inhospitable terrain (such as mountains and deserts), which may be
expected to degrade mobility. By contrast, an invasion force could
overwhelm its opponent more readily in a limited theatre of opera-
tions, for the defending forces would be without sufficient depths of
retreat or supply. One of the reasons for American military failure in
Vietnam, for example, was enemy use of sanctuaries and bases in
Cambodia.

It may be concluded that the availability of depth does hold
considerable benefit for the defender and that the strategy of depth
defence, which remains the essence of Chinese policy, is not a 'paper
tiger'. The pursuit of high-tech solutions to defence then becomes
irrelevant. At worst, it becomes counter-productive, and would be
tantamount to depriving the tiger of both habitat and hunt. People's
war has been modified but not 'tamed' by foreign formulas. Man-
the-weapon, rather than the technological imperative, dictates the
pace of advances in weaponry. Changes towards a middle-range
technological base and greater mobility have been made possible by
evolutionary change in the manpower procurement system: although
conscripted, Chinese soldiers have become more professional through
a selective system of acquiring the best of eligible manpower. Select-
tivity is also the key to technology acquisition. Like the capture of
enemy weapons in battle, modern technology and methods are also
captured to serve people's war under modern conditions.

3 The Nuclear Guerilla

In a modern war, there is not much difference between the front
and the rear, and the various areas may be cut off from each
other. Hence the need to build the base rear areas into strategic
bases capable of supporting a prolonged war and fighting on their
own.

Xu Xiangjian, 1978

In the absence of enforceable international agreements to com-
pletely ban all nuclear weapons, it is likely that small tactical
nuclear weapons will still be available. Strategic nuclear weapons,
on the other hand, probably won't exist.

M. Phillip Powell, 1987

If people's war under modern conditions is to prove to be more than
a slogan, it must 'deliver'. This book supports the view that it can
do so, and will endeavour to show how in this concluding chapter of
Part I.

The conjectural model which is proposed here does not presume to
identify China's future defence policy, for which adequate evidence
is lacking, but on which it is nevertheless possible to speculate. It is a
model drawn from the analyses in the foregoing chapters which, in
turn, are a reflection of this writer's understanding of nuclear and
conventional deterrence theories, people's war theory including its
modification under modern conditions, and probable developments
in future warfare generally. The model's key proposition is the
continued use of guerilla warfare by the professional military forces
armed with light modern weaponry (essentially in the 'mid' range of
technology), especially of the anti-tank and anti-air variety, and
borne by infantry on versatile weapons platforms such as helicopters,
fast attack craft and submarines. PLA use of battlefield nuclear
weapons as part of protracted guerilla warfare represents the nuclear
phase of this strategy. The non-professional elements of people's war
would be responsible for maintaining a network of civil defence
activities and fulfilling the support requirements of guerilla base
areas. Executive control will be exercised through fluid, mobile and
disguised command cells.
Modern Chinese Defence Strategy

A modern people's war strategy needs to be understood as integrating both nuclear and non-nuclear military elements. It will not depend on the occurrence of strategic nuclear exchange for its initiation, but will be employed at any stage and without warning – against a technologically superior aggressor. If this is the reality of people's war under modern conditions, then the foundations of this reality have been laid already – regardless of what the West chooses to see. In effect, military reform during the Deng decade may well bring about the PLA's virtual metamorphosis. But the changing face of Chinese defence is only cosmetically Western. Its strategic features remain Chinese. As the term 'nuclear guerilla' suggests, the metamorphosis is more likely to be one from revolutionary fighter to nuclear saboteur, than from Eastern army to Western clone.

As indicated in the Introduction and Chapter 2, China in the late 1980s lacked the skills, economic base, and possibly the inclination to become a major nuclear power. The PRC does not have a personal alliance system to protect, nor need nuclear parity be relevant against those that do: as this chapter will argue, a formidable nuclear force need not become a prerequisite for the defence of the homeland, when employment of battlefield nuclear weapons in a guerilla mode offers the cheapest and most viable evolutionary direction in Chinese nuclear policy to the goal of general and effective deterrence. To understand why this is proposed, it is necessary to begin with an examination of the Chinese nuclear arsenal and doctrine for employment in the late 1980s. As will be shown, China's nuclear forces cannot compete with the superpowers in either numerical or technological terms, but must rely on raising the costs to a nuclear aggressor with the promise of a retaliatory strike. This traditionally accepted function of a nuclear force (second-strike capability is the mainstay of both Soviet and American deterrence policies), has served the PRC well in the late twentieth century. It offers protection without being unduly provocative, for Chinese nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles are too few to be construed as a pre-emptive strike force. At the time of writing, China's stockpile of fission and fusion warheads was thought to number 1245, or approximately 3 per cent of the world's total. Warhead delivery systems (missiles and aircraft) number about 700.

Whilst this small force might be deemed vulnerable to Soviet pre-emptive strike, its survivability is enhanced by air-, land- and sea-base diversification, which can be expected to complicate if not confound enemy first strike calculations. Admittedly, most Chinese nuclear weapon systems are land-based. There is no specific information on their location, but existing public information indicates that they are concentrated in northern China: south of Beijing, south and west of the Mongolian border area, and near the Korean border. Even if all these missile sites could be identified and destroyed (a difficulty given their dispersion in groups of two or three, camouflage and the shifting locations of IRBMs and MRBMs), offensive missiles on submarines are not so easily targeted. According to an American assessment of Chinese capabilities in 1986:

in the face of a large scale nuclear attack, less than 10% of the coastal launching silos will survive, whereas submarines armed with ballistic missiles can use the surface of the sea to protect and cover themselves, preserve the nuclear offensive force, and play a deterrent and containment role.

Besides enhanced survivability through a variety of basing modes, the force is so constituted in delivery range capabilities as to enable it to respond to targets both near and far, from the close proximity of Vladivostok to the strategic distance of Moscow. It is a versatile arsenal which, though meagre and technologically unprepossessing, provides a poor country with a credible second-strike capability. For the present, it is probable that it constitutes an effective deterrent against all scenarios of major war, where the 'deterrent' exists in classic terms of retaliation to the end of unacceptable damage. Given China's primary adversarial relationship with a nuclear superpower, a closer inspection of its nuclear forces is provided in Appendix 2.

NUCLEAR STRATEGY

Beijing has never elaborated on what might be considered its own concept of nuclear strategy, if indeed it has one. Besides the threat of punitive retaliation (deterrence by threat of punishment), Beijing must continue to pursue deterrence by denial if its commitment to survive and fight a full-scale war is to retain credibility. The available evidence would suggest that the Chinese do believe nuclear weapons to be an aspect of the people's war deterrent, not a separate deterrent to be placed under the conceptual microscope. People's war under modern conditions presupposes the nuclear condition. In the absence of more specific formulations, one may extrapolate a Chinese nuclear strategy within the ambit of modern people's war.

The importance of civil defence for reasons other than passive
protection has been highlighted in Chapter 1. If China is not only to minimise loss of life through its civil defence programme, but conduct an active post-nuclear campaign against the enemy, then this level of organisational preparedness is crucial to a war fighting, victory denial strategy. From the perspective of a nuclear people's war, the victory denial posture is a statement of resolve. It speaks of a willingness to tolerate a high attrition rate in lives and equipment. Such a victory denial posture, supported by Chinese civil defence preparedness, reveals a general expectation that war must be nuclear. This, in turn, indicates that people's war under modern conditions is nuclear. The gross consequences borne of a non-discerning, countervalue (city-targeted) strategic force may announce the objectives of China's own nuclear strategy. In short, a classic, primitive nuclear armoury will be used in the classic, primitive mode of destroying whatever 'soft' targets it can reach.

Primitive deterrence was evident in the American 'massive retaliation' doctrine of the 1950s. With the formation of the USSR's Strategic Rocket Forces in 1960, the heavy, cumbersome ICBMs of both sides threatened mutual assured destruction (known, appropriately, by the acronym MAD). Neither nation could launch them without the expectation of a retaliatory strike. This second strike capability derives from the possession of weapons of sufficient number or invulnerability to survive the initial attack in order to return a blow of 'unacceptable damage' to the opponent. The countervalue nature of this deterrent strategy meant that the certain loss of one's population centres prohibited a first strike. The characteristics of the weapons deployed were eminently suited to this deterrent task. First and second generation ICBMs were less accurate than missiles today and required large numbers to be targeted on large objectives such as urban-industrial centres. That populations were primarily threatened rather than estimated, rather than the subsequent emphasis on military targets (counterforce), resulted in fears of a nuclear holocaust. This was the strength of deterrence in the early 1960s. In terms of the nuclear relationship, it gave rise to what the Soviets referred to as 'peaceful coexistence'.

Given Soviet defences and the paucity of China's strategic forces, a Chinese countervalue attack on the Soviet Union would not be as damaging as one from the United States. Certainly it would not be in the order of the 200 cities which the US Navy proposed as the US objective at the end of the 1950s. But nuclear strikes on only a few cities, of which the Chinese force would be capable, could well be deemed by the Soviets as unacceptable. Magnus Clarke's argument on the efficacy of the two minor Western European nuclear powers applies equally to China, which ranks third in nuclear warhead numbers after the superpowers:

A relatively small nuclear force, such as those of the British and the French, can reasonably expect to destroy an unacceptably large portion of the opponent's population with only a few warheads. Twenty-five Soviet cities destroyed has been reasoned to be too high a price for the USSR to wish to pay for the conquest or devastation of Britain or France.¹

The above considerations suggest that China's source of strength lies in a brute will to survive: in the probably indiscriminate countervalue nature of its retaliatory reply and its expectation of the escalation that must follow that strike. This is why civil defence must remain relevant, as argued in Chapter 1. As long as the threat of nuclear war is still the ultimate deterrent in the conduct of the world's politico-military affairs, then that threat must be explicit as to the devastating nature of such a war. There should be no confusion on this point, for deterrence is a psychological operation which depends on communication. China's strategic deterrent is therefore best served by maintaining a clear countervalue capability in its offensive strike forces, presuming low accuracy delivery vehicles (which is reasonable since high accuracy demands high technology).

However, if deterrence fails, such a primitive strike force becomes an easy target. This is not the case with China's mobile MRBMs and IRBMs, but the difficulty with ICBMs which are fixed, as China's appear to be in the light of available information, is that their possessor must either employ them or risk pre-emption - the 'use them or lose them' argument. The Soviets could not ignore Chinese ICBMs whose ranges threaten Moscow. The phased array radar complex is also fixed and thus readily eliminated. With the exception of mobile and concealed MRBMs, IRBMs, and SLBMs, China's strategic forces would only be of use if employed in the early stages of war. However, the fact that it is known that they must be used early adds to the deterrent effect. Beijing could not resort to this action and expect to escape at least equivalent countervalue punishment from the Soviets. With anticipated casualties in the order of tens of millions, it appears probable the Chinese leadership would choose to lose its ICBMs instead of its cities. The difficulty here is that if it is known that China would allow its ICBMs to be destroyed rather than
suffer the counter-counter blow, the deterrent value of the strategic force decreases to near-zero. Therefore, the more rational alternative for China would be tactical nuclear warfare which concentrates only on military and military support targets at battle level. As a presumed benefit, it also limits retaliatory damage to the user. This proposition calls for a serious re-evaluation of China's 'No-First-Use' (NFU) pledge, and suggests that China's most viable nuclear strategy is neither strategic nor tactical per se, but rather a variant which is termed here, guerilla nuclear warfare (GNW). China must rely on GNW, a term which will be clarified below, if its primitive strategic arsenal fails as a deterrent.

TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY:
(a) RE-EVALUATION OF CHINA'S NFU POSTURE

Upon the acquisition of nuclear power status in 1964, the PRC government declared that 'at no time, and under no circumstances, would China be the first to use nuclear weapons', stressing that 'the development of nuclear weapons in China ensures its defence and protection of the Chinese people'. This position has been consistently reiterated to the present day.

Although the purpose of an NFU, 'defence only', undertaking is to convey the defensive (rather than offensive) intent of China's nuclear armoury, it may be argued that the pledge to refrain from 'First Use' of nuclear weapons is, in reality, conditional. Obviously, under circumstances of enemy invasion, nuclear weapons would have failed in their deterrent role and China could well decide to use them to repel, or at least disrupt enemy forces at a certain kilometre distance from its border. This represents a feasible response: rather than accept defeat, China will use every weapon at its disposal. One is left with the grim speculation that besides placing the moral onus of nuclear good behaviour on the adversary, a Chinese NFU commitment does very little else to assist the victim of invasion. What, then, does an NFU pledge really mean in the desperate context of war-loosing?

With the advent of more accurate low-yield nuclear weapons, and the increased destructive power of conventional ones, such as precision guided munitions, NFU may be seen to apply only up to a certain threshold of restraint. Like the NATO option for First Use, such a threshold may be reached if the invader's strategic break-through cannot be stopped by conventional means. On this point, Lee Ngok offers a useful illustration: 'For instance, should the Soviets fail to effect a strategic breakthrough or should the survival of Chinese main forces be genuinely threatened, TNW [Tactical Nuclear Warfare] might be used. The threshold for the latter would be deemed to be lower than the first, although it would mean a Chinese renunciation of the NFU principle.'8 From the above considerations it follows that a war between these two powers holds a considerable risk of nuclear weapons use, whoever may be the first to employ them.

Technological advances affecting the characteristics of nuclear weapons — smaller yields, mobility and increased accuracy — increase the military feasibility of usage. Whilst the strategic world of the late twentieth century acknowledges the military-specific capabilities of latter-day nuclear targeting, sufficient politically induced uncertainty remains as to the possibility of escalation. The 'nuclear taboo' is still a firm psychological barrier to the use of nuclear weapons on even the smallest scale, with the possible exception of use at sea. Despite a healthy aversion to nuclear war in any form, the fact remains that NATO still maintains the right to First Use in the face of Soviet superiority in conventional forces. And like NATO, China is in a position of conventional arms inferiority — only to a worse degree.

The incentive for early or any use of tactical nuclear weapons because of the greater disparity in conventional strength, is offset by a number of factors. First, China's geography and depth defence allow for longer warning and decision times than the European theatre. Second, provided attack is from the north, Beijing would be less pressured than NATO in view of the latter's West German terrain being more exposed, and a NATO forward defence policy which calls for a possible First Use decision close to the enemy borders. The Chinese command, by comparison, can attempt to improve its relative strength over a longer time span (by attritional strategy), failing which it may still resort to tactical nuclear use well away from the border, but on Chinese territory. Forward defence at the border is not crucial to the success of depth operations. Finally, as an independent nuclear power, the Chinese government is not subject to a 'dual-key' system for the use of nuclear weapons. (In NATO countries, dual-key nuclear weapons require both American and European authorisation to be activated.) The decision for their employment will be a unilateral one made in China's own time. Hence the problems associated with complex command and control
arrangements in response to short warning times, need not arise for the PRC. The PLA can afford the luxury of NFU until such a time as compelling military reasons for First Use arise. As a result, deterrence in wartime can be maintained, since the option of use will not be lost.

In this it is important that the Chinese nuclear force is essentially one of intermediate and medium range missiles which, unlike the fixed deployment mode of ICBMs, is characterised by mobile basing. Dispersed deployment in small clusters, with an emphasis on mobility and camouflaged sites, would create uncertainty in enemy targeting of China's offensive theatre arsenal. This would enhance Chinese strike capabilities within Soviet Asia. Therefore, despite the possibility of initial Soviet strikes to disarm China of its fixed ICBMs, the PLA may still fight a nuclear and conventional 'war of resistance' against invading forces while retaining its SLBMs (range: 2000–3000 km), and surviving intermediate and medium range ballistic missiles (1200–2700 km), for a retaliatory reply to any possible escalation by the Soviets to the countervalue level.

Whilst maintaining this implied threat of taking the 'war of resistance' to enemy territory (either in retaliation to a countervalue strike or as part of a cross-border nuclear operation), special forces employing guerrilla methods would readily fight with tactical nuclear weapons on Chinese territory. The advantages of a dispersed tactical arsenal - not just the guns and missiles but, in particular, warhead stockpiles - are well represented by Charles Horner. Writing on the concept of protracted nuclear war, he states:

Such a strategy would envision the widest possible dispersion of nuclear weapons and their employment with relatively short-range and simple systems. Proponents of this view would draw parallels to the historically demonstrated ability of the PLA to operate in self-contained units in coordinated fashion - the prerequisites of conducting a limited nuclear war. Such a force configuration would make nuclear weapons available for the more likely military contingency - massive Soviet attack.

Nuclear dispersal would deprive the Soviets of the opportunity to launch a 'surgical' nuclear strike directed against the Chinese nuclear arsenal... Protracted nuclear war is, moreover, an unprovocative defensive strategy, and would seriously complicate Soviet planning.

TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY:
(b) GUERRILLA NUCLEAR WARFARE

These arguments suggest the need for a new concept to describe Chinese policy on nuclear usage - guerrilla nuclear warfare. In short, GNW may be defined as the use of guerrilla methods within a protracted nuclear war fought at the theatre level.

Within the context of China's strategic defence, tactical nuclear weapons might be used at an early stage but their strategy for employment (GNW) comes into full play after and not during the initial stage of war. It will be recalled from the previous chapter that this 'initial stage' - involving layered defence-in-depth, reinforced defences in the Beijing–Manchuria theatre, and defence of cities through mobile and positional warfare - is the crucial preliminary of a people's war under modern conditions which seeks to deny the enemy victory. China's concept of the initial stage of war highlights the immediate relevance of GNW in slowing the tempo of enemy advance and provides a Chinese answer to the Soviet challenge. In denying the enemy victory, however, GNW matters most if the enemy has not been persuaded to withdraw. The knowledge that GNW would become fully operative after the initial stages must in itself act as a deterrent to attack, let alone a decision to fight a protracted war.

In a war that benefits the defender through the promise to counterattack 'at any uncertain time . . . perhaps, hours, days, weeks, months or even years later', GNW must incorporate a requirement for no announced doctrine of use whatsoever. Thus the availability of delayed First Use, within a deliberately ambiguous posture of no declared doctrine, carries the added benefit of enemy demoralisation. Under circumstances of not knowing if or when nuclear weapons will be released, psychological stress on the part of enemy troops may be expected. This is particularly so when all the enemy knows is that China is tactically nuclear-capable. Orthodox strategic thinkers may raise the objection that tactical nuclear weapons are not counterforce weapons except in a short-range battlefield. This, of course, does not diminish the deterrent and there can be no monopoly claim by theorists as to what constitutes effective deterrence. If the Soviets believe the Chinese are prepared to engage in this tactical nuclear form of guerilla warfare, then the deterrent to violation of China's territorial integrity is effective.
GNW AND THE POLICY OF ‘NO DECLARED DOCTRINE’

Indeed, it is perhaps most appropriate to refer to China’s contemporary operational strategy as being ‘no declared doctrine’, as distinct from reserving the right for first use or adhering to the 1964 NFU pledge. A shift away from NFU doctrine and toward a deliberate policy of ‘no declared doctrine’ is plausible when viewed as part of the process of change in Chinese strategic thinking. For example, at the time of the PLA’s tactical nuclear exercise in 1982, one Chinese strategist was said to have been in favour of qualifying China’s NFU pledge by adding the phrase ‘on foreign territory’, thereby implying use on Chinese territory. This is indicative of the evolution of Chinese nuclear policy, for alteration in doctrine must be expected as in all aspects of modernisation. A posture of ‘no declared doctrine’ represents an evolutionary refinement of people’s war under modern conditions. The Soviets are more likely to be deterred if they know that the Chinese are prepared to fight a tactical nuclear war without expressly indicating how, when, and whether they will be first to use nuclear weapons. The deterrent is advertised, but not its conduct of operations. This is an important principle that deserves to be emphasised: deterrence strategies need to be advertised, whereas strategy for use (or operational strategy) under people’s war requirements depends on withholding intelligence as to one’s true intentions, and places a high value on deception.

The four deterrent elements of the contemporary concept of people’s war stated in Chapter 1 now find application. The element of intent is evident in the communicated will to resist aggression. There is evidence of tactical nuclear capability and ‘no declared doctrine’ is consistent with the use of an indirect strategy of psychological warfare characterised by the element of deception. Among the unique set of conditions forming the fourth element are the previously mentioned factors of geography and depth defence, as well as the absence of problems associated with complex command and control arrangements in response to short warning times (discussed above). Another factor of considerable import within this set of conditions is China’s ability to survive on its own strategic resources, such as food, fuel and power (Chapter 4). In the crucial area of nuclear self-sufficiency, China possesses an adequate supply of uranium and other natural resources (such as lithium) for the production of nuclear weapons.

Uranium deposits are found in various locations, including Xinjiang in the northwest and Inner Mongolia. The major processing facilities, like the uranium deposits themselves, are in northern China. Two warhead production centres have been identified in Qinghai Province in the southern part of northwest China, and one near the city of Harbin in the northeast. With the development of solid fuel for its missiles in the early 1980s, China is known to have opened a production facility for this form of propellant in the Inner Mongolian city of Huhehaote, about 400 kilometres northwest of Beijing. Because most nuclear powers would accept that the arsenal their opponents have at the start of the war is the one with which they will fight the whole war, all nuclear weapon production centres are very high priority (and easy) targets. As can be seen from the above, China’s known facilities for the processing and manufacture of nuclear weapon materials are located in northern China, with concentrations, as the Soviets have pointed out, ‘in the northwest of the country, in the triangle formed by the cities of Baotou, Yumen, and Lanzhou’. The area’s proximity to the Soviet Union can be viewed as a drawback because it falls within Soviet theatre-range targeting, but then so does practically the whole of China if a nuclear attack is launched from the Soviet Far East or from bomber bases in Vietnam (see Figure A.3, Appendix 2). However there is another perspective to be taken into account. That China’s nuclear weapon production facilities do not appear to be dispersed over the whole of China simply renders their neutralisation marginally less complicated – not the entire range of other military, political and economic targets, which the Soviets must also take into account if they wish to disable a Chinese military response, and – at the very least – attack on these remote northern facilities would leave large expanses of China undamaged.

Survival of the Chinese resistance below, say, the Yellow River, raises interesting suggestions as to the deployment and employment of tactical nuclear weapons. Harry Gelber’s prediction of 1973 – that China’s developing nuclear force profile ‘might even suggest the creation of some unorthodox and non-immediate means of retaliation’ – becomes plausible when viewed from the perspective of a protracted, guerilla-style, nuclear war. Retaliation, in the context described here, would be at the theatre rather than the strategic level, with the survival of the weapon systems enabled by dispersal methods which employ, to use Horner’s expression, ‘exotic system(s)’, such as ‘mobile-based missiles on barges, railroad flatcars . . . and deployment of missiles in a large number of small units’.
However, under GNW, with its requirement for no announced doctrine of use, retaliation, in the commonly understood sense of a second-strike capability, will be abandoned. One important reason for this is that a retaliatory strike may not even be possible for the Chinese if space-based strategic defence systems – whereby strategic defence is deemed to refer to counter-measures to nuclear weapon delivery vehicles – are successfully developed and deployed by the superpowers.

GNW VERSUS STRATEGIC DEFENCE

In March 1983, US President Ronald Reagan announced research on the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) programme (popularly known as ‘Star Wars’), and in December 1987, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev admitted that a space defence system, called ‘Red Shield’, was being developed by the USSR. ‘Practically, the Soviet Union is doing all the United States is doing,’ he said. ‘We are engaged in research, basic research, which relates to these aspects which are covered by the SDI of the US.’17 The US SDI programme encompasses research on technologies which, if successfully developed, would enable the construction of land-based and space-based systems for the interception of incoming Soviet ICBMs. The Soviets are said to have begun research into advanced ballistic missile defence (BMD) systems – such as particle beam weapons – in the late 1960s. This was after they had begun deployment of the Galosh exoatmospheric ABM system around Moscow (1963), as well as early warning and tracking radars.

If the Soviets deploy their Red Shield, the consequences for China are crucial. The People’s Republic simply does not possess sufficient numbers of missiles to launch simultaneously in the hope that a few warheads may penetrate the enemy’s protective shield. This means that the apparent Chinese development of guerilla methods of tactical nuclear usage carries an additional, highly significant, advantage: it anticipates strategic missile redundancy if space-based BMD schemes are to prove operable. Despite much criticism of the feasibility of BMD, superpower actions indicate that it might go ahead. That the superpowers have been talking about reducing strategic arsenals by 50 per cent could be an indication that they consider deployment of their BMD programmes to be feasible. As Clarke suggests, reductions in long-range ballistic missiles would serve to promote the credibility of SDI and Red Shield by removing the problem of ICBM ‘saturation’ (that is, if enough missiles are launched, at least a few must be expected to penetrate the defensive shield).18 Furthermore, the proliferation of ballistic missiles in the Third World – as exemplified by the sale of Chinese MRBMs to Saudi Arabia in 1988 – adds strength to the argument that the superpowers must continue with their strategic defence programmes. It also confirms the increasing relevance of SDI-related research to countries other than the superpowers. For example, the ARROW project, an advanced anti-tactical ballistic missile (ATBM) system for Israel, is associated with the US SDI programme. The development of ATBM that can intercept ballistic missiles in flight (such as those sold by the Chinese to the Middle East) holds enormous implications for smaller nuclear armed powers. As an increasing number of nations acquire ballistic missiles the demand for ATBMs may be expected to rise, in which case the tactical offspring of SDI might prove more popular – and more difficult to dismiss – than their visionary parent.

This is not so much an admission that the Reagan dream of ‘Star Wars’ is unachievable but an indication of its implementation philosophy. Simply stated: the stairway to a strategic heaven begins on the ground. Recent developments in the US SDI programme are those of rapid acceleration of R&D in lower technology programmes – emphasis is on ground-based rather than space-based interceptors – to a level where modest deployments may be possible before the turn of the century, and the US view of the Soviet programme is that deployment may already have taken place.19 Certainly the SA-X-12 ATBM, which is believed scheduled for production in thousands for the GIANT programme, had been successfully tested in Siberia against SCUD-B medium-range missiles and the Soviet-copied Pershing-2. Emphasis on ATBM projects illustrates that when it comes to superpower defence planning it is a question of ‘watch what we do, not what we say’.

This is a truism with which the Chinese can readily identify. Well aware of priority research into ATBM technology, they will not rest in the hope that space shields are too fanciful to be true or that in the post-INF era the superpowers will curb their competitive appetite. By mid-1988 China was officially expressing its concern to the Soviets over the ‘expansion of the arms race through high technology and its extension into outer space’,20 while academics like Zhuang Qubing, of the China Institute of International Studies, warned that ‘the arms race has not and will not stop, although its nature may alter from a
stress on quantity to quality, and from nuclear weapons to space weapons".21

It is not necessary to ‘believe’ in space wars to understand China’s concern. In the absence of hard evidence as distinct from speculation, uncertainty remains as to whether full-scale BMD schemes will eventuate, but given superpower R&D investment in the area, lower level deployments are almost certain. Since even such ‘lower-level’ deployments could frustrate a Chinese nuclear deterrent based on classical concepts, as it would remain numerically limited, then guerilla nuclear warfare provides a safeguard. The Chinese would be able to circumvent the Soviet ‘Red Shield’ by not challenging it. Nuclear strategy within a modern people’s war would therefore call for the abandonment of long-range ballistic missiles and the adoption of GNW using tactical nuclear weapons. This leads to the conclusion that if GNW does not exist now, it soon will because it is the Chinese option.

Even if SDI and Red Shield do not proceed and China does not abandon ballistic missiles, guerilla nuclear warfare will not be wasted. This becomes clear upon closer examination of an alternative path in the evolution of Chinese nuclear policy: pursuit of strategic defence capabilities. If the Chinese pursue this alternative of building more ballistic missiles and (perhaps) their own SDI (which they would have to call ‘Great Wall’), it is unlikely that they would be able to produce their own high technology systems for provision of strategic defence before the year 2020 or 2030.

However, despite China’s stated opposition to superpower developments of strategic defence, it may be contended that it is equally unlikely that the PRC will be able to continue to eschew its own provision if it is to continue to hold aspirations for great power (in effect, superpower) status, and to have any confidence in the ability of its own land-based nuclear forces to survive first strike by the USSR. Such a contention can be dismissed in view of the argument that dispersed Chinese theatre nuclear weapons would be practically invulnerable. Finding them in railway cars and other such elusive locations in the vastness of China would truly be a daunting task. Nonetheless, the argument for a Chinese strategic defence deserves to be examined further. Given that China would not wish to allocate resources to its own programme, even should the required level of expertise exist, it must then move to acquire such systems by purchase from others. However, whilst the American and Soviet systems would be of value to China, it seems most improbable that either would wish to offer their latest technologies to the People’s Republic.

Such is not the case with European supplies. According to Clarke, a European Defence Initiative (EDI), of sorts, is actively underway outside the element of mere ‘participation’ in SDI and whose objectives are more than the simple provision of strategic defence for Western Europe. EDI in Europe may be best described as an amalgam of projects ranging from an agreed NATO objective to improve ‘air defences’ through to very long-term technological initiatives epitomised by the EUREKA programme.22 Interestingly, the Chinese have commented positively on the French EUREKA programme, thereby indicating tacit approval of EDI efforts as opposed to the US SDI.23 Within the EDI, the goal of maintaining European technological capabilities to the twenty-first century and beyond, and thus maintaining overall independence from the USA, looms large.24 The price of such independence in the EDI R&D programme will be high and act as an imperative to Europe to find such markets for its products as present themselves. Only by accepting volume overseas orders for EDI systems can Europe afford such programmes – at least in a political sense. (The problem here, however, is one of time scale, as argued below.)

If the Chinese did seek defence systems like the European ATBMs that are being developed, then Western Europe must prove to be a willing supplier. A sales relationship, especially with France and Britain, is long established. Moreover, the greater the level of Chinese strategic defence, the greater must be the level of Soviet offensive deployments in the East, easing the Western European burden in its own defence. The problem here is that such systems would be too expensive for China to buy in the quantities that would be required. Given the time scale of Chinese economic modernisation (up to 2050), the PRC probably could not afford European ATBMs in the near term. Guerilla nuclear warfare, by contrast, is affordable and should be possible as an operational innovation by 2000.

Admittedly, when employed within GNW, these types of tactical defence systems (as distinct from SDI which relates to strategic defence systems) do provide a credible application of people’s war under modern conditions. The Chinese could adapt EDI-type defences for offensive use – for example, lasers against Soviet tanks.

If, however, the future battlefield is a primitive one in the wake of nuclear war, GNW may still offer a viable method of combat. This is because it is not technologically dependent, but can exploit the latest
Modern Chinese Defence Strategy

(such as lasers) as well as older generation defensive technologies (for example, nuclear artillery shells). Again, this brings to mind the complementary relationship between relatively modern and older technology systems within the PLA. Certainly GNW may readily embrace both. One is also reminded that it is not the weapons systems, but their strategy for employment, that matters most to the technologically 'weaker' contestant. Employed by the nuclear guerilla, simpler weapons be they nuclear artillery systems or even downgraded ATBM's could come to represent the 'stronger' technology, thus achieving the reversal of strength sought in people's war strategy.

To summarise, a nuclear-capable nation at war may conceivably be forced to take the NFU principle out of the logic of its deterrence theory (if it was ever really there), and apply it to the more immediate demands of the battlefield. The political and military leadership of the defending forces must decide whether a failed nuclear deterrent can be harnessed into the role of battlefield incentive for enemy withdrawal. It is concluded here that this would represent a viable defence posture for a nation with no recourse to a powerful alliance system or powerful nuclear resources of its own. By the standards of other declared nuclear weapon nations, China is the only nuclear-capable power (apart, perhaps, from India) that is economically underdeveloped and without a military force of modern standards. It is reasonable to postulate that if the PRC is forced to engage in a war of national defence before economic and military modernisation have reached a standard comparable to more developed nations - a process which may take another fifty years - it will consider and will, most probably, decide in favour of using nuclear weapons on the battlefield. Even after it reaches the developed nation status to which it aspires, tactical nuclear weapons with 'numerical defence' may still represent the minimum means available for the maximum objective of enemy deterrence in peacetime, or victory denial in war.

CONCLUSION

The guerilla method of use is the logical option for the nuclear battlefield if Chinese forces are to avoid confrontational counter-attacks. Invisibility and mobility would have to be the norm, with swift air-land guerilla raids at the points of engagement. Lightning raids by light naval units, armed with tactical nuclear weapons, would represent the naval arm of such operations. These 'points' - like the prelaid defences generally - would be selected for their disruptive effect on the tempo of enemy advance, not for any hope of inflicting defeat. Unlike the prelaid battlefields, which are geographically dependent, guerilla raids would be tactically determined in accordance with the unfolding dynamics of the war. Targets would include the enemy's supply lines and communications; its troops on patrol and at rest. The object is to inflict an unconventional war of attrition on the material and moral resources of the enemy - from the security of its supply tail to the morale of its soldiers and, above all, on the enemy's ability to secure political tenure. The greatest strength in a people's war under future conditions will be the ability to persist as a resistance force despite enemy successes in seizing and holding ground. It may be postulated that far from surrendering, the PLA would evacuate the occupied zone only to regroup in another part of the country. Whether or not China has suffered nuclear attack in the process of being invaded, GNW would provide an effective instrument of retaliation and must therefore be supposed the probable reality despite public NFU posture. Given this probable reality, and the requirement that deterrence strategies need to be communicated, China's announcement of GNW would mark the next logical stage in the evolutionary development of its defence policy. Consequently, the Soviets would know of the fate planned for them should they invade: a protracted war of resistance based on no declared doctrine of nuclear operations. The announced strategy therefore seeks to enhance its deterrent strength by refusing to announce a doctrine of operational use.

Even if guerilla nuclear warfare is a deterrent strategy which presupposes the failure of the overall Chinese deterrent, in that it cannot operate before China's territorial integrity is violated, yet what is created by the addition of GNW is a multi-layered deterrent, in which the failure of the first element is not (as it would be in the case of the USA or USSR) a terminal issue. If the Chinese can accept the costs of GNW to themselves then it seems certain that they can render the costs of GNW unacceptable to the enemy and hence succeed in their objective.

Guerilla nuclear warfare as the culmination of people's war under modern conditions, represents China's mastery of strategic-military survival in the twenty-first century. When a potential aggressor is deterred from provoking GNW it can be truly said that a victorious army wins its victories before seeking battle, but should GNW as a deterrent strategy fail, then it will prevail as an effective defence. An invader that 'fights in the hope of winning', under these terms of protracted warfare, is 'an army destined to defeat'.