

93 percent of oil import has to rely on maritime transport. Free and safe navigation in the maritime transport passages has not only become an important link that converges the Chinese economy with the world economy, but also the lifeblood at sea for the survival and development of the economy and foreign trade of China and even the Asia-Pacific Region. In case a sea crisis breaks out, it is possible to see the situation of transport passages being interrupted and obstructed. The security of maritime transport passages has become the very essence of China's main maritime interests. (Zuo 2010, pp. 8–14)

Accordingly, SOA Maritime Development Strategy Research Institute Administration Director Gao Zhiguo announced at the rollout ceremony for China's 2010 *Maritime Development Report*:

While facing the pluralizing tendency of the maritime security interests, the mission of safeguarding the maritime security in the new period is mainly to more effectively protect the safety of the sea lanes, combat piracy and maritime terrorism, carry out rescue and provide assistance in response to maritime accidents, clear up maritime pollutes, and protect the maritime environment. (Yu 2010, p. 4)

Similarly, Zuo argued:

...it is necessary to transform the navy from one of adjacent waters to a regional one that has both the comprehensive combat capability of carrying out offshore combat inside the First Island Chain as well as the capability of performing multiple military tasks on the more expansive high seas. It is necessary to make a serious effort to enhance maritime defensive capability, strategic deterrence capability, and the capability of conducting military operations other than war. (Zuo 2010, pp. 8–14)

XI ERA: BUILDING A GREAT POWER NAVY WITH WARFIGHTING CAPABILITIES

Xi Jinping assumed all three offices of Chinese paramount leader in October 2013 both determined to further China's maritime interests and capabilities and unusually well-placed to do so. Xi rode into office in part on a rising tide of maritime emphasis. In November 2012, the key report of 18th CCP National Congress outlined a "maritime power" strategy, calling for enhanced capacity for exploiting marine resources, protecting

the marine environment, and safeguarding China's maritime rights and interests" ("Xi Advocates," 2013). At the 18th Party Congress that officially instated Xi in office, his outgoing predecessor declared, "We should enhance our capacity for exploiting marine resources, develop the marine economy, protect the marine ecological environment, resolutely safeguard China's maritime rights and interests, and build China into a maritime power." The accompanying official report advocated "building a powerful maritime state" (建设海洋强国) (Hu Jintao's Report at 18th Party Congress").

According to former SOA Director Liu Cigui, Xi is accordingly guiding a Chinese "transition from being a great maritime country to being a maritime power" (Liu 2014). Liu defined a "maritime power" as "a country that has great comprehensive strength in terms of the development, use, protection, management, and control of the seas," essential, in turn, for "sustained development of the Chinese nation," including into a "global power" (Liu 2012). Xi appears poised to become the first Chinese leader to rigorously pursue strategies explicitly geared to operationalize the vision initially articulated by Hu: developing China as a comprehensive, top-level maritime power. Similarly, Beijing's 2013 Defense White Paper states:

China is a major maritime as well as land country. The seas and oceans provide immense space and abundant resources for China's sustainable development, and thus are of vital importance to the people's wellbeing and China's future. It is an essential national development strategy to exploit, utilize and protect the seas and oceans, and build China into a maritime power. It is an important duty for the PLA to resolutely safeguard China's maritime rights and interests.

China's 2015 Defense White Paper has unprecedented maritime emphasis:

- "the traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned... great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests."
- "strategic management of the sea" must be strengthened
- China must "build a combined, multi-functional and efficient marine combat force structure"

Meanwhile, China is achieving an unprecedented level and rate of maritime economic development. In a 30 July 2013 Politburo study session,

Xi stated that (Wang 2014) retained only devoted a chapter on marine-related issues (2015).

In October 2013, the time power of Southeast Asia of this theme and the "Maritime Silk Road" (丝绸之路经济带) counterparts in the Middle East.

Larger regional forces including the time forces of the Guard (CCG) Jiabao in 2000 tens of thousands. Even as older dedicated platform 25% over the Oceanic Conference long-term position.

Likewise, the University of China's newspaper states that the ocean on maritime law and jurisprudence. Beijing's view to which (if a law would be that would in of the state. The Beijing's "salvage policy, laws and

Xi stated that China's "prosperity will be increasingly linked to the seas" (Wang 2014). Whereas China's Eleventh Guideline (2006–2010) contained only one maritime section, the Twelfth Guideline (2011–2015) devoted a chapter to maritime economic development. In 2014, China's marine-related output approached 6 trillion yuan (9.4% of GDP) (Xinhua 2015).

In October 2013, Xi outlined a cooperative element to his maritime power vision, proposing a "maritime silk road" to link China with Southeast Asian nations. Xi has subsequently used an expanded version of this theme—"One Belt, One Road": the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "Maritime Silk Road of the twenty-first century" ("一带一路": "丝绸之路经济带" 和 "21世纪海上丝绸之路") (Zhao 2014)—to engage counterparts in other regions, such as the leaders of Indian Ocean and Middle Eastern states ("Xi Jinping" 2014).

Larger reforms are consolidating and improving governance under Xi, including the maritime dimension. Four of China's five largest civil maritime forces are being centralized under SOA as a unifying China Coast Guard (CCG). Following an abortive pilot program authorized by Wen Jiabao in 2005, the CCG is gradually consolidating control over several tens of thousands of personnel and hundreds of vessels (Shi et al. 2013). Even as older CCG vessels are replaced with new, larger, more sophisticated platforms, hull numbers are projected to grow by a staggering 25% over the next few years (DoD 2013, p. 38). Meanwhile, a National Oceanic Commission is being established to coordinate medium and long-term policy (*China Daily* 2013).

Likewise under multi-year development, but not yet realized in practice, is China's Ocean Basic Law (中国海洋基本法), which China Ocean University has been working to help develop. An article in SOA's official newspaper states, "the Basic Law should clearly define the scope of the ocean on marine national jurisdiction" (Liu 2014). In addition to deconflicting and eliminating gaps in maritime policy prioritization, legislation, and jurisprudence, this would seem to suggest that, the law would specify how Beijing will claim jurisdiction in the South China Sea and the extent to which (if at all) it will be based on the 9-Dashed Line. Passage of the law would enable the development of further subordinate regulations that would implement its provisions and energize the relevant agencies of the state. This would be in keeping with the general process laid out in Beijing's "salami-slicing" or "cabbage" strategy: the Party sets the broad policy, laws are developed, regulations follow, state agencies become

engaged, civilian support is engaged, and by using these sources of leverage China is ultimately able to shape the circumstances in its favor. CMSI Director Peter Dutton elaborates:

I tend to believe that under Xi's leadership over SCS issues since 2010, a choice has been made about Chinese SCS policy (that the 9-dash line represents a jurisdictional boundary) but that further details need to be developed and consensus achieved around those details. My sense is that publishing a basic law is delayed by one of two possibilities: 1) there is no consensus on what to do with the SCS waters within the 9-dashed line, including whether to draw straight baselines around the Spratlys as the Chinese expert Jia Bingbing has suggested, or 2) consensus has been reached and it includes some SCS claims that would be unacceptable and publicizing that fact would be too provocative to neighbors and the US at this time. Until the details are fleshed out, the time will not be ripe to publicize a basic law and even then the overall political situation must be right (whatever that means) for the announcement.³

Xi has a dynamic implementer for his efforts in PLAN Commander Admiral Wu Shengli. Born in August 1945, Admiral Wu Shengli is rumored to have received his first name in commemoration of China's victory over Japan in World War II. A native of Wuqiao County, Hebei Province, he has enjoyed a meteoric rise through People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) ranks.

Wu joined the PLA in 1964, when he was admitted to the PLA Institute of Surveying and Mapping in Xian. Since graduating from the institute in 1968, he has served four decades in the PLAN, attaining the rank of Rear Admiral in 1994, Vice Admiral in 2003, and Admiral on 20 June 2007. Key positions have included frigate deputy captain and captain and destroyer captain (1974–1984), commander of the Sixth Destroyer Detachment, and deputy chief-of-staff of the East China Sea Fleet's Shanghai Base (1984–1992), chief-of-staff and later commander of Fujian naval base, Mingde (1997–1999), vice commander of the East Sea Fleet, Ningbo (1999–2002), vice commander of the Guangzhou Military Region and commander of the South Sea Fleet (2002–2004), and deputy chief of the PLA General Staff Headquarters (2004–06). Having received training at Dalian Naval Academy's Class for Captains (1972–1974), he later served as its commandant (1994–1997). Wu also serves on the PLA Central Military Commission (CMC), China's highest military decision-making body. In his capacity as a high-ranking Chinese Communist Party (CCP) member,

Wu has been serving on the

PLAN Core the greatest ir position to pl to 1988. Wu' military leader oritization and Jintao appreci via PLAN pro since 2010, in

Under Xi, V training" to ra under Modern ingly charged limited wars" mission but th defense perime

Training so operations, re ware (human c ons systems h Clemens 2014 schools into a in Qingdao. I cant synergies is excessive, an likely to involv Academy, and institution akir

In 2015, fo offered a breal emerging divisi leads in numbe tions. The East Taiwan conting ships and missil seizure campai at a cave facility

Wu has been a full member of the CCP Central Committee since 2007, serving on the 17th and 18th Committees (Wu 2016).

PLAN Commander since August 2006, Admiral Wu has arguably had the greatest influence on the service since Admiral Liu Huaqing used the position to place the PLAN on a stable modern trajectory from 1980 to 1988. Wu's retention in October 2012 when all other service-grade military leaders of his age were forced to retire suggests both naval prioritization and particular confidence in the admiral. Outgoing leader Hu Jintao appreciated Wu's astute dissemination of his political philosophy via PLAN propaganda channels. In his capacity as CMC deputy chairman since 2010, incoming leader Xi Jinping might likewise have endorsed him.

Under Xi, Wu is placing unprecedented emphasis on "combat-realistic training" to raise PLA(N) efficiency and ability to execute the "Local Wars under Modern Informatized Conditions" for which it has been increasingly charged to prepare since first being tasked with preparing for "local, limited wars" in 1985 (Shan et al. 2014). What has changed is not the mission but the warfighting technologies and the expansion of China's defense perimeter from the coast to the Near Seas.

Training sophistication and realism, particularly with respect to joint operations, remains uncertain, but is definitely improving. PLAN software (human capital) and coordination lags well behind individual weapons systems hardware, but the gap is narrowing under Xi (Allen and Clemens 2014). A top priority for Wu is to consolidate the PLAN's eight schools into a system centered on a comprehensive academic institution in Qingdao. Unquestionably complex, the process could yield significant synergies and efficiencies. Current per-student administration load is excessive, and consolidation will help greatly with this.⁴ Integration is likely to involve combining Qingdao Submarine Academy, Dalian Vessel Academy, and Yantai Navy Aviation Engineering Academy into a single institution akin to U.S. Naval Academy (Erickson 2014).

In 2015, for the first time ever, the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence offered a breakdown-by-fleet of PLAN assets (Table 4.4). It reveals an emerging division of labor among China's three fleets. The North Sea Fleet leads in numbers of diesel attack submarines, optimized for littoral operations. The East Sea Fleet leads in numbers of frigates, useful to support a Taiwan contingency. The South Sea Fleet leads in numbers of amphibious ships and missile patrol craft, suggesting prioritization of patrols and island seizure campaigns. All four of China's operational SSBNs are based there, at a cave facility in Yalong Bay.

Table 4.4 PLAN fleet primary composition, 2015

	Ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs)	Nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs)	Diesel attack submarines (SSs)	Destroyers	Frigates	Corvettes	Amphibious ships	Missile patrol craft
North sea fleet	0	3	25	8	10	6	11	18
East sea fleet	0	0	18	9	22	6	20	30
South sea fleet	4	2	16	9	20	8	25	38

Note: Smaller and/or auxiliary (e.g., mine warfare) vessels not itemized. Default figure from that year's DoD report. Figure in () from U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), PLA Navy Orders of Battle 2000–2020, written response to request for information provided to the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Suitland, MD, 24 June 2013. Figure in <%> indicates “approximate percentage modern” as assessed by ONI, 2013: “Modern submarines are those able to employ submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles or antiship cruise missiles,” while “Modern surface ships are those able to conduct multiple missions or that have been extensively upgraded since 1992.” For 2015, numbers and % in [] from ONI, 2015

Sources: Anthony H. Cordesman, Chinese Military Modernization and Force Development: Chinese and Outside Perspectives (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2 July 2014), http://csis.org/files/publication/140702_Chinese_MilBal.pdf, ONI, 2015, pp. 14–15

PLAN growth, is projected, is projected, and quantitatively. Table 4.5 shows the early 1990s attack cruise missile fleet. Table 4.5

The most fundamental development defining the Near Sea approach through global commercial norms are such as China's 3000 aircraft carriers whose fortification aircraft may be

Beyond the by contrast, given even enhanced groups dispatched (half Chinese continental chemical weapons Malaysian air force Chinese and

While the from these countries major navy is for a transition seas defense' to develop where a severe sufficient for port force the replenishment Far more will prioritize the Near-Far development and

PLAN growth through 2020, two years before the end of Xi's term in office, is projected to entail significant but readily anticipated qualitative and quantitative improvements. It is poised to yield a force modern by international standards, yet more numerous than China has enjoyed since the early 1990s. Deck aviation and outfitting surface vessels with land-attack cruise missiles will offer new long-range power projection capabilities. Table 4.5 details these estimates.

The most fundamental dynamic in China's aforementioned naval development defines its potential consequences for international order at sea. In the Near Seas, China's sovereignty- and counter-intervention-focused approach threatens to undermine the existing order by carving from the global commons a zone of exception within which international rules and norms are subordinated to Beijing's parochial priorities. Case in point: China's 3000 acres of artificial island construction in the South China Sea, whose fortification with counter-intervention capabilities such as military aircraft may expand its parameters for "using the land to control the sea."

Beyond this zone of unresolved Chinese island and maritime claims, by contrast, growing Chinese sea power has the potential to support, and even enhance, order. Prime example: the twenty-one-plus PLAN task groups dispatched since 26 December 2008 to protect merchant vessels (half Chinese, half foreign) from piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Other Chinese contributions, however modest, have included escorting Syrian chemical weapons to their destruction and helping to search for a missing Malaysian airliner. The PLAN has also evacuated Chinese from Libya, and Chinese and other nationals from Yemen.

While the PLAN has gained considerable experience and proficiency from these operations, however, they do not prepare it to engage a major navy in combat. China's 2015 Defense White Paper indeed calls for a transition from "near seas defense" to "the combination of 'near seas defense' and 'far seas protection' (远海护卫)." But if the PLAN is to develop high-intensity warfighting capability beyond the Near Seas, where a seven-day supply of fuel, water, ordnance and food is marginally sufficient for wartime operations, it will need a much larger logistic support force than it now has. The PLAN's currently very small underway replenishment ships (UNREP) fleet would have to be massively increased. Far more would be needed beyond this, and the extent to which Beijing will prioritize such efforts remains unclear. So, for the foreseeable future, the Near-Far Seas dichotomy appears likely to define China's naval development and impact.

Table 4.5 PLAN primary order of battle in Xi Jinping Era and beyond, 2012–2030

Year	Ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs)	Nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs)	Diesel attack submarines (SSBs)	Total submarine rines	Aircraft carriers	Destroyers	Frigates	Corvettes	Larger amphibious ships: LSTs & LPDs	Smaller amphibious ships: LSMs	Missile patrol craft	Total surface ships	Total naval vessels
2013	3	5	49	54	1	23	52	N/A	29	26	85	216	270
2014	3 (3)	5	51 [56]	59 (60+)	1	24 (27) [28]	49 (48) [54–58]	8 (10)	29 [30]	28 [33–34]	85 (~85)	(226)	(286+)
2015	4 (3–5) [4]	5 (6–8) [5]	53 (57–62) [59]	62 (66–75) [68]	1 (1) [1]	21 (28–32) [26] [81%]	52 (52–56) [52] [67%]	15 (20–25) [20] [“new,” ~100%]	29 57 (53–55)	28 [56]	86 (85) [85] [100%]	(239–254) [240]	300+ (305–329) [308]
2020	(4–5)	(6–9) <100%>	(59–64) <75%>	69–78 (69–78)	(1–2)	(30–34) <85%>	(54–58) <85%>	(24–30)	(50–55)		(85)	(244–264)	(313–342)
2030	*12*	*12*	*75*	*99*	*4*	*34*	*68*	*26*	*73*		*111*	*316*	*415*

Note: Smaller and/or auxiliary (e.g., mine warfare) vessels not itemized. Default figure from that year’s DoD report. Figure in () from U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), PLA Navy Orders of Battle 2000–2020, written response to request for information provided to the U.S.–China Economic and Security Review Commission, Suitland, MD, 24 June 2013. Figure in <%> indicates “approximate percentage modern” as assessed by ONI, 2013: “Modern submarines are those able to employ submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles or antiship cruise missiles,” while “Modern surface ships are those able to conduct multiple missions or that have been extensively upgraded since 1992.” For 2014, [] indicates authors’ estimate, which may use different metrics from OSD since OSD does not publicize its methodology. Where totals based on DoD and ONI’s figures diverge sharply, the ONI-based total should be used, as DoD figures in these cases do not reflect one or more PLAN vessel categories. For 2015, numbers and % in [] from ONI, 2015

Sources: Anthony H. Cordesman, Chinese Military Modernization and Force Development: Chinese and Outside Perspectives (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2 July 2014), http://csis.org/files/publication/140702_Chinese_MilBal.pdf; Chinese_MilBal.pdf; estimate assuming maximally-favorable conditions for Chinese shipbuilding only; James Fanell and Scott Cheney-Peters, paper and presentation, “China’s Naval Shipbuilding: Progress and Challenges” Conference, China Maritime Studies Institute, Naval War College, 20 May 2015

As it continues to grow, China is once again becoming a more advanced shipbuilding power whose dynamism and influence in its maritime and civil markets are expanding its shores.

Examining the rapid progress to become a “plus” level—battleships. This is not for high-intensity phase zero missions. Great navies are likely rendered obsolete by the “plus.”

Xi Jinping is Admiral Wu with Party Congress command. Xi and

- Grows far
- Gives China
- Coordinates to maximize
- Learns from navies in the

CONCLUSION

As it continues its national resurgence, China is demonstrating increasingly that its “century of humiliation” was an historical aberration, albeit a devastating one. In keeping with this great wave of development, China is once more going to sea. In this sense, it is realigning itself with some earlier fundamentals of trade, deterrence, and naval diplomacy, as were manifested prominently in the Ming Dynasty. Arguably, this the more representative China: building larger numbers of increasingly advanced ships; attempting to manage a burgeoning maritime economy whose dynamism outpaces government policies; serving as a focus, an enabler, and increasingly a protector of international trade; and exerting influence in its region and beyond—all while focusing its foremost naval and civil maritime capabilities on island and maritime claims closer to its shores.

Examining China's increasing maritime interests and the parallel expansion of PLAN capabilities and missions demonstrates that it is making rapid progress in the maritime realm. The PLAN appears unlikely to become a peer competitor for the U.S. Navy in parallel blue water terms. Yet it is already becoming an important navy at the “regional-plus” level—backed by a first-rate “anti-navy” of land-based A2/AD systems. This is making it a top world navy. After all, aside from the U.S., for high-intensity kinetic warfighting purposes—as opposed to peacetime phase zero missions or actions against sub-state actors—the next tier of great navies are really mostly regional navies. Budgetary pressures will likely render the UK and French navies—arguably heretofore exceptions, propelled by their global imperial pasts—increasingly regional and less “plus.”

Xi Jinping is leading broad-based PLAN development, entrusting Admiral Wu with implementation. Wu's likely retention through the 19th Party Congress in 2016, would give him just over a decade as PLAN commander. Xi and Wu's legacy is likely to be a PLAN that:

- Grows far more rapidly in quality than quantity
- Gives China unprecedented options for furthering Near Seas claims
- Coordinates closely with a consolidating CCG and Maritime Militia to maximize peacetime progress therein
- Learns constantly from, and cooperates increasingly with, foreign navies in the Far Seas

or that have been extensively upgraded since 1992.” For 2014, [] indicates authors' estimate, which may use different metrics from OSD since OSD does not publicize its methodology. Where totals based on DoD and ONI's figures diverge sharply, the ONI-based total should be used, as DoD figures in these cases do not reflect one or more PLAN vessel categories. For 2015, numbers and % in [] from ONI, 2015

Sources: Anthony H. Cordesman, Chinese Military Modernization and Force Development: Chinese and Outside Perspectives (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2 July 2014), http://csis.org/files/publication/140702_Chinese_MilBal.pdf; ONI, 2015, pp. 14–15. 2030 *highest-end* estimate assuming *maximally-favorable* conditions for Chinese shipbuilding only: James Fanell and Scott Cheney-Peters, paper and presentation, “China's Naval Shipbuilding: Progress and Challenges” Conference, China Maritime Studies Institute, Naval War College, 20 May 2015

- Strengthens nascent power projection capabilities and deploys more vessels on increasingly-diverse Far Seas peacetime missions, but still lacks substantial combat capacity against a great power navy
- Costs ever-more to develop, maintain, and crew—factors that will force important choices in coming years

NOTES

1. Other Chinese soul-searching historical series include 走向共和 [For the Sake of the Republic] a 59-episode Chinese television series spanning the Qing Dynasty's collapse to the Republic of China's founding. Produced by CCTV and aired in 2003 to wide coverage by Chinese trapped inside by the SARS crisis, it was subsequently banned from China, perhaps for its extensive coverage of the political philosophy of Dr. Sun Yat-sen—himself not only the founder of modern China but also an enthusiastic maritime power proponent.
2. A state-owned Chinese periodical interprets the phrase “great sea nation” to mean that China has massive maritime areas, economic interests, and “sea rights” (Qin 2007, p. 48).
3. Author's communication with Peter Dutton, 30 July 2014.
4. PLAN educational consolidation is part of PLA-wide consolidation of 67 schools, themselves culled from an earlier group of more than 100. Ground Forces have the most schools to downsize.

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