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For Whom The Dragon Stirs: China's Defense Policy Influences

By Christopher Sandersfeld, CC '00

The death of Deng Xiaoping in February 1997 was a symbolic end of an era in the People's Republic of China, and the initiation of a new one. Thus, it is a convenient point for examination of the current defense policy of the country. President Jiang Zemin, Deng's successor is currently undertaking programs aimed at fundamental and wide-spread reform with implications on foreign and defense relations. President Jiang's China can be viewed in light of three major defense policy goals: Development of a military-economic modernization program; placement of priority on reform of China's internal and external defense; and assertion of sovereignty through formation of a more assertive Taiwan policy. What then have been the reforms designed to implement the defense policy of no-first-use of force, protection of sovereignty, and a strictly limited aims warfare? And perhaps, more importantly, what has been the impetus for policy change? It is my purpose in this article to show that China's reforms and policy changes are instrumental to a larger goal—becoming a superpower.

China's military-economic modernization is the result of the widely held view within the Chinese government that the military has become inefficient, ineffective, and out of date. In fact, concern over the military's preoccupation with making money rather than emphasis on developing and maintaining a well-oiled fighting force is a major part of this view.¹ As an important step in pursuing this policy, the government has ordered the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to begin to divest itself of the companies it owns or controls. In the words of one Chinese embassy official in Washington, "The PLA should be the PLA. It should concentrate on national defense."²

Related closely to this is the placement of a greater priority on reform of China's internal and external defense systems. Internally, the Chinese military is being streamlined. China's mechanism for reform of the armed forces has been centered around the transition from a numerically superior combat force to a qualitatively efficient type and from a manpower-intensive type to a technology-intensive type.³ Internal defense of China must be accompanied by a more effective, professional army. Thus, the PLA intends to accomplish this by reducing the number of troops from approximately 3 million to 2.5 million, diverting funds from personnel to improving quality of the adjusted forces.⁴ Defense from external threats is another top priority.

The PLA watched the coverage of the 1991 Gulf War with much interest, realizing that this would be the future of warfare—high emphasis on smart weapons and high technology.⁵ To this end, China initiated a procurement drive concentrated on Russian high-tech weapons and military technologies including: Su-27 fighter-bombers and surface-to-air missiles.⁶ China is also breathing life into its own domestic development of land-attack cruise missiles, guidance systems based on GPS technology, and terrain contour-matching radar systems.⁷

The modernization of the armed forces has also been a major step in reasserting sovereignty, especially with regard to Taiwan and, to a lesser extent, island chains like the Spratlys and the Senkakus. China asserts the inseparability between the mainland and Taiwan and also reserves the right to use force against any party that attempts to infringe on this sovereignty.⁸ At no time was this situation more apparent than the incident in the Taiwan Straits in March 1996. By performing military exercises at a time when Taiwanese people were heading to the polls, China attempted to stage a demonstration of its military might and assert more forcefully its claim over the island province. Although the intent was clear, the reality was also a glaring reminder of the inadequacy of the Chinese military. The PLA Navy fared badly in the less-than-desirable weather conditions. In order to remedy the situation, China has pursued a procurement policy based on Russian naval vessels (submarines, destroyers, and perhaps an aircraft carrier) as well as satellite technology for improved C4I capabilities.⁹

Of the many factors affecting defense policy formation (both internal and external), the first is the political-bureaucratic process within China. The effect of governmental organizations and bureaucratic offices, however, is most ambiguous. It is difficult to identify coherent and competing institutions in China, much less ones with well-defined and institutionalized interests. It is appropriate to look at two bureaucracies in order to examine the salience of this factor: The PLA and the tension within the civilian government.

When considering the defense policy implications of the PLA, it is not appropriate to begin looking at the competition between the air force, the navy, and the army. This simply is not a relevant point as the air force and the navy, the army, as well as five other branches are all subsumed under the heading of the People's Liberation Army.¹⁰ When the General Staff makes procurement and policy recommendations to the Central Military Commission, it does so with all of the branches in mind—not under influence of one or the other.

It is useful, however, to view the PLA's role as a single, coherent unit. It is currently unclear to what extent the military is under the control of the

civilian leadership and to what extent the military maintains a more autonomous position within China. While the PLA has been traditionally controlled by the Central Military Commission and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, the numbers of representatives from the military are at their lowest levels so far.¹¹ The ambiguity of this fact begs the question of whether the military is losing influence, or whether there is a growing separation between the civilian and military wings of the state and a greater sense of autonomy for the military.¹²

The other point of consideration is the possible tension between reformers in the civilian government and those who retain a more conservative approach to China's governance. Although even the more conservative policy makers are more accurately termed "cautious reformers," the tension arises with regard to bounding reform.¹³ Although Jiang Zemin appears to be a very committed reformer with much public as well as governmental support, his support is contingent upon not going too far. That is, if the more "cautious" members of the government were to feel his reforms to be too much too fast, the danger of institutionalizing opposition would increase. Organizational identification and rallying could cause significant political divide and translate into a real struggle for control and the reigns of policy formation power.

The economic factor is a second determinant of defense policy. With the recent financial crisis in Asia, most East Asian nations are concerned with getting the most value for their money. China is no different, and yet it is measurably so. While China has exhibited an economic slow-down, it has not felt the full effects of the crash. It has, however, been a contributing factor in allocation of funds to defense. It is unclear what affect this will have on long-term military procurement and development strategies. The focus on modernization and utilization of funds for the most productive and efficient end underlies much of this dilemma.

A more appropriate and immediate economic particular concerns the state of "military Keynesianism" that exists in China.¹⁴ It is important to note, however, that in China the military not only acts as consumer, but also as market supplier. The PLA-owned businesses are a significant source of revenue and funds not only for the armed forces but also the individuals who make up the armed forces. Anywhere from \$3 billion to \$5 billion worth of profits are generated every year, supplementing military wages, and generating funds for new barracks, construction projects, and other perks.¹⁵ The recent orders by President Jiang and the civilian government that the PLA divest itself of its market ventures gives rise to further uncertainty. Will defense procurement and development feel the pinch of a loss of significant profits from these industries? The result is unclear, but the implications

could be quite far reaching. For instance, if the PLA is forced to continue divesting itself of business enterprises and the supplements to wages gradually dry up, the morale of the armed forces may take a significant downturn. With millions of civilians and military personnel out of work (and sizable disenfranchised and less privileged number of ethnic minorities), the potential for civil strife becomes much greater.¹⁶ In order to counter this process, China must continue to build its economic base and stimulate macroeconomic growth. China's refusal to devalue *the yuan* has been a central part of this policy, as well as encouraging international investors to come (with their capital) to China.

Another factor affecting defense policy— geography— is a significant one. China's large size, the mountainous barriers guarding most of her borders, and a 13,000 km coastline are again both beneficial and somewhat troublesome.¹⁷ Barriers can serve as a prohibitive feature against invasion, but also indicate the predominance of air force support as a necessary part of attack and defense. The extensive coastline also is a vulnerable feature of China's geography in that maintenance of a secure shore requires a highly skilled and efficient navy— something China currently does not possess.¹⁸

A fourth internal factor at play is one less tangible, but one that is potentially very powerful: the cultural factor. Military and defense planning have been critical to China since the time of *The Art of War* and continue to embody many of the same tenets. For instance, Mao frequently cited the work as a crucial guiding force behind defense policy. The emphasis on strategy versus brute force had a special place for Mao, as it is a policy that is very useful when one's attack force cannot muster enough troops to become brute. Guerrilla warfare, Mao's means to Communist control of China, is highly conducive to this mindset.

The historical view that men are more vital to war fighting than technology/machinery also bears very directly on China's defense policy. With an expanse of territory as large as China's this becomes not only an emphasis but a necessity in the absence of technology. Thus, resistance to reductions in military manpower may be viewed in this historical framework, as well.

In addition, since most of China's conflicts have been civil in nature, resorting to wars of annihilation and total destruction are not viable options. This is an important point to consider especially in relation to Taiwan and the many disputed island chains in the South China Sea. Certainly China does not want to destroy these islands— such an action would be most counter-productive to coopting the population and utilizing the land.¹⁹

In addition to domestic factors, external international factors also comes into play in defense policy formation. Not least among these is the

influence of technology and intelligence. Although this may appear to be a domestic factor, it is highly dependent upon knowledge and dealings with the outside world. China in the past has used this tactic with remarkable success. In the 1962 war with India, China had extensive knowledge of the armed forces, weapons systems, and combat tactics.²⁰ It would seem that China indeed has a firm hold on the tactics necessary for adequate and even superior intelligence collection, but current technologies prevent it from realizing any sort of superiority. China's ongoing process of modernization (of which science and technology-intelligence is a main tenet) will eventually culminate in a fighting force that is better able to deal with the high-tech demands of future conflict.

China's intelligence has also been historically quite reliant upon human intelligence gathering as one if not the primary method of information gathering.²¹ In recent years this system has come under increasing fire as major blunders involving (ironically) lack of knowledge of the systems of surveillance of other countries have come to light.²² Having one's country's intelligence operatives exposed is not generally considered an ideal situation to understate the problem, and China must learn to deal with this. China's potential for increased intelligence gathering is highly increased with closer relations between itself and the West. Thus in this sense, defense and foreign policies that bring China and the US closer together are very much in China's interest. Greater access to US technologies and information greatly improves China's position vis-a-vis other would-be regional powers or internal problems such as Taiwan.

This problem could not be illustrated more clearly than the recent rigmarole regarding US sale of potentially dual-use technologies to China. Although specifically marketed as booster capabilities for launching (American) satellites into orbit, the same technologies could be used to improve ballistic missile know-how.²³

The regional factor is another area of consideration for defense policy. In looking at this feature of China's mindset, one must look to possible threats from China's neighbors, or at the very least the powers in the region. One possible threat that lends itself well to analysis is India. China still maintains a border dispute with India, a legacy of their 1962 war. India still names China as its number one threat, and its recent nuclear testing potentially poses a problem for China. Should India decide to go on the offensive, however unlikely that might be, it would have to rely on a strategy of limited aims territorial acquisition. The territory in dispute is in the middle of the Himalayas, making any sort of large-scale invasion difficult. China maintains a no-first use policy of any military force and thus would only attack if attacked.²⁴ India's attack seems unlikely, thus making it an unlikely threat in

the near future.

Another regional security consideration is the United States. Although not even a party to the hemisphere, the US poses a significant challenge to China regionally by its support of Taiwan. After the March 1996 incident in the Taiwan Straits, it became painfully apparent that the real force standing in the way of any sort of forced reunification was the US. Naval development modernization then is seen as a critical policy in dealing with this situation. Reportedly, China has admitted a desire to equal the US as a naval power by 2050.²⁵ This is a highly significant point for defense policy formation, and one which has implications to the international system as well.

The international system then is a third factor information of China's defense policy. In the absence of the Cold War bi-polar world, China has come to be seen as not merely a regional power, which it undoubtedly already is to a certain extent, but also a rising world power. In fact, the trend to a multi-polar world with benign regional hegemony (with China heading East Asia), is one which is gaining considerable attention.²⁶ Indeed if reports of the naval ambitions are correct and shared uniformly throughout the government, China also intends to become a world power.

Whether China as a world power in a multi-polar world would be stabilizing or de-stabilizing to the international system is beyond the scope of this analysis, but it is important to consider a time frame for China's security position. China's navy has a goal of par with the US by 2050, but the question of China's place in the world system may be forced much earlier—perhaps as early as 2010, when it is reported China intends for full reunification with Taiwan.²⁷ Further, China has placed a great emphasis on military technology and economic modernization, suggesting that it intends to be on par with those other powers on the leading edge of the system.

While all of the factors, both domestic and external/international play a role in China's defense policy formation, the relative weights of each is again dependent upon the time-frame at which we look.

In the short term, it would seem that China's defense policies are very much concerned with domestic factors and the preservation of China's notion of sovereignty. Although this has implications on the regional factors to a certain extent, it does not prohibit a look at this level. The greatest threat to China at this very moment in time comes from within.²⁸ Currently, the regime enjoys a great deal of stability and its leaders are popular. This may not always be the case, however, and planning for such a contingency is high on the PLA's agenda.

With the economic downturn still going in full force with no immediate end in sight, China is feeling the pinch. Many people are out of work

because of economic reforms, and the military is facing the task of moving away from business enterprises that seem to encourage less efficiency in military training matters. In order to deal effectively with possible insurrections or mass uprisings, a more streamlined, professional, and highly trained army, is in order. A better trained army with better technology and equipment is much more able to deal effectively with internal threats—including Taiwan. Separatists and regime threatening movements are dealt with much more easily when troops have the necessary training and equipment to implement the full coercive powers of the state.

In the long term, the international system arguably plays the dominant role. Modernization, acquisition, and training policies have a more ambitious aim once internal security is fully achieved—creation of a regional and world superpower. The US is indeed a thorn in China's side, preventing it from fully realizing its own sense of sovereignty with regard to Taiwan. By setting goals of naval equality and purchasing weapons systems and technologies that would allow it to promote and defend its interests without fear of intervention by those more powerful, China is on the road to becoming a superpower and a challenger to the US' unipolar moment.

Notes

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South Africa's Long Road: A Theoretical Approach

By Claude Rosenbaugh, CC '00

The manifest change in the relationship between citizen and state in South Africa under apartheid and then reconstruction, post apartheid, is of significant importance to a student of Political Science. Barry Weingast, a political theorist, provides an applicable model for the project as he devises a game-theoretic approach to illustrate the various scenarios and interactions of a state (political officials) and its citizenry. Explaining various interactions among key elements of a society, mainly the state, its citizens, and elite, he establishes a condition in which a breakdown of rule of law is manifested in that society. A breakdown in rule of law impedes progress toward democratic stability, which for the purpose of the argument, is the ideal goal of a society. South Africa in an apartheid state and the transition following serves as an excellent subject to apply the *Transgression* model by Weingast. The model applied to South Africa illustrates how a Democratic state can, in a non-democratic fashion, destroy rule of law and how society and elite overcome such forces and begin recovery down a road leading to a stable democracy with self-enforcing limitations and equality under the state.

APARTHEID: INTENT AND POLICIES

Apartheid, in retrospect was no less than a severely complex political organism comprised of rules, regulations, and legislation aimed at dominating the Black South African's body and mind. The intent of apartheid, established in 1948, was 1) to create a completely segregated society, in keeping with the precepts of Afrikaner politico-religious doctrine and in doing so preserve Afrikaner identity. 2) To secure white political supremacy and its resulting economic privileges from potential internal and external threats: mainly Black domestic threats, and international sentiments on racial rule. And 3) to move the Afrikaner community into a position of social and economic parity with the English speaking community. The apartheid state defines a society ruled by a minority government which imposed rules based on discriminatory ideology that compromised the rights of the Black majority and disregarded Democratic procedures. Apartheid required manipulation of the law and disregard for democratic procedure, both of which, along with the memory of their struggle against it, overshadow the history of the Black South African.¹ South African history