

4. *Give prominence to asymmetric warfare.* Here the PLAN is instructed to exploit particular features of “the near and far seas battlefields” to maximum effect against a potential adversary, wherein progress in each can relieve pressure on Chinese forces in the other. The near seas call for “a variety of simultaneous or alternating patterns of war fighting,” whereas the far seas demand “relatively independent operations under conditions of joint operations, highlighting the use of submarines and long-range air assaults focused on striking the enemy’s important nodes and high value targets.” Such “pushing the battlefield toward the enemy’s operational and strategic rear” can improve Chinese breathing room vis-à-vis “the near seas battlefield.”³⁰

These admonitions are somewhat abstract, and offer a wide range of potential interpretations. They are grounded conceptually in the continuous, progressive geographic and conceptual expansion of China’s national security interests. In an operational sense, strategic space clearly helps create depth for the implementation of China’s active defense strategy and the amorphous lines and areas at sea wherein it would wage maritime combat, including maritime people’s war. However, a more complex question of interpretation remains concerning how precisely Xi is directing his military/maritime forces and related actors to address China’s expanding interests.

In this vein, SMS 2013 calls for “relying on one’s home territory while moderately expanding the strategic space” (依托本土适度拓展战略空间), a phrase with numerous possible interpretations.³¹ The crux of the matter is the term “本土,” which SMS 2013 employs frequently but does not define directly, and the physical locations to which it refers. Given China’s emphasis officially on the “indisputable” nature of its sweeping claims in the South China Sea in this document and

elsewhere, this ambiguous yet potentially broadly inclusive term may refer not only to mainland China, but also all South China Sea islands, reefs, and other features claimed by Beijing. The “favorable conditions” and “laying a solid foundation” to which the authors allude could thus refer to increasing presence in claimed areas to demonstrate administration and enforcement, all the better to solidify the territorial foundation for forward-supported strategic expansion.³² China’s aforementioned ‘island building’ and maritime fortification activities would follow directly from such an approach.

At a minimum, the authors envision a very significant further radiating-outward of China’s interests, capabilities, and forces:

Along with the continuous rise of our military’s military capability, we will have higher strategic requirements and needs in the area of relying on one’s own territory (本土) to expand the strategic space. We need to gradually push forward from the current strategic space mainly at the home territory and coastal seas toward the relevant sea regions, outer space, and the information network space... with the strategic thought of “reliance on the home territory, stabilize the peripheral, grasp and control the coastal seas, advance into space, focus on information,” to form into a strategic space that has key-points, divided into echelons, and is mutually supporting and linked, with home territory as reliance, Two Oceans as the key point, and network space as the crux.³³

This brings us back to a Chinese maritime theater concept not widely discussed in previous authoritative Chinese documents: the idea of a dual Indo-Pacific focus for China’s navy, as encapsulated in the aforementioned “arc-shaped strategic zone

that covers the Western Pacific Ocean and Northern Indian Ocean.”³⁴ This zone is now termed the “Two Oceans region/area” (两洋地区) in authoritative sources, and is described as “mainly” including “the Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean, as well as the littoral regions of neighboring Asia, Africa, Oceania, North America, South America, and Antarctica, etc., with a total area occupying over 50 percent of the globe; within which the Two Oceans have a total area of 254.6 million square meters, occupying 71 percent of the global ocean area.”³⁵

The authors of SMS 2013 describe the Two Oceans region as being extremely important to China and its security interests. It represents “a crucial area in influencing” China’s “strategic development and security in the future” as well as “the intermediate zone of our entrance into the Atlantic Ocean region, Mediterranean Sea region, and Arctic Ocean region.” In accordance with the globalizing nature of China’s activities, they declare, its “national interests will surpass in an extremely large manner the traditional territorial land, territorial sea, and territorial air scope, while the Two Oceans region will become the most important platform and medium.” On this basis, Chinese actors “will create conditions to establish ourselves in the Two Oceans region, participate in resource extraction and space utilization of the oceans, and boost development in the two polar regions.” To be sure, the authors allow, new challenges and “security threats” of both a traditional and a non-traditional nature should be expected to accompany this sweeping geostrategic expansion, “especially [from] the oceanic direction.” These interrelated factors are likely to offer a continued rationale for concerted qualitative and quantitative development of the PLAN for years to come:

Because our at-sea sovereignty and interests have frequently come under intrusions, while intensification in the crises may very possibly ignite conflicts or war, we need to form into a

powerful and strong Two Oceans layout in order to face the crises that may possibly erupt. Therefore, we should focus on maintaining expansion in the national interests, defend the at-sea interests, and rely upon the home territory to reasonably and appropriately expand the strategic space toward the Two Oceans region.³⁶

Even amid continued hierarchical prioritization, Chinese strategists appear to have left the PLAN considerable geographic “room to grow” for even its most important operations: literally half the globe!

Charting the Evolution of Chinese Naval Strategy

While the latest iteration of *Science of Military Strategy* arguably builds on its predecessors as part of a logical continuum, it is worth highlighting some specific differences, particularly between the 2001 and 2013 editions.

- *Change from “Local War under High Tech Conditions” to “Local War under Informatized Conditions”.* Although the 2001 SMS introduced the growing importance of local war under high-tech conditions, and its gradual becoming the fundamental pattern in high-tech local war, the specific approach has evolved somewhat, reflecting both China’s broader informatization policy and the PLA’s focus on the sort of modern integrated, network-centric warfare for which the U.S. military is regarded as the gold standard.
- *Adoption of a two-layered strategy: “Near-Seas Defense, Far-Seas Operations” (近海防御、远海防卫).* The goal of China becoming a “Maritime Great Power” (海洋强国), which is emphasized as one of the key goals for the PLAN in the 2013 SMS, informs its new two-part

naval strategy. There does not seem to be an equivalent strategic phrase to “far seas operations” in the 2001 SMS, but the idea of multi-layered operations in the near-seas and development of far-seas operational capabilities is not a new one. What makes this strategic phrase interesting is the difference in the choice of wording for defense: the term *fangwei* (防卫) rather than *fangyu* (防御) for the second part of the strategic formulation, logically suggesting a lower level of intensity for the latter, more geographically distant operations. Both terms could be translated as ‘defense’ and there is not always a clear distinction between the two, but they do have distinctly different implications. *Fangyu*, the more narrowly-focused, higher-intensity, and more demanding of the two, refers to actively “resisting the operational missions of enemy attacks,” and is “one of the fundamental types of warfighting.” Examples might include using land-, ship-, and aircraft-based systems to defend PLAN surface vessels and submarines implementing a blockade of Taiwan. *Fangwei*, by contrast, refers to “defense and holding” across a broader range of more diverse, diffuse contingencies. Examples might include using the far-more-limited ship-based weapons systems on elements of a budding ‘battle group’ to create a protective envelope around a Chinese aircraft carrier transiting the Indian Ocean en route to showing the flag and assisting the evacuation of PRC citizens from a destabilizing Middle Eastern country.³⁷ To be sure, this strategic dichotomy is contextual rather than absolute, as SMS 2013 instructs the PLA, and in particular the PLA Navy, to blend and integrate the levels and areas of operations wherever and whenever it is required.³⁸

- *Enhancing “active defense” to distance potential enemy operations from China’s shores.* This new multi-layered

PLAN strategy reflects broader efforts to “carry out forward defense” that represent a sea change from the concepts espoused in 2001 SMS.³⁹ Accordingly, SMS 2013 places unprecedented emphasis on strengthening forward presence: “Optimizing the strategic layout involves the handling of the needs of war threats, protecting expanding national interests, and the transformation of homeland defense toward forward operations...”⁴⁰ This entails moving from purely defense of the homeland into defense of strategic front lines, especially of sea areas, thereby pushing these operational frontiers far away from the Chinese homeland. It includes emphasis on the “strategic pursuit” (战略追击) of a routed enemy and the radiation of force projection into surrounding areas.⁴¹ It requires giving prominence to “effective control” and engaging in joint, distant operations under informatized conditions.⁴² Emphasis on asymmetric warfare—extensive but more theoretical in SMS 2001, considerably more focused on practical implementation in SMS 2013—is at the core of this sweeping effort to “transform the mode of generating combat power” (转变战斗力生成模式). Such “giving prominence to asymmetrical warfare” is intended in part to increase PLA ability to create “relative superiority.”⁴³ New emphasis includes focusing on striking enemy important nodes and high-value targets, and pushing the battlefield toward the enemy’s operational and strategic rear, thereby alleviating the pressure on battles in the near-seas.⁴⁴

- *Expanding strategic space in keeping with national interests.* One of the key themes permeating SMS 2013 is the oft-invoked idea of expanding interests coinciding with the necessary expansion of strategic space past current front lines, namely eastward and southward into the Two Ocean region of the Pacific and Indian

Oceans.⁴⁵ This builds on the far more elementary, less-extensive, and less-geographically specific discussion in SMS 2001 of China's expansion of strategic space. Likewise, SMS 2001 introduces the concept of "strategic center of gravity" (战略重心), but it is the 2013 edition that stipulates that this is now moving southward toward the South China Sea. In evidence of a comparative consideration of key nations' military-strategic focus, SMS 2013 frequently describes the U.S. Asia-Pacific Rebalance as a shift in the American strategic center of gravity, using the term "‘战略重心’ 的转移" to describe its interpretation of Washington's desire to "cast off" the Iraq and Afghanistan wars in order to focus more on the East Asian littoral. As for the similar locus of China's current military efforts, SMS 2013 discusses the importance of "battlefield construction" in the South China Sea, including efforts to pre-empt conflict through proper war preparation and battlefield construction, strategic prepositioning of troops, materials, and equipment. Such measures, it contends, will help to consolidate forward presence and expand strategic space, which will ultimately deepen the strategic defensive space. Observing Beijing's current activities in the South China Sea, it appears that some of these measures are indeed being implemented in practice.

- *Unprecedented stressing of the need to engage in "strategic prepositioning."* When considered in conjunction with such Chinese activities in the greater Indian Ocean Region as port development projects, port calls and naval drills with nations such as Pakistan, and recent establishment of a naval supply facility in Djibouti, the term "战略预置" (translated in the authoritative 2005 AMS translation of SMS 2001 as "preset," but perhaps more aptly-termed "strategic

prepositioning”), may suggest integrated movement toward the implementation of a Two Ocean strategy. The related term 预储 was translated in the same work as “preposition,” but regardless of the precise translation, strategic prepositioning is emphasized considerably more strongly in the 2013 SMS. There, the term is employed many times in various contexts to which much significance attached—in contrast to a single appearance in the 2001 SMS.⁴⁶ Importantly, in the author’s note at the very end of SMS 2013, strategic prepositioning is listed as one of the items that was deliberately strengthened within the text per several experts’ suggestion.⁴⁷

- *Increased emphasis on MOOTW and international maritime contributions.* The 2013 SMS attaches much greater emphasis on the role of military operations other than war, and devotes a dedicated portion of its discussion of naval strategy to the Navy’s role therein. There is also a stronger recognition, stated multiple times, of the Navy as an ‘international service branch,’ entailing greater responsibilities for protecting international seas. The related phrase ‘harmonious oceans’ does not appear in the 2001 SMS, but is an important concept encapsulating one of the major strategic missions of the Navy in the 2013 SMS, having first been introduced in 2008 by Hu.⁴⁸ This emerging line of strategic thinking may not be prioritized equally by Xi, but is nevertheless continuing, with promising implications for Chinese and global security alike. In contrast to the aforementioned Chinese efforts to further Near Seas claims, which risk perpetuating a zero-sum mentality and ratcheting upward of regional geostrategic tensions, PLAN Far Seas operations can make a positive-sum contribution to international security. Provision of public goods in the form of UN Peacekeeping deployments, Gulf of Aden anti-piracy

operations, overseas hospital ship visits, and perhaps even more robust efforts going forward can afford Beijing the recognition that it craves while creating true ‘win-win’ benefits and potential areas for future cooperation.⁴⁹

Analyzed in juxtaposition over time, and compared against specific empirical manifestations of Beijing’s burgeoning efforts in the maritime domain, China’s major doctrinal publications and public statements reveal a sea change in strategic priorities and emerging capabilities to further them. China retains an incremental approach, in keeping with a disciplined hierarchy of national security priorities, but this layered development is already making major outward-radiating waves as the Middle Kingdom turns increasingly seaward as a hybrid land-sea great power.

Whether viewed deductively from strategic intentions, or inductively from development, operational, and tactical actions, China’s increasingly-modernized and -integrated maritime forces—centered on the PLAN—are pursuing a two-fold effort: intensive “near seas active defense” of outstanding island and maritime claims on China’s maritime periphery, coupled with “far seas protection” of more diffuse, diverse interests beyond.

Real-world developments, and particularly ongoing Chinese activities vis-à-vis the South China Sea, suggest that the strategic thinking embodied in the various iterations of SMS, the DWP, and related official publications and statements is not merely “words on a page” but rather is strongly indicative of actual PLA planning and action—both now and in the future. Analysts of China’s armed forces in general, and its navy in particular, should therefore continue to consider in-depth what some of Beijing’s latest conceptual thinking may mean when it is increasingly put into practice in the coming years. In that regard, three concepts in particular should enjoy top priority for

further explication: Chinese “home territory” and its role in force projection, the nature and expansion of Chinese “strategic space,” and activities and prioritization within the “Two Oceans” strategic zone envisioned for heightened naval operations.

NOTES

¹ The author thanks Conor Kennedy and Ryan Martinson for invaluable inputs.

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³ While the DWP’s stress on this point suggests that debate concerning the optimal land-sea balance for China remains strongly debated, its inclusion is significant from a bureaucratic policy perspective, and unprecedented from an historical perspective. For context, see Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, eds., *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, July 2009).

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⁴ Su Xiangdong [苏向东], Ed., China's Five Year Plan for Social and Economic Development (Full Text) [中国国民经济和社会发展第十三个五年规划纲要 (全文)], Xinhua, March 17, 2016, http://www.china.com.cn/lianghui/news/2016-03/17/content_38053101.htm, http://www.china.com.cn/lianghui/news/2016-03/17/content_38053101_11.htm, http://www.china.com.cn/lianghui/news/2016-03/17/content_38053101_14.htm, http://www.china.com.cn/lianghui/news/2016-03/17/content_38053101_20.htm. The author appreciates Ryan Martinson's bringing these documents to his attention.

⁵ Ryan D. Martinson, "The 13th Five-Year Plan: A New Chapter in China's Maritime Transformation," *Jamestown China Brief*, January 12, 2016, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=44974&no_cache=1.

⁶ This correlation may be observed over time in Peter A. Dutton, Professor and Director China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College, *Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing on China's Maritime Disputes in the East and South China Seas*, January 14, 2014, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS28/20140114/101612/HHRG-113-AS28-Wstate-DuttonP-20140114.pdf>; Peter A. Dutton, Professor and Director, China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College, *Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Committee Hearing on China's Maritime Disputes in the East and South China Seas*, April 4, 2013, <http://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Dutton%20Testimony,%20April%2004%202013.pdf>; Peter Dutton, Associate Professor, China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College, *Testimony before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Hearing on Maritime Disputes and Sovereignty Issues in East Asia*, July 15, 2009, <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/DuttonTestimony090715.pdf>; Peter A. Dutton, Associate Professor, U.S. Naval War College, *Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Committee Hearing on The Implications of China's Naval Modernization for the United States*, June 11, 2009, <http://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/6.11.09Dutton.pdf>; Peter A. Dutton, Associate Professor, China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College, *Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission on China's Views of Sovereignty and Methods of Access Control*, February 27, 2008, http://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/08_02_27_dutton_statement.pdf.

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⁹ Yang Zurong [杨祖荣], "Military Representatives Discuss the 'Thirteenth Five Year Plan': Increase Manpower Efforts Concerning Economic and National Defense Construction," ["军队代表谈 '十三五': 加大经济建设和国防建设统筹力度"], *PLA Daily*, March 7, 2016, http://zb.81.cn/content/2016-03/07/content_6945906.htm.

¹⁰ Kenneth Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, and John F. Corbett, "The PLA's New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation (Part 1)," *China Brief*, February 4, 2016, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=45069&no_cache=1#.VroaV1grKM8; Kenneth Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, and John F. Corbett, "The PLA's New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation (Part 2)," *China Brief*, February 23, 2016, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=45124&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=be8245a57f61b9df9abe4bc56f3065a7.

¹¹ For background and explanation, see Andrew S. Erickson, *Chinese Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile Development: Drivers, Trajectories, and Strategic Implications* (Washington, DC: Jamestown Foundation, May 2013), especially p. 30, pp. 34–39.

¹² See Andrew S. Erickson, "Academy of Military Science Researchers: 'Why We Had to Develop the Dongfeng-26 Ballistic Missile'—Bilingual Text, Analysis & Related Links," *China Analysis from Original Sources* 以第一手资料研究中国, December 5, 2015, <http://www.andrewerickson.com/2015/12/academy-of-military-science-researchers-why-we-had-to-develop-the-dongfeng-26-ballistic-missile-bilingual-text-analysis-links/>.

¹³ SMS 2013, pp. 105–106.

¹⁴ SMS 2013, p. 106.

¹⁵ SMS 2013, p. 106.

¹⁶ SMS 2013, p. 108.

¹⁷ SMS 2013, pp. 102, 109.

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¹⁸ For example, this concept was employed a decade ago to explain the rationale for Chinese anti-ship ballistic missile development. Wang Wei, [王伟], "The Effect of Tactical Ballistic Missiles on the Maritime Strategy System of China" ["战术导弹对中国海洋战略体系的影响"], *Shipborne Weapons* [舰载武器], 84 (August 2006): pp. 12–15.

¹⁹ SMS 2013, p. 212.

²⁰ SMS 2013, p. 209.

²¹ SMS 2013, pp. 209–12.

²² SMS 2013, p. 215.

²³ SMS 2013, p. 217.

²⁴ SMS 2013, p. 218.

²⁵ Nan Li, "China's Evolving Naval Strategy and Capabilities in the Hu Jintao Era," pp. 257–99; especially pp. 269–70, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB1201.pdf>.

²⁶ SMS 2013, p. 232.

²⁷ SMS 2013, pp. 213–15.

²⁸ For leading analysis on China's civil maritime forces and consolidating CCG, see Ryan D. Martinson, "Deciphering China's Armed Intrusion Near the Senkaku Islands," *The Diplomat*, January 11, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/01/deciphering-chinas-armed-intrusion-near-the-senkaku/>; Ryan D. Martinson, "China's Great Balancing Act Unfolds: Enforcing Maritime Rights vs. Stability," *The National Interest*, September 11, 2015, <http://www.nationalinterest.org/feature/chinas-great-balancing-act-unfolds-enforcing-maritime-rights-13821>; Ryan D. Martinson, "From Words to Actions: The Creation of the China Coast Guard," a paper for the China as a "Maritime Power" Conference, CNA Corporation, Arlington, VA, July 28–29, 2015, https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/creation-china-coast-guard.pdf; Ryan D. Martinson, "East Asian Security in the Age of the Chinese Mega-Cutter," Center for International Maritime Security, July 3, 2015, <http://cimsec.org/east-asian-security-age-chinese-mega-cutter/16974>; Ryan D. Martinson, "China's Second Navy," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 141.4 (April 2015), <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2015-04-0/chinas-second-navy>; Ryan D. Martinson, "Jinglue Haiyang: The Naval Implications of Xi Jinping's New Strategic Concept," *China Brief*, January 9, 2015, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43375&no_cache=1; Ryan D. Martinson, "Chinese Maritime Activism: Strategy Or Vagary?" *The Diplomat*, December 18, 2014,

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²⁹ See, for example, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015* (Arlington, VA: Department of Defense, May 8, 2015), http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2015_China_Military_Power_Report.pdf, pp. 7, 44.

³⁰ SMS 2013, pp. 216–17.

³¹ SMS 2013, p. 244.

³² SMS 2013, pp. 244–46.

³³ SMS 2013, p. 245.

³⁴ SMS 2013, p. 106.

³⁵ SMS 2013, p. 247.

³⁶ SMS 2013, pp. 246–47.

³⁷ Quotations are from Wang Bindang, Zhang Hao, and Ye Qinqing [王斌党, 张浩, 叶钦卿], Fangwei Does Not Equal Fangyu ["防卫不等于防御"], *China Defense News* [中国国防报], December 4, 2008; hypothetical examples were devised by the author.

³⁸ SMS 2013, p. 232.

³⁹ SMS 2013, Chapter 5, Section 1.

⁴⁰ SMS 2013, p. 265.

⁴¹ SMS 2013, p. 122.

⁴² SMS 2013, p. 121–27.

⁴³ SMS 2013, pp. 234 and 462.

⁴⁴ SMS 2013, p. 234.

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⁴⁵ See, for example, SMS 2013, pp. 121–123.

⁴⁶ SMS 2005, p. 320. This page, in Chapter 14, section IV, number 6, “Combining Preposition with Maneuver,” describes how modern warfare is relatively short, with very high “war consumption.” It explains that “the so-called prewar strategic preposition refers to the storing in advance, according to the strategic judgment, of the weapons, equipment and materials in organizational system in the vicinity of potential theater of operations, so that these weapons, equipment and materials can be quickly moved to the theater of operations at the advent of war.”

⁴⁷ SMS 2013, p. 292.

⁴⁸ SMS 2013, pp. 229–230, 235.

⁴⁹ For in-depth consideration of these geographically-linked negative and positive implications, see Andrew S. Erickson, “China’s Military Modernization: Many Improvements, Three Challenges, and One Opportunity,” in Jacques deLisle and Avery Goldstein, eds., *China’s Challenges* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), pp. 178–203.

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