Chapter Three

China’s Maritime Strategy
**Introduction**

The most important motive for developing sea power is overseas trade. In the structure of a nation’s economy if overseas trade is not a significant component, there is no foundation for developing and sustaining sea power. In recent decades, as the overseas trade component in China’s economy has greatly increased, the question of a ‘life line at sea’ has become increasingly important, which has in turn made the establishment of a strong sea power an imperative. If a country with an ‘outward-leaning’ economy is vulnerable at sea its domestic prosperity will also be at stake (Ni Lexiong 2005: 1-2).

Building a strong fleet has been seen as a part of the coordinated programme of military and economic development initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s. Speeches made by Deng in 1979 and in 1985 had specifically emphasized this point. Playing a more active role in international affairs, harnessing oceanic resources for China’s development and being able to enforce its claims over such resources, and defending its maritime trade routes are some of the factors that have prompted China to develop its own sea power (Kane 2002: 63-64). Modernization of naval forces, equipment and command and control networks has become a central theme in official Chinese sources since the 1978 Party Congress, a theme which has intensified after the enlarged meeting of the Central Military Commission (CMC) in 1985 (Kondapalli 2001: xxi). According to a statement made in 1989 by Zhang Xusan, a senior officer in the People’s Liberation Army-Navy (PLA-N) at the time, the open-door policy of the reform programme had increased the role of maritime trade, which had in turn resulted in the search for a strategic shift in naval policy. From then onwards the protection of SLOC, territorial waters and maritime resources needed to be addressed (Liao Wen-chung 1995: 8-9, cited in Kondapalli 2001: 11). As contemporary China becomes increasingly dependent on imported raw materials and energy for its rapidly growing economy its interest in protecting SLOC will also increase (Peter Howarth 2006: 4). As China’s economy grows patrolling of economic zones, uninterrupted maritime trade, and protection of SLOC will become an important part of the PLA-N’s mission. The increasing Chinese interest in vital SLOC is demonstrated in developments such as the take-over of the Panama Canal by a Chinese firm, the treaty between China and Egypt signed in May 2000 which will allow China the
use of port facilities at Port Said, the strong presence of Chinese companies with links to the PLA in Singapore, and the indirect role of the PLA-N in the Indian Ocean (Kondapalli 2001: 205-206).

China’s national political, economic and diplomatic policies are closely interrelated and in general directly embody national will. With continuous expansion of overseas and maritime interests the relationship between maritime interests and overall national interests has become more significant. In order to meet the requirements of national security and development interests, the navy must not only develop the important function of defending national sovereignty, but also unceasingly move toward the posture of a ‘blue-water navy’ and expand the scope of maritime strategic defence in order to contribute to the defence of national maritime rights and interests (Xu Qi 2006).

In 1995 Jiang Zemin had outlined ‘three major directions’ for the PLA-N. These were, place naval building in an important position and accelerate the pace of naval modernization, ensure the security of China’s coastal defence, and promote the reunification of the motherland (Jen Hui-wen 1995, cited in Kondapalli 2001: 5). Jiang had also acknowledged that the “current situation has placed new demands on building the navy” (Xinhua 1995, cited in Kondapalli 2001: 5). While reviewing naval manoeuvres in the autumn of the same year, in the presence of the four Vice-Chairmen of the Central Military Commission (CMC) - Liu Huaqing, Zhang Zhen, Zhang Wannian and Chi Haotian- he outlined the ‘sacred mission of the navy’ as follows:

“China is a continental power, and a coastal power as well. The Chinese coastal region has a dense population, with its scientific, technological, and economic levels far higher than the interior, and its place in the national economic life is very important. The ocean as a natural protective screen covers this region of strategic significance. It is also necessary to see that China’s per-capita possession of land resources is far lower than the world average. With the passing of time, the shortage of land resources will make itself keenly felt, and will inevitably restrict economic development. On the one hand, we must advocate saving and protecting resources in a big way; on the other hand it is imperative to look for and develop new resources. We can be sure that the development and utilization of the ocean will be of increasingly greater significance to China’s long range development. This being the case, we must see the ocean from a strategic plane,
and strengthen the whole people’s concept of the ocean....we must soberly see that the new situation has set out new and higher requirements on navy building. We must put navy building in an important place and step up the pace of navy modernization to meet the requirements of future war” (Huang Caihong 1995, cited in Kondapalli 2001: 5-6).

Chinese Views on Maritime Strategy

Xu Qi (2006: 48-52) conceptualizes geostrategy as comprising two basic factors, geography, which is constant, and geographic orientation, which is variable¹. While geography may influence geographic orientation it does not determine it completely. A state’s geographical position, comprehensive national power, and spaces separating it from other powers can be said to constitute the essential elements of its geographic orientation and to have a fundamental influence on a nation-state’s development, strength, and prosperity. Through geostrategy, a country can use geographic orientation to protect and pursue its national interests in the world arena. He argues that China’s naval strategy will have to take account of changes in China’s geostrategic relationships and develop a new orientation from the perspective of the new geostrategic relationships and environment. According to him, Alfred Thayer Mahan’s work on the ‘elements of sea power’ reflects the profound influence of maritime geostrategy on a nation’s power and prosperity. The most fundamental conditions that constitute a nation’s comprehensive national power and reflect its geographic orientation are its territorial area, natural resources, population size and national qualities. ‘Buffer zones’ that separate a nation from potentially hostile countries can protect its national security interests and give it ‘strategic depth’. The vast expanse of the ocean could serve such a purpose. The ‘geographical consequence of maritime space’ however can also at times constitute an ‘indirect threat’. Moreover the progress of science and technology has progressively decreased the function of the ocean as a ‘natural barrier’. He argues that struggles for supremacy among great powers have always focused on the ocean, resulting in maritime geostrategic rivalries. Since the end of the Cold War the eastward expansion of NATO has once again erected a new ‘iron curtain’ stretching from the Baltic to the Balkans.

England, the United States, and such maritime powers constitute the ‘spear’ the sharp point of which is fundamentally directed at containing both flanks surrounding Central Asia, and then infiltrating into the Indian Ocean. France, Germany, Russia, and such continental powers constitute the ‘shield’, supporting both flanks for the decisive battle in Central Asia and the ultimate advance into the Indian Ocean.

Although ancient China did not employ a ‘geostrategic conception’ it did have ‘geostrategic theory’. ‘Geostrategies’ such as ‘uniting the vertical’ and ‘linking the horizontal’ were directly employed in actual combat. In the modern era the development of strategic theory in China fell behind that of the West, and its understanding of maritime geostrategy witnessed a protracted process of development. Western geostrategic theory, rooted in ‘aggressive and expansionist’ goals, and represented by thinkers such as Halford Mackinder and Alfred Mahan, has on the whole taken both ‘land power’ and ‘sea power’ into account. China on the other hand, under the influence of Confucian notions such as ‘justice’ and ‘benevolence’, as well as the ‘doctrine of the mean’ philosophy, has always pursued ‘peaceful coexistence’ with neighbouring countries, with a national tradition of ‘good-neighbourliness’. Ancient China’s size, power and level of cultural development surpassed those of the neighbouring countries. The primary threat faced by imperial China was that of northern nomadic people moving southward in the direction of China’s central plains. This ‘continental threat’ ensured that most of China’s wars were land campaigns. Thus in China a ‘land-based survival’ view point has had firm and deep roots, causing its geostrategic thought to emphasize land power over sea power. Although from ancient times China had the beginnings of maritime geostrategic thinking, the societal attitude of ‘closing oneself off’ ran counter to the openness and global circulation of the ocean (ibid.: 52-54).

The geostrategies of coastal nations have certain fundamental patterns and characteristics. Having a contiguous border with the ocean, their geostrategy must take account of both land and sea. Having some space on land in which to operate, as well as maritime barriers and transport corridors that can be utilized, when engaged in war with maritime powers, they can bring their strength to bear on land and limit the opportunities
of their adversaries to occupy territory, when engaged in war with neighboring land powers, they have had to concentrate forces on their land flanks, and they have to avoid being attacked from the front and rear on land and sea, and being thus encircled by an alliance of sea and land powers. With respect to military structure, such powers have emphasized a balanced mix of land and sea forces and have had a geostrategy that comports with this balance. These characteristics are reflected in China's naval geostrategic conception to some degree. China has an extensive coastline, but its land-sea orientation has been powerfully influenced by its neighbors and for a time the sea was viewed as a solid barrier and neglected. In modern times the sea became a springboard for foreign invaders. While the great powers were smashing in China's maritime gate, it had to simultaneously confront the expansionist czarist Russia and could not let down its guard on its land flank. This illustrates how a nation's maritime geostrategy can be affected by its relationship with its neighbors on land (ibid.: 54-55).

According to Xu Qi (ibid.: 55, and translator's notes 9, 10) China's current maritime geostrategy is deliberated within the broader framework of Mao Zedong's 'three worlds theory' and Deng Xiaoping's 'North-South and East-West' analysis. The 'three worlds theory' put forward by Mao in the 1970s had argued that the United States and Soviet Union belong to the 'first world', that Japan, Europe and Canada belonged to the 'second world', and that the rest of the world made up the 'third world'. It had argued that China should help the 'third world' countries to avoid domination by the 'first world' super powers. In the 1980s Deng had argued that 'international security' depended on relations between nations in the East and West, and that 'economic development' depended on relations between nations in the North and South.

While the decade of the 1990s witnessed many changes, 'hegemonism' and 'power politics' still exist and have become major causes of threats to world and regional peace and stability. There are many uncertainties in the security environment along China's borders, and especially so in its maritime dimension. On its maritime flank China faces a concentration of strategic power in the Asia-Pacific region. Since this maritime strategic region and, more broadly, the strategic region of the periphery of the Eurasian
landmass constitute points of contention, they are also important arenas for global great-power competition. From a geostrategic perspective, China’s heartland faces the sea, the benefits of economic development are increasingly dependent on the sea, and security threats come from the sea. The United States has deployed strong forces in the Western Pacific and has formed a system of military bases on the first and second ‘island chains’ with a strategic posture involving Japan and South Korea as the northern anchors, Australia and the Philippines as the southern anchors, with Guam positioned as the forward base. Moreover, relations along China’s maritime boundary are variable. From the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait to the Spratly Islands, there exist many uncertain factors. The maritime contradictions between China and neighboring nations and regions are rather complicated. The new ‘Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defence Cooperation’ (1997) with respect to ‘situations in areas surrounding Japan’ has expanded to encompass Taiwan and the South China Sea area. The North Korean nuclear crisis has initiated a chain reaction involving Japan and South Korea and may transform the East Asian maritime geostrategic situation. Although India-China relations have improved India is still intensifying its military preponderance in the Indian Ocean, while extending ‘strategic feelers’ into the South China Sea (ibid.: 56-57).

China’s maritime geostrategic posture is in a ‘semi-enclosed’ condition because passage to and from the ‘open ocean’ is mediated through two ‘island chains’. In order to safeguard China’s maritime interests the navy must make strategic choices with regard to China’s maritime borders and maritime domain, the global oceans and the overall strategic space. From the beginning of the 19th century, with economic and technological development, the world’s oceans have become an integrated thoroughfare, making global integration both necessary and possible. A nation has to pay attention to maritime connectivity for both development and security. China’s land territory encompasses about 9.6 million square kilometers. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and China’s own claims, China has jurisdiction over and administers 3 million square kilometers of maritime territory. China’s coastal seas and continental shelf areas amount to nearly 273 million hectares. While for coastal nations the development of land and maritime territory are equally important, as land resources deplete, for one such
as China which is deficient in resources in relation to its population, the sea is an important resource base, which further increases the strategic importance of ocean space to it. With a long shoreline, many islands, a large administered sea area and plenty of ocean resources China is a great maritime power. In the last few years China has become a world energy development focal point for 'methane hydrates'. The sea is also an important means by which China can participate in international competition. It is China’s main transport artery of foreign trade. By 2020 China’s maritime commerce will exceed U.S. $1 trillion and it may become necessary to import three-quarters of China’s oil from overseas. Sea lines of communication will become increasingly important lifelines of national existence and development. At the same time China’s maritime economy has much development potential. In 2001 major maritime industry accounted for 3.44 percent of GDP and it is estimated that it will reach approximately 5 percent of GDP by 2010, which indicates the magnitude of its potential to contribute to overall national economic development. Developing the ocean economy involves forming a coastal belt economic zone encompassing the continental shelf, maritime economic zones and international seabed mining zones together as a unified maritime economic zone. By forming great ocean provinces, counties, and cities, with China’s eastern area taking the lead, the maritime economy can make an enormous contribution to the further development of the terrestrial economy, overall modernization and comprehensively constructing a relatively affluent society (ibid.: 58-60).

Xu Qi (ibid.: 60-61) argues that not only are naval vessels symbols of state power and authority, but they can also freely navigate the ‘high seas’ of the world under international maritime law. These characteristics mean that the role of the navy is not limited to administering waters over which China has jurisdiction and ‘offshore defence’. The ‘offshore defence’ strategy was put forward by Deng Xiaoping in the 1970s and it includes in its scope China’s territorial waters, islands and all maritime areas over which China has jurisdiction under international maritime law. It attempts to realize national unification, safeguard maritime rights and interests, and stipulates that the navy must able to respond to a ‘regional war at sea’ and be able to neutralize enemy encroachments. He goes on to argue is that while ‘offshore defence’ is the fundamental guarantee of national
maritime security, according to the requirements of national interests and the
development of naval battle operations capability, the scope of naval strategic defence
should extend further. While from mainland China the sea area extends 1600 nautical
miles in the direction of the South China Sea the scope of naval defence remains within
the first island chain. Developments in military technology such as
‘informationalization’\(^2\) has created weapons that can be guided precisely to a target over
large distances, which makes political, economic and military targets deep inland,
vulnerable to weapons launched from the sea beyond the first island chain. Therefore in
the long-term national interest the navy must extend the scope of strategic defence out to
the ‘open sea’ and develop its combat capabilities accordingly.

In order to adapt to the requirements of national interest, China’s navy must make
strategic choices in the world maritime space, in inner and outer space, and in the entire
grand strategic space. The composition of geostrategic relations indicates that territory for
human mobility, aside from land, also includes the grand strategic spaces of world ocean
space, atmospheric space, and outer space, and so on. The world maritime space
comprises of nationally administered sovereign interior waters, ‘international waters’
beyond the territorial sea and exclusive economic zone, the seabed at a depth of 3,000–
3,500 meters beyond which nations do not have the right of jurisdiction, the ocean
bottom’s entire ‘international seabed area’, and the ‘international navigation channels’
beyond the breadth of national territorial seas. World oceans beyond the scope of
sovereignty and administration of individual states is ‘international maritime space’ and
comprise 64.2 percent of total ocean area. This area is regarded as ‘high seas’ for
humanity’s common use, all nations may use it with freedom and equality. China
participates in globalized maritime scientific research activities, cooperates extensively
on ocean science and technology, and jointly develops the ocean with other countries. It
has many national interests in ‘international maritime space’ and ‘international navigation
channels’.

Its ‘open ocean’ transport routes pass through every continent and every
ocean, its ships navigate through each important international strait and have experience
with over six hundred ports in over 150 nations and administrative regions. China is the

\(^2\) See pp. 57-59 and p. 63, for further elaboration on ‘informationalization’.
fifth largest investor in international seabed-area development. In 1991, with the permission of the UN International Seabed Authority, China obtained seventy-five thousand square kilometers of a special joint exploration and development area in the Pacific Ocean southeast of Hawaii. Within this area it possesses international seabed development rights with regard to metal nodules. All of this indicates the scope of China's national interest in world ocean space. Space warfare has a profound influence on naval warfare. The development of spaceflight technology to travel through the atmosphere and outer-space has become an essential factor in geographic orientation. Due to satellite communication the atmosphere and outer-space have become important to the command and control of military operations and weapon systems. The United States plays a leading role with regard to such developments. China's launch of the Shenzhou 5 manned spacecraft in 2003 made China the third nation, after Russia and the U.S., to launch a human into space. This indicates an extension of China's national interests to outer-space and proves the capabilities of its satellite communications, global positioning, and radar information and transmission systems. By enhancing China's 'information strength' this will also be beneficial to its sea power (ibid.: 61-63).

According to Thomas M. Kane (2002: 69, 72-75) since the 1980s China's military thinkers have come to a consensus that maritime strategy must be global, active and long term. They have also noted that maritime capabilities, even relatively weak ones, can be used effectively in the context of an overall grand strategy. They have come to recognize the ability of contemporary 'command, control, communications, computers and intelligence' (C4I) technology to combine air, sea, land, outer-space, radio-electronic and other forms of warfare into a 'devastating totality'. They consider air forces, orbital weapons platforms, electronic and information warfare against enemy command systems, and nuclear devices as potential 'killer maces' that can trump a battle fleet. They have also realized however that building and maintaining state-of-the-art navies are costly, and that with C4I systems becoming the 'nerve centres' of naval warfare the complexity of the commanding officer's job has increased considerably. They believe that such constraints will reduce the scale and duration of naval wars, so that there will be fewer large-scale fleet actions and more medium and small conflicts with small and high-tech
forces. From the Chinese point of view, while on the one hand this can be a disadvantage given that China is relatively weak in high technology, on the other it can be an advantage that a militarily stronger country like the United States does not commit all its national resources in a war against the PRC.

Shen Zhongchang, Zhang Haiying and Zhou Xinsheng (1998b: 276-7, cited in Kane 2002: 76) have observed that:

"In naval combat vessels are usually organized in task forces or battle groups to fulfill tasks. Concentration is conveniently used for organizing effective command, using massive firepower and forming the most favourable defence system in order to reduce enemy threats. However, in the informationized battlefield, vessels can have direct communication with the command post. Vessels can have access to each other’s location and situation and have information about enemy vessels and aircraft. In addition the capacity for long-range precision attack is also improved. Information enables dispersal of platforms. Under such circumstances, the firepower needed to attack targets can be allocated through precise information transfer and long-range attack instead of concentration of platforms. Concentrations of battle groups in future warfare will probably be replaced by small formations and single vessels. Vessels will be dispersed ‘evenly’ at sea”.

Chinese maritime strategists believe that navies evolve with the strength of countries. So for example, weaker nations will focus on destroyers, corvettes, minesweepers and minelayers, while emerging powers will focus on developing aircraft carriers and amphibious ships. The submarine, however, will be vital to both weak and strong navies. The submarine suffers the least and benefits the most from current developments in technology. Satellite reconnaissance can locate targets for submarine raids, but is much less effective in detecting submarines while they are submerged. Nuclear propulsion will allow submarines to remain submerged for extended periods of time and to travel long distances without refueling. Latest generations of submarines will be able to dive deeper and carry missiles that can attack land targets more effectively (Kane 2002: 77).
Shen Zhongchang, Zhang Haiying and Zhou Xinsheng (1998a: 266; 1998b: 277, cited in Howarth 2006: 71) have also noted that, “in future naval warfare, the multidimensional battlefield will reveal naval targets and the marine battlefield perspective, making it impossible for surface ships without air force cover to operate in high-threat maritime zones”. They think the application of information technology will make the maritime battlefield so transparent that surface ships and aircraft will be deterred from intervening:

“Such deterrence is multidirectional but much less serious to submarines, because submarines are more difficult to track. Submarines can fulfill combat tasks and attack land targets according to information obtained from the command post while keeping their movements concealed, and they can move under-water for a long time without being discovered. The prospect for using submarines is good, because of their covertness and power. Even without attacking targets, submarines are menaces existing anywhere at any time”.

**China’s Maritime Strategy, Capability and the PLA-N**

In 1979 Deng Xiaoping approved the navy’s request to extend its activities from ‘coastal waters’ to the ‘adjacent seas’ consisting of the Yellow Sea, East China Sea and the South China Sea. In 1987 Liu Huaqing, the commander of the PLA-N from 1982-88, and Commissar Li Yaowen co-signed a doctrine entitled ‘On the question of establishing the naval strategy’ (Guanyu mingque haijun zhanlie de wenti) and submitted it to the Central Military Commission for approval. This doctrine sought to extend the PLA-N’s combat mission from ‘coastal defence’ to ‘blue water power projection’ and to change its operational objectives, weapons research and development, and battle tactics accordingly. During Liu’s tenure the navy was elevated from its subordination to the army within the PLA, and a ‘sense of ocean’ (haiyang yishi) was advocated to inspire a vision that saw beyond land territory. Liu expanded the area to be defended by the PLA-N from ‘in-shore’ (jinan) to ‘off-shore’ (jinhai), envisioning a ‘layered defence’. The area covered by jinan is fixed and is delineated by the Bohai, Taiwan and Qiongzhou straits, while the area covered by jinhai is flexible. Within the radius delineated by the Bohai, Taiwan and
Qiongzhou straits there would be a ‘coastal defence’ to guard against ‘amphibious operations’. The scope of the area to be covered by the next layer of defence radiates east to the first ‘island chain’, which stretches from waters adjacent to Vladivostok in the north to the Straits of Malacca in the south. This layer of defence would be crucial in breaking a ‘maritime blockade’ mounted against China. In a ‘posture of defence’ this layer would provide ‘depth’ for defending important economic centres along China’s coast, and in a ‘posture of offense’, given that international sea lanes traverse this area, it would enable China to mount a blockade against some of the other countries in the region (You Ji 2006: 72-4).

More recently the CMC has stated that the naval strategy should cover ‘all maritime areas that have an important bearing on China’s national security and fall within the effective reach of the PLA-N’ (You Ji 2006: 75), which links naval strategy more closely to China’s overall national security strategy. China seems to be aiming to make the PLA-N a ‘regional navy with a blue-water maritime strategy’. Therefore, while as a regional navy it should have a prescribed geographical scope of activity, as China becomes a global economic power, it should possess power projection capabilities that can deal with situations arising beyond this geographical scope. The notion of a regional navy extends the PLA-N’s combat zone to 1000 nautical miles, forming a further layer for the maritime defence of China. It indicates that while China’s maritime strategy is not global, expansionist or pre-emptive, in terms of strategic missions, combat ranges, force structure and strength the PLA-N will not be simply an ‘offshore navy’. This sort of strategy has stimulated China’s interest in constructing underwater surveillance networks in deep oceans, and in establishing ambush sites beyond off-shore waters. While the range at which it will require the PLA-N to operate will further add to China’s ‘defensive depth’, it will give the PLA-N a ‘forward defence posture’, making it difficult for it to sustain a ‘defensive posture’ vis-à-vis other navies in the region. Acquiring information about marine meteorology, magnetic field intensity and nautical charts of likely combat zones, needed to prepare for action in deep seas, have become important for the navy since the 1990s. A regional navy will also need access to ports in other countries.
Observation stations built by the PLA in the Indian Ocean and China's investments in the Pacific islands may be of relevance in this context (ibid.: 74-7).

Acquisition of major surface and sub-surface combatants like aircraft carriers, destroyers, frigates and submarines is crucial to the making of a blue-water naval power. To be able to produce these naval vessels, a country will need to have mastered several skills related to their propulsion systems, weapons, sensors, and command systems, besides inculcating appropriate training methods to the crew, which are in turn determined by the strategic direction of the naval forces, the scientific and technological level of the country, modernization, capacity of the personnel, costs of the systems, and so on. To ensure that SLOC remain open to overseas trade and raw material supply if and when under embargo and blockade, a country can build submarines. Submarines can have propulsion systems that are either diesel-powered or nuclear-powered. The diesel submarines, operating near home ports, can provide information about enemy ships at sea to the armed forces ashore and oppose enemy forces with missile launches. The problems with diesel submarines are low endurance, frequent 'snorkeling', short range and susceptibility to detection by under-water long-range active systems and other communication equipment. Frequent snorkeling can be reduced by high-density batteries and air-independent propulsion (AIP). Nuclear submarines, equipped with cruise missiles (SSNs) or ballistic missiles (SSBNs), with higher endurance levels, sustainability, stealth, mobility and flexibility, can be extremely useful to a country with blue-water ambitions. They can reduce the chances of 'war breaker' events, keep a watch on enemy warships and can destroy these along with enemy military infrastructure and command and control facilities. The combat systems on submarines have several subsystems, such as command and control systems, sensor systems (traditional main sensors, advanced sensors, passive optronic and electronic sensors, external communications, data link, and airspace surveillance radar), and weapon systems. These combat systems can be upgraded to increase the effective range of detection. With regard to surface ships, the demands of modern naval combat require an efficient engine system to cater for the needs of hauling larger tonnage displacement vessels, automation, and air-conditioning for nuclear, biological and chemical weapons compatibility. Their engine systems can be diesel-
driven or gas turbine based. The technological capabilities of surface vessels are also
determined by their combat systems consisting of command and control, sensor and
weapon subsystems. Destroyers are equipped with a long-range air defence system,
surface-to-surface missiles, medium-caliber guns and anti-submarine systems. Frigates
are fitted with anti-submarine systems, surface-to-surface missiles, medium-calibre guns
and a short-range air defence system. Destroyers and frigates are also equipped with
helicopters for Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW). For a blue-water navy the need for air
cover in naval missions far away from the coast necessitates a naval air-force. While the
PLA-N is in the process of developing such blue-water capabilities most of its inventory
consists of those that cater for a coastal defence navy (Kondapalli 2001: xxv-xxvii).

There has been a gap between China's strategic ambition and capability. The
expansion of the PLA-N's combat power in the 1990s was dismal. Only four new
destroyers, 112, 113, 165 and 167, entered service, the aircraft carrier project was
aborted, the design of arsenal cruisers (for launching a large number of long-range
missiles) was shelved, the production of a new class of conventional submarines was
slow, the replacement of 091 nuclear attack submarines was delayed, and its only nuclear
powered strategic missile submarine was in a crippled state. Current requirements, such
as the need to stay prepared for an unexpected war in the Taiwan Strait, may have
hindered the overall force restructuring and modernization effort. Strengthening the navy
with major combatants by itself will not be enough, since combat power has become
crucially dependent on advanced information technology which integrates different
weapon systems together. Thus apart from the challenge of adding more large hardware
platforms to its forces, the PLA-N has also had to face the challenge of developing the
information technology to network them in a seamless manner. Furthermore, foreign
procurement has not proven completely reliable in improving the PLA-N's overall
capabilities (You Ji 2006: 77-79).

Some of the specific operational areas that have impeded PLA-N modernization
are weak ASW capabilities, weak air-defence systems and weak logistical supply
capabilities. Only two destroyers, 112 and 113, were equipped with the 'towed body
sonar systems’. The direct communications between its ASW aircraft and surface ships were rudimentary, and there was no interface to harmonize the disparate components. It lacked effective ASW platforms such as aircraft, naval vessels, and land-based or sea-based anti-submarine missiles. Only a few major surface combatants had surface-to-air missiles capable of ‘point air defence’. The ship-borne ‘area air defence’ missile systems were installed in a few destroyers on a trial basis only recently. In a combat situation a weak air defence would restrict the PLA-N’s ocean-going activities and confine it to the radius of the land-based air force. The lack of ocean-going supply ships for tasks such as mid-ocean refueling have made it difficult to support battle groups of large and medium sized combatants (ibid.: 79-80).

In 1999, following the US bombing of China’s embassy in Belgrade and problems in the Taiwan Strait, the top Chinese leadership took a decision to accelerate preparation for ‘military struggle’. Between 2000 and 2005 there was a sharp increase in the number of ships entering service and in their level of technological sophistication. China’s rapid economic rise can now provide greater material and technological support for naval modernization. The conclusion by China’s leadership that its future wars will be fought in its maritime regions have provided greater budget allocations and foreign procurement for naval development. In the preceding 20 years the PLA’s research and development guiding principle had been ‘more research and trial, less series production and equipment’. Since the late 1990s, due to the situation in Taiwan and a perceived technological maturity, the equipment policy has been adjusted to allow greater hardware and software acquisition. The PLA-N’s understanding of ‘blue-water strategy’ has also improved in terms of the required force structure and weaponry. It has also learned from information technology-revolution in military affairs (IT-RMA) concepts that ‘network-centric warfare’ may be the type of war it will have to fight in the future. It has understood that a blue-water strategy merely based on major platforms is an obsolete idea of the industrial age and have begun to place equal emphasis on both the hardware and the systems integration in building its modern fleets (ibid.: 80-1).
In terms of major surface combatants seven destroyers and six frigates were committed to service between 2000 and 2005. The two Sovremenny destroyers purchased from Russia, 136 Hanzhou and 137 Fuzhou, have area air-defence capabilities and super-sonic anti-ship Sunburn missiles capable of striking aircraft carriers. The two 052B Luhu class destroyers, 168 Guangzhou and 169 Wuhan, have a displacement of 8000 tonnes and will be the PLA-N’s main sea-control destroyers capable of blue-water missions. These ships contain stealth features, anti-ship and anti-submarine warfare, and area air-defence capabilities. The two 052B Luyang class destroyers, 170 Lanzhou and 171, are equipped with Chinese made Aegis systems and cool-launch vertical launch systems (VLS) capable of intercepting targets more than 100 km away. With 48 launchers of HHQ-9 long-range surface-to-air missiles (SAM) they can provide PLA-N blue-water fleets with a shield against saturated air and missile attacks. The 051C destroyer, 115, has a displacement of about 7000 tonnes. This ship is likely to become the command ship of the North Sea Fleet, and as such it is likely to contain advanced C4ISR systems such as the LINK systems for network warfare capabilities. Most of the systems integration equipment on board this ship is believed to be developed by the Chinese. The two 054 Maanshan class frigates, 525 and 526, have strong stealth features. With a displacement of about 4000 tonnes they are able to keep pace with larger platforms such as destroyers or cruisers in deep ocean combat missions. They are equipped with either HHQ-7 long-range anti-ship missiles or HQ-16 mid-range anti-air missiles, with space reserved for replacing current systems with VLS. The four 053H3 Jiangwei 3 class frigates, 524, 564, 565 and 566, have good stealth features, but with a displacement of 2800 tonnes are not suitable for sustained deep ocean operations. During this time period PLA-N also acquired major sub-surface combatants, such as two 093 nuclear attack submarines, one 094 strategic nuclear missile submarine, one Yuan class conventional submarine with air-independent propulsion (AIP) technology, four Song class submarines and four Kilo (636) submarines. The Yuan and Kilo submarines are quite and equipped with long-range anti-ship missiles, anti-submarine missiles and new generation torpedoes. With these acquisitions the PLA-N submarine fleet can pose a real threat to any major naval power in the region (ibid.: 81-3, also see Table 3.1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combatant</th>
<th>Capabilities</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soveremenny Destroyer</td>
<td>Area Air-Defence</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Super-Sonic Anti-Ship Sunburn Missiles capable of striking Air-Craft Careers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>052B Luhu Class Destroyer</td>
<td>A displacement of 8000 tonnes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sea Control and Blue-Water Missions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stealth Features</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anti-Ship Warfare</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anti-Submarine Warfare</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area Air-Defence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>052C Luyang Class Destroyers</td>
<td>Chinese made Aegis Systems</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cool-Launch Vertical Launch Systems (VLS) capable of intercepting targets more than 100 km away</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48 launchers of HHQ-9 long-range surface-to-air missiles (SAM) which can provide blue-water fleets with a shield against saturated air and missile attacks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>051C Destroyer</td>
<td>A displacement of about 7000 tonnes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likely to become the command ship of the North Sea Fleet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Frigate</td>
<td>Features</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>054C Maanshan</td>
<td>Strong Stealth Features</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Frigate</td>
<td>A displacement of about 4000 tonnes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Able to keep pace with larger platforms such as destroyers and cruisers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in deep ocean combat missions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equipped with either HHQ-7 long-range anti-ship missiles or HQ-16 mid</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>range anti-air missiles, with space reserved for replacing current</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>systems with VLS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>053H3 Jianwei 3</td>
<td>Good Stealth Features</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Frigate</td>
<td>A displacement of 2800 tonnes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not suitable for sustained deep ocean operations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>093 Nuclear Attack Submarine</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>094 Strategic Nuclear Missile Submarine</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuan Class Conventional Submarine</td>
<td>Air-Independent Propulsion (AIP) technology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long-Range Anti-Ship</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Submarine Type</td>
<td>Missiles</td>
<td>Anti-Submarine Missiles</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song Class Submarine</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilo (636) Submarine</td>
<td>Long-Range Anti-Ship Missiles</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anti-Submarine Missiles</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New generation torpedoes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The ships and weapons that the PLA-N now has at its disposal will allow it to extend its combat range, and it may now be able to carry out some blue-water missions around the first ‘island chain’. The new destroyers and submarines can be used to carry out sea control tasks in China’s coastal maritime regions and sea denial missions within or beyond the first ‘island chain’ in the West Pacific. They can also be effective in conducting a blockade against Taiwan’s ocean liners (ibid.: 83).

The new assets of the PLA-N have been enriched by a number of technological breakthroughs in military research and development carried out in China. These are the ship-born ‘track-while-scan phased array radar systems’ in 170 and 171, the cool launch VLS long-range anti-aircraft missiles in some of the destroyers, the AIP technology in the Yuan class submarines, sound-absorbing tiles in 039, 091, 093, 094 submarines, the length-width ratio of 8.5 in 054 frigates, module design for ship-building and installation of weapon systems, initial success in producing CODOG which will allow more large ships to be built, the battle-field management system based on LINK technology in 167, and 730 close-in weapon system (CIWS) in 170 and 171. China’s maturing military space technology can help provide ‘precision positioning’ and real time C4ISR information for PLA-N combatants. The PLA Air Force’s Yujing 2000 AWACs can help the navy to identify, coordinate and attack targets. These technological developments will provide a solid foundation for naval development (ibid.: 84). Given its blue-water ambition the PLA-N will seek to add an increasing number of large platforms to its fleet to give it the heavier force structure suitable for operating in the deep seas. Apart from destroyers with a displacement of over 7000 tonnes and frigates with a displacement of over 4000 tonnes, it has also sought to acquire cruisers with a displacement of over 10,000 tonnes capable of area air-defence, comprehensive ASW and land-attacks with long-range cruise missiles with a range of 3000 km, which specifications match those of Russia’s Slava class cruisers. As a part of this restructuring their has been an effort to remove from service some of the large number of older and lighter ships such as missile boats and frigates with a displacement of less than 1900 tonnes. Another objective of the restructuring has been to improve the quality of the fleet. However combat requirements that may arise at present have slowed down the decommissioning of out-dated major
combatants. Nevertheless, as a result of the spurt of growth between 2000 and 2005 the PLA-N is in a position to prepare several ‘fast-response units’ capable of launching campaign level battles around the first ‘island chain’. As a weak navy, particularly in comparison to the United States Navy (USN), the concept of ‘fleet-in-being’ could be very useful to the PLA-N. This would entail several relatively small and flexible formations consisting of a variety of specialized combatants capable of tactical campaigns far away from home. In a confrontation with a stronger navy such as the USN this will help the PLA-N to ensure that it will not be totally eliminated in a few sea battles at the beginning of a war. With its current assets it could organize four small groups with the core of each composed of one area air-defence destroyer, one sea-control destroyer, one ASW destroyer, and one new class frigate, supported by a number of older surface ships and submarines. To be able to plan for strategic campaigns in the West Pacific it will have to acquire larger and more capable platforms. At that stage the PLA-N could be restructured into two major fleets, the Pacific Fleet and the South China Sea Fleet for decisive sea battles in deep oceans, with each commanding a few small, specialized, highly mobile and functionally integrated formations, and a coastal navy for the defence of home waters. The enlarged ocean going fleets would require cruisers and aircraft carriers and would comprise the next stage of naval development spanning from 2010 to 2020. All of this however will depend on how technological development is applied to the development of PLA-N capabilities so that it can keep pace with the development of the capabilities of the major naval powers. Most of the new classes of PLA-N ships produced by China have been the result of trial production of one or two ships rather than series production of many ships. Despite China’s technological breakthroughs it is still far behind the West. Series production of a new class of vessel can take a number of years. China has to ensure before undertaking such an endeavour that it will not be made obsolete within that time by further developments in the naval capabilities of the major powers. For example, the ‘phased array radar system’ on 170 and 171 could be too large and heavy, allowing only 48 VLS units on-board while Japan’s Kongo class with a similar displacement has 90. This indicates that China’s technological development has still not reached the stage at which it can undertake series production. China’s 2002 National Defence Strategy indicates that it may be trying to do this by ‘informatizing’ the
PLA in the next 30 years. While earlier China was trying to catch-up with the major powers in terms of 'mechanization' (i.e. engineering, manufacturing etc), now it is trying to catch-up in terms of both 'mechanization' and 'informatization' (ibid.: 84-88).

From the mid-1980s China has attempted to modernize its defence industries in order to enable them to develop production lines that can produce high technology equipment which can be sold at a profit, with the hope that the defence industries would be able to fund their own development. According to Frankenstein and Gill (1996: 417) Deng Xiaoping is supposed to have articulated this effort as early as 1978 in what has been referred to as the '16-character slogan': "combine the military and the civil, combine peace and war, give priority to military products, let the civil support the military" (jun-min jiehe, ping-zhan jiehe, jun-pin you xian, yi min yang jun).

Till 1998 the Commission for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence (COSTIND) had overseen both defence industries and equipment procurement, that is to say it had represented both producers and consumers. However in April 1998, in order to improve competition among defence firms, the government had separated the procurement arm from COSTIND, placed it directly under the military and renamed it the General Equipment Department (GED). Another key objective has been to phase out the production of older weapons while improving the capacity for producing newer more advanced weapons (Kane 2002: 95-96).

The commercial development of space, electronics, automobiles and shipping industries since the initiation of reforms, and the way in which the government has harnessed this development to strengthen China's defence industries through such efforts as the '16-character policy', have proven conducive to the development of China's maritime and naval capabilities (ibid.: 100).
China's Maritime Strategy in the Context of its Overall Diplomatic and Geostrategic Relations

A country's navy can be an important component of its overall diplomacy. The use of a fleet for combat, media projections of naval forces deployed in various regions, and the political tactics of port calls are aspects of the political resolve of the state. In 1993 Chen Mingshen, Deputy Commander of the PLA-N, had noted that:

"As the navy plays a role in all historical periods, whether peace or war, it is also a means of pursuing national foreign policy. Navies possess many specific characteristics that differ from those of the armed forces. The navy has international capabilities of free navigation on the high seas, and in peacetime it can cruise the world's seas, even conducting limited operations, outside the territorial waters of hostile countries" (Forsythe 1994: 44, cited in Kondapalli 2001: 185).

The PLA-N is being used to send political signals to China's adversaries and to indicate China's political and strategic resolve to contain them, port calls by the PLA-N at Chittagong, Colombo and Karachi in 1985 being one such instance (Kondapalli 2001: 184-5).

According to Kane (2002: 108, 132-133) developments in China's overall foreign relations appear to improve its position upon the seas. He argues that by garnering support for principles and concepts such as 'multipolarity' and 'opposing hegemonism', as well as through activities such as arms purchases, military cooperation and port visits by warships, China may have laid the diplomatic foundations for the exercise of sea power.

China has secured its landward flank with a general and steady improvement of its relations with Russia, Central Asia and the Caucasian countries. In the 1990s its relations with Russia saw a steady improvement and these relations contained a strong naval component. In May 1994 Chinese warships visited a Russian port and shortly

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3 Pp. 71-78 draw upon Kane (2002).
thereafter Felix Gromov, the commander in chief of the Russian fleet toured several Chinese naval bases. Following this visit Gromov announced that China had accepted his offer to train Chinese naval officers in Russian academies. In 1999 China and Russia began to conduct joint naval maneuvers. Most of Russia’s arms sales to China has some maritime relevance. In July 2000 following a meeting with Jiang Zemin, the Russian President Vladimir Putin had pledged his support to China on opposing ‘US hegemonism’, preventing the declaration of independence by Taiwan, and promoting ‘multipolarization’. In 1996 China, Russia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan initiated the ‘Shanghai Five’ process. This process lead to the development of economic, scientific, cultural and strategic ties among these countries. In a July 2000 summit the Shanghai Five issued joint statements supporting the PRC’s position on ‘Taiwan independence’, and supporting the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. During this summit Jiang proposed the conduct of joint operations to combat ‘extremist, separatist, and terrorist forces’, and the formation of an economic bloc that could generate enough prosperity within itself to resist the forces of globalization. Shortly after the July 2000 summit Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan hosted visits by a delegation of PLA officers lead by Area Commander Li Qianyuan. In the summer of 2000 Jiang Zemin visited Turkmenistan and in a speech pledged that China will work towards the establishment of a ‘new world political and economic order’ which would encourage ‘pluralism’ and discourage ‘hegenomism’. The Turkmen President, Saparmyrat Niyazov, expressed his support for a ‘strict definition of sovereignty’, and opposition to ‘ethnic separatism’ and violation of sovereignty on grounds of human rights abuse. He also supported the PRC’s position on Taiwan. In the same year Li Peng, the Chairman of the National People’s Congress, visited Azerbaijan. While Li expressed his sympathy for that country’s problems with Armenian separatists in the province of Nagorno-Karabakh, its Prime Mininster Rasizade endorsed ‘mulpolarity’. Azerbaijan and China have also mooted the idea of a ‘new silk road’ of commerce and industrial development between the Caucasus and China. Georgia has also shown enthusiasm for economic ties with China. For China economic cooperation with these countries can be particularly important due to their possession of oil reserves. The ‘16-character policy’ indicates that economic cooperation and development will be used to strengthen the armed forces. In
July 2000 the Chinese Vice-President Hu Jintao visited Belarus. During this visit Belarussian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka had expressed cooperation in international affairs between China and Belarus in general, and support for the PRC’s position on the Taiwan issue in particular. The PRC is the second largest customer of the Belarussian defence industry. Its purchases include optics, navigation technology, information systems and equipment for constructing field pipelines (ibid.: 109-112).

China has traditionally regarded the Korean peninsula as ‘the dagger and the bridge’ between the Asian mainland and Japan (Scales Jr and Wortzel 1999: 7, cited in Kane 2002: 112). Korea’s alignment in international politics has an important bearing on China’s freedom of action at sea. A key concern for China is the presence of the US military on the Korean peninsula. In the summer of 2000 the leaders of North and South Korea held a historic summit meeting in which they agreed on the desirability of closer relations and initiated steps such as the increase of trade and the building of a trans-Korean railway to further that aim. In the wake of this summit the PRC arranged follow-up meetings between the North and South Korean ambassadors in Beijing. The Chinese see rapprochement between the two Koreas as an important step in creating the conditions for the withdrawal of the US military from the Korean peninsula. Korea is also critical for Russia’s aspirations in the Pacific Ocean. President Putin visited Korea in July 2000, and discussed the visit with Jiang Zemin, which indicates that Russia and China are attempting to co-ordinate their Korea policy (ibid.: 112-115).

China regards Japan’s efforts to play a more assertive role in international politics with suspicion. China and Japan both claim sovereignty over the Senkaku islands which are in an area thought to be rich in fish, oil and gas resources. In terms of the balance of force between the PLA-N and Japan’s Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF) neither is in a position to launch an attack on the other with an assurance of success. The PRC periodically reminds the world of Asia’s experience of Japanese aggression in the 1930s and 40s. It holds naval exercises in preparation for a hypothetical war with Japan, frequently probes Japan’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and allegedly may even have encouraged pirates to attack Japan’s shipping. Although the PLA-N will hesitate to meet
the MSDF in a fleet battle, given that Japan is exceptionally dependent on its merchant shipping with over 70% of its oil coming from the Middle East via the Straits of Malacca, it can choose to disrupt Japan's merchant shipping with the use of its submarine fleet. In such a campaign the PRC will have to rely on its influence in South East Asia, and the United States Navy (USN) would be Japan's best guarantee of immunity from such a campaign. China has been sharply critical of Japan's alliance with the United States and sees the withdrawal of its troops from Korea as a prelude to their withdrawal from Japan as well. There are sections in Japan which are receptive to China's aversion to Japan being politically and militarily assertive in the international arena, and to China's criticism of the Japan-US alliance, while in China there are sections that are willing to regard Japan as a potentially friendly country, which enables Beijing to confront Japan with one hand and conciliate it with the other. Japan's seems to be responding by doing its best to adjust to the 'reemergence of China on the world stage'. During the 1980s and 90s Japan has given 2.6 trillion yen in economic aid to China, reaffirmed that Taiwan belongs to mainland China, and attempted to prevent the United States from using Japanese bases in support of the Taiwan regime (ibid.: 115-117).

From China's perspective Taiwan shares certain similarities with Japan. Both are islands that dominate important areas of the Western Pacific, have fleets that can stand up to the PLA-N, have close relations with the United States, and can serve as 'unsinkable aircraft carriers' off China's coast. The difference of course is that Beijing has committed itself to integrating the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan into the PRC. While some PRC leaders have hinted that they would not hesitate to go to war, including nuclear war, to prevent Taiwan from declaring independence, others mainland officials have adopted more conciliatory approaches towards Taiwan. In any case Beijing appears to lack the military capability to effectively invade Taiwan. Nevertheless, as with Japan, the PRC's armed forces have conducted frequent exercises in the Taiwan straits. Apart from minor military purposes such as training, intelligence gathering and testing the opponent's reactions, they may also have accomplished the major diplomatic purpose of setting the limits of acceptable behaviour within China's 'sphere of influence'. The facts that Taiwan has refrained from declaring independence, and that the US has urged it to
behave prudently, may indicate that these countries have accepted Beijing’s ‘implicit ultimatum’. Concurrently mutually beneficial trade and friendly relations between the PRC and the ROC may improve the long-term prospects for re-unification (ibid.: 118-9).

In terms of shipping, Southeast Asia’s waters are some of the busiest in the world, with approximately a quarter of the world’s shipping passing through the South China Sea. They may also contain substantial oil and energy resources. These waters are shallow and contain many islands and islets. Ships have to pass through long and narrow straits. In such conditions shipping is extremely vulnerable to attack, including those from pirates. The costs of re-routing shipping can be prohibitive. Given these characteristics, China has to be able to ensure the safe passage of its own shipping through the region, while if it can harass the shipping of other countries through these waters it will gain significant leverage over many other countries. Territory in these waters is highly contested, with China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Phillipines having overlapping claims. China has used its claims as a pretext for expanding its maritime influence in the region. In this connection China seems to be subjecting the Southeast Asian countries, like Japan and Taiwan, to ‘carrot and stick’ diplomacy, cajoling and enticing with one hand, and coercing with the other. From the mid-1990s onwards it has sought to regularize relations in the South China Sea by offering to set disputes aside and engage in ‘joint development’ of ocean resources. While claiming the entire South China Sea as its ‘exclusive economic zone’ (EEZ), in the summer of 2000 it initiated a series of negotiations conducted bilaterally between itself and each of the Southeast Asian states. The leaders of Laos, Malaysia and Vietnam responded positively to this initiative. At the same time it has not hesitated to occupy islands in the South China Sea by force, from its takeover of the Paracel archipelago in 1974 till its landing on Mischief Reef in 1995. The military value of these islands is that bases on them extend the range of China’s radar, sonar, aircraft and missiles. Fortified positions at sea can free maneuver elements such as warships from defensive duty. China is also alleged to have used pirates and ‘ethnic Chinese’/ ‘overseas Chinese’ residing in Southeast Asia to influence and put pressure on those countries (Renwick and Abbot 1999: 186-187, cited in Kane 2002: 123; C. Y. Chang 1980: 296, cited in Kane 2002:
123). The ‘ultimate check’ on China’s ambitions in the South China Sea could be the United States. However through the 1990s the military strength and the political influence of the US in Southeast Asia declined. The Southeast Asian countries on the other hand have built up their military forces, with a focus on air and naval capability. From the Chinese point of view, while countries with stronger military capabilities may be less vulnerable to intimidation, they are also less likely to need, or to get, US protection. The Chinese have played their part in this military build-up by selling armaments to Southeast Asian countries. Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have started developing military ties with China. In the first half of 2000 Malaysia and Indonesia affirmed an interest in naval cooperation with China. China is also in a position to take advantage of the differences among the Southeast Asian countries to increase its own influence. Moreover most of these countries are interested in economic relations with China. China’s currency reserves allowed it to play an important role in stabilizing the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s. In the long-term China’s growing economy is another means with which it can ‘overshadow’ the Southeast Asian countries (ibid.: 119-126).

In South Asia, India, with a fleet and economy comparable to China’s, is China’s most serious maritime rival. In 1990s Gen. Zhao Nanqi, Director of China’s Academy of Military Sciences had declared, ‘we are not prepared to let the Indian Ocean become India’s ocean’ (as quoted in The Hindustan Times, January 13, 1993, cited in Kane 2002: 126). In this region China has developed alliances with Pakistan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, which ‘hem India in’. Pakistan gives China a ‘geographical reach’ around India’s northern flank. Till the 1990s, one of China’s difficulties in deploying warships west of the Straits of Malacca was the lack of supply and maintenance facilities in that area. Since however Myanmar has allowed China to develop military port, radar and signals intelligence facilities on islands off its coast, in the proximity of India’s naval bases on the Andaman and Nicobar islands. China is also planning to develop land transport networks in Myanmar, which can give China an overland route to India and reduce China’s own dependence on the Straits of Malacca. Sri Lanka can be crucial for controlling the Indian Ocean in general and peninsular India’s coastline in particular.
China has provided, among other things, substantial military assistance to Pakistan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, about which more details will be given in chapter four (Kane 2002: 126-8).

South Africa, the Suez and the Persian Gulf are ‘pivotal points’ between the East and West of Eurasia. The increasing importance of Middle Eastern oil to Asian economies increases the value of these ‘maritime bottlenecks’. In 2000 a PLA-N flotilla headed by the destroyer Shenzhen made a ‘goodwill visit’ to Malaysia, Tanzania and South Africa, rounded the Cape of Good Hope and sailed into the Atlantic. During the flotilla’s visit to South Africa China’s ambassador to that country spoke of future naval cooperation between the two countries. China established diplomatic relations with Egypt in 1956 and has supplied it with ships and missiles. In Sudan, China National Petroleum Corporation has played a key role in developing oil resources. In 2000 when the government of Sudan was under threat from the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) China sent an expeditionary force by aircraft and ship to aid the government. China also maintains close relations with Israel as well as with the Palestinians, Jordan, Syria and Iran. China’s relations with Israel, Syria and Iran contain a significant military component (ibid.: 128-131).

In 2000 the government of the Pacific island Papua New Guinea (PNG) suppressed an uprising, following which China offered the PNG Defence Forces logistical support. PLA General Wu Quanxu and PNG Defence Secretary Vari Fore committed their countries to work together on military matters, and PNG’s Prime Minister announced support for China’s position on Taiwan (ibid.: 131).

Latin America would be extremely useful to China in challenging the United States Navy (USN). China has established electronic-intelligence facilities at Jaruco, Cuba and is assisting the government of that country to upgrade its satellite tracking facilities and to develop its telecommunications network. In 1997 Hutchison Whampoa, a company based in Hong Kong, purchased the rights to operate shipping terminals at both ends of the Panama Canal. The Rio Group consisting of the governments of Colombia,
Mexico and Chile have expressed support for the principle of ‘multipolarization’ (ibid.: 131-2).

According to Xu Qi (2006: 55-56) the collapse of the Soviet Union and the 9/11 incident had a profound effect on the global geostrategic situation and provided historical opportunities for China’s maritime geostrategic development. China’s rapidly growing economy has gradually integrated with the economies of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao. These economic and geostrategic developments have precipitated a turning point. The geostrategic environment along China’s borders has also improved. China has concluded border demarcation talks and signed a ‘Friendship Cooperation Treaty’ with Russia. With China and Russia in the leading roles, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, operating on the principles of mutual confidence, equality, and cooperation and on the basis of the ‘New Security Concept’, has initiated and implemented a model of regional cooperation. In 2003 China and India signed the “Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Co-operation” and the navies of the two countries carried out joint exercises for the first time. China has also signed a “Joint Declaration on Bilateral Cooperation” with Pakistan. In 2002, at the Greater Mekong Sub-region Senior Officials’ Meeting and the ASEAN Leadership Meeting, China adopted toward ASEAN the policies of ‘eliminating the deep-rooted China threat theory and guaranteeing that economic development cannot destabilize the peripheral environment’ and simultaneously published a declaration on avoiding conflict over the sovereignty of the Spratly Islands. In 2003, in the ASEAN Forum Ministerial Conference and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference, China formally joined the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. China and ASEAN have also signed a trade agreement and initiated a dialogue concerning security and cooperation. The Bo Ao Asia Forum has established the theme of ‘Asia seeking common gains, and cooperatively promoting development’.

Under the influence of ‘global integration’, China’s maritime strategic development is continuously expanding the strategic influence of maritime geostrategic tendencies. On issues of international security China emphasizes both cooperation and
competition, stressing that any security measure must be taken in the interest of collective security. China has played an active role in the Six Party Talks on the North Korean nuclear problem and has also worked with the ASEAN states in an active effort to improve China’s maritime geostrategic posture. During the 1990s in cooperation with neighbouring countries China has constructed harbour wharves in the eastern Indian Ocean in Burma and cleared the Mekong waterways, in order to gain access to the sea from China’s southwest. In 2003, China leased a port in Russia’s Far East and attempted to negotiate the development of the mouth of the Tumen River. On the Makran seacoast of southwest Pakistan China has invested U.S. $1 billion to construct a deepwater port at Gwadar, in order to establish a trade and transport hub for Central Asian nations and simultaneously expand China’s geostrategic influence. In the past few years China has provided aid to the South Pacific region and also strengthened economic and trade ties. Since entering the World Trade Organization China has also strengthened economic and trade cooperation with Africa and the Caribbean region. All of this can be seen as contributing to the development of China’s maritime geostrategic relationships (ibid.: 57-58).

Conclusion

Ni Lexiong (2005: 2-3) argues that China’s quest for sea power should be based on an assessment of the present level of world civilization and its future direction. The 17th century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes regarded society without authority and restraints as a ‘natural state’ (i.e. ‘state of nature’) in which individuals waged war against one another and society follows the natural law of ‘survival of the fittest’. In a situation in which there is no force bigger than that of the sovereign state to regulate relations among sovereign states, they are essentially in a situation in which each wages war against the other. This period of human history and world civilization can be called the ‘Hobbesian Era’, and the ‘survival of the fittest’ phenomenon the ‘Hobbesian Law’.

The German philosopher Emmanuel Kant on the other hand argued that the world is marching towards an ‘era of eternal/perpetual peace’. With regard to the question of
China’s sea power strategy there are two views. The first one is that China should build a strong navy and that China’s future depends on it. The second one is that the globalization of the world’s economy has made the interests of different countries interconnected to a greater degree, and that a country can preserve its ‘life line at sea’ through ‘cooperation’ rather than a ‘solo fight’. Which of these two views should be put into practice depends on whether the current level and future direction of world civilization is a Hobbesian Era or an Era of Eternal Peace. Since the end of the Cold War there have been instances of peaceful compromise, but there have been far more instances in which force has been used in disputes. In other words, the Hobbesian Era is more of a reality than Kant’s Era of Eternal Peace. If every nation handles its defence by the Hobbesian Law all nations will be trapped in the vicious cycle of the ‘security dilemma’, but at the same time many instances of peace in history have been supported by force. In Ni Lexiong’s view China’s sea power strategy should be constructed in such a way that it will be able to deal with threats posed to its ‘outward-leaning economy’ by some strong nations in the Hobbesian Era, and at the same time cope with the contingency of a Kantian ‘multinational alliance’ or ‘world republic’ emerging. If a ‘world republic’ does emerge China should be in a position in which its navy will be accepted as part of a ‘world navy’.

Kane (2002: 139-142) argues that China is systematically using all the resources at its disposal to increase its power at sea as part of a broader and long-term effort to put itself among the foremost global powers. China’s maritime capabilities are constrained by its position in numerous ocean areas throughout the world and by a variety of islands, peninsulas and their governments. To maximize its sea power it must position itself in these regions in a way that supports its requirements. It will seek friendly relations with powers on its ‘landward flank’ and with countries that can offer the PLA-N port facilities in strategic locations. It will use ‘balance of power’ politics as a way of turning other countries against each other so as to maximize its own position in a power configuration. Its policies will contain both conciliatory and coercive elements. It will have to considerably increase the capabilities of its armed forces to support this broader effort and to be able to seize the initiative in strategic contests. In order to do this it will avoid a
major war in the short-term and give priority to civilian economic development. The ‘16-character policy’ (or the ‘16 character slogan’) indicates that such development will be utilized for development of the military as well. In the short run, given its relative weakness, the Chinese navy will seek to provide oceanic mobility for joint operations and to threaten the mobility of others, and will use military and diplomatic means to limit the scope of fighting and avoid ‘all-out war’. However in the long-term they aspire to put themselves in a better position to directly dominate the sea. If one follows the development of the PRC’s armed forces and foreign policy one can see a systematic and incremental improvement of their position and a securing of greater and more general gains. When opportunities have arisen, such as in the early 1990s when the Soviet Union disintegrated and the United States re-evaluated its foreign policy, they acted rapidly to advance their policies in many ways at the same time. The continuity of this strategy will depend on the durability of the PRC’s current regime. Leaving aside the Western powers, even if China is to dominate Japan or India, it will have to considerably develop its fleet and defence industry. Kane goes on to argue that it is important to keep in mind that apart from its ability to win a fleet battle on the open sea, the PLA-N can also be assessed on the basis of how well it supports the rest of China’s foreign policy.

According to You Ji (2006: 88-90) the gap between the PLA-N’s strategic ambitions and operational capabilities may have narrowed as a result of the spurt of growth in its capabilities between 2000 and 2005. It still faces numerous difficulties such as a lopsided force structure, slow growth of ocean-going fleets, lack of progress in building strategic nuclear submarines, an obsolete air-force, and the low quality of personnel. Nevertheless if China’s economy maintains its high rate of growth it will have the material resources to finance its military modernization and it will only be a matter of time before it achieves its ambition of becoming a blue-water power.

Xu Qi (2006: 63) argues that the PLA-N’s strategic choice must be oriented toward the world’s oceans and formulated with a perspective of the grand strategic space. Confronting a world that has entered the space age, in his view, China’s navy must aim in the development direction of the new global revolution in military affairs, actively
advance a revolution in military affairs with Chinese characteristics, and on the basis of informatization leading mechanization, accelerate the achievement of informatization. At the same time, it is essential to surmount traditional concepts of geographic orientation, to closely monitor the development of space technology and space weapons in maritime warfare with a long-term perspective, and to build a powerful navy that possesses relative space superiority. In order to answer the threat from the sea, it must continue to improve China’s maritime geostrategic posture and contribute to peace, progress, and development in the region.

Kondapalli (2001: 217-218) argues that while the Ming and late Qing efforts at naval expansion are supposed to have included a cooperative but unequal framework under the concept of ‘Maritime Asia’ (Nanyang), the recent rise in Chinese naval power projection between the two ‘island chains’, and in the coming decades even beyond that, have raised concerns among China’s neighbours. These concerns were compounded by the lack of maturity in the Chinese position on outstanding maritime disputes. Therefore, in his view, cumulatively, tensions were bound to rise with the rise in China’s naval power.

The arguments we have considered in this chapter indicate that there is a link between China’s ‘blue water’ maritime strategy and the ‘opening’ of China’s economy in the context of the overall post-Mao reform initiated under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. For Ni Lexiong (2005) China’s sea power strategy should be constructed in such a way that it can compete with other states without alienating itself from international society. Kane’s (2002) argument that the growth of China’s maritime power is part of an overall grand strategy to improve its position in terms of power at the regional and global levels is cast primarily in competitive terms. You Ji (2006), Xu Qi (2006), and Kondapalli (2001) have looked specifically at the PLA-N. For You Ji, as well as for Kane, whether the PLA-N will become a ‘blue water’ navy or not depends on China’s economic growth and military modernization. Based on geostrategic thinking Xu Qi advocates the advancement of a ‘revolution in military affairs with Chinese characteristics’ in order to strengthen the PLA-N. While Xu Qi believes that a more
powerful PLA-N can contribute to regional development and peace, Kondapalli has argued that the rise in China’s naval power will create regional instability. If one considers these arguments in the light of our framework for analyzing the maritime dimension of international relations, what is clear is that the growth of China’s seaborne international trade gives it an increasing stake in the security of international sea lanes, and one could argue that this makes a ‘blue water’ navy and an appropriate maritime strategy a necessity from China’s point of view.