

*China's Post-Cold War Challenges and the Birth of its Current
Military Strategy*

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New Military Strategy and Puzzles

On 13 January 1993, the Chinese Communist Party's Central Military Commission (CMC), the highest commanding agency of China's armed forces, held a special meeting on strategy. It was nearly two years after the overwhelming victory of the U.S.-led Coalition in the Gulf War and thirteen months after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The former demonstrated the obsolescence of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) equipment and doctrines, while the latter ended the standoff between the West and the Soviet Union, a situation on which China had been dependent to manage a series of challenges, especially the issue of Taiwan, by maintaining a balance between the two opposing camps. Facing the unprecedented challenges of the post-Cold War era, Jiang Zemin, chair of the CMC, presented the "Military Strategic Guideline for the New Era" (MSGNE). The tone of his lengthy speech was gloomy. Jiang outlined China's new strategy to respond to the imminent threat to its national security arising from Taiwan's move toward *de jure* independence, an issue that brought into question the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s legitimacy to rule China. As Taiwan was vital to the strategic

interests of the United States in Asia-Pacific, Chinese leaders had to take the U.S. into account when they tried to use force on or coerce Taiwan. The MSGNE turned out to be the foundation of China's subsequent military build-up program.¹ The ensuing steady growth in China's military strength caught the attention of the United States as early as 2000, when the U.S. Congress created the U.S-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC) to "monitor, investigate and report"² to Congress on relevant issues related to China in addition to establishing an annual report by the U.S. Department of Defence (DoD) on Chinese military power. This sustained effort since 2000 provides an up-to-date and comprehensive picture of China's military power while raising new questions. U.S. researchers have observed that China is exploiting what it terms a "period of strategic opportunity"³ to assert its claims over its "core interests," including territorial disputes with many neighbouring countries.⁴ DoD researchers noticed in 2012 that Beijing was having "increasing difficulties [with] balance[ing]" its conflicting interests.⁵ By that time, Chinese researchers had been engaging in debates on China's maritime policy and foreign policy.⁶ DoD researchers found that they had "few direct insights into

¹ Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, "China's Military Strategy," http://www.mod.gov.cn/affair/2015-05/26/content_4588132.htm.

² U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC), <https://www.federalregister.gov/agencies/u-s-china-economic-and-security-review-commission>; USCC, *Annual Report to Congress* (2002–2015), <http://www.uscc.gov/about>.

³ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to the Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2013*, http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2013_china_report_final.pdf; *Annual Report to the Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2014*, http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2014_DoD_China_Report.pdf; *Annual Report to the Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015*, p. 21; http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2015_China_Military_Power_Report.pdf

⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2012*, p. 2, http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2012_CMPR_Final.pdf

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to the Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2013*, 20–23; *Annual Report to the Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2014*, 20–22. See: Xu Qiyu (徐弃郁), "Reflections on Some Misleading Aspects of Seapower" ("海权的误区与反思"), *Strategy and Management* (战略与管理) 5 (2003): 15–23; Wu Zhengyu (吴征宇), "Combined Powers of Seapower and Landpower" ("海权与陆海复合型强国"), *World Economics and Politics* (世界经济与政治) 2 (2012): pp. 38–50.

the strategic concepts motivating China's force build-up, the leadership's thinking about the use of force, and contingency planning that shapes the PLA's force structure or doctrine."⁷ Nor did DoD researchers explain, in their annual reports, Robert Ross's account of China's dichotomous naval policy, which he described as consisting of a war-fighting A2 (anti-access) capacity for a scenario of war against Taiwan and a blue-water fleet that worked effectively with the U.S. and other Western navies in their joint operation to protect sea lines of communications (SLOC).⁸ This conflicting situation arises from the reality that, in a war with the U.S. over Taiwan, the PLA would have to fight off U.S. fleets approaching Taiwan. But in peacetime the PLA Navy (PLAN) would participate in international naval operations along the SLOCs on which China's economy is dependent. As the U.S. Navy is overwhelmingly superior to the PLAN, the latter's large and medium surface warships would be easy targets. If China used its A2 capacity in a war for Taiwan and hit approaching U.S. vessels, the United States could retaliate, and these warships would be unlikely to survive. The USCC's 2015 annual report attributed this contradiction to China's nuclear strategy. As neither the U.S. nor the Chinese leaders want to "allow military conflicts to go too far,"⁹ the PLA's A2 capacity, which could significantly increase China's conventional striking strength, increases China's credibility in conventional deterrence. It therefore offers Chinese leaders more options for making decisions and improves China's position vis-à-vis the United States in the Western Pacific. Nevertheless, this explanation is far from satisfactory. The PLA's A2 capacity is irrelevant to SLOC protection. As this capacity is built on intermediate-range missiles, the category of missiles that were destroyed and prohibited in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty between the United States and the former Soviet Union in 1987 it

⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2009*, p. 10, http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/China_Military_Power_Report_2009.pdf; *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2008*, p. 16, http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/China_Military_Report_08.pdf; *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2007*, 11, <http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/070523-China-Military-Power-final.pdf>; *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2006*, 13, http://www.dod.mil/pubs/pdfs/China_Report_2006.pdf; *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2005*, p. 15, <http://archive.defense.gov/news/Jul2005/d20050719china.pdf>.

⁸ Robert S. Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the U.S. Response," *International Security* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2009): pp. 46–81.

⁹ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2015 Report to Congress of the U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission* (Washington: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2015): 371.

actually undermines the current international institution of arms control¹⁰ and by no means increases China's international reputation. Although Ross's interpretation of "naval nationalism" works in relation to China's nationalism, which regards large surface warships as a symbol of China's rising power, it cannot explain the ongoing debates among Chinese researchers about China's maritime policy.¹¹ The problem of the absence of "insights" therefore remains unresolved. This situation may be attributable to the lack of attention paid to the genesis of the MSGNE.¹² This paper is an attempt to identify the driving forces behind the MSGNE through an examination of accessible publications. This review may be helpful to researchers in their efforts to anticipate the possible responses of Chinese leaders to unprecedented challenges.¹³

The Generals Zhang: Makers of the MSGNE

The creators of the MSGNE were General Zhang Zhen (1914–2015), a vice-chairman of the CMC, and General Zhang Wannian (1928–2015), chief of the PLA's General Department of Staff (GDS) at that time. Both were appointed to the PLA high command in the late fall of 1992. By the time that their appointments were announced, the CCP leadership had just experienced a reshuffle of earthquake proportions. This restructuring was the last major decision by Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997), the helmsman of China's market-oriented reform and China's de facto supreme ruler. The change

¹⁰ Evan Braden Montgomery, "China's Missile Forces Are Growing: Is It Time to Modify the INF Treaty?" *The National Interest*, p. 2 July 2014 <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/chinas-missile-forces-are-growing-it-time-modify-the-inf-10791>

¹¹ Zhang Li and Ren Linlan (张丽任灵兰), "A Review of the Study of Maritime History in China in the Last Five Years" ("近五年来中国的海洋史研究"), *World History* (世界历史) 1 (2011): 118–27.

¹² The MSGNE is identified for the first time as "National Military Strategic Guideline for the New Period" in the Department of Defense's annual report in 2003 (U.S. Department of Defense, *Report to Congress Pursuant to the FY2000 National Defense Authorization Act: Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China*, 16, <http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2003chinaex.pdf>). The next time that it was mentioned in the DoD annual report was in 2006, when China became the world's second economic entity.

¹³ Canadian Security and Intelligence Service, *The Security Dimensions of an Influential China: A Conference of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) Held in Collaboration with National Defense Canada: Highlights from the Conference 28 February–1 March, 2013, Ottawa*, https://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca/pblctns/wrldwtch/2013/CHINA_POST_CONFERENCE_E_SOURCE.pdf.

consolidated Jiang Zemin's position as Deng's successor and ended the post-Tiananmen uncertainties about the power succession in China. The birth of the MSGNE was thus closely linked to the intense power among the CCP elite after the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989 and the debate about the legitimacy of the CCP's rule over China in the post-Cold War era. In order to understand the various forces behind the creation of the MSGNE, it is necessary to look back briefly on the challenges that Deng encountered before and after the Tiananmen Crackdown.

Deng's principal challenge concerned the appointment of Jiang Zemin as the CCP's general secretary. Jiang was a protégé of Chen Yun (1905–1995), a member of the Deng-led oligarchy.¹⁴ In contrast to Deng's inclination toward a market-driven economy, Chen preferred to preserve more government influence on the economy. Deng accepted Chen's nomination of Jiang as the CCP's future leader on the eve of the Tiananmen Crackdown because Zhao Ziyang (1919–2005), Deng's protégé and the CCP's general secretary, had refused to give the order to the PLA to crack down on the protesters in Beijing.¹⁵ In the meantime, Deng had to keep Premier Li Peng (born 1928) out of the competition for his successor because of his poor public relations skills and his bad image inside and outside of China. Li was inclined to support Chen's conservative policy and became well known for his notorious speech against the Tiananmen protesters, but his conservatism and his speech increased his standing among the octogenarian CCP leadership. In addition to his rivalry with Chen Yun, Deng found his aging oligarchy criticized relentlessly by Tiananmen protesters for various problems in China. Deng was thus under dramatically increased pressure and transferred his last official title, CMC chairman, to Jiang Zemin in November 1989. Nevertheless, the influence of the PLA's political branch, led by General Yang Baibing (1920–2013), director of the PLA's General Department of Politics (GDP) and general secretary of the CMC, increased markedly after the Tiananmen Crackdown. General Yang was a half-brother of Yang Shangkun (1907–1998), president of the People's Republic of China (PRC), who had worked with Deng since the early 1930s and had shared unpleasant experiences with him during the Cultural Revolution. In the shadow of the powerful Yang brothers and Chen Yun and Li Peng, Jiang adopted a strategy of inaction. The hardliners thus became dominant in

¹⁴ Andrew J. Nathan, "The Tiananmen Papers," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 2001): pp. 2–48.

¹⁵ Zhang Liang, *June Fourth: The True Story* (六四真相) (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 2001), pp. 591–96, 753–59.

political and economic affairs in China and threatened Deng's program of market-oriented economic reform. As Deng regarded this reform as his principal legacy, he started a campaign to reverse the reactionary tendency in Chinese politics in the spring of 1992. Deng bypassed the CCP's bureaucracy and appealed directly to various levels of CCP officials and to the Chinese public, stating that those administrative leaders who chose a safe strategy of inaction should be replaced, indirectly referring to Jiang without mentioning his name.¹⁶

Jiang responded to Deng's relentless push with bold action. In a private, face-to-face meeting with Deng in Deng's residence in September 1992, on the eve of the CCP's 14th National Congress, Jiang, who did not serve in the PLA, is said to have presented Deng with a list of names of potential candidates for the PLA's top positions, prepared by General Yang Baibin.¹⁷ He then attributed his inaction to his difficult situation in Beijing. Deng is said to have been silent during the entire meeting, but his action afterwards was swift and decisive. He quietly retired General Yang and suspended the appointments of those on General Yang's list¹⁸, naming General Zhang Zhen, the 78-year-old commandant of the PLA's University of National Defence (UND) as vice-chairman of the CMC.

Deng's instruction to General Zhang Zhen on his new position was brief and straightforward: he was to help Jiang Zemin, the CMC's official chairman, command the PLA by selecting and appointing cadres.¹⁹ General Zhang Zhen was the most senior among the PLA's active officers at that time. He had been the chief of staff of one of the PLA's four field armies in 1949. Before becoming the UND's first commandant in 1985, he served as chief of the PLA's General Logistics Department (GDL) and vice-chief of the GDS during the 1970s and 1980s. He was one of Deng's principal assistants who helped the PLA transform itself from a massive Maoist army of total war to a force that was smaller but better trained for regional wars.²⁰ Zhang Zhen was open-minded and a fast

¹⁶ Zong Hairen (宗海仁), *The Fourth Generation* (第四代) (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 2002), pp. 274–76.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 281–82.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 282–83.

¹⁹ Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen's Memoir* (张震回忆录), Vol. 2 (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2004), p. 359.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

learner, with good diplomatic skills. In his memoir, he recounted the intricacies of China's military strategy and politics as well as the various challenges he faced in shifting the PLA's focus from the Maoist "People's War" to Deng's "People's War under Modern Conditions" during the early 1980s, when he was deputy chief of the GDS and was responsible for training. Among the challenges he faced were how to achieve consensus among the PLA leaders and how to handle conflicting interests in downsizing the army.²¹ During his tenure at the UND, Zhang Zhen visited the United States, spending time at the U.S. National Defense University, the USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* and a U.S. Army transportation centre. Zhang Zhen was so impressed by attack helicopters and the practice of battlefield tours in military education that he promoted the development of attack helicopters for the PLA and introduced battlefield tours into the UND curriculum. Zhang Zhen also appointed bright, young university-educated junior officers as instructors for courses for middle-ranking and even high-ranking officers, in order to bring his vision to the PLA's officer corps.²² Zhang Zhen watched the Gulf War closely and called the Coalition's victory "a great revolution in the history of military thought."²³ He organized and chaired seminars on the Gulf War at the UND immediately after it ended. He emphasized the research on the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) and asked UND faculty members for "new ideas" in the fields of the post-Cold War international situation, military strategy and operations. In a PLA meeting that Jiang and Zhang Zhen attended in November 1992, shortly after the CCP's 14th National Congress the previous month, Jiang Zemin claimed that, as the international situation had been changed fundamentally since the end of the Gulf War, the PLA needed a new military strategy.²⁴ Zhang Zhen immediately began to implement Jiang's directive and gave this task to General Zhang Wannian, the recently appointed GDS chief. Zhang Wannian arranged a seminar on strategic issues in early December 1992. The principal participants were from the GDS operations department. Zhang Zhen participated in this seminar, and his speech and comments became the foundation for the MSGNE. Because Zhang Wannian was the executor of Zhang Zhen's project, a brief overview of Zhang Wannian's career is essential.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 193–203, 263–71.

²² Ibid., p. 321. This practice met quiet resistance and was mocked privately as "Daughters teach their moms how to deliver babies."

²³ Ibid., p. 317.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 361.

General Zhang Wannian was a battle-tested veteran. His military career began as an enlisted soldier during the Sino-Japanese War.²⁵ By the end of the Chinese Civil War, he was serving as a chief signal officer in a regiment, and he was assigned to the position of chief of operations soon after the Korean War began.²⁶ In addition to the wars in China, Zhang Wannian participated in the Vietnam War during the 1960s and China's Vietnam War in 1979. During the former, Zhang Wannian was a member of the PLA observation group during the Battle of Khe Sanh in 1968,²⁷ while during the latter he was commander of one of the divisions that participated in the Battle of Lang Son, the gateway from China to Hanoi.²⁸ The performance of Zhang Wannian's division in the war against Vietnam and his understanding of China's strategy of "killing chickens with a cattle butcher's knife" impressed Deng.²⁹ In the spring of 1989, Zhang Wannian was promoted to commander of the Guangzhou Military Region, one of the seven military regions of China. In April 1990, he was appointed as commander of the Jinan Military Region, which was responsible for the defence of Bohai Gulf, the gateway to Beijing from the sea. In May 1991, shortly after the Gulf War concluded, Zhang Wannian conducted a series of coastal defence exercises in his military region and organized seminars on operations in the age of "high-tech warfare."³⁰ Deng was impressed again and proposed to the CMC that Zhang Wannian be appointed as the GDS chief in October 1992.³¹ As mentioned earlier, Zhang Zhen advised Zhang Wannian that one of his top priorities was to help Jiang Zemin develop a new military strategy for the post-Cold War and post-Gulf War era.³² Zhang Wannian acknowledged in his memoir that this was not a task that had to be completed from scratch. In parallel to the research done at the UND under General Zhang Zhen's command, General Chi Haotian, Zhang Wannian's predecessor, had also

²⁵ Biography of Zhang Wannian team, *The Biography of Zhang Wannian*, Vol. 1 (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2011), p. 18.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 275–97.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 352–87.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 520–27.

³¹ Biography of Zhang Wannian team, *The Biography of Zhang Wannian*, Vol. 2 (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2011), p. 4.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

proposed a new military strategy to the CMC.³³ It is obvious that Zhang Wannian's MSGNE project benefitted significantly from the work already done as well as from Zhang Zhen's speeches at the GDS's seminars in December 1992. However, Generals Zhang Zhen and Zhang Wannian were not the only senior officers in the PLA and defence-related agencies who considered strategic issues. Among the others was General Liu Huaqing (1916–2011).

General Liu Huaqing: China's Admiral Sergei Gorshkov

General Liu Huaqing was dubbed "China's Admiral [Sergei] Gorshkov,"³⁴ even "China's Mahan."³⁵ As General Zhang Zhen had, Liu Huaqing participated in the CCP-led revolution in the late 1920s. In 1987, he became a CMC member and was promoted, in 1992, into the CCP Politburo Standing Committee, a position higher than Zhang Zhen's. In contrast to Zhang Zhen, whose entire career was spent in the PLA's ground force, Liu spent most of his career in the PLAN, following the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949. He thus possessed a strategic vision that his peers did not have. Liu's connection with the PLAN began in 1952 when he, then chief of the politics department of an infantry school, was appointed deputy commissar of the PLA's first naval school in Dalian.³⁶ In 1954, he was sent to a naval academy in the Soviet Union, where he spent nearly four years completing required courses. In 1958, he was appointed deputy commander and chief of staff of the Lushun (Port Arthur) Base, where he witnessed and experienced the PLAN's difficulties in transitioning from a ground force to a maritime force. During the 1960s and 1970s, Liu served as director of a naval engineering institution as well as assistant to Marshal Nie Rongzhen, who was in charge of the PRC's strategic weapons programs. The PLAN leaders at that time were preoccupied with the Maoist People's War dogma and devoted China's limited resources to developing light coastal

³³ Biography of Chi Haotian team, *The Biography of Chi Haotian* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2009), pp. 323–27.

³⁴ You Ji, *The Armed Forces of China* (London, UK: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 1999), p. 164; Euan Graham, *Japan's Sea Lane Security: A Matter of Life and Death?* (London, UK: Routledge, 2006), p. 203.

³⁵ Jeffrey Goldman, "China's Mahan," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, 122/3/1,117 (March 1996): pp. 44–47; Yves-Heng Lim, *China's Naval Power: An Offensive Realist Approach* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), p. 63.

³⁶ Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing's Memoir* (刘华清回忆录) (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2004), p. 252.

vessels and producing, through reverse engineering, outdated Soviet submarines based on the Germans' technology during World War II. They also tried to put into massive production a nuclear-powered submarine (SSN) and a ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) that were in the experimental stage.³⁷ Liu thought that these programs were without vision. As the PRC was developing its strategic weapons, Liu predicted that the PLAN would be required to escort PRC convoys for long-range rocket tests. He therefore, as early as the mid-1960s, regarded guided missile destroyers (DDG) as the PLAN's principal surface warships of the future. Liu took advantage of his position as director of a naval engineering institution and started preliminary research on improving the Soviet-made destroyers in the PLAN's inventory.³⁸ The research laid the foundation for the PRC's first indigenous destroyer. As early as 1975, prior to implementation of Deng's market-oriented reform in 1978, Liu submitted to Deng, the GDS chief at that time, a proposal for the PLAN's future development. Liu predicted that China would become increasingly dependent on international trade and would need a balanced blue-water fleet based on large surface warships and nuclear submarines. He recommended that China begin to develop an aircraft carrier with a tonnage of 40,000 tons and have it in service by 1990.³⁹ In this proposal, Liu recommended that the PLA members liberate themselves from the old mindset of revolution. He argued that the PLA's long-standing inferiority in equipment in relation to its opponents had produced a tradition of choosing to engage in battles only when it had weapons available. Liu pointed out that this era was over and that the PLA had to predict the kinds of battles it would engage in and develop the necessary equipment accordingly.⁴⁰

By the time that Liu submitted his proposal to Deng in September 1975, he had left the PLAN and had been appointed as a member of the leading team of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. In the fall of 1977, Liu found himself in the position of overseeing the PLA's equipment affairs. After Deng Xiaoping had consolidated his command over the PLA in 1979, Liu was appointed chief of the PLAN in 1982. The PLA and PLAN were

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 294–301, 312–17 and 349–55.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 313–15.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 355–57.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

in poor shape at that time. Liu had to spend most of his time reorganizing and retraining the PLAN in the first years of his tenure as its head.⁴¹ A direct outcome of Liu's reform and intensified training program was the PLAN's high-seas training and patrolling around the disputed Spratley Islands in the southern part of the South China Sea.

In 1985, as the PLAN was making remarkable progress, Liu advocated a "naval strategy" for China. To begin with, he promoted a set of discussions around whether the PLAN was a strategic force and whether it needed a separate strategy and doctrine. During the discussion, Liu argued that military strategies arose from necessity. As China's economy was booming, with rapid growth in overseas trade, the PLAN would take on the strategic responsibilities of defending China's maritime interests. The PLAN therefore needed a strategy to define its mission and guide its programs of research, development and training.⁴² Liu's efforts, however, were not successful this time, and his promotion of an independent naval strategy was not accepted into the PLA's official doctrine. Nevertheless, in October 1987, Deng, chair of the CMC, appointed Liu as a CMC member and placed him in charge of the PLA's equipment affairs.

When Liu took this position, the PLA was in the poorest position in terms of organization, equipment, training and morale that it had been in since 1949. In a time of rapid inflation, its budget had not been increased. Its outdated equipment, based on technologies of the 1940s and 1950s, could not be replaced. Its soldiers were underpaid and morale was low. On 18 March 1988, five months after Liu's appointment to the CMC, a brief naval skirmish occurred between the PLAN and the Vietnamese navy over an atoll in the South China Sea. Although the PLAN fleet overwhelmed the tiny Vietnamese flotilla in minutes, it had to leave the disputed area immediately because it was within range of Soviet-made Vietnamese fighter-bombers but out of range of Chinese land-based fighters, and the PLAN warships' air defence system was too primitive to confront the Vietnamese air force. Liu felt urgent pressure to reform and re-equip the PLAN.⁴³

Liu's first window of opportunity appeared after the Tiananmen Crackdown in June 1989. As a sign of protest, the U.S. government suspended the U.S.-China program to improve the electronic systems in the J-8 II, the best fighter of the PLAN and PLAAF

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 415–23.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 432–39.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 534.

(PLA Air Force) fleet. In the meantime, the Soviet Union, the PRC's deadly foe since the late 1960s, was willing to sell China its latest fighters, including the Sukhoi-27 (Su-27). Liu decided to send a delegation to the USSR and explore the possibility, an action that would lead to the subsequent large-scale trade of arms between Russia and China.⁴⁴ Liu then exploited the opportunity of the Gulf War to emphasize the importance of weapons. In one of his seminars on the Gulf War, Liu stated that the Americans could not treat the Chinese as they did the Iraqis during the Gulf War. However, the high-tech weapons that Western armies possessed could not be ignored; these weapons dramatically increased combat effectiveness and altered some basic concepts of warfare, including those concerning time and space.⁴⁵ The PLA had to emancipate itself thoroughly from the Maoist mindset of the People's War based on China's vast territorial and population size and a defensive strategy. It had to develop a brand-new strategy. Liu's words sounded like an intellectual revolution in China's defence affairs, an issue on which Liu and Zhang Zhen had shared opinions. Among their shared views was their opinion on the critical roles of airpower, a sensitive issue in the PLA.

Reappraising Airpower: The PLA's Intellectual Revolution and Jiang Zemin

A few years before Liu and Zhang led their respective research teams and exploited the Gulf War to overhaul the PLA's outdated doctrine, some PRC and PLA researchers had been challenging the Maoist doctrines of the People's War and Deng's People's War under Modern Conditions. One of the shared aspects of Mao's and Deng's doctrines concerned airpower. Both Mao and Deng were well aware of the impact of airpower on ground operations. During the Korean War, the PLA launched large-scale offensives as it had done during the Chinese Civil War and at first succeeded. But the initial victories were soon followed by disasters because of raids by the U.S. air force. The North Vietnamese army's offensives, in which the PLA were actively involved, suffered the same fate for the same reason. However, U.S. airpower could not stop the PLA and

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 573–74.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 613.

the North Vietnamese from supplying their frontline troops. The PLA and the North Vietnamese army used the strategy of protracted war as well as defensive operations and hit-and-run guerrilla tactics and successfully wore down the will of the U.S. public. The PLA therefore ignored the strategic air offensive campaigns. However, during the mid-1980s, a small number of PLA researchers did some rudimentary research on the Allies' air campaigns during World War II in an effort to draw greater attention to the significance of airpower.⁴⁶

In the meantime, civilian researchers in China's defence industry warned of the rapid decrease in the efficiency of surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) against invading aircraft, on the basis of their analysis of the recent conflicts in the Falkland War (1982), the Israel-Syria war (1982) and the U.S. air raid against Libya (1986).⁴⁷ They also introduced the Western concept of air defence based on air superiority, warning of the impact of stealth technology.⁴⁸ A small number of PLA researchers with education in engineering pointed out in 1988 that the PLA's concepts of war and the PRC's defence industry, which had

⁴⁶ Cao Yifeng (曹毅风), Zhou Tongrei (周同瑞) and Hua Renjie (华人杰), "The Warfare in the Early Stage of World War II and Lessons" ("第二次世界大战初期空战特点及其经验教训"), *Military History* (军事历史) 2 (1985): pp. 21–22; Liang Xiaoqiu (梁晓秋), "How did the United States Seize the Initiatives in the Pacific War?" ("美国是如何夺取太平洋战争主动权的?"), *World Military Review* (外国军事学术) 4 (1987): pp. 61–62; Liang Xiaoqiu (梁晓秋), "The Experiences and Lessons from the Strategic Air Offensives Campaigns during World War II" ("第二次世界大战中的战略轰炸及其经验教训"), *World Military Review* (外国军事学术) 6 (1987): pp. 49–50.

⁴⁷ Lin Yuceng (林玉琛), "Challenges to Air Defence: An Analysis of the Wars of Falkland Islands and Bekaa" ("从马岛战争及贝卡谷地空袭看防空问题"), *Modern Defense Technology* (现代防御技术) 2 (March 1983): pp. 6–14; Liao Chaopei (廖朝佩), "The United States' Air Raid against Libya" ("美国对利比亚的空袭"), *Winged Missiles Journal* (飞航导弹) 6 (1987): pp. 22–27; Zheng Wanqian (郑万千), "A Prediction to Air Raid Model in 2000" ("公元2000年空袭模式的预测"), *Tactical Missile Technology* (战术导弹技术) 12 (1987): pp. 79–80; Wang Weijun (王惟浚), "Challenges in Air Defense Operations in Regional Wars in 2000" ("2000年局部战争中反空袭问题探讨"), *Journal of Systems Engineering and Electronics* (系统工程与电子技术) 3 (1988): pp. 55–57; Cheng Chuzhi (成楚之), "The Costs of Air Defense Weapon Systems and their Cost-Effectiveness" ("防空武器系统的成本和作战费效比问题"), *Modern Defense Technology* (现代防御技术) 3 (1990): pp. 12–20; Xu Ande (徐安德), "An Evaluation of the Combat Effectiveness of Surface-Air Missile Systems' Capacity against Multiple Targets" ("防空导弹武器系统反空袭抗多目标作战效能的评定"), *Aero Weaponry* (航空兵器) (August 1990): pp. 15–18.

⁴⁸ Tang Wei (唐伟), "The Stealth to the Soviet Air Defense Systems" ("隐身对苏联防空系统的威胁"), *Modern Defense Technology* (现代防御技术) (December 1990): pp. 56–61; Li Engzong (李恩忠), "NATO's Active Air Defense: Ballistic Missiles or Long-Range Missiles?" ("北约的积极防空: 用弹道导弹还是用防区外发射的导弹"), *Missiles and Space Vehicles* (国外导弹与航天) (December 1985): pp. 25–27.

been founded on the Maoist doctrine of the People's War, needed urgently to be reviewed and overhauled.⁴⁹

The Coalition's victory in the Gulf War fuelled the exploration of airpower among these Chinese defence researchers. Their attention immediately after the Gulf War was focused on the Coalition's high-tech weaponry system and their performance in the war and then moved to the Coalition's systems of command and logistic supports. Specialists in air defence also reviewed the reasons behind the collapse of the Iraqi air defence.⁵⁰ They observed that the new technologies in electronic warfare dramatically reduced the survival rate of SAMs. In addition, the Iraqi air defence was built on outdated Soviet technology from the 1960s and 1970s.⁵¹ The Americans and their allies knew these

⁴⁹ Wang Qingrong (汪庆荣), "The Impacts and Responses: High-Technology on China's Strategy of Defence Industry" ("高技术对国防发展战略的影响和对策"), *The Forum of Chinese Science and Technology* (中国科技论坛) 2 (1987): pp. 20–23; Wang Qingrong, "The Impacts of High Technology on China's Defense Modernization" ("高技术的发展对国防现代化的影响"), *The Military Science of China* (中国军事科学) 3 (1988): pp. 28–35.

⁵⁰ Xu Xingqu (徐兴举), "Lessons for Air Defense Forces: The Defeat of Iraqi Air Defense Campaign" ("地面防空力量建设的鉴戒: 伊拉克防空作战失败的教训与启示"), *Modern Technology* (现代防御技术) (August 1991): pp. 70–76; Tan Xianyu (谭显裕), "Air Defense Systems and their Future" ("防空导弹武器系统的发展及未来对策"), *Fire and Command Control* (火力与指挥控制) (July 1991): pp. 65–71; Xu Pingao (徐品高), "An Exploration of the Development Directions of Surface-to-Air Missiles under Growing Airborne Threats" ("在严重的空中威胁环境下防空导弹的发展方向探讨"), *Modern Defense Technology* (现代防御技术) (May 1991): pp. 22–31; Xu Pingao (徐品高), "The Gulf War and the Importance of Intensifying Air Defense Studies" ("从海湾战争看加强防空体系研究的重要性"), *Modern Defense Technology* (现代防御技术) (December 1991): pp. 13–19; Xu Cunmeng (许椿荫), "The Roles of Air Defense Missiles and their Future: An Analysis of the Gulf War" ("海湾战争浅析: 简论防空导弹的作用及发展"), *Aerospace Shanghai* (上海航天) (June 1991): pp. 37–40; Wu Xiekang (吴燮康), "An Analysis and Prediction of the World's Market of Air Defense Missiles for the Next Decade" ("世界防空导弹市场的十年预测与分析"), *Modern Weaponry* (现代兵器) (June 1991): pp. 41–43; Cui Huaihua (崔怀华), "The General Approaches to Improving the Survival of Air Defense Missiles" ("提高防空导弹武器系统生存力的基本途径"), *Journal of Systems Engineering and Electronics* (系统工程与电子技术) (September 1992): pp. 16–20; Xu Pingao (徐品高), "The Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Air Defense Missiles at Crucial Locations" ("关于要地防空导弹体系的效能评定问题"), *Modern Defense Technology* (现代防御技术) (August 1992): pp. 20–27; Jiang Zaomeng (姜兆梦), "The Gulf War and the C3Is in Air Defense Systems" ("海湾战争与防空C3I系统"), *Modern Defense Technology* (现代防御技术) (December 1992): pp. 15–22; Chen Zhenbang (陈振邦), "The Anti-Stealth Advantages in the Air Warning Radar Systems" ("防空情报雷达系统的反隐身优势"), *Journal of Systems Engineering and Electronics* (系统工程与电子技术) (January 1992): pp. 65–71.

⁵¹ Xu Xingqu, "Lessons for Air Defense Forces," p. 68.

systems well and obtained precise information about the Iraqi electronic systems through pre-battle reconnaissance as well as data provided by the Soviet Union.⁵²

In addition to the unprecedented intensity and scale of jamming of communication systems, the United States used new weaponry systems (cruise missiles and stealth fighters) to destroy some essential facilities of the Iraqi air defence system.⁵³ Iraq's C³I system (the system of command, control, communication and intelligence) was therefore knocked out immediately when the war began. As the Iraqis could not organize a nationwide air defence, the effectiveness of their air defence dropped to nearly zero. In these specialists' view, the Iraqis' dependence on imported air defence systems deprived them of the capacity to develop their own up-to-date defence technology and was one of the principal reasons for their defeat.⁵⁴ At the operational level, the C³I system was the key to air defence, and some passive counter-reconnaissance measures could increase the survival rate of C³I systems. These specialists also thought that SAMs would still be an effective air defence system if some measures were taken. Among these measures would be technological improvements in anti-jam and counter-stealth, better aiming, and vertical launching technology.⁵⁵

Jiang Zemin, chairman of the CMC since November 1989, participated in the specialists' post-Gulf War discussions in June 1991. Jiang had obtained a university education in electrical engineering in China and the Soviet Union during the 1940s and 1950s, and he served as the PRC's minister of electronic industries from 1982 to 1985. He reiterated the specialists' opinions, with particular emphasis on electronic warfare.⁵⁶ Jiang raised this tactical and technological issue to the level of politics and national strategy. In addition to Iraq's fragile C³I system, Jiang attributed the Coalition's victory to the collapse of the Iraqis' will and the nature of the Gulf War, with the Iraqis seen as the invaders.⁵⁷

⁵² Ibid., p. 69.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 69–70.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Tan Xianyu, "Air Defense Systems and their Future," pp. 65–71; Xu Pingao, "An Exploration of the Development Directions of Surface-to-Air Missiles," pp. 22–31; Cui Huaihua, "The General Approaches to Improving the Survival of Air Defense Missiles," pp. 16–20.

⁵⁶ Jiang Zemin (江泽民), "On the Military Strategic Guideline and Defense Technologies" ("关于军事战略方针和国防科技问题") (8, 15 and 25 June 1991), *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin* (江泽民文选), Vol.1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), p. 143.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 144.

Jiang then linked the Coalition's victory to China's military and national strategy in the context of China's relations with the United States. Jiang acknowledged that China's economic strength was not great but asserted that "[China's] socialist system is good and fits our economic foundation."⁵⁸ Jiang acknowledged that the combat efficiency gap between the PLA and the Western armies had increased. However, he said, "we should not give up. Our natural resources are tremendous. Our economic foundation is solid. We have a superior system [over that of the West]. In the industry of national defence, our research capacity is strong."⁵⁹ Jiang then mentioned the PRC's successful strategic weaponry systems program of the 1960s.

Jiang reminded delegates of the priority of economic development. He used the Chinese popular saying, "Wealth produces confidence (财大气粗)," emphasizing that the defence industry was founded on the economy. Jiang asked his audience to reconsider China's defence policy in the context of the international and domestic situations, China's economic development, better military management and appropriate military strategy. He also offered a few guidelines for these issues, citing Deng Xiaoping's instruction on China's foreign and domestic policies, expressed in 24 Chinese characters: "Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership."⁶⁰ Extra attention, he said, should be spent on increasing the efficiency and the investment-profit ratio of the defence industry, especially at a time when China's economy was underdeveloped. Jiang claimed that the military management of the PLA was a gigantic systematic program that was linked closely with its military strategy and the PLA's future development as well as its current institutions.⁶¹

Jiang praised the traditional strategy of "active defence" and called for more attention to the offensive aspects of this strategy, including development of offensive weaponry systems.⁶² He asserted, "The strategy of active defence consists of offensive

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 145.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 148.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 149–150.

⁶² Ibid., p. 149.

and defensive operations rather than passive defence. This is a very important strategic issue.”⁶³ He argued that China had to “develop offensive weapons and possess the essential capacity of deterrence, including nuclear deterrence” against its potential opponents.⁶⁴ Obviously, Jiang was not happy with the air defence specialists’ proposals that emphasized defensive measures exclusively. Jiang wanted to find a way out of the Soviet-style defence industry and improve China’s position in the world in the long term. In the fall of 1992, Jiang found himself under such pressure that he had to adopt an aggressive military strategy to consolidate his power: he had just won Deng’s full support to command the PLA and urgently needed to develop a new strategy of his own. Jiang gave this task to General Zhang Zhen. Fortunately, before he began working on this project, General Liu had already started a research project, as early as March 1990, to develop the “Eighth Five-year Plan” and the “Ten-year Agenda” for the PLA. This project provoked researchers, including Liu himself, to consider a series of security and strategic issues in the post–Cold War era. As mentioned above, the Coalition’s victory in the Gulf War helped the PLA achieve some kind of consensus to face the changed world and free itself from the yoke of the orthodox military doctrine of Maoism.

The Birth of the MSGNE

As Zhang Zhen helped Deng Xiaoping develop the post-Mao military strategy of People’s War under Modern Condition in the early 1980s, he was experienced in strategy development. When Jiang tasked him with developing a new military strategy in November 1992, Zhang Zhen began work on this project and assigned General Zhang Wannian, the chief of GDS, to implement it.⁶⁵ Zhang Wannian then established a research team to give a seminar on strategic issues in early December 1992. The members of this team were primarily from the GDS operations department.⁶⁶ After a preliminary review of the global security situation and that of China’s neighbouring countries, Zhang Wannian opened the seminar on 5 December 1992. In addition to staff officers from the DGS operation and intelligence departments, participants included members of the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 146.

⁶⁵ *The Biography of Zhang Wannian*, Vol. 2 (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2011), pp. 60–61.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

PLA's leading agencies and think tanks in Beijing, including the PLAN, the PLAAF, the Second Artillery (the strategic striking force), the UND and the Academy of Military Science (AMS).⁶⁷ The issue of the international security environment was a familiar topic to the participants. When Liu Huaqing, the CMC member in charge of equipment affairs, began working on the PLA's Eighth Five-year Plan and Ten-year Agenda in March 1990, he and his assistants had considered the matter.⁶⁸ Liu found that the Taiwan issue was a prominent post-Cold challenge to China now that China's three-way relationship with the United States and the Soviet Union no longer existed.⁶⁹ The Taiwanese government showed no sign of moving toward national unification and began to upgrade its army's weaponry, with renewed American support.⁷⁰ This was a situation that the PLA had worried about since the early 1980s, when the health of Chiang Ching-kuo, Taiwan's dictator, was deteriorating rapidly.⁷¹ Chiang had fled from China to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek, his father, at the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949. His death would transform Taiwan's politics from the GMD's totalitarianism to democracy. The pro-independent Democratic Progressive Party would then have opportunities to come to power throughout the island and add to the uncertainties in the cross-Strait relations. Next to the issue of Taiwan was concern about Europe's move toward unification and Japan's pursuit of significant power in international politics.⁷² Liu and his assistants viewed the rise of Japan and a unified Europe as a signal of a phase marking transition from a polarized Cold War world to a post-Cold War multi-polar world. This was a situation that had not been seen since the end of World War II.⁷³ Liu predicted that this transition to a multi-polar world would be completed in five to ten years.⁷⁴ The transition

⁶⁷ Ibid. When he mentioned the participants, Zhang used the term "zai jing ge da danwei," which often refers to the three "general departments" of staff, politics and logistics plus the PLAN, the PLAAF, the 2nd Artillery, the University of National Defence and the Academy of Military Science. Zhang also named Xiong Guangkai, director of the Department of Intelligence of the GDS, as one of the principal discussants in the research team preparing the seminar.

⁶⁸ Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing's Memoir*, p. 580.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 581–582.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 582.

⁷¹ Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen's Memoir*, p. 203.

⁷² Liu, op. cit., pp. 581–582.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 582.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

resulted in arms reduction in the West, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and East Asia. In the meantime, the combat efficiency of the Western armies was increasing rapidly, as it was in China's neighbouring countries. This situation created a dilemma for China, whose economy was behind those of recently industrialized countries. On one hand, China needed an army as good as any in East Asia, but it did not have the necessary resources. Its large but outdated defence industry had to be both downsized and upgraded.⁷⁵ In the fall of 1990, Liu found that the PLA urgently needed an agenda that could guide its development for the next decade.⁷⁶ A set of events that occurred from the beginning of 1991 to the fall of 1992 provided strong momentum for the birth of a new military strategy. These events were the Gulf War (1991), the demise of the Soviet Union (1991), China's purchase of the Su-27 and other Soviet weapon systems (1992), the United States' sale to Taiwan of 150 F-16 fighters (1992) and the retirement of Yang Baibin and Yang Shangkun (1992).

Zhang Zhen's seminar on a new military strategy in early December 1992 was therefore an extension of Liu's previous work on the PLA's Eighth Five-year Plan and Ten-year Agenda. Zhang gave presentations and made comments during the seminar. Zhang's points turned out to be the principal determinants of the MSGNE.⁷⁷ His first point was that a world war was unlikely in the foreseeable future, so China would not have to face any serious external threat and could make economic development its top priority. However, as Zhang mentioned as his second point, because the end of the Cold War removed the restraints that had prevented various tensions across the world, there would be more regional conflicts. These conflicts might involve the United States and would therefore be intensive and would be conducted with high-tech weapons. His third point was that high-tech and high-intensity combined operations would be the feature of future wars in which the PLA would have to engage. Zhang's fourth point was that the PLA's modernization must be subject to China's economic development and must serve China's foreign policy.⁷⁸

Zhang Wannian translated Zhang Zhen's four points into four operational questions: (1) "Whom will [the PLA] fight against?" (2) "Where will the fight take place?"

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 582–585.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 585.

⁷⁷ Zhang, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 362–365.

(3) “What will the nature of this war be?” and (4) “How will the war be fought?”⁷⁹ These were the questions that Zhang Wannian had been considering since the end of the Gulf War, and he had some answers. He asserted in the seminar, “In the foreseeable future [China] will be inevitably involved some regional wars or some kind of armed conflicts. [The PLA] thus has to prepare for the worst scenario and do its best to achieve the best outcome.”⁸⁰ He then acknowledged:

Our biggest challenge, which is also the most difficult task in front of us, is to handle the regional wars and armed conflicts in the high-tech environments. In this [difficult] situation, we will still have to adhere to some principles in our traditional ways of war such as *houfazhiren* (strategically reactive but overwhelming), to fight in extremely difficult situations and to fight with inferior weapons. On the other hand, we have to find solutions to the challenges in the new situation such as quick response, agility and the effective control of the enemies. We therefore have to have a “fist,” some powerful forces of excellent mobility, especially naval, air and conventional missile forces. These forces can be rapidly deployed into the troubled areas and then control the situation and solve the problem. Next is that we will have to have *shashoujian* (trump card-like weapons). This means that we will follow up the technological progress and carefully select and develop a few weapon systems that can put the enemies under control. We will feel comfortable when we have a “fist” and *shashoujian* and will be able to handle various kinds of challenges.⁸¹

Zhang Wannian did not specified China’s possible opponents. As the situations in Taiwan and the South China Sea became increasingly tense, Taiwan and its American patron were obviously the PLA’s principal opponents and would be the target of the MSGNE. After consulting with other members of the CMC and relevant agencies of the GDS, General Zhang Wannian, chief of the GDS, refined and enriched the discussions at this seminar into a formal CMC report to Jiang in January 1993. Jiang accepted this report and delivered it in a speech at the CMC’s extended meeting on 13 January 1993, the

⁷⁹ Biography of Zhang Wannian team, *The Biography of Zhang Wannian*, Vol. 2, 62.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 62–63.

speech mentioned at the beginning of this article. The title of Jiang's speech was "The international situation and the guideline of our military strategy."⁸²

In addition to Zhang's points, which became the basis of the MSGNE, Jiang cited Deng's 24-character policy and defined the increasingly stressful PRC-U.S. relations as a "new cold war."⁸³ Jiang referred to the Taiwan issue as "[the CCP's] unfinished historical mission of national unification."⁸⁴ Jiang blamed the "forces of hegemonism and realpolitik" for China's challenges in national unification and external threat.⁸⁵ In order to adapt to a changed world full of uncertainties and growing domestic and international challenges, the PRC and the PLA had to develop an appropriate military strategy that would provide the guidance for the PRC to "obtain initiatives."⁸⁶ The intellectual foundation of this new strategy, the MSGNE, was "Mao Zedong's military thoughts" and Deng's 24-character policy.⁸⁷ The MSGNE would have to be subject to economic development. The direct military goal of the MSGNE was to "ensure that [the PLA] would be able to win regional wars that involve modern technology, especially high-tech."⁸⁸ The Gulf War demonstrated that the side possessing greater high-tech weapons enjoyed the initiative in the battlefields. Jiang stated, "If a nation does not upgrade its national defence and its army's combat effectiveness as its economy grows, it will fall into difficulties in war. Its national interests, national dignity and international reputation will suffer tremendous damages."⁸⁹ Jiang then referred to the Taiwan issue:

As far as the high-tech arms race goes, a regional conflict in the future might be a confrontation of high-tech weapons at the beginning. We have to take this case into account. Taiwan is an outstanding problem. If some Taiwan separatists create an incident of "independence," we will have to resort to

⁸² Jiang Zemin, "The International Situation and the Guideline of our Military Strategy" ("国际形势和军事战略方针"), 13 January 1993, *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin*, Vol.1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), pp. 278–94.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 280. See also: Deng Xiaoping, "Adherence to Socialism and Prevent Peaceful Evolution" ("坚持社会主义, 防止和平演变"), 23 November 1989, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), p. 344.

⁸⁴ Jiang, "The International Situation and the Guideline of our Military Strategy," *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin*, Vol.1, p. 282.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 282–283.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

military options in order to sustain the integrity and sovereignty of our motherland. It goes without saying that if we do our jobs well, this kind of confrontation could be prevented. The rule of military struggle is that if you are ready to fight, war will not come. . . . History shows that [world peace relied on countries' war readiness and that] the more a country was ready for war, the more advantageous this country's strategic position would be. [The less likely it would be that this country would be attacked,] the safer the world would be.⁹⁰

The top priority in our military struggle now and for a long time in the future is to prevent major pro-independence incidents from occurring in Taiwan. . . . The PLA must support the CCP and the government's efforts to increase [the PRC's] attractiveness and influence in Taiwan in the fields of politics, economics, culture and science and technology. In the meantime, it must be prepared well for [the unwanted] incidents and deter the separatists in Taiwan.⁹¹

Jiang Zemin's speech on 13 January 1993 marked the completion of Zhang Zhen's task and the beginning of the MSGNE's implementation. The entire process of development of the MSGNE took over two months. Zhang Zhen was pleased with this achievement and attributed it to Mao's and Deng's legacies, Jiang's leadership and the orchestrated efforts by the related officers from the CMC, GDS, GDP and GDL. Zhan called the MSGNE "a profound shift" in the PLA's history.⁹² He predicted in his memoir, published in 2004, that, as time passed, the value of the MSGNE would become more apparent.⁹³

Zhang Zhen's account of the birth of the MSGNE is a high point in his memoir. In contrast, discussion of the MSGNE is marginal in Liu Huaqing's memoir. Liu did not mention the seminar that Zhang Wannian organized in early December 1992. Instead, he traced the PLA's strategic updating to a GDS proposal at the beginning of the 1990s:

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 286.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 289.

⁹² Zhang, *Zhang Zhen's Memoir*, p. 366.

⁹³ Ibid.

The changes in international politics in the early 1990s were so profound that that our army had to adjust our strategic guideline. The General Department of Staff put forward to a proposal. This proposal was discussed in a CMC regular meeting chaired by Vice-Chairman Yang Shangkun and helped achieve a kind of consensus. Because Vice-Chairman Yang thought that the issue of concern were related to state secrets, this new strategic guideline was noticed only at the level of the military region, not across the entire PLA. At the beginning of 1993, the CMC was under Chairman Jiang's leadership and clarified its military strategic guideline of "active defence" in the new era. It called an expanded CMC meeting and made arrangements to *tongyi sixiang* (unify [PLA soldiers'] thoughts).⁹⁴

It is evident that Liu kept himself at a distance from the MSGNE. By revealing that Yang Shangkun had strictly limited dissemination of information about a post-Cold War military strategy, Liu implied that, although it was urgent that the PLA's strategy be updated, this revision involved issues related to China's maritime and naval policies, including the potentially explosive issue of Taiwan, and the PLA did not have a good solution to the post-Cold War challenges. In addition, Liu was away from Beijing (whether coincidentally or deliberately) when Zhang Wannian was busy with his seminar in early December 1992. Liu clearly did not want to engage in discussion of the PLA's post-Cold War strategy with Zhang Zhen and Zhang Wannian. Although he did not make any comment on the MSGNE in his memoir, Liu's hesitation — perhaps even anxiety — over the MSGNE and his unhappiness with Zhang Zhen can be discerned by carefully reading and comparing his memoir and Zhang's. Zhang Zhen was one of the PLA's top staff officers and was talented in solving immediate problems with available resources. So was Zhang Wannian. Both recognized the potentially critical threat of Taiwan's *de jure* independence to the People's Republic and identified the urgent need to prevent this scenario from occurring. Nevertheless, Taiwan is a sizable island at a considerable distance from the Chinese coast. At its narrowest, Taiwan Strait is 130 kilometres wide, nearly four times wider than the Strait of Dover. In addition, Taiwan's air force and navy were superior to the PLAN and the PLAAF at that time, and Taiwan could expect valuable assistance from the United States when the island was under attack. Zhang Zhen's and Zhang Wannian's solution of developing a "fist" and *shashoujian* might deter Taiwan from *de jure* independence, but it could not help with

⁹⁴ Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing's Memoir*, p. 633.

China's national unification, a mission tied to the CCP's legitimacy. Moreover, the *shashoujian*, which turned out to be the DF-21 anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) and supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles,⁹⁵ would challenge the U.S. Navy's commanding position in the Western Pacific and antagonize the United States. Zhang Zhen's memoir and the biography of Zhang Wannian say nothing about the two generals' observations or comments on seapower. There is no indication that the two generals recognized that when the MSGNE was successfully implemented, China would be in a dilemma: its naval and air forces would be too powerful to sit idle when China had territorial disputes with its maritime neighbours but would be powerless against the United States in the foreseeable future. The generals' short-sightedness with respect to China's naval and air forces is understandable: their entire careers had been dedicated to the PLA's ground forces.

In striking contrast to Generals Zhang, the positions in which General Liu served were far more diverse. He knew well how dependent China was on international trade. His insistence on building large surface warships rather than fast crafts and submarines was based on his observation that China would become increasingly dependent on international trade and the PLAN would have to engage in operations related to SLOC protection. Because protection of the SLOC was an international effort and involved navies of numerous countries, the PLAN, whose experience was limited to coastal defence by Liu's appointment as the PLAN's chief, had to develop the necessary capacity by sailing far from China's coasts and engaging with foreign navies. The PLAN made its first voyage into the Indian Ocean during Liu's tenure as commander of the PLAN and CMC vice-chairman. However, when Taiwan became an increasingly prominent security issue for China after the sudden end of the Cold War, the probability of conflict between China and the United States increased. It was evident that the PLA's large surface warships would be held hostage by the United States if they survived a war against the U.S. Navy and its allies. Liu thus faced a dilemma that the MSGNE could not alleviate. But as the MSGNE was the only effective approach to delaying China's showdown over

⁹⁵ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2015 Report to Congress of the U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission* (Washington: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2015), p. 357.

Taiwan, and given the political benefits it brought to Jiang Zemin, Liu could not reject it. He was therefore ambivalent about the MSGNE and chose not to talk about it in his memoir.

Liu's reluctance to discuss the MSGNE and his ambivalence about this strategy in his memoir is a reflection of China's post-Cold War strategic dilemma, arising from its dichotomous grand strategy of pursuing economic growth and unifying Taiwan. The pursuit of growth implies that China will be increasingly dependent on international trade founded on the American command of the sea, while the second goal demands a capacity to deter Taiwan from *de jure* independence. This means that China has to have the capacity to control China's near seas and block U.S. fleets from approaching to Taiwan. This is a task that is far beyond China's resources in the foreseeable future. Although the PLAN is far more powerful now than it was 23 years ago when the MSGNE came into being, some researchers in China's top think tanks, including some of PLA's, began to question the MSGNE's validity indirectly. As early as 2003, Xu Qiyu, a researcher at the UNL's Institute for National Strategic Studies, began to refute China's nationalistic and pragmatic arguments that it would need a powerful navy if it wanted to be a "big power" and was to be able to protect its SLOC. Xu stated that "big powers" are irrelevant to seapower and that continental nations' arbitrary pursuit of the command of the seas was self-defeating. As the defence of SLOC concerns numerous countries, their protection is an international effort and does not require a single country's endeavour. "If the SLOC of a *daguo* [big power] [are] indeed in danger, this country is actually at the edge of a large-scale war against the biggest maritime power. This country cannot solve its problem [concerning protection of its SLOC] unless its navy is as powerful as its opponent's."⁹⁶ In his doctoral dissertation (2007), Xu examined the interactions between Germany's internal politics and its foreign and defence policy from its unification in 1871 to the beginning of World War I, in 1914. He then warned directly that China has a dual identity of continental and maritime power and faces multiple challenges, as Germany did between 1871 and 1914. China's top priority in handling "the domestic and

⁹⁶ Xu Qiyu (徐弃郁), "Reflections on Some Misleading Aspects of Seapower" ("海权的误区与反思"), *Strategy and Management* (战略与管理) 5 (2003): p. 17.

international pressure from the complicated security situation,” Xu points out, “is to [establish an institution that can] manage [China’s] domestic determinants effectively.”⁹⁷

Xu Qiyu was not the only researcher in China to question China’s MSGNE-based naval policy. In 2012, Wu Zhengyu, a professor at Renmin University, furthered Xu’s argument and sharply criticized the PLA’s ASBM strategy. He stated, “China has two ways to achieve its needed maritime capacity (especially command of the sea) in theory. The first is a land-based approach through developing long-range weaponry systems such as ASBMs and ASCMs [anti-ship cruise missiles]. The second is to build up a powerful fleet of surface warships (especially battle groups of aircraft carriers).”⁹⁸ These two approaches, Wu argued, would bring about opposite outcomes for China and the other countries involved. The first would further complicate the situation and would “do no help at all to China’s overseas interests.”⁹⁹ In striking contrast, a surface fleet would be a reflection of China’s determination to integrate itself into the international community. It would not only serve China’s growing overseas interests but also minimize suspicion on the part of the United States, as long as the size of the fleet is under control. The United States, Wu claimed, might be unhappy to see China’s maritime expansion but would be glad if China’s naval development were centred on surface warfare, the strongest field of the U.S. Navy.¹⁰⁰

Xu’s and Wu’s criticisms of the MSGNE coincide with the conclusion reached by Senior Colonel Ke Chunqiao of the AMS in his own research project. By examining the relationships between the pre-1914 Anglo-German naval race, the outbreak of World War I and the collapse of the German Empire, Ke outlined five “principal lessons” from Germany’s experience.¹⁰¹ The first was that Germany’s goal was beyond its capacity. The second was the unsuccessful identification of Germany’s “core interests” by Kaiser

⁹⁷ Xu Qiyu, “A Study of the Dilemmas of Big Powers during their Rises,” PhD dissertation, Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Social Science, 2007, p. 112.

⁹⁸ Wu Zhengyu (吴征宇), “Combined Powers of Seapower and Landpower” (“海权与陆海复合型强国”), *World Economics and Politics* (世界经济与政治) 2 (2012): pp. 49–50.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁰¹ Ke Cunqiao (柯春桥), “Five Major Lessons in Germany’s Strategy Transition prior to 1914” (“一战前德国战略调整五大教训”), *Cankao xiaoxi* (News for Reference) (8 July 2014): p. 13.

Wilhelm II. The third was the Kaiser's ineffective diplomacy, which facilitated the emergence of the Franco-Russian alliance. The fourth was the Kaiser's unwise naval policy of competing against Britain despite Germany's geographic location as a continental power. The last was Germany's waste of time and resources in its efforts to suppress France.

Conclusion

These three scholarly works by Xu, Wu and Ke are part of the long-running debate about China's grand strategy among concerned Chinese officials and scholars that has been underway since the late 1870s, when the Chinese imperial government had to prioritize its limited resources to defend itself against simultaneous aggressions from land by Russia and from sea by the West and Japan.¹⁰² Liu's ambivalence about the MSGNE echoes this unresolved debate. Liu's mixed feelings might be attributable to the dilemmas created by China's urgent need to deter Taiwan from *de jure* independence, the immediate benefits from the Soviet naval doctrines¹⁰³ and the long-term hazards of these doctrines to China. These doctrines are based on the Russian/Soviet experience that naval operations (except those involving SSBNs) were secondary to operations on land. Because Taiwan is close to the mainland, these doctrines were suited to the scenario of Taiwan. However, in contrast to the former Soviet Union, whose economy was nearly self-sufficient, China's economy was dependent on international trade. The Soviet naval doctrines, the principal intellectual source of the PLAN, meant economic suicide for China. The MSGNE was therefore a product of expediencies and was the consequence of a set of events that occurred in and outside of China immediately before and immediately after the Gulf War. Generals Zhang Zhen and Liu Huaqing, who were involved in the PLA's strategic planning and development for over a decade, had developed a broader vision and identified the PLA's shortcomings inherited from Mao's time. In the meantime, Jiang Zemin, a technocrat, was eager to develop an approach to meet domestic and international challenges. Zhang and Liu, prepared by PRC leader Deng Xiaoping to

¹⁰² Kong Zhiguo (孔志国), "A Preliminary Study on the Mode of Sea Exploitation: From the Perspective of Modern Sea Power and Sea Rights" ("现代条件下的屯海模式研究"), PhD dissertation, Shandong University, 2009, pp. 18–26.

provide support for his successor Jiang Zemin, were the right men at the right place at the right time. But China was not a maritime power, either by culture or by history. Liu recognized China's delicate strategic dilemma and the intimidating challenges that the MSGNE would face in the future. He therefore kept a safe distance as it took shape in December 1992. In the twenty-three years since the MSGNE was implemented, the PLA, the PLAN and the PLAAF have made tremendous progress. But the MSGNE has not removed any of the challenges that it was intended to eliminate. It will not be surprising to see the MSGNE undergo significant transformation in the near future, in association with the PLA's ongoing structural reform.