China’s global maritime power projection: implications for Europe

Subcommittee for Security and Defence (SEDE) European Parliament

24 January 2018
China’s military power

- Latest trends
- Regional ambitions
- Global ambitions
- Implications for Europe
China’s military power

2015 PLA reforms (to be completed by 2020)

- Restructuration (CMC into 15 departments, 5 battle zones, 5 army sections)
- Rationalisation (budget and personnel cuts)
- Modernisation (cyber, space; personnel well-being)
- Reorientation (boost to Air Force and Navy)
Budget:

- Official defence budget 2017: EUR 136.9 billion (7% increase from 2016)
- 2nd after US, 13% of global expenditure
- Equally split between personnel, operations & training, and equipment procurement
China’s military power

PLA Exercises by Service (2003-2016)
China’s maritime power

Maritime interests:

• National security / traditional defence (Taiwan)
• Sovereignty interest / territorial integrity (ECS, SCS)
• Economic exploitation (resources, energy/fish)
• Shipbuilding industry
• International trade - SLOCs protection
• Protection of overseas diaspora and assets
• Desire for a global status / leadership
Blue water/ “far seas” capabilities (projection by 2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PLAN</th>
<th>USN</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Japan (6 helicopter carriers)</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carriers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroyers</td>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>88-91</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Aegis-style)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frigates</td>
<td>30-32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3-10</td>
<td>9-11</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submarines</td>
<td>34-36</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8-10</td>
<td>38-40</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regional ambitions

East China Sea

- Senkaku/ Diaoyu dispute
- Overlapping maritime boundary claims
- Hydrocarbon reserves
- Escalation of tensions since 2012
- ADIZ in 2013
Regional ambitions

South China Sea

• 90% claimed by China (70% VN, 30% PH)

• Overlapping boundary claims; disputed sovereignty claims (Paracels, Spratlys)

• Deterioration since 2013; evidence of island-building + militarisation

• 2016 PCA ruling on the PH-CN case
Global ambitions
Indian Ocean presence
Global ambitions

Indian Ocean presence

- Anti-piracy presence since 2008 (28 escort task force groups)
- Port development (“string of pearls”)
- Submarine deployments (port visits to Sri Lanka and Pakistan)
- Djibouti naval base opened in Aug 2017 (logistical support)
- Live-fire exercises in WIO (Aug 17), Mediterranean (Jul 17)
- Underwater surveillance network, regular patrols
- Gwadar next?
Global ambitions

21st century Maritime Silk Road
A ‘hybrid’ maritime power?

Use of non-conventional methods
- Use of civilian elements: coast guards, fishing fleet/maritime ‘militia’, SOA, etc.
- ‘Salami-slicing’ > *fait accompli* (SCS)

Use of economic and diplomatic pressure
- Bilateral negotiations > ASSYMETRY
- Trade incentives (FTAs)
- Debt-trap diplomacy (Hambantota seaport case) > erosion of sovereignty!
- Purchase of political goodwill

Generating ambiguity
- Discourse vs. reality (non-intervention; no sphere of influence; no hegemony/dominance)
- Disrespect of IL; self-interested interpretations of UNCLOS
- Mahan, Zheng He or Sun Tzu?

Evolving
- Adaptive
- “Evolutionary theory”
**What maritime power?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zheng He “Art of collaboration”</th>
<th>Sun Tzu “Art of war”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transparency (clear articulation of intent)</td>
<td>Win-all-without-fight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generosity (display of goodwill)</td>
<td>Use weaknesses/ avoid strengths (no direct confrontation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win-win (equality of treatment)</td>
<td>Knowledge of enemy and self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Securing external environment</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust (no conquest/ aggression)</td>
<td>Control (use of partnerships)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good leadership</td>
<td>Good leadership</td>
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</table>
Implications for Europe

• Changing strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific (Quadrilateral alliance)
• Influencing political goodwill (in EUMS and Western Balkans, “16+1” framework) > risk of fragmentation/weakening of EU positions
• Danger for rules-based global order/international law (incl. erosion of sovereignty)
• Lack of governance (inclusive, multilateral structure to cooperate on functional security issues)
Way ahead?

- United international front > rules-based international system/UNCLOS
- Proactive approach towards the Belt and Road Initiative > control, transparency
- Protection of strategic infrastructure (ports, communications), resilience in the neighbourhood
- Promotion of good governance (multilateral > IORA, IOC, IONS; bilaterally)
Thank you