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Haiyang Qiangguo: China as a Maritime Power

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We should pay close attention to both development and security. The former is the foundation of the latter while the latter is a precondition for the former. A wealthy country may build a strong army, and a strong army is able to safeguard a country.¹

Xi Jinping pointed out: China is at once a continental power and a maritime power (*haiyang daguo*) and it possesses broad maritime strategic interests...These achievements have laid a solid foundation for building a strong maritime power (*haiyang qiangguo*).²

At its 18th Party Congress in November 2012, the Chinese Communist Party adopted a new goal—that China “should enhance our capacity for exploiting marine resources, develop the marine economy, protect the marine ecological environment, resolutely safeguard China’s

¹ Xi Jinping, “A Holistic View of National Security,” in *The Governance of China*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2014).

² “Xi Jinping Stresses the Need To Show Greater Care About the Ocean, Understand More About the Ocean and Make Strategic Plans for the Use of the Ocean, Push Forward the Building of a Maritime Power and Continuously Make New Achievements at the Eighth Collective Study Session of the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau.” *Xinhua*. July 31, 2013.

maritime rights and interests, and *build China into a strong maritime power* (emphasis added).³ Subsequent commentary by Chinese leaders and national-level documents characterize the goal of becoming a maritime power as essential to China's national development strategy, the people's well-being, the safeguarding of national sovereignty, and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.⁴

The 18th Party Congress thus marks an important defining moment. China's future is to be a *haiyang qiangguo*—that is, a strong or great maritime power.

While the seas have become increasingly important to the PRC's economic and security interests since it adopted the policy of "opening up" in 1979, this is the first time that maritime issues have been officially identified as a national priority for the Communist Party, the state, and the country. It is a statement that the Chinese Communist Party leadership now perceives building maritime power as essential to achieving its national goals.

Moreover, the decision of the 18th Party Congress to build maritime power indicates a further evolution in how Chinese leaders think about China as a major power. China is no longer just a continental power or—as then general secretary Jiang Zemin said in 1995—both a continental and a *coastal* power.⁵ It is to be both a continental and a strong maritime power.⁶ That is, it must have power commensurate with its status as one of the world's leading powers. That suggests that Beijing will see itself as having a greater role and presence in the maritime domain and will be directing more resources toward developing its maritime-related capabilities, including those of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). China, therefore, will become even more active on the oceans in the future.

³ "Full Text of Hu Jintao's Report at the 18th Party Congress." *Xinhua*. 17 November 2012. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpenc/2012-11/17/c_131981259.htm.

⁴ "Xi Jinping Stresses the Building of Maritime Power," July 31, 2013; Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's Military Strategy*, (Beijing: State Council Information Office, 2015); Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*, (Beijing: State Council Information Office, 2013), Available on line at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/16/c_132312681.htm. Liu Cigui. "Striving to Realize the Historical Leap From Being a Great Maritime Country to Being a Great Maritime Power." *Jingji Ribao online*. November 2012.

⁵ As cited in State Oceanic Administration, *China's Ocean Development Report 2009 (Zhongguo haiyang fazhan baogao 2009)*, (Beijing: Ocean Press, 2009), 375.

⁶ "Xi Jinping Stresses the Building of Maritime Power," July 31, 2013.

This raises some important questions:

- What does Beijing mean when it says that China must become a maritime power? That is, what do Chinese leaders mean by *maritime power*, and how does it fit into China's overall national strategy?
- Why do Chinese leaders think China needs to be a maritime power?
- What does Beijing think are the major shortfalls in China's current maritime capabilities that need to be addressed?
- What are the potential implications for the United States?

How does China's leadership define *maritime power*?

China does not have a published maritime strategy document or white paper that clearly defines what it means by *maritime power* or how it intends to use that maritime power in support of national objectives. However, speeches by Xi Jinping and other civilian and military leaders, official documents, and articles and commentary in authoritative media outlets are fairly consistent, if very general, in how they discuss the elements of maritime power and how it fits into national strategy. These provide important insights into how Beijing is currently thinking about maritime power. Chinese leaders, military and civilian officials, and security analysts have consistently viewed maritime power as a broad concept that encompasses a wide range of military and civilian capabilities.⁷ While different sources have provided different mixes of capabilities over the years, elements of maritime power that have frequently been mentioned include naval, merchant marine, fishing, and other economic, as well as diplomatic, scientific, and cultural assets.⁸ Some Chinese sources argue that naval power is not the sole, or necessarily even the most important, determinant of maritime power. In some cases, non-naval elements of

⁷ For a good overview of how the terms *maritime power* and *sea power* have been used by Western theorists, see Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, Second ed (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009). Also see Ian Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 6.

⁸ For some examples of Chinese discussions of maritime power prior to the 18th Party Congress, see, for example: Zhang Wei, *National Maritime Security*, Ye Zicheng and Mu Xinhai, "Some Reflections on China's Sea Power Development Strategy," *Guiji Zhengzhi Yanjiu*, Volume 97, no. 3 (2005); Lu Rude, "Defining Sea Power in China's Grand Strategy," *Renmin Haijun*, June 6, 2007; and Gu Dongsheng, ed., *Theory of National Security Strategy* (Beijing: Military Science Publishing, 2006).

maritime power are the preferred means to pursue maritime objectives.⁹ A good example is China's use of maritime law enforcement forces in recent years to advance and safeguard its claims in the East and South China Seas.

While public discussions of maritime power following the 18th Party Congress remain very general and leave many questions unanswered, a review of major speeches, PLA publications, authoritative civilian media, academic journals, and interviews with Chinese subject matter experts offers some important insights:

- There appears to be a broad consensus that maritime power is a combination of economic, military, and other forms of power on the seas.
- The goal is to ensure that China becomes a world leader across all the elements of maritime power.
- There is some evidence to suggest that Chinese thinking on maritime power continues to evolve.
- While Chinese maritime power is eventually envisioned as global, the current and near-future focus is on maritime power in a regional context.

Elements of maritime power

Open-source discussions of maritime power focus on maritime capabilities related to economic development, and to the protection of economic development, maritime rights and interests, and sovereignty. Here are some representative examples from authoritative sources:

- Hu Jintao's work report submitted at the beginning of the 18th Party Congress linked maritime power to the ability to exploit marine resources, develop the marine economy, protect the marine environment, and protect maritime rights and interests.¹⁰

⁹ This point has been made many times to CNA analysts by Chinese military and civilian interlocutors over the past five years.

¹⁰ "Report at the 18th Party Congress."

- A Xinhua article published a few days after the 18th Party Congress stated that a maritime power was a country that “had comprehensive strength in maritime exploitation, maritime economic development, marine environmental protection, and marine control.”¹¹
- Similarly, an article in *Qiushi*, the Chinese Communist Party’s theoretical journal, stated that a maritime power was a country that could “exert its great comprehensive power to develop, utilize, protect, manage, and control oceans.” The article went on to say that China was not yet a maritime power—not only because of its limited ability to develop the oceans, but also because of the challenges it faces in defense of its maritime sovereignty, rights, and interests, and the threat of containment it faces from the sea.¹²
- At a Politburo study session in July 2013, Xi Jinping noted that building maritime power meant the development of the marine economy, extraction of maritime resources in a manner that protects the marine environment, advanced maritime science and technology, and safeguarding maritime rights and interests.¹³
- Chen Mingyi, a member of the Senior Advisory Committee for National Marine Programs Development, offered a more elaborate version, noting that a leading maritime power is one with advanced maritime industries; sustainable development of the marine economy and ecology; and a strong marine defense forces—a “powerful” navy and an “advanced” maritime law enforcement force—to protect maritime rights and interests and provide maritime security. He also stated that a leading maritime power is one that plays a major role in international maritime affairs.¹⁴
- A professor at Ocean University of China defined maritime power as “having a developed maritime economy, advanced maritime technology, a great naval strength, comprehensive maritime laws, healthy marine ecosystems, a maritime resource environment for sustainable development, a high level of awareness of the importance of

¹¹ Cao Kai. “China Voice: Building China Into a Maritime Power Essential for Future Development.” *Xinhua*. November 14, 2012.

¹² The author of the article is the director of China’s National Maritime Information and Data Center. Xu Sheng. “Follow the Path of Maritime Power With Chinese Characteristics.” *Qiushi online* (November 2013). <http://www.qstheory.cn/>

¹³ “Xi Jinping Stresses the Building of Maritime Power,” July 31, 2013.

¹⁴ Chen Mingyi. “China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050.” *Zhongguo Haiyang Bao*. January 13, 2014.

the oceans, and maritime cultural soft power.”¹⁵ This is a less authoritative but more detailed example, and one perhaps more representative of the discussion at lower levels on how to implement maritime power.

- An academic from Beijing University’s Center for Strategic Studies noted that becoming a maritime power means development of the maritime economy, resource extraction, protection of the environment, and protection of maritime rights and interests, and then went on to state that the objectives for maritime power should be to effectively manage, control, and deter in local waters, to be a powerful influence in regional and global ocean affairs, and to be a global maritime economic power.¹⁶

As indicated by the above examples, Chinese leaders and officials are placing a heavy emphasis on economic development as a key component of maritime power. There is also a strong direct and indirect emphasis on the importance of naval and maritime law enforcement forces. That is, the core of being a maritime power is having the capabilities to support national objectives, economic development, and national security—which may also require the exercise of diplomatic and cultural power. This will be discussed further in the following section.

China is to be a world leader in terms of maritime power

As Geoffrey Till has pointed out, *maritime power* is a relative term.¹⁷ China, arguably, already is an important maritime actor by some traditional measures of maritime power. It has an increasingly capable navy that is “evolving to meet a wide range of missions including conflict with Taiwan, enforcement of maritime claims, [and] protection of economic interests as well as counter-piracy and humanitarian missions.”¹⁸ As of 2015, the PLA Navy currently has:

- 26 destroyers

¹⁵ Cao Wenzhen. “Promoting Maritime Awareness, Building National Maritime Strength--Maritime Power Strategies and the Chinese Dream.” *Zhongguo Haiyang Bao online*. July 21, 2014. The author is listed as director of Ocean University’s International Issues Research Institute and the newspaper is the official newspaper of China’s State Oceanic Administration.

¹⁶ Hu Bo. “Three Strategic Objectives on the Road to Maritime Power.” *Shijie Zhishi*, no. May 2013: 28-29.

¹⁷ Till, *Seapower*, 2009, 23.

¹⁸ Jesse L. Karotkin. *Trends in China’s Naval Modernization*. US China Economic and Security review Commission Testimony. January, 2014.

- 52 frigates
- 20 corvettes
- 59 diesel-electric submarines
- 9 nuclear submarines
- 85 modern missile-armed patrol craft
- 56 amphibious ships
- 42 mine warfare ships
- More than 50 major auxiliary ships, and some 400 minor auxiliary and other vessels.¹⁹

Most of the PLAN’s major vessels are of recent design, and China is maintaining a very active naval shipbuilding program. In 2013, more than 60 naval vessels and craft were “laid down, launched, or commissioned.”²⁰ The Office of Naval Intelligence expects a similar number in 2015.²¹

Projections by the Office of Naval Intelligence suggest that by 2020, the PLA Navy will be somewhat larger and that 85 percent of its ships will be of modern design.²²

Table 1: Estimated Projection for the PLA Navy in 2020²³

Ship Type	Number of Ships
Diesel attack submarines	59-64
Nuclear attack submarines	6-9
Ballistic missile submarines	4-5

¹⁹ Ibid.; Office of Naval Intelligence. *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21st Century*. Office of Naval Intelligence. 2015.

²⁰ Karotkin, *Trends in China's Naval Modernization*, 2014; Office of Naval Intelligence, *The PLA Navy*, 2015.

²¹ Office of Naval Intelligence, *The PLA Navy*, 2015.

²² Ronald O'Rourke. *China Naval Modernization: Implications for US Naval Capabilities--Background and Issues for Congress*. Congressional Research Service. December 23, 2014.

²³ Ibid., 39.

Aircraft carriers	1-2
Destroyers	30-34
Frigates	54-58
Corvettes	24-30
Amphibious ships	50-55

China also already has strong capabilities in civilian aspects of maritime power. It has a large coast guard; it has the third largest merchant marine in the world;²⁴ and it has a large—though not necessarily very technically advanced—shipbuilding industry.²⁵

The important point here is that the goal established by the 18th Party Congress is not that China should acquire capabilities that increase its maritime power, but that China should become one of the leading maritime powers.

Remarks made by senior leaders since 2012 make it clear that the long-term goal is to develop capabilities that make China a leader across all aspects of maritime power. Simply having some of these capabilities means that China has some maritime power but is “incomplete.”²⁶

Chinese sources do not provide clear criteria for when Beijing may feel that it has become a leading maritime power other than that it needs to be “first rate.”²⁷ To date, there is very little information other than that China would be among the ranks of the world’s maritime powers or become the world’s main maritime power.²⁸

Several Chinese sources offer timelines with the goal of making progress or moderate success by 2020, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party.²⁹ Dates for when China becomes one of the world’s leading maritime powers are usually given as either 2049 (the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic) or 2050 (the year that Deng

²⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, *The CIA World Factbook*, 2015), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>.

²⁵ Hu Wenming. “Providing Equipment Support for the Chinese Move Toward the Deep Blue.” *Qiushi online*, no. no. 10.

²⁶ Liu Cigui, “Striving to Realize the Historical Leap ”.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Liu ibid.

²⁹ Chen Mingyi, “China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050.”; Liu Cigui, “Striving to Realize the Historical Leap ”.

Xiaoping gave for when China's economic level should reach that of the most advanced industrial economies).³⁰ It should be noted that these dates are used as symbolic markers for a wide variety of economic, political, and military goals. They serve as rhetorical markers rather than a real timeline.

Some evidence suggests that thinking about maritime power is still evolving

Some Chinese sources indicate that thinking about maritime power is still a work in progress. That is, while the Communist Party has established a goal which clearly says that China will develop a wide range of capabilities related to the economic and military utilization of the seas, there is still a lot of planning and research that needs to be done as to what capabilities China needs to build and how. According to Chen Mingyi, for example, “[T]here must be overall strategizing and planning for building China into a maritime power. Guided by the spirit of the 18th CPC National Congress, we must carefully research the meaning of being a maritime power, a system of related indicators, and a timetable for achieving this goal.”³¹

Other civilian maritime officials and academics have made similar comments in authoritative Chinese media. One official noted that China is “in a period of strategic planning for building into a maritime power, while it is also in a strategic period of transition for maritime standardization work.”³² And an academic specializing in maritime issues has argued that “introducing policies for planning the building of national maritime strength and developing maritime industry are vital matters of immediate urgency.”³³

Geographic scope of maritime power

Chinese sources also strongly suggest that a key component of the goal of building China into a maritime power is a transition from a regional maritime actor to a global one. To be sure, many of China's maritime concerns will likely continue to be concentrated in regional waters—that is,

³⁰ Liu Cigui, “Striving to Realize the Historical Leap”; Chen Mingyi, “China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050.”

³¹ Chen Mingyi, “China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050.”

³² Wu Qiong. “Standards Level the Playing Field--An Interview with Bian Mingqiu, Party Committee Secretary of the National Center of Ocean Standards and Meterology.” *Zhongguo Haiyang Bao online*. October 14 2014.

³³ Cao Wenzhen, “Building National Maritime Strength.”

the “near seas.” However, it is also clear from examining a wide variety of authoritative sources, that Chinese maritime power will also have an increasingly important global component. As the latest Chinese defense white paper states, the PLA Navy strategy is transitioning to “near seas defense” and “open seas protection.”³⁴

Many of the sources that have discussed maritime power since the 18th Party Congress continue to focus on issues related to the near seas—that is, the area within the first island chain consisting of the Yellow, East China, and South China Seas. For example, a number of authoritative articles and speeches have emphasized the importance of defending China’s maritime rights and interests in its 3 million square kilometers of claimed territorial waters and exclusive economic zone.³⁵ A large part of China’s offshore activity takes place in these areas, including provincial development projects in coastal areas, much of China’s offshore oil and gas industry, and a large range of other maritime economic activity.³⁶ This area is the focus of China’s maritime law enforcement forces. And, for the foreseeable future, the most important potential conflicts for which the PLA must prepare are in the near seas. (We will discuss this final point in the next section.)

However, it is also very clear that because of China’s growing interests in the maritime domain, its maritime power will also have to be global. China’s trade, which is mostly transported by ship, is global. Chinese economic interests are global, and, as Hu Jintao noted in his 2004 Historic Missions speech, they need to be protected. Chinese political interests are also increasingly global. This is reflected in current discussions of maritime power.

³⁴ Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's Military Strategy*, 2015.

³⁵ Meng Yan and Zhou Yong. “Maritime Power Equals Maritime Hegemony?” *People's Daily (Overseas Edition) Online*. November 13, 2012. Meng and Zhou are officials in the International Communications Bureau under the Chinese Ministry of Defense. Xu Sheng, “Follow the Path of Maritime Power,” November 2013; Hu Wenming, “Chinese Move Toward the Deep Blue.” And Wang Qian and Xie Qianjiao. “China's Deep Sea Center 'Open to the World'.” *China Daily online*. April 13, 2013; Liu Fei. “China's Maritime Strategic Thought During the Reform and Opening to the Outside.” *Gaige kaifang yilai zhongguo de haiyang zhanlue sixiang. Social Sciences Review*, no. No. 4 (April) (2012): 40-41.

³⁶ See detailed information on these economic activities, see State Oceanic Administration, *China's Ocean Development Report, 2014*, (*Zhongguo haiyang fazhan baogao, 2014*; 中国海洋发展报告, 2014) (Beijing: Haiqiao Chubanshe, 2014).

- PLA sources make clear that defending Chinese overseas interests is a critical mission for the Chinese military.³⁷ The PLAN is to transition from near-seas defense, to near-seas defense and open-seas protection (*yuanhai huwei*; 远海护卫).³⁸
- While the term *maritime rights and interests* is mostly used to refer to Chinese rights and interests in claimed territorial waters and the EEZ, it is also used to refer to open-seas rights such as freedom of navigation for China's commercial shipping and access to resources in the Arctic and Antarctic Seas.³⁹
- Several Chinese officials have made it clear that resource extraction extends to deep ocean mining, deep sea fishing, and oil and gas extraction beyond Chinese-claimed waters.⁴⁰
- Chinese sources stress the need for China to be able to contribute to international peace and security on the high seas.⁴¹

Where does maritime power fit into Chinese national objectives?

As has been noted, China lacks a published maritime strategy that provides a clear explanation of exactly where maritime power fits into China's overall objectives. However, a close review of Xi Jinping's speeches does offer some insights into the current thinking of China's leadership.

One central objective of Chinese leaders from Deng Xiaoping to Xi has been that of fostering economic development to build China into a prosperous society. For Xi, this means economic,

³⁷ Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*, 2013; Military Strategy Research Department of the Academy of Military Science, *The Science of Military Strategy, 2013*, (*Zhanlue xue 2013 nianban*; 战略学 2013 年版) (Beijing: Academy of Military Science Press, 2013); Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's Military Strategy*, 2015.

³⁸ Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's Military Strategy*, 2015.

³⁹ State Oceanic Administration, *Ocean Development Report 2009*; Wu Jingjing and Luo Sha, "State Councilor Zhang Guoli Stresses During Discussions With Members of China's 30th Antarctic Scientific Expedition Mission the Need to Promote the Reaching of New Height in China's Polar Scientific Survey Undertaking." *Xinhua*. April 24, 2014.

⁴⁰ Wu Jingjing and Luo Sha, "Promote the Reaching of New Height in China's Polar Scientific Survey Undertaking.;" Wang Yilin. "CNOOC: How the Maritime Oil Industry Can Assist in Building a Maritime Power (中国海油: 海洋石油工业助推海洋强国建设)", CNOOC Website.

⁴¹ See for example, Xu Sheng, "Follow the Path of Maritime Power," November 2013; Cao Kai, "Building China Into a Maritime Power," November 14, 2012.

social, cultural, and ecological development on the basis of economic growth.⁴² Xi further states that making “the people prosperous and the country strong” is the very purpose of the Party.⁴³ It is central to the Party’s national strategy and to its own survival. The 18th Party Congress, according to Xi, addresses the need to respond to issues in China’s development and speed up the transformation of China’s economy.⁴⁴

The other central objective for Chinese leaders is ensuring national security. In addition to calling for China to become a maritime power, the 18th Party Congress also called for building military forces commensurate with China’s international standing.⁴⁵ Xi has stated that national security should be the Party’s top priority.⁴⁶ According to Xi, national security is a holistic concept that includes both traditional and non-traditional security and integrates various elements of political, economic, military, scientific and technological, cultural, and social security.⁴⁷

For Xi, development and security are closely tied: development provides the base to develop strong military capabilities, and a strong military is needed to protect development.⁴⁸ Both are needed for what Xi has said is the “dream of the Chinese people”—the dream of seeing a strong and prosperous China, “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”⁴⁹

Xi has clearly linked the call to make China a maritime power with the “China Dream,” stating that building China into a maritime power “is of great and far-reaching significance for promoting sustained and healthy economic development, safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests, realizing the goal of completing the building of a well-off society, and subsequently realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”⁵⁰

⁴² Xi Jinping, “Study, Disseminate and Implement the Guiding Principles of the 18th CPC National Congress,” in *The Governance of China*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2014). The 2015 national strategic guidelines—unpublished as of the time of writing—also apparently state that economic development is at the core of national strategy.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's Military Strategy*, 2015.

⁴⁶ Xi Jinping, “Holistic View of National Security.”

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Xi Jinping, “Dream of the Chinese People.”

⁵⁰ “Xi Jinping Stresses the Building of Maritime Power,” July 31, 2013.

That, however, is as clear as Xi gets. Maritime power is essential for promoting China's overall economic growth and development, and it is essential for protecting that economic development and the Chinese nation. Like national security and development, maritime power is a holistic concept. Other commentary and articles by Chinese military and civilian officials and academics take their cue from Party leadership but offer no elaboration on the importance of maritime power to building a strong and prosperous China.

It does, however, show that at the highest level of the Party, there is a recognition that China's interests in the maritime domain have increased to the point where maritime issues are essential to the Party's approach to national objectives.

Why build maritime power?

Today and for a long time to come, our country's national interests are expanding mainly in the sea, national security is threatened mainly from the sea, the focal point of military struggle is mainly in the sea...

— *The Science of Military Strategy*⁵¹

This telling statement suggests that Chinese leaders, or at least the PLA, now see maritime issues and maritime power as being essential to achieving their national goals. The 18th Party Congress represents an important indicator that those reasons have now reached a tipping point and the maritime issues have become officially enshrined in national Party policy. Table 2 below illustrates how, over time, issues associated with the maritime domain have grown in importance to China and Chinese policy.

Chinese leaders believe that maritime power is important for three reasons:

- Economic
- Security
- Political.

⁵¹ Military Strategy Research Department of the Academy of Military Science, *The Science of Military Strategy*, 2013, 209.

Table 2: Growing focus on maritime issues in Chinese policy
1979: China adopts a policy of opening up to outside world and using trade as an engine of growth.
1985: China begins to develop a “near seas” regional navy to replace previous focus on coastal defense.
1993: The CMC fixes Taiwan as the military’s “main strategic direction” for combat purposes. China becomes a net importer of oil for the first time.
1995: Chinese leader Jiang Zemin says that China is both a continental and a coastal power.
1996: China joins the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
2001: China joins the World Trade Organization.
2002: Beijing launches “go-out strategy” to encourage Chinese companies to expand abroad.
2002: The 16 th Party Congress promotes maritime development.
2004: China’s defense white paper calls for more resources for the PLA Navy, PLA Air Force, and the Second Artillery.
2004: Hu Jintao makes a speech on the PLA’s “New Historic Missions” and tasks China’s military with defending Chinese interests abroad for the first time.
2006: The 2006 defense white paper calls for the PLA Navy to develop strategic depth as part of the offshore defense.
2007: The 17 th Party Congress calls for promoting the maritime economy.
2008: PLA Navy begins anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden; the PLA Navy is also referred to as a strategic service.
2010: The 12 th five-year plan is the first five-year plan to have a stand-alone section dealing with development of the maritime economy.
2012: The 18th Party Congress adopts the goal of becoming a maritime power.
2013: Chinese coast guard is formed from four separate maritime law enforcement forces.
2015: China’s defense white paper clearly indicates that the PLA Navy’s missions will be transitioning to “offshore defense and far seas protection.”

Economic concerns

The importance of the oceans to the Chinese economy revolves around a number of key factors:

First, there is China's dependence on trade. In 1979, China adopted the policy of opening up to the outside world and using trade as a vehicle for economic development. In the eyes of China's current leadership, trade continues to be an essential part of China's economic development strategy.⁵² Trade revenue in 2010 accounted for 12 percent of China's GDP.⁵³ While China is seeking to stimulate internal consumption as a driver of economic growth, for now the economy relies heavily on trade as an engine of growth.

Most of this trade travels by sea. Exactly how much is unclear. Some Chinese sources state that 80 percent⁵⁴ of Chinese trade travels by ship; the figure most commonly used by Chinese officials is 90 percent.⁵⁵ Moreover, 28 percent of all imports are fuel and raw materials, such as iron ore.⁵⁶ As China's total trade has grown, so has its dependence on access to the oceans. It has gone from an economy which was largely self-reliant in the 1960s and 1970s, and in which trade played only a minor role, to a country with key economic sectors that are critically dependent on unimpeded movement of merchant shipping around the world.

In addition, the maritime economy has become increasingly important to China's development strategy. According to Liu Cigui, Director of China's State Oceanic Administration, the total value of all these activities amounted to roughly 10 percent of China's GDP in 2015.⁵⁷ The term "maritime economy" is used by the Chinese to refer to all industries that are involved in the exploitation of marine resources or make use of coastal areas and the open seas. This includes at least 11 industrial sectors and involves such diverse activities as coastal and ocean transport,

⁵² Xi Jinping, "Holistic View of National Security."

⁵³ World Bank, *World Bank Development Indicators Database*, <http://data.worldbank.org/>.

⁵⁴ Hu Wenming, "Chinese Move Toward the Deep Blue."

⁵⁵ Xu Sheng, "Follow the Path of Maritime Power," November 2013; Luo Zheng, "Maritime Power Inevitable Choice for Achieving China Dream." *Peoples Liberation Army Daily*. March 9 2013.

⁵⁶ World Bank, *World Bank Development Indicators Database*.

⁵⁷ Liu Fei, "China's Maritime Strategic Thought During the Reform and Opening to the Outside," 2012.

offshore oil and gas, fishing, wind tidal and solar power from the sea, pharmaceuticals derived from marine animal and plant products, and even maritime tourism.⁵⁸ To date, most of this activity has been focused along China's coasts—such as in the long-term development projects off of Fujian, Shandong, and the Pearl and Yangzi River deltas—or offshore oil drilling.⁵⁹

However multiple sources indicate that future growth in the maritime economy will expand to areas well beyond China's regional seas.⁶⁰ Since 2001, the PRC government has been actively encouraging state-owned enterprises to invest overseas and acquire foreign assets. The “go-out” policy has led to a massive expansion of Chinese business investment and operations overseas as well as a sharp increase in the number of Chinese citizens living and working abroad. In 2013 alone, Chinese overseas direct investment totaled US\$101 billion according to Chinese government statistics.⁶¹ Much of that investment is concentrated in countries which have important resources.⁶² China's proposal of a “Maritime Silk Road” and the newly established Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank—which China will lead—are signs that Chinese overseas investments will further increase in the coming years.⁶³ Xi's emphasis on the Maritime Silk Road in particular underlines the importance of maritime trade routes to China's growing overseas interests.

China's Maritime Silk Road

⁵⁸ State Oceanic Administration, *Ocean Development Report 2009*; State Oceanic Administration, *China's Ocean Development Report, 2014*, 2014.

⁵⁹ This is sometimes referred to as China's blue economy. See Kathleen Walsh, ed. *Exploring the Frontiers of U.S.-China Strategic Cooperation: Roles and Responsibilities Beyond the Asia-Pacific Region, November 2014*, Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, 2014; Lin Dianxiong Jia Shaowen, ?, and Huo Liping,. “Remote Technical Support System for Equipment Maintenance.” *Ordnance Industry Automation* (2012): 21-23.

⁶⁰ See for example, Xu Sheng, “Follow the Path of Maritime Power,” November 2013; Hu Wenming, “Chinese Move Toward the Deep Blue.”

⁶¹ See Ministry of Foreign Commerce website, www.english.mofcom.gov.cn.

⁶² David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partical Power*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶³ See, for example, Xi Jinping, "Work Together to Build a 21st Century Maritime Silk Road; Xi Jinping, “Promote the Silk Road Spirit, Strengthen China-Arab Cooperation,” in *The Governance of China*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2014); Xi Jinping, "New Approach for Asian Security Cooperation. See also the website of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, www.aiib.org.



According to Foreign Minister Yang Yi, some 30,000 Chinese enterprises are overseas employing millions of Chinese workers. Four years ago estimates were that 5 million citizens were living and working abroad. More recently Premier Li Keqiang said, “The job of protecting overseas citizens is a serious one”. “The number of outbound Chinese is expected to exceed 100 million this year (2014).”⁶⁴ China has already had to conduct evacuations of its citizens from Libya, in 2011, and Yemen, in 2015.⁶⁵ The PLA Navy has been identified as having a central role in addressing this problem.⁶⁶

Security concerns

As with economic issues, Chinese security concerns related to the maritime domain have steadily increased since the 1980s and, as noted in the discussion of national objectives above, maritime

⁶⁴ Dong Zhaohui, “China’s logistic hub in Djibouti to stabilize region, protect interests,” *Global Times*, March 15, 2016, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2016-03/15/content_6961515.htm; Zhao Yinan, “Li vows to protect rights of Chinese working abroad,” *China Daily*, May 5, 2014, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2014livisitafrica/2014-05/10/content_17497900.htm

⁶⁵ For an extended treatment on the issue of protecting Chinese citizens and assets abroad see, Jonas Parello-Plesner and Mathieu Duchatel, *China’s Strong Arm: Protecting Citizens and Assets Abroad*, The Adelphi Series, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Routledge, May 2015, the Yemen evacuation is mentioned on page 9. The Chinese themselves understood that this reflected a significant growth in China’s comprehensive national power. “Chinese naval vessels evacuate hundreds from war torn Yemen,” *Xinhua*, April 8, 2015, news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/08/c_134134406.htm

⁶⁶ “With the growth of China’s national interests...the security of overseas interests concerning energy and resources, strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs), as well as institutions, personnel and assets abroad, has become an imminent issue” The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s Military Strategy*, May 2015:3, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/index.htm>.

security concerns are an important part of the Chinese national security policy. Land-based external threats continue to matter—China’s most recent white paper notes that “certain disputes over land territory are still smoldering” and expresses concern over instability on the Korean Peninsula.⁶⁷

However, the white paper also clearly indicates a growing concern with maritime security, noting that “the traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests.”⁶⁸

This concern is also reflected in recent PLA publications. As stated in the 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy*, written by the PLA’s Academy of Military Science, which is the think tank of the Central Military Commission:

The danger of war in the maritime, air, space, and/or cyber domains is escalating. The threat of war in the east is more serious than the threat of war in the west, the threat of war from the sea exceeds that of the threat of war from the land...the probability of military [use for] rights protection abroad, and even limited operational actions is increasing. The most serious threat of war is from a formidable enemy to initiate a war with our country through a surprise attack with purpose of destroying our country’s ability to wage war...The most likely threat of war is limited military conflicts from the maritime direction.⁶⁹

The Science of Military Strategy also outlines four types of combat operations that China may face.⁷⁰ All four have maritime aspects. They are:

- A large-scale, high-intensity defensive war involving “hegemonic” countries that seek to stop China’s “peaceful rise.” Such a conflict is considered a low probability but very dangerous. This is likely a reference to a potential conflict with the United States. Such a

⁶⁷ China still has not resolved its land border dispute with India. Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's Military Strategy*, 2015.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Military Strategy Research Department of the Academy of Military Science, *The Science of Military Strategy*, 2013, 100.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 99-100.

conflict would clearly have an important maritime element (and, presumably, air, space and cyber elements).

- A large-scale, high-intensity “anti-secession” conflict over Taiwan as a result of a move toward Taiwanese independence.
- A medium- to small-scale conflict with opponents along China’s periphery. Examples given of maritime versions of this type of conflict include armed conflict over islands, maritime boundary disputes, and “large-scale plundering” of offshore oil and gas. Clearly a reference to current disputes in the East China and South China Seas.⁷¹
- A small-scale, low-intensity conflict. This is described as closely related to a MOOTW operation but involve confrontations. Maritime examples provided include protecting strategic passageways, securing the safety of Chinese expatriates, and protecting Chinese interests overseas.

It is not surprising that the Chinese see the maritime domain as the probable greatest source of external security threats, given the wide range of growing security concerns that China has with regard to the oceans.

First, most of China’s remaining concerns over national sovereignty have a maritime dimension. Except for its borders with India, all of China’s land border disputes have been peacefully settled. All other remaining territorial and boundary disputes are with its neighbors along its maritime periphery. China has unresolved maritime boundary disputes with North Korea, South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia.⁷² It has unresolved territorial disputes over islands, shoals, and other land features with Japan in the East China Sea, and with the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia in the South China Sea.

⁷¹ The book also mentions a potential conflict over land borders, possibly a reference to India, and dealing with a refugee crisis as a result of political instability in a neighboring country.

⁷² State Oceanic Administration, *China's Ocean Development Report, 2014*, 2014.

Then, of course there is China's largest sovereignty concern—Taiwan. While China seeks a peaceful reunification with Taiwan, the need to prepare for the possibility of using force has been a driver of Chinese military modernization.⁷³

Protecting the homeland from attack also has an important maritime dimension. According to the 2013 *Science of Military Strategy*, this includes the need to be able to help protect Beijing from attack from the sea as well as “to contain, prevent, and resist possible attacks from the maritime direction, especially large-scale, high-intensity intermediate- and long-range precision strikes, to ensure the security of the homeland.”⁷⁴

Second, the growing importance of China's maritime economy means that the PLA and maritime law enforcement are needed to protect China's access to offshore resources, especially in disputed areas. As PLAN commander Wu Shengli observed in 2007, protecting resource exploitation, ensuring Chinese jurisdiction over its continental shelf and EEZ, and protecting China's maritime rights and interests constitute an important mission for the PLA Navy.⁷⁵ As China's capabilities to access and utilize maritime resources grow, access to resources in other ocean areas and the need to be able to protect that access will likely increase the need for the PLA to operate in the far seas as well as the near seas.

Third, China's economy is heavily dependent on trade. SLOC protection has long been an enduring mission for the PLA. As noted earlier, trade has been a major engine of China's economic growth and most of China's trade is moved by ship. China is dependent on seaborne trade for most of its oil and gas imports, iron ore, copper, and other strategic raw materials.⁷⁶ According to one source, some 55 percent of all Chinese trade travels through the Indian Ocean, including oil from Africa and the Middle East and most of China's trade with Europe.⁷⁷ Any

⁷³ Office of Naval Intelligence, *The PLA Navy*, 2015.

⁷⁴ Military Strategy Research Department of the Academy of Military Science, *The Science of Military Strategy*, 2013, 210.

⁷⁵ Wu Shengli and Hu Yanlin, “Building a Powerful PLA Navy That Meets the Requirements of Our Army's Historic Missions,” *Qiushi*, no. 14, July 2007.

⁷⁶ Murray Scot Tanner and Peter W. Mackenzie, *China's Emerging National Security Interests and their Impact on the People's Liberation Army*, (Quantico, Virginia: United States Marine Corps University Press, 2015), 96-97; Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy in the Twenty-First Century*, Second ed (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2010).

⁷⁷ Senior Captain Zhang Wei, *National Maritime Security, Guojia Haishang Anquan* (国家海上安全) (Beijing: Haichao Chubanshe, 2008), 463.

interference with China's seaborne trade would present a serious security challenge to the Chinese leadership.

The 2013 edition of *Science of Military Strategy* notes that there are more than 30 key SLOCs linking China to over 1,200 ports in 150 countries and that these SLOCs are vital "lifelines" for the China's economy and social development. The high prominence given SLOC protection in both the 2015 defense white paper and the *Science of Military Strategy* suggests that the need to secure SLOCs will be a major driver of future PLAN acquisition and missions.

Fourth, the growth in China's overseas interests and number of citizens living abroad is also driving a need to have a military that can protect those citizens and economic interests. This has been recognized since at least 2004, with Hu's New Historic Missions speech.

Fifth, all of China's greatest threats since the 19th century have come from the sea. China has strong memories of past attacks by the Europeans and Japanese. A threat from the United States—the only country able to prevent China from achieving its goals—would also come from the sea.

Sixth, non-traditional threats at sea, such as piracy in the Gulf of Aden, are of increased concern to Chinese security analysts because they have the potential to disrupt Chinese trade.⁷⁸

Seventh, China participates in carrying out nuclear deterrence and counterstrike.⁷⁹ The PLAN currently has four ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) and a sea-based deterrent is now identified as an important component of China's overall nuclear strategy.⁸⁰ As of the time of writing, it is not clear whether China will operate its SSBNs only in the near seas or also far beyond China's shores.

⁷⁸ Interviews with PLA and civilian think tank analysts, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014. Deputy PLA Navy Commander ADM Tian Zhong. "Providing Strategic Support for the Building of a Maritime Power." *PLA Daily. Jiefangjun Bao* April 2, 2014, April 2, 2014.

⁷⁹ Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's Military Strategy*, (Beijing, 2015), http://eng.mod.gov.cn/DefenseNews/2015-05/26/content_4586748.htm; Military Strategy Research Department of the Academy of Military Science, *The Science of Military Strategy*, 2013.

⁸⁰ Qian Xiaohu et al. "Heroic Nuclear Submarines, Sharpening Swords in the Depth of Vast Oceans." *PLA Daily. (Jiefangjun Bao; 解放军报)*. October 29, 2013. China, *China's Military Strategy*, 2015; Military Strategy Research Department of the Academy of Military Science, *The Science of Military Strategy*, 2013, 211.

Eighth, in recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on the need for China to contribute to international peacekeeping and other multilateral efforts to support the international order. This includes Chinese participation in UN peacekeeping operations in places such as Haiti, Lebanon, and Congo.⁸¹

There is also a maritime component, including responding to non-traditional security threats at sea, and participating in multilateral exercises and patrols. As the *Science of Military Strategy* notes, “As a globally influential great power...[our] participation in safeguarding international maritime security is both a requirement for safeguarding our own security interests and an important demonstration of fulfilling our international responsibilities.” It then goes on to directly link the development of maritime power with building a navy that is capable of participating in activities in support of the international order.⁸² This suggests that the PLAN will be increasingly tasked with participating in a wide range of multilateral activities in areas where it has not operated before. The PLAN’s participation in the international mission to destroy Syrian chemical weapons at sea may be an indicator of future missions.

With the exception of Taiwan and territorial and boundary disputes in the East and South China Seas, all of these concerns go beyond the near seas. Concerns over SLOC protection, access to resources, and overseas interests are all drivers for further broadening the PLA Navy’s missions, responsibilities, and tasks.⁸³ That is, the PLA Navy is increasingly needed to perform far-seas missions as well as near-seas defense.

Political/diplomatic

In addition to economic and security concerns, political interests are also driving an increased interest in the maritime domain.

Evidence suggests that Chinese policy-makers are increasingly interested in using maritime capabilities to build political and diplomatic influence.

⁸¹ See, for example, Emma Campbell-Mohn. “China: The World’s New Peacekeeper?”. *The Diplomat*. April 8, 2015. <http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/china-the-worlds-new-peacekeeper/>.

⁸² Military Strategy Research Department of the Academy of Military Science, *The Science of Military Strategy*, 2013, 211.

⁸³ Wu Shangrui et al. “Marine Energy Opens a New Era for the World’s Energy.” *Renmin Haijun*. August 27, 2013.

- Several Chinese officials have noted the importance of being able to respond to maritime disasters and to use maritime capabilities to provide humanitarian aid.⁸⁴
- Chinese sources also stress the importance of building cooperation in maritime issues including responding to threats of piracy, as well as cooperation in resource exploration and scientific investigations.⁸⁵
- China has increasingly made use of its hospital ship and has sent it on humanitarian missions in both the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean.⁸⁶
- Several sources also brought up the importance of being able to revise existing international treaties on the sea and to influence future international agreements on maritime issues.⁸⁷

Finally, there is evidence to suggest that one reason China is pursuing maritime power is *to gain status*. There appears to be a widespread impression among many elites that historically major powers have been maritime powers. Chinese writers note that the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal were once major powers due to their maritime capabilities. Later powers—Britain, the United States, Japan, and, briefly, Germany and the Soviet Union—also depended on maritime power.⁸⁸

While it is important to not over-stress this element, it does seem to imply that there is a maritime element to Chinese perceptions of what it means to be a world power and an actor of consequence on the global stage.

⁸⁴ Liu Cigui. “Develop China's Maritime Economy and Build China into a Maritime Power.” *Jingji Ribao on line*. January 22, 2013.

⁸⁵ See for example, Liu Cigui, “Striving to Realize the Historical Leap”.

⁸⁶ Kyle Mizokami. “Peace Ark: Onboard China’s Hospital Ship.” *USNI News*. July 23, 2014. <http://news.usni.org/2014/07/23/peace-ark-onboard-chinas-hospital-ship>.

⁸⁷ Liu Cigui, “Striving to Realize the Historical Leap”.

⁸⁸ Peng Kehui. “Discussing the Historical Evolution of New Chia's Maritime Strategy.” *Luelun xin zhongguo haiyang zhanlue de lishi yanjin. Social Sciences Review Shehui Kexue Luntun*, no. 10 (2012); Xu Sheng, “Follow the Path of Maritime Power,” November 2013.

What key shortfalls need to be addressed?

Shortfalls for the PLA

The PLA sees a wide range of issues that need to be addressed if it is to fulfill its tasks of defending Chinese economic, political, and security interests in both the near and far seas. While the main focus will continue to be on the near seas, many PLA sources strongly indicate that the PLA Navy will need to do more in order to meet its expanding missions in the far seas.

PLA reform efforts that relate to the PLA Navy

As of the time of writing, the PLA is planning and preparing to undertake a new round of reforms focusing on organization, training and education, and the development of an ability to conduct joint operations. Several of these reforms are likely to impact on China's ability to exercise military power in the maritime domain. For example:

- PLA Air Force (PLAAF) commander General Ma Xiaotian has stated that the PLAAF must become more proficient at carrying out missions over water, as part of the PLA's new emphasis on combat-related training.⁸⁹ In 2015, the PLAAF took part in a major maritime exercise flying bombers out over the Bashi Channel.⁹⁰
- The PLA has also indicated that new command structures will be developed to allow for joint operations and command.⁹¹ This may reduce the traditional dominance of the ground forces in higher levels of command and, though speculative, could result in senior PLAN officers leading joint commands with regard to maritime operations.
- The Third Plenum of the 18th Party Congress indicated that there will be adjustments in the force structure of the PLA and that changes will be made in the balance between ground forces and the PLA Navy, Air Force, and Second Artillery.⁹² Interviews with PLA think-

⁸⁹ Ma Xiaotian. "Strive to Enhance the Air Force's Capability of Fighting and Winning." *Jiefangjun Bao*. April 2, 2014.

⁹⁰ Zhang Junshe. "Japan Needs to Get Used to Chinese Air Forces's Distant Sea Training." *People's Daily*. April 1, 2015

⁹¹ State Oceanic Administration, *Ocean Development Report 2009*; Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's Military Strategy*, 2015; Luo Zhen. "An Interpretation of the New National Defense White Paper--Strengthening the Military is the Inevitable Choice for Fulfilling Our Nation's Great Rejuvenation." *Jiefangjun Bao*. May 27, 2015.

⁹² State Oceanic Administration, *Ocean Development Report 2009*.

tank analysts indicate that the PLA Navy is widely expected to be a major beneficiary of these reforms with greater access to resources.⁹³ The 2015 Chinese defense white paper certainly stresses the importance of the PLAN to national security, further suggesting that the PLAN will benefit from the military reforms.

PLAN shortcomings and the ability to support near-seas defense and far-seas protection

PLA sources indicate several shortcomings for the PLAN as it transitions to its new strategy of near-seas defense and far-seas protection. These include:

- Chinese military experts note that the PLAN needs to improve its level of “informatization,” including improvements in its communication systems, in its command and control systems, and in its ability to interact with space-based systems.⁹⁴
- Chinese military experts also note the need to develop and acquire new weapons systems and equipment better suited to both near- and far-seas operations, including aircraft carriers, advanced nuclear and conventional submarines, long-range multi-functional maritime combat aircraft, maritime unmanned operational platforms, and support ships.⁹⁵
- Some PLA sources advocate that the Chinese military develop the ability to extend forward defense outward from China’s offshore areas (the Yellow, East China, and South China Seas) to include the Western Pacific and areas of the Indian Ocean beyond the Straits of Malacca.⁹⁶
- Some Chinese defense experts also note that the China needs to conduct more oceanographic research and develop newer and more capable research vessels so that the

⁹³ Interviews in 2014.

⁹⁴ Military Strategy Research Department of the Academy of Military Science, *The Science of Military Strategy*, 2013, 213.

⁹⁵ Zhou Huizhen, Li Fusheng, and Guo Quankai. “Problems with Equipment Support Preparation for Distant Seas Defensive Operations” (*Yuanhai fangwei zuozhan zhuangbei baozhang zhunbei wenti yanjiu*; 远海防卫作战装备保障准备问题研究). *Journal of the Equipment Academy (Zhuangbei Xueyuan Xuebao*; 装备学院学报) 25, no. 3 (June 2014): 10-13; Li Fusheng, Zhou Huizhen, and Guo Quankai, “Research on Equipment Support and Preparation,” February 2014; Lu Sixi Zhou Qingzhong and Chen Yang. “Analysis of Measures to Improve POL Support Capabilities for Warships”. (*Ti gao chuanting budui zuozhan youliao baozhang nengli de duice fenxi*; 提高船艇部队作战油料保障能力的对策分析)*China Storage and Transport Journal*, no. 3 (2013): 127-128.

⁹⁶ Military Strategy Research Department of the Academy of Military Science, *The Science of Military Strategy*, 2013, 107.

PLAN can have a better understanding of sea conditions and oceanography in the far-seas areas in which it will operate.⁹⁷

- *The Science of Military Strategy* suggests that the PLAN will need to readjust its organizational structure, including developing new types of command structure, developing new types of support forces, and adjusting maritime special forces and amphibious forces.⁹⁸

PLAN's shortcomings and its ability to conduct wartime missions

Chinese-language material reviewed for this study raised the possibility of the PLAN conducting wartime missions far from home. However, the data did not provide much insight as to what types of future war scenarios PLA planners may be considering. To the extent that wartime missions are discussed, they appear to be in the context of far-seas operations that are connected to conflicts related to China's near seas. That is, they are an extension of a conflict—such as over Taiwan or disputed islands in the South China Sea. The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* notes the following with regard to future wartime missions for the PLAN:

- In wartime, the PLAN's operations cannot be limited to offshore areas; it must be able to operate in both the near and far seas and “create the conditions of defense in depth.”⁹⁹
- The PLAN needs to be able to operate jointly with the other services both near China and in combat operations far from home.¹⁰⁰

PLAN's shortcomings and its ability to conduct peacetime missions

For the foreseeable future, most of the PLAN's operations far from home are likely to be connected with peacetime missions. Here, too, Chinese military experts identify a number of shortcomings. For example:

⁹⁷ Ibid., 217.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 214-215.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 216.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

- Some Chinese defense experts assert that the PLAN will need to broaden the space and scope of its far-seas activities and further strengthen its physical presence in areas related to its overseas interests.¹⁰¹ The PLAN will need to operate “in most oceans” in support of Chinese foreign policy.¹⁰² It will also need to expand its ability to respond to emergencies—e.g., by evacuating citizens, responding to humanitarian disasters, and conducting naval diplomacy.¹⁰³
- Protection of Chinese citizens will require the ability to operate throughout the Indian Ocean region, parts of the Atlantic, and elsewhere. The PLAN will therefore require improved access to friendly ports for fuel, food, and other supplies, and for repair.¹⁰⁴ PLA experts also note the need to develop better support ships, both military and civilian.¹⁰⁵
- Some Chinese defense experts assert that the PLAN will need to develop operational units that are better suited for carrying out operations other than war, such as medical units for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, better support forces, and specialized units with legal and foreign affairs experts that can interact with foreign governments.¹⁰⁶ In other words, the Chinese military needs to develop the same range of capabilities that the U.S. military routinely employs in its routine operations around the globe.
- *The Science of Military Strategy* notes that the PLAN needs to develop an “open, pragmatic, and cooperative spirit” in order to expand maritime security cooperation with others.¹⁰⁷ This suggests that the PLAN—and the other services—are still very

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 217.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Zhou Huizhen, Li Fusheng, and Guo Quankai. “Problems with Equipment Support Preparation for Distant Seas Defensive Operations”. (*Yuanhai fangwei zuozhan zhuangbei baozhang zhunbei wenti yanjiu*; 远海防卫作战装备保障准备问题研究). *Journal of the Equipment Academy (Zhuangbei Xueyuan Xuebao*; 装备学院学报) 25, no. 3 (June 2014): 10-13; Li Fusheng, G Zhou Huizhen, and Guo Quankai. “Research on Equipment Support and Preparation for Large Combat Ship Formations.” (*Daxing jianting bianwei zuozhan zhuangbei baozhang ji zhunbei wenti yanjiu*; 大型舰艇编队作战装备保障及准备问题研究). *Journal of the Equipment Academy (Zhuangbei Xueyuan Xuebao*; 装备学院学报) 25, no. 1 (February 2014): 28-31.

¹⁰⁵ Li Fusheng, Zhou Huizhen, and Guo Quankai, “Research on Equipment Support and Preparation,” February 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Military Strategy Research Department of the Academy of Military Science, *The Science of Military Strategy*, 2013, 217-218.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 218.

inexperienced in developing positive and effective military relations with other armed forces.

Shortfalls for civilian agencies

Interviews with Chinese think-tank analysts as well as articles in Chinese journals and media outlets indicate that Chinese policy-makers perceive important shortfalls in civilian aspects of maritime power. While a comprehensive survey of these views is beyond the scope of this paper, the following section provides an overview of the most widely perceived shortcomings.

Shortfalls in the maritime economy

Some Chinese government officials state that the size of China's maritime economy is insufficient and that it needs to make up a larger share of China's GDP. Currently it is only 10 percent of GDP,¹⁰⁸ and state oceanic officials and others argue that it needs to be closer to 20-30 percent.¹⁰⁹ Other shortfalls are noted with the maritime economy as well:

- China's shipbuilding industry is underdeveloped. China needs to develop better engineering and technology so that ships built in China will use indigenous technology.¹¹⁰
- As China's maritime economy develops in the future, emerging industries and technologies related to the maritime economy need to be given priority.¹¹¹
- Chinese ministries and agencies need to develop better coordination and planning with regard to the sea.¹¹²

China has an inadequate system of maritime law

Chinese maritime experts argue that the country's system of maritime laws and regulations are inadequate and that new laws and regulations will be needed to enhance protection of China's

¹⁰⁸ Liu Cigui, "Build China into a Maritime Power."; State Oceanic Administration, *China's Ocean Development Report, 2014*, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Liu Cigui, "Build China into a Maritime Power."; Chen Mingyi, "China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050."

¹¹⁰ Hu Wenming, "Chinese Move Toward the Deep Blue."

¹¹¹ Chen Tun, Zheng Yinle, and He Lipeng. "Strengthen Maritime Management on the Basis of Laws, Provide Support and Guarantee for the Building of a Maritime Power." *People's Navy*. November 13, 2014.

¹¹² *Ibid.*; Liu Cigui, "Build China into a Maritime Power."

maritime rights and interests and to help coordinate government agencies and planning.¹¹³ These include:¹¹⁴

- Improved laws and regulations, to enhance the ability of China’s coast guard to enforce Chinese law in its claimed EEZ and territorial waters.¹¹⁵ Legislation on maritime sovereignty and national security issues is reportedly underdeveloped.
- Better coordination between Chinese agencies tasked with carrying out China’s maritime policies.
- Better laws and regulations, to improve coordination between national and local governments with regard to maritime issues.

Shortfalls in marine science and technology

Data indicate that Chinese officials believe that the country’s marine science and technology is very inadequate for its needs and that it needs to build up its capabilities in this area. Desired capabilities include:

- Better oceanographic science—one source wants Chinese research centers to be at the level of Woods Hole in the United States. Research staffs have to be brought up to world levels.¹¹⁶
- China needs to develop technologies in the areas of biotechnology and marine information technology; to develop an extensive array of ocean sensors, sonar buoys, and maritime satellites to monitor ocean conditions; and to develop its deep-sea drilling technology, seabed observation, seabed mining, and deep-sea research bases.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Chen Mingyi, “China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050.”; Chen Tun, Zheng Yinle, and He Lipeng, “Strengthen Maritime Management ”.

¹¹⁴ Chen Tun, Zheng Yinle, and He Lipeng, “Strengthen Maritime Management ”; Liu Cigui, “Build China into a Maritime Power.”; Liu Cigui, “Striving to Realize the Historical Leap ”; Chen Mingyi, “China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050.”

¹¹⁵ Chen Mingyi, “China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050.”

¹¹⁶ Liu Cigui, “Striving to Realize the Historical Leap ”.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Chen Mingyi, “China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050.”

- China needs to build further its deep-sea submersible technology and to become a world leader in this field.¹¹⁸
- China needs better technology to detect and identify resources for fishing and for oil and gas exploration.¹¹⁹
- China needs to take a larger role in scientific research and resource exploration in the Arctic and Antarctic Seas.¹²⁰

The need for better qualified personnel for China's maritime agencies and industry

Chinese maritime experts perceive China as having insufficient talented personnel in all sectors related to the maritime. It needs to train more people and ensure that the training and education it provides are at world levels.¹²¹

The need to improve the maritime environment

Finally, a number of Chinese officials have identified environmental challenges that need to be addressed if China is to become a strong maritime power. For example:

- Higher priority has to be given to the environment in economic planning for the maritime economy.¹²²
- Chinese shipbuilders need to be able to design “green” ships that help support a cleaner environment.¹²³
- China needs to develop planning for addressing offshore pollution so that by 2050, the environment of the 3 million square kilometers of claimed territorial waters and exclusive economic zone is “ecologically beautiful.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Chen Mingyi, “China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050.”

¹¹⁹ Chen Tun, Zheng Yinle, and He Lipeng, “Strengthen Maritime Management ”; Chen Mingyi, “China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050.”

¹²⁰ Wu Jingjing and Luo Sha, “Promote the Reaching of New Height in China's Polar Scientific Survey Undertaking.”

¹²¹ Chen Mingyi, “China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050.”; Liu Cigui, “Build China into a Maritime Power.”

¹²² Chen Mingyi, “China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050.”

¹²³ Hu Wenming, “Chinese Move Toward the Deep Blue.”

It remains to be seen how, and with what degree of success, Beijing addresses these and related challenges. It is likely that the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) will include initiatives aimed at addressing these problems and that the maritime section of the five-year plan is likely to be much longer and more detailed than in the past.

Implications for the United States

China's pursuit of building maritime power has several important implications for the United States.

First, the PLA Navy will increasingly become an actor outside China's regional waters. While the status of Taiwan and territorial disputes in the East China and South China Seas will likely remain security concerns for China for a long time to come, data for this paper indicate that the PLA Navy (and other services within the PLA) will increasingly be called upon to protect and defend growing overseas national interests. In the near term, this primarily means that a Chinese navy will be operating in the Western Pacific and the Indian Oceans. But it is also clear that the PLA Navy may not be limited to these areas. China remains interested in access to resources in the polar seas; Chinese naval diplomacy is likely to be truly global; and Chinese overseas interests are increasingly global. The goal of becoming a maritime power symbolizes the progression from a regional power to one that is global with interests in every maritime domain across the globe. There also appears to be no sea area that is not of potential interest to the Chinese. The polar seas, the Atlantic, and the Mediterranean are all possible areas of operation, at least in peacetime. Still, this is not like the naval competition with the Soviet Union that the United States faced during the Cold War. Chinese interests in the maritime domain are driven by a wide range of economic and political interests, not just purely security interests. It does mean, however, that U.S. policy will have to adjust to the notion that there will be a Chinese navy that will be able to operate globally.

Second, in order to be able to support Chinese national interests, the PLA Navy will have to acquire the capabilities to conduct a much wider range of missions than is currently the case, and to be able to do them much farther from home. This means developing a force and command structure that will better allow task forces to operate far from home for long periods. It will also

¹²⁴ Liu Cigui, "Striving to Realize the Historical Leap;" Chen Mingyi, "China Must be Built into a Maritime Power by 2050."

likely require China to build a network of agreements with Indian Ocean and other countries in order to support a far-seas navy.

Third, a true far-seas navy need not be a major challenge for the United States. The issues of greatest concern between the United States and China are centered in the Western Pacific. Elsewhere in the maritime domain there are areas of potential mutual interest. Both countries have an interest in combating piracy, and other non-traditional threats to good order at sea. Both countries also have strong interests in seeing SLOC protection. Both countries have interests in responding to natural disasters. Both may find themselves responding to NEOs in which maritime forces of the two countries might cooperate.

Fourth, as China's naval capabilities develop to meet growing demands to support national interests, the potential gap between Chinese naval capabilities and those of U.S. allies and partners is likely to grow, making these countries more dependent on U.S. defense guarantees.

Fifth, while it remains to be seen how well China deals with the challenges of developing its new coast guard and how well resourced it will be, a strong, well-managed Chinese maritime law enforcement force raises some interesting implications. A larger and more capable coast guard can police China's waters and make for a stronger presence throughout the waters of the Yellow, East China, and South China Seas, thereby freeing up PLA Navy resources for use elsewhere. It also means that China will have greater civil force with which to challenge its maritime neighbors in disputes over land features and maritime boundaries in disputed waters. Civilian maritime law enforcement forces are clearly the preferred front-line force that the Chinese can deploy and that are the force most likely to be encountered in disputes at sea. A more capable Chinese coast guard translates into a force that can better challenge, intimidate, and coerce U.S. partners and allies. The increasing capabilities of China's coast guard also mean that as USN ships operate within the first island chain, they will increasingly encounter Chinese coast guard ships and, in some areas of dispute, may be challenged by them. This will pose challenges to the USN: How is it going to respond to Chinese white hulls? How does it communicate intentions when meeting at sea since the Chinese Coast Guard is not a party to the agreements the US has reached with China on navy-to-navy interactions at sea?

Sixth, as noted earlier, some Chinese subject matter experts see maritime power as involving China as a major actor in international maritime relations. Beijing clearly has an interest in seeing some modifications to existing international agreements, most notably in the case of UNCLOS and freedom of navigation for military vessels. A major potential concern for the United States and other maritime nations is that once China has greater maritime capabilities, it may push for changes in the Law of the Sea and other treaties affecting the use of the seas and common spaces.

Seventh, Beijing is making a huge push to improve its capabilities in maritime science and technology. One consequence might be that China will have an important edge in both civilian and military shipbuilding. Thus, it could have a major advantage in the civilian shipbuilding market in terms of the quality of future naval vessels. Also, if China can improve its oceanographic research, it could be better able to conduct submarine and ASW operations. Stronger ocean sciences could also mean a better ability to exploit resources in the seas, and greater competition with U.S. businesses in the global market for marine-related science and other products—such as pharmaceuticals and the development and exploitation of offshore energy resources.

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