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# Modernisation of the Chinese Navy, its Strategic Expansion into the Indian Ocean Region and Likely Impact on the Regional Stability

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*China has actively begun to increase its naval capabilities since the last decade. As the PLA Navy aims at enhancing its strategic reach and push its maritime defence perimeter seaward, it requires modern naval hardware, additional infrastructure to support the growing force size, transformed operational doctrines, tactics and procedures and a matching manpower profile. The three primary objectives behind the PLA Navy's modernisation programme are the Taiwan question, significant US naval presence in the Pacific Ocean and the desirability to develop a 'blue water' fleet to secure its sea lines of communication (SLOCs) passing through the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. The last factor perhaps dictates the Chinese compulsion to aim for the PLA Navy's permanent presence in the Indian Ocean. The PLA Navy's current capabilities may not match its ambitions, but the rapid progress related to the acquisition of these capabilities,*

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*may pose questions on the future stability quotient in the Indian Ocean Region. Maintaining a clear perspective on this imminent event will serve the interests of the larger global community, well.*

## **Introduction**

China, driven by its steady economic growth, military might and comprehensive national power, is relentlessly pursuing its ambitions of emerging as a major power. While China would like to be the dominant Asian power in the short term, its mid-to long-term goal would be to emerge as a major player in the world. China has vastly increased its influence in South and Southeast Asia through adroit application of its 'soft power' – a combination of diplomacy coupled with financial assistance, infrastructure development projects, investments and other economic tools, including inexpensive military hardware.

The Chinese Defense White Paper released in December 2004<sup>1</sup> indicates that the PLA has been seeking to shift focus from predominantly defensive position to one of calibrated power projection by strengthening the capabilities of the PLA Navy and the PLA Air Force to win command of the sea and air as also to carry out strategic counter-strikes. The direction of the current PLA modernisation programme is to vastly improve its Navy's capabilities and make a concerted effort to achieve 'major power' status in a compressed time frame.

China is also likely to increase its military/naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) in future, in close cooperation with Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives, Seychelles and numerous east African coastal states as the leapfrogging modernisation of PLA Navy progresses. The deployment of PLA Naval ships off Somali coast for anti-piracy duties is just the beginning of an era of Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean.

This paper will cover various aspects related to the PLA Navy modernisation, its strategic expansion into the Indian Ocean Region and the likely impact on the Indian maritime influence in the region in three distinct parts, in that order.

## **Modernisation of the PLA Navy**

Historically, the PLA Navy has not been a strong and contemporary force. However, China has actively begun to increase its naval capabilities in the last decade, by

developing new projects domestically and continuing its notable acquisitions from Russia. The PLA Navy has been stressing upon improving its capabilities for integrated offshore operations, strategic deterrence and strategic counterattacks, and gradually developing its capabilities of conducting international cooperation in distant waters and countering non-traditional security threats.<sup>2</sup> President Hu Jintao clearly articulated as much by calling for a strengthened and modernised Navy under the guidance of the Deng Xiaoping Theory and the “Three Represents” during the PLA Navy’s 10<sup>th</sup> national Party congress in Beijing on December 27, 2006.<sup>3</sup> He placed the role of the PLA Navy in perspective by stating that “China’s territory comprises a large sea area and the Navy is of vital importance in defending state interests and safeguarding national sovereignty and security.”<sup>4</sup> The same sentiments towards naval modernisation were followed up by Admiral Wu Shengli, the current PLA Navy Commander, during the International Fleet Review at Qingdao in April 2009, by stating that “China will accelerate development of warships, submarines, jet fighters and long-range missiles to boost the ability to fight in regional sea wars, as also the PLA Navy will incorporate the capacity for non-war military actions”.<sup>5</sup>

## Drivers

There are three primary objectives behind the PLA Navy’s modernisation programme. The first can be attributed to the conflict potential within the Taiwan Strait. The second related issue may be the perception of an increased threat posed by the significant US naval presence in the Pacific Ocean. The third factor is the desirability to develop a ‘blue water’ fleet and secure its sea lines of communication (SLOCs), particularly those passing through the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. It is the third factor which has witnessed the recent increase in the frequency of the PLA Navy’s forays into the Indian Ocean. An American viewpoint mentions the following goals for the PLA Navy modernisation in addition to the above factors:<sup>6</sup>

- asserting China’s maritime territorial claims, particularly in most of the South China Sea;
- defending China’s interpretation of international laws relating to the freedom of navigation in exclusive economic zones (EEZ), which is at odds with that of the United States;
- displacing US influence in the Pacific Ocean region; and
- asserting China’s status as a major world power.

## **Salient Aspects**

As the PLA Navy aims at enhancing its strategic reach and push its maritime defence perimeter seaward, it requires modern naval hardware, additional infrastructure to support the growing force size, transformed operational doctrines, tactics and procedures and a matching manpower profile. All the above efforts are well supported by the growing economy and the consequent increase in the Chinese defence budget. Barring 2010, when the budget grew by 7.5%, there has been a double digit growth for more than a decade. The official Chinese defence budget for the year 2011 stands at about US\$91.5 billion, a year on year increase of 12.7%. With the PLA Navy being accorded top priority in the modernisation drive, it is estimated that about 24% of this outlay is allocated to the PLA Navy.<sup>7</sup>

## ***Hardware***

Over the last decade, the Navy has been decommissioning older ships and inducting modern units. The PLA Navy is pursuing a two-pronged programme, *viz.* acquisition of advanced technology based strategic assets and force multipliers and indigenous development and production of platforms and weapon systems. The main acquisitions include four Sovremenny class guided missile destroyers with advanced anti-submarine warfare Kamov 28 helicopters and eight kilo 636 class diesel driven submarines armed with '3M-54E' cruise missiles. The indigenous production includes the building and commissioning of the 093 Shang class nuclear powered attack submarines, 094 Jin class nuclear powered ballistic missile carrying submarines, Luyang I and II class multi-role destroyers, Jiangkai I and II class guided missile frigates and the Yuzhao class large amphibious ship. Amphibious warfare capabilities are also being augmented by way of significant equipment upgrades, including induction of new amphibious tanks, Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) and the air cushion landing craft – probably 'Zubr'<sup>8</sup> class air cushion landing crafts (LCAC) from Russia. The PLA Navy is also renovating its *Varyag* aircraft carrier indigenously and reportedly has plans to construct up to two more carriers by 2020.

## ***Infrastructure***

China has constructed an underground nuclear submarine berthing facility at the South Sea Fleet base on Hainan Island and the PLA Navy's Jin class SSBNs were

recently reported as having been based there.<sup>9</sup> This base is in addition to the one previously constructed at Jianggezhuang in the North Sea Fleet's area of responsibility. The base is likely to have extensive underground facilities which could include a canal to house at least one submarine, equipment handling and storage space as well as accommodation for personnel. The facilities at the PLA Navy's Woody Island base in the Paracel group of islands, about 180 nautical miles (NM) south-east of Hainan Island are also being upgraded to enable its ships and the PLA Navy Air Force to extend its sea and aerial coverage area further seawards into the South China Sea. A runway of about 8000 feet and the logistical infrastructure including ship berthing facilities exist there. The ship construction infrastructure is also being up-scaled with a view to undertake indigenous construction of China's first aircraft carrier in near future. A large shipyard complex at Changxing Island off Shanghai, which has a dry dock capable of undertaking construction of an aircraft carrier of up to 70000 tons displacement, has reportedly been constructed.<sup>10</sup> The largest dock is 580 m long and 120 m wide and an aircraft carrier's model has been displayed in one of the dry docks in the scaled mock-up of the Changxing Shipbuilding Base.<sup>11</sup> A full scale land based model of the *Varyag* carrier has also been constructed at Wuhan in the central Chinese province of Hubei for possibly training Chinese pilots for carrier based landing and take-off.<sup>12</sup>

### *Doctrine, Tactics and Procedures*

The doctrine, tactics and procedures of the PLA Navy all emanate from a combined PLA's military strategy of "Active Defense". "A Military Strategic Guideline of Active Defense for the New Period" has been formulated to achieve the same.<sup>13</sup> The guideline strives to increase the PLA's capabilities to maintain maritime, space and electromagnetic space security in order to be able to accomplish tasks such as counter-terrorism, stability maintenance, emergency rescue and international peacekeeping. 'Military Operations Other than War' (MOOTW)<sup>14</sup> now form an important part of applying military force. The "offshore defense" strategy<sup>15</sup> is the naval component of the "active defense" strategic guidelines which directs the PLA Navy to "defend the country's maritime rights, interests and security, safeguard its economic development and serve its peaceful diplomacy" by engaging in maritime operations in its offshore area, comprising the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea and the South China Sea. It also seeks to strengthen its capability to effectively control the major sea routes linking

China's waters, when necessary, and to operate in the seas adjacent to China's maritime territory.<sup>16</sup>

### *Manpower*

The personnel intake, training and remuneration patterns of the PLA Navy have also undergone a sea change in the last decade so as to supplement the ongoing modernisation drive. The PLA Navy, as part of its "talent training project",<sup>17</sup> launched in 2003, has signed agreements with 16 civilian higher learning institutions since 1999 for raising the technical skill level commensurate with various aspects of modernisation mentioned above. Over the past 10 years, these universities enrolled more than 9100 students, of which 5000 became officers in PLA Navy.<sup>18</sup> The PLA Navy, as part of the greater PLA, used to recruit 18–20 year-old men and 18–19 year-old women, but China's State Council revised the recruitment regulations in September 2001 to enlist college students for the first time.<sup>19</sup> The age limit for recruitment in 2009 has been raised to 24 for those with graduation degrees.

The Chinese Ministries of Education, Finance, Public Security and the General Staff department of the PLA have also jointly offered very attractive incentive policies to encourage fresh college graduates to join the armed forces. These incentives include subsidies from the government to cover their tuition fees and repay their educational loans, priority in the enrolment examinations for admission into the colleges of politics, law and public security, and a chance to pursue higher learning courses like the post-graduation without taking the mandatory entrance examination, on demobilisation after two years of mandatory service. Additionally, the PLA Navy has also been recruiting personnel with specific focus on the technical or specialised nature of their subsequent employment. For instance, the Flight Academy of the PLA Navy recruited and started training its fighter pilots independently in 2005. The first batch of fighter flight-cadets graduated from this academy in July 2010 and thereafter proceeded for advanced combat flight training.<sup>20</sup>

Salaries of the PLA personnel were doubled in 2006 after remaining stagnant for about 20 years. These were further revised in March 2009, with a recruit receiving a basic salary of about 1000 Yuan per month, while senior colonels got more than 10,000 Yuan and major generals up to 18,000 Yuan. With this increase, the military

personnel would get about 20% higher salaries than the salaries for civil servants placed in similar positions.<sup>21</sup>

All these new initiatives are expected to improve the military structure in terms of the skill set required for optimising performance in times of modern warfare.

## **Strategic Expansion of PLA Navy into IOR**

China looks at the Indian Ocean Region from two perspectives. The first revolves around the security of its sea lines of communication on which its growing economy is so dependent. The second aspect relates to the need for a growing power to find increasingly larger operating space under a sense of increased vulnerabilities and be present in all active spots of the Earth, so as to be able to influence events in favour of its own national interest.

### **Securing Sea Lines of Communication**

The highest tonnage of global maritime trade and vital hydro-carbons transit through the Indian Ocean, with about 100,000 ships plying its waters annually.<sup>22</sup> Roughly 40% of this sea-borne trade passes through the Malacca Straits. The Persian Gulf and adjoining region accounts for 50% of the world's container cargo and 33% of bulk cargo. Every day 15.5 million barrels of oil passes through the Straits of Hormuz and 11 million barrels go through the Malacca Strait.<sup>23</sup> This Ocean also comprises of states with disparate levels of economic and social development, governance and political maturity. Transnational terrorism and radicalism emanating from the region have risen and recent terrorist attacks in Mumbai and Jakarta are grim reminders of this reality. Threats to maritime good order – piracy, narco-terrorism, gunrunning, human smuggling and the like – can suddenly erupt into a crisis, which in turn can lead to massive disruption in the global trade and energy flow, including that of China. In such a scenario, China, and also the rest of the world, appreciates the utmost need to secure these vital SLOCs.

### ***China's Energy Dependence***

As the fastest growing Asian country, China has specifically focused on economic development in the last three decades as the bedrock of its intrinsic national strength.

This growth model is naturally energy intensive. China's oil demand has been growing at more than 5% over the last decade and rose by 6.3% year on year, to reach 388 million tons in 2009. Though its domestic production in 2009 was 189.4 million tonnes,<sup>24</sup> its dependence on imported crude oil has risen from 8% in 1994 to 48% in 2007,<sup>25</sup> and stands at about half of its total demand in 2009. The uninterrupted, safe and guaranteed supply of oil and gas has therefore become a serious issue for the Chinese leadership. President Hu Jintao, during a Central Party economic work committee meeting in 2003, reportedly raised Chinese energy security concerns by stating that more than 80% of Chinese imported oil has to pass through the Malacca Strait, and that China must actively adopt measures to ensure the security of its energy imports. This concern popularly came to be known as the "Malacca Strait Dilemma".<sup>26</sup>

### *Maritime Challenges*

The safe transportation of energy from their sources in the Persian Gulf and West Africa is therefore of the biggest concern to China. Though the incidents of piracy, robbery and maritime terrorism in Southeast Asian waters have been controlled to a large extent by the anti-piracy measures initiated by the littoral countries, the prospect of a rise in such incidents always lurks around the corner. Sub-national or non-state entities like the Al Qaeda, in collaboration with resident organisations like the Jemmah Islamiyah and Abu Sayaf, may attempt to sink a ship in a narrow strait or the use a Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG)/crude carrier as a huge bomb in a port or a busy waterway to disrupt the smooth flow of maritime trade and oil.

This perception has possibly obligated China to strengthen the capacity of the PLA Navy to operate effectively at long distances from its coastline and be in a position to safeguard China's trade and energy lifelines. Chen Mingyi, member the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, exhorted the PLA Navy to "move to oceans and shoulder the tasks of safeguarding territory, development of national economy and overseas interests".<sup>27</sup> The Chinese White Paper 2008 also mentioned the need to conduct international cooperation in distant waters and counter non-traditional security threats<sup>28</sup> just prior to the deployment of its first ever anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden.



### *Anti-Piracy Mission in the Gulf of Aden*

The increase in piracy in the Gulf of Aden and off the Somali coast has also caused equally great concern to the maritime nations, including China, about the safety of their mercantile trade coming into the Indian Ocean from the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. The maritime forces of many countries have been deployed to combat piracy – some operating under pre-formed groupings such as NATO, the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) and EU, while others are operating independently. However, despite concentrated effort, piracy in the Gulf of Aden continues to persist. In 2010, Somali pirates were responsible for about half of the 445 piracy incidents worldwide, amounting to 219 incidents.<sup>29</sup>

The first ever ‘Out of Area’ operational mission of PLA Navy commenced when an anti-piracy task force, consisting of two destroyers and a supply ship, arrived in Gulf of Aden on January 6, 2009. Since then, the PLA Navy has deployed eight successive task forces consisting of two of its most modern destroyers/frigates, a one-off LPD and a replenishment ship. The eighth task force which arrived on task in March 2011 comprises missile frigates *Ma’anshan* and *Wenzhou* and supply ship *Qiandaohu*.<sup>30</sup> China has reportedly agreed to collaborate with the CMF in the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor<sup>31</sup> (IRTC) in the Gulf of Aden. The PLA Navy ships have, however, been operating about 15 to 20 NM north of the IRTC and escorting merchant ships in addition to the regular escorting service being provided in that corridor.

### **Maintain Presence and Project Power**

#### *Register and Maintain Presence*

The Indian Ocean Region, with innumerable maritime security issues of concern to many players – regional as well as extra-regional – presents the right kind of environs for global power diplomacy. China, as the ‘having arrived’ major power, also harbours the ambition to register and maintain the presence of its Navy – the best tool of maritime diplomacy – initially and project power subsequently in this region. Towards this end, the uninterrupted and ongoing anti-piracy mission of the PLA Navy for last two years has provided China just the appropriate launch platform. China has undertaken many maritime and diplomatic activities which are either

associated with or complement the presence of its ships in the Gulf of Aden. Some of them are mentioned below.

- The PLA Navy ships have been visiting, calling on and showing their flag in various IOR littorals, either while proceeding for their mission or while returning on completion. Some of the countries visited include India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Malaysia and Singapore.
- Ships of the fifth task force, in fact, went into the Red Sea, crossed the Suez and ventured into the Mediterranean on completion of their mission. They visited ports in Egypt, Italy and Greece.
- The PLA Navy ships, while on mission, have visited ports in Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Djibouti, either for operational turn-around, replenishment, rest and recreation or to escape bad weather.
- The PLA Navy ships have increased their inter-operability by jointly operating with other countries' ships, conducting joint exercises, and exchanging visits of Task Force Commanders and other personnel.
- The PLA Navy hospital ship *Peace Ark* sailed for the Indian Ocean from China on August 31, 2010, on a 90 days "Mission Harmony 2010". The ship arrived in the Gulf of Aden in mid-September, operated for some time with the sixth task force and then proceeded to call on ports in Djibouti, Kenya, Tanzania, Seychelles and Bangladesh. The ship's staff provided free health services, diagnosis and treatment to the local public and military personnel, conducted medical cooperation and academic exchange with local medical staff, local hospitals, primary schools, orphanages, nursing homes and the poor communities.
- China hosted a "Shared Awareness and De-confliction" (SHADE) Conference, in Beijing on November 6–7, 2009, and is an active participant in the "Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia".
- The Chinese frigate "*Xuzhou*" from the seventh anti-piracy task force was diverted towards the Libyan coast in late February 2011 to assist in the withdrawal of about 35,000 Chinese citizens from the crisis struck Libya.
- Yet another Chinese frigate, "*Ma'anshan*", from the yet to be deployed eighth anti-piracy task force participated in the Pakistan initiated multilateral maritime exercise 'Aman 2011' in March 2011.

- China has also started raising the issues of better coordination in anti-piracy escort operations at the UN Security Council as a stakeholder. It has proposed that individual areas of patrolling responsibility should be allocated to the naval ships of different countries.<sup>32</sup>
- China has reportedly offered to mediate in the long-running island dispute between the United Arab Emirates and Iran regarding sovereignty issues over the Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa islands located in the Persian Gulf. This diplomatic mediation offer, if successful, could help establish China as one of the pre-eminent players in the Gulf region,<sup>33</sup> especially when seen in the context of the continued presence of Chinese naval warships in the vicinity.
- The majority of Chinese UN peace keeping contingents are deployed in Africa, with a sizeable presence in Sudan and Congo. In addition, the technical reserve troopers from the PLA are carrying out uranium, mineral, metal and oil exploration, infrastructure development and humanitarian assistance activities in about 28 African countries. The presence of PLA Navy ships in the maritime proximity implies an unstated and notional security assurance for them.

## Project Power

The classical American definition of 'Power Projection' emphasises "the ability to apply its elements of national power – political or military – to effectively deploy and sustain forces in multiple locations to contribute to deterrence."<sup>34</sup> While China may not be able to 'project power' in the all-encompassing manner as suggested in the above US definition, with the current naval capabilities, its intentions do indicate an aspiration to do so. Though the existing force level and capabilities of the PLA Navy may be considered as adequate for limited operations like the ongoing anti-piracy missions during peace time, the absence of close in and credible air-defence will render the force quite vulnerable in a hostile environment. It is to overcome this critical vulnerability that China will have to raise aircraft carrier groups and eventually deploy them in the IOR.

However, operating a carrier at extended ranges presents the major challenge of sustainability. The Chinese aircraft carrier *Varyag*, when operational, may just be able

to come to the central Arabian Sea and return with no available time for task.<sup>35</sup> The integral tanker may sustain it and its escort forces for not more than seven days and the PLA Navy may not be in a position to spare another tanker for carrier support at current holdings, unless it compromises on the operational efficiency of its three fleets. This argument is borne out from the fact that only two tankers, namely *Qiandaohu* and *Weishanhu*, have been alternately supporting the Chinese anti-piracy task forces in Gulf of Aden, each being deployed for an extended duration of six to eight months. This leaves just one tanker for each of the three PLA Navy fleets, with no back up.

While the carrier question lies in the future realm, the maximum force that the PLA Navy can possibly spare for the IOR, after assessing the maritime situation, threat perception and operational requirements in the Pacific Ocean, would amount to a not more than 10 ships (three destroyers and seven frigates), one fleet replenishment tanker and one SSN. This attack submarine may be deployed to offset certain disadvantages that its surface combatants may face, on account of the absence of “tactical air cover”.<sup>36</sup>

But this force will still be inadequate and ill prepared for undertaking any kind of proactive missions associated with “Power Projection” in the Indian Ocean. Herein comes the requirement of logistics supply bases in the Indian Ocean. China would therefore initially look to set up a logistics supply base at one of the “pearls” in its so called “String of Pearls” and, thereafter, explore possibilities in the other IOR littorals<sup>37</sup>.

Going by the above argument, the credible Chinese power projection ambitions in the Indian Ocean still appear to be at least a decade and a half away. By this time China would presumably have gained the relevant technical experience and expertise in carrier and aircraft construction, learnt the highly specialised art of carrier-borne air operations, raised at least three carrier groups and acquired one or two military bases to support its naval forces in this region.

## **Anticipated Impact on Regional Stability**

The prophetic words expounding on the importance of Indian Ocean security towards the stability of India, as expressed by the noted Indian maritime historian Sardar Panikkar still stand relevant till date.

*"To the other countries, the Indian Ocean is only one of the important oceanic areas; to India, it is a vital sea. Her lifelines are concentrated in that area, her freedom is dependent on the freedom of that coastal surface. No industrial development, no commercial growth, no stable political structure is possible for her unless her shores are protected."*<sup>38</sup>

The same concerns can very well be extrapolated to the stability of the whole region in light of the broad spectrum of security challenges currently existing therein. The naval forces of more than 45 countries, including many extra-regional powers, are present in the Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy operations. The US Navy is here to stay in the Indian Ocean, and this fact has been officially reiterated in unequivocal terms by stating that "credible combat power will be continuously postured in the Western Pacific and the Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean to protect [the American] vital interests and deter potential adversaries and peer competitors."<sup>39</sup> This has been further amplified by stating that "For the foreseeable future, [the US Navy] will maintain continuous presence of one each Carrier Strike Group and Amphibious Readiness Group in the Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean".<sup>40</sup> Chinese academic discourse indicates that China's preoccupation with the possibility that its energy security in the Indian Ocean could become a hostage to India's maritime strategy is increasingly becoming a source of anxiety to its strategic elite.<sup>41</sup> Hence, even if the problem of piracy in the Arabian Sea was to be resolved, it is considered that the PLA Navy would not return to China, especially after investing so much effort, resources and international relations capital, and having gained strong sea legs, vital lessons in inter-operability and above all, a say in global maritime matters.

The continued presence of these two extra-regional navies in the Indian Ocean with the similar stated motives of "SLOC security" and "freedom of the seas" but diametrically opposite ways of thinking, does have portends for instability. The rising capabilities of the Indian Navy also adds a third dimension into the power matrix. Robert Kaplan in fact identifies the "Indian Ocean [as the place] where the global struggles will play out in the 21<sup>st</sup> century".<sup>42</sup> One Chinese author also suggests that the Indian Ocean is perceived as a guarded sphere of influence by India and offers an important arena for Beijing and New Delhi to display their strategic muscle.<sup>43</sup>

One of the scenarios painted by two Indian strategists predicts that China will manage to find a military base on the East African coast and position an air

expeditionary wing for providing air cover for the PLA Navy ships deployed in the region. India will find itself isolated with regard to its strategic interests in the IOR.<sup>44</sup> Many other countries of Asia will perforce have to look for options in order to find a power balance vis-à-vis the proactive Chinese presence in the region. India will also have to look for alternatives to reverse this 'isolation' predicament. These dynamics and counter-responses may impact on the regional stability.

## Conclusion

China's stress on naval modernisation and the outward expansion thought process is the gradual manifestation of a doctrinal shift from the continental focus to that of a maritime one, since the end of Cold War. Since then, the contours of the PLA Navy have taken shape in the form of considerable change in its force composition and maritime strategy. The relevance and increasing necessity of the "far sea operations" for PLA navy may be explained in terms of the increasing vulnerability of the Chinese energy flow through the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea and also the need to secure its maritime zones and long coastline. Thus, the implied theatres associated with such "far-seas operations" strategy appear to be the western Pacific Ocean followed by the eastern Indian Ocean Region.

The PLA Navy's enhanced capabilities as a result of the rapid modernisation, combined with an assertion of 'operating in distant waters' are indicative of an eventual permanent presence and power projection in the IOR. The PLA Navy's current capabilities may not match its intent, but the rapid progress related to the acquisition of these capabilities does raise security concerns for India and may pose questions on the future stability quotient in the Indian Ocean Region. Maintaining a clear perspective on this imminent event will serve the interests of both India and the United States, and also the larger global community, well.

## Notes

1. See "China's National Defense in 2004," Chapter III, available at <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/2004.htm> (accessed July 12, 2011).
2. See White Paper on "China's National Defense in 2008," Section V – PLA Navy. <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/2008.htm> (accessed July 12, 2011).

3. "Hu Calls for Strengthened, Modernized Navy," *PLA Daily*, December 28, 2006. [http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/news-channels/2006-12/28/content\\_690523.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/news-channels/2006-12/28/content_690523.htm) (accessed November 11, 2010).
4. See *ibid.*
5. "Navy Admiral: China to Develop Sophisticated Marine Weapon Systems," *China View*, April 15, 2009. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-04/15/content\\_11191749.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-04/15/content_11191749.htm) (accessed November 12, 2010).
6. See CRS Report for Congress, Ronald O'Rourke, "China Naval Modernisation: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities – Background and Issues for Congress," October 1, 2010, p. 5. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33153.pdf> (accessed November 8, 2010).
7. See Integrated Headquarters of Indian Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Indian Maritime Doctrine, 2004*, (Government of India, New Delhi) p. 70.
8. Zubr is one of the largest hovercraft, with the capacity to carry three tanks or 10 APCs with 140 troops.
9. Hans M. Kristensen, "New Chinese SSBN Deploys to Hainan Island," Federation of American Scientists Strategic Security Blog. <http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2008/04/new-chinese-ssbn-deploys-to-hainan-island-naval-base.php> (accessed November 20, 2010).
10. See "All Things Ready at Changxing Island Shipyard," *Kanwa Defense Review*, May 2010.
11. See "New Facility Offers Carrier Building Capability," *SinoDefence.com*. <http://www.sinodefence.com/research/new-facility-carrier-building/default.asp> (accessed November 24, 2010).
12. See "Wuhan Aircraft Carrier Shocks Russian & Western Radar Experts in Dubai," *Kanwa Defense Review*, March 2010.
13. This guideline aims at winning "local wars under conditions of informationisation" by way of joint operations, training and support, optimising the force structure and composition, and building the capabilities suitable for such warfare. It professes close coordination between military actions and diplomatic, economic and legal efforts towards attainment of the same aim. See White Paper on "China's National Defense in 2008," Section II – National Defense Policy. [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/2009-07/21/content\\_4006236.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/2009-07/21/content_4006236.htm) (accessed July 12, 2011).
14. See *ibid.*
15. See "Chinese Navy to Stick to Defensive Strategy," *Xinhua*, April 23, 2009. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-04/23/content\\_11239423.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-04/23/content_11239423.htm) (accessed July 12, 2011).
16. *Ibid.*
17. See "Chinese DM Holds Briefings on Talent-training for Foreign Defence Attaches," *People's Daily* online, May 1, 2007. [http://english.people.com.cn/200705/01/eng20070501\\_371136.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200705/01/eng20070501_371136.html) (accessed November 20, 2010).

18. See “PLA Navy Enrolls Over 9,100 National Defense Students,” *Xinhua*, January 14, 2010.
19. See “China’s Annual Military Recruitment Favors College Graduates,” *PLA Daily*, November 2, 2009. [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2009-11/02/content\\_4072066.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2009-11/02/content_4072066.htm) (accessed November 20, 2010).
20. “Naval Flight-cadets Graduate from Naval Flight Academy,” *PLA Daily*, August 5, 2010. [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2010-08/04/content\\_4273070.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2010-08/04/content_4273070.htm) (accessed July 12, 2011).
21. “Pay Raise of 50% for Chinese Soldiers,” <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=14809&size=A> (accessed July 12, 2011).
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