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China's Military Modernization: Redefining PLA "Centers of Gravity"

Craig E. Palmer
LCDR USN
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The content of this paper reflects my own personal views, and is not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Student Signature: _____

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Advisor signature: _____

Vincent P. Mocini, CAPT, USN

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China's economy is expanding and is expected to be one of the top five in the world in the next 10 years. Due to this growth, China believes it is only natural progression to seek increased global and regional influence on their periphery. To achieve this desired influence, China is modernizing the PLA and planning for expansion of their operating area to a "green water" navy by early 21st century and a "blue water" navy by 2050. China's national defense strategy is characterized as an active defense and is primarily designed to counter perceived U.S. hegemonic practices within the Asian-Pacific Theater and a "unipolar" world. The Chinese are incrementally approaching their modernization to avoid being perceived as a threat until they obtain the capability to be dominant regionally.

The paper addresses the need to redefine China's "centers of Gravity" and presents a conceptual plan for a limited conflict with China. It also states that the U.S. must deliberately plan, budget, and procure to meet the possible challenges of future regional conflict with China.

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China's economy is expanding and is expected to be one of the top five in the world in the next 10 years. Due to this growth, the Chinese believe it is only natural progression to seek increased global and regional influence on their periphery. To achieve this desired influence, China is modernizing the PLA and planning for expansion of their operating area to a "green water" navy by early 21st century and a "blue water" navy by 2050. China's national defense strategy is characterized as an active defense and is primarily designed to counter perceived U.S. hegemonic practices within the Asian-Pacific Theater and a "unipolar" world. The Chinese are incrementally approaching their modernization to avoid being perceived as a threat until the PLA obtains the capability to dominate regionally.

The paper addresses the need to redefine China's "centers of Gravity" and presents a conceptual plan for a limited conflict with China. It also states that the U.S. must deliberately plan, budget, and procure to meet the possible challenges of future regional conflict with China.

"A new arms race has started to develop and war is not far from us now."
Liu Jiangjia, an Officer in the People's Liberation Army (PLA)[1]

"China's public view of the United States has changed quite seriously since 1998. The U.S. has been painted as a threat to Asian-Pacific security. We've never said it so bluntly before...I think China is more clearly preparing for a major clash with the United States."
Shen Dingli, a prominent arms control expert at Fundan University in Shanghai[2]

China poses some difficult challenges for the United States in the future. Chinese expansion, both regionally and globally, is primarily the result of her strong economy. As a result of this growth, the People's Republic of China (PRC) desires significantly more influence on her periphery. Consequently, this desire for influence is translated into new doctrine aimed at making China becoming a regional and global maritime power in the near future. This is evident in their stated doctrinal objectives of an active defense strategy with a "green water" navy by the early 21st century and a "blue water" navy by 2050.[3]

China's active defense strategy is primarily focused on the perceived "unipolar" and "hegemonic" practices of the United States in the Asian-Pacific region. In order to meet the needs of this geographically expanded active defense strategy and counter American influence in the region, China is aggressively modernizing its military with new and technologically advanced weaponry from both internal and external sources. Modernization efforts by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) are aimed at developing sufficient military strength capable of engaging the U.S. in the 2030 timeframe and winning.

The Chinese are incrementally approaching their goals, by appearing non-threatening, through deception. This incremental approach facilitates a non-obtrusive plan for the PLA to

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[1] Unknown Author, "In China, the U.S. is rapidly becoming Enemy No.1," The Providence Sunday Journal, 19 November 2000, A10.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment-China and Northeast Asia (Coulsdon, Surry: Jane's Information Group, Ltd., 2000): 111.

enhance its capabilities without drawing much attention from the United States or its allies. The Chinese believe that deception inhibits effective long range U.S. military planning against the PLA. Therefore, American reaction time in response to a credible Chinese threat due to complex military acquisition cycles is severely limited.

Consequently, will the U.S. need to address the Chinese military modernization efforts and stated doctrinal changes by redefining China's "centers of gravity" in order to plan and procure for a future regional conflict with the PLA? And if so, how will this need affect the operational planning of the CINC?

This paper will address China's modernization, long-term military strategy, and present a conceptual plan for the CINC or Fleet Commander. It will define China's objectives, discuss both current and future critical factors, and identify centers of gravity for the United States and China. Finally, it will present a basic conceptual plan (operational scheme), based on Chinese projected military acquisitions and proposed order of battle to counter China in the event of a regional conflict.

The PRC has emerged, for the most part, unscathed from the recent Asian-Pacific economic crisis. Due to this success, China has evolved into a stronger global economic power and indications suggest that they may have one of the world's strongest economies in the foreseeable future.[4] In light of China's latest gains and positive growth over the last ten years, Chinese leadership believes that it is only natural progression, based on an effulgent future, to have more influence on regional and global issues.

[4] According to the World Bank and other international agencies, China will emerge among the five largest economies of the world within the next two decades—the U.S., Japan, India, and the European Union being the others. Pollack, Johathan D. and Richard H. Yang, In China's Shadow: Regional Perspectives on Chinese Foreign Policy and Military Development (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1998): 92.

With its economy in mind and shifting security concerns, China has expanded its political and military presence to the east and southeast, and made clear its intention to maintain and increase its influence in these directions in the years ahead.[5] Despite the potential stress posed on a strong Chinese economy, modernization of their military is crucial to achieve this desired influence. This is where the stated objectives and capabilities of a "green water" and "blue water" navy come into play. With the additional reach, the Chinese could exhibit more political and military influence in the Asian-Pacific region. The "green water" and "blue water" navies will expand the Chinese military sphere of influence, and ultimately their political influence on regional and global issues. The Chinese define "green water" as reaching from Vladivostock in the north, to the Strait of Malacca in the south, and to the "first chain of islands" in the east, and "blue water" as reaching to the second island chain.[6]

This expansion east and southeast is specifically designed to encompass the Spratly Islands and Taiwan, a renegade state according to China. Both island chains reside in China's claimed territorial waters and Economic Exclusion Zone (EEZ) in the East and South China Seas. The Paracels, the Pratas, and the Senkakus islands also are disputed territorial claims. These disputed areas have enormous potential economic growth and valuable natural resources, such as oil, that may be very critical to China's economic future.

As a consequence of Chinese territorial claims and possible disputes over them, China has adopted an active defense strategy. Theoretically, the PLA Navy's (PLAN) active defense strategy is defensive, however, on the operational and tactical levels, the navy would be required to carry out offensive missions in order to guarantee the fulfillment of strategic

[5] Ibid.,19.
[6] Jane's Sentinel., 111.

objectives set by the Chinese national defense authority.[7] Strategists, according to Jane's Sentinel, have also stated that the active defense strategy is defense exercised for anti-attack purposes but it does not exclude the possibility of offensive strikes for self-defense or for offensive action after a period of defense.[8] According to China's most recent defense white paper, active defense is "a principle featuring defensive operations, self defense, and gaining mastery by striking only after the enemy has struck. Such defense combines efforts to deter war with preparations to win self-defense wars in time of peace, and strategic defense with operational and tactical offensive operations in time of war. China's armed forces seek to adapt to profound changes in the world's military sphere, and to prepare for defensive operations under modern, high-tech, conditions."[9]

The active defense strategy encapsulates China's long term strategy. This is clearly illustrated by the following passage:

"From a national security perspective, China is preparing to meet three key challenges after the Cold War. In an immediate sense, it must build a military force structure and capabilities that will enable it to use force if necessary to pursue its sovereignty and territorial claims on Taiwan, the South China Sea islands, and if necessary elsewhere—for example India, Vietnam, and Japan. Second, its military power must provide it with adequate deterrence against the United States—the remaining superpower—and defeat all calls for a neo-containment strategy against China. Finally, in the longer run its power must ensure that China will be an integral part of the new security structure in Asia and the Pacific, and that its interests and concerns not be undermined."[10]

The PRC is also interested in Mahan's concepts of power projection and sea control at the regional level.[11] This significant shift in China's strategic view has driven changes in PLA

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] "China's National Defense in 2000," China's National Defense in 2000. November 2000. http://fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/cnd0010/china-001016wp0.htm// [21 November 2000].
[10] Pollack, "In China's Shadow", 94.
[11] Xiang, Lanxin. The Chinese Military: Problems of Modernization. (Geneva, Switzerland: Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies, 1999): 33.

doctrine, tactics, training, procurement, and deployment of military forces. The following principal features characterize China's emerging strategic view:[12]

- With economic modernization as the number one priority of China's grand strategy, an increased concern with the stability and protection of the coastal, offshore, and sea-based material resources, communications routes and trade access;

- A shift from land-based, protracted "People's War" concepts, to embrace a more flexible, modernized capability to respond to limited conflicts along China's periphery;

- A growing recognition that likely threats and security concerns to China will emanate from China's southeast and east (the Korean peninsula, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South China Sea, Vietnam, and the U.S. presence in the Pacific);

- A shift of procurement and logistics priorities to reflect these new concepts, with a focus on maritime assets.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is not comfortable with the current American dominated regional security architecture. The Chinese government, particularly the military, is not inclined to tolerate either an indefinite US military presence or strategic pre-eminence in the region.[13] Beijing is sharply critical of what it terms American 'hegemony' and US attempts to create a "unipolar" world. Instead, China seeks a 'multipolar world' in which pre-eminent American power is diluted and constrained – while the United States seeks global leadership and works to expand the family of democracies, market economies, and to build a global-security architecture conducive to stability and favorable to US and Western interests.[14]

In China's most recent White Paper, China's National Defense in 2000, the United States is both directly and indirectly referenced multiple times. One such reference states the U.S.

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[12] Pollack, "In China's Shadow", 19.
[13] Shambaugh, David, "Sino-American Strategic Relations: From Partners To Competitors," Survival, 42.1 (Spring 2000): 97.
[14] Ibid., 98.

is "pursuing 'neo-interventionism', 'neo-gunboat policy', and 'neo-economic colonialism', which are seriously damaging the sovereignty, independence, and developmental interests of many countries, and threatening world peace and security."[15] The White Paper also states, "China is engaged wholeheartedly in its modernization drive. China is firmly pursuing a defensive national defense policy and is determined to safeguard its state sovereignty, national unity, territorial integrity and security."[16] Finally, the White Paper states,"[it will] adopt all drastic measures possible, including the use of force to safeguard China's sovereignty and territorial integrity" and "the PLA unswervingly takes the will of the state as its supreme will and the national interests as its supreme interests."[17]

With China's long term strategic view and perception of an aggressive United States, Chinese military doctrine is shifting toward preparation for a limited war. In anticipation of this limited war, which China expects to take place in its "green water" or "blue water" operating areas, the PRC hopes of containment and winning are based on a modern navy and weaponry. To illustrate this point, in December 1999, General Chi Haotian (Vice Chairman of the Communist Party Central Military Commission) gave this chilling assessment of China's future relations with the United States:

> "Seen from the changes in the world situation and the United States' hegemonic strategy for creating monopolarity, war is inevitable. We cannot avoid it. The issue is that the Chinese armed forces must control the initiative in this war. We must make sure that we win this local high-tech war against aggression and interference; win this modern high-tech war that [the] military bloc, headed by U.S. hegemonists, may launch to interfere in our affairs militarily; and win this war ignited by aggressor countries' sudden offensives against China. We must be prepared to fight for one year, two years, three years or even longer."[18]

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[15]" China's National Defense in 2000"
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Gertz, Bill. The China Threat, How the People's Republic Targets America. (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2000):12.

The "century of shame"[19] still has a great affect on Chinese thinking. China has been focusing heavily on modernization of the PLA to overcome the deficiencies of their long-standing emphasis on a coastal defense. Subsequently, as a result of the Gulf War and its emphasis on the importance of high-tech weaponry, CMC (Central Military Commission) Vice Chairman Liu Huaqing launched a major development effort, designed to enhance the capabilities of China's military forces. So far, the program has stressed the development and deployment of missiles, satellites, naval systems, and modern combat aircraft.[20] Clearly, reliance on advanced science and technology for future weapon systems is their solution to the deficit in their capacity.

Reduction of their obsolete forces and the arrival of more advanced weaponry is well under way with the PLAN receiving the most attention. Despite the PLAN already being a large force among the navies regionally, it is rapidly modernizing its surface, submarine, and air forces, while also planning to build two aircraft carriers [although the latter are currently on hold and linked to the blue water navy timeframe].[21] According to China's National Defense White Paper, "China adheres to building the armed forces by enhancing their quality ... relying on science and technology ... transforming its armed forces from a numerically superior to a qualitatively superior type, and from a manpower intensive to a technology intensive type, as well as ... improve the modernization level of weaponry in order to comprehensively enhance the armed forces' combat effectiveness."[22] The continuous upgrade of PLA capabilities and acquisition of high technology weapons and platforms in

[19] The profound bitterness of the "century of shame" begins with the 1842 Opium wars, when the British government dispatched warships to punish Chinese authorities who tried to prevent British traders from smuggling the banned narcotic into the country, and ends in 1949 after CCP forces prevailed over the Guomindang (Kuomintang – "Nationalist Party') armies to establish the People's Republic of China. Roy, Denny, "Tensions on the Strait," Survival, 42.1 (Spring 2000): 77.
[20] Pollack, "In China's Shadow", 43.
[21] Jensen, Peter, "Chinese Sea Power and American Strategy," Strategic Review, 28.3 (Summer 2000): 19.

their order of battle enforces their stated objectives and is reinforcing their desire to change the "paper dragon"[23] facade of yesterday.

Significant additions, mainly due to improved ties with Russia and Russia's desire for hard currency, include the acquisition of Su-27 and Su-30 aircraft to bolster efforts to acquire better air capability in the region. The economic factor also gives a powerful impetus to Russo-Chinese relations. Moscow, desperate for capital and worried about its troubled military-industrial complex is eager to shower the Chinese with airplanes, tanks, ships, and guns. The Russians believe that "if not Russia then some other country will provide weapons to China, and then we'll [Russia] lose in every respect."[24] Recent arrivals of two Sovremenny-class destroyers with modern anti-ship cruise missiles are major improvements in their surface force. Four Kilo-class attack submarines are a major improvement to their undersea warfare capabilities. China has also built one ballistic missile carrying nuclear submarine (SSBN).

Although the recent acquisition of Russian weaponry is having considerable impact on PLA modernization plans, China desires independence and self-reliance on weapons development.[25] China is trying to build indigenous weapons to counter reliance on other countries. Subsequently, the addition of Chinese designed and built attack and ballistic missile submarines will prove to be critical strengths in the future with their advanced capabilities and new generation of lethal USW weaponry. These forces will augment their

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[22] "China's National Defense in 2000".
[23] Perception during the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait crisis: the Chinese threatened to invade, but backed down after the US sent two aircraft carrier battle groups to the area. Roy, 81.
[24] Pollack, "In China's Shadow", 81.
[25] According to the Nation Defense White paper, China stresses self-reliance as the basis for safeguarding state security. China builds its defense science, technology, and industry, and develops weaponry through self-reliance. "China's National Defense in 2000".

existing surface and subsurface forces and add immensely to their quality despite reduction in numbers.

Sufficient conventional forces are needed to seize territory and control the seas. While modern warfare has proven that while air and missile forces are important, they must be employed with land and sea forces to produce decisive results. However, the limitations of the PLA conventional forces are the main reasons that China has emphasized its missile forces in recent years.[26] Consequently, China's missile force is now substantial with the full spectrum of ICBMs, SLBMs, IRBMs, MRBMs, and SRBMs, and has developed the ability to strike successfully in its "blue water" area. This high-tech capability to strike affects the U.S. military's forward deployed basing options.

The U.S. involvement and achievements in the Arabian Gulf and in Kosovo most likely accelerated China's plan for military modernization and procurement of high technology weapons. Given the above statement, it appears that an arms race with the West may already be in full swing. This leaves the Asian-Pacific region fearing China's effort may lead to conflict or ultimately a showdown with the United States.

Among the countries of the Asian-Pacific region, their consensus may be summarized in three parts:[27]

1. Chinese military power does not currently pose an immediate serious threat to East Asia.
2. If China maintains its current rapid pace of economic development, devotes significant portions of its GNP to military modernization, and builds up its

[26] Blasko, Dennis J. "The Chinese Military: An Assessment," The World & I, (Oct 1999): 336.
[27] Pollack, "In China's Shadow", 44.

power projection capabilities in neighboring waters; it will ultimately become a serious threat within the Asia-Pacific region.

3. A common source of apprehension is the lack of transparency of China's military intentions and developments, particularly in such areas as force redeployments and future weapons development.

In the past, China has incrementally driven towards her objectives whether they were economic or military in nature. This policy has been carefully employed so as not to dissuade world opinion. There is no indication that this course will be altered in the future, which may be pointing towards Chinese military intervention in places like Taiwan or the Spratly Islands. China's military policy involves deception--preventing the U.S. from recognizing the emerging power of China until it is greater, at least regionally, than America's. According to the late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, China must avoid provoking a conflict with the United States--at least until China builds up sufficient military, economic, and political power to win. In the words of Deng, "Hide brightness; nourish obscurity." Or as the official Beijing translation put it, "Bide our time and build up our capabilities." Chinese military writings predict that China's "dangerous decade"--when it faces a strategic checkmate--is the period between 2020 and 2030. PLA planners fear that China will not be powerful enough to take on the United States until 2030.[28]

Despite the best execution of the CINC's theater engagement plan, a peacetime policy to engage the Chinese in economic, political, and limited military arenas, the U.S. military may be forced into a limited war to counter Chinese military actions affecting American national interests in the Asian-Pacific region. The United States cannot ignore this possibility.

[28] Gertz, Bill.. The China Threat: How the People's Republic Targets America (Washington, D.C.:Regnery, 2000), 38-39.

Failure to deliberately plan now may lead to grave results. We cannot afford crisis action planning.

The U.S. needs to focus on new solutions due to reduction in forces and limited base access. Our strength through deterrence may not be realized or optimized if the U.S. cannot support significant military actions in the Asian-Pacific Theater. U.S. influence in the Asian-Pacific theater cannot be realized without a credible level of U.S. military involvement.[29]

Building large navies to numerically oppose the U.S. navy are not in the future plans for the Chinese. Emphasis will be on developing means to limit littoral access to our navy and effectively take us out of the fight. As a result, the U.S. military needs to focus on experimental or innovative solutions to counter denial to the littorals and advanced weaponry. The U.S. military also needs to address the basic tenets of operational art and its relation to the changing American and Chinese centers of gravity. Therefore, as China modernizes it military, the U.S. military needs to redefine PLA centers of gravity and determine our approach to these new definitions.

With a threat of a limited war with China looming over the reunification of Taiwan, natural resources and territorial claims in the Spratly Islands, or another future unknown, the following conceptual plan is offered as a possible course of action in the event of actual hostilities in the region.

Basic Conceptual Plan: The plan is anticipated to support allies of the Asian-Pacific theater in a limited conflict to counter or control (in response to) Chinese aggression.

[29] Pollack, Jonathan D. and James A. Winnefeld, U.S. Strategic Alternatives in a Changing Pacific (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1998): 22.

According to the Chinese, the U.S. would be expected to launch diversified air and missile attacks of the kind used against Yugoslavia and Iraq, albeit at a much higher intensity.[30]

The intermediate goal and highest priority would be protection of our forces while providing requisite support of regional players to rebuff Chinese aggression. Hopefully, this would be accomplished in a timely manner to hinder occupation of sovereign territory by Chinese land forces. This should also be accomplished rapidly to prevent escalation and prevent additional nations from entering into the conflict. The long-term goal is balanced military strength regionally to control aggressive actions by the PLA and to destabilize incumbent PRC leadership in order to promote a democratic society.

Our objective would be neutralization of China's missile and maritime offensive capabilities and eliminate the possibility for Chinese occupation of sovereign lands. Due to the nature and goals of this limited conflict, occupation of the Chinese homeland is not required or desired. Regain vital or national interests and assist in reestablishing order and sovereignty to the nation under China's aggression. Isolate opposition forces if entrenched in non-sovereign Chinese territory.

The desired end state would be a stabilized and peaceful Asian-Pacific theater conducive to global economic growth. Operationally, the end state would have a PLA with limited potential to strike offensively in Asian-Pacific Theater.

The United States' objective is not occupation of the Chinese homeland. Since an invasion into China proper is very unlikely, destruction of land forces is not required and therefore is not the center of gravity. Definition of China's center of gravity is difficult because of the nature of an intended limited conflict. In order to neutralize their offensive

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[30] Bodansky, Yossef. "Has Beijing Resolved To Go To War ?" Defense and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy. March 2000: p.6.

capabilities we must destroy their critical strengths, their most advanced weaponry. This will include their updated submarine force (SSs, SSNs, SSBNs), the advanced SU-27 and SU-30 fighter and attack aircraft, and the newly purchased Sovremenny-class destroyers with their modern anti-ship missiles. Development of a ground based air defense has also assumed critical (defensive strength, affects our ability and air access to inland offensive Chinese attributes) importance to the PLA in the aftermath of the Gulf War and Kosovo air campaigns. This is reflected in the acquisition from Russia of two regiments of the Almaz S-300 (NATO reporting name: SA-10 'Grumble') and one regiment of the Antey Tor-M1 (SA-15 'Gauntlet') air defense systems with discussions on doubling this inventory.[31] One major PLA asset that is difficult to defend against and that has a huge impact in the region is their MRBM and ICBM threat. The missiles should be defined as their center of gravity since China's peripheral countries and our regional bases are basically defenseless against and susceptible to ballistic missile attack due to lack of Theater Missile Defense (TMD). The offensive capability and range of the surface to surface missiles will have a major affect on everything we do militarily in the region. This will result in limiting our offensive capability until the missile threat can be reduced and enable increased basing options with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries such as Philippines. In the past China was not considered a major threat outside of their borders due to their limited reach of the massive number of ground forces (former center of gravity), and critical weaknesses in their green or blue water navy capacity. Border conflicts required the PLA to place emphasis on these land forces. However, with most major land disputes resolved or "in process", China can direct attention and funds elsewhere i.e. the PLAN.

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[31] Karniol, Robert, "Power to the people," Jane's Defense Weekly, 34.2 (12 July 2000): 25.

China's critical weaknesses include satellite imagery for intelligence, airborne early warning, C2W infrastructure, AEW, over the horizon targeting, air superiority, amphibious landing capabilities, training, and SUW, in-flight refueling, and airborne reconnaissance. Knowing this fact, Chinese modernization plans call for major upgrading in these areas. The American centers of gravity are its aircraft carriers due to their offensive potential and platform mobility with respect to PLA missile threat. However, the carriers are critically vulnerable to China's advanced submarine capabilities, especially the Russian procured USW weaponry. Carrier-based aircraft are a critical strength. Fixed base air assets are also critical strengths but critically vulnerable to attack because of limited basing options and their susceptibility to medium range ballistic missile strikes at these regional bases. However, due to the rapidly closing gap between the U.S. and China in technology, advanced fighters, and ECM, air superiority by American pilots cannot to be assumed. The U.S. submarine fleet should prove to be a critical strength in this conflict, although water depth and sound attenuation may be limiting factors. The space and time issues of supporting a regional theater with long air and sea lines of communication also become a critical vulnerability, especially with escalation or time-extended operations. The PLA is more likely capable to engage in a lengthier battle due to much shorter lines of communication, local resources and logistics. Information Warfare will have a significant influence on both the battlefield and at home.

With respect to direction/axis, the United States would need a three pronged attack centered near Taiwan and expanded north and south to isolate China's three main naval bases and their respective North Sea, East Sea, and South Sea Fleets. Our forces would disperse significantly to hinder detection by the PLAN and PLAAF.

Operational Idea (Scheme): A basic course of action (concurrent and sustained):

1. Tomahawk attacks from CVBG assets as well as SSNs, and ALCMs to fixed SRBM, MRBM, and ICBM missile sites and critical radar sites.
2. Air assault by minimum of five CVBGs (one in South China Sea, two near Taiwan, two in East China Sea to align with PLA strengths) and locally forward deployed assets on major military installations, airfields, naval bases, power grids, and C2 nodes.
3. Use submarine assets to mine and blockade major naval bases to eliminate their subsurface and surface forces access to U.S. forces.
4. Continued assault on missile sites, warships, and attack aircraft.
5. Gain air superiority over East China Sea and South China Sea.
6. Gain air superiority over Chinese coastal regions in order to continue assault on mobile missile launchers.
7. Isolate PLA forces.
8. Disrupt internal domestic stability of PRC to advance democracy.

Principals of war:

1. Objective: Neutralization of PLA offensive forces. Sever their air and sea lines of communication. Continue or open diplomatic channels in order to end conflict and regain sovereignty of nation inflicted with China's aggression. Avoid delays which may draw any one of China's "allies" (Russia, Indian, North Korean, Iran, or Iraq) into the fray, which could be overwhelming for our already strained military.

2. Offensive: U.S. forces must constantly keep China in a defensive posture through the three pronged offensive to limit concentration of PLA forces.
3. Mass: The U.S. will need a minimum apportionment of five aircraft carrier battle groups. Forward-deployed U.S. assets from Japan and Korea must be used to add to the mass since limited airfields and ports will be available for basing additional assets.
4. Surprise: Surprise likely will be limited depending on support from foreign intelligence. The initial attack, despite ongoing diplomatic efforts and build-up of American forces, will have to be done rapidly so China cannot deploy significant surface and subsurface forces. The longer we wait the more likely China will be able to identify and target our positions or possibly take the offensive.
5. Economy of force: Efficient use of force is required due to limited U.S. military forces. We must prioritize our targets with respect to offensive threats (their critical strengths) while concurrently eliminating their surface to surface missile capability (center of gravity).
6. Unity of Effort: A well defined command structure is required to accomplish this task. Since US Navy forces will primarily be used (until other services i.e. the Air Force are able to participate), COMSEVENTH Fleet should be the JTF commander for the operation to ensure a synergistic sea and air effort.
7. Security: Security and self-defense of our forces should be our number one priority. We have limited forces so it is imperative that we retain

what we have. A war of attrition is not the intent for this conflict nor would the American public support it. By dispersing our forces and determining the major threat axes, we should be able to defend our battle groups from surface, subsurface, and air threats. The U.S must defend against information warfare designed to dissuade our public opinion and neutralize our force communication infrastructure and weapon technology.

8. Movement: Timeliness for arrival of forces in the area and their sustainment will be very difficult. Detailed logistic plans must be established well in advance of the conflict with contracts for commercial air and ship services already in place. Aircraft Carrier Battle Group deployment schedules will have to be altered to meet minimum apportionment.
9. Simplicity: The three pronged scheme, which would include sub regions of responsibility, should simplify and assist in the coordination and deconfliction of our forces. Water space and airspace management will be very critical to limit blue on blue engagements. Since invasion of China proper and destruction of land forces is not required the three pronged approach should be appropriate and more difficult for China to coordinate and defend against.

The evolution of the conceptual plan is based on anticipated Chinese actions in the Asian-Pacific region and what the CINC may be faced with in the future. Many experts agree that China, as a result of her strong economy, and desire for "green" and "blue" water navies, will modernize sufficiently within the next 10 years to become a formidable threat. Implications

of China's reemergence in the regional and global architecture due to their military modernization must be recognized, not only in the economic and diplomatic arenas, but also in the military arena as well. We cannot count on economic or diplomatic measures, or Chinese domestic instability to forestall a military encounter with the PRC.

The United States can ignore the fact that China will most likely acquire the desired hardware it needs to achieve its objectives. We may incorrectly assume that they may not be able to train, supply, maintain proficiency, or deal with reliability of Western or Russian equipment. We can become complacent with China's military growth and fail to plan. We could continue using today's doctrine, policies, and plans without any significant loss if the PLA doesn't develop into a decisive force. But if we don't anticipate their potential and China does train, become proficient, and materializes into a major military power we will be caught gravely off guard.

This is not an alarmist but rather a realistic point of view. "Misreading a weak China may not do gross literal damage to western interests, but misreading a strong China may lead to far more morbid consequences."[32] This is evident with China and their resolve to "fight until the finish".[33]

Hopefully, as the result of a successful theater engagement plan, a military confrontation with China will not take place. However, one confidential Chinese government report leaked to the Hong Kong press in 1997 predicted a future war between China and the United States over Taiwan:

"With the return of Hong Kong and Macao to Chinese rule, The Taiwan issue will inevitably become China's major event around 2010. If the United States uses force to

[32] Xiang, 44.

[33] On March 21, 2000, official Beijing issued the first public communiqué reflecting this mindset to fight to the finish if Washington was bent on confrontation regarding the imminent and inevitable reunification with Taiwan. Bodansky, 6.

meddle in China's sovereignty and internal affairs, China will certainly fight a war against aggression, thus leading to a limited Sino-U.S. war.[34]

It is imperative that the U.S. gains access to regional land bases and deep-water ports. Without access to airfields and ports, sustaining logistics and the synergistic effect of additional forces will not be realized. U.S. Navy assets cannot and should not accomplish this task alone. Knowing this, China may possibly try to influence and deter Asian-Pacific countries from providing necessary territory and cooperation to United States forces. If so, the U.S. may not have any assets in East Asia and would lose the ability to fight limited regional wars similar to the Gulf War. The U.S. would have to choose between no war—in other words, acquiescing to China in a confrontation—and world war.[35]

With the incremental approach in mind, "China's always pragmatic rulers know well that decisions made today by U.S. defense planners, under the mistaken notion that China poses no threat in the future, will prevent the United States from preparing for the challenge from China in the crucial decades up to 2030. Weapons systems being designed and researched today must anticipate the threats of tomorrow."[36]

Our impetus to contain aggressive foes must be met head on or the United States will lose credibility worldwide. We cannot take our military strength for granted. We cannot rely on a reputation for deterrence if it weak. Our downsizing, aging weaponry, lower readiness, and reduction of overseas bases leaves us critically vulnerable to a constantly improving and modernizing China. This leaves us with very difficult task ahead, which must emphasize planning and procurement in the long term and quickness, efficiency, proficiency, and unity of effort in the short term. The United States must maintain and build up its military power,

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[34] Gertz, 8.
[35] Bernstein, Richard and Ross H. Munro,, The Coming Conflict with China, (New York: A.A. Knopf and Random House, 1997): 217.

following the same strategy adopted by President Ronald Reagan that left the Soviet Union in ruins: peace through strength.[37]

To answer the basic question of this paper, "yes", the United States needs to redefine the Chinese centers of gravity, develop operational plans, and analyze those plans for deficiencies in force structure so we may budget and procure appropriate assets for a military response if necessary. Hopefully, through foresight we will deliberately plan for this contingency and be able to deal with the PRC militarily in the future.

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[36] Gertz, 13.
[37] Ibid., 14.

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