

China's Naval Modernisation Since 2013: Implications for Regional Security

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Abstract

The current pace of People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) modernisation drive manifests China's intentions for the future outlook of the Asia Pacific region. It is not only employing sophisticated weapon systems in service of PLAN to improve its efficiency but also reforming its military doctrine to cope with the current geopolitical and geostrategic realities of the region. On the one hand, China is flexing its muscles to expand its sphere of influence while on the other hand, it is trying to deny reach of the rival powers to its backyard. A closer analysis of the pattern of weapon acquisition by PLAN, and its A2AD and Offensive Defense policy divulge its strategy of regional domination which has security implications for the regional states. Drawing on the Offensive Realism theory, this paper analyses the PLAN struggle for absolute security by developing both offensive and defensive weapons. It further looks into geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic complexities and, the overall regional security architecture being affected by the rapid PLAN modernisation drive.

Keywords

PLAN, Naval Modernisation, Offensive Defence, Regional Dominance, South China Sea, Maritime Security.

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Introduction

After achieving victory in 1949 in its fight against nationalist forces, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was formally moulded into a professional army by establishing its Air Force and Navy wings. This was done to improve the standing of the PLA among the regional armies. At the time of its inception, it was an obsolete force with dilapidated weapons, technology and training—China focused on numerical strength rather than qualitative capabilities. But, after the Gulf War and the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996, it was struck by the reality that to secure itself, it needed a capable force that could effectively thwart any threat and minimise the power imbalance with other major powers. Therefore, the CCP started the military modernisation efforts in the 90s and later Premier Xi Jinping catalysed it at such a pace that China is now hedging for regional hegemony.¹

China, being a claimant for the vast maritime region, understands the significance of a powerful naval force and is thus moving towards the establishment of an invincible naval force by employing sophisticated, hi-tech weapons in the service of its Navy. Recently it has developed aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, and amphibious assault ships to conduct distant operations and prevent adversaries from intruding into its waters and mainland. Moreover, it focuses on developing weapons that could neutralise the lethality of the adversary's force. For instance, its anti-ship missiles such as DF-21 have the capability to deceive the radar system of adversary's ships and thus jeopardise their security.

Under Xi's leadership, China is spending heavily to modernise its naval forces, according to RAND Corporation, China's naval force has almost 70 percent modern ships compared to 50 percent in 2010.² Moreover, it has expanded impressively in terms of number of ships it possesses. However, it still lags behind the US in terms of the number of

¹ Defense Intelligence Agency, "China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win Wars," *Defense Intelligence Agency* (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019), accessed January 17, 2023.

² David Lague, "China's Vast Fleet Is Tipping the Balance against U.S. in the Pacific," *Reuters*, April 30, 2019, accessed November 17, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-army-navy/>.

aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines. Though PLAN is the largest Navy in the world in terms of the number of ships, yet it has to travel a long way to achieve the status of a pre-eminent naval power.³

Transformation of Chinese navy: theoretical reasoning

The best explanation for the modernisation efforts of PLAN is mainly provided by the theoretical proposition of Alfred Thayer Mahan's Sea Power Theory, Monroe Doctrine (1823) and Mearsheimer's prediction of transforming economic power into military power (Offensive Realism).⁴

In his theoretical proposition, Mearsheimer contends that great powers are always sceptical of the intentions of other great powers. They always go for relative gain in order to achieve complete security. In his hegemonic model, he further holds that global hegemony is almost impossible and thus holds that great powers initially establish regional dominance in their respective regions and try to prevent other great powers from achieving dominance in their respective regions. Similarly, Alfred Thayer Mahan contends that without a powerful naval force, it is almost impossible to constrain the expansion of rival powers. In his analysis of Britain's rise to global power, the epicentre of its strength was the powerful Navy that it possessed at that time.⁵ Monroe, the US President in 1823, also argues in his doctrine that without successful thwarting of great powers from interference in the affairs of the regional great powers, regional dominance is almost impossible. Drawing on these propositions this paper analyses the Chinese naval build-up in the Asia Pacific region and its implications for the overall regional security architecture and national security of the regional states.

³ Michael Nixon et al., "The US-China Military Score Card: Forces Geography and the Evolving Balance of Power 1996-2017," *RIND Corporation* (RAND Corporation, 2017), accessed November 17, 2023, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR300/RR392/RAND_RR392.pdf.

⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

⁵ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Asia Pacific is an extremely significant region and is the centre stage of contemporary global politics. This region possesses geo-economic and geo-strategic importance as it provides energy transportation and trading routes for many regional states and global powers. Besides this, this region is extremely rich in natural resources. Domination of such a region by any single power will have severe consequences for the economic and energy security of many states. China is currently working in the direction of successfully dominating the region. To counter it, the Trump administration framed an 'Indo-Pacific policy'⁶ in collaboration with Australia, Japan and India to deter China from altering the traditional status quo.⁷ Similarly, the Biden administration's policy is a continuation of his predecessor's policy wherein Biden considers China a revisionist power and a threat to the US interests. Its policy mainly revolves around three pillars— allies, values and technological advancement. The US considers itself on high moral ground in these areas and is trying to further consolidate its position by putting China on the back foot.⁸

By closely analysing China's military modernisation drive, it is evident that China is following Mearshiemer's and Thayer Mahan's propositions and Monroe's doctrine under the policy of A2AD and Offensive Defence with excessive care and contemplation for others, to attract minimal aggression from other major powers and successfully attain regional hegemony. President Xi has called upon the PLA "to prepare for the military struggle for all strategic directions". His three-step plan— making PLA a fully mechanised force by 2020, a modernised force by 2035 and a world first-class force by 2050 is the manifestation

⁶ N.d. (U) (U) U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific, US Government (accessed December 26, 2023, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IPS-Final-Declass.pdf>).

⁷ Roger Cliff, "A New U.S. Strategy for the Indo-Pacific," *The National Bureau of Asian Research* (The National Bureau of Asian Research, June 16, 2020), accessed February 4, 2023, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/a-new-u-s-strategy-for-the-indo-pacific/>.

⁸ Gu Guo-Ping, "Three Pillars in the Biden Administration's China Strategy: Allies, Values, and High-Tech," *International Relations and Diplomacy* 10, no. 6 (December 28, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.17265/2328-2134/2022.06.004>.

of his ambitions for PLA.⁹ In such a competitive environment China has to have a clear strategic policy, a strong Navy and a will to protect its interests at any cost. To achieve these ends, China has developed Anti Access Area Denial (A2AD)—a Chinese version of Monroe doctrine and, “Active Defence”.¹⁰

Though the available literature provides a multi-dimensional approach to China’s military modernisation efforts and unveils different aspects of it, but it does not provide a detailed pattern of how China is modernising its naval force and what is the strategic thinking behind the Chinese pursuit of specific weapon systems for warships. The available studies primarily look into the great powers rivalry in the Asia Pacific region while ignoring the implications of the growing competitive security environment on the security of regional states. However, this article attempts to provide a detailed account of the pattern of the Chinese quest for specific weapons and the implications of the increasingly powerful PLAN for the security of regional states.

An account of China’s naval modernisation

Acquisition of aircraft carriers - dominance at sea: Being overwhelmed by the US military power in the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996, China intensified its efforts to achieve naval power to deter such incidents in the future. It bought Australian-built Melbourne and the Soviet-built “Minsk, Varyag and Kyiv” to modify it into a functional aircraft carrier. Further, it raised indigenous expertise in the field of manufacturing aircraft carriers which has yielded the results in the form of Liaoning and Shandong. This programme acquired the focus of the Central Military Committee (CMC) in 2005 and, eventually, China announced the commissioning of its first aircraft carrier in 2009.¹¹

⁹ Defense Intelligence Agency, “China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win Wars,” *Defense Intelligence Agency* (Washington DC, United States of America: Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019), accessed January 27, 2023.

¹⁰ Wu Shicun and Jayanath Colombage, “Indo-Pacific Strategy and China’s Response,” *Institute for China America Studies* (Institute of China America Studies, October 2019), accessed May 2, 2023.

¹¹ Andrew Scobell, Michael McMahon, and Cortez A. Cooper III, “China’s Aircraft Carrier Program: Drivers, Developments, Implications,” *Naval War College Review* 68, no. 4 (2015): 65–79.

Liaoning, Shandong and Fujian: Liaoning, the first commissioned aircraft carrier by PLAN, can displace 58,000 tons of weight and is powered by a diesel engine.¹² Technologically it is no match to the US ships but it is certainly an icon in the PLAN. Its 304-meter-long deck can accommodate up to 50 fixed and rotatory wing aircraft and thus provides China the opportunity to assert itself in distant waters.¹³ Moreover, it is equipped with Flying Leopard 3000 Naval (FL3000N) missile system, Type1030 Close-in Weapon System (CIWS) and an anti-submarine rocket launcher.¹⁴ In the domain of surveillance, it has 3D surface-air and four multi-purpose active phased array radars (APAR).¹⁵ Although these capabilities are much weaker than those of the US aircraft carriers, still these make the Chinese Navy an advanced naval force regionally.¹⁶ Similarly, Shandong is a copy of the previously developed Liaoning with certain extra space for the aircraft.¹⁷

Recently, China has launched its third aircraft carrier, the Fujian. It is its first completely indigenously developed design and is equipped with Electromagnetic Catapult Assisted Take off Barrier Arrested Recovery (CATOBAR). Moreover, it is diesel powered with a capacity for J20 and, Air Borne Early Warning and Control (AEWC) aircraft. Such a facility on the high seas is indeed an impactful strategic asset that provides China with a power projection capability in the Asia Pacific region.¹⁸

¹² "Liaoning (Varyag) Aircraft Carrier, China," Naval Technology, accessed December 27, 2023, <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/varyag-aircraft-carrier-china/>.

¹³ "Liaoning (Varyag) Aircraft Carrier."

¹⁴ "Liaoning (Varyag) Aircraft Carrier."

¹⁵ Franz-Stefan Gady, "China's 1st Carrier Strike Group Reaches Initial Operational Capability," *The Diplomat*, June 5, 2018, accessed April 19, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/chinas-1st-carrier-strike-group-reaches-initial-operational-capability/#:~:text=The%20carrier%20strike%20group%20led,Chinese%20Ministry%20of%20National%20Defense.>

¹⁶ Benjamin Brimelow, "China Is Getting Ready to Field Its 3rd Aircraft Carrier — Here's Why It's No Match for US Flattops," *Business Insider*, October 8, 2020, accessed April 23, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-chinas-aircraft-carriers-compare-to-us-navy-flattops-2020-10.>

¹⁷ Robert C. Rubel, "An Assessment of Chinese Aircraft Carrier Aviation," in *China's Evolving Surface Fleet* (CMSI Red Books, 2017), 81–93, [https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=cmsi-red-books.](https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=cmsi-red-books)

¹⁸ Matthew P. Funairole, Joseph S. Bermudez Jr, and Brian Hart, "China's Third Aircraft Carrier Takes Shape," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, March 11, 2022, accessed June

PLAN's submarines project - struggle for greater outreach:

Along with aircraft carriers, submarines also play an important role in power projection and greater outreach in waters. Although China has been trying to acquire submarines since the 1950s but, success came its way from 1962 to 1984 and later. Initially, it developed Romeo Type-33 attack submarines and Ming Class Type-35 submarines. In the field of nuclear submarines, China's first success was the development of Xia Class Type-092 (SSBN) in 1987 and thus it speeded up its journey to achieve excellence in this field. Currently, China has been successful in developing submarines equipped with Air Independent Propulsion Systems (AIP) and has a fleet of 58 submarines consisting of Ballistic Missile Submarines (SSBNs), Diesel-electric attack submarines (SSKs) and Nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs).¹⁹ It has concluded an agreement with Russia to secure Amur Class diesel attack submarines to diversify the strength of its submarine fleet.²⁰

China's rationale behind its submarine capability is to attain second-strike nuclear capability and to march further to the second chain of islands.²¹ However, the US still is on a high technical footing in the field of submarines and poses a persistent threat to Chinese security and interests.²²

Anti-submarine warfare - denying adversary's reach to its backyard: To attain the status of a regional hegemon, a state has to deter the interference of foreigners in its region. John. J Mearsheimer rightly quotes the example of the Monroe Doctrine—which had envisioned a

29, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-third-aircraft-carrier-takes-shape#:~:text=Work%20on%20the%20Type%20003,deck%20is%20now%20partially%20complete>.

¹⁹ NTI, "China Submarine Capabilities," Data set, The Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI, March 6, 2023), <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/china-submarine-capabilities/#:~:text=China%20possesses%20six%20operational%20Jin,carry%2012%20JL%2D2%20SLBMs>.

²⁰ NTI, "China Submarine Capabilities."

²¹ NTI, "China Submarine Capabilities," Data set, *The Nuclear Threat Initiative* (NTI, March 6, 2023), <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/china-submarine-capabilities/#:~:text=China%20possesses%20six%20operational%20Jin,carry%2012%20JL%2D2%20SLBMs>.

²² Department of Defense, "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020," *Department of Defense Media* (Department of Defense, 2020), accessed July 3, 2023, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

strategic direction for the US to build a powerful Navy—for the establishment of US supremacy in the Pacific and American continent. Mearshiemer's hegemonic mode provides a framework for Chinese ventures. Assessing the Chinese military modernisation in this context makes it evident that China is following exactly the same route. It is developing anti-submarine warfare capabilities to deter others from entering its claimed waters. Moreover, it is diversifying and enhancing its maritime patrolling and surveillance capability by inducting advanced surveillance aircraft such as Z-18 and Z-20 and, employing Unarmed Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for locating adversary's submarines.²³ Its anti-submarine Corvettes (Type-056A) further expand the option for China in anti-submarine warfare manoeuvrability.²⁴ Moreover, its H10 missile launchers, ZKJ-5 system and its towed sonar multiplies its lethality by providing a compact communication and surveillance system.²⁵

Frigates - deterring local wars: PLAN's design of ships acquisition makes it evident that China wants to surpass the adversary's naval might by developing high-tech and advanced weapons that could enable it to successfully assert its power in the near seas and create a credible image of its power projection in the far seas. Previously, China possessed Type-054 Jinkai Class frigates which were competitive but, the development of Type-054A and its advanced version 054B has taken its frigates fleet to a new level of technological advancement. Its weapon systems consists of HQ-10 surface-to-air missiles, YJ-83 anti-ship missiles, anti-submarine warfare torpedoes and rocket launchers (Type-87).²⁶ Besides these, it has a 76mm main gun and indigenously developed Type-730 CIWS. Its radar system consists of RM1290 navigation radar

²³ Lyle J. Goldstein, "China Is Doing All It Can to Make Sure It Can Kill U.S. Submarines," *The National Interest*, November 15, 2020, accessed June 6, 2023, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/china-doing-all-it-can-make-sure-it-can-kill-us-submarines-172600>.

²⁴ Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2023), accessed June 8, 2023, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL33153.pdf>.

²⁵ Martin Manaranche, "China Commissioned Its Ninth Type 056 Corvette So Far in 2020," *Naval News*, June 23, 2020, accessed June 23, 2023, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/06/china-commissioned-its-ninth-type-056-corvette-so-far-in-2020/>.

²⁶ Derek Grossman, "Military Build-Up in the South China Sea," in *The South China Sea: From a Regional Maritime Dispute to Geo-Strategic Competition* (London: Routledge, 2020), 182–200, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429331480>.

and MGK 335 active/passive sonar which increase its capacity to detect objects in deep and bumpy waters. Moreover, its main deck enables Kamov KA-28 helix and Harbin Z-9C helicopters to operate from it and help in locating submarines and transportation of armed personnel.²⁷

Destroyers - patrolling distant strategic islands: PLAN journey of Destroyers starts from the commissioning of Type-52C in 2004-5 but the indigenously developed Type-055 manifests its real Destroyer power. These ships are extremely advanced technologically, powered by QC-280 and equipped with surface-to-air missiles, anti-ballistic missiles, anti-submarine rockets and land attack cruise missile systems. Its radar system contains an S-band array that can detect the stealthiest targets; an X-band radar that improves its ability to detect low-flying objects; and a 364-B planner array that can detect objects beyond 400-kms. These destroyers have the capacity for the accommodation of Z-19 helicopters which are used in anti-submarine warfare. These specifications provide much proof about the lethality of this ship and its significance for the Chinese Navy in its objective of power projection.²⁸

PLAN's amphibious assault ships - scrambling for distant operations: China, being an ambitious global power, prioritises to secure its vicinity first.²⁹ Amphibious assault ships open options for it to proactively deter regional states from falling prey to the strategic manoeuvres of its rival powers. Taiwan, in this regard, has remained a crucial issue for the CMC. Currently, the US is not adhering to One China policy in letter and spirit. China is countering it diplomatically but hasn't given up the option of forceful annexation. Another factor that makes amphibious assault ships 'a must-have ship' is the overall security

²⁷ Michael McDevitt, "China's Far Sea's Navy: The Implications of the 'Open Seas Protection' Mission Revised and Updated April 2016," Paper, *Center for Naval Analysis* (Arlington, Virginia, United States of America.), https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/china-far-seas-navy.pdf.

²⁸ Daniel Caldwell Caldwell, Joseph Freda, and Lyle J. Goldstein, "China Maritime Report No. 5: China's Dreadnought? The PL Eadnought? The PLA Navy's Type 055 Cruiser and Its Implications for the F Type 055 Cruiser and Its Implications for the Future Maritime Security Environment," *US Naval War College Digital Commons* (Chinese Maritime Studies Institute, February 2020), accessed July 2, 2013, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=cmsi-maritime-reports>.

²⁹ J. Blasko, Dennis. 2022. "China Maritime Report No. 20: The PLA Army Amphibious Force." 20. *Digital Commons*. China Maritime Study Institute. Accessed December 12, 2023. <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=cmsi-maritime-reports>.

environment in the Asia Pacific region. Keeping these factors in mind, the Chinese naval strategists have opted for an amphibious assault ship to secure its interest in the region and beyond.³⁰ It will help PLAN to dampen Taiwan's ambitions for independence, provide it with multiple combat engagement options and enable it to occupy the uninhabited islands in the SCS and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).³¹

Currently, China has two classes of amphibious assault ships – Type071 and the latest Type075. These are equipped with advanced radars and sonar systems, and are capable of accommodating, vertical landing aircraft, surveillance helicopters and gunship helicopters.³²

PLAN's naval aviation: eye in the sea - PLAN's aviation is criticised for being underpowered and obsolete yet, being an eye on the seas, it provides the much-needed surveillance, air combat options, and capacity to assist the navy conducting successful operations. PLAN is actively working on the enhancement of capabilities of its aviation unit under the policies of 'Active defence', 'A2AD' and 'Informationisation', to respond to this criticism. PLAN Aviation possesses the best capabilities in the region comprising attack aircraft, surveillance aircraft, and transport helicopters.³³ Its aircraft carriers allow J10 and J15 attack aircraft, and Z8/KA31 AEWs helicopters to operate from its deck.³⁴ In addition to that, Chinese navy plan to commission J20 in its naval air arm and replace Z18F and Z18J with more advanced multi-role helicopters

³⁰ Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2023), accessed June 8, 2023, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL33153.pdf>.

³¹ Derek Grossman, "Military Build-Up in the South China Sea," in *The South China Sea: From a Regional Maritime Dispute to Geo-Strategic Competition* (London: Routledge, 2020), 182–200, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429331480>.

³² Sebastien Roblin, "China's 3 Helicopter Carriers Are Here to Stay: Paper Tiger or Super Weapon?" *The National Interest*, September 29, 2019, accessed July 10, 2023, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/chinas-3-helicopter-carriers-are-here-stay-paper-tiger-or-super-weapon-73831>.

³³ Benjamin Brimelow, "China Is Getting Ready to Field Its 3rd Aircraft Carrier — Here's Why It's No Match for US Flattops," *Business Insider*, October 8, 2020, accessed April 23, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-chinas-aircraft-carriers-compare-to-us-navy-flattops-2020-10>.

³⁴ Humphrys, Matt. 2023. "China's High-Altitude Heliports: Examining PLA Helicopter Force Changes." Masters Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University.

such as Z10 and Z20 will further enhance its surveillance capabilities³⁵. Despite all this, China's naval aviation lags far behind its adversary's naval aviation capabilities, for instance, the US has F-35 vertical landing aircrafts in its naval service which alone can outclass the whole Chinese naval aviation assets. To become a regional power, China has to enhance its naval aviation capabilities to at least on equal footing with that of the US.³⁶

Anti-ship missiles - deterring dominant adversary's naval force: The US Indo-Pacific commander Admiral Phil Davidson admitted in his statement to the Senate armed services committee "Our conventional superiority in the Indo-Pacific region is eroding". The reason for such a pessimistic statement was the testing of DF21D and DF26 anti-ship ballistic missiles.³⁷

PLAN is comprehensively working on its intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities to improve the accuracy of its weapons and improve the manoeuvrability in the busy waters of SCS, IOR and East China Sea (ECS).³⁸ Recently, China has increased the use of such technologically advanced missiles in PLAN exercises which, is indeed a clear message to other powers to refrain from interfering in China's domain in case of a regional crisis and thus shaping its A2AD manoeuvrability. In addition to this, China is developing HN-2000, a missile with an advanced navigational system with extremely high precision and, a ship-launched version of DH-10- which will enable

³⁵ Minnie Chan, "What a Hull Number Reveals about China's Big New Amphibious Warship," *Business Insider*, May 10, 2021, accessed February 19, 2023, https://www.businessinsider.com/chinese-type-075-amphibious-warship-on-par-with-aircraft-carrier-2021-5?utm_source=flipboard&utm_content=Daiyang1%2Fmagazine%2FNaval+Power.

³⁶ Kris Osborn, "China & Russia Do Not Have an F-35B-like 5th-Gen Vertical Take-Off Stealth Ocean Attack," *Warrior Maven: Center for Military Modernization*, July 6, 2023, accessed July 9, 2023, <https://warriormaven.com/sea/china-russia-do-not-have-an-f-35b-like-5th-gen-vertical-take-off-stealth-ocean-attack>.

³⁷ Anthony Capaccio and Peter Martin, "U.S. Cites Threat to Carriers from Chinese Anti-Ship Missile," *Bloomberg.Com*, March 9, 2021, accessed July 12, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-09/china-tested-top-anti-ship-missile-in-drill-u-s-admiral-says>.

³⁸ Felix K. Chang, "China's Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile Capability in the South China Sea - Foreign Policy Research Institute," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, May 24, 2021, accessed July 13, 2023, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/05/chinas-anti-ship-ballistic-missile-capability-in-the-south-china-sea/>

PLAN to target adversary's ships and aircraft carriers anywhere in the seas.³⁹

Implications of PLAN's modernisation efforts on the regional security:

With the economic rise of China, its overseas interests are also rising rapidly. Regional states are increasingly becoming dependent on trade with the Chinese while at the same time fearing the military rise of China. The states in East Asia had independent economic systems; however, the 1997 crisis brought about drastic changes in the pattern of economic affairs of the region. Japan and the US disagreed on the nature of the economic crisis; the US blamed Crony Capitalism for the crisis while Japan was of the opinion that it was due to liquidity and monetary problems. This dissent resulted in the formation of the Asian Monetary Programme. This crisis opened the way for China to become a formal member of WTO and it could now propagate its economic model in the world. China benefitted from this opportunity and emerged as an economic giant in the world.⁴⁰ To protect its growing economic interests and its maritime trade, it was imperative for China to modernise its navy.

Implications for the security of Japan: Japan, being an ally of the US, is heavily dependent on the US for its security. Although, the US has guaranteed the security of Japan under the US-Japan Agreement of 1952⁴¹. Yet, this alone cannot fulfil its security needs given the growing assertiveness of China by building strategic capabilities in the SCS. The US-Japan alliance serves the security need of Japan but this too has limitations in face of China's rapidly growing outreach in the region. As

³⁹ Ian Easton, "The Assassin under the Radar: China's DH-10 Cruise Missile Program," *Project 2049 Institute*, June 1, 2018, accessed July 19, 2023, https://project2049.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/assassin_under_radar_china_cruise_missile.pdf.

⁴⁰ Iram Khalid and Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, "Rise of China: Global Order and the Region," *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology* 17, no. 9 (2020): 8212–32, <https://archives.palarch.nl/index.php/jae/article/download/5746/5639/11208>.

⁴¹ Blinken, Antony, Lloyd Austin, Yoshimasa Hayashi, and Yasukazu Hamada. 2023. "Joint Statement of the 2023 U.S.–Japan Security Consultative Committee ('2+2')." Press release. January 11, 2023. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3265559/joint-statement-of-the-2023-usjapan-security-consultative-committee-22/>.

a result, Japan is looking for more concrete steps to balance the Chinese threat –the number one adversary of Japan⁴².

Japan has employed a two-dimension policy— strengthening diplomacy and economy, and reviving the Self Defence Force (SDF) - to secure itself from the perceived Chinese assertiveness. It is countering the Chinese policy of fighting and winning the local wars under ‘Informationised’ conditions by developing the domains of cyber security, space security and the electromagnetic spectrum to secure its data, communication and detection of strategic assets.⁴³

Japan has close economic relations with both the US and China and cannot opt for either of the two in its competing economic and security interest. However it fears that China’s quest to become a regional power will undermine its security. In future, Japan may reconsider its US centric foreign policy to establish some sort of neutrality that serves its interests and ensures its security without further provocation of China.⁴⁴

Taiwan question and Chinese military posture: Taiwan, being an unresolved issue for China, occupies much of its strategic thinking and military efforts. While on the other hand, Taiwan seeks international support for the declaration of its independence. This posture of Taiwan infuriates China as it wants the gradual absorption of Taiwan into its mainland, given its strategic importance.

Geo-strategically, Taiwan is located at the entrance of the First Chain of Islands and its permanent loss will certainly have security and economic consequences for China. By controlling Taiwan, China can shift its complete attention to the Nine-Dash Line where it wants to control the trade of regional allies of the US and secure free navigation of

⁴² Sameer Patil, “China’s Military Modernization – Analysis,” *Euroasia Review*, April 3, 2022, accessed July 21, 2023, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/03042022-chinas-military-modernization-analysis/>.

⁴³ Masaaki, YATSUZUKA. 2020. “PLA’s Intelligentized Warfare: The Politics on China’s Military Strategy.” *Anzenhosho Senryaku Kenkyu* 1 (2): 17–36. <https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/security/pdf/2022/01/05.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Feng Liu and Kai He, “China’s Bilateral Relations, Order Transition, and the Indo-Pacific Dynamics,” *China Review*, February 2023, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/48717987.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A4226252dd184ed37c882f6c70c39a66c&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1.

its own ships.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the US is closely working with its allies in East Asia to stem its relative economic slide and, for this, it is providing diplomatic and technical support to Taiwan and strengthening advocacy of the values of the liberal world. Additionally, the US has some of its largest trading partners in East Asia which is vital for the economic growth of the US and the complete control of Taiwan by China may disrupt regional trade which could harm the US economy massively.⁴⁶

For its strategic and symbolic value, China is trying to control Taiwan diplomatically but it has not given up the military options. If China's core interests are threatened, it will not hesitate to annex Taiwan by the use of force. Chinese premier Xi Jinping's statement on the US interference in the affairs of Taiwan that 'those who play with fire are perished by it' provides an insight into vision for the future of Taiwan⁴⁷. On the other hand, the US wants to continue diplomatic support, economic and military aid to Taiwan to create a Ukraine-like state in the Asia Pacific region. The recent military aid by the US for Taiwan under the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) — military aid designed for sovereign states has two dimensions: supporting Taiwan militarily; and extending implied recognition of its sovereignty.⁴⁸

China in the divided Korean Peninsula: China and North Korea have been enjoying a roller-coaster relationship since the Korean War.⁴⁹ But after the failure of the Six Parties Talks, China softened its

⁴⁵ Lowy Institute, "China's Nine-Dash Line Proves Stranger than Fiction," *The Interpreter*, April 12, 2022, accessed September 16, 2023, [China's nine-dash line proves stranger than fiction | Lowy Institute](https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/china-nine-dash-line-proves-stranger-than-fiction)

⁴⁶ Emma Chanlett-Avery et al., "U.S.-Japan Relations," *Congressional Research Service* (Congressional Research Service, September 12, 2023), accessed September 14, 2023, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF10199.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Steve Holland, Michael Martina, and Ryan Woo, "Don't 'play with Fire' over Taiwan, China's Xi Warns in Call with Biden," *Reuters*, July 29, 2022, accessed September 17, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/biden-looks-tamp-down-taiwan-tension-during-china-xi-call-2022-07-28/>.

⁴⁸ Matthew Lee and Aamer Madhani, "China Objects as US Approves Military Aid to Taiwan under Program Aimed at Sovereign Nations | AP News," *AP News*, August 31, 2023, accessed September 19, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/us-military-aid-taiwan-sovereign-one-china-policy-23dbe7da92c63bc33e93f95ab09b7f2b>.

⁴⁹ Eleanor Albert, "The China–North Korea Relationship," *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 25, 2019, accessed September 23, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-north-korea-relationship>.

stance against North Korea mainly for two strategic reasons: first, it wanted a strong and pro-China North Korea on its North Eastern border for the economic imperatives of its North Eastern provinces; and second, it wanted to limit the access of the US to its borders. The strategic thinking behind such a move was, to counter the US presence in South Korea through balancing of security architecture of the Korean Peninsula by strengthening North Korea.⁵⁰

China occasionally employs coercive means to limit South Korean engagement with its natural adversary. For instance, China warned South Korea not to enter into a formal security alliance with the US and, warned it of the consequences of any further cooperation in the wake of deployment of the THAAD missile defence systems in South Korea which the Chinese consider as a threat to their nuclear deterrent.⁵¹

South China Sea - A strategic hotspot: Geo-economically, SCS is a resource-rich region with a massive amount of hydro-carbon reserves and fisheries. According to the US Energy Information Administration, the region possesses approximately 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Besides this, the region is a rich source of marine economy and has the five largest fishing zones which contribute about 12 percent of the world's harvested fish. Such a resource-rich region is vital for the food security and economic prosperity of China and of ample economic significance for its 300 billion dollar economy directly linked with SCS.⁵²

Geo-strategically, this region is important for China and the US. Main trading arteries, SLOC and, Choke Points are present in this region. About 5.3 trillion dollars trade passes through this region every year including about 1.2 trillion dollars trade of the US. According to the

⁵⁰ Chu Shulong and Lin Xinzhu, "The Six Party Talks: A Chinese Perspective," *Asian Perspective* 32, no. 4 (2008): 29–43, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42704652>.

⁵¹ J Meick, Ethan, and Nargiza Salidjanova. 2017. "China's Response to U.S.-South Korean Missile Defense System Deployment and Its Implications." U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. Accessed December 11, 2023. https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Report_China%27s%20Response%20to%20THAAD%20Deployment%20and%20its%20Implications.pdf.

⁵² Asyura Salleh et al., "The South China Sea: Realities and Responses in Southeast Asia," *Asia Society* (The Asia Society Policy Institute, 2021), accessed September 19, 2023, <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/south-china-sea-realities-and-responses-southeast-asia>.

World Energy Outlook, about 90 percent of Middle Eastern oil passes through this region— fuelling the industries of China, Japan, and South Korea. Moreover, regional states' energy and trade security is dependent on this region and any disruption in the supply chain of energy or trade will have detrimental consequences for the regional economy.⁵³

Geo-politically, this region provides better strategic options for those who dominate it. For instance, China is actively pursuing its maritime trade route policy to secure its trade and energy supplies. Besides this, China is establishing artificial islands, occupying uninhabited islands and denying the reach of other states to its claimed islands in order to successfully craft its image as regional dominant power. This, in return, will provide China options to regulate and dominate regional trade and to counterbalance those states that are not on good terms with it. Such ambitious Chinese goals cannot be achieved without having a powerful Navy.

Conclusion

The change in global economic and power dynamics during the last decade has changed the pattern of pursuit of power and strategic interests. China, being a rising global power, is in active competition both regionally and globally to not only secure its interests but cement the pillars of its security to an extent where it feels completely secure. This posture of China was predicted by Mearsheimer in 2014 in his article “Can China Rise Peacefully?” based on his argumentation for the rise of America. He concludes that securing the economic interests of China, which are ever-expanding, will eventually compel it to have a strong force that could effectively look after its economic and strategic interests. Currently, China is following exactly the same pathway under the doctrine of A2AD— a Chinese version of Monroe doctrine— and Offensive Defence.

On the other hand, the US wants to secure its allies and trade in East Asia and is continuously getting involved in the East Asian affairs

⁵³ Todd Moulton, “Preventing War in the South China Sea,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, August 1, 2022, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3111133/preventing-war-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

to contain the rising China. This has pushed China to compete with the US and hence to increase its military power, in particular its maritime power, to the extent that regional countries are unable to balance the Chinese power. All of the East Asian allies of the US are heavily dependent on it for their survival and security. In such a critical security architecture of the Asia Pacific region, building up of its naval strength is critical for the Chinese to safeguard their economic and geo-strategic interests. Chinese are also wary of the emerging alliances/partnerships such as Quad – including US, Japan, India and Australia; and AUKUS that involves Australia, the UK and the US, with the explicit goal of checkmating a rising China and to constrain its geo-strategic and geo-economic ambitions in the Asia Pacific Region.