

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, RI

EAGLES and DRAGONS at Sea
The Inevitable *Strategic Collision* Between the United States and China

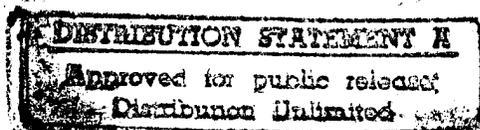
by

Ulysses O. Zalamea

Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.



Signature: Ulysses O. Zalamea

6 March 1996

Paper directed by
Captain David Watson, U.S. Navy
Chairman, Department of Joint Military Operations

19960501 227

Faculty Advisor

Date

Alexander Read Saunders, II
Captain U.S. Navy

DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 1

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
2. Security Classification Authority:			
3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule:			
4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.			
5. Name of Performing Organization: JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
6. Office Symbol: C		7. Address: NAVAL WAR COLLEGE 686 CUSHING ROAD NEWPORT, RI 02841-1207	
8. Title (Include Security Classification): EAGLES and DRAGONS at Sea The Inevitable Strategic Collision Between the United States and China (U)			
9. Personal Authors: LCDR Ulysses O. Zalamea, U.S. Navy			
10. Type of Report: FINAL		11. Date of Report: 06 March 1996	
12. Page Count: 32			
13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.			
14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: East Asia, U.S. Navy, Chinese Navy, Spratly Islands, South China Sea, Territorial Disputes, "Green Water Defense Strategy," PLA (People's Liberation Army) Navy Modernization Program, METT-T (Mission, Enemy, Troops, Terrain and Weather, and Time Available), and U.S. Navy's white paper . . . From The Sea			
15. Abstract: Collision is imminent. To advance China's expanding maritime interests, the Chinese Navy is altering its strategic direction from ground-support missions to open-water operations. Meanwhile, the U.S. Navy is maintaining a steady course to strongly affirm the U.S. continuing commitment in the region. Thus, on the "offshore" waters of the Western Pacific, the strategies of these two navies will inevitably collide. East Asia remains vital to America's economic renewal. It has the world's fastest-growing economies. It is also the U.S. biggest export market. Therefore, America's continued economic growth is tied to the region's enduring prosperity and security. But, all is not well in East Asia. There are a number of "hot spots" that threaten regional stability. More importantly, behind almost every flash point in the area, China's shadow looms large in the distance. China is an emerging maritime power with towering aspirations. Clearly, the Chinese Navy will play a crucial role in promoting those ambitions. However, as the Chinese fleet prepares to sail away from its familiar shores, it is quickly discovering that the U.S. Navy's shadow looms even larger in the not too distant horizon.			
16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract:	Unclassified X	Same As Rpt	DTIC Users
17. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
18. Name of Responsible Individual: CHAIRMAN, JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
19. Telephone: 841- 666 6461		20. Office Symbol: C	

Abstract of

EAGLES and DRAGONS at Sea
The Inevitable *Strategic Collision* Between the United States and China

Thus it is said that one who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be endangered in a hundred engagements. One who does not know the enemy but knows himself will sometimes be victorious, sometimes meet with defeat. One who knows neither the enemy nor himself will invariably be defeated in every engagement.

Sun-tzu, The Art of War

Collision is imminent. To advance China's expanding maritime interests, the Chinese Navy is altering its strategic direction from ground-support missions to open-water operations. Meanwhile, the U.S. Navy is maintaining a steady course to strongly affirm the U.S. continuing commitment in the region. Thus, on the "offshore" waters of the Western Pacific, the strategies of these two navies will inevitably collide.

East Asia remains vital to America's economic renewal. It has the world's fastest-growing economies. It is also the U.S. biggest export market. Therefore, America's continued economic growth is tied to the region's enduring prosperity and security. But, all is not well in East Asia. There are a number of "hot spots" that threaten regional stability. More importantly, behind almost every flash point in the area, China's shadow looms large in the distance. China is an emerging maritime power with towering aspirations. Clearly, the Chinese Navy will play a crucial role in promoting those ambitions. However, as the Chinese fleet prepares to sail away from its familiar shores, it is quickly discovering that the U.S. Navy's shadow looms even larger in the not too distant horizon.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	iv
<i>Chapters</i>	
1 The Yellow Sea Incident	1
2 East Asia and U.S. Interests	3
3 China and Regional Security	6
Great Wall At Sea	6
Green Water Defense Strategy	7
4 A Matter of <i>Operational Art</i>	9
Mission	9
Enemy	10
Terrain and Weather	11
Troops	13
Time Available	14
5 Some Conclusions	15
Endnotes	17
Illustrations	22
Bibliography	25

List of Illustrations

<i>Figures</i>		
1	Diagram of Disputed Territories in the South China Sea	22
2	The "Green Water" Region -- The First and Second Island Chains	23
3	South China Sea Transit Passage	24

Chapter 1

The Yellow Sea Incident

On October 27, 1994, the U.S. aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*, while conducting routine operations in the international waters of the Yellow Sea, encountered a Chinese *Han* class nuclear submarine.¹ The carrier launched its S-3 anti-submarine aircraft, which deployed sonobuoys to track the Chinese *Han* -- only to discover that two Chinese F-6 fighters were in turn watching the American plane.² Words were not exchanged.

For China, it was an intolerable incident; for the United States, it was an unavoidable one. In Beijing, a U.S. officer was informed that China "would take appropriate defensive reactions if there were violations of their airspace and territorial waters."³ Washington, on the other hand, underplayed the event. Understandably, now that China is beginning to send the fleet beyond its shores into waters that have been the sole domain of the U.S. Navy, "there's inevitably going to be more and more of this kind of thing," observed Michael Swaine, co-director of the California-based Rand Centre for Asia-Pacific Policy.⁴

The Yellow Sea incident underscored the prevailing chill in U.S.-China relations. Once allied against the Soviet Union, the two countries parted ways when Washington imposed sanctions on Beijing after the attack on unarmed demonstrators at Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989.⁵ Relations have marginally improved since. However, there is a lingering perception in the United States that the Chinese attitudes across a broad range of issues run counter to American national interests.⁶ A congressional China expert admitted that "there is a body of opinion in this country, I don't know how big, that thinks China is the enemy."⁷

In Beijing, where the leadership is busily "fanning the flames of nationalism" to hang on to power, the attitude is equally hostile.⁸ Hardliners believe that the United States, having disposed of the Soviet Union, will now move against China to eliminate a major barrier to American global supremacy.⁹ More significantly, the military, aiming for expanded budgets, leads in promoting the aggressive nationalism and unyielding atmosphere in Beijing.¹⁰

Is China a threat? Admiral Richard Macke, the former commander of U.S. Pacific Command, noted that a combination of capabilities and intentions makes a threat.¹¹ China's continuing military modernization program, started in the 1980s to support a new forward-looking maritime strategy, has already made the Chinese Navy a potential regional power. However, it is more difficult to evaluate China's intentions than its military might. Indeed, according to Robert Manning and James Przystup, State Department officials under President Bush, China has a policy of "calculated ambiguity to mask its ambitions."¹²

This paper tries to explore those "ambitions." It also attempts to analyze the Chinese Navy's shift in strategic direction from supporting land operations to fighting war at sea. By using the analysis framework of METT-T (mission, enemy, troops, terrain and weather, and time available), the operational art implications of this strategic transformation are examined. This paper argues that China's long-term goal of becoming a blue-water naval power can, over the horizon, head on a strategic collision course with U.S. regional interests. Further, while China clearly wants to be a global sea power, the Chinese Navy is developing a near-term forward defense strategy focused on limited wars and local conflicts. Finally, since East Asia has such a maritime character, the article's theme purposely centers on a nation's primary medium of power -- its navy.

Chapter 2

East Asia and U.S. Interests

Winston Lord, the Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, stated that of all region, East Asia is "the most relevant to the President's highest priority -- namely his domestic agenda, the renewal of the American economy, getting the deficit down, getting more competitive, promoting jobs and exports."¹³ President Clinton himself described East Asia as "the most promising and dynamic area for American foreign policy."¹⁴ From the very beginning, access to East Asia's riches has been one of America's primary goals.¹⁵ It was trade that prompted the American merchant ship, *Empress of China*, to anchor off Canton more than two centuries ago.¹⁶ Isolated from the lucrative European markets, the new republic saw a bright future waiting across the vast Pacific. In today's global interdependence, America looks again to the "far west" in a quest for economic renewal.

Noting that East Asia already accounts for 2.5 million U.S. jobs, Admiral Charles Larson, the former chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, prophesied that "our economic future" is in this region.¹⁷ The numbers are already impressive. Consider the following:

Thirty-six percent of U.S. trade is in East Asia (\$120-billion of U.S. exports), three times our trade with Latin America, and one-and-a-half times our trade with Europe. East Asia has almost half the world's population. It contains some of the most rapidly growing economies in the world. Japan is already the second-largest industrial economy in the world. China already has a gross national product of about \$1.2 trillion. According to the International Monetary Fund, East Asia will, by the turn of the century, account for thirty percent of the world's gross national product.¹⁸

Lord implies that East Asia is a region of significant, perhaps even vital, importance to U.S. national interests. What are they? For almost a hundred years now, the fundamental

objectives of U.S. policy in East Asia have remained basically unchanged. They include peace and security, the prevention of the rise of any dominant regional power, and guaranteed commercial access to the region.¹⁹ Today, China is challenging those interests.

On the surface, East Asia appears tranquil and peaceful, preoccupied with the pursuit of more wealth. But under the calm surface, East Asia is a boiling cauldron of competing interests. From the Russo-Japanese quarrel over the Kuril Islands off Hokkaido to the Malaysia-Philippines squabble over Borneo's Sabah, territorial disputes in the region abound. The Spratly Islands dispute is, possibly, the most volatile. The competing claimants include China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei.²⁰ Reportedly rich in oil and other natural resources, its proximity to major sea lines of communication (SLOC) through the South China Sea has the potential to destabilize the entire region.²¹

When the Communists took power in 1949, China followed the internationally accepted three nautical mile territorial limit. In 1958, however, China extended its territorial waters out to twelve miles. Further, instead of using the low water mark on the mainland coast as the baseline, China measured its territorial waters from a baseline drawn by connecting the outermost offshore islands. Consequently, all of the disputed offshore islands now lie within China's territorial waters.²² (see figure 1, page 22) Then, in 1982, China's National People's Congress passed a "Law on Territorial Waters" that reasserted its claims and authorized the use of military force to preclude other nations from occupying the islands.²³ Moreover, in 1993, a book called *Can China Win the Next War?* appeared in China. The author, almost certainly a naval officer, discussed in alarming detail the scenarios for war in the disputed areas.²⁴

The implications are worrying. Geographically, the scope of this vast area closely resembles the extent of Chinese domineering influence during the seventeenth century, when East Asian states paid tribute to China.²⁵ The chief of the Malaysia Institute of Maritime Affairs, Hamzah Ahmad, fairly summed up the worries in the region: "China should not attempt to revive the Middle Kingdom mentality and expect tribute from Southeast Asia."²⁶ Strategically, the South China Sea can be considered a maritime "heartland."²⁷ Domination of this central position would give the Chinese immense political, economic, and military influence over the "rimland" nations and other states in the region. Japanese, Taiwanese and South Korean imports come via the SLOC through the South China Sea.

Beyond these looming security threats lie more challenges for the United States. In the many corners of East Asia, America's military resolve is again being questioned.²⁸ There is a growing perception in the region that the "U.S. has become inward-looking."²⁹ This may not be far from the truth. Some believe that America should go back to being, in former ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick's words, a "normal country."³⁰ Voices for disengagement and protectionism, small admittedly, are growing louder. Further, domestic problems continue to dominate American politics. It did not help that the U.S. withdrawal from Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base, both in the Philippines, were subsequently followed by a massive downsizing of the military force. In addition, the budget deficit and the burden of the national debt threaten further cuts. Based on America's "long history of not understanding our own policy, being dislocated, sidetracked, and short-sighted," it is no wonder that our allies are beginning to question our commitment to the region.³¹

Chapter 3

China and Regional Security

In February 1995, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy expanded its presence in the disputed Spratlys in the South China Sea by taking over an island claimed by the Philippines.³² Washington hardly noticed the incident but the Chinese Navy's brazen move to enforce a territorial claim just 130 miles off the Philippine western coast sent a grim message across East Asia. Raising the Chinese flag in the appropriately named Mischief Reef was "an act that both in symbol and substance may foreshadow a role reversal in the Pacific, with the PLA Navy ultimately displacing the traditional U.S. Navy preeminence."³³

Great Wall at Sea

After centuries of decline, China, today, is an emerging maritime power.³⁴ And the PLA Navy has recently become a considerable factor in the strategic equation in East Asia and the Western Pacific. Although China has a lengthy naval history that goes back about two millennia, it was not a continuous and proud legacy.³⁵ Periods of unprecedented expansion were followed by much longer stretches of almost complete abandon. Consequently, when the PLA Navy was established in 1949, it did not inherit a seagoing tradition from the Nationalists. Naval forces were viewed as a mere coastal arm of the ground forces. In 1950, Xiao Jingguang, the navy commander, dictated that:

the navy should be a light type navy, capable of inshore defence. Its key mission is to accompany the ground forces in war actions. The basic characteristic of this navy is fast deployment, based on its lightness.³⁶

Lacking in naval warfare ideas and experience, the PLA Navy adopted the naval doctrine of its military master, the Soviet Union.³⁷ Then, the "Young School" of naval

strategy governed Soviet naval development.³⁸ The "Young School" promoted a navy of "coastal submarines, torpedo boats, and other coastal crafts, supported by naval aircrafts based on shore."³⁹ Over the next three decades, the PLA Navy built a virtual "wall at sea" of hundreds of small vessels. It was, indeed, a navy for coastal defense only. Subservient to its more powerful army brethren, the PLA Navy followed this subordinate and limited naval strategy until the latter 1970s.

Green Water Defense Strategy

In 1974, the PLA Navy forcibly took the Paracel Islands from the Vietnamese. The numerous Chinese forces, however, were badly bloodied by a smaller but superior naval enemy. Alarmed by the navy's severe deficiencies, the Chinese leadership set in motion a plan to modernize the fleet. More importantly, the navy's strategic focus was shifted from coastal functions to open-water operations.⁴⁰ Chinese planners realized that new international conditions also required a new strategy. However, they concluded that in the near future, due to the end of bipolar competition, a world war was unlikely. Instead, limited wars are distinct possibilities.⁴¹ Consequently, the development of naval strategy has been more concentrated on what the Chinese call the "green water defense strategy."⁴²

To understand this strategy, the ideas of "active defense" and "green water" must first be examined. As a strategy, active defense is "defense exercised for anti-attack purposes or for offense after a period of defense."⁴³ In the old Maoist definition, this means luring the enemy deep into Chinese territorial waters and, then, engaging it in a "people's guerilla war."⁴⁴ Under the new *People's War In Modern Conditions* doctrine, in which the importance of

high-technology in modern warfare is emphasized, the fleet would oppose the enemy in the "outer approaches and stop any advance before incursions into coastal waters occurred."⁴⁵

The PLA Navy is somewhat unclear about the actual distance implied by "offshore waters" or "green water."⁴⁶ Several Chinese officials actually provided conflicting definitions. Admiral Liu Huaqing, when he was the commander in chief of the PLA Navy, asserted that "the Chinese Navy should exert *effective control* of the seas within the first island chain."⁴⁷ In the late 1980's, another commander said that the navy "must project a sea control capability beyond the second chain of islands."⁴⁸ As defined by Admiral Liu, the first island chain includes the Aleutians, the Kurils, the Japanese archipelago, the Ryukyus, Taiwan, the Philippine archipelago, and the Greater Sunda Islands. The second island chain comprises the Bonins, the Marianas, Guam, and the Palau group.⁴⁹ (see figure 2, page 23)

History shows that landpowers react to maritime threats by going to the sea themselves to fight their enemies *on* the sea.⁵⁰ Sparta built hundreds of triremes to defeat the Athenians. Carthage compelled Rome to build a navy.⁵¹ Russia extended its defensive lines onto the oceans during the Cold War.⁵² Today, China is building a modern fleet and, simultaneously, pushing its defensive depth hundreds of miles from the mainland shores. Eventually, China's transformed "green water defense strategy" will oppose the U.S. *on* the sea. Out there, on the "offshore waters" of the Pacific, the PLA Navy's emerging strategy of "forward defense" is sailing straight into the U.S. Navy's primary mission of "forward presence." Washington has been watching . . . with growing concerns. Last year, the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment run a simulation exercise using a scenario that showed China invading Taiwan.⁵³ The Chinese won.

Chapter 4

A Matter of *Operational Art*

The Chinese Navy has developed new capabilities. In 1984, the PLA Navy sent a large fleet to the "green waters" of Iwo Jima in the Western Pacific. Warships, bombers and submarines participated in the exercise. The scenario involved assembling a task force of dispersed units and deploying quickly to oppose an enemy force.⁵⁴ In recent years, it has been engaged in large-scale operations, at times involving more than 100 ships, in the South China Sea, has built airstrips and bases in the Paracels and Spratlys, and has established an amphibious assault force.⁵⁵ Hence, China's remarkable progress, in relatively few years, from a brown-water coastal-defense navy to a regional force with blue-water capabilities demands closer examination. METT-T is a helpful framework for such an analytical inquiry. However, these METT-T factors do not remain constant. Situations change and therefore, any METT-T analysis must be frequently reviewed.

Mission.

China's new strategic orientation toward the oceans to protect its expanding maritime interests is a key factor in shaping the PLA Navy's missions. Central to the navy's maritime strategy is *deterrence*. Zhang Liangzhong, the navy commander, said that: "As a weak sea power, China suffers from lack of credibility in carrying out its political and diplomatic objectives."⁵⁶ Given the relative weakness of most regional navies, the object of this deterrence is likely the U.S. Navy. Effective *control of territorial waters* is another core element of this strategy.⁵⁷ This mission implies capturing, occupying, and defending islands. The Mischief Reef incident shows that the PLA Navy can project power to distant shores.

Another mission is to *protect and conceal sea transportation lanes*. This suggests that the Chinese Navy clearly intends to control vital SLOCs in order to influence the outcome of the island disputes.⁵⁸ Finally, *coastal defense* capability protects China's economically vital shorelines.⁵⁹

These missions are realistically matched to the navy's capability and, importantly, the perceived threat. While the PLA Navy is adequate for coastal missions, its ability to contest the U.S. Navy on the sea must be taken as a long-term goal. With respect to the territorial and SLOC missions, they fit well with the Chinese Navy's strategy, capability, and concept of limited wars. However, such missions involve a high level of readiness, training, equipment, inter-operability, and logistical support -- areas in which the Chinese Navy is still seriously weak.⁶⁰ Capturing an island is one thing; defending it, away from the mainland, is another.

Enemy.

Though the Chinese military has embraced new doctrines and strategies tailored to *modern conditions*, its leaders remain "steeped in traditional military thought."⁶¹ They faithfully refer to their great ancestors' advice to seek victory through deception and cunning rather than through victory on the battlefield.⁶² Mao's teachings remain an influence. The PLA Navy strongly advocated the "Young School" thinking because, theoretically, it was guerilla warfare applied to sea conditions. They easily fused Sun-tzu's advice and Mao's teachings to naval warfare: "the concealment of forces behind islands or among fishing fleets, the rapid concentration of forces for surprise night attacks, and mastery despite technical inferiority through audacity and tactical skill."⁶³ In contemporary application, enemy commanders may easily find their tactical displays cluttered by hundreds of unknown and

undistinguishable contacts. Lately, Southeast Asia has become the center of pirate activity.⁶⁴ While it has not been positively established that the PLA Navy is involved, some hostile craft fly the Chinese flag.⁶⁵ The PLA Navy may employ these renegades, alongside the country's huge fishing and merchant fleets, around chokepoints to get near the enemy, thus overcoming its technical disadvantage in size, quality, and weapons range.

Though the PLA Navy is modernizing its forces, poor command and control systems and antiquated communications equipment continue to plague the fleet.⁶⁶ Consequently, the PLA Navy is incapable yet of conducting and synchronizing large-scale operations. Anyway, an adversary with a modern navy can detect and engage the Chinese fleet from a distance. Sophisticated enemy platforms with stand-off weapons linked to airborne, or even satellite, detection systems can inflict heavy damage to a Chinese task force without even getting close.

Troops.

In naval application, the idea of *troops*, in essence, takes the form of ships and aircraft. China's purchase of four Russian *Kilo*-class conventional submarines in 1995 raised the military stakes and tension level in the region.⁶⁷ The purchase of these quiet submarines is part of China's ambitious naval modernization program. An upgrade of the *Ming*-class patrol boats has also been undertaken with help from Israel. The first *Song*-class unit, a locally-produced submarine that incorporates "many new technologies" -- including a new low-noise screw, was launched in 1994.⁶⁸ By the turn of the century, China plans to begin building two aircraft carriers; each capable of carrying twenty-eight fixed-wing planes. Several new ships have also joined the fleet recently: two *Luhu*-class guided-missile destroyers with French-built

sonars, two *Jiangwei*-class guided-missile frigates, *Huang*- and *Houxin*-class missile patrol boats, and two *Dayun*-class logistics ships.⁶⁹

Despite some progress, however, the PLA Navy's power projection capabilities remain constrained. The number of modern, multipurpose platforms is modest at best. For instance, the new *Luhu* destroyer is a capable and versatile platform but there are only two in the fleet. Similarly, the *Jiangwei* frigates are major improvements over the older types, but there are just a few of them. The PLA Navy is also weak in anti-submarine and anti-air areas. For example, the only means of fighting an air threat, for most of the ships, is portable surface-to-air missiles or anti-air guns. These are no match against high-performance aircraft. The main weapon against a submarine attack is the antiquated depth charge. The navy's huge conventional submarine force, mainly old *Romeo*-class boats with 1950's technology, is ill-suited to deal with a sophisticated anti-submarine platform or modern attack submarines.⁷⁰ Deploying an operational carrier battle group is another daunting challenge for the PLA Navy. The navy does not have a carrier-capable aircraft. And even if it becomes available, years of pilot training would still be necessary.

Terrain and Weather.

East Asia is basically a maritime theater. Except for China and Russia, all the states are islands, peninsulas, or archipelagos. Among these littoral actors, China is potentially the most powerful. In Northeast Asia, however, the U.S. Seventh Fleet, homeported in Japan, provides a stabilizing balance of power in that region. In Southeast Asia, on the other hand, the PLA Navy is all too ready to fill the strategic gap created when the U.S. and Soviet navies pulled out of the area. Like the Strait of Malacca, the South China Sea is a vital link between

the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Unimpeded passage through this area is therefore critical for the economy of the United States and her allies. (see figure 3, page 24)

The relatively restricted confinement of the South China Sea is ideally suited for the PLA Navy. Key chokepoints can easily be guarded by small craft and fishing vessels. In addition, shallow water favors submarine operations. The mainstay of the Chinese fleet, these stealthy ships can "hide between the layers of the underwater thermals and maneuver among the rocks and shoals, where the acoustics are clouded."⁷¹ Moreover, some strategically located islands can be used as stationary "carriers" from which aircraft would be launched to support the naval forces. The many other smaller islands, rocks, and shoals can be used as missile platforms, communication relay stations, observation and listening posts, and temporary logistics bases.

Terrain, however, favors or hinders both sides. Here, geography confronts the PLA Navy with several difficulties. First, unity of effort is sacrificed due to the dispersion of the naval forces. The PLA Navy is evenly divided into the North Sea Fleet, the East Sea Fleet, and the South Sea Fleet. It is not difficult, then, for a potential rival to recognize that the Taiwan Strait is a vital chokepoint. For example, China severely criticized the passage of the *Nimitz* battle group, on its way to the Persian Gulf, through the Taiwan Strait in December 1995.⁷² Second, the PLA Navy is sailing into an unfavorable *focal sea terrain*.⁷³ The South China Sea is surrounded on three sides by nations potentially hostile to China. These same states are members of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). Though created to promote economic cooperation, the ASEAN Regional Forum recently discussed security issues in the area.⁷⁴ Due to the region's economic growth, most of these states have acquired

new wealth and new weaponry. Hence, China's huge military advantages have actually decreased. Finally, distance is another challenge for the Chinese Navy. While potential enemies are close to the disputed areas, the PLA Navy has to operate from a disadvantageous exterior position. A Chinese naval task force facing a determined opposition would require effective air cover. China lacks modern aircraft that can support a large naval engagement.⁷⁵ Just recently, *Military Secrets*, a Chinese government journal, declared that "it is a top priority for China to have air support for the possible battle in the Spratly Islands."⁷⁶

Time Available.

The PLA Navy's plan of attaining blue-water capability consists of three phases. In the first phase, which is expected to be completed by the end of the century, the focus is on enhancing equipment that will quickly increase the navy's combat capability. Its goal is to deter local threats and to win quick battles at low cost, without being entrapped in protracted clashes. In the second phase, which extends to the first two decades of the twenty-first century, it is anticipated that the projection capability of the navy will expand beyond the Western Pacific to all the oceans of the world. Then, task forces will center on the aircraft carriers. The key to this phase is the acquisition of high-tech equipment. The third phase will extend beyond 2020 and envisions China as a global sea power.⁷⁷

There are, however, limitations that can set the navy's modernization program adrift. While China has been the main beneficiary of wholesale-priced weaponry flowing out of Russia, policy-makers in Moscow recently put a stop to the sale of major warships to Beijing.⁷⁸ Moreover, since the West has been China's main source for advanced defense equipment, the Bush embargo put the modernization program behind schedule.⁷⁹

Chapter 5

Some Conclusions

The United States wants to be and, in fact, needs to be engaged in East Asia but its erratic policies add uncertainty rather than stability to the strategic calculations of the states in the region. It follows, then, that ongoing territorial disputes, if kept unresolved, may eventually lead to a war that could conceivably involve the United States. Before that happens, an evaluation of our current naval strategy may be in order.

The Mischief Reef incident confirms the maritime dimension of regional conflicts of interest. It is entirely possible for a war to start in the South China Sea "accidentally." Poor communications and lack of discipline could combine to allow independent-minded Chinese naval officers to "make their own rules."⁸⁰ Officially, the United States has distanced itself from these territorial disputes.⁸¹ But more important concerns like maritime access through SLOCs could potentially drag the United States and the rest of the region into an unwanted confrontation with China. In that event, U.S. naval forces remain unique assets in protecting U.S. interests. Their value is significantly increased in a theater like the South China Sea where land-based air support is generally not available.

Given the many weaknesses of the PLA Navy today, the U.S. Navy will remain superior to the Chinese fleet for many years to come. However, the Chinese Navy has markedly improved in capabilities. Over the next decade, it will continue to improve its surface fleet by building more destroyers, frigates, and missile patrol boats. It will seek to upgrade its obsolete submarine force by importing more Russian *Kilos*, improving the capabilities of its existing fleet, and building new ones. It will also put a top priority on

acquiring or constructing its own aircraft carriers. By the turn of the century, it will definitely be a naval power to be reckoned with in the region.

China's long-range plans are clearly aiming for a blue water capability. Near term, it has developed a "green water defense" strategy commensurate with its navy's improving ability to deal with limited wars and regional conflicts. It is interesting that the U.S. Navy is building a brown water capability in support of its new maritime strategy. The U.S. Navy's white paper, . . . *From the Sea*, shifts its strategy from open-ocean warfighting to operations in the littoral areas of the world. While the U.S. Navy orients itself toward the littoral landmass, the PLA Navy turns away from its coasts into the open ocean. There is an additional irony in the fact that, while the U.S. Navy has casually abandoned its sea control mission, the PLA Navy is actively pursuing command of the *local* seas.

While the Somalias and Haitis and Bosnias of today justify the current naval strategy, it must be kept in perspective that the U.S. Navy's *Maritime Strategy* was abandoned several years ago because of the absence of a naval competitor. General John M. Shalikashvili, the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, in a recent speech at the U.S. Naval War College, warned of tomorrow's "unicorns." We may find soon enough that the unicorns have already moved *on* the sea. The foundation of . . . *From the Sea* was based on two assumptions: "that the U.S. has uncontested command of the high seas, wherever and whenever it chooses," and "that all military operations in response to a crisis will be joint."⁸² Today, the dawning Chinese naval might, as it gradually sets its anchor in one of the world's most important maritime arenas, is shaking loose this very foundation.

Endnotes

1. Barbara Starr, "Han Incident Proof of China's Naval Ambition," Jane's Defence Weekly, 7 January 1995, Vol. 23, No. 1, 5.
2. Nigel Holloway, "Closer Encounters," Far Eastern Economic Review, 13 April 1995, 30.
3. Starr, 5.
4. Holloway, 30.
5. Thomas L. Wilborn, Security Cooperation With China: Analysis and a Proposal, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1994), iii.
6. David Shambaugh, "The United States and China: A New Cold War?," Current History, September 1995, Vol. 94, No. 593, 243.
7. Nayan Chanda, "Winds of Change," Far Eastern Economic Review, 22 June 1995, 16.
8. Nayan Chanda and Kari Huus, "The New Nationalism," Far Eastern Economic Review, 9 November 1995, 20.
9. David Winterford, Expanding Chinese Naval Power and Maritime Security in Southeast Asia (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 1992), 6.
10. Shambaugh, 245.
11. Richard C. Macke, "A Commander in Chief Looks at East Asia," Joint Force Quarterly, Spring 1995, 13.
12. Holloway, 30.
13. "Focus on Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation," U.S. Department of State Dispatch, 20 September 1993, Vol. 4, No. 38, 643.
14. Ibid.
15. East Asia includes Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. Northeast Asia refers to China, Japan, the Russian Far East, the two Koreas, Taiwan and Hongkong. Southeast Asia refers to the ASEAN countries (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand), Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and, because of its immense size, China.
16. Frank Gibney, The Pacific Century, (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 42.

17. Charles R. Larson, "America's Pacific Challenge, 1993 and Beyond," Vital Speeches of the Day, 1 December 1993, Vol. 60, Iss. 4, 123.
18. Donald S. Zagoria, "Clinton's Asia Policy," Current History, December 1993, Vol. 92, No. 578, 402.
19. U.S. Dept. of Defense, United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region, (Washington: 1995), 5.
20. Jon Sparks, "The Spratly Islands Dispute: The Possible Outcomes And Their Effects On Australia's Interest," Asian Defence Journal, March 1995, 18.
21. Ibid.
22. David G. Muller, Jr., China as a Maritime Power (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), 82.
23. Eric Hyer, "The South China Sea Disputes: Implications of China's Earlier Territorial Settlements," Pacific Affairs, Spring 1995, Vol. 68, No. 1, 41.
24. Ross H. Munro, "Eavesdropping on the Chinese Military: Where It Expects War -- Where It Doesn't," Orbis, Summer 1995, Vol. 38, No. 5, 356.
25. Bill Gunston and others, The Chinese War Machine (London: Salamander Books Limited, 1979), 113.
26. Michael G. Gallagher, "China's Illusory Threat to the South China Sea," International Security, Summer 1994, Vol. 19, No. 1, 170.
27. Hyer, 36.
28. Colin McInnes and Mark G. Rolls, "Post-Cold War Security in the Asia-Pacific Region: Trends and Issues," Contemporary Security Policy, August 1994, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1-3.
29. Merrill Goozner, "U.S. Allies in Asia Fear China's Growing Might," The Chicago Tribune, January 30, 1995, 1.
30. Doug Bandow, "Keep The Troops At Home, American Nonintervention," Current, July 1994, Iss. 364, 26.
31. James F. Giblin Jr., "How Did We Get Where We Are? -- The National Security Calculus of Southeast Asia," Lecture, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 4 May 1995.
32. William Branigin, "China Takes Over Philippine-Claimed Area of Disputed Island Group," The Washington Post, 11 February 1995, A18:1.

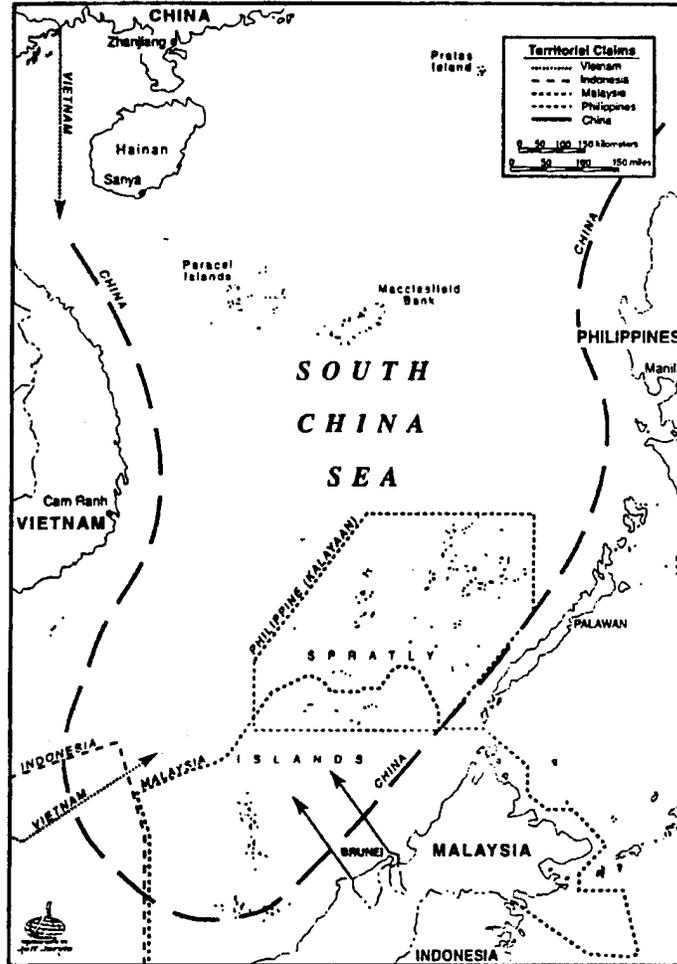
33. Robert A. Manning and James J. Przystup, "China's Syndrome: Ambiguity," The Washington Post, 19 March 1995, C1:5.
34. Muller, 1.
35. Gunston, 150.
36. You Ji and You Xu, "In Search of Blue Water Power: The PLA Navy's Maritime Strategy in the 1990s," The Pacific Review, 1991, Vol. 4, No. 2, 139.
37. Muller, 47.
38. The early Soviet navy adhered to the "Old School" of Russian naval strategy, a Tsarist inheritance that emphasized battleships and cruisers. Economic realities, however, prevented modernization. In 1921, the Baltic Fleet mutinied against the government and was decimated. Thus the "Young School" was born. It rejected the "imperialistic" purposes of the western navies' major combatants and opted instead for a mission closer to its shores. *Ibid.*, 48.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Winterford, 11.
41. Rizal Sukma, "China's Defence Policy and Security in the Asia Pacific," The Indonesian Quarterly, First Quarter 1995, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, 80.
42. *Ibid.*, 81.
43. You, 139.
44. Alexander Chieh-cheng Huang, "The Chinese Navy's Offshore Active Defense Strategy: Conceptualization and Implications," Naval War College Review, Summer 1994, Vol. XLVII, No. 3, 13.
45. You, 140.
46. Where does "green water" end and "blue water" begin? Common dictionaries vaguely define *offshore* as away from land while that area beyond the territorial jurisdiction of a country is called the *high seas*. Bradley Hahn, a U.S. Naval Academy faculty member, put the distinction in terms of capabilities. According to him, the phrase "green water" describes a navy's capability between "brown water" (coastal defense) and "blue water" (full open-ocean operations). See *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, March 1986, 116.
47. Huang, 18.
48. You, 140.

49. Huang, 18.
50. Jan S. Breemer, "The End of Naval Strategy: Revolutionary Change and the Future of American Naval Power," Strategic Review, Spring 1994, Vol. XXII, No. 2, 48.
51. Geoffrey Barraclough, ed., The Times Concise Atlas of World History (London: Times Books Limited, 1982), 30.
52. Breemer, 48.
53. Chanda, "Winds of Change," 16.
54. Ngok Lee, China's Defence Modernisation and Military Leadership (Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press Inc., 1989), 23.
55. Jing-dong Yuan, "China's Defence Modernization: Implications for Asia-Pacific Security," Contemporary Southeast Asia, June 1995, Vol. 17, No. 1, 70.
56. You, 142.
57. Winterford, 17.
58. Ibid.
59. William J. Nault, The Strategic Impact Upon the United States of Future Naval Rivalries in South and Southeast Asia (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 1992), 36-37.
60. You, 142.
61. Munro, 357.
62. Ibid. For another discussion on the influence of ancient teachings to current Chinese leadership thinking, see Commander Borik's excellent article *Sub-tzu & the Art of Submarine Warfare*, Proceedings/November 1995.
63. Muller, 115.
64. Wilfred A. Hermann, "Conflict Potentials in Southeast Asia," Military Technology, August 1995, Vol. XIX, No. 8, 14.
65. Jane's Fighting Ships, 1995-1996 (London: Butler and Tanner Limited, 1995), 31.
66. Peter L. Young, "The Potential for Conflict in the South China Sea," Asian Defence Journal, November 1995, 18.

67. Kathy Chen, "China Buys Russian Submarines, Raising Tension Level in Region," The Wall Street Journal, 9 February 1995, A10:1.
68. "Submarine Force Priority for China's Modernization Plan," Jane's Defence Weekly, 13 February 1995, Vol. 23, No. 9, 18.
69. The Naval Institute Guide to Combat Fleets of the World, 1995 (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995), xv.
70. John Caldwell, China's Conventional Military Capabilities, 1994-2004 (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994), 9.
71. Frank C. Borik, "Sub-tzu & the Art of Submarine Warfare," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, November 1995, 67.
72. Patrick E. Tyler, "China Hints at a Timetable To Take Control of Taiwan," The New York Times, 31 January 1996, A2:1.
73. Ralph D. Sawyer, Sun-tzu, The Art of War (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1994), 219.
74. Ralph A. Cossa, "Asian Multilateralism: Dialogue on Two Tracks," Joint Force Quarterly, Spring 1995, 32.
75. Gallagher, 178.
76. Hyer, 34.
77. You, 141.
78. Yuan, 76.
79. Ibid., 77.
80. Young, 18.
81. Branigin, A18.
82. Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., ed., Naval Forward Presence and the National Military Strategy (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1993), 229-230.

Figure 1

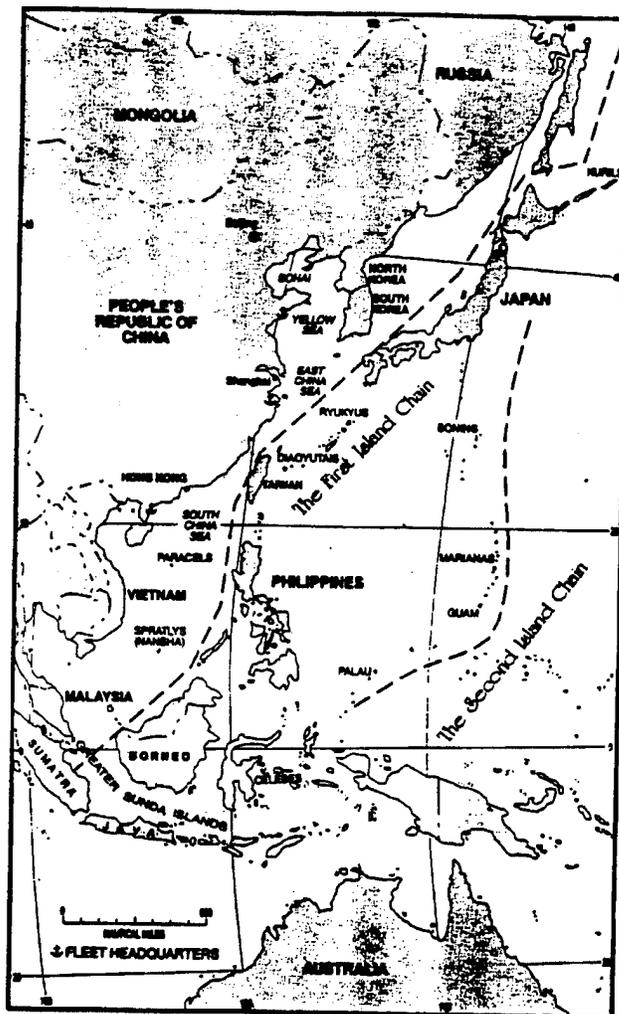
Diagram of Disputed Territories in the South China Sea



Source: Pacific Affairs, Spring 1995, 38

Figure 2

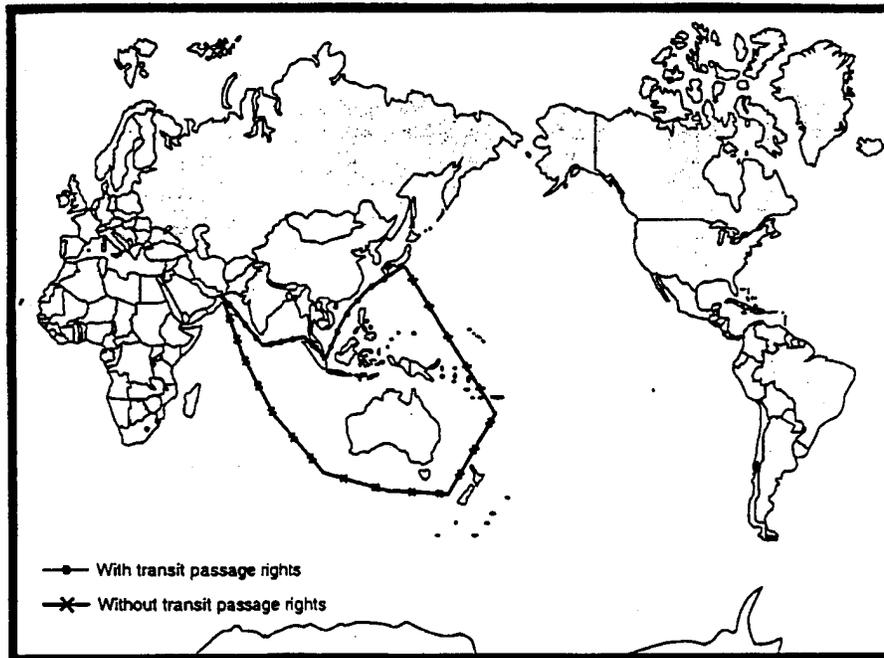
The "Green Water" Region -- The First and Second Island Chains



Source: Naval War College Review, Spring 1994, 21

Figure 3

South China Sea Transit Passage



"If prevented from transiting through the Indonesian Archipelago and the Malaccan Straits, a battle group transiting from Yokosuka, Japan to Bahrain would have to reroute around Australia. Assuming a steady 15 knot pace, the six ship battle group (all consuming conventional fuel) would require an additional 15 days and 94,050 gallons of fuel to transit an additional 5,800 NM. Additional fuel cost would be approximately \$2.9 million."

Bibliography

- Bandow, Doug. "Keep The Troops At Home, American Nonintervention." Current. July 1994, 26-32.
- Barraclough, Geoffrey. The Times Concise Atlas of World History. London: Times Books Limited, 1982.
- Borik, Frank C. "Sub Tzu & the Art of Submarine Warfare." United States Naval Institute Proceedings. November 1995, 64-72.
- Branigin, William. "China Takes Over Philippine-Claimed Area of Disputed Island Group." The Washington Post, 11 February 1995, p. A18:1-6.
- Breemer, Jan S. "The End of Naval Strategy: Revolutionary Change and the Future of American Naval Power." Strategic Review. Spring 1994, 40-50.
- Caldwell, John. China's Conventional Military Capabilities. Washington: CSIS, 1994.
- Chanda, Nayan. "Winds of Change." Far Eastern Economic Review. 22 June 1995, 14-16.
- Chanda, Nayan and Kari Huus. "The New Nationalism." Far Eastern Economic Review. 9 November 1995, 20-26.
- Chen, Kathy. "China Buys Russian Submarines, Raising Tension Level in Region." The Wall Street Journal, 9 February 1995, p. A10: 1-2.
- Cossa, Ralph A. "Asian Multilateralism: Dialogue on Two Tracks." Joint Force Quarterly. Spring 1995, 32-36.
- "Focus on Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation." U.S. Department of State Dispatch. 20 September 1993, 642-644.
- Gallagher, Michael G. "China's Illusory Threat to the South China Sea." International Security. Summer 1994, 169-194.
- Giblin, Jr., James F. "How Did We Get Where We Are? -- The National Security Calculus of Southeast Asia." Lecture. U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI. 4 May 1995.
- Gibney, Frank. The Pacific Century. New York: Macmillan, 1992.

- Goozner, Merrill. "U.S. Allies in Asia Fear China's Growing Might." The Chicago Tribune, 30 January 1995, p. 1: 1.
- Gunston, Bill, Harold C. Hinton, William V. Kennedy, Hugh Lyon, Harvey W. Nelsen and Bill Sweetman. The Chinese War Machine. London: Salamander Books Limited, 1979.
- Hahn, Bradley. "Hai Fang." United States Naval Institute Proceedings. March 1986, 114-120.
- Hermann, Wilfred A. "Conflict Potentials in Southeast Asia." Military Technology. August 1995, 8-15.
- Holloway, Nigel. "Closer Encounters," Far Eastern Economic Review. 13 April 1995, 30.
- Huang, Alexander C. "The Chinese Navy's Offshore Active Defense Strategy: Conceptualization and Implications." Naval War College Review. Summer 1994, 7-32.
- Hyer, Eric. "The South China Sea Disputes: Implications of China's Earlier Territorial Settlements." Pacific Affairs. Spring 1995, 34-54.
- Jane's Fighting Ships, 1995-1996. London: Butler and Tanner Limited, 1995.
- Larson, Charles R. "America's Pacific Challenge, 1993 and Beyond." Vital Speeches of the Day. 1 December 1993, 123-125.
- Lee, Ngok. China's Defence Modernisation and Military Leadership. Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press Inc., 1989.
- Macke, Richard C. "A Commander in Chief Looks at East Asia." Joint Force Quarterly. Spring 1995, 8-15.
- Manning, Robert and James J. Przystup. "China's Syndrome: Ambiguity." The Washington Post, 19 March 1995, pp. C1:5, C4:1-6.
- McInnes, Colin and Mark G. Rolls. "Post-Cold War Security in the Asia-Pacific Region: Trends and Issues." Contemporary Security Policy. August 1994, 1-9.
- Muller, Jr., David. China as a Maritime Power. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983.
- Munro, Ross H. "Eavesdropping on the Chinese Military: Where It Expects War -- Where It Doesn't." Orbis. Summer 1995, 355-372.

- Nault, William J. The Strategic Impact Upon the United States of Future Naval Rivalries in South and Southeast Asia. Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 1992.
- Pfaltzgraff, Jr., Robert L. and Richard H. Shultz, Jr., ed. Naval Forward Presence and the National Military Strategy. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1993.
- Sawyer, Ralph D. Sun-tzu, The Art of War. New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1994.
- Shambaugh, David. "The United States and China: A New Cold War?" Current History. September 1995, 241-247.
- Sparks, Jon. "The Spratly Island Dispute: The Possible Outcomes And Their Effects On Australia's Interest." Asian Defence Journal. March 1995, 18-22.
- Starr, Barbara. "Han Incident Proof of China's Naval Ambition." Jane's Defense Weekly. 7 January 1995, 5.
- "Submarine Force Priority for China's Modernization Plan." Jane's Defence Weekly. 13 February 1995, 18.
- Sukma, Rizal. "China's Defence Policy and Security in the Asia Pacific." The Indonesian Quarterly. First Quarter 1995, 76-87.
- The Naval Institute Guide to Combat Fleets of the World, 1995. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995.
- Tyler, Patrick E. "China Hints at a Timetable To Take Control of Taiwan." The New York Times, 31 January 1996, p. A2: 1-2.
- U.S. Dept. of Defense. National Security and the Convention on the Law of the Sea. Washington: 1994.
- U.S. Dept. of Defense. United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region. Washington: 1995.
- Wilborn, Thomas L. Security Cooperation With China: Analysis and a Proposal. Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1994.
- Winterford, David. Expanding Chinese Naval Power and Maritime Security in Southeast Asia. Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 1992.
- You, Ji and You Xu. "In Search of Blue Water Power: The PLA Navy's Maritime Strategy in the 1990s." The Pacific Review. 1991, 137-149.

Young, Peter L. "The Potential for Conflict in the South China Sea." Asian Defence Journal. November 1995, 18-27.

Yuan, Jing-dong. "China's Defence Modernization: Implications for Asia-Pacific Security." Contemporary Southeast Asia. June 1995, 67-84.

Zagoria, Donald S. "Clinton's Asia Policy." Current History. December 1993, 401-412.