

## **China's Anti-Access Strategy and Regional Contingencies: Implications for East Asian and Korean Security**

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While China's new military capabilities are an issue of growing importance to regional security, it should be understood that they are very much a work in progress. It is also important to note that it is not China's military modernization per se, but its ability to project and sustain power along and beyond its borders—in particular, the possibility to resolve forcefully its outstanding maritime disputes and various contingencies in the region.

This article argues that China's "anti-access capability"—a U.S.-coined term originally developed for a Taiwan crisis—is equally applicable to other major regional cases such as the Spratly disputes and a North Korean contingency. Furthermore, notwithstanding China's continuous efforts to develop and deploy various types and classes of weapons/platforms, it is the Russian systems and technologies that are most capable and thus assigned to the highest mission-critical areas.

In assessing China's current and likely future military capabilities as well as their implications for the region, it is necessary to take note of the following:

- It is very important not to "overestimate" or "underestimate" China's actual military capability, as war is most likely when China overestimates and others underestimate the PLA's capability.
- China's military not only employs mixed defense strategies but it also possesses both new and old (in fact, very old) military technologies. Its more than a dozen sources of foreign technologies are a nightmare for system integration and interoperability.
- There exists asymmetry of military capability between China and its weaker neighbors. While the PLAN is weak in several important aspects, many of its neighbors' navies are weaker still.
- Some have argued that China's foreign policy behavior apparently became more "assertive" in 2009–2012, but it is wiser to keep in mind that China has always been assertive and aggressive when it comes to what it defines as "sovereignty and territorial issues" as well as its newest "core interest."
- For Korean security it is imperative to take into account the geostrategic and historical factors. On top of the existing military threats from North Korea, the ROK should be able to employ a) a hedging strategy, b) "limited defense sufficiency" strategy, and c) rock-solid relations with the United States.

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China's "military rise" is now the talk of the town. Since the last weeks of 2010 and continuing to date, stories about an impressive array of China's new and sleek weapons/platforms—e.g., anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM, December 2010), the J-20 stealth fighter (January 2011), the J-15 carrier-based aircraft (February 2011), and finally the *Varyag* aircraft carrier (August 2011)—have made regular newspaper headlines in Seoul and elsewhere. To casual observers and some experts China's rise in all aspects is beyond doubt. If China's propaganda machinery has ever intended to project China's image as a "strong and up-and-coming power," it has succeeded.

Upon a closer look at them, however, it is not difficult to find that most of China's "new military capabilities" are a work in progress. Some of them (e.g., ASBM) are of dubious quality and will face severe countermeasures in combat; others (J-20) will take years of tests and training before mass production, let alone actual deployment; and still others (J-15) may not see the light of the day and could be a bargaining chip for the Russian Su-33s. Just compare, for example, the "training and R&D-purpose" *Varyag* with the USS *George Washington* (CVN-73) deployed in maritime East Asia in September 2008. It seems that they are in the shopping window before the arrival of stocks in the shop.

With such pervasive perceptual gaps in mind, this paper sheds light on China's "anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD; hereafter "anti-access") capability and its implications for regional and peninsular security. The first section addresses the meanings of China's "military rise" in U.S.-led East Asian security and its implications for their bilateral "competitive interdependence" as well as for East Asian security. It then offers the definition, conceptualization, and operation of the anti-access strategy as employed by China's People's Liberation Army (PLA). The next section explores the possible application of the strategy to three regional contingencies—namely, the South China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, and the Korean peninsula. At the end of this paper a few policy recommendations will be made regarding the ROK's security.

Due to the nature of this topic, several important caveats are in order. One caveat, as implied above, is that it is very important not to "overestimate" or "underestimate" China's actual military capability. As Thomas Christensen and others have reminded us,<sup>1</sup> a war (in the Taiwan Strait, for example) is most likely when China overestimates and other countries underestimate the former's military capability. Another is the fact that the PLA not only employs a mixture of different military strategies but it also possesses both new and old military technologies, thus calling for a balanced assessment on its actual fighting capability. Most of the PLA naval ships, for example, embody extremely diverse sources of foreign military technologies, which create numerous problems in combat system integration (CSI) and interoperability.<sup>2</sup> Still another is the reality that the vast majority of the important sources and first-rate analyses on the PLA come from the United States. While they enable the outside researcher to understand the PLA better and in greater detail, she or he must be aware at the same time that America's national interests, its perceptions, and its military capabilities are different from all others'. For instance, while the PLA Navy (PLAN) is weak in several important aspects, many of China's neighbors are weaker still.

### **China's "Military Rise" in U.S.-led East Asian Security**

Probably the most consequential aspect of China's "military rise" will be a change in

the dynamics of power in East Asia, in which the United States maintains the leading and stabilizing role, a network of bilateral alliance and defense ties, and a set of economic and security objectives. It is thus no wonder that the possibility of power transition from the dominant United States to the rising China has attracted so much attention from the academic and policy community as well as from the international media.<sup>3</sup> Due also to the logic of great-power politics, the nature of the Chinese political system, and its continued involvement in the region's outstanding territorial and maritime disputes, it stands to reason that its neighboring countries are concerned about how China might use its new power and influence—now and in the future.

The realist-neoliberalist divide over the effects of China's ascendancy on U.S.-China relations and the possible power transition is rather well-known and will not be repeated here. Moreover, "[h]istorical parallels are by nature inexact," notes Henry Kissinger in his new book *On China*. But he quickly asks whether or not World War I was caused by Germany's rise or by German conduct (and intentions). The answer is, as he alludes to a British Foreign Office official named Crowe in 1907, "it made no difference." What matters is an objective threat. "Whatever China's intentions," he continues, "the Crowe school of thought would treat a successful Chinese 'rise' as incompatible with America's position in the Pacific and by extension the world."<sup>4</sup>

The present-day "strategic distrust" between the United States and China is a case in point. The Chinese leadership perceives that the thrust of U.S. strategy toward the Asia-Pacific region and China is to contain China, so it needs to hold off America's encroachment as much as possible, whereas the Obama administration relies heavily on the linkage of alliance networks and friendly ties in the region. The net effect is none other than "strategic access vs. strategic anti-access competition" at the regional level. Moreover, it needs only one side to make this vicious cycle tick. To wit, it does not always take two to tango. On this point Kissinger strikes a similar note.

China would try to push American power as far away from its borders as it could, circumscribe the scope of American naval power, and reduce America's weight in international diplomacy. The United States would try to organize China's many neighbors into a counterweight to China's dominance. Both sides would emphasize their ideological differences. The interaction would be even more complicated because the notions of deterrence and preemption are not symmetrical between the two sides. The United States is more focused on overwhelming military power, China on decisive psychological impact. Sooner or later, one side or the other would miscalculate.<sup>5</sup>

A realist take or a "realistic" understanding of the rise of China is available from many of America's best minds. For one example, John J. Mearsheimer, assuming similarly to Kissinger that unlike military capabilities state intentions are mutable and hard to divine, argues that "China will have aggressive intentions and will try to become a hegemon in Asia," thus causing a problem for the United States, which will prevent another "regional hegemon" (like itself) from arising in the world.<sup>6</sup> Another is Aaron L. Friedberg, who has sized up China's rise for both cooperative and conflictive aspects but leans toward differences with the United States in terms of national interests and ideological and political dimensions. While summing up the 1998 message by CIA Director George Tenet, Friedberg relayed that "China was

a fast-rising power, determined to increase its influence, and likely some day to challenge America's preponderance in Asia and perhaps beyond."<sup>7</sup> For still another and at the official level, the annual DoD report to Congress on China's military developments, while echoing President Obama's January 2011 statement that "the United States welcomes a 'strong, prosperous, and successful China that plays a greater role in world affairs'," nonetheless notes that "Beijing is seeking to balance a more confident assertion of its growing interests in the international community with a desire to avoid generating opposition and countervailing responses from regional and major powers."<sup>8</sup>

Most, if not all, of the authors cited above would concur that at present China, with the exception of the Taiwan case, is basically a status quo power in a sense that even if it is a rising power, China is benefitting from the regional stability buttressed by the United States, the world's sole superpower. In other words, China is basically "satisfied" with the U.S.-led regional security. The question is: for how long? For its part, the Chinese government often stated that the first two decades of the 21st century (i.e., 2000-2020) constituted the "period of important strategic opportunity" (*zhongyao zhanlue jiyu qi*) for its national development. Will China remain a status quo power even after it continues to rise in the 2020s and beyond? As illustrated in the above debate over "intention versus capability," a future China could behave like a revisionist state if it can—regardless of its intentions. This calls for an analysis of the ways and means China can employ to achieve its future status. One of the best cases that can be made is the PLA's anti-access strategy

## **The Concept and Its Military Dimension**

It is now well-established that the term "anti-access strategy" originates in the PLA's preparations for a Taiwan contingency and that it is aimed at the countering the strength of U.S. naval and air power in a crisis.<sup>9</sup> China's attempts to "deter, delay, and if possible defeat" any U.S. military intervention in a Taiwan contingency are supposedly based upon a combination of assets including a substantial submarine force, a fleet of fourth-generation aircraft, a variety of air-to-surface, ship-to-ship, and ballistic missiles with terminal guidance capability—i.e., anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM),<sup>10</sup> and an array of coastal defense measures.

Specifically, the strategy aimed at impeding the outside power's ability to operate within or near the theater of conflict, thus diluting the effectiveness of the outside power's own and allied combat capability. The latest *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR) emphatically notes that:

Anti-access strategies seek to deny outside countries the ability to project power into a region, thereby allowing aggression or other destabilizing actions to be conducted by the anti-access power. Without dominant U.S. capabilities to project power, the integrity of U.S. alliances and security partnerships could be called into question, reducing U.S. security and influence and increasing the possibility of conflict.<sup>11</sup>

In what is probably the first anti-access literature exclusively devoted to China, Roger Cliff and his associates have succinctly defined the term anti-access as "the idea that an opponent of the United States may seek to interfere actively with the U.S. military's

ability to deploy to or operate within overseas theaters of operations.”<sup>12</sup> Its political-military objectives are clear as well. According to Michael McDevitt, “China aims to have the ability to deny the US military access to the region to prevent it from interfering with a PLA use of force to resolve many of its outstanding maritime strategic issues.”<sup>13</sup>

In PLA language, on the other hand, there exists no terminology that corresponds to anti-access. Instead, such PLA strategies as “active defense” (*jiji fangyu*) or “strategic defense” (*zhanlue fangyu*) come close to the concept of anti-access in effect. For example, in the authoritative *The Science of Military Strategy*, the authors underscore that “The essence of the active defense is the offensive defense. Although strategic defense is defensive on the whole and passive in form, it is not purely defensive operations, and doesn’t mean waiting passively for the enemy’s attack.”<sup>14</sup> It thus follows that at the operational level called “strategic maneuver” its major features consist of “Seizing the Initiative” (*zhangwo zhudong*), “Acting Quickly” (*xingdong xunsu*), “Being Flexible” (*jidong linghuo*), “Strengthening Coordination” (*jiaqiang xietiao*), “Combining Openness with Cover-up” (*gongkai yu yinbi jiehe*), “Combining Preposition[ing] with Maneuver” (*yuzhi he jidong jiehe*), and “Combining the Strategic Maneuver with Combat Operation” (*zhanlue jidong yu zuozhan jiehe*).<sup>15</sup> In particular, while incorporating the changing features of modern local war, it even goes on to argue that “we should try our best to fight against the enemy as far away as possible [from China’s coast], to lead the war to the enemy’s operational base, even to his [sic] source of war, and to actively strike all the effective strength forming the enemy’s war system.”<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, these strategic principles and concepts should better be conceived as “asymmetric warfare strategy,” which is longer in history and broader in application.<sup>17</sup> While asymmetric warfare has its genesis as far back as human warfare, the Cold-War confrontations were largely based on symmetric capabilities. In the post-Cold War era, on the other hand, the single dominant military power has to cope with countries with less advanced military capabilities, who seek to employ unexpected ways and means so as to diminish the strengths of the superior military power. It also focuses on the vulnerabilities of the stronger power in a way that it cannot effectively respond to the challenges. Western consciousness on civilian casualties and morality of warfare may often be construed as such vulnerabilities by its opponents. The terrorists’ bombing in Beirut (1983) on U.S. marine barracks or cruelty inflicted on the bodies of the deceased U.S. soldiers in Mogadishu (1993), which resulted in the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the conflict, are such examples.<sup>18</sup>

In the Chinese case, the PLA has long taken pride in its self-acclaimed tradition of “defeating the superior enemy.” The PLA’s strategic principles based fundamentally on asymmetric warfare strategy have broader access denial implications, especially when confronted with a superior adversary. In an extensive survey of the PLA’s doctrinal writings, Roger Cliff has summed up these principles as follows: a) Avoiding a direct confrontation; b) seizing the initiative early; c) achieving military surprise; d) launching a preemptive attack; e) conducting “key-point strikes”; f) mounting a “concentrated attack”; and g) achieving information superiority.<sup>19</sup>

A gallery of the existing literature points to the particular set of military operations that intends to cope with a superior military power. They are: a) attacks on C4ISR systems including computer network attacks, EMP attacks, and attacks on satellites; b) attacks on logistics, transportation, and support functions; c) attacks on enemy air

bases; d) blockades; e) attacks on sea lanes and ports; f) attacks on aircraft carriers; and g) preventing the use of bases on allied territory. Complicated and daring they might be, they only appear to be the fuller spectrum of military actions and capabilities that have potential access-denial effects; the level of operational advancement in each category—let alone their actual performance in conflict—will be all but different from each other.

Moreover, the ways and means the PLA can adopt to harness these operational concepts should be taken into account as well. This calls for an analysis of major trends in PLA modernization as well as of likely future acquisitions, including China's threat perceptions, its evolving military strategy, defense budget, hardware acquisition, defense industry, personnel and exercises/training. As this is capably done elsewhere,<sup>20</sup> only the most recent and salient aspects of PLA force modernization—with an emphasis on its acquisitions of Russian weapons and military technologies—that touch upon regional security will be discussed here.

Most PLA analysts would agree that the PLA has gradually but considerably improved its fighting capability over some 25 years through its across-the-board defense modernization. Notwithstanding a slow yet steady progress for about 15 years (1985–1999) in a wide array of areas such as organization, equipment, and exercise, a glaring weakness remained as to military technological backwardness, outmoded and obsolescent weapons systems, inadequate number of high-tech systems, and a lack of realistic training. The post-Tiananmen Western embargoes as well as Sino-Soviet/Russian rapprochement (in particular, the decline of the Russian power) allowed PLA leaders to seek from Russia high-tech weapons and technologies. Parenthetically, the 1995–96 crisis in the Taiwan Strait and the subsequent U.S. military involvement further reinforced China's military-equipment dependence on Russia.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the 1990s China gradually increased the scope and level of weapons and technologies imported from Russia. Its acquisition patterns tell, among others, of its continuing deficiencies, its likely future military requirements, and the direction of PLA and defense-industrial modernization. Included in Russia's actual arms transfers to China were fourth-generation aircraft (e.g., Su-27SK and Su-30MKK) and their associated components (i.e., AA-8/10/11 missiles, AL-31F engines, and *Zhuk* radar); SAMs (S-300PMU/SA-10); naval platforms (*Kilo*-class submarine and *Sovremenny*-class destroyer); and some land assets (BMP APCs and T-72 MBTs). The total value of transfers in this decade is estimated to be US\$8 billion—that is, an average US\$1 billion per year. For its part, China intended to minimize the off-the-shelf purchase of weapons and maximize the introduction of new technologies so as to enhance the domestic defense-industrial capability in preparation for future warfare as well as for further defense modernization.

In particular, since around 2000 a new and more extensive pattern in PLA force modernization has been observable from outside. They include, but are not limited to, a) the production and deployment of new weapons systems; b) the introduction of more and better weapons systems from abroad, particularly from Russia; c) enhanced rapid reaction capability (RRF); d) the steady increase in information warfare (I/W)/information operation (I/O), and EW capability; e) improved integrated logistics system (ILS); f) widespread “joint” MR training and exercises; and g) the production and deployment of a variety of missile systems.

China's imports of Russian weapons and technologies, for instance, jumped to US\$2 billion from the previous US\$1 billion per year. In addition to new hardware

(such as the naval Su-30MK2, Il-76 [for transport and AWACS], and Il-78 [for mid-air refueling]), their technological cooperation includes parts, design, R&D, and operational know-how. It is in this context that China became the world's largest importer of major conventional weapons in the period from 2001 to 2008.<sup>22</sup> China's "indigenous" development of HQ-9 and FT-2000 SAMs may also have been aided by the import of a whopping 994 S-300PMU/SA-10 missiles and its related technologies by 2006.<sup>23</sup>

It is thus not surprising to note that China's acquisition of Russian weapons and technologies has been the most important source for PLA's new "indigenous" weapons development and force modernization as well as by extension for its anti-access capability.<sup>24</sup> The current and likely future acquisition processes invariably point to a continued acquisition of the Sukhoi (Su) series of aircraft, J-11A/B (China's licensed or unauthorized product of Su-27SK), and J-10 (China's domestically developed combat aircraft); KJ-2000/KJ-200 AWACS; Ilyushin (Il) series transport (Il-76) and tanker (Il-78) aircraft and its domestic variants (Y-20); and engines (WS-10), radar, design, and avionics. There also is a whole range of new air-to-air and air-to-surface missiles with an eye on anti-ship missions.<sup>25</sup> In essence, it is highly likely that the thrust of future PLA force modernization—at least until 2020—would very much follow the course identified in the first decade of the twenty-first century.<sup>26</sup>

It is thus necessary to keep an eye on the Russian assistance and transfer to China of weapons systems and military technologies. As illustrated earlier, Russia has been the most important source for the PLA's advanced weapons and platforms—and by extension for its anti-access capability. For instance, while China's sea denial capability has similarly been buttressed by the introduction of new types and classes of missile destroyers and frigates as well as new submarines for the past two decades,<sup>27</sup> it is the *Sovremenny*-class destroyers and the *Kilo*-class submarines that are most capable, thus being assigned to the highest mission-critical areas. Finally, it is noteworthy that Sino-Russian military cooperation began to resume in October 2010 after a three-year hiatus—in the form of visits to Russia by ranking officials such as CMC Vice Chair Guo Boxiong (September 2011), Chief of General Staff Chen Bingde (August 2011), State President and CMC Chair Hu Jintao (June 2011), and State Council Vice Premier Li Keqiang (April 2012).<sup>28</sup>

All in all, China's acquisition of advanced weapons and military technologies from abroad since 2000 is geared toward establishing a modern fighting force. Its acquisition patterns also indicate the PLA's continuing difficulties as well as its future direction of army building. Even if most of the imported and license-produced assets can be assigned to various anti-access roles, they are not a good measure of the PLA's actual war-fighting capability, however. Not only does it take years of practice and training with new equipment but the theater of possible conflict often makes a big difference in performance, as shown below.

### **The Regional Context: "Getting the Questions Right"**

In assessing the regional implications of the PLA's force modernization and its anti-access strategy, it is very important to understand that it is not China's defense modernization per se, but its actual and perceived capability to project and sustain power along and beyond its borders that has a direct bearing on achieving its foreign

policy goals and arouses concerns over its capability to destabilize regional security. The angst will continue as long as there remains a possibility that China would try to resolve forcefully a host of outstanding disputes with its neighboring countries.

Of great relevance to this study is, for one thing, East Asia's political and geographical diversity. Land-based inter-Korean confrontation, for example, requires an approach quite different from disputes in the South China Sea, which are maritime and multilateral in nature. Besides, in Northeast Asia when compared with Southeast Asia there exist a higher level of hostility and militarization, bilateral nature of conflict, and the lingering impact of bilateral security arrangements. This partly explains the difficulties of establishing viable multilateral security arrangements, notwithstanding the SCO, Six-Party Talks, and the NEA Summit Meeting.

Another is, as noted at the outset, China's neighbors' overall lower level of military capability than China's. There is little value in asking when and how the PLA will catch up with the United States militarily. Nor is it useful to engage in "bean counting"—that is, enumerating each side's order of battle or force-on-force comparison. While the PLA Navy is weak in air defense, sea-based air power, and ASW capability, many of its neighbors' navies are weaker still. It calls, among others, for an individual country's own strategic and military assessment on the implications of China's military rise.

Still another is that for now and for the foreseeable future, the PLA Navy would continue to pursue the twin goals of preparing for a Taiwan contingency as well as of building a truly regional navy.<sup>29</sup> Given China's expanding national interests—and the growing role of the navy and maritime issues in them, it is commonsensical. They now range from out-of-area antipiracy operations (such as those in the Gulf of Aden) to international disaster relief activities (HA/DR) and from SLOC and seaborne trade/energy protection to UN peacekeeping roles.<sup>30</sup> While many of the military requirements for both goals do overlap, it is prudent to treat them as an integral whole.

### ***The South China Sea: Geography and Limited Power Projection***

China does need and has worked for a peaceful and stable external environment—the foremost reason being for its own economic development. As to the disputes in the South China Sea, it has long called for dialogue and diplomatic negotiation—mostly on a bilateral basis, signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, and actively participated in various ASEAN forums such as ARF, ASEAN+1, and ASEAN+3. A former PLAN admiral even asserts that “[F]ollowing the extensive growth of China's influence and power in Asia, the apprehension and doubts of neighboring countries toward China have not increased but rather decreased.”<sup>31</sup>

Even if they were to be taken at face value, it is also true that China has continued to build up its military capability, especially its naval and air assets. A flurry of recent events, such as fishery and maritime disputes with Vietnam and the Philippines, the expansion of naval ports and airfields on Hainan Island, and an increase in maritime patrol activities, are not reassuring to its ASEAN neighbors. While some have argued that China's foreign-policy behavior took a more “assertive” turn in the 2009–2012 period, it is wiser to keep in mind that China has always been assertive and aggressive when it comes to what China defines as “sovereignty and territorial issues”—now coupled with the “core interests” (*hexin liyi*).<sup>32</sup>

Given the existing gap in military capability between China and its ASEAN

neighbors, it would be a herculean task for the latter to cope with a small, isolated contingency should it arise. Their overall weaknesses in military preparedness, especially those of Vietnam and the Philippines, are well known.<sup>33</sup> On the diplomatic front, furthermore, the 10 ASEAN member-states are deeply divided over the Spratly issue: Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar (formerly Burma) remain sympathetic to China; Malaysia and Indonesia are wary of U.S. involvement in the row; Thailand and Singapore mostly take a neutral stance; and Vietnam and the Philippines, as claimants, are most vocal about China's stance and actions.<sup>34</sup> This again points to the continued importance of the U.S. presence in maritime Southeast Asia. In brief, China's stated emphasis on regional stability and a "responsible great power" (*fuzeren de daguo*) is one thing, and its realpolitik behavior based on hard-nosed national interests could be quite another.

It is thus the function of the U.S. presence in the theater—in the form of overseas bases and the freedom of navigation—and the PLA's own limitations to project and sustain power for an extended period of time that have largely prevented armed conflict from occurring for the past decade or so. Geography alone makes the PLA's power projection a difficult proposition, including long-range air and naval assets (e.g., refueled Su-30MK2s, *Sovremenny*-class destroyers, and *Kilo*-class subs), replenishment-at-sea (RAS) capability, ocean surveillance satellites, and even carrier-based air power. Many of these at-sea requirements are being acquired by the PLA. Until the full constellation of forces is in place, however, the PLA's anti-access operations against the U.S. military will be limited to the areas that are within the protection range of land-based assets.<sup>35</sup>

China's current and likely near future military capability should be seen in this context. According to Jonathan D. Pollack, a noted scholar on the Chinese and Asian security environment, China is likely to acquire the following military capabilities by 2015: a) sea denial capability near China's waters; b) sustained air superiority near China's land borders; c) a capability to threaten U.S. regional bases by long-range assets; d) a challenge to U.S. information superiority; and e) strategic nuclear threat capability against U.S. homeland.<sup>36</sup> These projections will become a dawning reality especially when the PLA acquires a more extensive and sustained campaign-level war-fighting capability from the current theater-level force.

### ***The Taiwan Strait: Still the Leitmotif but a Tough Nut to Crack***

The Taiwan issue is the *idée fixe* of China's diplomacy and military. In order to conduct a successful military campaign in a Taiwan Strait contingency, the PLA will need to have air superiority, sea control, amphibious capability, and missile strikes. It is sobering to note that the PLA has achieved significant progress in each category over the years. In particular, the PLAAF and PLANAF's acquisition of modern combat aircraft is quite impressive, especially when seen against Taiwan's eroding air defense capability.<sup>37</sup> Its sea control capability has similarly been buttressed by the introduction of new types and classes of missile destroyers and frigates as well as of 38 new submarines in the 1994–2007 period.<sup>38</sup> Its amphibious capabilities, though less noticeable, have grown in numbers and loading capacity as well.<sup>39</sup> Finally, the PLA's growing inventory of missiles—in the form of SSM, LACM, and ASCM—pose a distinct threat of and by itself and especially when combined with other assets.<sup>40</sup>

The operational and tactical measures the PLA can employ are extensive and highly complicated. But some of the most plausible—and thus most effective—approaches are identifiable. For one thing, air superiority will be indispensable for the follow-up naval and amphibious operations and for weakening Taiwan's defense capability. In a scenario intended to conclude the conflict before the third party's intervention, airpower can be particularly instrumental. For another, a wide array of ballistic missiles in the PLA's possession could inflict damage on many valued targets in Taiwan such as command and control centers, airfields, naval ports, and other military installations. Missile attacks could precede or could be conducted in tandem with air strikes to do great damage; but they alone cannot disable Taiwan's ability to counterattack. Nor is it sufficient to foil the Taiwan people's will to fight. Moreover, some of the so-called "non-equipment" aspects such as leadership, C4ISR, NCW, inter-service coordination are essential ingredients for a successful campaign over the Taiwan Strait.

Timely arrival of three to four U.S. carrier battle groups (CVBs)—which is a big if—in and near the Taiwan Strait, together with sufficient expeditionary forces, would lead to a failure in the PLA's anti-access efforts and may even thwart the invasion itself. Though extremely complicated, a numerical count indicates that in the case of PLAAF's anti-ship role a total of one JH/FB-7 regiment (20 to 22 aircraft), two Su-30MKK regiments (44 to 48), one Su-30MK2 regiment (22 to 24) and older bombers (H-6D) could be assigned.<sup>41</sup> They are not, in brief, sufficient in numbers to face the carrier-based airpower and air defense. For this reason, the PLA has worked on developing longer-range ALCM and ASBM.

Similarly, the PLAN's substantial submarine force remains a main pillar of the sea denial mission. If deployed to the boundaries of sea-denial area, a minimum of six subs are needed per each carrier battle group. It thus needs 18 to 24 submarines for three to four CVBs; yet for a rotation of at-sea operation, en-route to port, and maintenance and resupply at port it will require a total of 54 to 96 submarines. At present, the PLAN does not possess such numbers, even if it is likely to grow in numbers down the road. Besides, lack of practical experience, logistics training, and operational know-how will be difficult hurdles to surmount for a successful PLAN submarine operation.

Beyond the specific focus on the military dimension, much will depend on the future of the current cross-Strait rapprochement. Will the combination of "a rising China, a weakened Taiwan, and declining U.S. support," as Robert Sutter has recently argued, push Taiwan further into China's orbit?<sup>42</sup> Or would the shift in Taiwan's domestic debate from identity to economy ensure the continuation of the Taiwan-China détente and integration?<sup>43</sup> The two views see different futures for the cross-Strait relations: the former implies an inevitable change in the status quo, whereas the latter presupposes the status quo as the only realistic alternative. At least in the former case, which envisions the deepening of the current trajectory of Taiwan's integration with China, the United States will become less relevant—with unknown consequences to regional stability.

### ***The Korean Peninsula: Intermix of Geostrategy and History***

The fact that South Korea (or the ROK) and China have since 1992 remarkably improved their bilateral relations in all major issue-areas is beyond doubt.<sup>44</sup> Yet, the

ROK and China have put an uneven emphasis on economic and socio-cultural relations.<sup>45</sup> On the political and diplomatic fronts their perceptions often diverge from each other—as vividly seen in the aftermath of the *Cheonan* sinking (March 2010) and the artillery shelling of the Yeonpyong Island (November 2010). For its part, China appears indifferent to such sensitive yet important issues as North Korean contingencies, the history of Koguryo/Goguryeo, and the plight of North Korean residents in China.

China's "military rise" is an issue of growing security concern to the ROK, but it is often viewed as one of a long-term nature. Of all factors that affect the ROK's calculations the geostrategic and historical considerations remain the most enduring and consequential. First, the Peninsula is not only located closest to China's capital but also shares a 1,400-kilometer (880-mile) land border with it. Furthermore, Chinese strategists often regard the Peninsula as a "route" (*tonglu*) between the maritime and continental powers. Second, it is also on this Peninsula that the fledgling PRC fought with the United States 60 years ago. Before that, the historical rivalry between China and Japan over the Peninsula and the West Sea (Yellow Sea) also illustrates the strategic importance of the Peninsula. Third and in China's view, the fast growing economic ties between Beijing and Seoul testify the vicissitude of Cold-War politics and the validity of China's ongoing reform and opening drive. Fourth, not only was traditional Korea part of the Sinocentric world order but China's potential to become a full-fledged great power will likely be tested again on this Peninsula.

More specifically, China's operational SSNs and SSBNs are not only harbored in the North Sea Fleet and mostly patrol in the West Sea (Yellow Sea) and East China Sea.<sup>46</sup> China's future carrier battle groups, once they become operational, would also likely be located in the vicinity of the peninsula. China's increasing number of modernized combat aircraft as well as of conventional missiles needs to be reckoned with, even if they are not necessarily targeted at the Peninsula. More immediate attention should be given to the PLA's RRFs. By present estimates, seven out of the PLA's 18 group armies (GAs) are RRUs or mobile forces (MFs), of which four are located in the Beijing (38th and 27th), Shenyang (39th), and Jinan (54th) MRs. In light of the past patterns of China's use of force in a diplomatic crisis as well as the growing body of evidence of North Korea's internal weaknesses, they could be employed in a variety of North Korean contingencies such as humanitarian cases, a large flow of refugees, and instabilities in the border areas.

South Korea is a genuine middle power by any definition. Given its geographical location as well as its neighboring major powers, on the other hand, it is a relatively weaker power. To overcome its continuing plight, there are only two ways: "internal balancing" or "external balancing." The object of the latter should have a) no territorial ambitions; b) a will and capability to assist in time of crisis; and c) a proven historical record to be a benign power. That the only country which meets the three conditions is the United States is a grim reality. Besides, it is imperative to ponder over how South Korea emerged as a major economic power with its enhanced international stature during the Cold War. The essence of its external balancing is therefore to maintain a rock-solid relationship with the United States.<sup>47</sup>

China's "military rise" will continue to influence the current ROK and future Korea's security environment. In addition to military considerations, therefore, the ROK should work for the improvement of overall bilateral ties and pave the way for an eventual reunification. As long as China's future positions and role on the Peninsula

remain uncertain, the ROK must simultaneously pursue toward China both “exchange and cooperation” and “anticipation and preparation” in case China changes its current course of “peace and development.” A hedging strategy will remain the most reasonable approach for the foreseeable future.

On the military side, the ROK’s force modernization based on the principle of “limited defense sufficiency” should continue.<sup>48</sup> It means, among others, a minimum defense capability to deter and deny military provocations and to respond to small-scale conflict on and near the Peninsula. In the near term, it should be able to cope with maritime conflict on top of the existing military threats from North Korea. In the mid- and longer term it calls for a capability to deny or raise the cost of military provocations, which depends upon a more independent intelligence-gathering capability (e.g., E-737), effective naval and air power (Types 209/214, F-15K), and a high-tech force. When and if China’s “benign and reliable” policy is not forthcoming and in particular it becomes a more dominant power with a campaign-level fighting capability, the ROK will have no option but to further strengthen its defense ties with the United States.

An intriguing question is whether closer ROK-U.S. alliance relations would invite a harsher reaction from China—thus detrimental to the ROK’s relations with China—or they would be beneficial for China’s overall posture toward it. As long as the Chinese government views the alliance as part of a U.S. “containment” strategy and its position remains similar to that of North Korea, China is likely to take a critical stance toward the alliance, making peninsular and regional issues more difficult to resolve. The opposite—i.e., the ROK’s distraction from the alliance—would be far more consequential for the ROK, however, possibly leading to a more independent yet isolated state without a reliable ally. It is, thus, in the interest of the ROK to maintain rock-solid ties with the United States, notwithstanding the rise of China or their effect on the U.S.-China relationship.

### **Some Concluding Observations**

From the above analysis, it can be deduced that the effectiveness of the PLA’s anti-access strategy designed for a Taiwan Strait crisis is equally applicable to other regional contingencies. The Spratly disputes and a North Korean contingency are cases in point. In so far as China’s anti-access strategy intends to deter and delay the arrival of U.S. naval and air assets and the United States in such contingencies must use the forward bases in Japan and Korea, key regional actors will not be immune from the effects of the PLA’s anti-access capabilities. For some of China’s neighbors this means the need for developing a “mini anti-access strategy” of their own.

All in all, it is imperative that the PLA’s force modernization and its anti-access efforts be assessed on a regular and objective basis. China’s future force build-up will also be a function of mixed factors such as Chinese leaders’ perceptions of its own security environment, the availability of domestic and foreign sources, and internal/bureaucratic constraints. Additionally, future trends in China’s defense resources allocation—which will be largely affected by the current 12th Five-Year Plan (2011–15)—would be a good indicator for its trajectory of enhanced anti-access capability and/or other priority missions. Without greater transparency on the part of the PLA, outside analysts must inevitably work with the trends and outcomes.

An outcome where the United States cannot effectively cope with a regional security crisis will have ripple effects throughout East Asia in terms of a crisis of belief in U.S. commitment, a renewal of militarized conflict, and a dramatic change in the regional security architecture. The regional actors may well be advised to think hard about the military implications of China's ascendancy for themselves and to the regional balance of power. Multilateral security fora are just one such endeavor, which by all means should be encouraged; yet many salient sovereignty and territorial issues are addressed at the bilateral, not multilateral, level. The multi-layered competition between the U.S. and China at the strategic, military, and access/anti-access level also calls for individual regional actors to cooperate and coordinate with each other in peacetime.

Finally, regional actors should be able to read correctly the changes in East Asia's security environment. Not only are they mostly nations with democratic governance and market economies, but they also share a set of common goals—in real and idealistic terms. In addition, they are in need of preparing for the present and likely future challenges to their own security and they also are intertwined with each other on a panoply of such security issues as missile defense (MD) systems, anti-access/area-denial capability, and maritime safety—to name but a few. They will be the most cost-effective investment for continued peace and prosperity for all individual countries and the region as a whole.

## Notes

1. Thomas J. Christensen, "Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing's Use of Force," in *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, eds. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 50–85.
2. James C. Bussert and Bruce A. Elleman, *People's Liberation Army Navy: Combat Systems Technology, 1949–2010* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011).
3. It is important to note, however, that the power transition theory and its variants should be verified in terms of their theoretical logic and their contextual applicability. For two representative works on the critique of the theory, see Jack S. Levy, "Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China," in *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*, eds. Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 11–33; Steve Chan, *China, the U.S., and the Power-Transition Theory: A Critique* (London: Routledge, 2008).
4. The quotations and the Crowe episode are from the "Epilogue: Does History Repeat Itself? The Crowe Memorandum," Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), 514–30, esp. 518–20.
5. *Ibid.*, 521.
6. For an excellent exposition on the history of great-power politics and its theoretical insight into the effects of a rising China on the region, see John J. Mearsheimer, "The Rise of China and the Fate of South Korea," paper presented at an international conference on the "Korean Question: Balancing Theory and Practice" hosted by the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security (IFANS), Shilla Hotel, Seoul, October 7, 2011.
7. Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011). The quotation is from 98. See also a critique of this book with an emphasis on the importance of the economic factor in their rivalry, Martin Jacques, "The Case for Countering China's Rise," *New York Times Book Review*, September 23, 2011.
8. See *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2011

- (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2011), 1, 55.
9. "Anti-access strategy" is a term coined by the U.S. military. First appearing in the 2001 *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR), it was mentioned more than 17 times in total in its latest version. See U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, February 2010). For an authoritative exposition on the PLA's anti-access strategy, see Michael McDevitt, "The PLA Navy Anti-access Role in a Taiwan Contingency," paper presented at the NDU symposium on the PLA Navy, which is available at [www.ndu.edu/inss](http://www.ndu.edu/inss). See also U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), *The People's Liberation Army Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Naval Intelligence, August 2009).
  10. This capability is believed to be in the developmental stage and is aimed at striking aircraft carriers. Not surprisingly, it has been emphasized in the 2010 edition of *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, especially 2, 29–30. See also Andrew S. Erickson and David D. Yang, "Using the Land to Control the Sea? Chinese Analysts Consider the Antiship Ballistic Missile" and Eric Hagt and Matthew Durnin, "China's Antiship Ballistic Missile: Developments and Missing Links," *Naval War College Review* 62, No. 4 (Autumn 2009): 53–86 and 87–117, respectively.
  11. *Quadrennial Defense Review* (2010), 31.
  12. Roger Cliff, Mark Burkes, Michael S. Chase, Derek Eaton, and Kevin L. Pollpeter, *Entering the Dragon's Lair: Chinese Antiaccess Strategies and Their Implications for the United States* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2007), 1.
  13. See his "PLA Navy Build Up and Implications for US Strategy and for the US Navy," in *PLA Navy Build-up and ROK Navy-US Navy Cooperation*, ed. The Korea Institute for Maritime Strategy (KIMS) (Seoul: KIMS, 2009), 378.
  14. The quotation is from the English version of the AMS's *Zhanlue Xue*. See Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, *The Science of Military Strategy* (Beijing: Military Science Publishing House, 2005), 307.
  15. These requirements are summed up in *ibid.*, 318–20.
  16. *Ibid.*, 459–61. The quotation is on 461.
  17. Among the vast body of asymmetric warfare literature, see Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); John M. Collins, *Military Strategy: Principles, Practices, and Historical Perspectives* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2002); and T. V. Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
  18. It should be noted, however, that in both cases U.S. strategic interests were not very high.
  19. Roger Cliff, "Anti-Access Measures in Chinese Defense Strategy," testimony presented before the U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission on January 27, 2011, [www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT354.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT354.html). See also the same website for the anti-access implications of cyberwar by Martin C. Libicki (CT355.html) and of China's "system-of-systems" approach by Cortez A. Cooper (CT356.html).
  20. For a recent and comprehensive assessment of PLA modernization, see *The PLA at Home and Abroad: Assessing the Operational Capabilities of China's Military*, eds. Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, June 2010). U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD) annual report on China's military also offers an extensive discussion on China's overall security environment and the Taiwan issue. For China's own assessment, see *Cross-century Glory: China's Defense and Army Building for the 30-year Reform and Opening* [in Chinese], ed. Jiang Tingyu (Beijing: Dangjianduwu chubanshe, December 2008) and *Qiangjun zhi lu*, Editorial Committee, *The Road to a Strong Military: Experiencing Chinese Army's Major Reform and Development* [in Chinese], (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, May 2009).
  21. The most comprehensive account of the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait crisis is in Qi Leyi, "Defense

- Action: Records of the 1996 Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis" [in Chinese], (Taipei: Liming wenhua, 2006).
22. See *SIPRI Yearbook 2009*, 326.
  23. U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2006* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006), 21 and the author's estimates.
  24. For a succinct and balanced assessment of Russia's role in China's force modernization, see *SIPRI Yearbook 2009*, 308–10. This author, on the other hand, has long argued for a distinction between a fighting capability and force modernization. They are simply different concepts from each other.
  25. For a comprehensive assessment of the current status of PLAAF modernization, see Craig Caffrey, "China's Military Aircraft: Up and Coming," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, July 5, 2010; Kenny Fuchter, "Air Power and China in the 21st Century," *Air Power Review* 11, no. 3 (Winter 2008): 1–17.
  26. It should be noted, however, that the so-called "non-equipment" aspects of PLA modernization such as leadership, C4ISR, NCW, and joint exercises have not been addressed in this brief paper.
  27. For a comprehensive analysis of the PLAN's history, mission, and equipment, see Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010). See also Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities*, Background and Issues for Congress (Washington, D.C.: CRS, November 2009). This report has been updated several times since its first publication. The PLA Navy has operated the Romeo, Golf, Whiskey, Ming, Song, and Yuan subs. Destroyers include Luda, Luhai (Type 052), Luhai (Type 051B), Luyang I/II (Type 052B/C), and Luzhou (Type 051C).
  28. For a brief overview of recent visits, see Jingdong Yuan, "Sino-Russian Relations: Renewal or Decay of a Strategic Partnership?" *China Brief* 11, issue 18 (September 30, 2011): 11–14; Stephen Blank, *Shrinking Ground: Russia's Decline in Global Arms Sales* (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2010).
  29. While a Taiwan contingency may be the main driver of current PLA modernization, its scope and nature strongly indicate that it also aims at achieving goals beyond Taiwan. See *Beyond the Strait: PLA Missions Other than Taiwan*, eds. Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, April 2009); Michael A. Glosny, "Getting Beyond Taiwan? Chinese Foreign Policy and PLA Modernization," *Strategic Forum*, SF no. 261 (January 2011), [www.ndu.edu/inss](http://www.ndu.edu/inss).
  30. For such overseas activities in 2009–2010, see *China's National Defense 2010*.
  31. The quotation is from Yang Yi, former director of NDU's Institute for Strategic Studies, "Navigating Stormy Waters: The Sino-American Security Dilemma at Sea," *China Security* 6, no. 3 (2010): 3–11, esp. 5.
  32. In a two-part study Michael D. Swaine has offered an insightful examination of China's more confident assertion and its "core interests." See Michael D. Swaine, "China's Assertive Behavior, Part One: 'Core Interest,'" *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 34 (February 22, 2011); Michael D. Swaine and M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Assertive Behavior, Part Two: The Maritime Periphery," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 35 (September 21, 2011). Both are available at [www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor](http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor).
  33. See, for example, Evan S. Medeiros, "The New Security Drama in East Asia: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners to China's Rise," *Naval War College Review* 62, no. 4 (2009): 37–52.
  34. See, for example, Trefor Moss, "Regional Matters: Regional Overview—Southeast Asia," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 6, 2011.
  35. For a succinct review of PLA's limitations in projecting power in the theater of the South

- China Sea, see Bernard F.W. Loo, "Chinese Military Power: Much Less than Meets the Eye," *RSIS Commentaries*, Number 111 (September 9, 2010): 1–2.
36. It is a dated yet still prescient observation. See Jonathan D. Pollack, "The Changing Political-Military Environment: China," in *The United States and Asia: Toward a New U.S. Strategy and Force Posture*, Zalmay Khalilzad et al. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), 137–61.
  37. Probably the most cogent often-source argument to shore up Taiwan's air defense capability with the acquisition of F-16C/D Block 50/52 is Lotta Danielsson-Murphy, ed., *The Balance of Air Power in the Taiwan Strait* (Arlington, VA: US-Taiwan Business Council, May 2010).
  38. For a comprehensive analysis of the PLAN's history, mission, and equipment, see Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010).
  39. See Bussert and Elleman, *People's Liberation Army Navy*, 98, Table 24 and Richard D. Fisher, Jr., *China's Military Modernization: Building for Regional and Global Reach* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 154, Table 6.8.
  40. See, among others, Eric C. Anderson and Jeffrey G. Engstrom, *Capabilities of the Chinese People's Liberation Army to Carry Out Military Action in the Event of a Regional Military Conflict* (McLean, VA: Science Applications International Corporation, March 2009), 48–49, 52.
  41. They are the author's own estimates. See the recent and different counts made by Kenneth Allen, Mike McDevitt, and Anderson and Engstrom. For PLAAF's recent order of battle, see *The Military Balance 2011*, 234.
  42. Robert Sutter, *Taiwan's Future: Narrowing Straits*, NBR Analysis, May 2011.
  43. The argument has been made by Lowell Dittmer, "Taiwan's Security in an Era of Cross-Strait Détente," paper presented at the 18th Smart Talk Seminar, East Asia Institute (EAD), Seoul, July 15, 2011.
  44. For a recent account of Sino-ROK relations as well as the gap between rhetoric and reality, see Taeho Kim, "'Strategic Cooperative Partnership' between Beijing and Seoul? A Quest in Search of Reality," *New Asia* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 14–33.
  45. The other major aspects of the almost 20-year ties between the ROK and the PRC include: a) uneven growth in different issue-areas; b) rapid expansion in the number of actors and in the scope of their ties; c) the effect of the "rise of China" on their bilateral ties; and d) the growing gap in their respective national power.
  46. The annual DoD report on China's military estimated that there are three SSNs in the North Sea Fleet. See U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2012), 31.
  47. In a search for the possible causes of recent strains in Sino-ROK relations, closer ROK-U.S. defense ties, especially the incumbent Lee Myung-bak administration's "one-sided" strategic orientation toward the U.S., are often cited as the main culprit by a group of opinion-makers in Seoul. Simply put, it is a case of mistaken causality, as the opposite would be far more consequential to the ROK's national interests. Moreover, the real causes lie more on the nature of the 20-year-long Sino-ROK ties and of the Chinese political system.
  48. This is the author's term, which apparently is congruent with the ROK government's new post-Cheonan defense posture called "proactive deterrence." The latter term seems more targeted at the North Korean threats and has yet to be incorporated in the full report, which is in the making at the time of this writing.

## **Notes on Contributor**

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