Military modernization has been a core objective of the People's Republic of China (PRC) since the advent of the "Four Modernizations" program initiated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after the death of Mao Zedong and the fall of the Gang of Four in the mid-1970s.

Naval modernization is a key component of that program, now seen as crucial to President Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" of a strong and prosperous China. The development of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has accelerated greatly as China's economic interests have become global in scale, leading to new diplomatic, political and security interests which must be supported by the hard power of a world-class navy.

By 2020, China will possess the second-best navy in the world. The China's Military Strategy white paper (2015) announces ambitious goals for Beijing's navy: The PLAN "will gradually shift its focus from 'offshore waters defense' to the combination of 'offshore waters defense' and 'open seas protection.'" With this broad strategy in mind, the white paper sets forth an ambitious agenda for the navy:

» To deal with a wide range of emergencies and military threats, and effectively safeguard the sovereignty and security of China's territorial land, air and sea domains.

» To safeguard China's security and interests in new domains.

» To safeguard the security of China's overseas interests.
» To maintain strategic deterrence and carry out nuclear counterattack.

» To participate in regional and international security cooperation and maintain regional and world peace.

» To perform such tasks as emergency rescue and disaster relief, rights and interests protection, guard duties, and support for national economic and social development.

In this list is an enumeration of the goals and interests driving the expansion of the role of the Chinese Navy in world affairs. In geographical terms, these goals are divided in Chinese discourse between “near seas” objectives and “far seas” (blue water) objectives. The far seas area can be further subdivided into successive zones extending from China’s coastal waters out into the global maritime commons. Each requires its own set of interests, objectives and capabilities, and each implies its own political and diplomatic challenges. The near and far seas strategies are not mutually exclusive. Domination of the near sea theater makes far sea expansion possible, and far sea operations and Chinese cooperation with overseas naval partners strengthens China's position in the near seas.
The near seas – what the white paper calls “offshore waters defense” – involves the defense of the Chinese coastline and Chinese territorial waters in the East and South China Seas, the avenue of invasion used by foreign powers from Great Britain during the Opium Wars to Japan in the 1930s. The PRC is determined that such events will never be repeated. This includes the vital PRC interest in the recovery of Taiwan. But Chinese objectives are not limited to historical redemption.

Beijing is looking to a future in which China takes its place as a major world military power commensurate with its economic power and global interests. A precondition to that goal is maximum control of the East Asian littoral. Just as the United States had to dominate the Western hemisphere before it could succeed in achieving a global navy, so China must achieve naval dominance in the South, East China and Yellow Seas, and in Southeast Asian waters before it can hope to guarantee its rapidly developing global interests.

This is the genesis of China’s "anti-access/area denial" (A2/AD) strategy, which is focused around two island chains. The outer chain runs south from Japan, bends toward Guam and Palau, marking off the Philippine Sea, and ends at New Zealand. The inner chain begins with the entire nine-dash line1 containing the South China Sea, extends north past Taiwan, skirts the East China Sea, and ends at Japan’s Kyushu Island.

1The nine-dash line is the demarcation line which Beijing uses with regard to its claims in the South China Sea.
A2/AD means that China must be capable of denying access to the two-chain area to any foreign power, thus enabling China to achieve a number of crucial objectives:

1. Clear the area of hostile naval forces, and block access to invasion forces from beyond the outer island chain in the event of a regional war, or of conflict over Taiwan.
2. Deter and, if necessary, defeat an American blockade of China’s access to the sea.
3. Guarantee access to the sea lanes of communication through the Strait of Malacca.
4. Provide military support for China’s territorial claims in the South and East China Seas.
5. Persuade other states to refrain from military and resource development in the area.
6. Remain capable of disrupting normal shipping and thus cause economic damage, in an effort to deter regional states from aligning with China’s adversaries with respect to any given political, economic or military issue.
7. Maintain naval superiority over potential adversaries, primarily Japan and South Korea.
8. End the strategic dominance of the region by the United States Navy.
9. Keep the designated area free for Chinese deployment of nuclear-armed submarines (SSBN) as a credible and survivable second-strike capability.

Beijing has invested heavily and aggressively in near-sea naval capacity. China now has the largest navy in Asia, with 300 surface ships. It also has submarines that work in coordination both with aircraft armed with anti-ship cruise missiles, and with land-based anti-ship ballistic missiles. The PLAN has approximately 30 corvettes (with many more under construction), 60 wave-piercing catamaran missile patrol boats, about 40 modern diesel-powered submarines and four nuclear attack submarines (two more of which are expected by 2020). There is also an ongoing and ambitious program to modernize China’s anti-ship cruise missile arsenal, with heavy investments in reconnaissance, surveillance, command, control and communications systems. China has also acquired submarine-launched supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles not possessed by the U.S. Navy, and is developing a fleet of amphibious attack ships.

This array of naval assets does not include many of the ships listed later in this report that remain available for near sea operations but are also being deployed in far sea missions. China’s increasing power over its near seas has enabled Beijing to sustain a rapidly expanding array of far seas interests.
China's far-flung economic, diplomatic and security interests have made necessary a steady advancement toward a global navy, with the purpose of what the white paper terms "open seas protection." Indeed, Chinese Navy ships have tranversed the Red Sea and Suez Canal, the Mediterranean, the Cape of Good Hope, the Bosporus, the Panama Canal, the Strait of Magellan, the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, and have made port calls all along both the east and west coasts of Africa, Bulgaria, Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Australia.

Chinese warships have sailed into American territorial waters near the Aleutian Islands off the coast of Alaska in the Bering Sea. Both nuclear and diesel submarines have patrolled the Indian Ocean. China participated in the U.S.-organized RIMPAC exercise in 2014 with a destroyer, a frigate, a supply ship and a hospital ship. China’s participation in anti-piracy operations in the Arabian Sea have been underway since 2009, giving the PLAN considerable experience managing deployments far from Chinese home waters.

There are two essential steps required to achieve the goal of a global navy. The first is the development of far seas capacity. The second is to employ that capacity as part of a larger geopolitical strategy. There are four strategic areas of concerted development, each with its own dynamic: the Indian Ocean, Africa, global operations with Russian cooperation, and SSBN second-generation nuclear deterrence.

### CHINA’S NAVY BY THE NUMBERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CURRENT NUMBER (2016)</th>
<th>EXPECTED NUMBER BY 2020</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The PLAN has one aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, acquired from Russia. This craft has limited capability, and is primarily suited for fleet air defense and for training and experience with air operations at sea. China is beginning construction on a second carrier – with entirely Chinese design and technology – we have evidence of the onset of plans for multiple carrier construction projects over the next 15 years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three Type 094 (Jin-class) SSBNs in service; five more may be in service by 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>At least three ballistic missile submarines (to be discussed below)</td>
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<td>Six destroyers</td>
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<tr>
<td>The newly commissioned Type 052D Luyang III-class destroyer (the equivalent of the best U.S. destroyers), with more under construction (14 expected by 2020)</td>
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The new Jiangkai II (Type 054A) guided missile frigate, with about 40 expected by 2020 (these have been used for anti-piracy operations in the Arabian Sea)

Three Yuzhao (Type 071) amphibious transport docks capable of carrying 800 troops (six expected by 2020)
Beijing has steadily built an arc of supply, berth and maintenance facilities, through diplomatic and economic agreements with regional countries, that extends from China’s Hainan Island in the east to Djibouti in Africa in the west. This series of ports has enabled China to maintain a constant surface ship and submarine presence in the Indian Ocean. With the exception of Djibouti, these are not characterized as naval bases. Rather, they are established as bilateral projects with the host countries focused on port infrastructure, development and trade. But the possibility of dual military use must not be ruled out, particularly over the long term as regional balances of naval power change. These include: Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan (Gwadar and Karachi), Oman, and Yemen, and a number of ports in Africa to be covered below.

Some argue that this series of ports, known as “China’s String of Pearls,” is designed to dominate the Indian Ocean as maritime hegemon. This may be a very long-run strategy. But more immediate objectives are just as important and should not be missed. One crucial maritime goal is to gain access to the three key Indian Ocean shipping chokepoints, the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb, and to other strategic sea lanes of communication, in order to either interdict shipping or to deny control of them to others. Other important goals include:

1. Provide naval support for commercial shipping.
2. Counter any possible India-Japan-America containment coalition.
3. Secure the capability to put maritime pressure on India in conflicts over borders and support for Tibet.
4. Enhance access to the Indian Ocean for Chinese SSBN strategic deterrence capability, and the capability to mount “offensive defense” (strategic counterattacks).
5. Build an effective military and diplomatic counter to the American system of alliances and bases, which China sees as strategic encirclement.

Source: Global Balita
Just as crucial as these maritime objectives is the connection between China's naval diplomacy and its land-based strategic interests. The strongest example is Pakistan. China's port projects support Pakistan as a balance and lever against India. The key project in this strategy is the Gwadar Port, which Pakistan recently leased for the next forty years to a Chinese state-owned company that will possess operation and management rights there. It is also a major component of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which will connect Pakistan's Arabian Sea coast with China's Himalayan border with transport and energy projects—a $46 billion Chinese investment over 15 years. This in turn must be seen in the context of China's Silk Road Economic Belt initiative, which is designed to promote Chinese interests deep into Central Asia. China's maritime relations with other countries along the Indian Ocean rim serve similar purposes.

AFRICA

Africa has become a major target of Chinese economic expansion. Bilateral trade exceeds $200 billion. African countries are important suppliers of energy and other key natural resources. Beijing has accordingly invested heavily in economic partnerships with African nations, including energy and infrastructure projects and port development. But while China has been careful to downplay the actual or potential military dimensions of its port projects along the Indian Ocean, Beijing has been much more open and proactive in pushing the military dimensions of its relations with African countries. China has military agreements with Algeria, Ethiopia and Nigeria. PLAN ships deployed to the Gulf of Aden have visited Mombasa, Kenya, where China has also participated and invested in the development of Lamu Port. The PLAN has conducted extensive naval exercises with Tanzania and Nigeria. The Chinese task forces involved in the Nigeria exercises also visited ports in Namibia, Angola and South Africa. The Tanzania exercises were based at the Kigamboni naval base in Dar es Salaam. Tanzania is one of China’s most important African allies.

Another newly emerging key ally is Djibouti. China's Djibouti base signals a major advancement of this ongoing and accelerating Africa strategy. China and Djibouti concluded a Security and Defense Agreement in 2014. China announced in November 2015 that it will build its first overseas military installation at the Obock port facility in Djibouti. The port will not be a commercial project but explicitly a naval resupply and maintenance base, established at a strategic point on the Horn of Africa that is well-placed to support not only anti-piracy operations but also China’s increasingly complex relations with African nations, which may require action either under U.N. auspices or as unilateral political or even military interventions to protect Chinese citizens in Africa, as well as the Middle East. Already, Chinese evacuees from Yemen were taken to Djibouti in March of 2015.
GLOBAL COOPERATION WITH RUSSIA

Africa is a solo Chinese enterprise; expansion into Europe and elsewhere, including Alaskan waters, is taking place under Russian auspices, or following Russian precedent. The Chinese ships sighted in the Bering Sea close to some Alaskan atolls in September 2015 were following the Russian precedent, which regularly sends ships into these waters under the maritime rule of “innocent passage,” which allows foreign ships to enter territorial waters “continuously and expeditiously, not stopping or anchoring.”

The Chinese Navy has and will continue to use Russia as a strategic partner for gaining a position and experience in global operations. The most recent example is the Joint Sea 2015 I and II Sino-Russian naval exercises in the eastern Mediterranean, the Sea of Japan and off the coast of Vladivostok – the fourth large-scale set of exercises in as many years. Chinese frigates called at the Russian Novorossiysk naval base in the Black Sea as part of Joint Sea I in May 2015. Chinese ships were present in the Caspian Sea as the Russian Navy launched cruise missiles against rebel positions in Syria in October 2015. And China sent a frigate which docked at Cyprus to aid in the international operation to remove chemical weapons from Syria in 2014. Future joint activities may take place in the Arctic and the Baltic Sea.

These exercises emphasize long-distance multi-role expeditionary operations, anti-submarine warfare, area air defense, anti-ship missile simulation, amphibious landings, maritime defense, replenishment and escorting. The exercises also enhance Sino-Russian technological cooperation. The Chinese excel in electronically scanned radar, while the Russians possess superior anti-submarine capabilities; the two navies shared radar and sonar data, capabilities which will enhance both China's coastal A2/AD and its power projection capabilities in Africa and the Indian Ocean. The close cooperation demonstrated by these major exercises between Russia and China in the open seas and in areas such as the eastern Mediterranean suggests that future major operations undertaken by either power could include joint command, control, organization and planning.

SSBN NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

China inhabits a multipolar nuclear system. Aside from the United States, Beijing also faces several other nuclear threats. India began its nuclear weapons program in response to the Chinese nuclear program, the onset of which followed closely the sharp border war between the two in 1962. Beijing sees steadily deepening ties between the United States and India, which include extensive civil nuclear cooperation and little pressure to join the NPT and CTBT, as an attempt at strategic containment. And Russia, despite a deepening entente with China, remains a potential adversary, with a vastly superior ICBM and SSBN capacity. Another threat, not yet actual, is that from Japan, which has the capability to go nuclear at any time should Tokyo lose confidence in the American nuclear umbrella. Finally, a potential rogue nuclear North Korea remains an uncertain and unpredictable ally of Beijing.

According to current estimates, China now has three or four Type 094 (Jin-class) SSBNs in service; five more may be in service by 2020. Jin-class submarines carry JL-2 SLBMs with a range of nearly 4,500 miles. If reports that Chinese nuclear deterrence patrols began in 2015 are true, China now has its first credible sea-based deterrent capable of mounting a nuclear counterattack from anywhere in the world. This would represent a significant change in China's nuclear posture, which has to this point emphasized land-based mobile ICBMs. China now possesses a nuclear dyad, lacking only strategic bombing capacity.

The question now concerns where the PLA Navy will deploy its SSBN force. This is a question of survivability, and of command and control. Keeping China's SSBN patrols close to the first island chain in the South China Sea and around Hainan Island, a bastion...
strategy, would enhance central control over tactical submarine commanders, but would constrain both the area of operations (and thus the ability to hide in deep waters) and the range of possible targets. Wide-ranging patrols under the world's oceans would enhance survivability and target availability, but would put tactical commanders far from government and CCP authority, and would cause greater maritime tension with other nuclear powers, particularly the United States. Given the forward-leaning development of Chinese defense strategy, it is likely that Beijing will eventually, if it has not already, opt for the latter posture, which would have the added advantage of creating strategic uncertainty for potential adversaries.
The various aspects of China’s naval expansion form parts of a larger grand strategy.

The move to control the South China Sea is a crucial element of Beijing’s A2/AD strategy for defense of the homeland. But the South China Sea is also the eastern end of a growing and strengthening area of operations that runs all the way to East Africa.

This places China in a position to bring significant military force to bear on key strategic points in the region, as demonstrated by the anti-piracy and humanitarian operations in recent years — and eventually to challenge other powers for dominance of the Indian Ocean region.

China will not emerge as a new global maritime hegemon or peer competitor of the United States anytime soon. But it could emerge as a peer challenger in East Asia or in other theaters in cooperation with another regional peer competitor such as Russia — or even on its own, should the U.S. be occupied in more than one theater at the same time.

China’s more immediate strategy is designed to achieve specific national objectives associated with specific interests. Those interests are expanding at an accelerating rate, and will push the Chinese toward operating on an increasingly global scale in the coming decades.

Naval expansion is taking place in an analogous fashion to the implementation of the economic reforms from the late 1970s to the present: a careful, deliberative, experimental trajectory toward the achievement of strategic goals.

As this experiment proceeds, it will be important to watch some key factors that could derail Beijing’s grand naval strategy:

- Will the entente with Russia last?
- Will political tensions between the CCP and the PLA undermine the confidence the leaders of each have in the other?
- Will new Chinese-designed and Chinese-reengineered Russian technology work in battle as expected?
- How will the United States respond; how would a serious commitment to the strategic rebalance and vigorous promotion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement change regional dynamics?
- Will steady Chinese economic growth continue to sustain such an energetic political, diplomatic and military expansion?

Over the longer term, with the growth of Chinese capability and experience, and the accumulation of international partners, it becomes less and less likely that China will allow the United States, Japan or India to determine political outcomes in such sensitive geostrategic areas as Myanmar and Pakistan, or in areas where China has crucial energy and economic interests, as in Africa.
» China is likely to become over the next ten to fifteen years a far more interventionist power than it has been so far in its history as the PRC.

» A world-class navy would give Beijing such hard-power options as gunboat diplomacy and expeditionary intervention in crucial situations.

» It also adds an element of hard-power intimidation that can aid in forcing accommodation by regional powers to China’s preferences regarding its interests in regional and global politics and diplomacy.

» Under its policy of non-intervention, China insists it has no intention to engage in any sort of interventionist behavior. To date, this policy has been a necessity largely due to a lack of capability. But new capabilities and expanding global interests will certainly lead to new intentions.
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ATTRIBUTIONS

[COVER] “People’s Republic of China, People’s Liberation Army (Navy) frigate PLA(N) Yueyang (FF 575) steams in formation with 42 other ships and submarines representing 15 international partner nations during Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise 2014.”, by U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Shannon Renfroe, released into the public domain.
THE CHINESE NAVY: A LOOK AHEAD

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