



## Khaki and commerce

The relevance of military power to China's economic go-global policy

Jonathan Holslag

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**Main policy recommendations:** China will inevitably develop into a military power with an agenda for protecting its growing interests overseas. While this is a potential challenge for both the US and the EU, there are various opportunities for collaboration. Therefore they need to invest in collaborative military presence abroad, consider China as a main stakeholder in world stability, and engage it in a broad military partnership. This implies:

- . Increasing **knowledge** about China's new security thinking.
- . Insisting on more **transparency** in China's military development.
- . Maintaining collaborative military **presence** in areas such as Africa.
- . Joining forces with China in the framework of the **UN** and UNPKO's.
- . Initiating joint peacekeeping **training** programs.
- . Involving China in the stabilization of **Afghanistan**.
- . Develop alternative instruments for the obsolete **arms embargo**.

For the **EU** in particular, enhanced security cooperation with China, and the development of an autonomous assessment of China's military growth, has to be seen as a source of influence in its security cooperation with the US. Anyhow, it would not make much sense to engage China, without recognizing that security cooperation with the US too needs to be structured in regions like Africa and Western Asia.

**Jonathan Holslag** is research fellow at BICCS. This paper is still work in progress. It forms a first start of a more comprehensive research project on China-EU security cooperation that will be launched at BICCS. I am indebted to Bates Gill, David Shambaugh, Yan Xuetong, Larry Wortzel, Pan Zhonqi and a few anonymous officials for reviewing this paper, and to Duncan Freeman for helping me tracing the Chinese sources.



## The military implications of China's trade ambitions

Jonathan HOLSLAG

China's outreach to the global market has increased its exposure to various traditional and non-traditional threats. These new challenges have triggered a fundamental revision of the conservative continental boundaries of its military strategizing. This shift requires the West to prepare for a more proactive and assertive Chinese posture towards flash points worldwide. The question should no longer be *whether* the People's Republic will extend the reach of its security policy, but *how* it considers doing this and what could be the options for new synergies. *Topics*: economic security, strategy and mercantilism. *JEL-codes*: F52, 59.

### 1. Introduction

It is the geopolitical curse of large continental states to be disposed towards the protection of their borders. China's fixation with sovereignty and territorial unity is understandable if one takes into account its vast continental border of 22,000 km and a claimed exclusive economic zone of 877,020 square km that includes numerous disputed islands. Half of its 2.2 million troops are still guarding the continental boundary and near to 300,000 others are watching the Strait of Taiwan. While China's strategy has evolved from *deep defense*, i.e. defeating potential invaders by luring them into the Chinese hinterland, to *active defense*, which also implies the use of force in adjacent countries and seas; its national security will continue to be identified with the safeguarding of its borders, maintaining internal stability and curbing intrusion by other great powers into its periphery.

Yet, while this strategic conservatism will persist; it will not restrain Beijing from addressing new security threats that emerge as a consequence of its growing international presence. As China is transformed into a trading nation with global ambitions, its national security interests are becoming globalized too. "We must continue our enhanced participation in

economic globalization and at the same time conscientiously safeguard national economic security," President Hu Jintao stressed at a Central Committee meeting in 2007, "We need to build effective national economic security systems, early warning, crisis response and the capacity to protect our interests and the safety of our citizens abroad."<sup>1</sup> China's development has arrived at an important stage where its initial reluctance to project military force might make place for a more assertive use of military capabilities in its foreign policy. Whatever the outcome of this shift, it will be decisive for the strategy of other large powers and the security outlook of the world in this century

Thus far, China has given the impression that it will become the first great power that does not use military force to back its economic growth. The last three years, the Chinese government spared no efforts to convince other countries that it has no such ambitions. It consistently held to a discourse of *peaceful development* that prescribes "persistent efforts to strive for a peaceful international environment for its own development and to promote world peace with its own growth."<sup>2</sup> Peaceful development has to prevent external tensions that might in turn imperil domestic stability and the creation of a *harmonious society*. Yet, this restraint is not unique and is definitely no guarantee for its future security strategy. In history, most emerging trading nations have gradually enhanced their military clout while preaching peace and harmony.<sup>3</sup>

In the late tenth century, the Doge of Venice, Pietro II Orseolo, invoked the necessity of open trade routes to launch naval expeditions against pirates: only a century later the city state had provided itself with military strongholds from the Adriatic Sea to the Southern Alps. In the early fifteenth century, the Portuguese Prince Henry the Seafarer claimed the liberation of Portuguese citizens from Islamic slave traders and the protection of Christianity as a justification to start military expeditions to North Africa. Afterwards, leaders like the French Minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert, the English King Henry VIII, Theodore Roosevelt and the Meiji Emperor would all refer to open seas, free trade and higher moral ground as reasons to protect their national economic interests abroad with the use of force. Neither particular geographic

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features, nor the willingness to be perceived as a responsible power prevent security identities from changing.

This paper looks for the military implications of China's trade ambitions. On the one hand it will add another dimension to the comprehensive research that has been carried out on how China's growing economic status has affected its overall diplomacy and multilateral security cooperation.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand it adds insights to the rich literature that focuses on China's evolving military posture in its immediate neighborhood.<sup>5</sup> The paper will first explain how China's overseas commercial ventures are confronted with a growing number of risks. Secondly, it examines to what extent decision makers are aware of these challenges and how this leads to a re-securitization of China's foreign policy. Therefore I draw on various Chinese sources that reflect the official position as well as the views of experts. Subsequently, this paper elucidates how this has caused an adaptation of China's security objectives and how it gradually looks for means to project military power beyond its borders. Finally, the study assesses whether the West can try to bend this power projection into cooperative engagement and how it can give China's aspirations a place in its own security thinking.

## 2. Challenges

China's commercial go-out policy has driven Chinese investors to the most remote parts of the world. At the beginning of 2007, its outward direct investment stock amounted to 77 billion USD.<sup>6</sup> Up to a quarter of these investments is funnelled into mining projects. As a consequence of the growing import dependence, access to natural resources is considered as a strategic priority. In 2007, foreign supplies made up 52 percent of the PRC's oil consumption and 32 percent of its metal consumption.<sup>7</sup> Acquiring foreign deposits not only allows Chinese companies to gain direct control over upstream supplies; it strengthens these players' bargaining position in the international commodity market too. Beijing also wants domestic companies to build their own export channels because it feels uncomfortable with the fact that foreign firms control 57 percent of national exports. Securing export revenues is not only a matter of goods. China has emerged as a major actor in contracting projects. In 2007, the business

volume of its outbound contract and labor service projects amounted to 48 billion USD.<sup>8</sup> The same year, total private remittances of Chinese workers reached 26 billion USD.<sup>9</sup>

China is becoming increasingly aware of the security implications of this growing economic presence in overseas markets.<sup>10</sup> To start with, its citizens fall more often prey to violence while working abroad. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports that 68,000 Chinese were working in other countries in 2007 and expects this to increase to over 100,000 by 2020.<sup>11</sup> While large-scale incidents such as the anti-Chinese pogroms in Indonesia in the late 1990s have not reoccurred, *sinophobia* is on the rise. In developing countries Chinese immigrants are accused of stealing jobs and targeted by opposition groups for siding with discriminative political elites. Such suspicion has led to an increasing number of violent incidents. In Russia more than ten attacks on Chinese were reported between 2003 and 2007, mostly carried out by anti-Chinese skinheads. The same period, rebel groups in Pakistan's renegade provinces of Baluchistan and Waziristan killed eight Chinese as revenge for their alleged support to the regime of President Musharraf. A review of open sources revealed that at least 48 Chinese were killed as a consequence of anti-Chinese violence: most of them in South Asia and Africa.<sup>12</sup> While China has actively nurtured its political partnerships across the world, it has not been able to turn public attitudes in its favor. The intermingling of anti-government rebellion with *sinophobia* now proves to be a main obstacle for its charm offensive.

Apart from private citizens, companies' facilities too are increasingly exposed to security threats. In the last three years, eleven attacks on Chinese plants were registered in Africa alone. In 2006, insurgents of the Nigerian Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta detonated a car bomb near to the oil refinery of Warri, warning "the Chinese government and its oil companies to steer well clear of the Niger Delta." In 2007, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), a rebel group from Darfur, carried out three raids on Chinese oil facilities in Kordofan state, the heart of Sudan's oil belt and a strategic passage for the Chinese south-north pipeline to the Red Sea. The same year, Ethiopian rebels stormed a Chinese oil field in the Ethiopian province of Ogaden, urging Chinese to "refrain from entering into agreements with the Ethiopian government." In Asia, Chinese facilities were targeted in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia and Myanmar.

Beijing's initial reaction is to inform expats via specific travel advice, provide emergency response guidelines for embassies, and establish a Consular Protection Department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. With key states it has brokered agreements for protecting Chinese citizens. In Angola for instance, oil engineers enjoy special escorts from the paramilitary police. In South Africa, China hammered out special guarantees for protecting citizens from rampant armed crime. In Pakistan, the Embassy obtained special protection from the army for the barracks of its laborers. The swift evacuation of hundreds of nationals from Timor and Tonga in 2006 and from Chad in 2008 too proves the alertness to sudden incidents.

Yet, it is emphasized that while evacuation in case of calamities might be appropriate for the personal security of compatriots; it will not be suitable for China's long-term economic interests. "We cannot run away all the time, and it is a wrong signal anyway," admitted an official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Beijing also derides the option of hiring locals to do the work instead.<sup>13</sup> "Rather than withdrawing workers safely or replacing them, China will need to develop the capability to keep its workers safely in unstable countries," a colleague at the Ministry of Commerce adds.<sup>14</sup> Jin Canrong, a scholar at Renmin University, sees the current "diplomacy for the people" as a "start in a gradual process that will further evolve with the development of China's overall national strength."<sup>15</sup>

Beijing is also beginning to be concerned about the safety of its supply lines. Several strategic arteries that unlock parts of China's hinterland, run through instable countries. Its new pipeline to the Gulf of Bengal for instance, is constructed in an area of Myanmar that is prone to attacks by armed resistance movements. "This pipeline is of strategic

importance for many parts of southern China," a former analyst at CNPC stressed, "most important is that we obtained the approval of the government. Once in operation China will take appropriate measures to keep it safe from sabotage."<sup>16</sup> Drug gangs

and other armed factions, who try to drain a part of the booming cross-border business into their own pockets, already besiege the extensive road

network that China has built in Myanmar. Similarly, the energy grid in Central Asia that nourishes China's East West pipeline is an easy target for alleged Islamic movements that afflict countries like Kirgizstan and Tajikistan.

Even more important are China's maritime linkages. In March 2007, a session of the Tenth National People's Congress focused on the importance of oceans in China's development. "China is a maritime country," its was concluded, "the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is increasingly dependent on the seas, but until now we have never developed a national comprehensive marine policy."<sup>17</sup> Some 87 percent of China's exports and 88 percent of its oil import are seaborne. In 2005 the State Council decided that China had to develop a national fleet of bulk, oil, LNG and container carriers by 2020 in order to carry these enormous freights. While non-traditional threats like maritime piracy appear on the radar screen of the Chinese government; it is more focused on traditional risks such as sea denial or *guerre de course* strategies that could be applied by other powers.

Even 15 years after the event, Chinese news media and experts still discuss the implications of the Yinhe incident, when the US Navy forced a Chinese merchant ship bound for Iran in international waters to halt for three weeks. The Indian Ocean is definitely China's main artery for natural resources. Two prominent energy experts indicated that the United States is building a chain of bases that will allow them to cut off oil supply.<sup>18</sup> Apart from the American naval presence, China is especially concerned about the growing capability of the Indian navy.<sup>19</sup> In 2005, President Hu Jintao promulgated the "Malacca dilemma" and warned that new strategies were needed to address the attempts of "certain major powers" that aim at controlling the strait under the pretext of combating piracy. The director of the National Defense University stressed the importance of the Indian Ocean as the main energy lifeline and called a major strategic task to protect strategic channels by building up deterrence and combat capacity.<sup>20</sup> At the Maritime Conference in Qingdao, Liu Guangding, an advisor to CNOOC, stated that "resource security" should become China's priority in its maritime power strategy and that China should watch the policies of other countries.

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### 3. Defining new security interests

Among scholars, officials and politicians, a consensus is developing that Beijing has to be more vigilant in safeguarding its stakes abroad. The actual means to secure overseas interests are assessed to be inadequate. The narrow state-centric diplomacy that China has used to pursue to curry favor with political elites no longer fits. First and foremost this is because of the rapid proliferation of Chinese non-state and sub-state stakeholders that operate abroad. Second, competition with other powers has forced China to move into unstable parts of the world. Several key partner states are failing to keep their domestic affairs in order and are therefore not reliable in maintaining China's security interests. Ma Xiaojun of the International Institute of Strategic Studies of the Central Party School summarizes this predicament very clearly: it is the responsibility of the state to protect its citizens, and China is now confronted with a dilemma between its principle of non-interference and the interests that derive from our historical task of national development.<sup>21</sup> Experts also recognize that non-interference is becoming less useful as a diplomatic tool. Staying aloof when violence in a certain country erupts might be useful for short-term contacts with the elite of that state, but its neighbours might think otherwise. For instance, China was haunted by several African partner states such as Chad and Egypt to push the Sudanese government to stabilize its borders. Indonesia and Singapore asked Beijing to exert pressure on the Burmese junta to get the constitutional process on track. The same obviously occurred with regard to North Korea's nuclear program. State-centric diplomacy is no longer adequate as the only device of China's foreign security policy.

China is therefore gradually modifying its fixation with *strategic restraint* and silent diplomacy. This approach implied not taking the lead in tackling international security issues and resorting to governments of partner states and the United Nation's Security Council to fulfill its objectives. Two senior researchers of the State Council's study department categorized non-traditional threats as a strategic economic challenge and pleaded for including a series of new measures in the national security strategy, according to China's position as an "influential world power."<sup>22</sup> After the lethal attack on a Chinese oil facility in Ethiopia, *China Daily* headed: "China needs to consider new channels to protect overseas

interests." The article stressed that: "China must break through traditional diplomatic thinking... Only to rely on the traditional mode of high-level political contacts, only 'peaceful coexistence' and 'mutually beneficial cooperation' or the principle of self-restraint are insufficient to protect ourselves or to safeguard overseas economic interests and development."<sup>23</sup> Likewise, *Xinhua* published an interview in which Zhang Wenmu, a leading security thinker, explained that globalization brings a globalization of security interests, that China's security philosophy can only be maintained by adapting it to new realities and that it would be "doomed to loose out world competition if it would focus on a narrow sense of border security."<sup>24</sup> In another *Xinhua* article experts emphasized that cooperation on asymmetric threats is desirable but that it cannot be taken for granted. "Self-restraint does not work anymore," it concluded, "China should develop its capabilities faster and show that while it becomes stronger it does not threaten others, but rather contributes to a stable world."<sup>25</sup>

The willingness of China to promote its own instruments for a more capable foreign security policy is obviously stimulated by a lack of trust in the intentions of other powers. "Hegemonism and power politics still exist," writes Standing Committee Member Liu Libin in a *Qishi* article, "traditional security threats and non-traditional threats to security are still intertwined."<sup>26</sup> In 2005, the renowned *Scientific Decision Making* journal published an article in which the author explained that, despite the fact that

9.11 formed a momentum for international security cooperation, the United States is seizing upon non-traditional threats such as terrorism to maintain its hegemonic position via political, military and economic unilateralism.<sup>27</sup> Numerous Chinese scholars have contended that Washington is using the war against terror in Afghanistan, the anti-terror cooperation programs in Southeast Asia and the naval operations against piracy to sustain its military primacy and to curb the influence of China. The American military presence in Africa as well has raised eyebrows. An official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs interpreted the establishment of AFRICOM mainly in the context of the war against terrorism, but also recognized that "for the Americans military diplomacy is a way to

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counterbalance China and to maintain a strategic edge.”<sup>28</sup> Lin Zhiyuan, the deputy director of the Academy of Military Sciences went further: “AFRICOM will surely facilitate coordinating or overseeing US military actions in African for an effective control of the whole of Africa,” he wrote, “the US has enhanced its military infiltration in Africa in recent years, with its military aid to the continent doubling and its weaponry sale skyrocketing continuously.”<sup>29</sup>

Growing economic interests abroad have instigated China to add another dimension to its security thinking. It is clear that the Chinese government is recognizing the new challenges and that it is aware of the fact that vulnerability might further increase because of its growing dependence on overseas markets, anti-Chinese reactions as a consequence of its raising visibility and looming instability in key natural resource producing countries. While it initially tended to keep a low profile, to withdraw, or to limit the defencelessness of its expats by hiring local workers; it now recognizes that this will no longer suffice. When violence erupts, China nearly automatically ends up at the centre stage and is obliged to take a position. What is more, China’s security community seriously takes into account that non-traditional challenges might be exploited by other powers to interfere with internal affairs, to strengthen their own influence at the expense of others, to prepare for containment strategies, or in the worst case to stir proxy wars and to disturb trade. This double security dilemma renders it impossible for China to pass the buck or to rely solely on multilateral security organizations. Traditional and non-traditional threat perceptions are mutually reinforcing and make China to look for ways to build its autonomous capacity to safeguard its foreign economic interests.

#### 4. Implications for China’s military capability

In December 2006, a plenary meeting of the Central Committee pored over the issue of security threats to China’s foreign interests and concluded that: “China should integrate various means: political, economic, intelligence, military,...”<sup>30</sup> How is the Chinese government developing the capability to project military force abroad and how will it apply this? The 2006 White Paper on National Defense foresees two main tasks: “The Army aims at

moving from regional defense to trans-regional mobility, and improving its capabilities in air-ground integrated operations, *long-distance maneuvers*, rapid assaults and special operations. The Navy aims at gradual extension of the strategic depth for offshore defensive operations and enhancing its capabilities in integrated maritime operations and nuclear counterattacks.”<sup>31</sup> This implies that the military at the same time will have to improve its mobility within and outside its borders.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4.1. Integrated long-distance operations

Since 2006, the Chinese government has recognized the need to engage in interventions beyond the Strait of Formosa. President Hu Jintao for instance asserted that the army should improve the capability to deal with a multitude of traditional and non-traditional threats and among others “prepare itself for non-war military operations.”<sup>33</sup> The idea of non-war military operations is gaining prominence in China’s security thinking. At a conference on non-war military operations in Beijing in 2007, four types of such missions were distinguished: disaster relief, enforcement action, peacekeeping operations and military operations.<sup>34</sup> In order to facilitate such missions, Beijing has approved an ambitious plan to boost its strategic lift platforms. “Mobility and flexibility are key for addressing new challenges,” Wang Hongshe writes in an article that was published in leading state-controlled media such as *Liberation Army Daily* and *Xinhua*, “A policy should be implemented to combine domestic development and acquisition of large military aircraft, transport helicopters and large landing ships to enhance our military’s three-dimensional mobility.”<sup>35</sup>

The development of military airlift capacity has clearly shifted into a higher gear. China’s current airlift capacity is limited to about 150 domestically produced Y-8 turboprop aircraft with a maximum payload of 20 tons, 14 Russian Il-76 jet transport aircraft with a capacity of 45 tons, and a number of smaller and older planes. Thus far China has transported its peacekeepers with chartered aircraft, paid for by the UN.<sup>36</sup> In order to beef up its strategic airlift, Beijing ordered an additional batch of 34 Il-76 and four Il-78 refueling tankers in 2005, but the order was cancelled because of extra costs.<sup>37</sup> The failed deal with Russia made the Central Military Council focus several meetings in 2006 and 2007 on the future development of

China's airborne transport and to come up with a proposal to diversify the delivery of new aircraft. On the one hand, the Chinese government decided to develop its capacity to produce future large aircrafts domestically. "China should by all means conduct overall design and final assembly of large aircraft by our self," Prime Minister Wen Jiabao asserted.<sup>38</sup> In 2007, Shaanxi Aircraft Industry and Antonov announced that they would build a *Military Heavy Airlifter* with a payload of at least 100 tons. In 2008, a new Chinese consortium, Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China, was established to develop China's first jumbo passenger aircraft. Both new types are due to be completed by 2020. On the other hand, Beijing reopened talks with Moscow for the delivery of Il-76's to ease the immediate needs.

An article in *China Military Digest* argued that China prioritizes strategic airlift to respond to factors of instability in its immediate neighborhood and beyond. At least two recent large military training operations have revealed that the Chinese government is recognizing future scenarios of military long-range deployment in hostile areas. In 2007, five Il-76's flew hundreds of soldiers all the way to Western Siberia, being refueled in air.<sup>39</sup> In 2008, an operation was launched that simulated the combat units disembarking from military and civilian aircraft while establishing a security perimeter in violent conditions.<sup>40</sup>

The navy too is going through a similar upgrading. In 2007, it commissioned the Type-071 landing platform dock. This is the first vessel that has all the features for lifting a small battalion-size unit to distant theaters. The commissioning of two large Fuchi class replenishment ships confirms that the Chinese government aims at naval expeditionary capacity. With a freight capacity of 12,000 tons they allow the Chinese navy to engage in long-term and distant operations. Experts believe that more long-range amphibious ships are under consideration and that studies were prepared for the construction of a larger helicopter carrier and an aircraft carrier. These plans should be linked to new projects that were recently launched to build a new generation of transport helicopters. An article in *Military Science* revealed that by 2020 a new generation of medium and large transport helicopters would be commissioned, apart from a new advanced attack helicopter.<sup>41</sup> China's long-range mobility will also be

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increased by the introduction of several types of light armored vehicles such as the EQ-2058 multi-utility vehicle and the WZ-0001 8x8 wheeled armored fighting vehicle.

China's *active defense strategy* foresaw guidelines for waging limited, local wars under high-tech conditions. For the ground forces this mainly implied that they had to prepare for a conflict in China's periphery with another army that would likely be assisted by the United States. In particular the weakness of the highly centralized Iraqi Army during the second Gulf War, led Beijing to invest in smaller, better equipped brigade-sized units with a more flexible command system. As a consequence of the "diversification of military operations", the Chinese ground forces are going through a new stage of reform in command, equipment and training. The most recent innovation in the Chinese army's organization is the introduction of battalion-sized battle groups. These groups combine several arms of the same brigade, such as infantry, engineering, army aviation and reconnaissance. Their command is based on the *pei shu* principle, leaving more autonomy and flexibility to smaller units.

China has held several exercises that simulated the deployment of combined battle groups in foreign crises. *Peace Mission 2007*, a large-scale maneuver that was staged in the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, showed how the Chinese forces were training to combine mobility with tactical integration of service branches. Six Il-76 aircraft simulated the lifting of armored vehicles and combat units, assisted by special forces, engineers and transport helicopters. Maneuvers at battle group level have become a standard practice at the training centre for peacekeeping operations. In 2008, the Central Military Council launched its Military Training and Examination Program, that aimed at developing new theories and guidelines to enhance non-war operations with "long-range rapid mobility" and "joint combat capability in hostile environments".<sup>42</sup>

With the concept of non-war military operations, the Chinese government is clearly paving the way for a more robust use of military power in its foreign security policy. The reorganization of its ground forces into smaller and more flexible units as such might not prove that China is boosting its expeditionary capacity, but in combination with specific training and the development of various logistic platforms, it is likely that

China will be able to deploy several battle groups in low-intensity conflicts abroad in 10 to 15 years.

#### 4.2. Heading for the high seas

China's navy will develop from a *yellow sea* fleet into an oceangoing *blue sea* naval force. There are several indications that this objective has moved up from expert debates to the government's short-term policy agenda. Top leaders have publically stressed the importance of beefing up naval power. In 2005, the State Council concluded that becoming a maritime power does not only imply to strengthen maritime transport, but also the building of a powerful navy to protect the national merchant fleet.<sup>43</sup> In 2006, Hu Jintao called for building "a powerful navy", and while visiting the new navy base at Hainan two years later, he stated that the navy should modernize faster and that it should prepare itself for a growing number of tasks. In the 2006 National Defense report it was stressed that the navy "aims at gradual extension of the strategic depth."<sup>44</sup> Hence, there is a clear political willingness to increase the reach and responsibilities of China's naval forces.

In the past few years, China has strengthened its force projection capacity. All surface combatants commissioned between 2004 and 2007 are outfitted for blue water fleet operations. More efficient and powerful gas and diesel turbines have extended their range significantly. Whereas the air defense missiles of the type 052 Luhu class destroyers that were commissioned in the mid 1990s only had a reach of about 13 kilometers, the type 051C Luzhou class is able to engage six airborne targets simultaneously beyond 80 kilometers.<sup>45</sup> The type 052C Lanzhou, commissioned in 2005, is a showcase of the advancing detection capacity of China's navy. Its multifunction active phased array radar has a detection range of 450 kilometers and is complemented with a long-range 2D air search radar with a 350-kilometer range and three additional radar systems for incoming missiles and aircraft at short distance.<sup>46</sup> The type 054A frigates' air defense system allows tracing 40 targets simultaneously at a maximum range of 120 kilometers.<sup>47</sup> New long-range subsonic type YJ 62 missiles are able to target ships at a distance up to 280 kilometers and have an anti-jamming and guidance system that outperforms most other anti-ship

missiles. China will continue to improve these vessels and transform its obsolete surface combat fleet into an advanced fourth generation blue sea navy, most likely to be headed by a conventional aircraft carrier before 2015.

Thus far, the navy's presence beyond the adjacent seas has remained limited. Despite its participation to humanitarian aid and peacekeeping operations, it has never used military sealift capacity for such missions. Without a doubt, the navy will continue to concentrate on the Strait of Taiwan, and the East and South China Seas. As it gains military clout, it might even become more assertive in enforcing its claims in the region, for example by stepping up naval presence, allowing more Chinese fishers in disputed areas and exploration activities. China is gradually expanding its naval security perimeter eastwards. The geographical boundaries of its offshore defense strategy are being pushed forward to the high seas of the Pacific. Japanese and American defense analysts have registered more frequent patrolling by submarines and surface combatants east of the Mariana Islands.<sup>48</sup> In official statements the Western Pacific is increasingly interpreted as China's maritime zone of influence.<sup>49</sup>

The Western Pacific is a relatively open sea where no particular country claims supremacy. The situation is different in the Indian Ocean, where India does position itself as a regional maritime hegemon and aspires to keep the Chinese navy out of it as much as possible. Therefore, the Indian Ocean is the most important theater for China to show how far it will go in projecting naval power to defend its economic interests. Chinese defense

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analysts have become vociferous in stressing that the Chinese government should not be hesitant. In *Liberation Army Daily*, two navy officers claimed that the main national maritime interests were located along a belt of islands from Taiwan, via the Indonesian Archipelago, all the way to Diego

Garcia, and that the Chinese navy consequently has to consider this corridor as its legitimate *offshore defense* perimeter.<sup>50</sup> Most experts underline that the pressing need for resource security no longer allows Beijing's policy of self-restraint towards the Indian Ocean region.<sup>51</sup> "In an era of globalization, sea lanes are of national interest," Meng Xiangqing, one of the leading strategic thinkers at the National Defense University, stated in

*Global Times*, “it is understandable that many countries develop military power along such sea routes: why can the Chinese people not be tolerated in the Indian Ocean?”<sup>52</sup> A paper from the Chinese Institute for International Strategic Studies (CIISS) concluded that because of the military build-up by other navies in South Asia, “China’s shipping fleet will be faced with an extremely dangerous situation” and it therefore has to build overseas bases. “Many of the world’s great modern countries do, and China can be no exception.”<sup>53</sup>

The Chinese military leadership is skeptical about the ability to counter an eventual Indian sea denial strategy. In potential confrontation with the navy, Chinese vessels will be highly vulnerable while sailing through the narrow sea-lanes of Southeast Asia, and India enjoys a huge strategic depth to absorb any kind of naval intrusion from the East. It is therefore key for China to avoid triggering a naval race in the Indian Ocean on the one hand, but on the other not to permit Delhi to turn the surrounding Ocean into an Indian lake and to use the control over maritime corridors as a strategic lever. Therefore, the Chinese navy will continue to show its flag by participating in search-and-rescue exercises with other Indian Ocean countries. “India should get accustomed to a peaceful Chinese naval presence in Southern Asia,” a Chinese diplomat stated.<sup>54</sup> Beijing will gradually increase the number of exercises: with India in the first place, but also with Pakistan, Bangladesh, South Africa and Iran. Second, it will maintain the prominence of South Asian countries in its naval diplomacy. Until now, about one third of its port calls have been to the west of the Strait of Malacca. Thirdly, Beijing is exploring deploying its navy for joint operations against non-traditional maritime threats.<sup>55</sup> It has agreed with Pakistan to hold joint patrols in the piracy-prone Arabian Sea. China’s anti-piracy cooperation with ASEAN could be an alibi for activity in the Gulf of Bengal. The Chinese navy reportedly has been talking to France and South Africa to send its navy to the insecure waters of Somalia. Fourth, Beijing will continue to capitalize on the Indian Ocean states’ growing uneasiness about Delhi’s ambitious naval strategy with the aim of strengthening its own military ties. While there has been a lot of misunderstanding about imagined Chinese naval facilities, Beijing is cementing bonds by supplying military equipment, a growing number of military exchanges and joint-training programs. Finally, its participation to UN peacekeeping operations

in Africa, will offer another justification for sending in sea-based support.

## 5. Conclusion

After decades of turmoil and hardship rapid industrialization has permitted the Chinese government to bring back stability. Wealth and the expectation getting more of it in the future are the main constituents of China’s constructive nationalism. Yet, this process has blown the lid off many of new sources of instability: both inside and outside China’s borders. As the country is now consolidating its transformation from an inward-looking agricultural society to a trading nation, so are foreign security interests becoming more prominent. Trade is exposing China to several new non-traditional threats that are often connected to threats from other powers. It is clear that Beijing has grown aware of this. After the economization of its foreign policy in the last thirty years, it has now started a new process of re-securitization has started.

This affects China’s stance on the utility of military power. Initially, it was solely concentrated on the protection of its territorial sovereignty: its extensive continental borders, national unity including the one-China policy towards Taiwan, and the adjacent South and East China Seas. In the last few years, new issues have come to the fore, such as resource security, protecting Chinese expats and safeguarding maritime supply lines. The Chinese government is partially reorienting its military power to these new tasks. Non-military operations and blue-water naval capacity have become accepted as new key objectives in its strategizing. Moreover, recent shifts in military theory, organization, training and equipment reveal that China is gradually gearing its armed forces to meet these goals. China is replacing its narrow conservative continental security thinking with a policy that addresses threats from demonstrators in a Chinese suburb to a besieged Chinese plant thousands miles away.

The readiness to protect its economic interests will continue to grow. This is first and foremost a matter of interests. Despite rising domestic production and efficiency, China’s dependence on foreign natural resources will continue to grow. In 2008, the government predicted that by 2020 domestic supplies would be insufficient to meet the demand for 20 kinds of important minerals.<sup>56</sup> The National Development and Reform

Commission (NDRC) estimates that by then dependence on imported oil will amount to 60 percent. Simultaneously, more workers and capital will be invested in overseas assets and contract projects. Second, China is divesting itself of the material constraints on power projection. Recently launched projects for developing air- and sealift capacity are expected to near completion in the next ten years. Simultaneously, the Chinese military will consolidate its transition into a more flexible combat-ready organization and gain experience from specialized training and peacekeeping operations. Third, China will become aware that its self-imposed strategic restraint is insufficient to deflect all suspicion.<sup>57</sup> Many developing countries already take for granted China's status as a military power with regional or global aspirations and have formulated strategies to deal with it. In addition, several of China's economic partners have showed their support for China's expanding military range and call on Beijing to become more active with regard to regional security challenges. Countries like Angola, Nigeria and Venezuela attempt to develop closer military linkages with the People's Republic. Chad, the Central African Republic and Egypt have summoned Beijing to help curbing a spillover of violence from Darfur into the rest of Africa.<sup>58</sup> Fourth, these changing external views, together with China's growing confidence in its comprehensive national power, are making the position of security underdog no longer tenable. China will reconstruct its security identity according to the economic and diplomatic status granted by itself and others. Fifth, there are no indications whatsoever that Beijing will tie the protection of foreign security interests solely to multilateral bodies. The American presence in Iraq, AFRICOM, the Russian attack on Georgia, Delhi's meddling in weak Indian Ocean states... China has enough arguments to believe that unilateralism is here to stay and that "everybody does it". Ailing regional and international platforms for multilateral security cooperation are not going to prevent tensions and great power interference. Finally, the Chinese government sees the threats to its foreign security interests growing rather than decreasing. Many weak and failing states with which it has to do business could easily slip into violence and civil war. The risks emanating from India's military ambitions have just become a policy issue. These motivations will make China less reluctant to flex its own military muscle and to develop a solid autonomous capacity for overseas operations in the next ten years.

The challenge for China will be to find a balance between the need to secure its overseas commercial ventures, safeguarding its territorial borders and avoiding the additional risks of being perceived as an aggressive hegemonic power itself. In any case, its new security strategy will have to combine proactive engagement with moderation and conflict prevention. China cannot afford itself to be drawn into enduring high-intensity civil wars or into arms races with its challengers. It will therefore stick to an incremental expansion of the geographical and operational range of its military operations. Showing the flag in UN peacekeeping operations, joint exercises, port calls and humanitarian operations are habituating other countries to Chinese military presence abroad. Moreover, these ventures are key for gaining experience and improving interoperability with important partners. Until now China has made its military power projection acceptable to others by operating under UN mandate. Another option will be *enhanced sovereignty*: if a crisis in a main partner country became imminent, a request for military support could allow China to move in. It could then consider helping to protect national stability and sovereignty by means of comprehensive military training, arms supplies, joint counter-guerilla operations and joint protection of sensitive facilities. This way, enhanced sovereignty can be interpreted as a comprehensive policy, including military support, for the maintenance of friendly regimes. The emergence of a multipolar world order would offer additional maneuverability for this. Ad-hoc alliances with other main players like Russia could then prove to be useful for supporting operations that might be refuted by the West.

China's new foreign security policy could run up against Europe and the United States. While it will be less and less possible for the West to weigh on Beijing's policy choices, it should try to push China's aspirations into a collaborative posture. This requires accepting the People's Republic's growing foreign security interests and the need to protect them. It is not justified to assume naively that China's military strategy is purely that of a continental power. Neither is there ground for expecting China to opt for a kind of *military exceptionalism* that was imposed on Japan after World War II.

Nevertheless, whatever course China may follow, several enduring weaknesses will oblige it to cooperate. China will never have the luxury of

*island powers* like Japan and the UK. Neither does have the luxury of the US to have to concentrate only on two more or less stable and peaceful neighbors. Given the strategic depth of the Indian Ocean, or eventually the Arctic Ocean at a later stage, China will not be able to safeguard its maritime lifelines if it enters into an open conflict with India, Russia or the United States. Beijing might deploy its navy to protect its merchant fleet in unsafe waters and to deter an eventual *guerre de course*. Yet, it will be nearly impossible to break through a deliberate and sustained sea denial strategy. Any continental corridor via Pakistan or Central Asia will not reduce this geopolitical quandary. In addition, China's economic interests are too dispersed to defend in case of a full-fledged competition with another rival. Burden sharing will be an evident option for a trading nation whose economic empire stretches across most of the globe.

What then are the policy implications for Europe and the United States? The baseline is that both continue to invest in a sustained and collaborative military presence in key areas such as Africa, the Western Pacific, the Western Indian Ocean and Central Asia. This will mitigate military competition between emerging powers and maintain the leverage that is needed to prevent the West from ending up at the sidelines if such a contest would occur. While Asian and African countries deride military unilateralism, most of them, including China, recognize informally that Western presence will be conducive for regional stability by helping to maintain regional public goods and checking the ambitions of regional pretenders like India and Japan.

Second, more knowledge is necessary about China's new security thinking: its concepts, objectives, cooperation with third countries, and how it perceives other powers related to non-traditional security threats. Research as well as exchanges with Chinese scholars and military experts should be encouraged. Third, Europe and the United States should insist on more transparency in China's military development programs. Fourth, the West should join forces with China in the framework of the UN. They should work towards a consensus on conflict prevention and the responsibility to protect. Rather than hiding behind values, it is necessary to recognize shared long-term interests as the fundamentals of this common ground. Furthermore, Western countries should step up their involvement in UN peacekeeping operations. The operation in Lebanon in particular has

showed that such missions are an important opportunity for confidence building, interoperability and the legitimacy of UN operations as such. Fifth, Western countries should do more to run operations and programs in Asia and Africa into regional structures in close cooperation with regional organizations and require China to do the same. Sixth, while China will remain reluctant vis-à-vis NATO, it should become more frequently consulted in the context of the war in Afghanistan. China is a key-stakeholder in Afghanistan's stability. Whatever exit-strategy that will be followed, it should be actively involved as an investor in the country's economic recovery, a source of aid for local public infrastructure, an ally in the combat against crime and smuggling, and an unavoidable partner of the future Afghani military forces. Finally, Washington and its European partner should decouple Chinese domestic human rights issues, i.e. the post-Tiananmen sanctions, from their military posture and arms trade policies. This quarantining is no longer relevant at a moment where the repercussions of China's military modernization lay outside, rather than within its borders. While adequate means should be developed for preventing arms being used for internal repression; the arms embargo in its current form risks to become counterproductive in engaging China as a peaceful stakeholder in world security.

China's military growth is a challenge, and might become even a threat. Yet, the fundamental weaknesses that will remain to be inherent to China's military strategy bring opportunities for pragmatic cooperation. It requires a good sense of realism for the West to seize these chances.

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