quotas for all these positions come from the nearly 100,000 openings for different types of training that China offers triennially through FOCAC, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁴

China also has a knack for “showing up.” 2023 marks the 33rd consecutive year that a Chinese foreign minister visited five or six African countries in early January as China's inaugural diplomatic activity.²⁵ Since the mid-1990s, every Chinese foreign minister has made at least 50 state visits to Africa during their 10-year tenure—a higher rate of visits than any foreign minister from other major powers.²⁶ Between 1958 and 1964, 144 Chinese delegations visited Africa and received 405 African ones in return.²⁷ More recently, between 2008 and 2018, Chinese leaders visited Africa 79 times, while African leaders undertook 222 return visits.²⁸ As far as strategic intentions go, the PRC leverages these voluminous exchanges to send a message to African countries—and to China's rivals—that Africa matters to China.

Engagement with Africa is also highly institutionalized within the CCP. Premier Li Qiang, the number two on the CCP's Politburo Standing Committee (PBC), China's highest leadership organ, coordinates FOCAC's 36 implementing agencies. The third-ranked PBC

member, Zhao Leji, leads the National People's Congress, which has working relations with 35 African parliaments.²⁹ The fourth-ranked PBC member and veteran Africa expert within China's establishment, Wang Huning, chairs the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference that works with 59 political organizations in 39 African countries. The CCP's International Liaison Department, led by another top Africa expert, meanwhile, works with 110 ruling and opposition political parties in 51 African countries.³⁰ Simply put, Africa is part of the foundation that China has used to pursue its interests on multiple fronts.

How the PLA Supports the People's Republic of China's Strategic Intentions in Africa

As the backbone of the CCP, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) obeys Party commands. It employs a "blended approach" to foreign military cooperation, mixing African political, ideological, cultural, economic, commercial, and security interests in Africa in support of the CCP.³¹

Political work is the spearhead of the PLA's engagement in Africa around which military ties are built. Mao himself argued that those who view the PLA merely as a military do not understand its role in "carrying out political and revolutionary tasks."³²

All PLA delegations to Africa include political commissars (政委) to ensure that CCP intentions are reflected in all military activities. These commissars also interact with ruling political parties and other political organizations like Parliament. As part of this political work, the China Association for International Friendly Contact, the PLA's political front organization, arranges exchanges on several topics to cultivate influential decisionmakers. This way, the PLA plays its part in influencing policies that are favorable to China's interests and preferences.³³

The PLA also conducts professional military education (PME) in China on a scope and scale unmatched by other development partners, according to African officers trained in Chinese, American, and European military institutions.³⁴ The CCP designed Chinese PME to reflect its values and practices and to shape an environment conducive to advance party-state goals, including the longstanding principle of absolute party control of the armed forces, state, and government.³⁵

Chinese PME also seeks to promote China's political governance model, not merely expose students to military subjects and doctrine. During the first China-Africa Peace and Security Forum in 2019, Major General Xu Hui, dean of the PLA's International College for Defense Studies (ICDS), noted that "[t]he great importance of this forum lies in the gathering of senior Chinese and African representatives to jointly diagnose security issues faced by Africa, share their governing experience and wisdom, and then take targeted and suitable measures."³⁶

Notably, political commissars, officials from CCP organs, and top Party theoreticians interact with and give lectures to foreign (including African) military students as part of their training, especially at higher level institutions like the PLA National Defense University (PLA-NDU). Political commissars are also part of the directing staff in PLA academies and enjoy coequal rank and authority with the commandant in the leadership structure of China's 37 officer academic institutions. Hence, foreign students are exposed to the "party-army" models of control throughout their educational experience. Many African students also attend the CCP's political education institutions, like the PLA-NDU's Political College located in Jiangsu, Nanjing, and the China Executive Leadership Academy in Pudong, Shanghai.³⁷ Hence, the PLA, through an array of institutions, directly advances the People's Republic of China's strategic intention of imparting its political models and experience upon foreign officers.

Another key outcome the People's Republic of China hopes to accomplish in Africa is an improved expeditionary and power projection capability, or what Chinese military experts call "far seas protection" (远海防卫).³⁸ Without this capability, it cannot become a "world-class" military power by 2049, a goal articulated by the 19th CCP National Congress of 2017 and reiterated in several directives of the CCP Central Military Commission chaired by Xi, its chairman and the CCP general secretary.³⁹ Africa has been a key testing ground for the development of far seas protection. (Since 2008, the PLA has conducted anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden of increasing size, duration, and complexity.) Forty PLA Navy task forces had been deployed into African waters by 2023, featuring some of China's newest weapons and platforms like the Jiangkai II-class guided-missile frigate, Yuan-class nuclear submarine, Luyang-class destroyers, Z-9C anti-submarine warfare helicopters, Yuzhao-class amphibious dock, and improved Fuchi-class replenishment ships.⁴⁰

In 2017, the PLA Navy opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti.⁴¹ As part of its operations, it has escorted 7,000 civilian vessels, trained with African navies and land forces, engaged in defense diplomacy, and evacuated stranded Chinese nationals in 2011, 2015, and 2023 in Libya (35,000), Yemen (571), and Sudan (1,300), respectively.⁴² In all three cases, it used military assets that were in theater conducting anti-piracy patrols. China's activities in the African maritime domain mark the first time in history that the PLA has ventured beyond the Western Pacific.⁴³

African waters have offered the PLA a permissive environment to practice and gain operational experience in different aspects of far seas protection. This opportunity might not have been available in Asia, where China is engaged in complex and interlocking disputes with maritime neighbors and encounters high levels of political mistrust. China, therefore, has a keen interest in ensuring that African countries continue to accommodate its naval and maritime activities on their territories.

The PLA has also partnered with African countries to develop its credentials as a global peacekeeper consistent with the PRC's self-perception as a "responsible great power" (负责任大国), a term that describes its desire to play a larger role in the world.⁴⁴ Since the mid-1990s, China has overcome its initial reservations about peacekeeping, which it viewed as interference in internal affairs. It made a U-turn and set its sights on forging a dynamic peacekeeping partnership with African countries to increase its influence in multilateral peace and security decision making, socialize Chinese security concepts, and forge complementarities with African countries, many of whom share its interest to promote alternative, non-Western and non-liberal peacekeeping concepts and doctrine.⁴⁵

While China's contribution to UN peacekeeping is one of the most debated aspects of its investments in the global system, there has been little discussion about the role African countries played in helping China get there. It was in Africa where the PLA gained most of its knowledge of peacekeeping and mobilized political support to cultivate an image as a leading global peacekeeper. Roughly half of the UN's 12 peacekeeping missions are in Africa.⁴⁶ Additionally, African countries contribute the biggest share of the world's peacekeepers.⁴⁷ As of October 2023, 12 African countries were in the top 20 of the world's contributors, contributing a combined 21,749 troops. The total African troop contribution stands at 29,108, over four times larger than the world's number one contributor, Bangladesh, and 12 times larger than China's.⁴⁸

China's decision to cast its sights on Africa therefore made strategic sense as far as its global ambitions were concerned. Apart from learning the ropes from its African partners in peacekeeping missions, China gained their favor in various ways. In 2015, it created the China-Africa Peace and Security Fund, a \$100 million endowment to develop African peacekeeping capacity over the next five years.⁴⁹ In 2016, with African backing, China created the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund, consisting of the Secretary-General's Peace and Security Sub-Fund and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund, which have both been preoccupied with African peace and security issues.⁵⁰ In 2018, the PLA raised an 8,000-strong force and placed it at the disposal of the UN Secretary-General for rapid deployment to conflict hotspots—a move African countries applauded, as they have been seeking more “burden-sharing” from their development partners.⁵¹

It is not lost on Africa's top troop contributors that China provides more peacekeepers than all the other permanent members of the UN Security Council combined—the vast majority of whom are deployed in Africa.⁵² China's is also the second-largest contributor to the UN's peacekeeping and overall budgets, after the United States, further boosting its credentials as one of Africa's most important partners in international security.⁵³ Since 2018, African nationals have constituted the vast majority of the UN's staff compared to other continents, and most of the UN's work in specialized development agencies occurs in Africa.⁵⁴ Hence, China's robust engagement at the UN dovetails with Africa's own efforts to increase its participation and influence at the world body.

The UN has taken note of the importance of the China-Africa partnership to its work. In September 2019, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres told the UN Security Council that the China-Africa cooperation was a major boost to UN operations and the emerging partnership between the UN and African Union (AU).⁵⁵

How Well-Postured Is China Relative to the United States in Africa?

According to African officers involved in education and training, China is currently outpacing the United States in the implementation of PME programs. PLA academies offer significantly more training and educational quotas than not only the United States, but also European countries, Asian ones like India and Pakistan, and Latin American

countries like Brazil. That said, the United States conducts more PME programs on African soil through several year-round programs with African military academies, like the African Military Education Program (AMEP) implemented by the US Defense Department's Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) and US Africa Command (USAFRICOM).

African countries also rate US professional military education (USPME) higher than its Chinese counterpart, especially the strategic-level education offered at the National Defense University, US Army War College, and Naval Postgraduate School, among others. An abundance of anecdotal evidence from African officers indicates that foreign and Chinese students study on different campuses at China's higher military schools, like the PLA National Defense University.⁵⁶ Hence, the United States is better at relationship-building, as foreign officers study and work together with their foreign colleagues at all levels of the PME experience, not to mention that, for decades, US military education institutions have maintained personal and professional relationships with successive generations of African officers, mainly through their alumni foundations.⁵⁷ By contrast, China's military alumni programs are ad hoc and less institutionalized. African officers also say USPME is more prestigious, rigorous, and higher quality in terms of critical thinking and analysis, international recognition, and the value of its diplomas.

African officers also view USPME as offering better exposure to certain military disciplines that are in high demand in Africa. A major one of these high-demand disciplines is joint warfighting (combined arms), where all combat arms are integrated to achieve complementary effects. In USPME, joint warfighting is taught at all levels. In China, by contrast, it is only taught at the PLA NDU.⁵⁸

Despite the shortcomings of Chinese PME in the eyes of African officers, the sheer number of educational opportunities China provides Africa should not be underestimated. There are, by far, many more educational opportunities in China. According to one African military educator, "We love to send our people to Sandhurst, the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, or West Point, Leavenworth, and the National Defense University in Washington But if course directors from Nanjing, Beijing, and Dalian show up and give me 20, 30, 40 slots, then that's where I'll send my officers."⁵⁹ China also educates more African civilian students, professionals, and civil servants than any other industrialized country, at a combined rate of over 80,000 annually. Hence, PME is part of a larger

human resource development package designed to position China as a preferred partner and instill positive sentiments toward the country.⁶⁰

When it comes to military sales, China's no-questions-asked policies, bargain prices, and flexible payment options have given its military industries an edge over some of its competitors. There have been recurring complaints, however, about the quality and durability of Chinese equipment, which African countries have traditionally viewed as being of a lower quality than US hardware. That said, affordability and the diversification of military suppliers remain key criteria for procurement departments in Africa. Hence, China will continue to be competitive in this area.⁶¹

The general sense is that—quality concerns notwithstanding—China offers good enough equipment and with a fast turnaround time. That said, China has also made strides in improving the quality of its military capabilities since the 1990s, putting it in a position where it can give its customers better value for money but still at lower prices and flexible payment terms. In recent years, African countries have purchased high-end Chinese equipment like unmanned aerial vehicles, naval patrol vessels, armored vehicles, tanks, and combat helicopters.⁶²

Finally, China seems to be better postured than the United States in peacekeeping, despite the fact that USAFRICOM conducts year-round targeted training in Africa to prepare peacekeepers for deployment. “Showing up in actual missions is half the battle,” said veteran peacekeeping trainer, Kwezi Mngqibisa. He continued:

When you have just 35 troops [US contributions as of 2023] serving in non-combat roles, then you will not be perceived to be in the game even if you are making the largest assessed contributions and mobilizing additional resources from other countries. It is not just about money, at least not in the perceptions of African peacekeepers who serve alongside troops from other foreign partners like China.⁶³

Broad Policy Discussion

The People's Republic of China's engagements in Africa and the Global South are multifaceted, comprehensive, and complementary along many fronts. Within this context, the PLA supports other lines of effort: economic, commercial, party-to-party relations, and culture,

among others. China's activities are framed around two core messages: 1) China was a steadfast supporter of African liberation from colonialism and apartheid; and 2) as a "fellow developing country," China understands Africa's development needs better than Western countries and is, therefore, a better strategic partner. As Chai Jianzhong, a professor at the PLA's ICDS, has argued, "Many officers have previously been exposed to Western military education before arriving in China. However, most come from developing countries whose national conditions are very different from those of Western countries. . . . Chinese strategy opens up a new perspective and provides inspiration."⁶⁴

The United States can become more competitive by dramatically increasing the quotas available for African officers to attend its military academies. Several innovations could also be explored, however, such as sending US officers to undertake some of their PME in Africa. This is not entirely new, as some US Foreign Area Officers have attended and received qualifications from schools in their assigned regions, including Africa. The United States should make this more institutionalized, however, by working with African countries to select a regionally representative mix of military schools that can receive US military exchange students on a regular basis. This would create a greater sense of partnership and equality, offer opportunities for US officers to learn from and share experiences with their African colleagues, and allow them to gain a deeper understanding of African PME needs and factor these into US security assistance.

It should be recalled that PME is a major growth area in Africa, with over 118 military colleges as of February 2022, according to the ACSS.⁶⁵ Hence, the United States would be responding to a strong demand in a way that is innovative, cost-effective, and highly popular with African countries.

In addition to sending US officers to Africa on academic exchanges, the USPME community should create a fellows program to bring African military cadets to the United States to participate in professional development experiences and connect with US counterparts early in their careers. This could be modeled on the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), a popular US program that has prepared more than 5,000 young African leaders and 300 young American leaders in reciprocal exchanges as of 2023.⁶⁶

Such innovations could go a long way in strengthening relationships, leveraging unique American strengths, and responding to a growing demand. A 2019 ACSS survey of 742 African military professionals found that 97 percent held international training in high regard and credited such training as the most influential factor in determining their service's identity.⁶⁷ The United States should also pay attention, however, to revitalizing its engagements with Africa along other lines of effort beyond the military. This way, the new innovations in PME would become part of larger ecosystem of enhanced US engagements in education and other fields.

A good place to start would be the high visa rejection rate of African students, which, according to the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, reached 54 percent in 2022—up 10 percent from 2015.⁶⁸ This is one of the most frequently cited reasons why African students and professionals opt to study in China, which also provides generous scholarship to increase its competitive edge.

Finally, the United States should consider regularizing its engagements in Africa. A key lesson of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation is its level of institutionalization. It has met every three years since 2000 and has a mechanism of day-to-day engagement bringing together numerous implementing agencies and policy dialogues from the ministerial level to the director-general level. By contrast, the United States–Africa Leaders Summit has met only twice (in 2014 and 2022). The United States should also pay close attention to the power of messaging and symbolism. As previously mentioned, China's leaders have a long tradition of conducting continuous, high-level visits to Africa—a cost effective but highly impactful way of conveying a message that Africa matters. Since 1993, for instance, every Chinese foreign minister has made no fewer than 50 African visits during their 10-year tenure—way more than any of their counterparts.⁶⁹

These events are not ad-hoc; as discussed earlier, African engagements are highly institutionalized within the Chinese party-state, allowing different tiers of leaders and institutions to maintain continuous contact and build institutional memory regardless of their office bearers. More generally, the Chinese government is accustomed to pulling out all the stops to demonstrate to Africans that they prioritize African issues and the continent's prospects.

The United States should not necessarily copy FOCAC but should work with African governments, civil societies, and private sectors

to position itself more optimally. The United States can review, expand, and build upon previous and current strategic policy innovations to bring this about. One example is YALI, as previously mentioned. Others include the “Airlift Africa 1960” initiative (popularly known as the Kennedy Airlift), which brought promising East African students to the United States from 1960–63 on an extended immersive experience focused on leadership and professional development.⁷⁰

A large proportion went on to assume senior leadership positions in the newly independent states of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Among them were the late Kenyan Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai, Kenyan trade unionist Tom Mboya, and former US president Barack Obama’s father (Barack Obama Sr.).

A decade earlier, the Voice of America facilitated a program to bring rising high school seniors from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America to interact with and debate their American counterparts in an extended immersive program focused on solving global problems. A long line of political and military leaders, civil servants, and educators throughout the Global South participated in this program, which many considered ahead of its time.⁷¹ Ultimately, improved two-way interactions between Africans and Americans should provide a strong foundation for trust, genuine partnership, and equality that can reinforce new innovations in military engagement.

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Sino-Russian Relations and the Indo-Pacific

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Sino-Russian relations are deepening, though areas of competition and disagreement persist. Although Sino-Russian ties remain short of a strategic alliance, their partnership has important political, economic, military, and geopolitical consequences for the Indo-Pacific. Closer alignment between Russia and China exacerbates regional polarization, leading to a greater attention to strategic competition with Russia and China to the detriment of other regional dynamics. Indo-Pacific states fear economic interests and other priorities, such as maintaining food security and stable access to energy, reducing inflation, and addressing climate change, will not receive the attention these economic interests and priorities need.¹

The People's Republic of China's (PRC's) tacit support for the Russian war in Ukraine highlights the fault lines of future conflict in the Indo-Pacific. China's support also begs the question of whether Russia will intervene on China's behalf in future conflicts in the Indo-Pacific, especially over Taiwan and in the South China Sea. At present, Russia and China have overlapping, nonidentical interests in the Indo-Pacific, but this concurrence could change in the event a weakened Russia becomes more dependent on the People's Republic of China and Chinese leaders demand greater Russian support for core Chinese interests.

The strategic ambiguity inherent in the Sino-Russian partnership contributes to its deterrent value, making an alliance unnecessary. Both Russia and China have downplayed the existence of a military alliance, while leaving open the possibility of forming an alliance in the future. This strategic ambiguity has a deterrent effect, enabling Russia

and China to create uncertainty for opponents that may be less likely to take action against one of them if the action might result in a joint response.²

A Deepening Partnership in the Indo-Pacific

For nearly a decade, Russian arms sales to the People's Republic of China have been the strongest indicator that the countries' partnership affects the Indo-Pacific. China's purchases of S-400 air defense systems in 2014 following the first Russian invasion of Ukraine will make Taiwan's endeavor to control its airspace and extend to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands difficult. Depending on the location of the S-400s' deployment, the missile systems could potentially cover parts of India as well.³ The same year, the People's Republic of China also purchased a squadron of 24 Sukhoi Su-35 aircraft, extending the range of PRC airpower to the South China Sea.⁴

Joint naval and air patrols in the Indo-Pacific are designed to showcase Sino-Russian military cooperation in the region and to counter the US-Japanese alliance. Having started in 2005, joint military exercises have increased in frequency since 2014.⁵ Beginning in 2019, Russia and China began to hold joint patrols that typically involved either their navies or their air forces.⁶ During a November 2022 exercise over the Japan Sea/East China Sea, Russian and Chinese bombers landed in each other's airfields for the first time.⁷ In addition, both the Russian Air Force and the Russian Navy participated with the People's Liberation Army Navy in the Northern/Interaction-2023 exercise.⁸ These exercises and patrols have particularly targeted the Japan Sea/East China Sea, where both Russia and China have separate territorial disputes with Japan. Japan disputes Russian control over the Southern Kuril Islands, and China disputes Japan's control over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Taiwan also claims these islands. Despite these differences, joint military activities have a deterrent effect because they suggest China and Russia might collaborate in a future conflict in the region.

Sino-Russian dialogue on northeast Asia has become institutionalized. Since 2014, China and Russia have been holding a regular dialogue on northeast Asian security issues at the deputy foreign minister level.⁹ Before Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the two countries had different views on many northeast Asian security issues, but recent statements following the countries' February 28, 2023, dialogue highlighted China

and Russia's desire for greater coordination and joint action.¹⁰ Whether greater coordination and joint action are possible remains to be seen.

Russia and China have deepened their mutual understanding on opposition to US alliances and partnerships in the region, as the countries highlighted in their joint statement following their March 20–22, 2023, summit.¹¹ Both object to the US framing of the Indo-Pacific, which smacks of encirclement to the People's Republic of China and, for Russia, awkwardly unites its longtime partner, India, against its newer strategic partner, China. Consequently, Russia and China refer to the Asia-Pacific region, not the Indo-Pacific. Russia and China also oppose the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Australia, India, Japan, and the United States) and accuse AUKUS (the trilateral security dialogue consisting of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) of encouraging an arms race in the Indo-Pacific.

No Limits?

At the March 2023 summit, Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin called their partnership superior to an alliance, dropping the “no limits” phrasing that was widely misunderstood.¹² “No limits” did not mean “no parameters.” This phrasing came from PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs efforts to convey an alliance with Russia is unnecessary because nothing is limiting the countries' partnership. Chinese academics, by contrast, argued internal drivers of the partnership (that is, political and economic factors) should be the focus of analysis. Sino-Russian cooperation in the Indo-Pacific has long had parameters, reflecting the countries' different historical, political, and economic positions in the region.¹³

Although Russia has long been an important player in the Indo-Pacific historically, in the post-Cold War era, Russian diplomacy has faced strong headwinds in the region. Russia's economy also is a poor fit for Asia's trade dynamism because Russia, with the exception of its resource sector, lacks the export-oriented growth characteristic of the region.

Despite being a key partner, China did little to bring Russia into the region. Indeed, China may have complicated Russia's path because the latter feared being asked to take sides on issues such as the South China Sea. Russian experts have speculated Putin has failed to attend East Asian summits that might have boosted Russia's profile

in the region to avoid potentially awkward discussions about China's maritime claims.¹⁴

Russia has sought to play a role in the Indo-Pacific that is independent of China, but the Russian war in Ukraine has made playing this role more difficult to achieve. Potential partners in Southeast Asia suffer from the higher food and energy prices the war has caused. South Korea, which did not impose sanctions on Russia after its first invasion of Ukraine, now fears Russian nuclear threats, and closer cooperation with North Korea will enable its adventurism. Japan sees deterring Russia in Ukraine as crucial to deterring China in the Indo-Pacific.¹⁵

Areas of Competition and Potential Disagreement

The primary area of competition between Russia and China in the post-Cold War Indo-Pacific has been the arms markets. Until 2017, Russia was the primary arms supplier to Southeast Asia—especially to Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Vietnam—and had been making inroads into new markets, such as Thailand and the Philippines.¹⁶ The People's Republic of China also seeks to increase its share of the Southeast Asian arms markets, and the country competes directly in nations such as Myanmar and Thailand. Due to sanctions imposed on Russia after 2014 and mounting concerns in the region over China's assertiveness, other entrants, such as South Korea and European countries (including France, Germany and the United Kingdom), have reduced the share of both Russia and China since 2017.¹⁷

Russia will maintain long-standing partnerships with India and Vietnam despite the tensions between these countries and China. Developing relations with India and Vietnam has been integral to Russia's effort to play an independent role in the Indo-Pacific. For Moscow, these partnerships have never been negotiable, despite PRC dissatisfaction with Russian military cooperation with its adversaries in the Indo-Pacific.

Russia has tried to balance its ties to India and the People's Republic of China with trilateral initiatives and support for India's participation in other multilateral initiatives that involve China, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, also known as BRICS. Russia claims neutrality in Sino-Indian disputes, but before the invasion of Ukraine, Russia typically engaged in more extensive military cooperation with India than with China. The Russian government also suspended a delivery

of S-400s to Beijing during the 2020 Sino-Indian border hostilities while accelerating the delivery of the same system to India.¹⁸ Russia currently provides Vietnam with more than 60 percent of its weapons and invests in Vietnamese energy projects in the South China Sea.¹⁹ In Vietnam, Russia has found a partner that has supported Russia's war in Ukraine, abstained on key UN resolutions, supported Russia's bid to remain on the UN Human Rights Council, and echoed Russian propaganda about the sources of the war. Vietnam has faced PRC coercion in the South China Sea that Russia has not criticized overtly. But Vietnam has been diversifying its foreign relations and military procurement, engaging with the United States and its other Asian partners, a trend that is surely concerning for China as well as Russia.²⁰

Russia has never fully supported China's position on South China Sea maritime claims. Putin objected to a third-party court ruling on the admissibility of PRC claims but did not support those claims specifically. Russia and China held a bilateral naval exercise in the South China Sea in September 2016, but the exercise took place in an uncontested area. Although reportedly, PRC officials warned Russia against proceeding with certain offshore energy projects with Vietnam and even harassed Rosneft vessels, Russia continues this cooperation.²¹

Security Implications for the Indo-Pacific

Indo-Pacific countries are drawing a variety of lessons. South Korea is considering allowing US nuclear weapons to be stationed on its territory and even possibly developing a South Korean nuclear deterrent. Japan is doubling its defense spending and sending defensive military equipment to Ukraine. Despite Russian and PRC rhetoric on Ukraine aimed at the Global South, Southeast Asian states feel their economic concerns are not being heard and are suffering from war-related inflation and food and energy insecurity. Some PRC academics acknowledge these problems.²² Nevertheless, the Southeast Asian states hope to avoid being drawn into efforts to polarize their region.

The People's Republic of China may be drawing lessons from Russia's war in Ukraine for a future invasion of Taiwan, but the war (and China's tacit support for Russia) is complicating China's path to Taiwan. Taiwan is enjoying unprecedented support, including from European democracies, and, following Ukraine's courageous example, is more motivated to make preparations for self-defense. Japan's unusually robust

response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine speaks to Japanese concern about deterring China from invading Taiwan.

Russia has been more explicit in supporting China's position on Taiwan, but the course of action the Russian government might take in the event of a PRC attack remains unclear. Assuming the current (or a similarly minded) government remains in power in Moscow, Russia's satisfaction with the degree of PRC support during the war in Ukraine may determine Russia's support for China. But even a satisfied Russia may think twice about supporting China on Taiwan because a Chinese government that has achieved this long-sought goal might be emboldened to revisit other historical grievances, such as territories lost to Russia during the nineteenth century.

China has not called out Russia by name for its nuclear threats. Although Xi and other officials indicate nuclear weapons should not be used, and the PRC statement on the war in Ukraine specifically argues against threats to use nuclear weapons or to target nuclear power plants, the People's Republic of China has never criticized Russia directly.²³ China's lack of criticism has implications for North Korea (which may be further emboldened) and may lead to a nuclear arms race in northeast Asia.

Japan is drawing closer to the United States and focusing much more on Japanese self-defense. Although this focus is in response to the People's Republic of China's growing assertiveness in the Taiwan Strait (including the launching of missiles that flew over Japanese territory), Japan's concern about its security also reflects the disillusionment over any hope of a territorial settlement with Russia. Sino-Russian joint patrols in the Japan Sea/South China Sea raise the specter of the countries' future joint action toward Japan. But Japan maintains its energy investments in the Russian Far East for fear relinquishing them would enable China to acquire them, thereby endangering Japanese energy security.

South Korea is reconsidering the stationing of US nuclear weapons on its territory and possibly even the development of a South Korean nuclear deterrent. South Korea is especially concerned about the impact of Russia's nuclear threats in Ukraine and growing military cooperation with North Korea on security in the peninsula. South Korea's 2022 Indo-Pacific strategy harshly criticized Russia for its aggression in Ukraine, while downplaying outstanding issues with China.²⁴ Seoul did not impose

its own sanctions on Russia in 2014 or in 2022, but South Korea has observed the sanctions other states have imposed.

India has been more vocal than China in urging a peaceful solution to the war in Ukraine. In some respects, India has deepened its ties to Russia. A small contingent of Indian land forces participated for the first time in the Vostok 2022 exercise in the Russian Far East (India avoided the naval component that was directed at fellow Quad member Japan). India has taken advantage of lower oil prices to boost oil purchases from Russia. Previously, less than 1 percent of India's energy came from Russia, but now, the Russian share is more than 20 percent.²⁵ But for India, the deepening Sino-Russian alignment—exemplified by China and Russia's joint refusal at the Group of 20 meeting India hosted to agree to language on the war in Ukraine, which China and Russia had previously approved in Bali in November 2022—is a mounting concern. Growing Russian economic dependence on China could lessen Russia's desirability as a partner for India if Russia becomes more inclined to side with China on issues in the former's relations with India.²⁶

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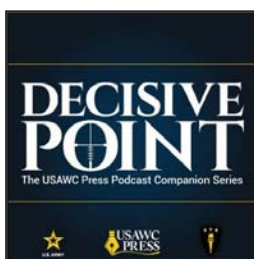
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