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OF NAVIES AND POWER TRANSITIONS: THE UNITED STATES, NAVAL POWER, AND THE RISE OF CHINA

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In the Age of Discovery, European powers explored, conquered, and tied together the regional systems of the world. These states—Portugal, the Netherlands, France, and England—were the first world powers and influence events around the globe based on their power projection capabilities. In jockeying for position with other competing states, establishing colonies, and subjugating tribute states, the world powers relied on one particular form of power projection: naval power. Christopher Columbus, James Cook, Bartolomeu Dias, Francis Drake, Vasco da Gama, Henry Hudson, and Ferdinand Magellan all sailed from Europe and explored Africa, South Asia, the Americas, and Oceania. If a map does not show the obvious, these men's stories do: Europe conquered the world because it could project naval power. Indeed, Europe's use of land power on these newly-explored continents depended on the ability of its navies to bridge the oceans between the metropolises and the colonies.

Nearly seventy-five percent of Earth's surface is water. In the international system, a blue-water navy is one of the necessary conditions to be the world's dominant power (Organski 1968, 364).¹ From time to time, the dominant state perceives a potential challenger, a rising state that is developing capabilities to rival or overtake those of the dominant power. Power transition scholars seek to shed light on the dominant state-rising state dyad to understand

¹ A blue-water navy has the ability to undertake operations far from land for extended periods of time without support from or defense by forces based on land. This differentiates a blue-water navy from green- and brown-water navies: a green-water navy can project power up to a couple hundred miles from shore, but still relies heavily on land support, while a brown-water navy is a riverine navy, patrolling rivers, lakes, and coastlines.

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when transitions are attempted, how they are attempted, how each state reacts, and what factors aggravate or mitigate the attempted power transition.² These two concurrent conditions—the dominant state's dependence on its naval dominance and the periodic dominant-riser power transition dyad—lead to the question of naval power's role in power transitions.

Today, the dominant state is the United States and its navy is the dominant navy in the international system. But the United States is not the only power, and the recent rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC), its implications for the United States and the international system have been receiving much attention. As China rises, it may transform its current green-water navy into a blue-water navy, which would be China's first in 600 years. This would add a new variable in the Taiwan scenario and could challenge U.S. naval hegemony in East Asia. Resource security, prestige, and establishment of a maritime defense barrier are all reasons for Chinese naval development. Whatever the reason, the United States has kept a watchful eye on the PRC's navy. What effect would a Chinese blue-water navy have on the United States and bilateral relations? Would both U.S. perceptions of and policy toward China change appreciably and, if so, how?

This paper analyzes the naval variable in the current U.S.-China relationship and addresses these questions in five sections. First, I elaborate on the role of naval power and its enduring importance in the face of air power, nuclear weapons, and globalization. Second, I discuss what the current U.S. threat perception is and its contributing factors. I argue that, as of spring 2009, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy does not present a general naval threat to the United States. This is due to a PLA Navy modernization effort that has been partially ineffective and that is aimed primarily at Taiwan rather than global power projection. Third, I outline the steps China's navy would take for the United States to develop a threat perception sufficient to alter its China policy. Fourth, I discuss policy implications for the U.S.-China relationship in the event of a naval arms race. Finally, I examine the theo-

² I define *power transition* to mean both successful and unsuccessful power transitions.

retical implications that this chapter holds for the United States, China, and international relations and the power transitions that could occur therein.

NAVAL POWER'S ENDURANCE IN THE MODERN ERA

Five hundred years ago, naval power was indisputably important; however, its relevance is no longer obvious. In a world of airplanes, nuclear weapons, and increasing economic globalization, does naval power still occupy such a prime role? These issues raise broader questions about the salience of technology in understanding contemporary geography, geopolitics, and geostrategy.³ Although many argue that technology has figuratively closed the distance between peoples and rendered literal distance meaningless, I hold that naval power is still important in light of air, nuclear, and economic developments.

Air power has not made naval force obsolete. It may be quick, but it is temporary. Aircraft cannot stay in the air for months at a time; they must return to base to be refueled. Refueling in flight requires sending up a certain number of aircraft just to ensure that those already in the air stay in the air; it is not an economical process. Furthermore, while technology has allowed one airplane to connect a fuel hose to another and recharge that machine, no technology exists by which one pilot in a fighter plane can be relieved in mid-air by another pilot in the same machine. Thus, man and machine constrain the permanence and efficacy of air warfare, which raises a third issue in the form of basing requirements. Air power requires bases from which to project, but air force bases are immobile, requiring great geographic distribution for expedient global air support. The navy's aircraft carriers mitigate this disadvantage by providing mobile air bases around the world; thus, global air power has actually made global naval power more, not less, impor-

³ "Geography is the geological reality of the earth, composed of mountains, rivers, seas, climate, and so on. Geopolitics is a combination of geological features (e.g., natural resources) with human activity (e.g., production and communication technology) that alters the value of places. . . . [G]eostrategy describes where a state directs its military and diplomatic efforts" (Grygiel 2006, ix-x).

tant. Aircraft and airmen cannot stay in the air continuously with enough firepower to be effective without exacting great costs. What an air force calls “virtual presence” is, in reality, actual absence (China, Taiwan, and Mongolia Team [China Team] 2009).

The navy does not face the problems of the air force. Its vessels, especially those that are nuclear-powered, can remain at sea for extended periods of time. Blue-water navies, by definition, are self-reliant for both provisions and defense and do not require land support. Since blue-water navies are not tied to their shore support facilities, naval forces are free to sail to more places for longer periods of time in a more efficient way than air forces. This self-reliance ensures that the navy is not tethered to land as the air force is. Naval vessels also avoid the manning problem of aircraft. Ships and submarines are manned by crews in the hundreds and thousands, so just as the machine can operate for extended periods of time, so its large crew can operate for extended periods of time as well.

Nuclear weapons have not rendered naval power obsolete because the two are different types of weapons designed for different purposes. Nuclear weapons are meant to ensure a state’s survival, while naval dominance is meant to preserve the dominant state’s power projection capabilities. To argue that nuclear weapons have diminished the importance of naval power or any other conventional force would thus require one to assume that most, if not all, external threats are existential. This is not the case. Nuclear weapons are not used for power projection, but for existential continuation.

It can be argued that nuclear weapons render conventional warfare between nuclear-armed states obsolete because the adversaries cannot be sure that a conventional conflict would not escalate. This point is valid, but it implies that all conflicting naval power projections have a great probability of ending in war. This is not the case, as the United States and the Soviet Union did not go to war in their naval arms race. The Soviet Union did not respond to initial U.S. naval superiority by going to war with Washington; rather, it built a blue-water navy. Likewise, the United States did not respond to this buildup with war against Moscow; it respond-

ed with renewed naval shipbuilding and a forward defense strategy. The nuclear-weapons-as-conventional-war-deterrent argument also cannot explain why the United States chose a horizontal escalation strategy in the 1980s that was deliberately confrontational and that may have raised the chances of war through its geographic expansion, creating more points for potential U.S.-Soviet conflict.

It is certainly possible for states to perceive nuclear weapons as more important than they are or important in more ways than they are. Policymakers may choose to fall back on nuclear weapons as a guarantor of existence and of power. The danger then becomes one of allowing conventional capabilities to diminish on the grounds that nuclear weapons make up the qualitative deficit, only to be caught out when the opposing state reaches nuclear parity. One’s existence may still be ensured, but one’s freedom within the international system is greatly restricted.

There remains the argument concerning economic globalization and the technology on which it depends. This argument does not so much attack naval power as it does geography; if geography is unimportant, then so are forms of power defined by it. The economic globalization argument asserts that a free global market “diminishes the incentives to exercise direct control over natural and economic resources. . . . [T]he prerequisite of power is not control over resources but the ability to purchase them” (Grygiel 2006, 165). This argument fails to consider that the very economic ties that bind geographically distant states ensure that a state in one part of the world becomes even more vested in the geopolitical situation of another part of the world. “Because of limited resources, states have to discriminate according to some geographic criteria” (Grygiel 2006, 165).

The economic globalization argument also ignores the reality that “globalization does not mean that trade occurs in cyberspace.” Trade is facilitated through geographically-defined routes. The United States relies on ships and open sea lanes for forty percent of its foreign trade (Grygiel 2006, 165–66), while the proportion of global commerce that travels by sea stands at ninety percent. Colin S. Gray writes, “The strict limitations of air and space vehicles as

carriers of bulky or heavy cargo translates [sic] as a permanent significance for U.S. maritime power as a servant of foreign policy and national strategy" (1994, 162–63). Gray concludes that any future world order must also have a "nervous system that is principally maritime" (1994, 165). The sea lanes vital to international trade are kept open by U.S. naval power, not by a U.S. cyber monopoly, U.S. air power, or the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Recent Somali pirate attacks on merchant vessels in the western Indian Ocean affirm the signal value of the freedom of the seas to global commerce. Despite the technological advances of the modern era and technology's pervasive influence in daily life, the importance of spatial considerations has not fundamentally changed.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

In this section, I show that Chinese naval development has not been uniform and still lags far behind U.S. abilities in key categories such as training, expertise, and quality of matériel. These factors prevent China from seriously and consistently projecting power beyond the East Asia region and limit the quality of the PLA Navy. I then contend that the PRC's naval development is not geared toward blue-water power projection, but is instead a reflection of Beijing's real defense priority: deterrence of *de jure* Taiwanese independence and, in case deterrence fails, the ability to establish *de facto* control of the island, with or without U.S. intervention. For geographic reasons, Chinese military preparations for a war involving Taiwan do not need a blue-water navy. Taiwan is, in a sense, a distraction for China that prevents Beijing from fully devoting itself to funding and constructing a navy with oceanic abilities.⁴

⁴ The timing of this case study presents unique information-gathering difficulties. The most valuable documents are classified, so I must rely on scholars, policymakers, and the professional naval community. I draw heavily from four interviews I conducted for this case study: Professor William S. Murray, Dr. Richard C. Bush III, Professor Bernard D. Cole, and the China Team in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Department of Defense. Murray is a former U.S. Navy submariner and an associate research professor at the U.S. Naval War College, where he also helped found its China Maritime Studies Institute. Bush is the Director of the Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies and a senior

Chinese Naval Development

What is the state of the PLA Navy today? Is it a blue-, green-, or brown-water navy? What is the trajectory of its development? Avery Goldstein argues that the PLA Navy, while preparing for a localized war involving Taiwan, is simultaneously pursuing a blue-water navy (2005, 60n36). His unconvincing argument cites certain acquisitions that the PLA Navy has made, such as guided missile destroyers and transport ships, but then explicitly connects their acquisition to use against the United States in a *Taiwan conflict* (Goldstein 2005, 61). His mention of improved PLA Navy amphibious capabilities undermines his blue-water hypothesis, as the utility of amphibious craft is obvious in a conflict over the island of Taiwan, but less so for oceanic power projection (Goldstein 1997/98, 48). Furthermore, the sources that he draws upon are out of date, some having been written in the early 1980s (Goldstein 2005, 60–62nn36-42). If the PLA Navy is pursuing a blue-water navy that projects power around the world, it has not done so in any serious or sustained manner.

Size, expertise, and operational effectiveness are necessary in determining a navy's strength (Bush 2009). The fleet must be large enough to consistently project power at will, its officers and crew must have the training and experience to project power, and the ships, submarines, support vessels, and shore facilities must have enough capacity to sustain power projection. An examination of the PLA Navy shows that Chinese naval development inconsistent with global capabilities and Goldstein's argument. While the size is certainly increasing, expertise is minimal and operational effec-

fellow in foreign policy at the Brookings Institution. Cole is a professor of international history at the National Defense University and served with the U.S. Navy's surface fleet before retiring with the rank of captain. The China Team is responsible for implementing and coordinating U.S. defense policy toward China, including managing the military-to-military relationship between Washington and Beijing. Murray's views are his own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the U.S. Naval War College. Cole's views are his own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the National Defense University. The China Team's views are its own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Secretary of Defense. None of my interviewees' views necessarily reflect the opinions of the Defense Department or the U.S. Government.

tiveness is still nowhere near where it ought to be for a blue-water navy. Expertise and operational effectiveness retard PLA Navy effectiveness.

Expertise

It is apparent that the Chinese navy is, if not exactly a paper tiger, certainly far less capable than its fleet size would suggest. The level of expertise that the officer corps and crew of the PLA Navy possess is very low by U.S. standards. Inadequate naval education, insufficient training, and inflexible organizational mindset inhibit PLA Navy personnel from using their matériel professionally, efficiently and fully. Expertise, or lack thereof, is the single most important factor hindering Chinese naval advancement (Murray 2009; Cole 2009; China Team 2009).

The PLA Navy lacks a unified naval academy that offers a general course of education (Murray 2009). The naval schools are divided by region and specialization, which results in naval officers receiving educations of varying quality that emphasize different skills. Unlike Western navies, China's navy lacks a professional non-commissioned officer corps, which serves as a link between commissioned officers and enlisted crew and is the primary source of naval and military instructors of recruits (Cole 2009). Some are not actually recruits, but conscripts, whose terms of service usually last only two years, resulting in high turnover, little skill development, and low returns on investment (Bergsten et al. 2008, 202). The PLA Navy has begun trying to recruit people with technical degrees into its officer corps, as well as trying to set up university programs similar to the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps in the United States (Murray 2009). These are beginning steps, so their levels of success will not be known for some years.

A second problem, which is related to poor education, is the low level of training. Only ten percent of PRC warships make overseas deployments, doing so once a year (Murray 2009). Cole holds a higher opinion than Murray of PLA Navy officer training, but still finds it lacking: individual sailors' skills may be adequate,

but officers and crew as a whole still face a steep learning curve because they lack of at-sea training and state-of-the-art equipment (Cole 2009). Training 245,000 sailors in a disorganized education system is exacerbated when the ten percent of warships that deploy can only take hundreds (International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS] 2009, 383). The resulting lack of real-life exercises for many sailors degrades their abilities. Though the Chinese are placing great emphasis on submarines, their sailors' anti-submarine warfare (ASW) training is "rudimentary": the tool is sharper than the mind using it (Cole 2009).

The PLA Navy is neither nimble nor flexible. The biggest hurdle for the PLA is the organizational culture and a lack of creative thinking. It is a service with a fear of failure, which is seen as simply unacceptable (China Team 2009). Chinese officials have no enthusiasm for anything that involves free play. In short, there is no questioning, not enough critical thought, and an environment that is not conducive to testing new ideas.

In a ship-to-ship communication exercise to mimic a scenario where a U.S. vessel and a PRC vessel meet in the night and can only communicate by radio, the China Team wanted the United States and PRC commanders to simply talk to one another. This would increase each side's ability to communicate and decrease chances of misunderstandings or mistakes. It would allow each side to think on its feet. The PLA Navy insisted on scripting out not only the steps of the exercise, but the actual words that each commander would say despite U.S. protestations that this would not resemble reality and would defeat the purpose of the exercise. The PLA Navy's fear of failure constrains it from trying anything that is not planned in detail as a result, it favors form over substance.

Poorly-trained sailors lack the experience to effectively deploy at great distances and Chinese command, control, and communications capabilities are not comparable with those of the United States. In reference to the recent deployment of three Chinese vessels to East Africa, the China Team notes that it is dealing with a navy that congratulated itself because the three ships it sent half-

way around the world managed to survive the voyage (2009).⁵ A PLA Navy *Ming*-class submarine was not as fortunate in 2003: it was found floundering in the Bohai Sea in northeast China, with the entire crew on board dead at its posts. The belief among the U.S. naval community is that the submarine's diesel engine was not shut off when the submarine submerged, sucking oxygen out of the vessel in a couple of minutes. That any navy in the twenty-first century could have fatally failed in such an essential action astounded U.S. naval professionals (Murray 2009). That the PLA Navy did indeed fail to execute this elementary precaution reveals just how far it still has to go to school its sailors in the operation of its ships and submarines.

Operational Effectiveness

What can a navy really accomplish if it has a large number of ships manned by poorly educated and inadequately trained crews? All of my interviewees think that PLA naval capability is lacking, and I discuss the constraints that hold the PLA Navy back from operational effectiveness in this section. The first constraint is the fleet's composition. China does not have a blue-water navy today. It has no aircraft carriers, no overseas bases, no forward-deployed fleets, and no sufficient support infrastructure. Cole (2009) notes that there have been discussions of the PLA Navy constructing an aircraft carrier for some years and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) estimates that, if given permission and money, the PLA Navy could build one in the next decade. Yet the PLA Navy faces major hurdles before it can build one. The technology, expertise, and resulting cost required to build the ship itself are immense, but the technology and expertise needed to maintain the shore facilities that would support the carrier are just as complex, particularly so for a navy that would be building its first one.

Carriers are the most complex man-made vessels afloat in history, not only in and of themselves, but for all the unattached

⁵ Cole strongly disagrees with this "insulting" assessment of the mission, which appears to have been a success.

accessories and support infrastructure they require. This speaks to the larger issue of naval technology, which has grown more complicated and expensive over the years. China faces a steep climb in modernizing its naval forces because power projection has become a more expensive and more difficult task. It takes more than three years to lay down, launch, commission, sea-trial, and operationally deploy a carrier, and China starts off with a zero to eleven disadvantage against the U.S. Navy.

An aircraft carrier, for all its complexity, has a minimal self-defense system and is remarkably vulnerable to attack. It needs a strike group for defense, which usually consists of destroyers, frigates, submarines, and support vessels. China does have guided missile destroyers and frigates and its submarine service is growing, but it lacks the logistical and support ships to maintain a large carrier group. These ships are necessary to support and sustain long-range and extended deployments. China has either refrained from constructing these ships or has not constructed as many as would be needed for naval power projection.

Since 1994, the PLA Navy has decommissioned its tankers with replenishment-at-sea (RAS) capabilities, all ten of its submarine support vessels, and both of its repair/technical support ships (IISS 1994, 171–72; IISS 2009, 383–84). It has built only two replenishment ships and has failed to construct any auxiliary ammunition carriers (with or without RAS capabilities), sealift cargo ships and tankers, or crane ships and tenders, which serve as floating shipyards for cargo transfers, vessel maintenance, and repair (Cole 2009; Murray 2009). These might all be unnecessary if the PLA Navy had overseas bases, either its own or that of a host state. No such network exists. The PLA Navy thus lacks the logistical and support base necessary to project power beyond regional waters (China Team 2009).

The second constraint, which can be both a result and an exacerbating factor of PLA Navy education and training, is the generally low operational effectiveness of PLA Navy vessels. Murray (2009) rates the PLA Navy's deployment capabilities as poor. Declassified U.S. naval intelligence reveals that Chinese tactical submarines went

on more patrols in 2008 than in any previous year: twelve. Moreover, Hans Kristensen notes in “Chinese” that none of the PLA Navy’s three nuclear-fueled ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) has undertaken a patrol.⁶ This is significant because it speaks to China’s nuclear deterrent. A major component of the U.S. nuclear deterrent is that it has nine SSBNs operating around the world at any given time, with four on alert and ready to fire their nuclear warheads on command. Their locations are classified, unlike the locations of other U.S. ships and submarines. This ensures the United States of a second-strike capability in the event of nuclear attack, since no enemy knows where the SSBNs are. In China’s case, no such problem exists, since its SSBNs are never deployed; in fact, they can be viewed dockside via commercial satellite.

Cole cites maintenance as the most important problem facing the Chinese fleet, which is the result of operational deployment and opportunities for training. The *Ming*-class vessel that sank in 2003 had just come out from shore-side maintenance (Cole 2009). Once at sea, the Chinese navy cannot fix things that the United States does on a weekly basis (Murray 2009). In particular, damage control systems are of poor quality, especially in fire suppression. When Chinese vessels sailed across the Pacific Ocean to visit Naval Base San Diego, U.S. sailors noticed that the PLA Navy had great difficulties with its onboard hydraulic hoses (Cole 2009). Avery Goldstein admits, “issues of training and maintenance set limits” on Chinese naval modernization (2005, 62).

Cole rates the quality of the ships themselves as average (2009). Murray believes that Chinese naval vessels constructed from 2004 onwards are of a much better quality, though still behind the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, and South Korea; PLA Navy vessels built before 2004 are, in his opinion, obsolete (2009). Beijing’s navy is seriously constrained in its capabilities, especially when considered what is necessary to project and sustain global power. Were the PLA Navy to build aircraft carriers and requisite support ships and facilities, there would have to be an accompanying increase in education, training, and exercises

for the new fleet to be effective.

A final constraint is the issue of command and control aboard PLA Navy vessels. Whatever doctrinal and educational reforms have been implemented, the Chinese military chain of command remains a largely Leninist apparatus. There are two parallel chains of command: operational and political. Cole observes that the ship-board relationship between the senior operational officer (usually a captain or senior captain) and the senior political officer (a commissar, who is equal in rank to the senior operational officer) often depends on the personal relationship between the two. Sometimes, the operational officer dominates; at other times, the political officer dominates. This discrepancy raises a whole host of questions over how much influence one has upon the other in both combat and non-combat situations (Cole 2009).

Despite having many ships and submarines, the Chinese fleet cannot project blue-water power, is not actually designed to do so, is of lower quality than other navies, is not taken out to sea for exercises, and suffers logistical and maintenance issues that impair effectiveness. Sailors have received different educations at different naval academies emphasizing different skills, who do not go to sea to put classroom knowledge to practice, and who operate in a risk-averse environment that discourages initiative. The PLA Navy may be numerically superior in principal combatants to every navy save that of America, but closer inspection reveals that these vessels and the crews that man them cannot compete with the U.S. Navy. The China Team points out that, after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the U.S. Navy was the first foreign force to arrive with assistance; the geographically closer PLA Navy could not contribute anything to the relief effort (2009). While China’s anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia are the first real example of naval projection, it is nowhere near to what would be sufficient. Indeed, the PLA as a whole “has not engaged in significant observable combat for almost 30 years (since 1979 in Vietnam)” (Bergsten et al. 2008, 201). Lack of expertise and low operational effectiveness tempers the numerical challenge that China can ostensibly throw at the United States. Quantity may have a quality all its own, but China has yet to reach

⁶ I thank Prof. Daryl G. Press of Dartmouth College for providing this source.

even that level.

Due in part to this contradicting mixture of quantity and quality, a general Chinese naval threat to the United States is presently non-existent. The matériel is partly there and what is missing can be built. China has purchased old aircraft carriers and, aside from turning them into amusement parks, has sought to learn about the intricacies of carrier construction (China Team 2009). The Pentagon estimates that China could build and operate a carrier before the end of the next decade (DoD 2009, 40). Discussion of when the PLA Navy fleet will gain a carrier has been ongoing for years, with experts each year predicting that acquisition or construction is imminent (Cole 2009). China still lacks a professional, expert officer corps to ensure that any power projection by the PLA Navy is not fleeting, weak and unsuccessful. Unless and until China does so, neither the U.S. professional naval community nor U.S. policymakers will see the PLA Navy as a great threat to U.S. global dominance.

THE TAIWAN QUESTION

The Taiwan question involves the world's dominant state preventing another state from forcefully occupying an island ruled by a government that lost a civil war. The dominant state, the United States, is obliged by its own law in the form of the Taiwan Relations Act to actively provide weapons for Taipei's defense. This issue predates the introduction of the power transition dynamic in U.S.-China relations; that is, the Taiwan issue was a thorn in U.S.-China relations before Washington ever considered China to be a potential challenger to U.S. global hegemony. This is important because Taiwan is an island ninety miles off the Asian mainland, so kinetic operations by either the United States or China would have a substantial naval component.

China does not need to project power globally to conquer Taiwan and it does not need to conquer Taiwan to project power globally. This means that the United States could find Chinese naval development threatening, not to general U.S. command of the

oceans, but rather, to a specific regional conflict involving one party to which Washington has given a defense commitment. Herein lies the difficulty of gauging U.S. perceptions of Chinese naval power: does the United States believe that PLA Navy development is aimed at U.S. naval power in general, at U.S. naval power in a specific Taiwan conflict, both, or neither? In this section, I show that the current U.S. perception is that the PLA Navy is a force specifically designed to deter local U.S. naval power in the event of a Taiwan conflict. I will also discuss how Taiwan may alter U.S. threat perceptions.

The Impetus for PLA Naval Development

It is the assessment of U.S. policymakers, naval strategists, and most scholars that the PLA Navy's modernization is solely designed for kinetic operations involving Taiwan. Murray notes that the Chinese navy has built and "bought with thought to accomplish goals," these goals being, in order of importance: successful kinetic operations against Taiwan's armed forces, successful deterrence or neutralization of U.S. kinetic operations in theater, and the general defense of the PRC. In Cole's view, the PLA Navy has, since 2000, focused almost exclusively on Taiwan. Bush states, whatever naval intentions China may have had before the mid-1990s, it quickly directed its focus on Taiwan after the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, when China fired missiles in 1995 to protest Lee Teng-hui's visit to the United States and his remarks at Cornell University, and again in 1996, in the run-up to Taiwan's first direct presidential election. The United States responded by dispatching two carrier strike groups to regional waters, a show of force that revealed, in an eye-opening way, China's shortcomings vis-à-vis U.S. naval power. The Pentagon states that "a potential military confrontation with Taiwan and the prospect of U.S. military intervention remain the PLA's most immediate military concerns" (DoD, 2009, 9).

Susan L. Shirk writes that Taiwan is the motivating factor, attributing the increase in PRC destroyers and submarines to a "humiliated" Jiang Zemin's decision to take a harder stance on Taiwan

(2007, 192). Jeffrey W. Legro's examination of Chinese power leads him to conclude: "it is unlikely that the current scale of China's military modernization signals more than a desire to protect its version of autonomy, which problematically includes Taiwan" (2007, 518). Alastair Iain Johnston concurs, "There is good evidence as well that military modernization programs, training exercises, and doctrinal innovation . . . are aimed to a large degree at dealing with Taiwanese separation." He also traces this to the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis (2003, 27). An analysis by Ellen L. Frost, James J. Przystup, and Phillip C. Saunders asserts that the Chinese are focused primarily on "detering possible U.S. intervention in a Taiwan crisis" (2008, 4). M. Taylor Fravel notes that PLA Navy modernization is not only concerned with "delaying or slowing the deployment of U.S. forces to the theater and potentially frustrating U.S. military operations around the island [Taiwan] if a conflict erupts," but area denial would also protect "China's wealthiest provinces and cities such as Guangdong and Shanghai, which could become military targets in a conflict over Taiwan" (2008, 131).

Consensus holds that Chinese naval modernization and Chinese armed forces development are concentrated on the Taiwan issue: preventing both Taiwanese independence and U.S. intervention. From a U.S. perspective, then, the nature of a Chinese naval threat is largely contained to a regional, ad hoc conflict. There is a threat posed to U.S. naval power, but it is not posed to U.S. naval power beyond East Asia. Threat perception, a subjective phenomenon, is even harder to measure when the threat itself is limited in geographic and policy scope.

PLA Naval Strength

The PLA Navy's order of battle suggests that its fleet is geared for a Taiwan conflict and the deterrence of U.S. intervention in such a conflict. Chinese concern over Taiwanese independence (and U.S. support) has led Beijing to develop its naval policy of anti-access and area denial. The PLA Navy has been developing and acquiring "mines, submarines, maritime strike aircraft, and modern

surface combatants equipped with advanced ASCMs [anti-ship cruise missiles]" to bolster its sea denial capabilities (DoD 2009, 21). The DoD believes that China is "prioritizing the development of measures to deter or counter third-party intervention in any future cross-strait crisis," developing "the capability to attack, at long ranges, military forces that might deploy (anti-access) or operate (area denial) within the western Pacific" (2009, 20).

The IISS places submarines "at the heart of the [PLA N]avy's goals, even while debates take place over aircraft carrier capability" (2008, 360). Cole believes that China's submarines are specifically targeted at U.S. Navy aircraft carriers in the China Seas. Lyle Goldstein notes that Beijing's focus on submarines results from its intense study of the Falklands War: "The key enabler for almost all other types of operation in the Falklands was undersea warfare, a fact not lost on Chinese observers. The importance of undersea warfare is the primary principle emphasised [sic] in Chinese analyses of sea combat in the Falklands" (2008, 72). The Falklands present interesting comparisons to a cross-strait war with U.S. intervention: a geographically proximate continental state tries to take an island that is backed by a more distant yet more powerful state (L. Goldstein 2008, 66). From the time of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis through 2009, the PLA Navy's submarine service has seen net growth of 30 percent from fifty submarines to sixty-five, almost all of this accounted for by the construction or purchase of fifty-four patrol submarines with ASW capabilities and ASCMs. It has also constructed eight ASW support vessels (IISS 2009, 385).

Beijing's acquisition of twelve *Kilo*-class patrol submarines with ASW capabilities from Russia are "measures to acquire the capability its armed forces would need to deny the United States Navy access to waters adjacent to the Chinese coast and surrounding Taiwan" (Howarth 2006, 2). He also notes the PLA Navy submarine service-leading role:

[The submarine service] provides Beijing with its most effective sea-denial instrument, well suited to preventing the U.S. Navy from approaching the Chinese littoral

... In any crisis or conflict involving the United States and its allies, the PLA Navy's submarine fleet would play a leading role in an anti-access strategy designed to keep United States naval forces away from the Chinese coast. (Howarth 2006, 97)

U.S. surface ships deployed to waters around Taiwan would operate in a more restricted environment and be more vulnerable to attack.

Granted, finding an enemy ship (even a 96,000-ton carrier) in open waters is quite difficult (Howarth 2006, 102), but it raises an unpalatable scenario for the United States: if China were to sink a U.S. carrier in a war over Taiwan, what would the United States do? Would the U.S. Navy be willing to send another carrier, knowing that the transit time would only give the PLA Navy even more time to bolster its theater area denial capabilities, or would the United States try to defend Taiwan with its remaining submarines, destroyers, frigates, and cruisers in theater?

This focus on submarines merits a brief discussion on diesel submarine capabilities.⁷ Chinese diesel submarines, which comprise sixty-two of the sixty-five in service, derive distinct geographic benefits from a Taiwan operation. The PLA Navy's diesel submarines are particularly suited to operating in the East China Sea, which is warmer than most waters. It is also frequently the depository of sand, mud, and silt brought by the Yangtze and other rivers draining into the ocean. Together, the "surface layer of warm water can trap the signals of hull-mounted sonars [sic], reducing their capability to negligible range against a submarine even at modest depth," while the silt, sand, and fresh water mix with the salt water to create "varying layers of salinity" that "reflect or refract the sonar beams" (Howarth 2006, 94). The East China Sea's warmer climate and marine sediment distort sonar beams and prevent other vessels from making accurate readings. Warm, murky waters make an already difficult task—the detection of sub-surface vessels—even harder.

Anti-submarine warfare still relies on acoustic detection methods, which means that diesel-powered submarines can operate "in virtual silence over the full band of sonic frequencies" (Howarth 2006, 93). Murray observes that one could very well be on top of a diesel submarine before detecting it (2009). Diesel-powered submarines can also rest on a seafloor less than 400 yards below sea level, turn off all machinery, and emit no sounds for detection. Nuclear-powered submarines cannot take similar maneuvers: they cannot turn off all onboard machinery and would clog vital condenser inlets if they settled on the East China Sea's muddy seabed (Howarth 2006, 93). Nevertheless, the benefits of operating diesel submarines have yet to be exploited, given the PLA Navy's reluctance to deploy them.

Since the PLA Navy is spending its resources on a Taiwan scenario, it has little to devote to building a blue-water fleet. Cole argues that the reason a much-discussed Chinese aircraft carrier has not been built because it is incompatible with the PLA Navy's primary objectives. Carriers are unnecessary to defeat Taiwan, to deter the United States in a Taiwan conflict, and to ensure national security; the costs of acquiring a carrier and building the shore facilities to maintain it are hard to justify (Cole 2009). The costs may be particularly high for China, considering its lack of expertise in building any (Cole 2009; and China Team 2009). There have been reports of PLA Navy surface warfare officers receiving carrier training, but it has come to light that this carrier training is for helicopters, not fixed-wing aircraft (Cole 2009). The Taiwan contingency appears to actually be holding China back from devoting itself wholeheartedly to a blue-water navy (Murray 2009). U.S. policymakers' and naval scholars' opinions are unsurprisingly inclined to the belief that China is building for a Taiwan contingency, i.e., challenging the United States in the East China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

The irony of the Taiwan situation is that U.S. policymakers and naval experts are sure that China is building its navy against the United States, but in the specific event of a Taiwan crisis, whose unique and self-contained nature makes extrapolation to a general

⁷ The following two paragraphs are from Chao 2009, 32.

dominant state-rising state relationship more difficult. The United States can appreciate why China would build a more powerful navy. This complicates an analysis of U.S. perceptions of China and what role certain variables play in forming those perceptions. That Beijing's naval modernization threatens Washington in some form is admitted: to deny Washington the operational ability to support Taiwan in a cross-strait war. However, one must ask how much importance the United States should place on a Chinese naval threat that is essentially an ad hoc response to a self-contained dispute that does not threaten vital U.S. interests.

The Taiwan issue also highlights the capabilities-intentions debate. The PRC has had the intention of invading Taiwan for sixty years; the United States has had no reason to spend those years worrying about the PLA Navy. That U.S. naval professionals had not previously considered the PLA Navy a threat suggests that increased PRC capabilities are responsible for U.S. threat perceptions. Ambitions without commensurate capabilities are the classic formula for a paper tiger, be it Washington's Monroe Doctrine in the 1830s or Beijing's One-China Policy in the 1970s.

While China can build many ships and submarines, it has not been building a force that could project power around the world in any sustained and effective manner. Furthermore, its ability to operate those vessels is questionable. U.S. policymakers and navalists thus see many hurdles for China to overcome before they will seriously consider a Chinese threat to global U.S. naval dominance. The make-up of the fleet suggests that the PLA Navy is preparing for a war against both Taiwan and the United States. This is inherently a naval threat to the United States, but not an overarching one. It is self-contained to a small island located on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. China's navy does not threaten the U.S. Navy globally, but it is a local concern in the Taiwan Strait. China's navy has the second largest principal combatant fleet in the world, but it consists of poorly maintained ships and submarines manned by poorly trained sailors. The PLA Navy is not a threat to U.S. *global* naval dominance.

TOWARD A WORSENING U.S. PERCEPTION

In this section, I outline what actions China would need to take for the United States would find threatening to its global naval dominance. I posit that the two primary signs would be the acquisition of matériel and logistics to project power continuously over long distances and the effective and frequent use of those new acquisitions to raise the PLA Navy's operational effectiveness. The naval power necessary to not only unseat the current dominant naval power, but to take its place, is quite different from the naval power necessary to invade and hold a small island 90 miles offshore. Chinese preparations for a Taiwan contingency could actually serve as a baseline comparison for U.S. perceptions of Chinese naval development. If China were to develop a navy that was not only capable of invading Taiwan, but of Hawaii, for example, then the United States would take notice. As of yet, the Chinese navy's geographic extension cannot encircle the globe. The PLA Navy has the size to challenge the U.S. Navy, but it lacks the expertise and capabilities. It is clear from my interviews that these two areas hold the PLA Navy back and depress any alarming U.S. threat perception in terms of global naval power. In this section, I discuss the specific changes the PLA Navy would need to make for the U.S. Navy to take a Chinese naval challenge seriously.

Cole sees no evidence that China is building a world-class navy (2009). The United States will not see a Chinese threat to its blue-water fleet unless and until China builds a blue-water navy. The distinguishing attribute of a blue-water navy, as opposed to green- or brown-water navies, is its ability to undertake operations far from land for extended periods of time without land support, i.e., its ability to project power. It operates on the high seas, over the ocean deep; it is capable of being out of the sight of land for weeks at a time. At present, the PLA Navy has no such capability, and not until it gains those capabilities will the U.S. Navy find something to be threatened about.

The most obvious course for the PLA Navy is to pursue an

aircraft carrier program. Murray and Cole both think that China will inevitably acquire one, primarily for the sake of national prestige. In essence, China will get an aircraft carrier because the other major powers do too: China is the only member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council's permanent five to not have a carrier. Cole believes that, within ten years, China should have a ski-jump aircraft carrier similar to the Royal Navy's *Invincible* class, which displaces 21,000 tons (compared with the U.S. *Nimitz* class' 96,000 tons). A carrier, as the largest and most advanced weapon of war ever built, affects perceptions in a greater way than any other type of naval vessel.

The PLA Navy could not keep its carrier(s) in port, as it does its SSBNs. U.S. policymakers and naval strategists would see through such inaction. The carrier must be both deployable and deployed and its crew must have the ability to maintain and operate the carrier and its accompanying strike group. The carrier must be deployed in open ocean; sailing around the East China Sea does not demonstrate blue-water capabilities, with land so near. A Chinese aircraft carrier and its support group would have to be able to operate in open water for extended periods of time with no land support; this is what the U.S. Navy expects of its own carrier strike groups and this is what would get the U.S. Navy's attention.

A strike group would need to accompany the carrier and would consist of cruisers, destroyers, frigates, submarines, and support ships. The PLA Navy would have to build more of these vessels to offer credible protection to a deployed carrier. The PLA Navy has guided missile destroyers and guided missile frigates, but Murray notes that only 10 percent make an overseas deployment. PLA Navy warships have "a really long way to go." To worry the United States, the PLA Navy would have to deploy its principal surface combatants on a regular basis and deploy them far from home waters. More of the PLA Navy's submarines would have to deploy more often.

China would need to build a logistics tail with tenders, auxiliary ships, supply ships, and shore support facilities to credibly project power and affect U.S. threat perceptions (Murray 2009;

and China Team 2009). Refueling and replenishment ships and capabilities would have to be improved, especially since China has no RAS logistics or support vessels as of 2009 (Murray 2009; and IISS 2009, 385). China would need to demonstrate an ability to keep its ships seaworthy, an ability to feed and supply its officers and crews for long periods of time away from land, and an operational effectiveness that only training and professionalism can provide.

All this is dependent on the underlying assumption that China would first improve its educational and training programs. Sailors need to receive some uniform instruction and need the opportunities to go to sea and actually practice their skills. Academic education and operational effectiveness must be developed; currently, the Chinese navy has too little of both. The atmosphere must be changed, and a professional officer corps must be developed that embraces initiative, creativity, professionalism, and risk-taking. China could very well build a carrier, but if its sailors do not know how to properly use it, it will be of no use. China could send its SSBNs out to sea as strategic deterrents, but if their crews suffer the same fate as the *Ming*-class vessel of 2003, then the matériel would be useless.

A second way for the PLA Navy to negatively affect the United States' views would be to establish a network of overseas bases (Murray 2009). Unlike the United States, China does not have territories scattered around the world or defense commitments that would allow it to station naval assets far from home waters. If China were to build up a blue-water fleet, it could obtain bases or basing privileges with strategically positioned states. To secure those bases now would signal great optimism in China's self-assessment of its naval modernization; it would also be of no practical utility, as the PLA Navy would not have the power projection to use those bases. It would also provide advance warning to the United States that the PRC was seriously developing power projection capabilities.

Power projection is important for China not simply because it is what separates a blue-water navy from a green- or a brown-water navy, but also because it is the only way that the United States

would find naval power threatening. Washington would need to see Beijing gain the capability to reach before the United States could feel a blue-water threat. If the Chinese navy could do that, then it could probably go to many other places that U.S. naval power would find to be an encroachment. China could build a blue-water fleet and keep it close to shore, but that would not threaten U.S. command of the seas.

What China needs to do to negatively alter U.S. naval threat perceptions is at once simple and difficult. It is not too difficult to build ships and submarines, but it is more difficult to build them to a quality matching or exceeding that of the U.S. Navy. It is not too difficult to improve naval education, adopt a uniform curriculum, or make training more rigorous, but it is more difficult to overturn an organizational mindset that is risk-averse and would be loath to overturn much of anything. It is not too difficult to send a ship or submarine out to sea, but it is more difficult to send them out self-reliant, over long distances, and repeatedly. Building for Taiwan is not the same as building for the world.

THE U.S. RESPONSE: A POLICY RECOMMENDATION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this section, I discuss what strategy the United States should pursue if it becomes clear that China is transitioning to a blue-water navy. I argue that the United States should pursue a “capabilities gap” strategy (hereinafter shortened to “cap-gap” strategy) designed to make futile any rising state’s attempt to challenge the dominant state for command of the seas. Rather than close the gap in mutual intentions, the United States should widen the gap in mutual capabilities. I then briefly consider the state of the resulting U.S.-China bilateral relationship and its effects on regional and international systems.

The Cap-Gap Strategy

There is one way out of the security dilemma that would lead

to an outcome in the dominant state’s favor: if the potential challenger never develops the potential to challenge the dominant state. China should not build a blue-water navy to contest command of the oceans with the United States. It might do so anyway; it might start, then stop; it might forego the naval challenge altogether. Robert S. Ross notes that continental states that have tried to challenge naval powers “have failed throughout history.” Ross thus raises one reason why China would not challenge the United States: the futility of competition with America (2005, 87).

Military buildup will be met with either a reciprocal military buildup or no military buildup. If there is no Chinese military buildup, then it is possible that China does not seek to dethrone the United States from the dominant position in the world and no attempt at power transition is in the offing. If there is a military buildup, however, then the United States needs to win it. The United States will not win by simply maintaining a small superiority over China; this is reactive and would constantly put the United States on the defensive. Ross may or may not be right; China may decide not to challenge the United States. Whatever Beijing’s ultimate decision, the United States needs to be proactive and make it clear that military competition with the dominant state in the world would be futile. Shaping Chinese capabilities is more important than shaping Chinese intentions: instead of trying to close the two states’ intentions gap, the United States ought to widen the two states’ capabilities gap. This would bring military superiority into the U.S. shaping strategy and add another dimension through which the United States could, if it chooses, persuade through a position of strength.

The cap-gap strategy can break out of the security dilemma. Beijing might respond to Washington, but a *reciprocal* response does not also mean an *equal* response. The strategy I propose is concerned precisely with *unequal* response. Cap-gap explicitly recognizes the security dilemma; it accelerates the security dilemma for the dominant actor, creating asymmetric capabilities so weighted in its favor that the rising state will find the costs exceed the benefits. The challenger could fight with its military inferiority, but

it would be crushed. The security dilemma would be broken when one side realizes that its reaction would be too costly and would not matter.

What does this mean in practice for the United States? The United States must maintain its forward-deployed naval forces, which are the power projection of the U.S. Navy and of the United States as a whole. The United States must maintain its Fifth Fleet at Manama, Bahrain, a symbol of both U.S. power and of U.S. commitment to the oil-rich region. Recently, the DoD stood up U.S. Africa Command, seen as a response to China's growing (but still relatively small) influence on the world's second-largest continent. A lesser priority would be the maintenance of the Sixth Fleet at Gaeta, Italy, its prioritization perhaps dependent on regional conflicts in the Middle East and Russian activities in the theater. The most important would be the maintenance of the Seventh Fleet at Yokosuka and Sasebo, Japan, along with the U.S. naval base at Guam and the U.S. presence in South Korea, which is becoming more naval and air-oriented. A Chinese blue-water navy that projects power would contest the United States; therefore, so long as the financing is available, the United States should maintain its worldwide network of naval bases and keep watch over the vital chokepoints and regions of the globe.

The changing U.S. force posture toward a Pacific orientation should continue. Positioning U.S. forces closer to the Chinese homeland would force Beijing to concentrate on self-defense (as well as the balance in Taiwan). China's two self-defined defensive perimeters include the South China Sea and the East China Sea in their entirety and extend as far east as Guam. This suggests the desired minimum geographic extent of Chinese power projection. The United States is already within both defensive perimeters and there is no suggestion of U.S. forces moving outside of those perimeters. A bolstered U.S. presence in the Pacific, projecting power from Yokosuka, Sasebo, Guam, and Honolulu, could pin China to home waters and keep Beijing's attention on self-defense. Such a task would be aided by China's geography: its coastline is unbroken and extends along the east and southeastern edge of the country.

The United States could thus place a great concentration of force with relatively few men and matériel.

The purpose of increasing the capabilities gap is two-fold: it is to bolster the U.S. military in general so that China will be dissuaded from competing, but it is also meant to remain relevant should China not be dissuaded. In order to prevent China from exercising worldwide naval dominance, the United States must be able to present a threat in East Asia and the western Pacific, so that if China does develop a blue-water navy (and preventive attack is not an option), then it would be forced to operate on the defensive in home waters against the fait accompli of U.S. command of the seas. Even if China develops a blue-water fleet, the PLA Navy may find itself constrained in projecting power globally, consistently, and credibly. The U.S. Navy would have the opportunity to contain the PLA Navy in the China Seas.

This strategy should be adopted once the political will exists for it but cannot be implemented beforehand, for the same arguments that are made against preventive war can also be made against cap-gap.

Limitations and Drawbacks

Enhancing the capabilities gap is much easier said than done. The costs of building and maintaining a larger U.S. military are very high, especially since U.S. military technology is so far advanced. The United States may face the financial risk of having to temper its military buildup. Current U.S. defense policy seems to be that, in financial straits, geographic breadth is sacrificed for maintenance of overall qualitative superiority. At the expense of other fleets, the U.S. Navy is prioritizing and redirecting new resources to the Pacific theater, specifically, to the forward-deployed Seventh Fleet, though it is probable that the San Diego, California-based Third Fleet will receive a matériel boost as well. This could result in the United States drawing down its forces in the Atlantic Ocean, Central and South America, and the Mediterranean Sea.

The political and strategic implications of such a move are

unknown, but may include steps by other states to fill the power vacuum. The United Kingdom might decide to revive its naval force if it thought the United States had become too preoccupied with East Asia. In Africa and the Middle East, where no state is building a navy or seeking maritime hegemony, one might see a security vacuum remain unfilled. If maritime piracy were to remain or re-emerge as a problem during a U.S. drawdown, it would be up to other states, most likely Russia, the wealthy European states, and states in the vicinity of the piracy to respond effectively without heavy U.S. contribution or cajoling. Reduced naval capabilities would also affect U.S. humanitarian relief efforts, citizen evacuation efforts, and general power projection. Of course, if the U.S. economy grew at such a rate that the United States and its navy could increase their superiority over China and its navy while simultaneously maintaining, even increasing, its commitments elsewhere, then this is a moot point.

The U.S. Navy has proposed a 313-ship navy that is supposed to be ready in less than thirty years. At current shipbuilding rates, this target will not be met. This highlights another problem for the U.S. Navy: timely, efficient, cost-effective execution. The U.S. Navy's recent shipbuilding projects have been "embarrassing" fiascoes: the *Zumwalt*-class guided-missile destroyer's costs have soared so far beyond projections that the Navy's original order for thirty-seven *Zumwalts* has been cut to three; the littoral combat ship (LCS) has experienced dramatic cost overruns as well; and the newly-completed United States Ship (USS) *New Orleans* amphibious transport dock failed its inspection because it was deemed unfit for transporting men and matériel (China Team 2009; and Kreisher 2009, 41). One problem is that two companies hold a monopoly on U.S. Navy shipbuilding contracts, while another problem is that ships are being built before the designs are even finished (Taubman 2008). The solutions are to break up the monopoly and to actually plan vessels out before starting to build them. These are simple solutions, though not necessarily easy ones.

Money is *the* foundation of military might. China, with an economy that can potentially challenge that of the United States

both in size and dynamism, could very possibly present a more potent challenge than the Soviet Union did in terms of financial strength. The U.S.-Soviet contest was an endurance race; it would appear that the U.S.-China case could, in the economic sense, prove to be more of a sprint. If this is the case and if the U.S. economic foundation were to be sufficient, then a cap-gap strategy implemented at the right time could leave China in the dust. If the economic foundation were insufficient, the United States would exhaust itself and collapse, regardless of whether or not it crossed the finish line before China (if it crossed the finish line at all). A strong economy is necessary for a strong military, especially one used to project power. The cap-gap strategy is predicated on the U.S. ability to maintain this balance; otherwise, it would be utterly pointless for the United States to pursue a strategy that so profoundly disrupts the economic-military balance as to render that strategy's outcome irrelevant by sealing the dominant state's fate regardless.

Alternative Policies and Scenarios

The United States should not launch a preventive attack. Such an operation would be extremely risky, with a less than desirable chance of success and the very great possibility of blowback that would affect U.S. positions throughout East Asia and could potentially destroy the regional allies that Washington would rely on for support if and when relations with Beijing deteriorate. The political repercussions would be massive and, if the Chinese government does not respond with a force commensurate to the nationalist outrage of its citizens, China may be plunged into chaos. The possibility of a hard-line, jingoistic military leadership supplanting civilian officials is not palatable. The United States should be careful of the regime change it sometimes wishes to see.

The United States should not adopt a containment strategy at this time. For one, it would be very difficult, as regional allies seem reluctant to give up their own engagement or hedging strategies. As noted previously, the dominant state has unique fears from a challenger that smaller states either do not worry about or lack

the means to solve. It would be very difficult for the United States to ask other states to join it in containing China when the threat is unclear and when regional states' geographic proximity means that they would bear the brunt of any hostile Chinese response to a containment coalition.

The United States should not adopt a policy consisting solely of appeasement or engagement. The United States derives great benefits from the international system that it created and its trade with the world depends overwhelmingly on its control of the oceans, sea lanes, and chokepoints of the world. If the United States were to appease or solely engage China, it would find its position in and benefits from the international system decreasing at an alarming rate and through its own doing. While the current international system is one of America's making, the world is not. This is a world in which other states have conflicting goals and varying abilities to achieve them. While goals may conflict with those of the United States, capabilities should not.

The United States should not disregard geopolitics, power projection, and military superiority because economic integration has rendered major war highly unlikely in the globalized world. This is conjecture and has not yet been proven. Global power projection demands prudence and caution, not untested faith. Beyond this, dominant state-rising state relations do not need to worsen to the level of war for the dominant state to feel pressured, disadvantaged, and weaker, perhaps to a simultaneously unacceptable yet irreversible level. The United States would find that an unpalatable military balance could have repercussions on other issues, including diplomatic initiatives, alliances, and general influence. Paper money and copper coins, while (and because they are) valuable, ought to have some support by firepower.

WIDER IMPLICATIONS OF HOSTILE RELATIONS

In early 2009, China completed its first successful overseas deployment of naval forces since the fifteenth century. Shortly after and closer to home, China harassed the United States Naval

Ship *Impeccable*, an oceanographic surveillance vessel, operating in the South China Sea. The United States dispatched the USS *Chung-Hoon* to escort the otherwise defenseless *Impeccable*. In late April, the PLA Navy celebrated its sixtieth anniversary with an international fleet review, featuring twenty-five PLA Navy vessels and twenty-one vessels from fourteen other navies. Events of 2009 suggest that the naval variable will continue to figure prominently in U.S.-China relations. But what is the overall relationship to look like? What is the endgame for Washington and Beijing in the twenty-first century?

The U.S.-China relationship will be hostile, though not necessarily warring. As China continues its military buildup and develops abilities far too capable for its stated goal of self-defense (assuming Beijing continues to state this justification), the United States will adjust its China and defense policies in an attempt to maintain superiority. Outright hostility might be tempered with practical negotiations and diplomatic exchanges, or careful hedging could not temper a perception of unabated advances. Relations between Washington and Beijing may carry on as a necessity, though probably not out of any feelings of goodwill.

A souring U.S.-China relationship would affect each state's relations with regional powers. The United States may opportunistically use a regional dispute involving China to constrain Beijing. The most obvious case is Taiwan, but the United States could also encourage Japanese militarization. Should China become involved in a war in East Asia and should America decide to intervene, Washington may enter on the anti-Chinese side. It might actually be beneficial for the United States to encourage hostile relations between China and its land neighbors, as Paul Kennedy noted in the case of 18th-century Britain and France (1987, 88–89, 97–98). By keeping China preoccupied with a continental geostrategy, the United States may forestall, if not entirely scuttle, Chinese plans for a maritime geostrategy. At the least, China would have to try and execute both geostrategies simultaneously. Depending at what stage of PLA naval development the United States reacts, there is the potential for reciprocal meddling by China in the Americas.

The broader international system may see a worldwide battle for power and influence. This might not be the Cold War of the twentieth century, especially if the disparity in U.S. nuclear capabilities and Chinese nuclear capabilities is maintained, but it could take on the global dimension of the United States' struggle against the Soviet Union. Global power projection must be combated on a geographic scale larger than most other arms competitions. The world could, as a result of this competition, be divided into U.S. and Chinese spheres of influence. If Beijing managed to send forth a navy to compete with Washington's, one would see a more evenly divided international system; if Washington successfully destroyed a Chinese navy or prevented it from reaching a geographic breadth comparable to that of the U.S. Navy, one might see a twenty-first century geostrategically divided much like the twentieth, when the United States still managed to maintain overall naval superiority, leaving its adversary with a largely continental empire.

CONCLUSION

In this section, I offer some final thoughts on larger issues affecting and affected by the U.S.-China case study. I discuss the relationship between economic power and power projection and how the latter is simply impossible unless the former exists simultaneously. I discuss the elusive presence of preventive attack in power transitions and what role the nuclear balance plays in it. Finally, I address the inter-related issues of the security dilemma, hedging, and Taiwan in U.S.-China relations.

Economic Strength and Power Projection

A state's military expenditures are constrained by the amount of money available and by competing priorities. Power projection is an expensive endeavor, and it is perhaps fitting that the dominant state in the international system, with its weighty economic power, should also be a formidable military power. The ability to maintain global naval capabilities is not cheap: the United Kingdom discov-

ered in the years preceding World War I that there was a limit to how long it could withstand industrial Germany's naval buildup, while the U.S. Navy, facing economic malaise in the 1970s, languished as its Soviet rival gained ground.

The current economic crisis may have great implications for U.S. defense expenditures, particularly since recent shipbuilding fiascos involving the *Zumwalt*-class destroyer and the LCS have not endeared the U.S. Navy to the Congress. While the PLA Navy's budget appropriations have increased, they have not increased relative to other branches, but only as a reflection of across-the-board increases resulting from a booming economy (Cole 2009). It remains to be seen how the current global financial downturn will affect the U.S. Navy and the PLA Navy in the long-term. If the effects are largely similar in breadth, depth, and duration, one may see the United States emerge from the economic crisis with a relatively similar level of naval superiority over China as before the economic crisis. If China's suffering is greater than America's, then the mere possibility of a Chinese naval challenge to the United States might be postponed for some years. If, however, the United States emerges worse from the conflict than China does, one may see the United States respond to China with a greater lag. The issue would then become whether the United States could respond before the PLA Navy reached the point where any U.S. response would be deemed too expensive and a lost cause.

The United States is currently the only state that has true power projection capabilities. Murray notes, in his research, he has not come across anyone discussing, let alone suggesting, that the United States acquiesce to a rising PLA Navy. He personally conceives of only a domestic issue affecting U.S. force posture in East Asia. If the United States were to suffer a "terrible depression" or some other broadly-accepted "economic, political, or environmental crisis," Washington would have to reorganize its fiscal priorities, at which point the U.S. Navy's overseas commitments may be cut (Murray 2009). Cole (2009) also notes that the U.S. response would ultimately depend on its financial means, but that, so long as money was not a problem, the United States would respond with a

robust program to remain ahead of China.

This would greatly affect the United States and China in a competition for global power. Already, concerns over growing Chinese influence in places such as Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, and Africa have led to calls for a renewing of U.S. power and influence in those regions. If the United States were to face an economic downturn while China continued its growth, Washington would be unable to project its power and maintain its influence on a level that could compete with Beijing. The three forward-deployed fleets of the U.S. Navy — in Italy, Bahrain, and Japan—could be reduced in strength, if not scrapped altogether, leaving U.S. allies vulnerable to both attack and bandwagoning pressures from the rising state. A healthy economy at home is essential for a robust naval presence abroad.

The Nuclear Balance and Preventive Attack

Nuclear superiority increases the probability of success in a preventive strike, particularly if the target state's second-strike capability could be neutralized. U.S. military officers argued for preventive war against the Soviet Union while they still possessed nuclear superiority. Nuclear parity made preventive war a less palatable option, but it did reinforce the importance of conventional forces. Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press (2006), however, argue that the United States has such nuclear superiority today that it could neutralize China's entire nuclear arsenal if necessary. Assuming that were true, why does the United States refrain from preventively destroying the PLA Navy, especially since its three SSBNs do not operationally deploy? The answer may be as simple as that it is contrary to current U.S. policy; therefore, U.S. policymakers, who make and implement policy, will not undertake steps to undermine that very policy. Current U.S. policy is to hedge against and shape China precisely in the hope that the future will not end in war. Like *détente* in the 1970s, preventive war is simply one of many methods of policy execution that do not agree with the U.S. policy being executed.

As straightforward as the policy inconsistency argument sounds, there are other reasons. It is notable that the United Kingdom, in the pre-nuclear era, also refrained from launching a preventive war. There must be something more than a simple fear of mutually assured destruction at play. The first issue may be a threat-reaction gap. Preventive war, by definition, is aimed at something that is not currently threatening, but may become threatening in future. It would be psychologically difficult to both justify an attack on another state's potentially threatening yet currently benign naval force and to justify doing so with a preventive attack. The human mind may simply find the concept too jarring and difficult. States usually do not engage in defensive wars against non-existent threats, so for a state to be told that it must go to war precisely because the threat it will face does not yet exist seems very presumptuous, if a bit nonsensical. Fighting a threat that does not (yet) exist is hard to justify.

The dominant state's wariness in launching a preventive war may also be a product of the dominant state's role in the international system. The dominant state represents the status quo and seeks to ensure stability. This may explain the relative rarity with which dominant states launch preventive wars. Since preventive war is a reaction to a currently non-existent threat, launching a preventive war is a proactive decision, not reactive. By definition, an extant threat can only provoke a reactive response. The dominant state is a reactive state: it has climbed to the top of the greasy pole and sees no reason why it should harass other states *unless* they challenge it.

There are many other difficulties that present themselves when planning a preventive attack: intelligence and counterintelligence capabilities, logistical coordination, operational mistakes and setbacks, other kinetic options, other grand strategies that do not espouse preventive attack, and political repercussions and blowback. If, despite all these considerations and the "fog of war," a preventive attack on a growing navy were successfully executed, that would still leave the target state in existence, since destroying its navy would not entail destruction of the state. The target would

be free to retaliate, even without nuclear weapons. China could launch an invasion of Taiwan; create problems in North Korea; attack Japan, South Korea, and other regional allies; involve itself in Afghanistan; fund anti-American terrorists; commit state terrorism, such as killing Americans in China after the preventive attack; or do a number of other things that could harm the United States. Washington would have to be prepared to deal with any and all of these responses, perhaps simultaneously.

The Security Dilemma and Hedging

As the United States and China are unsure of the other's intentions, but see growing capabilities, the result may well be the classic security dilemma: a spiraling armament race. Suspicions are already evident. Murray notes that the PLA Navy has been "cagey" in its interactions with the U.S. Navy and that it is unenthusiastic about naval understanding between the United States and China (2009). The Pentagon's annual report emphasizes what it perceives to be a lack of Chinese forthrightness and what the U.S. response has had to be:

China has begun a new phase of military development, . . . but has left unclear to the international community the purposes and objectives of the PLA's evolving doctrine and capabilities. . . . The limited transparency in China's military and security affairs poses risks to stability by creating uncertainty and increasing the potential for misunderstanding and miscalculation. The United States continues to work with our allies and friends in the region to monitor these developments and adjust our policies accordingly (DoD 2009, 1).

The China Team also complains about the lack of transparency, trust, and openness from its Chinese counterparts, echoing Murray's view that they are not genuinely interested in mutual understanding. Chinese officials go through the motions and undertake

joint ventures for the sake of doing them. This is partly seen in the PLA Navy's proposals, which usually suggest complex activities but provide little to no detail, so they are either not carried through or, if they are, it is because the China Team has pushed and prodded for the details necessary to execute the exercise. What U.S. policymakers view as strengths—U.S.-China cooperation and jointness—China views as weaknesses. For the China Team, one of its basic issues is not so much that China is acquiring matériel to "blow the United States out of the water," but that China denies such an "obvious fact." The 2009 edition of *Military Power of the People's Republic of China* concludes that Beijing "has improved modestly the transparency of its military and security affairs," but that it sees transparency as more of a "transaction to be negotiated" and less of a responsibility (DoD 2009, vii).

The security dilemma may play a very large role in future U.S.-China relations. Indeed, it may have already begun. Murray notes that the U.S. Navy has already begun to shift its focus from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, with the three *Seawolf*-class nuclear-powered attack submarines already serving in the latter and the newer *Virginia* class also marked for service with the Pacific Fleet (2009). Kristensen writes in "U.S." that the U.S. Navy's SSBN patrols have continued at levels comparable to the Cold War, with the majority occurring in the Pacific Ocean. The U.S. Navy is also planning to transfer more carriers to the Pacific (China Team 2009). In 2009 testimony before the Congress, Adm. Timothy J. Keating, then-commander of U.S. Pacific Command, referred to Chinese naval development as the reason why ASW is the U.S. Pacific Fleet's "number one priority" (U.S. Senate 2009, 25). As with carriers and submarines, each increased Chinese capability would be met with a U.S. response to counter the threat.

In the specific situation of Taiwan, the security dilemma is unavoidable, given U.S. strategic ambiguity. By deliberately avoiding a firm commitment either way to the Taiwan question, the United States not only compels China to build up capabilities for a Taiwan crisis, but is itself obliged to respond to China's developments in order to maintain strategic flexibility. At the same time, by leaving

open the door for intervention in the Taiwan Strait, Washington ties down Beijing by forcing it to devote an inordinate amount of time, money, and matériel to an island one-half the size of West Virginia. Were China free of the Taiwan issue, it might embark wholeheartedly on a navy with power projection capabilities and have already presented a challenge to the United States. One could thus argue that strategic ambiguity, while fueling an arms race across the Taiwan Strait, has dampened and delayed an arms race on a wider, general scale.

There is, however, one problem. If the Taiwan issue were the prism by which the United States or China viewed the *entire* bilateral relationship—if Washington or Beijing were to project its overall threat perception of the other based on what happens with Taiwan—then strategic ambiguity, far from being a salve, becomes an infection. It should not be a shock that China, with its extensive coastline, should build some sort of navy, but its capabilities and level of threat could be blown out of proportion, creating the possibility that it would not matter what China's geostrategic focus really was because Taiwan would make it appear maritime in America's eyes. Given the gross disparity between China's resources and Taiwan's resources, it is simply a matter of time before the cross-strait military balance tips in Beijing's favor (if it has not already). The United States' role would then become even more vital, placing greater importance on U.S. capabilities in theater to credibly uphold strategic ambiguity, while the perceived interest gap over Taiwan between the United States and China may make Beijing angrier at Washington's continued refusal to retract military protection over something that the latter should care less about.

The true importance of the Taiwan question now comes into focus: since China views Taiwan as a question of basic territorial sovereignty and Chinese Communist Party legitimacy, it is very difficult to see how Beijing would halt its military buildup in Fujian unless Washington were to renounce its defense commitments. There is thus the potential for a security dilemma (Taiwan) within a security dilemma (overall U.S.-China relationship). Beijing has not halted its military buildup with Ma Ying-jeou's accession to the

Taiwanese presidency (Bush 2009). The United States, to maintain strategic ambiguity, must build up in response to Beijing and negatively change its threat perception, which would lead Beijing to do the same, and the spiral would take on a life of its own.

It is possible China may not escalate. Ross explicitly posits a naval arms race as the reason for China's reluctance to proceed with a carrier program:

Thus far, China's leadership has resisted the temptation to acquire this prestigious symbol of great power status. . . . China's leaders are seemingly aware that a Chinese carrier . . . would challenge U.S. maritime interests and induce an arms race with the United States that China could not win. (2005, 86–87)

Cole (2009) also notes the possibility of the PLA Navy removing itself from the security dilemma because a naval race against the United States would simply be too hard, though he also thinks the carrier delay is due to its operational uselessness against Taiwan. This would signal that China would be content with a continental sphere of influence in Asia, which would not clash with the largely U.S. maritime sphere in the region (Ross 1999; and Ross 2003). Although my interviewees see the existence of a Chinese carrier program as inevitable, this does not mean that Ross is necessarily wrong. One carrier is frankly not a security threat; multiple carriers would be more threatening. If the PLA Navy were to construct one carrier, see a robust U.S. response, and refrain from constructing anymore, Ross's assertion would still stand. Only his timing of when China would realize a carrier's dramatic effect on U.S. perceptions would be wrong.

The security dilemma and its self-fulfilling nature have implications for the current U.S. strategy of hedging, which is a combination of engagement and dissuasion. Engagement on its own is solely an attempt to influence and shape the rising state's changing position in the international system. It is reflected in the U.S. *détente* policy toward the Soviet Union, in which nuclear parity

was acknowledged and conventional superiority was allowed to deteriorate. The policy of dissuasion is the maintenance of military superiority with the purpose of persuading potentially hostile states to refrain from initiating arms races. Dissuasion is not deterrence. Whereas dissuasion is applied to states that may or may not be hostile, deterrence is applied to states that are assuredly hostile. The practical differences between the two lie in the breadth, depth, and intensity of the military buildup. Deterrence is also exclusive of engagement, for if shaping a state's actions is still possible, then a simultaneous pursuit of deterrence is presumptuous and self-defeating. Dissuasion is thus a self-strengthening movement taken when another state's hostility is possible, even plausible, but not definitive.

The dissuasion component of the U.S. hedging strategy is something not seen in the strategies of other states that may choose to hedge against China. Singapore, for example, could choose to pursue a hedging strategy against China, but regardless of whether China builds up a military or not, the Singaporean military could only be a small part of the entire hedging strategy. If China does not build up its military, then Singapore has no need to improve its military. But if China builds up its military, no plausible Singaporean military buildup could defeat the Chinese military in a confrontation. Thus, for many states, dissuasion would be either a useless or an unnecessary component to China policy.

For the United States, however, the situation is different. America is the dominant state in the world and possesses the world's best military, including the navy. It is an inescapable fact that the dominant state of the international system, almost by definition, possesses such kinetic superiority. Assuming the rising state is building up its military simultaneously, any dominant state that pursues a hedging strategy against the potential challenger must place great importance on military armament in its hedging strategy if it wishes to remain dominant. The dominant state is forced to be a reactionary power: if the rising state builds a military, the dominant state has to respond, assuming it wants to stay dominant. This forced response, if met by the rising state with an escalatory

response, initiates the security dilemma.

Engagement is the other half of the U.S. hedging strategy, and while the U.S. experience with *détente* shows that engagement by itself is a foolhardy venture, it would seem to be less so when tempered with dissuasion. The problem is that dissuasion does not just temper engagement, it kills it. When the dominant state and the rising state undertake reciprocal arms buildups, engagement is taken over by talk about the arms race, as early twentieth-century Anglo-German relations show. If two states can have an engagement, then dissuasion is the pre-marital agreement of international relations. Precautionary steps to guarantee one's well-being in a potential worst-case scenario—while realistic, prudent, and far-sighted—may also be self-fulfilling. Hoping for the best and preparing for the worst keep the former from becoming reality and make the latter seem prescient. If the United States continues on its hedging strategy toward China, it will find that its attempt to shape Beijing into a responsible stakeholder in the international system will not succeed. The very dissuasion that will cause engagement to fail will also have prevented engagement from being seen as a greater failure than it could otherwise be, for dissuasion would mean that the United States will have maintained military readiness.

The driver behind the dominant-riser dynamic is the rising state. Recognition of this fact may explain why dominant states try to “shape” the rising state, in the hopes that the rising state will start to act in a manner more conducive to the dominant state's desires, thus allowing the dominant state to stop reacting in ways unfavorable to international stability. This also means that, if China does challenge the United States for world power, then the reactive decision to hedge is unavoidable on the dominant state's part. The United States would have chosen a failed strategy, but this failed strategy would be the most optimistic available when compared with outright dissuasion, deterrence, or containment. Hedging would still afford China the opportunity to halt its challenge and become a “responsible” (i.e., subordinate) stakeholder in a U.S. international system.

This suggests that a national policy of hedging is doomed

to fail in a dominant state-rising state dynamic because it all but guarantees a security dilemma; it is hard to see how the engagement component of the hedging strategy can overcome increasingly hostile military relations. The exception would be for one of the states to voluntarily halt the arms race *regardless of how the other state responds*: either the dominant state would take the chance of being overtaken or the rising state would cement its status as a potential challenger and not turn into a bona fide challenger. The United States has tied much of its changing force posture in the western Pacific Ocean to Chinese military development, implying that Washington is merely reacting to Beijing's unsatisfactorily-explained actions.

The real danger of the security dilemma, aside from the dilemma itself, is the product. China may be spurred on to develop a blue-water navy precisely in response to U.S. efforts to prevent it from doing so. Even if China did not consciously seek a blue-water force, it is difficult to see Beijing get mired in an arms race with the United States and still be content to produce small patrol craft. As the arms race intensifies, the threat looms closer, and the need for larger and more capable vessels grows. It is possible that China could simply build up hundreds of patrol craft and other small vessels, but that is not what past ascendant powers have done. Major powers have major warships. The United States, in such an arms race, would have to consider its rate of construction as well, but it would face the problem of its fleet being dispersed around the world. China does not have such a problem and can concentrate whatever forces it builds. If the United States cannot keep pace with Chinese shipbuilding and its superiority erodes as a result, it may have to call on alliance partners, redistribute the fleet, or both.

For much of history, but before the United States achieved any status as a major power, China was a powerful state. Granted, much of its dominance was confined to Asia and it has never been the dominant state in the international system, but China's past two hundred years are actually the exception, not the rule, in its unbroken history. China was, simply put, great. It may feel that it is

time to be great again. China currently has a large navy: it is an unimpressive fleet. The vessels themselves are of varying quality and operational effectiveness, while their officers and crew lack high and uniform standards in professionalism, initiative, and training. These weigh down the PLA Navy more than any anchor could. At the same time, Chinese naval development has focused on confrontation with Taiwan and on keeping the United States out of that conflict. Clear signs that China wants to keep the United States out of more than just the Taiwan Strait have not been forthcoming: "The absence of a true expeditionary logistics capability . . . will limit the PLA's ability to project and sustain military operations at locations distant from the mainland" (DoD 2009, 38). Scholars such as Avery Goldstein who raise the apparition of a Chinese blue-water navy may be right someday, but not today. If there is a Chinese naval threat in the form of blue-water capabilities and global power projection, it is still a latent one.

The current U.S. strategy for China, while mixing optimism with caution, may find that optimism misplaced and that caution deepening to anxiety. For now, America does not face multiple challengers, as its British predecessor did. It does not face the mutually assured destruction that it did last century. It does not yet face the blue-water navy, the challenge to power projection, and the threat to international dominance that the Soviet Union presented last century. Will China try and succeed where the Soviet Union failed? The world waits and watches.

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INTRODUCTION: A PORTRAIT OF OSH, KYRGYZSTAN

Osh, the “southern capital” of Kyrgyzstan located in the ethnically rich Ferghana Valley, is a network of streets and lanes gradually rising into a tree-lined urban landscape from surroundings of yellow hills and flatter expanses of farmland. Even from an initial cursory glance, unlikely juxtapositions perhaps only to be found in this region of the world leap out. Walking a straight course along, say Ulitsa Lenina or Kurmanzhan-Datka, one could travel from the busy bazaar where vendors sell melons, flat rounds of tandoor bread, and hard balls of dried yogurt, past Soviet blocks of apartments and smaller alleys leading into *mahallas* of courtyard houses, to the main government “white house” across from an imposing statue of Lenin. Osh’s face seems to be that of “two cities” which “captures the coexisting presence of divergent orientations and aspirations within the city.” But even a two-sided characterization dividing this urban space into a Soviet sector and a “traditional Central Asian” sector is too simple (Liu 2007, 66). Seemingly contradictory beliefs, habits, and identities overlap and spill out of bounded domains, manifesting themselves in various aspects of everyday life in Osh, whether in terms of religious identification, ethnic connections, national sentiments, linguistic choice, or merely commonplace practices.

In these interviews, language reveals itself to be a window onto the forces that shape cultural and national identity: it illuminates dialogues of power within a society and shapes politics, builds national solidarity, and underscores group divides. It is malleable, and

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