

2007

## Imagined Enemies: China Prepares for Uncertain War

Andrew S. Erickson

John Wilson Lewis

Xue Litai

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Erickson, Andrew S.; Lewis, John Wilson; and Litai, Xue (2007) "Imagined Enemies: China Prepares for Uncertain War," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 60 : No. 4 , Article 13.

Available at: <http://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol60/iss4/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [daniel.desilets@usnwc.edu](mailto:daniel.desilets@usnwc.edu).

## BOOK REVIEWS

---

### A COMING CONFRONTATION WITH THE U.S. OVER TAIWAN

Lewis, John Wilson, and Xue Litai. *Imagined Enemies: China Prepares for Uncertain War*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2006. 377pp. \$60

This sophisticated Chinese-language research, based on numerous original sources and interviews, completes Lewis and Xue's authoritative series on China's military development. Other books in the series, all published by Stanford University Press, are *China's Strategic Seapower: The Politics of Force Modernization in the Nuclear Age* (1994), *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (1993), and *China Builds the Bomb* (1988).

In this fourth and final volume, the authors (both scholars affiliated with Stanford) begin by surveying Chinese military culture and history. Among their findings is that as part of a larger effort to exploit military tension with Moscow to further his personal power, in 1969 Marshal Lin Biao placed China's nuclear forces on "full alert" (an action both unprecedented and, thus far, unrepeated) without Mao Zedong's approval or knowledge. Such assertions should be weighed against other information as it emerges. Lingering uncertainties are hardly the fault of the authors, however, because, as they point out, "no [Chinese] Party, military, or

state contemporary security-related archives have been opened up to the general citizenry, let alone foreign scholars."

Part Two elucidates China's military decision making. A key finding is that China's national command authority resides with the Politburo Standing Committee even during "the most intense crises involving armed threats and military deployments" but that it transfers to the Party's Central Military Commission in war. Untested in battle since 1979 (against Vietnam), the dynamics of these complex bureaucracies remain uncertain even after this penetrating analysis.

The third part examines China's recent efforts to modernize its strategic rocket forces and air force. Efforts to improve strategic missile command, mobility, and survivability appear to have been partially tested in the 1995–1996 cross-strait crisis and in subsequent exercises. The authors' earlier assertion that China's current doctrine of "'active defense' can justify preemption even before the enemy has struck because the enemy *intended* to strike first" raises troubling questions about China's stated policy of

no first use of nuclear weapons (NFU). Indeed, the authors demonstrate that, alarmed at the prospect of a conventional attack on its strategic infrastructure, China's military planners have recently revisited NFU. This, and lingering problems with military aviation (despite the catalyst of the 1991 Gulf War, subsequent Russian imports, and incremental domestic progress), have caused Beijing to seek additional deterrence through a growing arsenal of conventional missiles.

Finally, the authors assess the degree to which China's military has met the strategic imperatives of its ancient strategists and modern leaders. They reach the sobering conclusion that despite China's continuing difficulty in approaching Western technological and even organizational levels, Taiwan's importance to Chinese identity, strategic value, and position as a bellwether of national territorial integrity justify extraordinary expenditure of blood and treasure. Moreover, China's military planners appear to believe that by investing selectively in asymmetric weapons, they can reconcile these conflicting realities without fueling an arms race and hence mutual insecurity. It is to be hoped that a new generation in Beijing, Taipei, and Washington, drawing on Lewis's and Xue's research, will find the collective wisdom to avert conflict that would devastate all parties involved.

ANDREW S. ERICKSON  
*Naval War College*



Dreyer, Edward L. *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405–1433*. Old Tappan, N.J.: Pearson Longman, 2006. 238pp. \$20.67

The military history of China has become a common element in the professional reading of many American military officers. Journals like this one have included an important focus on the Chinese past and present, and Edward Dreyer's book contributes important new history and analysis to that understanding. Studying the Chinese foreign expeditionary armada of the early fifteenth century, Dreyer outlines a Chinese strategy and set of naval tactics that are familiar to today's naval officer.

Starting in 1405 the eunuch Admiral Zheng He led a series of seven voyages from the shores of the Ming empire into the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. These voyages were made by fleets larger than any the world had ever seen; armadas of over two hundred vessels, the largest wooden vessels ever constructed, carrying roughly thirty thousand sailors and marine infantry. Scholars and Chinese government historians have characterized these expeditions, which reached as far west as the coast of Africa, as peaceful voyages of discovery. Dreyer, however, disagrees. He writes instead, "After thoroughly reviewing the primary Chinese sources, I concluded that the purpose of the voyages was actually 'power projection' . . . rather than mere exploration. Zheng He's voyages were undertaken to force the states of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean to acknowledge the power and majesty of Ming China and its emperor."

The book is structured in a straightforward manner, chronologically moving from Zheng He's personal biography and the background history of the voyages to the voyages themselves. While not a professional naval architect, Dreyer has obviously done his research.