

CHAPTER 1

CHINA'S STRATEGIC CHALLENGE

In 2008 America and its coalition partners find themselves engaged in a costly and protracted war against the terrorist forces of Islamic extremism. This struggle handily predates Osama bin Laden's September 11, 2001, attacks against the United States, but it became an intense U.S. priority as the George W. Bush administration sought to confront Islamist terrorist strongholds, first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq after the 2003 U.S. toppling of Saddam Hussein. This will be a lengthy and costly struggle, given that the Islamists are driven by a religious-ideological justification to wage war against liberal democracy and the inability of military force alone to defeat them. American preoccupation with this war caused a sharp change in President George W. Bush's formerly critical approach to the People's Republic of China (PRC) prior to September 1991,¹ leading to an increasing "reliance" on Chinese strategic support. China's acquiescence is essential for United Nations acceptance of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan; China is now regarded as a "partner" in the War on Terror; and Washington increasingly accedes to Chinese leadership in resolving North Korea's nuclear weapons challenges and in turn follows China's wishes to contain legitimate democratic expressions on Taiwan for recognition and independence.

At the same time China is pursuing a broad quest for global influence and access to resources and markets and is building common cause with most of the world's antidemocratic regimes. China is doing so having benefited from the greatest period of economic growth and transformation in its 5,000-year history, made possible by the West's welcoming of trade and investment with China. Furthermore, China is making no contribution in terms of lives or treasure to arrest the spread of Islamist terror. Instead China is accelerating its military

buildup, whose consequences, absent a U.S. commitment to deter and provide leadership, may be the unraveling of the U.S.-led alliance system in Asia, perhaps leading to arms races and new unforeseen threats to Americans. When the Nixon Administration began its dialogue with China's Communist leadership in the early 1970s, the United States was assured of its own strategic superiority and was confident in the knowledge that a weak China needed the United States to counter a much stronger Soviet Union. At that time there was little concern or fear that, within forty years, power balances could shift so much that China could begin to pose a serious military challenge to the United States. And while China expended great energy seeking to quell concerns and to conceal its gathering strength, it has made occasional demonstrations.

Rapidly Advancing Military Technology and Global Ambitions

For example, on January 11, 2007, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) destroyed a Chinese weather satellite with a direct-ascent antisatellite (ASAT) missile. While China's two previous attempts to destroy the satellite in July 2005 and February 2006 were known to a small number of intelligence and military personnel in the United States and perhaps a few other countries,² the successful test was a shock to the world when revealed about six days later. It took the Chinese government twelve days even to acknowledge what the world had already long known. This event illustrates several aspects of China's accelerating military challenge:

- China's military action in space signals that, when its interests dictate, China will not be bound by U.S. or Western conventions, in space or on Earth, and that it will not cede the strategic "high ground" to another power.
- China has cloaked its military growth in denial and secrecy and will continue to do so. Since the 1980s China has loudly championed the idea of a treaty to ban weapons in space, but since that same period it has been developing missile and laser space weapons. Former Chinese paramount leader Deng Xiaoping once told Richard Nixon that China "is against whoever goes in for development of outer space weapons."³
- China is making very rapid progress in applying high technology to gain new military capabilities, and future demonstrations in the areas of energy weapons, nanoweapons, unmanned weapons, and cyberwarfare are very possible.
- China is able to gather and assimilate advanced foreign military technology rapidly. The DF-21 intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM), which forms the basis for the PLA's SC-19 ASAT and its new antiship ballistic missile, was perfected after China obtained U.S. missile motor technology.
- China is focusing on attacking key "asymmetric" vulnerabilities of the U.S. military, such as its growing dependence on space information systems, without which the U.S. military cannot wage war.

China's construction of a military capability in outer space is but one dimension of China's future military-strategic challenge. For most of the years since 1992 China's official military budget has grown by double digits, or more than 10 percent, per year. In 2007 the official defense spending figure grew 17.8 percent, to an official total of \$44.9 billion. The U.S. Department of Defense has long disputed China's bookkeeping and estimates the total is closer to \$125 billion. China strongly disputes this, and in mid-2007 former PLA intelligence chief Lt. General Zhang Qinsheng stated that the annual increase "is mostly used to make up the retail price, improve welfare of the military personnel, and for better logistical support." Yet China's military spending is also paying for the following programs:

- *Space warfare*: Missile, space plane, and laser-based space weapons
- *Space information architecture*: Surveillance, navigation, communications, and electronic intelligence (ELINT) satellites
- *Anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defenses*: China is most likely developing an ABM system which could be deployed after 2020.
- *Manned moon presence*: To secure China's potential military and economic interests
- *Nuclear missiles*: Three types of new solid-fuel intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (ICBMs/SLBMs) in or near deployment
- *Energy weapons*: High-power microwave weapons now deployed (lasers to follow?)
- *Fifth-generation combat jets*: Two, possibly three fifth-generation programs under way
- *Unmanned combat and surveillance jets*: Three air companies have active programs.
- *Nuclear submarines*: New nuclear attack and ballistic-missile subs now being built
- *Aircraft carriers*: Chinese naval officers, informally, say four to six may be built.
- *Antiship ballistic missiles*: A revolutionary weapon that only China is building
- *Large amphibious assault ships*: 20,000-ton LPDs being built and an LHD in development
- *Large (60-ton capacity) airlifters*: Proposals from both of China's air consortia
- *Airmobile army forces*: developing new family of airmobile wheeled combat vehicles.

In 2007 China was the only country that was pursuing all of these expensive military construction and development programs. Each program requires an extensive research, development, and production base, plus generations of engineers to develop follow-on systems. In many cases the United States and Russia developed these capabilities only after several decades of effort, while China in most cases is able to compress its development-production cycle into two decades, thanks to access to foreign technologies. Russia has more money for its military after energy price spikes and, in 2007, announced plans for six nuclear

aircraft carriers and a manned moon program, though there is considerable reason to doubt these will succeed. But Russia does not have plans for a long range amphibious projection fleet. The United States, by choice, has no active space weapons program. Furthermore, the United States is modernizing only one solid-fuel ICBM (which will be armed with only one warhead) and is not building any nuclear ballistic-missile submarines.

Each of these programs listed above also represents an aspiration to global, not just regional military power. Although a permanent Chinese manned moon presence may not happen until 2020 to 2030, most of these PLA programs either are being realized now, or could be by the end of the next decade. The aspects of China's military buildup that can be identified in 2007 may constitute only the beginning of a military competition that could severely challenge Asia and the United States sooner rather than later. When realized, the PLA programs listed above may only allow China to approach an American level of military capability circa 2007 to 2010. But China is accumulating this similar spread of capabilities, with depth in some areas, at a breakneck pace. Chinese, U.S., and other universities have trained a new generation of Chinese military engineers, many of whom are responsible for current military-technical breakthroughs for China and have long careers ahead of them. American policy makers should consider that, increasingly, it may be China that first develops the next-generation weapon system, not the United States or Russia.

Internal Weakness

An additional concern is that what China may or may not do with its accelerating military and political power will be determined by the very few Chinese who lead the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In 2007 all 1.3 billion citizens of the PRC were beholden to only 73.36 million CCP members.⁴ The CCP, in turn, is ultimately controlled by about 300 people selected from its ranks: the 300 or so members of the Central Committee, who produce a twenty- to twenty-five-member Politburo, which is dominated by its eight- or so-member Standing Committee, which is in turn usually dominated by its single Chairman. The CCP tolerates no political competition and ruthlessly employs internal police and security services in cooperation with organs of the CCP to search out, co-opt, or destroy political opposition.

Such resistance to political reform may be accelerating China's path to a series of internal crises. Looming crises such as a potential collapse of a weak financial system, deepening resentments from endemic corruption, a mounting burden from environmental disasters, a growing economic and social disparity between the prosperous coastal regions and the majority, who do not share in this wealth, plus outright opposition as demonstrated by Tibetans in March and April 2008, or the insistence of the majority of Taiwanese to be governed by their own democracy and not by Beijing, may eventually spur events that could overwhelm a CCP regime with thin legitimacy. In April and May 2008 Chinese at home and

abroad demonstrated a resentful and at times threatening nationalist anger in response to Western protests against Chinese behavior in Tibet and the Sudan, organized around the China's global Olympic Torch relay. This anger was abruptly arrested by the need to respond to the devastating May 12 earthquake in Sichuan. While the government and the PLA won respect for their rapid response to the disaster, and there was a rare openness in media reports, it is not clear that openness will grow following these incidents. In the months prior to the November 2007 Party Congress, current CCP Secretary Hu Jintao made clear he would tolerate neither calls from the left for imposing Maoist like discipline or calls for internal CCP reforms toward representative democracy.

Ultimately the power position of the CCP depends on the loyal support of the 2.25 million members of the PLA, the 1.5 million People's Armed Police (PAP), and 800,000 other internal security forces. In short, the CCP maintains a political dictatorship enforced by security services, police, and the armed forces. This will require that the CCP maintain its largely martial character and pay increasing heed to the priorities of the PLA and the security services. This means, most likely, that the CCP will continue to strengthen policies designed to control Chinese, while giving the PLA the means to obtain greater global military influence.

Threatening Foreign Policy Choices

The aforementioned circumstances also mean that China's military and foreign policies will proceed without the potentially moderating influences of countervailing institutions, such as legislatures or a free press. Indeed, China has a large press, and there are many government-sponsored and academic institutions, which have voluminous output on foreign affairs and military subjects, and individual Chinese do express a wide range of views on their Internet. But there is little to suggest that there are major identifiable opinion centers that offer fundamentally different choices to those made by the CCP. China's penchant for secrecy and deception stratagems, based on venerated historic treatises of statecraft such as that of Sun Zi, dating back to the sixth century B.C., further compound the task of analysis of Chinese actions. Such a lack of honest debate is at least in part responsible for China's pursuit of policies or actions that can only be viewed as counterproductive for most Chinese:

- Preparing for a war against democratic Taiwan, thus also risking war with the United States, possibly resulting in long-term hostility between China and the West, even though such a war may fail and still imperil China's political stability and continued economic growth
- Pursuing political-military hegemony in Asia, specifically trying to push out American influence, with little regard to the potential to spur an Asian arms race that ultimately may force non-nuclear states such as Japan, Taiwan, and Australia to seek nuclear weapons or other major deterrent capabilities

- Proliferating nuclear weapon and missile technology to Pakistan, North Korea, and Iran, with no regard for their potential to give this same technology to terrorist groups who, in turn, may well attack Israel, the West, and eventually China too
- Resisting efforts by the United States and its allies to mobilize decisive political and economic pressures against North Korea's and Iran's nuclear weapons programs, indicating China's potential to "protect" future nuclear weapons programs undertaken by its friends
- Making common cause with and becoming an increasing source of support to belligerently antidemocratic dictatorial regimes such as North Korea, Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, Burma, Zimbabwe, and Sudan—all of which fuel suspicion of China's future goals and prompt resentment against China as seen during its 2008 Olympic Torch relay.
- Pursuing an increasingly active military entente with an increasingly authoritarian Russia while also leading the countries of Central Asia in its Shanghai Cooperation Organization down the path to an eventual military alliance designed to preserve dictatorships, exclude Western influences from the Eurasian heartland, and further isolate India
- Undertaking a massive program of global cyberespionage and surveillance that has resulted in growing alarm in capitols around the world, in which China has wrecked cyber networks in Taiwan, has likely caused power outages in the United States, and has likely positioned its cyber forces to launch instant and devastating attacks against the American electronic infrastructure.

This list indicates that China is making quite disturbing choices regarding its use of global influence. There is of course, much that appears positive. China has created new institutions and regulations that appear to signal a greater interest in stopping its own nuclear and missile proliferation, yet the proliferation continues. China's leadership in helping to convince North Korea to end its nuclear weapons program is praised by many in Washington, yet the material effect of the Six-Party Talks China has led since 2005 has been minimal—North Korea even tested nuclear weapons in 2006. China professes a willingness to forge a peaceful future with the people of Taiwan, yet it ignored Taiwan's democratically elected government from 2000 to 2008, works to divide Taiwan politics between the older sympathetic Kuomintang Party from the "independence" leaning Democratic Progressive Party, and shows no interest in slowing its accelerating military buildup near Taiwan.

Most commercially oriented countries, which include most of Asia, greatly value their economic ties with China, which contribute increasingly to their growth. Yet for Asians, China's military buildup causes fear, and they are wary of China's subtle but increasing push that they choose between Chinese and American leadership. Beijing has long sought to convince Japan and Australia to end missile defense cooperation with the United States. However, both continue this pursuit, and Japan and the United States have sought to deepen strategic relations with India in the hopes of balancing China. In July 2007 an Australian defense strategy paper noted, "China's emergence as a major market and driver

of economic activity both regionally and globally has benefited the expansion of economic growth in the Asia-Pacific and globally. But the pace and scope of its military modernisation, particularly the development of new and disruptive capabilities such as the anti-satellite missile (tested in January 2007), could create misunderstandings and instability in the region.”⁵

China's Assurances Versus Its Historic Character

Despite its growing military and foreign policy choices, which pose threats to its neighbors and to American interests, Chinese leaders are quick to assure the world of their peaceful intentions. Until recently, China advanced the “theory” created by CCP theoretician Zheng Bijan of China’s “peaceful rise.” Chinese leaders routinely describe their foreign policies as one of “noninterference” and that China will never seek “hegemony.” Furthermore, China adheres to a “no first use” policy regarding nuclear weapons, and it routinely opposes “militarization of space” and destabilizing “missile defense.” But one can question the sincerity of such pronouncements in the face of China’s rich domestic and foreign martial heritage and its veneration of strategies of deception, subterfuge, and, when necessary, “total war.” In addition, China actually was the “hegemon” of its region for many centuries, and many Chinese believe that China should resume its rightful place.⁶ This alone could set the stage for a long period of conflict with Japan, India, and the United States.

The *Art of War* by Sun Zi (596–544 B.C.), one of the first texts on the universal arts of war (Table 1.1), is revered and studied intently by China’s civil and military leaders as a superior Chinese contribution to the history of strategic thought. It was produced during the late Spring and Autumn Annals period, one of constant intrigue, assassination, and warring among competing feudal kingdoms. For Sun Zi, the highest morality was the survival and expansion of the state, which required a vigorous embrace of war as an essential art that demanded constant preparation and consideration, “War is a matter of vital importance to the state; a matter of life or death; the road either to survival or ruin. Hence it is imperative that be studied thoroughly.”⁷

Shock and consternation greeted the publication of *Unrestricted Warfare* by two PLA colonels in 1999, in which they praised cyberwarfare and the tactics of terrorist Osama bin Laden, which was remembered after his attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001.⁸ While some analysts have noted that *Unrestricted Warfare* does not represent PLA doctrine and that its authors are political officers, not strategists,⁹ it is also clear that their version of “total war” is but the latest in a long tradition of Chinese strategic literature on the use of all means of power to obtain objectives. Texts such as the *Shi Chi* and *Tso Chuan* became textbooks on the employment of deception, infiltration, bribes, and sex to undermine enemies.¹⁰ Former Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian is reported to have said in a speech, “In Chinese history, in the replacement of dynasties, the ruthless have always won and the benevolent have always failed.”¹¹

Table 1.1 Sun Zi's Axioms

Sun Zi's treatise *The Art of War*, along with many other ancient writings on statecraft, are studied intently and guide China's current political and military leaders in their personal as well as national approach to gaining power. Sun Zi's advice includes such points as the following:

Statagems

All warfare is based on deception.

Be so subtle that you are invisible. Be so mysterious that you are intangible. Then you will control your rival's fate.

Warfare

Hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting.

Hold out baits to entice the enemy. Feign disorder, and crush him.

Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected.

Security against defeat implies defensive tactics; ability to defeat the enemy means taking the offensive.

In war, then, let your great object be victory, not lengthy campaigns.

Espionage

Thus, what enables the wise sovereign and the good general to strike and conquer, and achieve things beyond the reach of ordinary men, is foreknowledge.

Knowledge of the enemy's dispositions can only be obtained from other men.

Current PLA preparations for cyberwarfare that could cripple the U.S. economy, for space warfare that could eliminate the U.S. military's primary means of surveillance and communication, as well as for a high-casualty war to conquer Taiwan, therefore, are not historic aberrations. Given China's record of proliferation to regimes with terrorist connections, it is also necessary to ask, How would China respond to a nuclear terrorist attack against the United States? Would China join those hunting the terrorists or instead seize the moment to attack Taiwan?

The recent record also shows that China has been willing to engage in offensive wars that entail great risk and sacrifice.¹² China is also willing to define "victory" in geostrategic as well as operational results. Estimates that Mao Zedong lost over 250,000 troops during the Korean War demonstrated his willingness to take great risks and sacrifice lives. During World War II Mao had waged a lackluster war against the Japanese invaders, hoping to waste and exhaust his greater foe, the Kuomintang, but barely a year after winning his revolution he moved to commit hundreds of thousands of troops to invade North Korea, in order to impress Stalin, deliver a "defeat" to the Americans, and

reassert China's authority over Korea. Deng Xiaoping's 1979 war against Vietnam cost China about 20,000 lives, yet did little damage to Vietnam's defenses. Yet this war advanced Deng's domestic political power consolidation, embarrassed Hanoi's allies in Moscow, and encouraged the United States and its NATO allies to join China in an anti-Soviet entente.

Would Hu Jintao be willing to use the PLA in a similar large-scale offensive manner, perhaps against Taiwan? It is reported that Deng's decision to select Hu to succeed Jiang Zemin was influenced by Hu's willingness to lead police forces and up to 170,000 troops from the Chengdu Military Region to suppress political protests in Tibet violently in March 1989.¹³ One unconfirmed report notes that as a Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution, Hu may have led students to burn down the British Embassy in August 1967.¹⁴ Thirty-two years later, in May 1999, just after Chinese students attacked the U.S. embassy in Beijing and burned down the consulate in Chengdu following the mistaken U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, it was Hu, then vice president, who gave the first Chinese government comment, saying, "The Chinese government firmly supports and protects, in accordance with the law, all legal protest activities."¹⁵ While it is possible that China's leaders will resort to external wars to deflect internal strife, others argue that the final decision depends more on a leader's calculation of strategic opportunity versus cost.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it appears that in Hu Jintao the PLA has a leader who is not afraid to use force. Thus, there are compelling reasons to consider that Chinese leaders may conclude that attacking Taiwan is worth risking international opprobrium, economic and political boycotts, and even large-scale loss of life, if it could secure a "victory" that would in any way force an end to Taiwan's democratic era and thus reshape the geostrategic balance of power in Asia against the United States.

This should serve as a warning. The Chinese Communist Party-led government is not satisfied with a world order in which the United States is the dominant power. While Chinese leaders acknowledge their growing dependence upon global good will for vital commercial and resource access, recent experience shows that CCP leaders will seize opportunities to alter power relationships and power balances. Their actions will very likely include the calculated but decisive use of military force. A Chinese decision to use force will depend on numerous factors, but perhaps among the most important is whether Chinese political and military leaders believe they possess the raw military power to prevail.

Can We Engage the PLA and Create Confidence?

Since the 1980s successive U.S. administrations have tried to engage China in hopes of developing a basis for "confidence" that might in the future help prevent conflict. The PLA and U.S. shows of force surrounding China's threatening military exercises near Taiwan in March 1996 and the April 2001 collision that

saw the destruction of a PLA Navy jet fighter and the compromise of a U.S. Navy EP-3 electronic intelligence aircraft point to the need for some level of communication. The Clinton Administration did make substantial efforts to reach out to the PRC, which did not result in a greater PLA interest in “transparency.”¹⁷ But the PLA did accept all that, in the hope of fostering “confidence,” the United States would reveal about its forces. For its part, the George W. Bush administration has repeatedly expressed its frustration with China's lack of transparency.¹⁸ In June 2005 at the annual Singapore Shangri La Conference hosted by the International Institute of Strategic Studies, former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated:

China appears to be expanding its missile forces, allowing them to reach targets in many areas of the world, not just the Pacific region, while also expanding its missile capabilities within this region. China also is improving its ability to project power, and developing advanced systems of military technology. Since no nation threatens China, one must wonder: Why this growing investment?; Why these continuing large and expanding arms purchases? Why these continuing robust deployments?¹⁹

With Rumsfeld's October 2005 visit to China, his first as Secretary of Defense, the latest uptick in U.S.-China military exchanges began. In 2006 and 2007 the PLA even decided to allow U.S. representatives to visit some new and modern weapons. However, American frustration continues. In June 2007 then–Undersecretary of Defense Richard Lawless commented, “As a consequence of what we see as a deliberate effort on the part of China's leaders to mask the nature of Chinese military capabilities, the outside world has limited knowledge of the motivations, decision-making, and key capabilities of China's military or the direction of its modernization.”²⁰

The first real opening in military-military contacts occurred during the late Carter administration, when the anti-Soviet entente was sealed with the beginning of intelligence cooperation. This cooperation grew to include CIA listening posts in northern China, directed against the Soviet Union, and covert U.S. shipments of Chinese arms to the Afghan mujahedeen fighting Soviet occupation. President Ronald Reagan approved a limited sharing of military technologies judged as “defensive,” leading to sales of artillery radar, fighter radar, torpedoes, and civil Lockheed-Martin C-130 transport aircraft. However, Reagan also maintained consistent support for Taiwan, to Beijing's consternation. Technology cooperation, however, was largely halted after an arms embargo imposed on China following the Tiananmen massacre, an embargo that remains in force as of early 2008.

From the late George H. W. Bush administration to the second George W. Bush administration, U.S.-PLA exchanges have waxed and waned in response to respective internal political pressures.²¹ The early moves by Secretary of Defense William Perry to revive contacts in 1993 and 1995 were stopped by the

Chinese side in response to the Clinton administration's early 1995 decision to allow Taiwan President Lee Teng Hui to visit Cornell University and other U.S.-Taiwan exchanges, which led to China's decision to conduct threatening military exercises around Taiwan in July 1995 and March 1996. Military exchanges did not really resume until the December 1996 visit of Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian. There was a further hiatus following the May 1999 accidental U.S. bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. But in late 1998 the Republican-led Congress expressed opposition to what it perceived was a dangerous increase in U.S.-PLA interactions that threatened to reveal too much to the PLA.

At the beginning of the George W. Bush administration, there was a drop off in enthusiasm for U.S.-PLA exchanges, largely because of perceptions that during its later years the Clinton administration went overboard, allowing greater PLA access to the U.S. side, and thus learning more about U.S. capabilities and not reciprocating by allowing useful U.S. access to the Chinese side. After many U.S. complaints, exchanges resumed in 2005 and 2006. In early 2006, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Peter Pace visited China, was shown an Su-27 unit, and was able to visit a new ZTZ-99 tank and its crew. In July 2007 Pacific Command Commander Timothy Keating was able to have a semi-candid conversation during which the Chinese side confirmed what had been increasingly clear since 2002: that they intended to build aircraft carriers. Then, in August 2007, future Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Mike Mullen visited China and was able to view PLA Navy maneuvers involving a Type 039 *Song* class submarine, a first. And later that month the House Armed Services Committee for the first time sent a delegation that was allowed to visit a Second Artillery office building and tour a *Luhu* class destroyer.

As encouraging as these new visits may appear, they still do not approach the level of openness shown to the PLA during its visits to U.S. facilities (see Table 1.2). On a broader level the open character of the United States, with its overproductive defense press and competitive legislative process, allows the PLA to achieve a far more rapid and deeper understanding of current to medium-term U.S. capabilities and intentions. One cannot obtain the same from the PLA. As the chart above indicates, the United States has allowed the PLA to attend many more complex military exercises and demonstrations that would allow the PLA to gain an understanding of vulnerabilities. The United States has been refused requests to send observers to the two "Peace Mission" exercises, the most complex undertaken by the PLA. The PLA, arguably, has had access to more advanced U.S. weapons systems, especially to U.S. aircraft carriers, which the PLA intently desires to defeat and emulate. American requests to inspect new PLA weaponry have been rebuffed until late 2006 and 2007.

It is not possible to read actual PLA military doctrine documents, as one can view U.S. official doctrinal documents. While there is a large body of Chinese-language secondary literature on these subjects, it can only assist educated guesses. The Chinese defense press is allowed to provide details about historic

Table 1.2 Highlights of Reciprocal Military Access Compared, PLA and U.S.

	China	United States
Military exercises	PLA refused U.S. requests to send observers to its "Peace Mission" multinational combined arms exercises in 2005 and 2007. U.S. officials have been allowed to see various unit-level demonstrations. In 2007 a U.S. admiral was allowed to view PLA Navy (PLAN) maneuvers, and a U.S. attache attended the "Warrior 2007" army exercise in September.	PLA observers attended RIMPAC multinational combined arms exercise in 1998, Cope Thunder advanced air force exercise in 1998, and the large Valiant Shield combined-arms exercises near Guam in 2006. PLA officers have observed U.S. Army airborne and tank gunnery exercises.
Aircraft carriers	PLA has yet to allow U.S. or Western inspection of the ex-Ukrainian carrier <i>Varyag</i> and only started acknowledging its carrier ambitions to U.S. military officials in 2007.	The United States has allowed PLA officers to tour U.S. aircraft carriers in 1980, 1997, 2006, and 2007. PLA officers have had a catapult takeoff and an arrested landing on a U.S. carrier.
Submarines	PLA has not allowed U.S. officials to tour PLAN nuclear submarines and allowed only outside viewing of the new Type 039 SSK in 2007.	PLA officers toured a U.S. SSN in Pearl Harbor in 1997, a move that was "unauthorized" by civilian leaders at the time.
Destroyers	PLA has used old <i>Luhu</i> and <i>Luhai</i> class DDGs to visit U.S. ports and for tours, but has not let U.S. officials tour its new Aegis radar-equipped <i>Luyang 2</i> DDGs.	Chinese officials tour U.S. Aegis radar-equipped DDGs when they visit Chinese ports.
Combat aircraft	U.S. officials have visited H-6, J-7E, J-8I, J-8II, and Q-5 units, all obsolete aircraft. In 2007 U.S. officials were able to inspect fourth-generation Su-27 and JH-7As for the first time. A request to visit a J-10 unit was refused in 2007. A potential PLA stealth fighter remains secret. No test flights have been made by U.S. pilots.	PLA groups have visited at least four U.S. F-15 bases, then the most modern U.S. fighter. In 1998 a PLA general was able to inspect a U.S. F-117 stealth fighter. Before that, PLA pilots likely have test flown U.S. F-16s in the Pakistan Air Force.

weapons and even some military policies, but it cannot report in depth about current and, especially, future military policies and weapon systems. Even at arms shows where China is trying to sell weapons systems, security restrictions limit what sales personnel can say about the latest weapons for the PLA and about future systems. When questioned on the BBC in mid-2006 about U.S. concerns about China's military spending and transparency, China's UN Ambassador to Geneva Sha Zukang said "It's better for the U.S. to shut up and keep quiet."²² At least Dr. Shen Dingli of Shanghai's Fudan University, an oft-cited unofficial "spokesman" for the Chinese government, offered an honest reason for Chinese reticence: "We have to keep certain secrets in order to have a war-fighting capability. . . . We can't let Taiwan and the U.S. know how we are going to defeat them if the U.S. decides to send forces to intervene in a conflict over Taiwan."²³

After his June 2007 visit to China, U.S. Pacific Command Commander Admiral Timothy Keating recounted one of his conversations: "Our Chinese guests said, 'Here's what we'll do. You take care of the Eastern Pacific, we'll take care of the Western Pacific, and we'll just communicate with each other.'"²⁴ Did such a statement constitute China's real intention: to destroy the U.S.-led alliance system in Asia? And consequently, when China achieves even greater military power and global prominence, will it become more hostile to the West and especially, to the United States and its allies?

The U.S. Navy did not have to wait long for a more "formal" demonstration of Chinese displeasure at its presence. Just before the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Kitty Hawk* was to dock in Hong Kong to allow many crew members to have family reunions for the November 2007 Thanksgiving holiday, China informed the United States that the *Kitty Hawk* group was not welcome. Even though the U.S. Navy makes about fifty port calls in Hong Kong a year, which are arranged by diplomatic procedures months in advance, the Bush Administration chose to respond to an apparent message from China's visiting Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and call the incident a "misunderstanding."²⁵ But then China's Foreign Ministry angrily retorted there was no misunderstanding and that China had acted to protest American military sales to Taiwan and the recent Washington, DC, reception for the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibet.²⁶ While China often and sometimes loudly protests American military and diplomatic support for Taiwan and the deep political sympathies shown to the Tibetan spiritual leader, the *Kitty Hawk* snub was a rare demonstration of that displeasure. Because American support for Taiwan is grounded in laws such as the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act and because sympathy for the Dalai Lama also runs deep, these policies are unlikely to change in reaction to Chinese snubs or even more forceful action. Once China had revealed plainly that it deliberately snubbed the U.S. Navy and had denied Hong Kong visit to other U.S. ships, protests were delivered, and the *Kitty Hawk* made a rare transit of the Taiwan Strait, a show of force veiled by the fact that adverse weather made that route necessary. Despite nearly two years of intense Bush Administration efforts to "engage" the PLA, the *Kitty Hawk* incident came as a painful reminder that "peace" with the

PLA will require that Washington surrender strategic friends and compromise core political values.

In January 2008 Admiral Keating made another visit to China, with a clear effort to get beyond the *Kitty Hawk* incident and to try to advance the long-standing goal of U.S. military leaders of building "relationships" with their PLA counterparts so as to build "confidence." Keating even suggested that the PLA could participate in the regular U.S.-Thai Cobra Gold joint-service exercises, which would constitute a major upgrade in political acceptance of the PLA and a facilitation of PLA military activities in Southeast Asia.²⁷ After long urging by Washington, at the end of January 2008 China agreed to set up a "Hotline," which, the United States hopes, will facilitate better communication between the U.S. government, the U.S. military, and the PLA. Another hopeful pause emerged in the aftermath of the horrific May 12, 2008, earthquake in Sichuan, when China made a rare allowance for many countries, including the United States, Japan, and Taiwan, to send relief supplies.

But after nearly three decades of U.S. attempts at "engagement," it is just not possible to say that U.S. military and PLA leaders can ever be "friends" as long as China embraces strategic ambitions such as the conquest of democratic Taiwan and displacing American strategic relationships in Asia. The *Kitty Hawk* incident also demonstrates that China's hostility toward the U.S. military presence in Asia is not due to the U.S. military per se, but to deeper ideological issues such as basic challenge of democracy to the Chinese Communist Party dictatorship. The PLA, despite some recent progress in allowing foreigners to visit more units, does not intend to become anywhere near as transparent as any military from a democratic country. And behind their smiles, it is likely that Chinese leaders will keep their military and strategic intentions very much a mystery. It is not likely that the PLA itself will fully explain the goals of its current military buildup and the future capabilities it seeks.

China's frustrating penchant for secrecy or refusal to be "transparent" finds ample justification in Sun Zi. As noted by Ralph Sawyer, Sun Zi's stress on secrecy was a "force multiplier," quoting his formulation, "The pinnacle of military employment approaches the formless . . . If I determine the enemy's disposition while I have no perceptible form, I can concentrate my forces while the enemy is fragmented." A modern corollary would be former paramount CCP leader Deng Xiaoping's constant advice to "bide our time and hide our ambitions."²⁸ The remainder of this book is one analyst's attempt to lift some veils and produce an open-source assessment of China's near- to medium-term military capabilities. The following chapters will examine how the PLA supports Communist Party ambitions, how the PLA is arming for Asian regional conflict, and how the PLA is also beginning to build capabilities to project real military power far beyond Asia.