Part II
4 ‘The Kingdom in the Middle’: Threats to China

Trust in virtue, not walls.
Chinese minister, AD 280

He who excels at resolving difficulties does so before they arise.
He who excels in conquering his enemies triumphs before threats materialise.

Sun Tzu, 350 BC

In Part I it was argued that the defence of the People's Republic can be sustained by continued reliance on China's traditional strengths—the two most obvious being those of large land mass and population. It was also argued that within the context of the people's war philosophy that exploits these strengths, the most viable option for Chinese defence modernisation is pursuit of middle-range technology, employed in the complementary modes of professional guerilla warfare by elite forces and 'swarm' combat tactics by regular forces. The second part of this book will develop further these ideas by examining the effectiveness of such a policy in relation to threats or potential threats to China. Because this study is an investigation of people's war under modern conditions as the vehicle for understanding emerging Chinese defence strategy, the purpose here is not simply to provide a general assessment of threat, but to interpret China's strategic environment from the perspective of modern people's war. In other words, how would a modern people's war strategist view China's strategic environment?

As the USSR represents China's major strategic adversary, the Soviet threat to China will be assessed first. This will be followed by evaluation of threats posed by lesser regional rivals or potential rivals.
THE SOVIET UNION

The Chinese and Soviets are no longer ardent enemies even if the adversarial principle still holds. In 1982 Beijing agreed to resume talks with Moscow and by 1985 the momentum toward rapprochement was accelerated with a change in the Secretary Generalship of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The vast empire of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 15 republics in all with a total population of 280 million (more than a fifth of them Asians), came under the reform-minded leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. He introduced the policy of perestroika for his nation's reconstruction. Like China's four modernisations programme, perestroika calls for all-round reforms — not just in the domestic economy but also in foreign policy — with the aim of bringing a greater 'openness' (glasnost) to a hitherto insular empire. Also like China's modernisations programme, perestroika is about national power. The notable difference is that while China aims to become a great power in the modern world, the Soviet Union needs perestroika if it is to remain one. It also needs the Asia-Pacific region. Gorbachev regards this economic growth area as 'the area where world politics will most likely focus in the next century'.5 The desire for Soviet integration into the Asia-Pacific economy is reflected in Moscow's plans for a threefold increase in its trade with the region by the year 2000. (In 1988 the volume was 8 per cent.) Trade with China, which grew from a mere US$300 million in 1981–2 to US$2.6 billion in 1986–7, has already shown a significant increase.

Gorbachev's Asian policy was launched in the very city which is to become the gateway to Siberia's economic development. Founded on territory seized from China in the nineteenth century, 'Ruler of the Orient' by name, and home of the Soviet Pacific Fleet, Gorbachev chose Vladivostok for his diplomatic springboard into the Asia-Pacific region. 'I have long intended to visit the Far East,' he said in his speech there on 28 July 1986. 'And it is not only because a person is attracted to regions where he has not been and by an interest in what he has not seen.'3 The Vladivostok Initiative was followed up with the Siberian initiative when two years later the Soviet leader spoke from the 'radar city', Krasnoyarsk.

From the Soviet Far East Gorbachev had a clear view of the source of his country's economic salvation. But he also recognised where his most dedicated diplomatic efforts must begin. China, the very embodiment of the mighty East, straddled nine million square kilo-
know their longtime enemy they can be expected to know this too. The traditional phobia has not been supplanted entirely by the ethos of economic co-existence. Short-term expedience, what has popularly been termed ‘detente’, must not be confused with long-term rivalry. Short-term expedience may be viewed as part of the strategy of people’s war under modern conditions. Unless the Soviets can be convinced that a strong China does not pose a threat to themselves, then the Sino-Soviet detente is without substance. It is to be hoped that one of the strengths of people’s war under modern conditions is that it will manage the relationship with the Soviet Union so as to gradually erode suspicion of the potential threat posed by a developed China. Indeed Gorbachev himself is a willing and able player in this perception management ‘gameplan’, a diplomatic process of the highest order, and whose successful application must represent the most desirable of outcomes. Meanwhile, so long as the underlying adversarial relationship exists, it merits closer inspection.

Military Comparisons

Because the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies constitute the most serious threat to the Soviet Union, it would be unrealistic to consider total Soviet military strength in relation to armed conflict with China. The Chinese themselves have pointed out that about 68 per cent of Soviet forces are designated for the European theatre. Nor – given the Soviet strategy of independent theatres – are forces in the European theatre likely to be ‘swung’ into use in the east where deployments, according to Western estimates, continue to constitute about a quarter of Soviet ground and air forces and a third of its navy. Similarly, China could not deploy all PLA divisions against Soviet forces: it must garrison its western frontiers, especially the border with Vietnam, and maintain at least a small military presence in the east, opposite Taiwan.

The USSR’s most advanced equipment and high-readiness divisions are deployed in its western Strategic Theatre facing NATO. Forces which can be engaged against China are within the Central Asian, Siberian, Transbaykal, and Far Eastern Military Districts (MDs) of the Far Eastern Strategic Theatre (see Figure 4.1). According to the annual report of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London, these four MDs account for 56 divisions, including the four stationed in Mongolia. Taking together, total Soviet deployments along China’s borders comprise seven tank divisions, forty-eight motorised rifle divisions, one division for coastal defence, five artillery divisions, and two arm assault brigades. Only 35 per cent of these divisions are expected to be capable of mobilisation within one to three days. The rest would require an estimated eight to nine weeks to bring them to operational full strength. These estimates relate to the organisation of the Soviet Union’s 209 divisions into three categories of combat readiness. According to Western estimates, Category 1 comprises about a third of Soviet divisions, which are at full strength, completely equipped and on 24 hours notice. Another third are thought to be within Category 2, manned at 50 to 75 per cent strength, complete with fighting vehicles, and the planned requirement of three days for full manning. Category 3, at 20 per cent strength, and with older models of equipment, would require eight to nine weeks – possibly as much as three months – to become fully manned. The strength of a motorised rifle division has been estimated at 12 500 to 13 000 personnel, and that of a Soviet tank division at 10 500 to 11 000. These amount to over half a million troops (about 700 000) which could be deployed at full divisional strength against approximately a
million Chinese soldiers deployed in Military Regions (MRs) of the north (Beijing MR), northeast (Shenyang MR) and the west (Lanzhou MR) facing the Soviet border (see Figure A.1 and Table A.2 in Appendix 1).

 Territory on either side of the 7500-kilometre Sino-Soviet border holds significant economic and military value. While key nuclear facilities and 75 per cent of the Soviet Union’s natural resources are located east of the Ural Mountains, half of China’s industrial capacity is contained in the north and northeast, nuclear test facilities are in the northwest, and oilfields are in both the west and northeast.

 Destruction of China’s industrial and mining areas would not be in the Soviet Union’s interests if it wished to engage in a conventional pre-emptive war with the political objective of seizing Beijing and installing a pro-Soviet regime. China’s industrial capacity must remain operational after such an objective is met, otherwise the USSR would not be capable of supporting an economically crippled client state of such magnitude. In other words, and somewhat paradoxically, the costs of victory would be excessive. Even if China were partitioned into a pro-Soviet north and a chaotic Vietnamese-harassed south, northern China still represents a sufficiently large area to justify maintenance of the existing infrastructure.

**Background to Sino-Soviet Relations**

As practised for almost thirty years, Sino-Soviet relations existed on a government-to-government basis, not a party-to-party basis, with the obvious difficulty arising from the fact that the party is the government in both these countries. From the Chinese perspective, improved relations were dependent on: (1) cessation of Soviet support for the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia (in progress in 1989); (2) the reduction of the Soviet troops along the Chinese border to pre-1969 levels – that is, about a fifth of the present strength; and (3) withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan (which was completed in 1989). The Afghan obstacle was more a reflection of China’s political efforts to thwart perceived Soviet strategic gains than any military concern over Soviet troops crossing from Afghanistan into China. The narrow land frontier between the two nations is too inhospitable to be of use as an invasion entry point.

By comparison, Beijing’s two other obstacles, Vietnam (examined in the next section this chapter) and Soviet forces on China’s border, have long represented more readily identifiable military threats to Chinese territory.
cannot be deemed a significant demilitarisation. From China’s northeast border must be regarded as token. One of 56 to improve relations. Even the removal in 1987 of one Soviet division than any substantial concession, aimed at a broader diplomatic effort reduction in the estimated 75,000 Soviet troops along the Sino-Mongolian border. However, these moves represented ‘a gesture’, rather than any substantial concession, aimed at a broader diplomatic effort to improve relations. Even the removal in 1987 of one Soviet division from China’s northeast border must be regarded as token. One of 56 cannot be deemed a significant demilitarisation.

Sandal and the SS-5 Skean, each capable of carrying a single one-megaton warhead up to ranges of about 1930 and 2900 kilometres, respectively, into Chinese territory. Not only could they threaten Beijing in the north, but also Shanghai and other urban centres further south.

The wider territorial origins of the border dispute, coupled with a traditional Russian xenophobia of the Chinese, explain Soviet fears of China despite the seemingly defensive configuration and capability of the PLA. Although the Chinese may not pose a credible threat to Soviet territory in the near term, Moscow cannot discount the longer-term possibilities of a militarily strengthened China: a China which would one day seek to reassert control over territory it had lost in a time of weakness and which, notably, includes Mongolia. Particularly disconcerting would be the prospect of a Chinese predatory action in the USSR’s Asian frontier should the opportune moment arise, such as that of a war-weakened USSR after a wider East–West military confrontation. The perceived threat of Chinese armed hostility must be held as an important determinant for Soviet military action – even if it is not usually considered a plausible action in reality. China has demonstrated in the past that it will take advantage of this type of opportunity if it believes the opponent is in no position to offer strong resistance, either of itself, or through external assistance. This occurred in 1974 when the enfeebled Saigon regime was unable to oppose Chinese seizure of the contested Paracel (Xisha) Islands. The ‘liberation’ of Tibet in 1950–51 was another example of China’s assertion of its perceived territorial rights.

That Beijing has shown itself willing to launch offensive operations, which were ostensibly in pursuit of territorial claims, has unequivocal implications for Moscow. Conscious of China’s past behaviour – including its initiation of hostilities in the 1969 Ussuri clash – and possible future Chinese strength (which might permit the revival of such behaviour), the Soviet Union cannot risk demilitarising its common border to any significant degree. But it has attempted to placate the Chinese with regard to the Ussuri River boundary and other Vladivostok speech initiatives, such as the possibility of a reduction in the estimated 75,000 Soviet troops along the Sino–Mongolian border. However, these moves represented ‘a gesture’, rather than any substantial concession, aimed at a broader diplomatic effort to improve relations. Even the removal in 1987 of one Soviet division from China’s northeast border must be regarded as token. One of 56 cannot be deemed a significant demilitarisation.

Thus despite the importance attached to resolution of the ‘Cambodian obstacle’ in improved relations, it is really the Soviet military presence to China’s north that matters most in the long term. Furthermore, with the Soviet Union’s economic centre of gravity shifting to Siberia, its military presence there is unlikely to diminish greatly. China’s demand that it should diminish is, in the apt summation of one analyst: ‘the sticking point as the Soviets need their strategic Far East seaboard to remain a Pacific naval power, and are counting on the wealth and natural resources in that region for their future economic development.’ The May 1989 Sino–Soviet summit, however, provides a cautionary note to this evaluation, as Gorbachev did promise further reductions of force levels.

Scenarios for Conflict

Beijing’s prime concern is, of course, that Soviet Far Eastern forces might be employed against China. Beijing does not regard such a war as imminent, but if it were to occur, it would take the form of an invasion from the northern border. For example, during China’s 1979 offensive against the USSR’s client, Vietnam, Deng Xiaoping stated: ‘We have long ago made full preparations for a Soviet invasion.’ PLA mobilisations and the evacuation of civilians in the northeastern border area indicated that a Soviet attack was expected from that quarter. In simulation, too, combat scenarios reflect this expectation. For example, one computer simulation exercise in the late 1980s had Soviet forces descending the North China plains and being met by a Chinese Group Army.

The speculations of Western analysts (such as Harlan Jencks, William Green, David Yost, and Kenneth Hunt whose ideas are presented below) also tend to concentrate on the Soviet threat from the north. Scenarios take a variety of forms: Jencks proposed a scenario of surgical strikes and demonstrative raids on selected targets (for example, the Lop Nor nuclear test site) on the Chinese borderlands; Green and Yost speculated on Soviet seizure of China’s remote northwest; and Hunt is one of numerous analysts who have concentrated on invasion from the northeast (the Manchuria Scenario).)

Soviet Surgical Strike with Possible Escalation to Nuclear Attack

The first Sino–Soviet military scenario which may be considered is that of a limited action in the form of a ‘surgical’ strike. Harlan Jencks included in this popularly envisaged scenario the sub-category of raids into China, to punish or pre-empt such behaviour as ag-
Soviet nuclear attack. However, Jencks has offered a possible Chinese response that is particularly suited to the professional guerrilla mode advocated in Chapter 3. The relevant passage is therefore worth quoting:

If one were to select a particular site and its method for attack, the Shuangchengzi ballistic missile launch complex would be a likely target for such a demonstrative action against China. No ground forces would be required for the operation, only aerial bombardment or a missile attack with conventional warheads. Neither the threat of determined PLA resistance nor geographic obstacles need be overcome. As for China's aerial defences, these could be suppressed through electronic counter-measures, superior Soviet air combat forces, and the decisive element of surprise. Use of a non-nuclear payload would hope to remove justification for a Chinese nuclear retaliatory strike. If China did resort to first use of nuclear weapons launched from locations that have not been crippled, including those at sea – Moscow could then justify its own retaliatory nuclear strike. The problem with this outcome is that a Soviet nuclear reply might be theoretically justifiable but hardly profitable: the action is out of all proportion to the original goal. One needs to consider what the Soviets would lose in the meantime. As already noted, military and urban-industrial targets east of the Urals are within easy range of Chinese land- and sea-based missiles. This is assuming that some will be able to penetrate Soviet missile defences in an era which has yet to see deployment of an effective strategic defensive system from either superpower. Apart from the problem of immediate damage to any of these targets, losses within Soviet central and eastern Asia could well destabilise the troublesome eastern republics. So, in this scenario, the probability of nuclear action by the Soviet Union must be assessed as very low. The Soviet Union would be deterred from employing nuclear weapons because the costs of such action far outweigh the anticipated benefits.

A situation which begins as a military gesture of warning may thereby proffer an opportunity to ‘eliminate’ the adversary, but at the risk of the Soviet Union’s own destabilisation if nuclear weapons are used, rendering escalation to nuclear war highly improbable. China, of course, may deprive the Soviet Union of a retaliatory pretext for a nuclear attack, deciding that its own geopolitical gains from such a development were not worth the damage it would sustain from a
another more decisive campaign for longer-term security gains. Rather than concentrating on their own depth defence, the Chinese would find themselves pitted against Soviet forces on Soviet terms in a cross-border battle, while the enemy’s lightning attack elsewhere could hope to reap the benefits of confusion – and thereby preclude any concerted resistance to the Soviet blitzkrieg. Given such a scenario, there is indeed much to commend the argument for Chinese commando counter-raids in response to a surgical strike, as long as the Chinese have already occupied Mongolia.

**Detachment of Border Provinces**

Even if a Soviet demonstrative action did succeed in humbling China, it would not remove the prospect of a strengthening China which one day would certainly seek to extract its revenge. For this reason the detachment of Chinese border provinces, as noted above, may be deemed a more substantive security measure.

A key ethnographic weakness which the USSR might exploit in such an operation is the composition of the frontier population. Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia are strategically sensitive border regions which are traditionally populated by China’s minority nationalities. The Deng leadership has advanced the security of these areas by recognising that their intensive ‘sinification’ during the Mao era was a source of discontent, open to enemy exploitation. Highly illustrative of Beijing’s past vulnerability to exploitation of minority sentiments is the flight of refugees from Xinjiang in 1962: 50 000 to 60 000 Turkic Muslims crossed this north-western Chinese frontier to join their ethnic compatriots under Soviet protection. The Soviets, who had encouraged the incident, used it to accuse the Chinese of maltreating minority nationalities. The Chinese, in turn, closed Soviet consulates in Ürümqi, Ili and Tacheng.

By instigating widespread rebellion against the Chinese authorities, and then intervening on behalf of the rebels, Moscow could well create a pretext for sending an invasion force into Xinjiang. A Moscow-inspired ‘liberation’ of Xinjiang would encourage similar moves by the People’s Republic of Mongolia to absorb Chinese-held Inner Mongolia. Again, Soviet armed assistance to its Mongolian ally may be expected to be forthcoming. Yet another uprising in troubled Tibet, also encouraged by these developments, might draw material support from within India, a state which maintains friendly relations with the USSR. China’s response to the Lhasa riots of 1987–8 was indicative of the seriousness with which it regarded the security of its borderlands. Protests were promptly suppressed by the PLA and Beijing made it clear that Chinese control over Tibet was not negotiable: The Dalai Lama’s subsequent proposal – not for independence but for greater autonomy – made no headway with Beijing. Needless to say his call for the demilitarisation of Tibet, including a ban of nuclear weapons there, was also brushed aside. Tibet remains a crucial buffer, not so much against India itself, but Soviet influence through India.

At the practical level, the building of roads and railways represents a more overt attempt to enhance Chinese military control over its frontiers. Announcing the completion of the Nanjiang Railway in 1984, *Beijing Review* noted that it would ‘strengthen frontier defence’. Only two weeks earlier the magazine had published an article on the PLA which drew attention to communications improvements in Tibet: ‘In Tibet, where once there was not a single highway, the PLA has built highways to Sichuan, Qinghai and Xinjiang and opened an air route between Lhasa and Beijing.’ It is worth bearing in mind that the road to Xinjiang, which had to be built across disputed territory, was of sufficient strategic importance to precipitate a war with India in 1962.

The geopolitical security implications of these borderlands have caused the Chinese government to become more circumspect about interfering with minority nationalities, preferring to promote rather than destroy their way of life. Religious freedom for minorities, and the teaching of their local languages in schools, provide obvious contrasts to such harsh measures of the past as the Red Guards’ infamous desecration of Tibetan monasteries. It is also notable that minority groups are not being unduly antagonised by population control measures. At 67 million, or about 6.7 per cent of the Chinese population, the fifty-five minority nationalities are exempt from the birth control policy of one child per couple applicable to the dominant Han culture. Nonetheless, perceived Han imperialism and exploitation – a perception historically imbedded in centuries of intermittent Han rule over minority cultures – continues to manifest. Tibet is an obvious example, but neighbouring Xinjiang provides one too. In November 1986, a delegation of Xinjiang’s minority leaders travelled to Beijing to demand greater autonomy and a larger budgetary allocation. ‘They were saying openly,’ noted a Beijing official, ‘that if Xinjiang, with its vast resources, had been an independent country, it could already have become Asia’s “fifth dragon”.’ Beijing responded by reaffirming development priorities for coastal
and inland provinces, with development of the northwest postponed until after the year 2000. That the region is found suitable for nuclear weapons testing but not speedier economic development, is a point not lost on local inhabitants. Student demonstrations have drawn attention to this aspect of their homeland’s perceived degradation. In a January 1986 demonstration, university sources reported that 3000 students gathered at the capital, Ürümqi, to protest against the nuclear tests.19

Han settlers constitute only 40 per cent of Xinjiang’s 13 million people, though they do form the majority in Ürümqi. The Central Asians who live in Xinjiang are a mixture of ethnic groups, many of whom originally came to the area through the ancient trade route known as the Silk Road. Given that the north-western frontier is the historical approach route to China and that its minority populations remain potential targets of subversion, Soviet military action from Xinjiang needs to be considered.

Xinjiang Autonomous Region is part of the Lanzhou Military Region (MR) in which possibly two of China’s 22 Group Armies are deployed, and only one of the 10 armoured divisions. Soviet deployments in the Military Districts (MDs) of Central Asia and Siberia, which were designated in 1979 as a theatre of wartime operations, comprise one tank, thirteen motor rifle and two artillery divisions, as well as air support. If the Soviets decide their objective is control of Xinjiang and the Gansu Corridor to its east, then Chinese forces are likely to be overwhelmed. As demonstrated by Donald McMillen, the open terrain of the region is not conducive to people’s war methods, and PLA deployments in the west lack the means for static defence at strategic locations.20 Such open terrain would be suitable for tank warfare, at which the Soviets excel. Kenneth Hunt also holds little hope for a Chinese defence:

Xinjiang could be attacked from Soviet territory or by operations mounted from Mongolia, west of Lanzhou, designed to cut off communications. The whole region is remote and inhospitable, but Soviet forces with their air power and strategic mobility would have huge advantages. A people’s war would have little relevance there are few people there and the PLA could hardly defend the region against determined attack until it is more nearly able to match Soviet strength.21

The objective, however, may not be confined to control of Xinjiang. An invasion from the northwest could be aimed at control of northern China as a whole because of its political, economic and military importance. The creation of a ‘Chinese rump state’, as Green and Yost describe it, would be preferable to the occupation of all of the PRC which might prove too difficult to control.22 If a rump state were indeed the object, then the magnitude of the task would greatly diminish Soviet chances for successful invasion. An invasion force would need to penetrate 7500 kilometres of hostile terrain and climate — this being the length of the historical approach route from Ürümqi to Beijing — as well as contend with PLA resistance. Apart from lacking the infrastructure to mount an attack from the north-west, the Soviets are further handicapped by the easy detection of any attempt to consolidate their relatively meagre forces at this remote entry area. The PLA would be forewarned and Soviet planners could not hope to launch a significant operation while still maintaining the element of surprise. This would suggest that the probability of invasion from the northwest must be ranked as very low. Surprise and speed are best served by an attack staged from the northeast.

The Manchuria Scenario

In its Far Eastern theatre of operations the USSR deploys more substantial forces: 42 of its 56 armoured and mechanised infantry divisions are located in the MDs of Transbaykal and Far East, and in the puppet state of Mongolia. Because their permanent presence would not arouse undue suspicion, a military exercise near the Chinese border could be used to disguise invasion preparations into the industrial provinces of Manchuria. The Soviets succeeded in defeating the Japanese Kwantung Army here in 1945. This was a six-day blitzkrieg operation whose study has been revived in Soviet military literature.23 The Soviets, with only a 2:1 superiority in personnel but far higher ratios of superiority in weaponry, staged a three-pronged attack into depths ranging from 300 to 800 kilometres. The entry zones for this combined arms operation which enveloped the Japanese were: Mongolia in the west, the Soviet maritime province to the east, and across the Amur River in the north. The distance along the three fronts spanned 5000 kilometres.

An obvious difference between the campaign against the Japanese and one that might be launched against present-day Chinese forces is that in 1945 the Soviets relied on friendly populations within the invaded territory. This cannot be expected today. Another difference pertains to advances in electronic surveillance over the past forty
years. Data from both Chinese and American satellites would provide better warning of an impending Soviet attack. (It is believed that the United States provides China with some satellite intelligence in exchange for hosting a US monitoring facility in the Tianshan mountains of Xinjiang. Information on the facility emerged in the early 1980s indicating that it is manned by Chinese technicians, and is designed to spy on Soviet missile tests at the Kazakhstan bases of Leninsk and Sary-Shagan.) Even if large-scale military manoeuvres were used as a pretext for force concentrations, close monitoring by satellite and ground stations would reveal any aberrant developments. One may conclude that Soviet reliance on surprise must be somewhat eroded. Another facet of the 1945 campaign was use of air and naval landings for rear operations. Chinese permission for US naval visits since 1986 would act as a deterrent to the planning of such action.

Western analysts such as Kenneth Hunt draw attention to Soviet air superiority as a major obstacle to effective PLA resistance, while ‘a people’s war strategy of giving up territory is obviously unsatisfactory for such an important region’. It is true that although more than half of the Chinese armed forces are deployed in the north, and are supportable from Jinan MR, the PLA lacks airborne and helicopter assault capability to counteract a deep manoeuvre operation. However, Hunt’s argument does not accord with Chinese strategy. If the Chinese operate true people’s war, Soviet air superiority would not make a great deal of difference. Air superiority had not assisted the French against the Vietminh, the United States against the Viet Cong or, for that matter, the Soviets against the Mujahideen. As for a people’s war strategy of ‘giving up territory’, insofar as this includes ‘strategic points, key cities and fortress zones’ (Chapter 1), people’s war under modern conditions does not give up territory.

Despite overall Soviet military advantages, the differences between past and present conditions outlined above, as well as Chinese familiarity with the Manchurian campaign model (Shenyang MR which spans Manchuria is, after all, the most heavily armed in the entire country), would argue against a repetition of 1945 methods. The Chinese could well take comfort in the famous quotation from Marx that ‘history, when it repeats itself, happens first as tragedy and then as farce’. For the Soviets, dependent as they are not only on strategic but operational and tactical surprise, the same deceptions cannot be expected to work twice. (For example, the crossing from Mongolia into China via the Greater Xingan Mountains rather than the traditional route expected by the Japanese High Command.)

Instead of a re-enactment of the familiar Manchurian formula, one may postulate the implementation of an invasion strategy usually associated with the European theatre of operations, past and future: the creation of a single corridor through which enemy forces would rush. Like the Schlieffen Plan, which failed in Europe in 1914 but could work in northeast China, a turning movement would be executed from a single corridor of attack launched from across the Amur River into northern Manchuria, with the objective of facilitating troop movement in a south-westerly arc toward Beijing. As indicated by Soviet military literature cited below, the strategy under conditions of modern warfare depends on the use of nuclear weapons to blast out the corridor. In effect, it would create a linear military vacuum which would be filled by radiation protected Soviet forces (especially tanks).

Certainly the operational strategy of a nuclear corridor is a familiar offensive scenario against NATO. For example, in The Offensive, published in Moscow in 1970, Colonel A.A. Sidorenko stated: ‘The primary method of attack [under conditions where nuclear weapons are employed] will be the launching of nuclear strikes and the swift advance of tank and motorized rifle podrazdeleniye [subdivision(s)] into the depth of the enemy’s defense through the breaches formed by nuclear weapons’ (emphasis in the original).

Speculation continues as to whether or not the Soviets would use nuclear weapons in this initial stage of the war. P.H. Vigor, in his most recent writings, argues the reasons the USSR would want to avoid the nuclear option:

in a non-nuclear contest between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the chances of a meaningful victory for the latter are very significantly higher than they would be if nuclear weapons were used; furthermore, in such a war it is quite impossible for the NATO forces to do any significant damage to the territory of the USSR.

Donald Mercer, drawing upon a selection of Soviet open source documents, has argued convincingly that the nuclear option is indeed the preferred Soviet strategy. He belongs to the school of thought which proposes that: (a) the Soviets prefer to avoid war with NATO; but (b) would prosecute it with full force, if it happened, in pursuit of victory; and (c) since they believe that it must eventually become nuclear, they would use nuclear weapons from the outset.
Because of the uncertainty surrounding this issue, the continued reluctance within the world's present political environment to resort to the use of nuclear weapons, and the growing acceptance by both superpowers that they must work toward reducing nuclear force levels, one may further postulate that the corridor of advance into China will not be nuclear but chemical. Unlike nuclear weapons, chemical agents have been used as battlefield weapons. First employed on a large scale in the First World War, subsequent instances of chemical warfare have included its use by the Japanese against China in the 1930s and 1940s, while its most recent and obvious application had been in the 1980s Iran–Iraq war. Soviet use or supply of chemical weapons had reportedly occurred in Afghanistan, Cambodia and Laos.

Whether or not the Soviets chose to do so, they would be capable of creating a chemical corridor as they are well advanced in the technology of modern chemical systems. The Soviet stockpile of chemical weapons — the size of which was acknowledged for the first time in December 1987 — is said to be about 50,000 tons. This corresponds to the American arsenal. In chemical combat units, however, the Soviets are better prepared than the Americans. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, by the mid-1980s the Soviets had 85,000 such units compared to only 7,000 in the US forces. If the American comparison is so poor, any Chinese chemical capability can only fare worse. The PLA would do well to learn from Soviet chemical preparedness, which is a total, integrated effort, not simply a means of "dealing with or defending against what in NATO is referred to as "Chemical Defence".29 A.C. Hallett's account of the extent of this preparedness supports the proposition that the Soviets are indeed capable of creating a chemical corridor into Manchuria:

The Soviet battlefield commander is supported by a massive Chemical Warfare Organisation which will provide him with specially trained support troops capable of providing specialist advice on all chemical warfare matters, carrying out reconnaissance to define clear areas or the limits of contamination and to provide a personnel or equipment decontamination facility. All officers and men of all arms of the Soviet forces are expected to be able to carry out certain tasks to protect themselves from the effects of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Within every Soviet Army unit, and formation, Air Force, Naval base and major warship there is, as an integral part of its complement, a unit or sub-unit dedicated to NBC Defence tasks . . . The primary task of these specialist forces is to increase the Soviet Armed Forces' ability to survive the effects of all weapons of mass destruction . . . Furthermore, the operational and tactical groupings and manoeuvres of the Soviet ground forces are specifically tailored to make it possible to rapidly exploit the use of CW [chemical warfare] weapons and to reduce the vulnerability of the Soviet forces to their effect.30

In sum, the Soviets have invested a great deal of time and effort on chemical arsenals, and have demonstrated that they are prepared to employ chemical warfare in the field should that be required. (Whether they would be prepared to use such weapons against another chemical power is not so clear.) Evidence tends to show that in practice chemical weapons can be effective in war, and there is no psychological barrier of world opinion comparable to nuclear usage. Given China's relative lack of resistance, there is a high probability that the Soviets would use their chemical arsenals instead of nuclear weapons.

The requirement for a chemical corridor of up to two week's lethality becomes apparent when viewed against the problems posed by a conventional invasion scenario of Manchuria under contemporary (late 1980s) conditions.

An invasion force comprising the available border strength of up to 56 armoured and mechanised divisions would be mobile, compact and self-contained. A 150-kilometre-wide attack would move at least 400 kilometres down the central Manchurian plain to Qiqihar. For 300 kilometres the invaders are unlikely to meet any serious resistance. After this point, re-supply becomes vulnerable. The 300-kilometre distance must be crossed by 2000 to 3000 tons of re-supply material. Petrol, oil and lubricants (POL) are heavy items, as is water. Moreover, the supply line is not normally protected by armour. In identifying the Soviets' logistical vulnerability, Li Jian, deputy commander of Beijing MR's artillery unit, gave the following estimations:

- The destruction of one of the 20 water-carrying vehicles will cause either 68 tanks or 136 vehicles to grind to a halt; the destruction of one refuelling vehicle will cause 7–8 APCs [armoured personnel carriers] to stop . . . the destruction of one of the four oil pipe lines in a Soviet Front Army will paralyse 4 to 5 mechanised divisions.31

A people's war under modern conditions becomes important as the
invasion force approaches a theatre depth of about 300 kilometres. At this depth, the Chinese would be prepared to resist with dug-in defensive positions (the 'prelaid battlefields' mentioned in Chapter 1). Although these may not be expected to defeat the invaders, they would pose a delay and therefore disrupt the momentum of advance upon which a deep manoeuvre campaign depends for its success. The advance elements of the Soviet attack could reach this defensive shield in 30 to 40 hours; some would probably be parachuted in. The armoured force can be expected to take three to five days. Soviet requirements would be to break through the Chinese defence and to protect a vulnerable supply tail.

For these reasons a chemical corridor appears the better military option. Anticipating Chinese defensive positions, Soviet military planners would make them part of the cleared corridor. Instead of a conventional blitzkrieg, they would lay down active chemical agents along a corridor whose proportions could be as much as 500 kilometres wide and 1300 kilometres long. The military requirements for such an operation call for 'persistent' chemical agents which remain active for longer periods of time — perhaps days — compared to the 'non-persistent' variants. Taking into account the spread of contamination by prevailing wind systems, a chemical corridor laid into northeast China could threaten a maximum of 90 million lives. Where chemical agents are not subject to dispersal by wind — such as persistent 'sticky' agents which cling to structures, vehicles and personnel — there are still considerable operational difficulties for the defence and danger to exposed civilian populations.

Possible Chinese responses to such military initiatives are not easily proposed. Certainly, they could not indefinitely cede territory. In the absence of their own chemical weapons — or at least those more advanced systems that might be expected to deter the Soviets — they might seek recourse to use nuclear weapons. In the local environment, the Chinese would almost certainly retaliate with tactical nuclear weapons, and tank concentrations make good targets. Knowing the strength of Soviet capability and intentions, China could be expected to threaten nuclear retaliation before Soviet use of chemical warfare — at the pre-combat phase of force concentrations; for example. Or it may do so unilaterally: Beijing could make the deterrent obvious by stating it. Again, assuming the Soviets had not yet deployed an effective ballistic missile defence shield, such a threat would constitute a deterrent because it would be countervalue — that is, cities would be the targets.

Clearly, world opinion would condemn an overtly offensive Soviet attack, especially if resultant civilian casualties are in the tens of millions. The international community might support China, reasoning that if a state does not possess chemical weapons to retaliate in kind, then in pursuit of its defence it can use tactical nuclear weapons provided it does not escalate to the strategic level. Such a policy, it can be noted, remained the strategy of NATO at 1989: even within the restrictions of the 1987 treaty on intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF), short-range forces — those with less than a 500-kilo-metres range — are permitted. However, support of the Chinese action would involve a major shift in international perceptions of nuclear weapons. For the first time since 1945 the 'nuclear taboo' would be breached. But the course of events described above can be expected to render such a response plausible.

If the Soviets proceed with the chemical corridor operation, which the PRC would not tolerate, either Soviet Asia would have to absorb Chinese nuclear strikes, or Soviet attacking forces would be subjected to PLA use of battlefield nuclear weapons. In the former case, the 110 medium- and intermediate-range missiles in the PRC inventory, if delivered successfully, might be expected to be highly damaging to the USSR's isolated urban and industrial centres such as Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Irkutsk, Krasnoyarsk, Novokuznetsk, Novosibirsk, Omsk Tashkent and Alma Ata. Many of these cities are also within range of China's medium bomber and fighter-bomber forces. Additionally the Trans-Siberian and BAM railways would also be vulnerable to interdiction at concentration points like marshalling yards. As noted on earlier, the costs to Soviet Asian political stability and its growing industrial-strategic value must be weighed against the benefits of a Soviet invasion into Manchuria. The risk of nuclear retaliation applies also to other courses of Soviet action: for example, a swift in-and-out incursion to destroy nuclear, technological or industrial targets in China. The Soviets could not be sure that such an incursion would be sufficient to disable a Chinese retaliatory response against the Soviet Far East.

In the case where the PLA use battlefield nuclear weapons against advancing forces on Chinese soil, the employment of air-burst enhanced radiation weapons would be particularly well suited for defensive tactics against armour. This seems a likely course of action when one considers PLA vulnerability to the typical air-land battle scenario of massive Soviet tank assaults under heavy air cover. Specifically, Soviet military doctrine suggests use of the Operational...
Manoeuvre Group (OMG), whose strength can be as large as a front, and whose intense firepower is an operational art in itself: aptly named ‘Integrated Fire Destruction of the Enemy’ (KOPP), the aim is to breach Chinese defences through the shock effect of integrated conventional and nuclear firepower. Meanwhile Ground–Air Strike Teams (LPZUs) would perform as advance or follow-up surprise tactical units. One study which details precisely this application of a modern Soviet blitzkrieg against China concedes that operations even of that order are not infallible: ‘For instance, the insertion of an OMG requires support and protection as it is vulnerable to enemy countermeasures.’ Recalling the point made in Chapter 2 about anti-blitzkrieg operations, it is indeed imperative that agile forces conduct guerilla actions at selected points against enemy flanks. Further, in the light of guerilla nuclear warfare advanced in Chapter 3 and the very prospect of ‘Integrated Fire Destruction of the Enemy’, those guerilla actions will have to be nuclear. As stated in Chapter 2, if the blitzkrieg’s decisive breakthrough can be prevented through PLA harassment, enemy reliance on a campaign of speed and surprise has been undermined, and therefore the attainment of their military objective within the shortest possible time.

Even if the objective was attained, victory is not assured. Supposing the objective were seizure of ‘the Ruhr of China’, as the northeastern peninsula has often been called, and the installation of a pro-Soviet regime in the capital adjoining this region. In that case forces of resistance could still operate effectively from other industrial and political bases. Chinese industry is becoming more decentralised – the northeast accounts for 36 per cent of China’s total industrial production compared to 42 per cent in 1966. As regards the possibility of the seizure of Beijing, the heart of China may not stay in the capital city. There is no historical or cultural significance to Beijing being the seat of power as might be the case with London or Moscow. With regard to the Mao Mausoleum, evacuating forces could take Mao’s body with them. The flight from the capital is neither unprecedented nor militarily unfeasible. Deng Xiaoping took refuge among his military supporters in the southern army when he was disgraced the second time in 1976; and the divisional structure then maintained south of the 35th Parallel remains powerfully intact. Whether the Chinese would abandon Beijing and allow ‘face’ to be lost, is another matter. Recent military thinking about the importance of being competitive in the initial stage of war, and hence the immediate relevance of GNW as hypothesised in this book, indicates that the Chinese will choose to defend Beijing. This is assuming that their forces are not diverted elsewhere, as may well happen if the Soviets back a Vietnamese action in China’s south. (The Soviets, too, must be credited with the capacity for surprise and innovation.) For present purposes, it is enough to observe that Chinese military resistance can survive after the occupation of Beijing.

One may conclude that if Chinese defences were chemically or otherwise overcome in the forward combat zone, and even if the PLA chose not to resort to tactical nuclear counter-attacks which they most surely would, then the traditional option of strategic retreat – despite the enormous sacrifice of ground – will have to be employed, as will GNW. In effect, this means that the whole of China becomes a theatre of war, with the Soviet occupation of the northeastern a mere tactical victory. In this context, 56 Soviet divisions cannot prevail. This reasoning would suggest that the Soviets would not embark on the campaign in the first place, thereby rendering invasion from the northeast highly improbable.

Given the difficulties which can be identified for the whole range of available Soviet ‘conventional’ options, it must then appear more probable that in the event of irresolvable dispute, Soviet war objectives in China would tend towards ‘totality’. In this, and despite the surety of adverse world opinion, together with the prospect of a full-scale people’s war, one cannot underestimate the Soviet xenophobic fear of the Chinese. In view of the Soviet invasion scenarios discussed so far, it would appear that effective military action by the USSR on China demands an all-out attack conducted by weapons of mass destruction, probably nuclear but at least chemical, as the only means which can avoid the possibility of a deluge of PLA upon the USSR in the long term. It would take an inordinately brave (or stupid) Soviet general to choose the attrition-based approach which the basic Chinese model of protracted people’s war represents, and which the lessons from Afghanistan must provide clear warning. As if their experience of conventionally armed guerilla opponents in Afghanistan was not enough, the additional threat of GNW in China would make matters worse. Soviet war theory demands a quick victory, and this goal must prove elusive in the absence of Soviet decisive action in the initial stage of war.

A Full-Scale Soviet Attack Employing Weapons of Mass Destruction
As indicated above, Soviet divisions along the border – while adequate under present conditions for defence of Soviet Far Eastern
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territory - are insufficient for an invasion of China. However, Far Eastern Soviet strategic forces which, in 1988, included 366 SLBMs, an estimated 440 ICBMs, 132 IRBMs (subject to removal by 1991 under the 1987 INF treaty), and about 160 bombers, offer this option of massive attack. Given the earlier low probability assessments, it is unlikely that the Soviet Union would attack and invade China unless the Chinese themselves had invaded Soviet territory. Therefore, among the northern conflict scenarios, that which must be considered the highest probability is a Sino–Soviet war beginning with border conflicts which, unlike those of 1969, would escalate into full-scale war.

The trigger to yet another border dispute may be as innocent as a helicopter crossing or as deliberate as a PLA incursion into Soviet (Chinese-claimed) territory. Escalation beyond these geographic and military limits could be the outcome of a Soviet decision to take advantage of its nuclear superiority to punish a recalcitrant China. Writing in the late 1970s, William Kennedy suggested the strategic advantages which the Soviets might hope to gain through nuclear weapons, especially if the Chinese could be induced – and thereby blamed – to be the first to use such weapons in battle. If the Soviets were successful, 'conditions would exist for a negotiated peace by which China would be stripped of a nuclear capability and condemned to permanent inferiority'.

Further, Kennedy stated that the USSR is unlikely to be deterred by the prospect of its own civilian casualties from a successful Chinese nuclear strike: 'the question must be asked whether possible civilian casualties would deter the Soviet government from what it considered to be a necessary course of action. If so, it would be the first time in Soviet, or Russian, history that a decision was made on that basis.' Green and Yost, in considering the Soviet 'genocide option' against China, weigh the military advantage of a nuclear strike – disruption of Chinese C3I through electromagnetic pulse – against the disadvantages of a possibly severe fallout on the USSR itself and Japan (an American ally). This, they point out, could happen even with low-yield weapons, unless 'the Soviets tailored the warheads to maximize blast and prompt radiation (and also carefully exploited atmospheric conditions)'. Most analysts agree that 'fallout uncertainty' would also diminish the option of biological weapons, particularly the bacteriological variety which could be used to disable China agriculturally. The scale of damage – famine, world censure and the inability of China to function at its most basic level even after surrender – precludes this option. Chemical warfare, by comparison, would minimise fallout and leave China's infrastructure intact. It is therefore conceived to be the most plausible instrument of a Soviet full-scale attack on China. In their analysis, Green and Yost draw attention to (a) the historical record of Stalinist purges to support the argument (also advanced by William Kennedy) that the Soviets would be willing to absorb casualties of their own and (b) the existence of unofficial Soviet sources which 'are continually cited as making explicit threats to wage against China (if necessary) “a total war entailing the use of all means of warfare, including the most destructive ones”'. Such types of evidence are not entirely convincing. The first assumes the continued prevalence of Stalinist perceptions in the USSR – or rather, that these are the norm and more enlightened thinking an aberration; the second that the 'unofficial sources' were not a form of deterrence signalling (as one might expect them to be), but actual contingency plans for war. P.H. Vigor suggests otherwise. Writing in the context of nuclear war in the European theatre, he states:

The strains of accepting casualties ... whether among the Soviet armed forces or the Soviet civilian population, and the risk of the breakdown of morale among them if these casualty rates are to be deemed acceptable, are far too great to be viewed with equanimity by any Party leader or Soviet general.

It is worth noting that whatever the Soviet resolve to absorb casualties, it cannot begin to compare with the Chinese view of their own casualties: according to their people's war strategy, the Chinese are prepared to sacrifice 500 million people if necessary.

Besides the question of Soviet morale and comparative views on casualties, there are also the effects on the East–West nuclear balance to be considered in any Soviet action (including chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction) which would risk a Chinese nuclear retaliatory strike. PLA nuclear forces could inflict significant damage to Soviet Asia where nuclear weapons research and production facilities are sited, thereby subtracting from the Warsaw Pact effort to maintain parity with the American alliance at a time when negotiated arms reductions are becoming the rule rather than the exception. The overall conclusion which may be drawn is that there is no advantage in tempting a Chinese nuclear response or, for that matter, plunging 56 divisions into China under a conventional operation as had Napoleon or Hitler in their attempts to reach Moscow. China would, indeed, 'swallow' them up.

An important question which remains is the likelihood of a Sino-
Soviet war eventuating from causes other than cross-border hostilities. A Soviet invasion of Manchuria could be a likely consequence of a Sino-Vietnamese conflict should the USSR-Vietnam Security Treaty induce the Soviets to come to the rescue of the Vietnamese. Under such circumstances the Mass Attack Scenario diminishes in probability but the Manchuria Scenario increases. This scenario is worth hypothesising, not only because of its plausibility in the unlikely event that a Sino-Soviet war breaks out, but for the purpose of examining China's response. It provides a useful vehicle for demonstrating the practice of GNW within the strategy of people's war under modern conditions, especially regarding nuclear ambush, the active civil defence force, the deployment of low-yield devices and small dispersed groups, and the multi-layered deterrent.

The Manchuria Scenario and GNW

In this scenario the Soviets conduct pre-emptive nuclear strikes on silos in northern China, successfully destroying 90 per cent of all known Chinese ICBM sites. Nuclear air strikes present a logical solution to the preparatory phase for a land invasion by mechanised forces. G. Jacobs' own scenario of Sino-Soviet war concurs that these initial air strikes would be conducted as 'part of the Soviet Long-Range Aviation's (LRA - Dal'nyaya aviatsiya) effort to neutralize the PLA's strategic missiles'.

An action of such magnitude as a Soviet counter-silo strike would shock the world into a state of high military alert and frenzied diplomatic efforts to prevent further hostilities. If the strategy of guerrilla nuclear warfare were adopted by the Chinese, Beijing, to the world community's relief, would do nothing. There would be no retaliatory second-strike from surviving forces, not even the slightest hint that the Chinese leadership could be contemplating such a course of action.

In the days immediately following the silo attacks, the Chinese press is likely to emerge as a powerful tool in the propaganda war against the Soviets. Besides publicising images of national mourning, it would remind the world (and the Kremlin in particular) of China's long-standing resolve to sacrifice millions of Chinese lives rather than succumb to nuclear aggression. This public profession of resolve needs to be understood within the context of private recourse to that which the Chinese know and understand best in military tradition: 'Apparent confusion is a product of good order; apparent cowardice, of courage; apparent weakness, of strength.' The psychological component of people's war under modern conditions once again becomes evident.

A policy whereby China neither calls for a ceasefire in order to negotiate a peace settlement, nor launches some form of retaliation, intends to confuse Soviet calculations. China would speak of sacrificial resolve but do nothing to risk testing it. This inaction in response to Soviet offensive action would draw international repercussions: World opinion scorns blatant Soviet aggression (justified by the Kremlin as necessary to ensure the inoperability of a volatile nuclear power), and commends Chinese self-control under conditions of extreme provocation. The United States, not wishing to become embroiled in the war, avoids a military response but uses every possible diplomatic pressure in favour of China. Therefore, a China which finds itself deprived of its land-based strategic forces has, in fact, preserved lives, internal cohesion, and international approval.

The military exploitation of these carefully created conditions within modern people's war may be postulated as follows. Instead of resisting by conventionally armed people's war methods in the northeast, PLA detachments await the Soviet tank spearhead as it emerges from its chemically protected corridor deep in Chinese territory. Chinese enhanced radiation weapons, employed from protective dug-in positions, slow the blitzkrieg by inflicting heavy tank crew casualties. The neutron device thereby becomes the 'people's war nuclear weapon'.

The main area of PLA operations, however, need not be in the northeast where the Soviets would expect to find resistance. Taking advantage of Soviet force diversion in Manchuria, the Chinese are more likely to sink troop and tank concentrations into the Soviet puppet state of Mongolia. This positions the PLA at the enemy's rear. The Chinese invasion of Mongolia would need to be accompanied by large-scale commando operations against Soviet communications and supply links. The PLA's principal supply base in the adjoining Chinese Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia (a priority target area for the enemy) should act as a further distraction for Soviet planners hitherto focused on the Manchurian campaign.

As a matter of deliberate strategy, it is unlikely that Beijing would resort to nuclear weapons beyond those which are infantry-portable, knowing that the Soviet Union could not afford to release its strategic nuclear weapons lest it weaken itself against the Americans. The resultant nuclear stalemate would lend itself to the guerrilla nuclear mode, as well as a continuation of conventional guerrilla resistance by
the Army. The Soviets would be forced to fight by China’s terms of attrition and nuclear limitation.

Taking advantage of PLA troop diversions in Mongolia, the Soviet command could decide to attempt the capture of Beijing. In doing so it would hope to impose the, hitherto elusive, ‘swift decision’ on a dangerously delaying war and this scenario presumes that this action is taken. Unable to muster sufficient defending forces, China’s political centre of resistance must then be relocated – most favourably to Wuhan in central China.

From there, the CPC would be in a position to launch a protracted war of resistance against the Soviet occupation forces in the north, whilst fending off periodic Vietnamese raids on the south-western frontier.

Soviet forces would now occupy most of China north of the 35th parallel, and need make no offer to withdraw. The Chinese could not threaten the use of strategic nuclear weapons from their hidden SSBNs, because if they pursued their threat, the Soviets would respond in kind. Hence, a stalemate exists which the Chinese must break by some new initiative, most obviously by the PLA’s resort to people’s war under modern conditions, using guerilla nuclear warfare.

Like the Vietnamese Communists who were supplied from adjacent territory in China during the First Indochina War against the French, the Cambodian rebels through Thailand during the Third Indochina War, and the Mujahideen via Pakistan, resistance forces in Manchuria would be supplied with arms from sanctuaries in the unoccupied zones to the west and south of Manchuria. Supply dumps for nuclear munitions might be concealed in caves carved into the hillsides. These arms would need to be pre-positioned by the locally based forces, in readiness for PLA commando infiltrations as well as for larger counter-offensive operations when the enemy has been weakened.

Outside enemy occupied territory, the Chinese resistance would be co-ordinated from central, eastern and southern China. Because of the underground shelter system created by the Chinese leadership after the Sino–Soviet border war of 1969, war production for the PLA could be continued in tunnels under every major Chinese-held city. Small underground factories could be operated within a civil defence structure which is both passive in the provision of underground shelter for the protection of the inhabitants, and active in organising those inhabitants to supply the resistance. More than 400 million civilians capable of bearing arms or providing ancillary mili-

Guerilla nuclear warfare requires the PLA’s nuclear special forces to be integrated in the ‘web’ of main force troops. This also means a dispersed deployment. Dispersion of China’s nuclear guerillas holds the benefit of decreasing their vulnerability to Soviet tactical nuclear reprisals, and improving their surprise attack capabilities as the enemy can never be sure of the whereabouts of this ‘scattered’ force. By comparison, enemy assault patrols into PLA-held areas could not be expected to achieve surprise because they would never be unobserved. Intelligence gathered through village networks would enable the PLA to plan pre-emptive attacks.

If the PLA employed nuclear weapons of only sub-kiloton to two-kiloton yields under favourable weather conditions (presuming the selective incorporation of Western technology, meteorological conditions could be determined by radar vehicles which accompany short-range missile launchers), casualties among its own forces and civilian populations would be minimised. Radiation from a one-kiloton air burst, for example, is calculated to extend only as far as the heat and blast, or perhaps 450 metres from the target, with negligible fallout.43

Battle discipline would demand that regular forces would not be authorised to fire nuclear weapons unless compensating for casualties in the nuclear assault echelons. During counter-offensives, this specialist assault force would be charged with the responsibility of advising the commander whether rapid exploitation of a nuclear
breakthrough in enemy defences was feasible. Specialist advice and
decentralised control, in which local commanders are given the
freedom to exploit tactical nuclear victories, may be expected to lead
to greater flexibility than normal military practices permit. There¬
fore, Chinese nuclear guerillas would not need to risk endanger¬
ing their position by radio communications to command headquarter¬
s, nor would they lose time awaiting authorisation to continue the
advance. Requests for reserves and casualty evacuation forces would
be best relayed via militia operating at the closest site within the base
area network.

The inevitable effect of Chinese tactical nuclear attacks would be
an enemy casualty rate in excess of any gains which could be derived
or projected from the occupation. Reduction of casualties would be a
matter of difficulty for the Soviets. Would they issue full protective
clothing and vehicles to all operational troops at the cost of degraded
combat efficiency? Or would they chance the occasional nuclear
ambush in the hope that the Chinese could be subdued by superior
firepower?

The first option would constitute an expensive overreaction. Un¬
like Chinese troops who need to be protected only for the short
duration of their attack, Soviet soldiers would have to wear NBC
suits for long periods. Even if these are the light-weight suits issued to
reconnaissance elements, they would still retard responsiveness to
surprise guerilla methods. The war would be further protracted, as
the Chinese would wish. On the other hand, the Soviets might decide
to retaliate with nuclear weapons, for example, enhanced radiation
explosives, to force the Chinese into prolonged use of NBC suits. The
problem with this counter-argument is that the Soviets must advance
into the territory they have contaminated (thereby impeding them¬
selves) if they are to fulfil the objective of neutralising rebel-held
areas. Besides, even if the Soviets used standard fission weapons or
chemical devices, PLA troops would not oblige by remaining to give
battle, but would evacuate these areas in order to strike unexpectedly
from another quarter. The role of the nuclear guerilla is not to defend
territory, but to attack the enemy. ('Attack' here is taken to embrace
a variety of methods, such as sabotage, ambush and carefully devised
propaganda. As commandos they are expected to plan for the most
effective method of attack which may not always take the form of
direct encounters with enemy troops. In short, simply because they
are the tactical nuclear specialists does not mean they engage in
indiscriminate nuclear attacks.) By extension, the role of the PLA as
a whole is to fight a defensive war by using territory to confound the
opponent, in keeping with the policy of victory denial as distinct from
the denial of territory.

If the Soviets could find no enemy combatant on whom to impose
the need for extensive use of NBC suits, they might fire nuclear
weapons as a matter of course when ambushed. However, it is in the
nature of guerilla strikes that they are swiftly executed. The PLA not
only chooses when and where it will give battle, but also when it will
disengage. It only attacks, it does not wait to 'finish' the fight if the
enemy proves resilient during a particular engagement. If it did, it
would be fighting by the enemy's terms which is against the people's
war ethos. Hence an army which attacks without warning, and
without regard for the military convention of holding ground, cannot
be forced to wear NBC suits for long periods. However, the Chinese
forces would need an ample supply of radiation detection devices to
tell them when it was safe not to wear NBC suits or to enter areas that
could have been contaminated. It is not known how many of these
devices the PLA possesses. Large-scale production of radiation de¬
tection devices would be an indicator of GNW intentions.

The second Soviet option of accepting nuclear ambushes as a
tactical loss, but hardly a strategic impediment, does not accord
with the calculus of psychological warfare against an invasion force for
whom control of territory is crucial. The combat infantry soldier will
remain central to the military task of occupying and holding ground
for political objectives. If soldiers believe they are being unnecess¬
arily sacrificed, they become easily unnerved and begin to lose the
mental stamina required for their mission. If that, then their enemy
the nuclear guerilla - has succeeded in robbing them of the will to
fight. Short of embarking on a strategic nuclear strike, the USSR
would have to extricate itself from China before other enemies,
including internal ones, have time to digest the methods of Chinese
success.

It can also be argued that the Soviets might resort to a pattern
attack with short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM) with ranges up to
500 kilometres. The impact of these few SRBM on the geographical
depths and numerical abundance of the Chinese resistance must be
deemed negligible. As a military measure it lacks logic; as a psycho¬
logical ploy it could well recoil on the Soviets by hardening Chinese
resolve to resist, and eliciting further international condemnation. In
effect, Soviet use of SRBM would provide the Chinese with a con¬
siderable propaganda victory, for it is one thing to defend one's
sovereign territory with every means available, but quite another for a foreign occupation force to vent its irritation through nuclear attacks.

The problems associated with a Soviet nuclear response are compounded by an issue raised earlier. If the Soviets used nuclear weapons this would represent an escalation of hostilities to the point of threatening Manchuria’s industrial infrastructure: the industrial capacity must remain intact after a pro-Soviet regime has been installed in Beijing and Manchuria, otherwise Soviet support of an economically crippled client state of this magnitude would render the costs of victory excessive (as did the support of Germany by the UK in the aftermath of the Second World War). Guerilla nuclear warfare would itself destroy much of the industrial capacity – as would a simple scorched-earth policy – if the Soviets provoked escalation. This factor of maintaining the industrial infrastructure increases GNW’s deterrent effect, for the Soviets would have more to lose from an industrially disabled Manchuria than would the guerilla forces who are reliant on a simpler, decentralised, infrastructure within the Chinese heartland. The Chinese resistance would not choose to initiate escalation to this level because its threat is more valuable than its enactment: better to deter the Soviets from escalating the level of nuclear combat than to jeopardise the nation’s rehabilitation to pre-war industrial levels. The objective of GNW is to persuade the Soviets to withdraw, preferably without sacrificing the fruits of the post-1978 modernisations programme. On the other hand, if Sino-Soviet hostilities did escalate to countervalue strikes on urban industrial centres, it would be just as well that China remained a primitive, decentralised economy. It would represent the best adaptation to survival under countervalue nuclear conditions.

Guerilla Nuclear Warfare would not result in ‘quick’ victory but after perhaps three years of this form of resistance, the Soviets would be under enormous political, military, and economic pressure to open peace negotiations.

From the above investigation of scenarios it may be concluded that even though a full-scale Soviet attack, employing weapons of mass destruction, was evaluated as the most probable of all the northern threat scenarios, it is not the most probable in the speculative context of China’s next major war being triggered from any direction. The Soviets cannot afford to lose parity with the United States through mass attack on China. They can, however, afford to employ sub-strategic nuclear weapons in purported defence of a threatened ally such as Vietnam.

When one considers that the ultimate success of a modern people’s war strategy depends on dissuading a potential enemy from resorting to physical force, one needs to understand why the Soviet Union – whether under the enlightened leadership of Gorbachev or a Stalin-like successor – would be deterred from attacking China.

Soviet Strategic Weaknesses

This returns discussion to the underlying rationale of people’s war as the means for overcoming a materially powerful adversary. One is struck by the vast amount written – and therefore critical attention focused – on Soviet military superiority vis-à-vis China. Yet such an observation describes the problem of how a poorly equipped military power can best defend against a better armed adversary, not the probable war outcome between ill-matched adversaries. Certainly manpower levels, mobility, firepower and other relevant data must be carefully assessed. Such information is crucial for formulating a strategy based on knowledge of one’s enemy as well as of one’s own forces. It is that strategy which will ultimately determine which side is ‘stronger’ or ‘weaker’. Used to predict a victor rather than choose a strategy, comparative military strength per se becomes an unreliable predictive model because it is based on:

(a) the untenable assumption of similarity of type (if not degree) between contestants,
(b) the assumed ‘bipolarity’ of the contest itself, and ignores
(c) ‘local factors’ (Chapter 1, ‘Peoples War Under Chinese Conditions’) and
(d) strategies.

The limitations of (a) and (d) are well expressed by Richard Simpkin:

If you pit two smaller but unequal organisms or machines against each other – a heavy tank against a light tank, a bantamweight boxer against a heavyweight, a female tennis champion against a male one – the probability is that the stronger will win. This is especially so if they are constrained to similar behaviour by their nature or by ‘the rules of the game’. If two essentially dissimilar opponents are matched and their behaviour limited only by their respective physical characteristics – a tank-hunting team against a tank, a helicopter against a submarine, or a guerilla force against an organised one – you have a completely different kind of contest, one which the seemingly weaker contender is apt to win.44
With regard to the second assumption (b), Frederick H. Hartmann points out: 'capability analysis always ends up being an essentially bilateral comparison'. He reminds us that it derives from the bipolar focus of the post-1945 Cold War era which concerned the superpower relationship - not China. 'Yet we live in a world in which two nations confronting one another necessarily leave flanks and rear in great jeopardy (since the world is round).'

By refusing to allow the traditional focus on bilateral capability to obscure peripheral assistance to a strategic solution, this exposure of 'flanks and rear' may be identified as an inherent strategic weakness open to exploitation. In the 'round world' terms of 'flanks and rear', the Soviet Union is just as prone to a two- or multi-front war, as is China. There are also economic, diplomatic, technological and socio-political flanks and rears to consider. Even if the Soviet Union is militarily superior, the use of superior military muscle would only further strain its more delicate economic constitution. It would encourage adverse world opinion and expose Soviet technological underdevelopment to the Western powers who at present merely speculate about it (just as China's 1979 Vietnam venture revealed the PLA's shortcomings). Moreover - through the use of conscript reserves who are, by numerical necessity, non-Russian - it would demonstrate the degree to which ethnic divisions compromise the efficiency of the Soviet military machine. The major constraint in a Sino-Soviet war is the risk factor of US opportunism against a militarily expended USSR. The United States would prefer to remain uninvolved in a major armed conflict between the Soviets and Chinese as it would emerge the dominant world power after such a war. This provides a significant disincentive to the USSR to initiate one.

The primary search for enemy weakness is the search for ways of avoiding war, for devaluing the military contest. This accords with the psychological strategy of a contemporary people's war presented in Chapter 1, and epitomised by Sun Tzu's recommendation: 'To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.' Because the Soviet Union cannot ignore the risks of initiating war with China, any military ambitions it may have harboured would surely have been subdued.

The Contest of Wartime Survival and Recovery

From the perspective of a modern people's war strategy, the above conclusions are reinforced by underlying strategic factors which favour China's ability to endure, and recover from, wartime conditions more readily than the USSR. China's lower level of industrialisation, as well as a greater geographic dispersion from which energy resources may be tapped, suggests that the PRC will prove less vulnerable than the USSR to the disruptive effects of general war.

In 1978, the year in which China embarked on its modernisation drive for the twenty-first century, the Soviet Union's economy rested firmly on an abundant and diverse energy base. Soviet energy needs were met by coal (41 per cent), oil (28 per cent), natural gas (24 per cent) and the remainder by hydropower and nuclear energy. The USSR is a net exporter of energy. As will be shown below, it is not the abundance of Soviet reserves that is questioned. Of interest is the expectation of their future extraction in Soviet Asia which, in turn, renders this region strategically vulnerable in relation to neighbouring China. The People's Republic, also a resource-rich nation in oil, coal and natural gas, does not expect to achieve developed nation status until well into the twenty-first century. In the meantime, its position of relative economic backwardness offers greater protection against the socio-economic losses of war.

Both the Soviet Union and China are far less dependent on the import of strategic raw materials than are the United States or Europe. However these comparatively self-sufficient Communist nations do exhibit differences of emphasis in their external economic needs. While the Soviet Union must only import natural rubber, China's import dependence extended to approximately fifteen strategic materials in 1980. However, additional mineral resources - including rare metals - have since been discovered and mined. An official report published in 1987 suggested that while these are sufficient for China's needs 'there still exist quite a few problems in the exploitation and utilization of natural resources in this country'. Strategic metals are also mined in the Soviet Central Asian republic of Kazakhstan which adjoins China. If China were in a position to act upon its territorial claims to parts of this republic (up to Lake Balkhash), it appears probable that it might also incorporate the whole of Kazakhstan as an autonomous region within the PRC. Not only would Beijing acquire an assured source of strategic rare metals that are not adequately exploited in China, but it would also deprive the Soviet Union of its supplies from this source and, as a bonus, deprive the USSR of a major grain producing region - a matter which will be discussed later.

In terms of oil, China is the world's sixth largest producer and
Asia's largest. In 1985, it extracted twice as much as the region's second largest producer, Indonesia, and by 1995 the PRC is projected to produce about three times as much as either Indonesia or India. Over that decade Chinese oil production is expected to continue to exceed domestic consumption. This would indicate a capacity to stockpile or to earn valuable foreign exchange by export even after meeting internal needs. In time of war, petroleum products will be needed to sustain transport. That China exports refined petroleum products as well as crude oil, shows the potential to rely on reserves of its own processed fuel, but only at the present low level of industrialisation - as modernisation proceeds, Chinese oil demand will increase.

Comparatively, in the mid-1980s China produced only one-fifth of Soviet oil output, and proven reserves are higher in the USSR than in the PRC. Although the Soviet Union is the world's largest oil producer, production peaked at 616 million tons in 1983 (whereas in China it continued to increase, with the 1987 production figure at 134 million tons). Soviet oil output has been declining since 1983 for a number of reasons, including lack of advanced technology, shortage of capital, and the location of potential new oil fields in inhospitable and remote areas.

These trends indicate future Soviet substitution of natural gas for oil as the obvious solution, given that the USSR is also the possessor of the world's largest natural gas reserves. Indeed it is a solution which the Soviets have begun to implement. But like oil, extraction of this resource entails high expense: reserves are concentrated in western Siberia. As the more easily tapped resources in European USSR (west of the Ural Mountains) are exhausted, the Soviet Union's energy requirements must be met in Soviet Asia (east of the Urals). Yet the cost of extraction in Soviet Asia has been estimated as roughly twice as much for the same returns. The Soviets themselves admitted in 1988 that their goal to develop the Soviet Far East and northeast, close to the Soviet border. The largest deposit representing a third of the country's reserves lies in Shanxi Province (west of Beijing), as does the largest production centre. Although the coal mining belt may be deemed to be strategically sensitive because of its location across the north, it should be noted that China has abundant reserves of coal in most provinces, including Sichuan in the within China's theatre target range - a geographic vulnerability identified above - the region's future economic development constitutes a further dependence of the Soviet position in relation to China.

The necessity for the Soviet empire to tilt east if it is to retain its vigour is one facet of this economically engendered constraint in Soviet choices. The deterioration of Soviet oil production aggravates Moscow's position from the perspective of an admittedly worst-case, but nevertheless plausible, scenario: lower Soviet oil yields in conjunction with an 'oil glut' on the world market. If the Soviet Union sought to conserve (for domestic consumption and wartime reserves) rather than export its dwindling output, and if it found no suitable replacement to fill this export gap, it would lose a considerable amount of its foreign currency earnings. In the 1980s, oil exports - already suffering from the characteristic fluctuation in market prices - constituted more than two-thirds of such earnings. As suggested in a possible Soviet-backed Vietnamese attack on China's southern oil rigs and special economic zones (see next section, 'Vietnam'), acquisition of foreign currency is precisely the point of vulnerability which the USSR would wish to exploit in China's case. Without Hong Kong and foreign exchange, China's development would be retarded. A continued decline in both Soviet oil production and world prices could represent a reversal of roles. The decision to withdraw oil from export in order to satisfy peacetime consumption and boost wartime preparedness would lead to the same result - significant loss of foreign earnings.

Oil accounts for only about one-fifth of China's total export earnings, and still less for its domestic energy consumption. The PRC's primary energy source (70 per cent) is coal. Its production of 920 million tons of coal in 1987 was the world's largest. Mining increased by 46.8 per cent in the period 1981-7 and is expected to increase further with the planned export of a billion tons by the 1990s, or as much as China's entire coal exports during the 35-year period of 1949-84. By century's end, China plans to double its total output to 1.2 billion tons of standard coal.

More than half of PRC coal production is concentrated in the north and northeast, close to the Soviet border. The largest deposit representing a third of the country's reserves lies in Shanxi Province (west of Beijing), as does the largest production centre. Although the coal mining belt may be deemed to be strategically sensitive because of its location across the north, it should be noted that China has abundant reserves of coal in most provinces, including Sichuan in the
southwest, the coal-rich southern province of Hunan, and Anhui – the country's fifth largest coal producer – in the east. Figures on 'proven reserves' vary. Whether they rank the world's largest or third largest (after the USA and USSR), they are still indisputably considerable. China's dependence on coal is almost twice as high as that of the Soviet Union, and its power stations – which must supply wartime needs – are run primarily on this reliable energy source. While the abundance of indigenous coal is an invaluable asset, it is also an 'achilles heel' in war. Coal supplies – being bulky – are easily interdicted by attacks on rail lines. Without coal, there can be no power, and therefore no war production. This would suggest that in a people's war under modern conditions, China must operate a wide network of decentralised power and production facilities in coal producing sites, thereby minimising its reliance on rail transportation for this fuel. Indeed, China's energy decentralisation policy has resulted in the creation of small village-run mines. By 1987 there were 60,000 of these mines, producing 250 million tons of raw coal or 27 per cent of the nation's total output.

That China's industrial infrastructure is not particularly advanced means that energy production would be less crucial to overall survival than for the already industrialised USSR. The Soviet Union has become an energy intensive economy. By 2020, Eastern Europe's per capita energy consumption is projected to be second only to that of North America, whereas China does not even expect to become a comparatively modern nation until three decades later. In the 1980s, PRC energy utilisation remained as much as 40 per cent lower than industrialised countries. Even in China's first priority for modernisation, the agricultural sector, mechanisation has made little headway because of reforms that encourage cultivation of small parcels of land. More intensive use of irrigation and fertilisers rather than fuel-consuming tractors, are responsible for productivity. Between 1978 and 1984, for example, the amount of land which was tractor-ploughed declined from 41 to 35 million hectares. Yet China's grain harvests improved from 305 to a record 408 million tons. This has been attributed largely to government price incentives (or guaranteed crop prices), a policy which was reaffirmed in late 1987. In that year harvest output declined to 402 million tons, basically because of a stagnation in the state price paid to farmers, and bad weather. The government set about adjusting the state purchasing price, amalgamating underutilised or misused land into larger plots so as to increase productivity, and guaranteeing state-set prices for fertilisers, insecticides, diesel oil and related farming materials. At the same time the government State Council admitted that mechanisation was still making little headway. The production of farm machinery was not proving to be a particularly profitable enterprise. China News Analysis, which devoted its April 1988 issue to the subject of agricultural reform in China, provided a revealing insight in respect of modernisation in this sector. It found that the State Council's guidelines for the next decade 'suggest that the mechanisation of agriculture remains a very vague notion' and that 'the principle of mechanization should not be expected to go at the same pace everywhere, that many regions should hope only for "half-modernization" at best'. The 1987 PRC publication, China's Economy in 2000, affirmed that China is not ready for the introduction of universal mechanisation – mechanisation should be gradual and selective.

The overall direction of Soviet farming is toward more mechanisation rather than less. Economic planning for 1986-90 intended 'to put agriculture on a thoroughly industrial basis, to introduce on the broadest scale scientific systems of farming and intensive technologies'. Whilst this policy was designed to improve harvest yields, and hence reduce reliance on Western imports to make up shortfalls, it does not bode well for post-nuclear adaptation if the industrial infrastructure has been badly damaged.

Soviet resolve to improve grain harvests emphasises the point that food is also a strategic commodity and, like power and fuel, essential to a nation's wartime survival. Food security has always exercised a strong influence on the Chinese national psyche. For a people who have known famine and fear of war only too well, grain is as related to national morale as it is to denying an enemy easy victory. Political admonitions in the comparatively prosperous 1980s still recall the starvation that followed crop failures in 1959 and 1960. Grant shortages will lead to chaos,' Chen Yun warned the CPC national conference in the agriculturally unspectacular year of 1985. 'We cannot underestimate this matter.' This Politburo member and veteran economist represented a voice from the past, echoing Mao's own obsession, after the 1969 border war with the Soviets, to 'store grain everywhere'. But Chen Yun, in the mid-1980s, was also a voice for China's future. By stockpiling grain, the Chinese government would be able to divert the population from food production to weapons production, from farming to fighting, and in the event of nuclear attack, cultivation could be delayed until radiation levels subsided.

It is within the crucial period immediately following nuclear attack
that grain reserves hold greatest strategic value, for surviving populations must subsist on available stocks until radiation levels have fallen to permit a resumption of farming. Indeed, the ease with which cultivation can be resumed must be seen as the longer-term complement to short-term survival on available stocks. In this respect, it is worth noting that rice production – which accounts for almost half of China’s total grain output – can restart much quicker than other grain staples. The standard methods for fallout neutralisation are (a) removal of topsoil or (b) flushing with water. Flushing rice paddies should enable their safe return to cultivation in, say, one-tenth of the time of other grain areas where – given their extent – radiation can only be allowed to decay naturally.

Harvest unpredictability, because of natural factors such as poor weather or pest plagues, creates a problematic difference between food which is grown, and other strategic materials that need only be mined. For this reason, peacetime reserves can never be entirely secure. So even though China is essentially self-sufficient in food, it continues to import a small percentage of its consumption requirements. Because food is the most perishable of a nation’s vital strategic resources, the performance of harvests from year to year must remain an important determinant in stockpiling practices. An example illustrating harvest, and therefore planning, uncertainty was China’s unprecedented ‘granary crisis’ when 1984’s harvest resulted in a 25 million ton surplus. This example also provides a telling comment on the whole issue of China’s food security. That farmers produced more grain than the country could store shows that China is in a position to produce enough grain for its domestic requirements, but needs to increase its storage facilities to provide for both periodic excesses and stockpiling. (Government expenditure on capital construction projects – including grain centres – rose by 40 per cent in 1987 over the previous year.)61 Certainly the Deng years have seen record harvests, and the government would have had little difficulty maintaining reserves for war or natural disaster.

In the Soviet Union, by comparison, the agricultural sector has been castigated for its inefficiency. A specific offender is Soviet Asia. During a visit to the region in late 1985, Gorbachev told leaders of the five Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Tajikistan, Turkmenia, Uzbekistan), Siberia and the Urals that he expected them to stabilise harvest output by more efficient and intensive land use. Even if harvest yields could be improved by ‘intensive tech-

ologies’, there are political factors which detract from the USSR’s ability to achieve its grain quotas. The Republic of Kazakhstan, home of a Turkic-Muslim ethnic group, is a vital grain producing region. Government quotas which called for 14–16 per cent increases in grain production between 1986 and 1990 depend on Kazakhstan for their success.62 Although other republics were criticised for corruption and inefficiency, Kazakhstan was singled out by the Soviet campaign for greater agricultural efficiency as a ‘graphic example’ of failure, and for the ‘inertia’ of its agricultural committees.63 The ethnic Kazakh First Secretary of the CPSU, Dinmukhamed Kunayev, was blamed not only for the region’s inefficiency and corruption but also for allowing an unbridled nationalism to flourish. He was dismissed from his post in December 1986 and by January lost his membership of the Politburo. Kunayev’s replacement by an ethnic Russian led to riots in the capital, Alma Ata. Significantly, this city of one million people is only about 230 kilometres from the Chinese border, across which the Soviet Kazakhs’ ethnic cousins reside. The potential for Soviet destabilisation of China through its minority nationalities was discussed earlier. In this instance, exploitation of ethnic dissent can clearly operate in the other direction. Moscow’s unease must surely increase with the knowledge that China claims as an historical right the region from its own Xinjiang border to Kazakhstan’s Lake Balkhash.

One may conclude that Soviet food security in time of war suffers from a combination of negative factors: the unsuitability of mechanisation in farming when the industrialisation on which it depends has been damaged; the inefficiency and unreliability of grain harvests; the political sensitivity of the Central Asian republics, especially the region’s granary republic, Kazakhstan, part of which is claimed by China; and the location of these republics within China’s reach. In the strategic calculus of relative strengths, the PRC may have a greater population to feed but fewer uncertainties. It is in a better position to adapt to a post-nuclear environment, and to endure protraction of war. If China embarked upon guerrilla nuclear warfare over a protracted period, Soviet industrial and therefore agricultural recovery would be further retarded. Rebellious republics might be expected to take advantage of a weakened empire to assert their independence. Just as energy and fuel suggest Soviet vulnerability on its economic flank, Soviet food security could be undermined from the political and technological flanks.
With the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the Indochinese peninsula to China's southwest was effectively removed from the superpower gameboard. In the years that followed, the focus of Western attention was directed away from Indochina to other crisis centres involving the superpowers, and Indochina has been viewed as a region of local conflict irrelevant to the mainstream of international affairs. This view is certainly incorrect: as early as 1978, Soviet patronage of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) led to the establishment of Soviet military bases in the area, and China's undisguised indignation with the allied presence of its two chief adversaries at its southwestern gate. In combination, these nations, China, the Soviet Union and the SRV, possess the world's three largest armies, two of which contain nuclear weapons in their arsenals. The strategic changes of the 1980s suggest that China's southern flank is potentially its most vulnerable and the most probable theatre for major war in the 1990s if Sino-Vietnamese relations fail to show any marked improvement.

Background to Sino-Vietnamese Hostility

In the period 1979 to 1988 military confrontation between the PRC and the SRV along their common border was intimately linked with Hanoi's activities in the peninsula formerly known as French Indochina. Though in post-colonial times the name 'Indochina' was retained in general usage to denote the geographic region occupied by the three states of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, since the late 1970s the term began once again to resemble its earlier meaning of one political entity. From 1975 Laos came under Hanoi's influence, and a garrison force of 50,000 troops (reduced by about half in 1988). Cambodia, ruled by a Hanoi-installed government since 1979, was controlled by another 140,000 Vietnamese soldiers (reduced to an estimated 80,000 in 1988). The French formula thereby acquired renewed relevance after 1975. It also provoked China's wrath: the SRV's ruling Vietnamese Communist Party appeared to be engaged in a federating process which befitted its founding name of 1930, the Indochinese Communist Party. Its military instrument, the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) behaved accordingly. The Hanoi High Command treated the whole of Indochina as one theatre of operations, and the military personnel of all three states as one Indochinese force.64

While fighting on the Sino-Vietnamese border was a symptom of PRC concern over a perceived SRV expansionist policy (to the Vietnamese, of course, it was the Chinese who were guilty of such a policy), the border dispute itself was represented in terms of the 'unequal' boundaries argument. Like much of China's frontier with the Soviet Union, its boundary with Vietnam was formalised towards the end of the late nineteenth century when Manchu rule was at its weakest, and claims of suzerainty over Vietnam were challenged by the incumbent French colonial power. However, the border cannot be regarded as a legitimate source of conflict. As one political scientist of the region has argued: 'slight differences in interpretation of the actual alignment of the boundary markers did not impinge on the vital interests of both parties to a degree that would initiate conflict'.65 Even the pro-Vietnamese Ba Yi (First August Radio), which purported to be transmitted by malcontent elements in the PLA, was not entirely unreasonable to complain in 1982 of the unnecessary 'development of the border issue between the two countries to such a precarious state'.66 It went on to remind its listeners of the small size of the 'dispute sector' and the early diplomatic initiatives to resolve it:

The border between China and Vietnam covers some 1,000 km, but the current dispute sector is only about 60 km long. As early as . . . 1954, Premier Zhou Enlai told President Ho Chi Minh that we [China] would work together with Vietnam in correcting the boundary fixed by China and France at the end of the 19th century.67

Clearly, both Vietnam's post-1975 activities in Indochina and China's use of the border pretext to 'punish' Vietnam must be seen against the broader politico-cultural background of Sino-Vietnamese relations. Otherwise it is possible to mistake the symptoms for the causes of mutual hostility.

China, as the 'Middle Kingdom', conducted its affairs according to the Confucian order which called for submission from the lesser kingdoms in return for Chinese protection. The relationship was modelled on the values associated with filial piety. Modern China's identification with the Confucian model becomes readily apparent when one considers that Deng's 1979 justification for 'punishing' the SRV was expressed in terms of teaching the Vietnamese that 'they could not run about as much as they desired'. As with the traditional Chinese concept of time in relation to China's nuclear missile pro-
gramme, which was discussed in the introduction of this book, an awareness of traditional Chinese political culture helps illuminate Beijing’s attitude to the Indochina peninsula. To this end, the following excerpt from Lucian Pye is pertinent:

China had been the suzerain of its neighbors; China was considered the ‘elder brother’ and the vassal country was the ‘younger brother’ who had to show proper Confucian deference to the elder. The tribute system called for periodic missions . . . to the Peking court. Members of these missions would perform the proper rituals to show their submissiveness to the Celestial Empire and present to the emperor their gifts. The total effect of this practice was to provide the basis for significant foreign trade while not giving power or status to private merchants whom Confucian officials distrusted . . .

In theory, in return for tribute the emperor would protect the suzerain country and take care of its foreign affairs, while allowing it freedom to manage its internal affairs. In the Chinese mind the relationship was precisely that of the elder and younger brother.68

From Vietnam’s perspective, however, China is not only its most recent aggressor but its earliest coloniser. For twelve centuries, beginning in the third century BC when the Chinese subjugated the then Vietnamese Lac society, China prevailed as the dominant power. This experience and subsequent attempts to reconquer Vietnam had provided a perceptual lens through which latter twentieth century Chinese behaviour was viewed, and indeed readily explained in propaganda tracts on Chinese aggression. For example, one of the more potent propaganda symbols is the legend of the Vietnamese Trung sisters. These heroines led an unsuccessful but glorified revolt against the Chinese in the first century BC. The legend became a modern rallying point for Vietnamese resistance to China. Maintaining the security of the northern border is very much a symbol of Vietnam’s determination not to become what it historically fears most – a Chinese sphere of influence. While China chose to speak of disciplinary action against an errant Vietnam, Hanoi scoffed at the presumption of Chinese superiority:

Seeing Beijing rise up and threaten to punish Hanoi, public opinion sees the image of the stately Great Dragon in its holy wrath recounting the disobedient child’s sins, and, in front of the assembled world, slapping him hard in the face as an example. The

naughty child, trembling with fear, would throw himself at the Great Dragon’s feet to beg pardon, while the witnesses would advise him never to displease his elder again.69

February 1979: The Lessons of Failure

Against this background, Vietnam took pleasure in its ridicule of China in 1979. China’s actions in the brief border war of that year were clumsy and poorly co-ordinated. They were the actions of ‘a dragon’ who was not so much an elder, but elderly. On 17 February, six weeks after Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia, China unleashed six to seven main force divisions in a five-pronged attack across the Vietnamese frontier. As the war progressed, China committed another four divisions, bringing total Chinese combat strength to 80 000 troops out of the 200 000 which it had massed on the border. PAVN main forces, by comparison, were used only in the key battle of Lang Son; border troops – some 75 000 to 100 000 in strength – were considered sufficient to hold the Chinese. This is understandable, given the traditional military prescription which requires an attack/defence ratio of 3:1 for success. In the case of the Sino-Vietnamese war, the defenders (Vietnam) had outnumbered the attackers.

On 5 March the PLA won Lang Son. Beijing decided that its troops had attained their military objective, and announced their withdrawal. This military victory was – by any measure – an expensive one. China lost a quarter of its forces as casualties, approximately half of whom died. (It should be pointed out, however, that the casualty estimate for Vietnam was much higher. Compared to China’s 20 000 killed or wounded, Vietnam’s was 50 000.) Chinese military weaknesses in command, equipment and logistics had been openly exposed. The traditional elder of the region had been humiliated. This was a high price to pay for a tutorial which left the Vietnamese unrepentant over their actions in Cambodia. Indeed, there was perhaps a message for China in its first military offensive since the death of Mao: next time China must choose military means better suited to its political objective. However, the threat of another war had been communicated periodically by China. For example, in early 1985, PRC Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian stated that China ‘reserved the right’ to give Hanoi ‘a second lesson’.

Having learnt their own military lessons on the first occasion, the Chinese could be expected to be better prepared than they were in
1979. Such preparedness must be understood to apply as much to their strategy (the psychological calculations of modern people’s war, including deception) as to their equipment and command. Failure to deal successfully with Vietnam in the second war would be unthinkable – China’s prestige and military credibility would not survive. Therefore, the event, if it were to occur, would have to be a less restrained operation (beyond the border and possibly at sea) with the objective of hobbling Hanoi politically and strategically. Such a course of action by China could be motivated by a refusal on Vietnam’s part to relinquish its right to intervene in the political course of action by China could be motivated by a refusal on objective -of hobbling Hanoi politically and strategically. Such a restrained operation (beyond the border and possibly at sea) would have to be a less restrained operation (beyond the border and possibly at sea) with the.

In effect, Soviet aid was doubled from its prior level of an estimated $1.1 billion a year. This rendered Vietnam the largest recipient of Soviet aid after Cuba, which received an annual $3.5 billion. In 1988, when Gorbachev reiterated his desire to hold a Moscow–Beijing summit, Deng maintained his position. He would only meet with Gorbachev if the Soviet Union pressured Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia. Moscow’s position on this issue had been consistently one of respecting Vietnam’s sovereign rights: attempts to improve Sino–Soviet relations would not compromise ‘the interests of other countries’. Deng would hear nothing of it. Without Soviet assistance, he said, Vietnam could not fight a single day in Cambodia. The desire for detente with China proved stronger than Moscow’s declaratory position on Vietnam’s foreign policy independence. The Soviet Union now expected Vietnam to be ‘co-operative’.

Hanoi responded pragmatically. In April 1989, it announced the withdrawal of all remaining Vietnamese troops by the end of September, regardless of whether a satisfactory political settlement was achieved in Cambodia. The decision appeared to be based on a potent combination of unrelieved poverty and Soviet pressure. The Soviets themselves had set the example by having recently withdrawn their troops from Afghanistan. Clearly, Vietnam’s economic recovery depended on military retreat. Neither the resumption of Western aid nor the continuation of Soviet assistance could be assured without it.

Vietnam’s September deadline came after the Chinese (and, by implication, the Soviets) failed to be impressed by an earlier pledge in 1988 for total withdrawal by 1990. On that occasion Hanoi gave no guarantees that it would abide by the timetable, nor would it rule out reintervention if the Khmer Rouge – which Vietnam toppled from power in 1979 – attempted to again take over Cambodia. This position was understandable in view of the Khmer Rouge’s estimated military capability to do so (see below). In an effort to pave the way to the May 1989 meeting between Deng Xiaoping and Mikhail Gorbachev – the first Sino–Soviet summit to be held thirty years – Hanoi engaged in its own talks with the Chinese at the start of the year. After reaching broad agreement that Vietnamese troop withdrawals would be matched by the phasing out of Chinese support for the resistance forces, the announcement for an unconditional withdrawal was made. The 1980s thereby closed on a high point with regard to communication between the more powerful players in this most recent phase of conflict in the Indochina saga, known as the Third Indochina War. However, in the absence of a political settlement among the less powerful but now most crucial players – the Cambodians themselves – the decade also left a chasm of uncertainty. Like Afghanistan after the Soviets withdrew, conflict in Cambodia might not be resolved as peacefully or as quickly as planned. Approximately 45,000 of the Hanoi-installed government forces are theoretically reinforced by an estimated 400,000 Vietnamese civilians who have settled in Cambodia. The combined strength of the two non-Communist factions is only about 10,000. But the Khmer Rouge’s estimated 30,000 to 35,000 fighters are not to be underestimated. They are experts at protracted guerrilla warfare and they are said to have stockpiled arms sufficient for at least two years’ fighting.

If Vietnam refrains from intervening once again in a Cambodia threatened by a Khmer Rouge takeover, then it may be said that China’s strategy since the border war of 1979 has succeeded. If, however, its withdrawal was a mere tactical retreat for improving its
economic and political stature, then as far as China is concerned, Vietnam had not abandoned its regional ambitions.

Should the latter circumstance prevail, and should China decide against embarking on a second major military venture against Vietnam, it would have to reconcile itself to the prospect of a Vietnam emboldened by Chinese military ineptitude and the possibility of renewed Soviet support. That China is unlikely to countenance such a development was evidenced by sustained military pressure during the 1980s on the Vietnamese border, the disputed Spratly Islands and the accompanying public denouncements of Hanoi. Chinese actions during that period were suggestive of a war of long-term, low-level attrition designed to weaken Vietnam's capability and resolve to dominate the other two Indochinese states. In keeping with Maoist military theory, the purpose of attrition is to so weaken the adversary as to enable a decisive Chinese 'counter-attack' for final victory. In the event that Hanoi's retreat from Cambodia does prove to be conditional and therefore (to Chinese thinking) based on deception, this stage is yet to come. In short, if Vietnam privately reserves the right for reintervention or manipulates the new coalition government so that its own favoured faction assumes dominance, China could feel justified to take military action early in the 1990s. It might even choose to take the contest with Vietnam into the South China Seas, settling once and for all the Spratly Islands dispute (see Figure 4.2). With Vietnam out of Indochina and its reach into the South China Seas curbed, China could hope to resume its position of 'regional elder'.

The Spratly Islands

The Spratlys' potential to become a decisive battleground for these regional rivals calls for a closer examination of what is otherwise an unremarkable island chain in the South China Seas. Some 150 islands, reefs and rocks form the archipelago but many of the islets are so small that they are submerged during high tide and only a few of them – perhaps 24 – could hold a permanent garrison. For this reason they are uninhabited, save for the turtles and seabirds, soldiers of many flags and the ubiquitous 'scientific teams' from China. The Spratlys are claimed in whole or in part by the PRC, the SRV, Taiwan, the Philippines and Malaysia. China stationed troops on three small islands in 1987, and since 1962 Taiwan has occupied the largest island of Itu Aba, which it calls Taiping. It measures a mere 0.43 square kilometres. As Beijing regards Taiwan to be a province of the PRC, Taiping is considered a Chinese-occupied island. Beijing's (like Teipeh's) claims on the Spratlys are based on historic usage by fishermen from as early as 200 BC and the Chinese–Vietnamese boundary convention of 1887, while Vietnam also claims historical links with the islands, but rests its case of modern-day ownership on having inherited former French territory.

Shortly after the French departed from Indochina, the Vietnamese took Spratly Island itself, which was abandoned by the Chinese Nationalists in 1950. The then teetering South Vietnamese regime managed to occupy another four islands in 1975, and its Communist successor built the number up to about twenty. Nine of the Vietnamese-held islands are in the 'Kalayaan' sector claimed by the Philippines. In 1976 the Philippines established the Western Command to defend Kalayaan and by 1988 it became a municipality with its own (absentee) mayor. Although the largest of the eight islands occupied by the Philippines, Pag-asa, has no municipal hall it does boast a 1800-metre airstrip and concrete bunkers. In time of trouble, such as the March 1988 incident in which the PLA Navy sank three Vietnamese supply vessels, Manila is known to send in the marines and artillery reinforcement. Malaysia is another claimant which began fortifying its stake in the Spratlys in the 1980s. Early in the decade it built a military base on Swallow Reef, which it has held since 1974. Malaysia occupied three other reefs in 1987, two of them in Kalayaan. In April of the following year the Malaysian navy arrested three Philippine fishing vessels in the disputed Rizal Reef. While this may be regarded as a relatively minor incident compared to the Sino–Vietnamese clash a month earlier, it is illustrative of the increasing tensions within the area. As far as the more powerful protagonists are concerned, China has attempted to occupy the moral high ground by denouncing the recent flurry of military housekeeping within its claimed waters. But it is Vietnam which occupies the real ground. It controls more islands in the Spratlys than any other claimant or, for that matter, all claimants combined. Apart from occupation, Vietnam holds another practical advantage over China: that of strategic reach. The Spratlys are located almost 1000 kilometres from the Chinese coast but 400 kilometres from Vietnam. This is not so much a naval problem for China. The PLA Navy now has a functional blue water capability. The problem lies in control of airspace. That Hanoi is already exploiting this strength became evident in Chinese Foreign Ministry complaints of the Vietnamese air
force 'frequently dispatching aircraft to intensify its reconnaissance and war preparations in the air space over China's Nansha [Spratly] Islands'.

The PLA Navy has not been alone in establishing a presence in this territorial outpost of Chinese cartography. (In PRC maps the country's international boundary loops low into the South China Seas.) Military and scientific expeditions have been closely co-ordinated affairs. The research ship Xiyangyang Hong-5 deposited personnel and building materials on a Philippines-claimed reef. Soon after, two other reefs were taken over by Chinese troops. Hot on the heels of the March skirmish was the dispatch of another Chinese 'oceanographic team'. China was not only asserting itself militarily, but entrenching itself scientifically.

The economic dimension to the disputed sea territories is a recent contribution to the historical and political facets of disputation, particularly since the Third United Nations Law of the Sea Conference in 1974. Its proposal that 'coastal states should have exclusive economic control over the living (fish) and non-living (mineral) resources in a 200-mile zone off their coasts' has been accepted by most nations, but has caused dispute in areas such as the constricted South China Sea where Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) overlap. For the PRC these seas are no less important than they are for its Southeast Asian competitors. The South China Sea is a source of food (China is among the world's largest fishing nations) and future energy through its oil deposits. These deposits have been verified but their extent is unknown. If they are extensive, their importance probably resides in the increased energy requirements that will accompany China's industrialisation. Any Soviet support of Vietnamese claims in these seas would narrow China's economic, as well as strategic horizons. Because oil deposits in disputed territory are for the most part unverified and therefore uncertain sources of future energy, one may presume that China's irritation over Vietnamese competition in the area has had more to do with what China perceived to be Hanoi's unforgivable behaviour in befriending the Soviets and attempting to dominate Indochina. Long-term economic speculations over uninhabited islands, regardless of whether they are justified, exacerbated present-day rivalries.

PRC 'discoveries' of oil and other resources may be seen to serve two purposes over and above the purely economic benefits of owning the Spratlys. One is to further legitimise its claims of sovereignty to a strategically significant area. The other is to legitimise China's use of
force should it decide the time was ripe for Vietnam's 'second lesson'.

The Spratly scenario becomes especially appealing when the possible concurrence of strategic developments in the area are taken into account. First, the lease on US bases on the Philippines is secure until 1991. After that the bases may again emerge as an issue of contention, just as they had in 1988. Whether or not US forces evacuate from the immediate vicinity, Manila's ambivalent attitude to the bases cannot be ignored. Nor can the country's potential for political instability. Realising their tenuous position in the Philippines, the Americans might seek to prevent a deterioration of the Western deterrent presence in Southeast Asia by encouraging a diffusion of responsibility. The obvious candidates for a more active policing role in these waters are China and Japan. For China, such a role can only further legitimise its presence in the Spratlys, a situation which raises a parallel strategic consideration: Moscow's likely reaction. The Soviet Union would not risk confrontation with China over the Spratlys if this meant the undoing of improved Sino–Soviet relations - not to mention the undoing of Gorbachev's diplomacy in Asia and, ultimately, the viability of perestroika which depends on Soviet integration into the Pacific economy. Military action against China would only serve to destroy the credibility of his Vladivostok and Krasnoyarsk initiatives. It is also of interest that under Gorbachev the Soviet Union offered to relinquish their naval base in Vietnam if the Americans did likewise with their Philippine facilities. This indicated that Moscow now regarded Cam Ranh as negotiable, a point which would not be lost on China's estimations of Soviet resolve. Neither the superpowers nor regional powers are likely to be devastated by Vietnam's eviction from the Spratlys.

In addition to these geostrategic considerations there are domestic pressures which Beijing must face. With defence lagging behind other modernisations in Chinese society, a military victory could be an effective method of appeasing PLA opposition to such economic priorities. For how long can the Administration contain PLA resentment over cuts in the defence budget and the ignominy of having its munitions factories produce household goods? China's Navy has already taken pride in its ability to conduct operations as far as the Spratlys. A decisive victory in the Spratlys would boost the morale of the forces as well as demonstrate to the world China's advances in defence modernisation. A modern military operation employing crack forces would surely dispel any lingering perceptions on the PLA as the dinosaur of the contemporary military world. However there is sound reason why Chinese seizure of the Spratlys is not imminent. The biggest risk for China is not military intervention by outside powers, or the prospect of Vietnam's economic and 'moral' regeneration in its post-Cambodia years, but the probable heightening of threat perceptions among ASEAN nations, many of whom are also contesting ownership of Spratlys. If China wishes to become a recognised Pacific power it will need more than its growing naval prowess to achieve this recognition. Perception management (which was admittedly poorly handled with regard to China's internal use of force - the 4 June Tiananmen Square massacre) is acknowledged to be of more lasting benefit in the modern people's war ethic.

**Counter-Oﬀensive Action in Indochina**

However, under circumstances of continued Vietnamese political-military activity in Indochina, the late 1990s might be considered appropriate for Chinese counter-offensive action in Indochina. The modernisation programme would have progressed considerably toward its goal of a per capita income of US$800 in the year 2000. China would have acquired control over the financially significant territory of Hong Kong and - on 20 December 1999 - the lucrative casinos of Macao, where gambling taxes provide a considerable proportion of government revenue. The opportunity for a new Chinese 'lesson' to the Vietnamese could well be an anniversary of the fall of the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh (7 January 1979), the most appropriate of which might be 1999 - the time of China's above-mentioned economic superiority, and the year of the PRC's 50th anniversary.

Even with a resumption of Western aid and investment, Vietnam cannot hope to achieve similar economic advances within the few remaining years of this century. With an annual per capita income estimated to be only US$150 (about half that of China's), Vietnam was the world's fourth poorest country in 1987. Its food security, unlike China's, is not so assured. The annual growth rate of Vietnam's population of 63 million - estimated to be about 2.5 per cent - outstrips the pace of food production. In 1987 agricultural output fell by 2 per cent. This meant that between 1985 and 1987 the amount of food available per capita declined from 303 to 280 kilos. The nation's reliance on high levels of Soviet aid was neither politically nor economically advantageous in the longer term. Mismanagement of the Vietnamese economy became a concern for Moscow by 1986, and led to the resignation of upper echelon Vietnamese leaders.
at the year’s end. Nguyen Van Linh, an advocate of economic reform, became Secretary General of the Vietnamese Communist Party. Even with a tightening of aid management practices, economic improvement did not follow. Soviet aid has been centrally administered and Vietnam’s trade relations with the USSR have been conducted essentially by barter. This handicapped Hanoi’s concurrent attempts to revive the indigenous economy through greater decentralisation and the encouragement of foreign investment. As analysts have been quick to observe, ‘market forces and a command economy simply do not mix very well’, while ‘barter trade will mean Vietnam has to commit much of its production to the USSR.’74 The implications for Vietnam are clear. After more than a decade of economic stagnation and confusion, Vietnam’s recovery will take time. But in the same period (1975–88), China has prospered. In the 1990s China will be in a decidedly better economic position relative to Vietnam.75

If the above economic analysis (in addition to the 1989 political developments discussed earlier) suggests that Vietnam may be judged to be a diminishing threat to China, this is mistaken. Nations are as much co-creators of their strategic destiny as they are respondents to perceived threats which surround them. In China’s case, an economically weakened Vietnam does not suggest a corresponding diminution in its hegemonic ambitions. As a defence strategy, people’s war requires the exercise of initiative at the opportune moment. In view of the way in which China has helped mould the strategic environment at its Indochinese flank, developments there need to be recounted. They point to a deliberate strategy of protracted attrition. As noted earlier, in Chinese military thought this can only mean that if the enemy is not exhausted into submission then the attritional phase must be followed by decisive counter-attack.

Strategic Changes Flowing from the Vietnamese–Soviet Treaty of 1978

Since the SRV-USSR Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation was signed in November 1978, China watched with growing unease the strengthening of enemy forces along its southern frontiers. Soviet aid helped finance Hanoi’s dominance over Cambodia and Laos, and assisted Vietnamese armed forces’ expansion to unprecedented levels.76 By the mid-1980s, both the Vietnamese navy and air force were the largest among Southeast Asian countries and were competitive in their levels of sophistication; while the army is the world’s third largest, after the Soviet and Chinese armies. In return for its military-economic assistance to the SRV, the Soviet Union gained access to the former American bases of Danang Air Field and Cam Ranh Bay. In other words, the Soviet–Vietnam relationship is ‘locked in’ (as, for example, is the US–Australia relationship by the establishment of joint military facilities such as Pine Gap). Development of Danang included the building of a major monitoring station. Cam Ranh Bay, which is the principal air and sea facility, was expanded to cater for nuclear submarines, underground fuel storage, electronic monitoring and larger numbers of personnel. The seaborne threat from Cam Ranh Bay had been compounded by supporting air unit deployments. In 1988, these comprised sixteen Tu-16 Badger D/K and six Tu-95 Bear bombers, whose mission requirements also include maritime reconnaissance and anti-submarine warfare, as well as a squadron of MiG-23 Flogger fighter/surface attack aircraft.

To Beijing, developments since 1978 reinforced its view of a Soviet strategy to encircle China and threaten the security of its southern periphery. Certainly, the Vietnamese facilities provided the Soviet Union with a strategic maritime presence on China’s contiguous seas. Cam Ranh Bay – with a naval complement of at least three attack/ cruise missile submarines, some four principal and twelve minor combat vessels – became the main forward base for the Soviet Pacific Fleet headquartered in Vladivostok. The primary threats posed by Soviet deployments from Vietnam lie in their potential for assisting the Vietnamese with combat and supply functions in the event of another border war with China, interdicting China’s sealines of communication, and denying assertion of China’s territorial claims in the South China Sea.

With regard to maritime communications, it is of relevance that sea transport represents China’s principal means of international trade, and that by the 1980s China had established one of the largest merchant shipping fleets in the world. (In 1987 China ranked ninth in deadweight tonnage and sixth in the number of vessels.) Interdiction of these lines would not cripple China, but they would impose a considerable constraint on China’s economic and therefore military strength. This is particularly so when Hong Kong’s shipping is added to that of China’s in 1997. By the mid-1980s, Hong Kong already operated Asia’s third largest merchant fleet, after Japan and South Korea. In time of war, the supply of arms to China would be imperilled if the Soviets intercepted China’s sealines of communi-
cation. US airlifts of military aid would have to contend with Soviet attempts to control airspace as well. Besides, the latter cannot provide the high-volume supply capacity of sea transport. Land routes do not offer a viable alternative. As Jan Breemer argued, they would be guarded by pro-Soviet states, and a pro-China Pakistan may not wish to become embroiled in a war which directly threatens its own security. Karachi may fear retribution from neighbouring India and the USSR.77 The wartime threat to external communications lines is an understandable cause for Chinese concern and underscores Beijing's self-reliance on nuclear weapons.

Soviet naval activity in the South China Sea also allows Vietnam to derive competitive advantage over China in the areas of disputed waters. The presence of Vietnam's superpower supporter in the vicinity must complicate any Chinese plans to eventually assert control over island claims. The Spratly Islands, it has been noted, are not valuable in themselves but they do lie in waters of potential economic importance.

China's increased naval and scientific presence in the Spratlys in the 1980s coincided with a policy of economic development on its southern coast. The archipelago comes under the administration of Hainan, an island comparable in size to Taiwan and which lies off China's southern coast close to Vietnam. Hainan was upgraded to the status of province in 1988. Four years earlier it was designated a zone of special economic growth. Over the same period China dispatched research teams to the Spratlys to investigate resources. One hundred and sixty-seven observation stations were established to this end. In the second half of 1987, when the various claimants became increasingly active in the area, China reported the discovery of 'rich oil and gas reserves'.78 It continued to denounce Vietnam's illegal presence and described Philippine attempts to legitimise control of the eastern sector of the Spratlys as a violation of the PRC's sovereign rights.

From the above it may be postulated that if the next Sino-Vietnamese war were to be fought in the Spratly theatre, Hainan itself would become strategically vulnerable to Vietnamese attack. It has been suggested by Charles McGregor that Hainan's economic development would call for better military protection of the Island, and indeed a May 1987 meeting of the region's party and military officials was concerned with ways of further promoting Hainan's prosperity and military strength.79 A military build-up on the Island would be expected to heighten Vietnamese suspicions, thereby 'creating a new focus for Sino-Vietnamese tension'.80 The next Sino-Vietnamese war, should it eventuate, might even pre-empt a Spratly 'tutorial'.

Chinese Campaigns of Attrition, 1979-88, and Their Projected Culmination Point

It may be concluded that China's use of military force against Vietnam since 1979, as well as its demonstrative actions at sea, show that China had not renounced the military instrument as a means of settling its differences with Vietnam. Nor had it been cowed by the Soviet naval deterrent. After the 1979 war, Beijing launched a campaign of intensifying pressure on the Vietnamese border, with notable increases in the level of 'punishment' occurring in 1984 and 1987. As early as September to November 1980, the PLA subjected all six of Vietnam's northern border provinces to raids or seizure of their strategic hilltops. The following May, infantry operations were concentrated in the Ha Tuyen area opposite China's Yunnan Province, while Chinese naval intrusions in the Gulf of Tonkin were noted by the Vietnamese. In 1982 the two navies again clashed in the Gulf of Tonkin, this time over disputed water boundaries. When Hanoi reiterated its claim to an oil exploration zone near China's Hainan Island, Beijing retorted that Vietnam's claim was 'a wilful distortion' of prior French colonial boundaries.81 The year also saw two fleets of the PLA Navy practise simultaneous troop landings. The exercise appears to have been the sixth and the largest since 1979, indicating China's interest in strengthening its amphibious warfare skills - skills of obvious relevance to (a) enforcing or defending its island claims in the South China Sea, and (b) to any serious military action against Vietnam. A practical expression of both these possible applications came in 1983: Chinese and Vietnamese naval forces clashed near the Paracel Islands, contested by Vietnam but occupied by China since 1974; and the PLA conducted yet another amphibious exercise in which, according to Bradley Hahn, submarines carried amphibious warfare detachments on 'a routine sea patrol, surveillance, and underwater demolition mission in Vietnam'.82

Unlike naval activity, ground operations during 1982 were comparatively restrained. However, this was not to last. The Chinese were determined to maintain pressure on the SRV's northern border for as long as Vietnam continued its military campaigns in Cambodia - an activity which often intruded into Thai territory. Thus Vietnamese attacks on the Khmer resistance camps on the Thai border in April 1983 were immediately followed by Chinese artillery bombad-
ments on Vietnamese positions along the Chinese border. Intermittent fighting in the first three months of 1984 culminated in bombardment and skirmishing for a week in April. Shelling resumed during November and December, with Vietnamese reports of 20 enemy incursions conducted at company level.

That year not only confirmed the determination of both adversaries to resist the demands of the other in reconciling their differences, but also highlighted the USSR's commitment to the Indochinese peninsula: 14 MiG-23s were deployed to Cam Ranh Bay on a permanent basis in the latter part of the year; and Soviet capabilities to land troops in Vietnam were demonstrated for the first time during a joint Soviet–Vietnamese amphibious landing exercise in April. This was the month in which China conducted its heaviest ground assaults against the Vietnamese since 1979; in which US President Reagan visited China; and Vietnam reneged on a decision to hand over all troops to Bojiao Island of China's Nansha [Spratly] Islands and quoted a PLA Navy reminder that the 'Chinese islands remain under Chinese sovereignty, and that it would not tolerate any decisive military action designed to expel the Vietnamese from Cambodia or undermine SRV sovereignty – be it on land or sea.

Unlike the PLA Navy’s more retiring behaviour during the 1979 war, when the USSR reinforced its naval presence off the coast of Vietnam, China reacted almost immediately to the April 1984 demonstration by staging its own exercise around the Spratly Islands. As already noted, any major war with Vietnam could be instigated or accompanied by armed conflict over ownership of the islands. Another entrenched claimant, the Philippines, could also become involved. This situation would theoretically bring Soviet and American regionally based forces in close (high alert) proximity. Even if the Americans had vacated their Philippines bases in 1991 and the Soviets did not wish to become embroiled in a Sino–Vietnamese clash, both superpowers would still wish to protect their lines of communications through the South China Seas. Thus, it is not a matter of protecting their respective allies but of protecting their access to these waters. The islands represent Southeast Asia’s maritime heart and the shortest route between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Control of the Spratlys implies control over the Malacca Strait gateway to the Indian Ocean. It is highly unlikely that the superpowers or, for that matter, Japan, would countenance a threat to international shipping in the South China Sea, let alone contemplate the implications of an expansionist policy on the part of the controlling power. It should not be forgotten that during the Pacific War the largest island in the Spratlys group (now occupied by Taiwan) served as Japan’s staging point for its expansion into the Philippines. For all these reasons, Chinese naval manoeuvres in 1984 are worth citing. According to Hahn:

A double-pronged ‘show-of-force’ was conducted around Nansha Dao (Spratly Islands) . . . This action, in support of PRC-claimed sovereignty, consisted of maneuvering a sizeable air and logistically supported surface action group to conduct a series of air, surface, and subsurface exercises there, followed immediately by the circumnavigation of these islands by a 2000-man, combat-loaded amphibious force with escort and gunfire support elements, to demonstrate China’s capability to assault and occupy any or all of the islands in the archipelago.84

The exercise, which began on 1 May, came only a week after the Reagan visit to Beijing and the increased intensity of Chinese shelling on the Vietnamese border. China’s military actions against Vietnam were condemned in the Soviet press,85 and on 9 May, Moscow postponed its scheduled Sino–Soviet normalisation talks. China, however, remained unperturbed. After the Spratly exercise, the task force sailed back to the Gulf of Tonkin to conduct amphibious landing exercises on Chinese soil.

Naval activity continued to feature in Beijing’s demonstration of resolve against Hanoi and, indirectly, Moscow. In 1987 China remained vocal over alleged Vietnamese transgressions in the area, as illustrated by the Chinese Foreign Ministry’s denunciation of 16 April: ‘Recently, the Vietnamese authorities once again encroached upon China’s territorial integrity and sovereignty by brazenly sending troops to Bojiao Island of China’s Nansha [Spratly] Islands and illegally occupying it.’86 Five days later Xinhua announced a ‘large-scale modern landing operation’ by marines on an unnamed South China Sea island, and quoted a PLA Navy reminder that the ‘Chinese navy is now capable of operating as far as the western part of the
Pacific, and China's Xisha [Paracel] and Nansha islands'.

87 Its capability was clearly displayed during extended exercises in the Spratly area in October. A skirmish which incapacitated several Vietnamese ships five months later marked the first armed clash between Vietnamese and Chinese forces in this theatre of potentially serious conflict. Vietnam claimed that a missile- and gun-armed convoy of six PLA ships opened fire on its own 'supply' vessels, leaving three of its servicemen dead, seventy-four missing, two ships sunk and another damaged. As far as Beijing was concerned, the PLA Navy was entirely justified in its actions against the Vietnamese trespassers who 'wilfully provoked' the armed clash. In the lead-up to the event Vietnam was accused of occupying a further nine islands and reefs and of obstructing the work of a Chinese scientific survey there.88 Significantly, barely five months after the incident, the PLA Navy completed construction of an oceanographic observation station, replete with helipad and a pier capable of handling 4000-ton vessels.89 At the same time, China announced it was establishing postal and telecommunications links with the Spratlys.90 Like the Philippines, which had declared its section of the Spratlys a municipality with its own mayor, China too wished to foster the appearance of permanence - though the political signal behind the telecommunications link would be intended for Vietnam rather than the less problematic Philippines.

To conclude, in the years 1985 to 1988 Beijing showed no indications of change in its Vietnam policy: 1985 began with the Chinese reportedly seizing high ground a few kilometres within Vietnamese territory in the Lang Son area, and conducting artillery attacks and raids along most of the border; clashes resumed in September after the monsoon; Chinese 'counter-attacks' were reported in the Lao Shan area in February 1986; in January 1987, the PLA made another effort to seize strategic high ground within the Vietnamese border; and in April 1988 - soon after the Spratly clash - border fighting broke out in the Pigxai region of Guangxi Province.

Only with the imminence of the Deng-Gorbachev meeting and Vietnam's compliance to remove its forces from Cambodia did border tensions ease at the beginning of 1989. If the SRV has not, in fact, been exhausted into submission but merely into abeyance, China's campaigns of attrition cannot be said to have reached their culmination point. One may argue, as B.P. Mahony does below, that the problem with a deliberate and prolonged containment of the level of military action is that it risks losing its strategic momentum. It becomes bogged down in habitual stalemate:

The effects of [China's post-1979] operations, while increasing the cumulative psychological and material pressures on Vietnam (the 'bleeding white' process), would have little chance of achieving a marked military advantage for the PLA . . . Should China decide that its present concept of operations is failing to achieve the required results, it will need to consider other military measures outside the border regions.91 (emphasis added)

Leaving aside for the moment 'other military measures outside the border regions' in the event that Sino-Vietnamese competition in the region intensifies rather than diminishes in the 1990s, it is worth recalling that from the vantage-point of attrition warfare, the time for considering other military measures is, by necessity, a longer-range process. For the purposes of scenario construction, one decade of protracted pressure on Vietnam has been shown to be strategically acceptable. By 1990, the attrition phase may be said to have fulfilled its function of allowing the enemy the opportunity to retire without further costs to its people, economy and national autonomy vis-à-vis the USSR. It also forestalled the formation of a Vietnamese Indochina under Soviet protection. From the perspective of subsequent future action, the 1980s were the preparatory period in which Beijing was prosecuting its Vietnamese war at a level low enough to avoid provoking Soviet military retaliation on behalf of its client, but sufficient for Vietnam to reinforce border guard defences against China with 500 000 main force troops - or half of its regular Army.92 With regard to the level at which Beijing was prosecuting its Vietnamese war, achieving the appropriate level depended on the percentage of SRV military and economic resources that the border war of attrition was consuming. A level low enough not to provoke Moscow might not have been high enough to prevent Hanoi's consolidation of Indochina. However, China's diversion of half the Vietnamese army was certainly significant. SRV forces in Cambodia were described 'barefoot by comparison'.93 This was not necessarily a disadvantage given the guerilla nature of the war in Cambodia, but it did indicate that the best equipped forces were deployed not in Cambodia but in northern Vietnam. On the Chinese side of the border, the 1980s saw about 400 000 PLA troops positioned, or less than one-tenth of China's regular forces. Excluding deployments required for the Soviet border, it was still only about a quarter of the Chinese force. The Chinese therefore maintained a far higher poten-
tial for border strength reinforcement, even though they were out-numbered by better armed Vietnamese border forces. It should be noted that PLA troops from ten MRs were assigned to the 1979 operation,94 and that in 1985 the regional command mergings meant the earlier campaign’s problems of command duplication had been redressed through clearer operational front demarcations. As David Bonavia observed in 1985: ‘Merging the Chengdu and Kunming military regions means that Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan provinces and Tibet will be commanded as one military unit, which would help bolster the Chinese position in any future border conflicts with Vietnam or India’.95

Despite China’s numerical superiority in manpower and weaponry, and its attempts to inject greater organisational efficiency into wartime operations, doubts about China’s ability to again invade Vietnam are worth citing. B.P. Mahony has argued that the number of divisions, which realistically could be made available to a Chinese invasion force, would be inadequate:

Even if a third of [China’s 130 to 140 main force divisions] could be assigned to the Sino-Vietnamese border in an emergency, and assuming that the necessary infrastructural and logistic resources to support such a large force could be arranged, the approximate 50 divisions would barely match the opposing PAVN strength, let alone provide it with the eight to one, or ten to one numerical superiority the Chinese strive for in the attack phase of war. Providing the balance required from the less mobile and less capable local forces would be a risk the Chinese would probably not want to take. When this factor is considered together with the qualitative disparity in equipment, and the potentially far-reaching effects of a major conflict on China’s modernization program, there is good reason to believe that, even without taking strategic and political impediments into account, an all-out attack on the SRV is unlikely.96

From the purely military standpoint (relevant considerations such as the four modernisations can be expected to be less severe in the 1990s), the most obvious problem with this evaluation concerns the size of the invasion force. That which the Chinese theoretically ‘strive for’ is not the same as they would or could do in practice. The idea of the PLA invading with 8:1 or 10:1 superiority on the border is beyond even reasonable speculation. The ratios are more unrealistic than a Chinese estimate that the USSR would need a 4:1 advantage to invade from the north.97 An 8:1 or 10:1 superiority would require China to muster an attack force of four to five million. As for reticence in using ‘less mobile and less capable local forces’, this may be reasonable from a Western perspective, but it is alien to Chinese military thinking. Manpower remains the pillar of Chinese combat strength. The ‘qualitative disparity in equipment’ also recedes in importance when pitted against Chinese numerical advantage. As indicated in Chapter 2, the effect of a strategy which swamps the opponent with manpower and matériel cannot be underestimated.

Mahony’s assessment was based exclusively on a Chinese cross-border invasion. The application of modern people’s war theory does not presume the Chinese would restrict themselves to the traditional strategic passes, but comes closer to his earlier statement about ‘other military measures outside the border regions’. Superior strength at the border then becomes less relevant. In other words, the Chinese can outnumber the Vietnamese on their common border, but they may not need to. Superior strategy is more important than numerical superiority. Armed with a better strategy, China’s numerical advantage may be employed to its greatest operational advantage – that is, unexpectedly. This is a distinctly different usage of numerical strength from its deterrent value which requires that it be visible and its intentions clearly communicated. Operational strategy normally depends on withholding intelligence as to one’s true intentions, and places a high value on deception. The two may be used concurrently: the enemy has knowledge of one’s overall capabilities (and hopefully deterred from certain courses of action), but is deceived as to how such capabilities will be employed.

A hypothetical anti-Vietnam operation might, for example, entail an encirclement strategy which is not immediately apparent. Thailand probably depends more on China than the USA to come to its rescue if it were attacked by Vietnam, so its relations with China are likely to remain friendly; Laos has always been at the geostrategic mercy of its more powerful neighbours (which include Thailand), but if given a choice it would probably align with the most prosperous (which excludes Vietnam), – which leaves only Cambodia. If a ‘hot war’ should break out in Cambodia because a post-1990 coalition government will not coalesce, Thailand is well placed to act as the southern logistics base and an excuse for any Chinese war directed at Vietnam’s containment. Thailand has been groomed for this staging role during the Chinese-supplied insurgency in Cambodia, and since the late 1980s it hosted a Chinese arms stockpile. Thai purchases of
Chinese weapons for their own forces mean that supplies in time of war are assured. If the Chinese strategy succeeds, Hanoi is divested of its sphere of influence - or rather the remnants of influence. Instead it is surrounded by non-communist states being revived with Japanese investment and nourished by the dream of joining the fraternity of Asian NICs. Needless to say, Beijing's political and strategic objectives would be fulfilled.

A conclusion that may be drawn from this analysis of Sino-Vietnamese hostilities is that the Indochinese peninsula has become potentially the most crucial element in China's security calculations. To the modern people's war strategist, Vietnam may be judged to be a more dangerous opponent than the Soviet Union, for it challenges the PRC on the psychological basis of its own people's war strategy. As observed in Chapter 1, the Vietnamese Communists have successfully applied Mao Zedong's people's war strategy in the past: the First and Second Indochinese Wars took their toll of the technologically superior French and American forces. In the Third Indochinese War, China and Vietnam became locked in a battleground of patience: both practitioners of the people's war method, they understood the strategic rules of engagement - that is, the need to protract their adversarial 'contest' until one side gained a decisive advantage (either Vietnam consolidated its influence over the rest of Indochina or it was forced to withdraw its forces from Cambodia). In 1989 it appears China is winning the 'contest'. Thus the overt military manifestation of Sino-Vietnamese hostility - intermittent fighting across their common border - needs to be viewed within the context of a multi-faceted strategy. Since the PLA launched a large-scale attack across the Vietnamese frontier in 1979, the border dispute performed a military function in physically diverting Vietnamese forces from the rest of Communist Indochina to the benefit of China. This function was part of the PRC's wider war of attrition in which Vietnam either succumbed to economic and political pressures, or eventually found itself the victim of the post-attritional phase in Chinese war strategy: that of decisive counter-attack.

Vietnam, too, is theoretically capable of arriving at the phase of decisive counter-attack, but by a different route and with the military assistance of the Soviet Union. If Vietnam waited for the Chinese to initiate war, and if it was able to secure the co-operation of both the USSR and Taiwan, it could then justify its own advance into southern China (Hainan might be attacked, oil rigs disabled, the SEZs and Hong Kong threatened). Indeed, the Soviet threat may be assessed as benign unless it is harnessed to Vietnam's strategic contest against China. Taiwan, as the next section will show, also represents a threat to China only if it colludes with Vietnamese-Soviet opposition to the PRC.

TAIWAN

It has been shown that people's war strategy calls for an offensively oriented response to the Vietnamese threat on China's southwest periphery. This policy also applies to Beijing's foe across the Taiwan Strait. Here, too, the opponents are engaged in a contest of patience, with the difference that the Beijing-Taiphe contest is not one between ethnically different people's war practitioners but between the Chinese themselves who all, as argued in Chapter 2, take a long-term view of time.

Since the Nationalist Party forces fled to Taiwan after defeat by the Communists in 1949, both adversaries have wished to reunify China - but under their own systems of government. The Nationalist Government in Taipeh claims to represent all of China, though in practice it controls the islands of Taiwan, Quemoy and Matsu - with land areas of 35,788, 150 and 30 square kilometres, respectively - as well as the smaller Pescadores (Penghu) islands in the Taiwan Strait (see Figure 4.3). Given Taiwan's population of 20 million (or one-fiftieth that of China's), and an armed force of 405,500 personnel (the PLA, by comparison, is about six times larger), it is understandable that Taipeh does not threaten to initiate military action to enforce its political claim to the mainland, but concentrates on the defence of its own territory, airspace and approach routes. The defence budget for 1988-9 was increased by 16 per cent over the previous year's allocation to US$6.7 billion. This is almost US$1 billion more than the PRC's military budget. With Taiwan's GDP only one-tenth the size of China's, Teipeh is clearly prepared to spend a great deal on defence. The US$6.7 billion defence allocation accounted for about a third of the government's US$19.9 billion budget. In reality the proportion could be higher, as much as half when all defence-related expenditures are taken into account. On a per capita basis, the Island's defence spending is around US$200 compared to China's US $6. Such high government priority toward deterring a Chinese invasion is based on Taipeh's unabated threat perceptions. Speaking in 1987, Taiwan government spokesman, Shaw Yu-ming, maintained:
'It is undeniable that the Chinese communist threat to the Republic of China [Taiwan] has up to the present not diminished in the least ...' The following year Taipeh explained its yet higher budget allocation for defence as a response to the PRC's improved amphibious capability. For its part, Beijing has always regarded Taiwan to be a Chinese province which eventually it would reabsorb. Beijing has offered to negotiate on the issue of reunification, but it has not renounced the use of force to achieve this aim. Such a threat is credible in terms of PLA capability.

Not all of the PLA would be relevant for a military campaign to 'liberate' Taiwan. Redeployment of PLA main force divisions from more strategically vital areas facing the Soviet Union and Vietnam poses the unnecessary risk of opportunistic actions on China's flanks. Ground forces which China could realistically utilise against Taiwan would therefore be limited to those in the eastern and southern Military Regions of Nanjing and Guangzhou. Even so, their size still exceeds that of Nationalist ground strength.

PLA Air Force deployments in the Taiwan Strait region (over 1400 combat aircraft compared to Taiwan's 500), though already superior numerically, would not be representative of the air strength which would be brought to bear on Taiwan. Given the continued importance of numerical superiority in Chinese defence, the PRC is likely to favour an air war strategy of saturation. At less than a quarter of the PLA Air Force's total inventory, Air Regions opposite Taiwan would probably receive reinforcements from other bases. Unlike predominantly land-mobile ground forces, these could be quickly flown in and just as quickly redeployed, if a buildup of enemy forces was detected elsewhere. Of China's naval forces, the East Sea Fleet would be committed to Taiwan, with elements of the North and South Sea Fleets probably available on short-notice. One naval specialist on the region, Admiral Edwin Snyder, has noted that fast attack craft from these fleets would be easily transportable by rail, but - as with ground force priorities - a security presence against China's other adversaries would have to be maintained. The East Sea Fleet alone, with about 750 vessels (about 400 under 100 tons) has superiority in every category of ship except destroyers.

With regard to the type of military action China would employ to force reunification with Taiwan, three present themselves: (a) blockade; (b) full-scale conventional invasion; and (c) invasion employing tactical nuclear and chemical weapons. This set of military options supposes the PRC's efforts at peaceful unification with Taiwan continue to fail. The first option, blockade, presumes other factors will remain unchanged in the meantime - that is, US change of policy away from support of the PRC and back to uncompromising support of the Taipeh regime. The Chinese would choose blockade because it would be less costly in casualties and resources. The third option, (c), would presuppose the failure of (a) and (b), and an element of...
irrationality born out of frustration in Chinese behaviour. If the forcible reunification of Taiwan is an objective carried out in isolation of other, more pressing, reasons – such as Moscow attempting to convert Taipei into a strategic ally – then Beijing’s diversion of PLA resources to the conquest of Taiwan would be indulgent. This is particularly so in view of other hostile forces arrayed along China’s frontiers from the southwest to the northeast. To the pragmatist Chinese military mind, the price of invasion would be too high. Only within the context of a wider threat would the Chinese seriously contemplate the capture of Taiwan.

**Peaceful Reunification**

Although China already holds the requisite numerical superiority for invasion of Taiwan, the time variable so important to people’s war strategy argues against a hasty military solution to reunification. Beijing will seek to exhaust peaceful avenues for reunification before embarking on its military option, for contemporary Chinese strategy still holds that ‘to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill’ (Sun Tzu). China’s non-military method of persuasion is its still holds that ‘to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill’ (Sun Tzu). China’s non-military method of persuasion is its offer of ‘one country, two systems’ rule: that is, the PRC will exercise sovereignty but not interfere with Taiwan’s prevailing socio-economic system. In accordance with China’s long-term political calculations, Taiwan would have the opportunity to witness the success of this formula when applied to Hong Kong and Macao for a period of 50 years after their return to China in 1997 and 1999, respectively.

Taipei, by comparison, has fewer options than its more powerful foe. Its military strategy for ‘recovery’ of the mainland is contingent upon China’s internal destabilisation: the Nationalists do not plan to mobilise for invasion unless the Communist government is seriously threatened by domestic upheaval. (The ‘pro-democracy’ unrest of June 1989 clearly was not: the government had it crushed before it could develop into a serious threat.) In the absence of this contingency, Taiwan will continue to emphasise its economic success as a demonstration of the superiority of a free market economy compared to a Socialist one. In the decade from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, Taiwan’s GNP averaged an annual growth rate of 8.5 per cent. Its per capita GNP in 1988 was more than US$5000, or fourteen times greater than the PRC’s. China’s post-1978 reforms toward a more market-oriented economy are dismissed by Taipei as ‘adjustments forced on [the CPC] out of economic necessity’ and that liberalisation of communal farming practices is superficial because ‘farmers do not even own their own land’.103

Notwithstanding Taipei’s resolve to prevent within its own society the twin ‘threats’ of ‘communism and attempts to undermine national integrity by advocating changes in the status of Taiwan’,104 President Chiang Ching-kuo introduced liberalisations to the Island in the last years of his life. Among them was the choice of Lee Teng-hui, a native Taiwanese, as his successor. As mainlanders form only 15 per cent of Taiwan’s population, Lee’s ascent to the presidency in 1988 was significant. It was an admission on the part of the Guomindang that the imperatives of history could not indefinitely justify its political tenure on the Island. In other words, by not simply treating Taiwan as a temporary refuge from the Communists but by adopting an indigenous identity, the GMD was attempting to keep up with the times and secure its future.

The Nationalists’ change in attitude became evident from 1986 in a series of unprecedented events: the participation of an opposition party in general election (1986), relaxation of travel restrictions to China (1987), and the GMD’s endorsement of indirect investment in the PRC (1988). In the first of these, the Democratic Progressive Party contested the election in December 1986 and won a fifth of the votes. Taiwan’s political thaw carried over into the following year when martial law was lifted. A test of the government’s sincerity came in May 1988 when riots broke out after a demonstration by farmers. Despite the temptation to reimpose martial law, the government refrained. The second notable reform, in 1987, also spelled greater freedom for Taiwan residents. The easing of travel restrictions to the PRC meant that for the first time in thirty-eight years Taiwanese were permitted to travel to the mainland to visit their relatives. Within a year some 170 000 Taiwanese had gone to China, though it should be pointed out that this figure does not represent the number who applied; approval for travel to the mainland is given on a case-by-case basis. Economic contacts are also improving despite Taipei’s refusal to engage in direct trade with the mainland. In 1987 indirect trade between the PRC and Taiwan (via Hong Kong) more than doubled to US$1.5 billion. Business across the Taiwan Strait received a further boost when indirect investment was sanctioned by the GMD at its 13th party congress held in July 1988. China lost no time responding to this opportunity for closer relations and economic advantage. With Taiwan foreign exchange reserves amounting to a

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sizeable US$70 billion, it was understandable that China offered preferential treatment to Taiwanese investors.

These relaxations of governmental controls in Taiwan signal an awareness of the need for new political directions. Whether the Island chooses to join with CPC-ruled China, becomes independent, or arrives at any other permutation of possibilities – including alliance with outside powers – remains in the realm of speculation. A materially and militarily stronger PRC of the next century will not necessarily impose its will on this matter. But it will be monitoring developments with more than a passing interest, especially if external powers become involved, or the banned Taiwan Independence Movement along with like-minded forces pose a serious threat. China is unlikely to tolerate either of the superpowers exerting its influence from Taipei, or the declaration of a sovereign state of Taiwan.

Should China find no such pressing reason for forcibly resolving the reunification issue, then the approach of the PRC’s 100th anniversary in 2049 could provide one, especially in view of the socialist/nationalist fondness for anniversaries. If Taiwan remained unimpressed, at this juncture, with the ‘one country, two systems’ formula applied to Hong Kong and Macao, then a military solution may be called upon. Whether the reunification of China is negotiated or enforced, the CPC leadership’s overriding concern will be to celebrate China’s 100th anniversary as a united country. The occasion, in this instance, would justify the expense. It would also provide an excellent excuse for settling ‘certain unresolved questions of history’.

A compelling reason to suggest why this anniversary will be celebrated for ‘the success of the great cause of reunifying the motherland’ is China’s anticipated national strength by mid next century. As noted in Chapter 2, an extension of some 50 years had been added to the end-of-century ‘deadline’ for transforming China into ‘a powerful, modern socialist state’. National defence being one of the four modernisations designed to achieve this goal, one may presume that China would not only feel confident that its priorities for internal development had largely been met, but that its defence forces were primed for the task of mounting an invasion of Taiwan with some probability of success. Indeed, in an interview in the 1 June 1985 edition of the Hong Kong magazine Bai Xing, the then CPC Secretary-General Hu Yaobang indicated that forcible reunification would be contingent upon China’s military economy, which he expected to be sufficiently strengthened for such action by the 1990s.

Hu’s timing comes close to the economic watershed year of 2000 when China expects to achieve its goal of a per capita GNP of US$800. But in the absence of any serious developments on the Island, military action is unwarranted for reasons of excessive costs to China. Therefore, Hu’s warning must also be seen for its propaganda worth in exerting pressure on Taiwan. It is consistent with Beijing’s two-pronged approach to resolving the Taiwan issue: patient proposals for a negotiated solution alternate with the threat of armed force.

Assuming China’s heightened military development in the next century, Taiwan’s defence forces might be unable to keep pace. Taiwan is capable of producing advanced small weaponry such as a version of the Sagger anti-tank missile for land warfare and air defence, but it has yet to establish a more self-reliant production base for major weapons systems such as aircraft, ships and tanks. Developments toward this end, with the aim of improving Taiwan’s force profile in the 1990s, include: the replacement of about 400 aged fighter aircraft with an estimated 100 to 200 domestically produced advanced fighters; replacement of the 26 destroyers with about half as many guided missile frigates (based on the US Navy’s FFG class); and modernisation of about 300 MBTs through the provision of diesel-driven engines, fire-control and thermal imaging electronics, and larger guns (105mm instead of 90mm). However, any technological superiority over the PLA that the Nationalists could achieve would be sustained only for the short term. As Lasater and Lamb observed in 1987: ‘Once Taiwan has started domestic production of major weapons systems, it should be capable of maintaining a qualitative edge over PRC equipment for at least 10 years. However, by 2010 Taiwan’s qualitative edge will have eroded somewhat as the PRC develops a more modern arms industry.’

The importance of Taiwan’s short-term technological lead is further diminished by those key characteristics of modern people’s war strategy identified in Chapter 2: reliance on mid-tech weapons, quantitative dominance with regard to both men and matériel, and a long-term view which recognises the attritional benefits of time. In comparison to Soviet technological superiority against which people’s war under modern conditions must operate, the narrower margin of Taiwan’s weapons sophistication cannot be expected to cause Chinese military planners undue concern. A further complication in the modernisation and maintenance of Nationalist force levels is that the Island lacks diplomatic recognition to ease purchase of foreign wea-
Modern Chinese Defence Strategy

China had hinted at in April 1982, would have constituted an over-substantial weapons orders to Taiwan?force improvement in the next century by dispatching yet more worse the relationship if the US tried to match the scope of PLA PLA was still relatively backward in the period to 1988. How much worse the relationship if the US tried to match the scope of PLA force improvement in the next century by dispatching yet more substantial weapons orders to Taiwan?

Obviously in the early 1980s a break in diplomatic relations, which China had hinted at in April 1982, would have constituted an over-reaction on China's part. It was a time when priority interests in domestic development meant the US was an important source of technology and foreign currency reserves. Nevertheless, the TRA became Beijing's officially proclaimed obstacle to any further improvement in Sino-American ties. After the then US Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, visited in mid-1981, Xinhua announced: 'It is ridiculous to say that "China needs the United States" . . . in coping with the Soviet menace. Early in 1982, shortly before Beijing suggested it would recall its US Ambassador, Deng Xiaoping indicated that China would be prepared to face the Soviet Union alone if US intransigence on the Taiwan issue continued. 'Sino-US relations are not good', he said. 'We are not afraid to be isolated again by the United States.' Nor had Beijing's dismal appraisal of the Taiwan thorn in Sino-American relations subsided as the decade wore on. In 1985 two of China's international relations scholars, Zi Zhongyun and Zhuang Qubing, speculated on events which would lead to a serious deterioration in Sino-American relations:

If, by relying on the support of the United States, the Taiwan authorities should stick to a diehard position, if the appearance of 'two Chinas' on the international arena should become a real danger and if, because of succession crises or other factors, an unsolvable [sic] chaotic situation should arise on the island including, in extremis, the seizing of the power by a few 'Taiwan independence' elements and the declaration of the independence of Taiwan, the PRC government is bound to do something. Should this happen, the United States will find itself in a real dilemma and, with one misstep, its relations with China will meet with serious and potentially critical setbacks.

There would come a point at which Washington would have to decide on which side of the Taiwan Strait its interests were best served. In all probability it would side with the PRC, essentially because American loss of Chinese support would represent a Soviet gain. Even though China would continue to retain its strategic independence from both, stating as it does that 'the source of the world's ills is the fierce contention of the two superpowers for hegemony', Moscow would welcome cooler relations between the Chinese and Americans. By 1987, China's relations still remained closer with the US than with the Soviet Union. Despite the US having been named the co-author of the 'world's ills' - to which the US Ambassador to China remarked 'we do not appreciate being confused with the Soviet Union' - from the perspective of bilateral relations with China the US was accorded only one obstacle (Taiwan) to the Soviet Union's three. But by 1989 - the historic year of the Sino-Soviet summit - the USSR had removed 20 per cent of its troops from Mongolia on China's northern border, withdrawn its troops from Afghanistan, and pressured Vietnam to leave Cambodia. Certainly the US has had the advantage of normal diplomatic relations since 1979, but under Gorbachev's leadership the Soviets had made rapid progress in normalising relations a decade later.

While neither superpower can realistically expect to become China's bosom ally, the Sino-US relationship had become but a shadow of its celebrated union the previous decade. Quite apart from the potentially serious implications of Western - including American - reaction to China's June 1989 crackdown on internal dissent (by July, Beijing was already examining ways of reducing trade with the US). The period to 1989 was far from trouble-free for Washington relations with Beijing. It had still to clear the Taiwan hurdle, and a few lesser ones besides. While Taiwan remained the obstacle, the emergence of strategic, economic and moral irritants did not help matters. The most contentious was China's arms sales to Middle Eastern countries, including anti-ship missiles to Iran and medium-range ballistic missiles to Saudi Arabia. The latter, in particular, drew US criticism. To the Americans this posed a strategic problem, contributing to a 'disturbing regional trend in surface-to-surface missile proliferation', not to mention the threat posed to Israel - a US ally. For China, arms deals with the Middle East were economically driven. They had little political relevance. After all, at the time of these transactions Saudi Arabia recognised Taipeh, not Beijing, as China's legitimate government. Nor did the absence of diplomatic relations stop China from purchasing missile warheads from Israel -
the very country that was supposedly threatened by Chinese MRBM sales to the Saudis. While China's purchase of the warheads was made in the same year that it sold missiles to Saudi Arabia, military links with Israel are not new. They are said to go back to 1980. As far as China was concerned, American sermons on strategic ethics carried more than a hint of hypocrisy. The opportunity was not lost on Beijing to remind the world that it was the superpowers who were the 'biggest arms dealers', not China. 'Compared to these two countries' arms sales, China's arms sales only amount to a fraction,' the Chinese Defence Minister, Qin Jiwei, pointed out. 'China is a developing country and even in the future will not sell armaments in large quantities.' More to the point, for this developing country, arms sales – including the ballistic variety – were a valued source of foreign currency earnings. Needless to say, the Chinese did not take kindly to US disapproval. On the contrary, Beijing felt that the Americans were not proliferating enough of their own technology to China. Besides complaining over US restrictions on high technology exports to the People's Republic, the Chinese were less than satisfied with strict American import quotas on textiles. The issue of Chinese textiles paled in comparison to what the Americans perceived as Chinese 'dumping' practices in the satellite launch industry. In its tireless pursuit of foreign exchange earnings, the PRC made a bid for the international space market, undercutting American launch prices by as much as 50 per cent.

Besides commercial irritants, there was the issue of China's human rights record in Tibet – an issue rekindled by the 1987 anti-government riots in Lhasa. When the US Congress adopted an amendment on China's human rights violations there, Beijing condemned this as yet another example of the American penchant for interfering in its internal affairs. '[The Congressional amendment] grossly meddles in China's internal affairs and openly urges the US administration to interfere in these affairs.' Human rights in Tibet (like elsewhere in China) bring the Chinese obstacle course full circle again to Taiwan. As the decade closed with diplomatic advances for the Soviets, US ambivalence over Taiwan was beginning to smack more of strategic neurosis than rationality. In the words of Taiwan affairs specialist, Li Jiaquan: 'For the United States, Taiwan is both an asset and a burden, more of the latter.' Compared with the People's Republic, Taiwan would not represent as significant a strategic loss to the Americans. The US no longer stations troops in Taiwan, but it does maintain Northeast Asian facilities in nearby Japan and South Korea, while China itself allows joint US-PRC monitoring facilities on its northern borders (two in Xinjiang for monitoring Soviet missile tests in Central Asia) and port rights for visiting American naval vessels.

It may be argued that Taiwan could still survive a diminution in American arms sales – which ran to about US$800 million annually in recent years – by obtaining its military requirements from other sources (such as Japan, South Africa and Israel). About a third of its total US$2.5 billion in arms purchases already comes from non-American sources. Arms exporting countries, however, are certain to meet with diplomatic pressure from Beijing if they attempt to expand their Taiwan dealings. A government-subsidised shipbuilding firm of the Netherlands, for instance, accepted a US$300 million submarine construction order from Taiwan in 1981. The agreement was for two diesel-powered submarines, and the hope for subsequent agreements in the construction of four more. These would have supplemented Taiwan's anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities. Beijing immediately downgraded relations with The Hague, which in turn responded by rejecting further orders form Taiphe. The example was obviously effective for the Swiss government which declined a request to supply Taiwan with wheeled APCs. Japan could expect the same treatment from China if it became an arms supplier to Taiwan. For Japan, the strategic costs of incurring China's wrath would outweigh the economic benefits of arms sales. Like the US, Japan needs the PRC as a strategic counterweight to the Soviet Union, but in Japan's case the perceived Soviet threat is magnified by its presence in Japanese littoral waters and nearby bases. Moreover, Japanese arms sales to Taiwan would be construed by Beijing as an American betrayal via its Asian proxy. As an American military ally, it would not be in Tokyo's interests to contribute to its protector's loss of Chinese support.

Whilst Taiphe would welcome Japanese arms sales as a propaganda coup against the PRC and an alternative to American supplies, if Taiwan turned to other sources, such as South Africa, it would risk losing the international goodwill it needs to deter China from the very invasion which it seeks to defend against. Part of that respect hinges on Taiwan representing an anti-Marxist bastion practising the free world value of an open economy, thereby drawing some moral sympathy for its own reunification formula: a democratic China united under the 'Three Principles of People'. These principles, usually translated as 'nationalism, democracy and the people's liveli-
hood’ and which are enshrined in the Republic of China’s Constitution, were advocated by Nationalist People’s Party founder, Sun Yat-Sen (1866–1925). It must also be remembered that whilst Taiwan is diplomatically isolated, it is not so commercially. The Island’s exports account for 53 per cent of its GNP, and it is industrially reliant on the import of raw materials. It would not wish to undermine a thriving economy – often held as evidence of the superiority of its own system compared to that of the Chinese Communists – by associating with ‘pariah’ states. For example, Taiwan depends on oil from the Persian Gulf for most of its energy requirements: to offend the Arab bloc by becoming more openly reliant on Israeli weapons sales would be counter-productive. (Like Beijing, Teipeh has had clandestine weapons dealings with the Israelis.)

If, however, Teipeh did decide to sacrifice the propaganda war and its more sensitive trading partners for outright military deterrence, its association with ‘pariah’ states such as Israel and South Africa would no longer pose a dilemma. That these two states are considered to be undeclared nuclear powers may be a lesson not lost on the Nationalists, but held in abeyance as a contingency in extremis. In this respect it is interesting to note that the clandestine Ba Yi (First August Radio) – transmitted in Mandarin from the Soviet Union but purportedly Chinese – claimed in 1983 that Taiwan had already embarked on a nuclear weapons project. In its 2 February broadcast, it stated that a ‘private corporation of which the [US] Secretary of State was once manager, has gone so far as to build a nuclear project in Taiwan. In the near future, the Kuomintang [Guomindang] will be able to produce guided missiles and nuclear warheads.’ Whether the PRC believes this is not clear, for Beijing does not acknowledge the existence of clandestine radio stations, and therefore refrains from commenting on their allegations.

In 1988 there was renewed speculation that Taiwan was developing nuclear weapons when one of its nuclear scientists disappeared to the US. Chang Hsien-yi, of the Chungshan Institute of Science and Technology (a weapons development centre), reportedly left with blueprints of nuclear missiles being developed there. Soon after the New York Times reported that the US pressured Taiwan to close the Institute’s 40-megawatt reactor and to stop building a secret plutonium processing plant. Although the Island has an energy-oriented nuclear programme, with three such power plants in operation, any secret hoarding or processing of plutonium would raise suspicion: plutonium, which is obtained from uranium by bombardment, is vital to nuclear weapons production. Again, Beijing remained silent on external speculation over the Nationalists’ nuclear ambitions. However, the fact remains that Taiwan does have the technological expertise for producing nuclear weapons – a project of perhaps three years’ duration – and China, like the rest of the world, is well aware of this. Beijing need not trifle with hearsay. By threatening Taiwan with invasion if the Island did become nuclear capable, China has already made its deterrent clear.

Unlike Taiwan, whose status in the world community is a de facto one dependent on moral claims for the right to resist Communist rule, the PRC has the advantage conferred by formal recognition – it was admitted to the United Nations in 1971 – for exercising its national rights. A stronger PRC of the twenty-first century could build upon its status quo as the recognised China, so that world opinion would not necessarily condemn an action justified on the basis of sovereignty, just as it had not condemned Britain when it sent a task force to the Falklands on a similar basis. This is assuming, of course, that China is not perceived by international society to be abusing its power, declaring its invasion of Taiwan to be an ‘internal affair’. International opinion could come to regard this as a Chinese code term for transgressing the rights of minority political groups, such as the Tibetans and the ‘pro-democracy’ demonstrators.

Besides fulfilling its longheld objective to reunify China, control of Taiwan would confer significant strategic advantages to China. The strategic importance of Taiwan is its obstruction of complete Soviet encirclement; it would enable the Chinese to exert more effective naval pressure on Vietnam, especially in terms of military leverage over territorial claims in the South China Sea. Additionally, as Snyder points out, it allows for China’s unimpeded access to the Pacific Ocean, and the potential to dominate the region’s major trade routes. China’s ability to intercept the USSR–Vietnam sea route would be a significant strategic benefit in this respect.

However, in the period to China’s projected status as an advanced world power in the mid twenty-first century, reunification by force may be judged too costly. Taiwan is an embarrassment, but it is not a plausible military threat to the PRC, certainly less in the latter part of this century than at any time in the past. Radio and balloon-borne propaganda characterise the extent of Taiwan’s ‘threat’. Nor do the Nationalists intend provoking the Communists by permitting the growth of the independence movement. During Taiwan’s election campaign in December 1986, the threat of a Communist invasion was
used by the Nationalists to dissuade Taiwanese from voting for the newly sanctioned opposition party. Obviously the Nationalist government's common interest with its rival in Beijing is 'One China' reunification, not Taiwanese independence. To the extent that the Nationalists will ensure that 'internal chaos' will not emerge as an excuse for a Chinese invasion, a military solution to reunification in the remaining years of this century is improbable.

Certainly there are no economic or military advantages to be gained by armed intervention. Economically Taiwan represents an advanced industrial base with technological expertise upon which the mainland could draw for its own modernisation. This suggests that invasion could be exceedingly costly for the Chinese — they would not want to destroy Taiwan's industry. From the perspective of trade, Taiwan is less important commercially when one takes into account Hong Kong. The point was made in Dan C. Stanford's *The Future Association of Taiwan With the People's Republic of China*: 'Taiwan does not represent a crucial window for Chinese products to move West . . . Only the petroleum sales carry the prospect of endearing Taiwan to the mainland.'\(^{125}\) This provides China with even less incentive to invade. In terms of military benefits, unification would increase the PLA's strength in weapons but not in trained manpower. Taiwan's armed forces would not be trusted as part of the PLA. This is a point that seems to have eluded observers who looked for a flaw in Beijing's 1981 promise that the Taiwan armed forces could be retained after reunification. They thought they had found it when Deng Xiaoping confirmed that Taiwan's military would come under PLA control. Deng's admission is, at best, equivocal. Thus there is no military advantage to be gained in absorption of Taiwan's armed personnel.

Clearly, the forcible recovery of an intransigent Taiwan before the year 2049 would prove extremely costly in comparison to the established, more patient, campaign of persuasion and is hence improbable. Relations with Taipei improved noticeably after the end of Chiang dynastic dominance over the GMD, and there is no serious indication that this trend will not continue. If, however, China finds itself at war with other enemies, the state of protracted play between the 'two Chinas' might seem to demand swift resolution. Taiwan could willingly reunite with the PRC through a CPC-GMD alliance if China were invaded. This occurred at the time of the Japanese invasion, and it might occur again in the event of a Soviet invasion of China as a consequence of serious Sino-Vietnamese war. If, instead, Taiwan chose to ally with the aggressors, Beijing's decision to forcibly incorporate Taiwan under its rule would be motivated by this fear of enemy alignment. China could not allow Taiwan to serve as the strategic nexus between the Soviet Far East and Vietnam. Nor would it give Moscow the satisfaction it might have had if the Communists had not won the Chinese revolution: a China enfeebled by its division into a Soviet-dominated north and Nationalist-controlled south. Under circumstances of the GMD's collusion with the enemy, China's most plausible course of action is to pre-empt the alliance by invading the Island. Therefore, the most probable catalyst to reunification is an external aggressor.

To conclude, Taiwan, in isolation, poses no threat to China but its refusal to accept CPC rule calls for a long-term diplomatic offensive. However, were such a non-military offensive to be interrupted by external aggression and were the Chinese Communists and Nationalists to fail to co-operate once again in the defence of China, then the PLA must invade Taiwan in an effort to neutralise its strategic worth to external adversaries. True to the people's war requirement for holding the psychological initiative, China's quest for long-term security necessitates an offensively conceived strategy toward Taiwan.

**INDIA**

As with Vietnam and Taiwan, China's dispute with India exhibits a policy of 'active defence', for here too the Chinese prefer to mould their own strategic environment in the spirit of holding the initiative. Beijing refuses to recognise the McMahon Line, drawn by the British in 1914, and adopted by New Delhi as its legitimate boundary in the Himalaya region. Nor will Beijing relinquish control of territory further to the northwest, which was won during the short but severe border war of 1962. During the quarter century since China fought with its largest Asian neighbour, the Sino-Indian frontier dispute had not been resolved. This is despite the resumption of diplomatic relations in 1976, eight rounds of border negotiations in the period to November 1987, and a summit meeting between Deng Xiaoping and Rajiv Ghandi in December 1988. The potential for settlement by force of arms is obviously present, even if it is not especially attractive to either side.

As Figure 4.4 indicates, three sectors of the frontier are contested. The Western Sector of Aksai Chin, between Kashmir and Tibet; the
PLA military victory in 1962, China withdrew its troops from Arunachal Pradesh - 90,000 square kilometres of which are still claimed by Beijing - but retained control over the 36,000-square kilometre Aksai Chin. The Chinese were not concerned with engaging the Indians in a general war: the October–November 1962 operation was of limited scope designed to demonstrate to the Indians that the PRC intended to maintain its control over Aksai Chin - a vital strategic connection between the remote Chinese borderlands of Tibet and Xinjiang.

Aside from the wartime benefits which Pakistan may derive by obtaining access to the Chinese-controlled Western Sector (the movement of Pakistani forces from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in the event of another Indo-Pakistan war), or - if under Indian control - the possible benefit of an Indian military route to Pakistani territory, New Delhi is more concerned with the Eastern Sector. Under Chinese control, Arunachal Pradesh would be removed as a natural barrier to India's Brahmaputra plains. Of more immediate import are the internal reasons for New Delhi wishing to retain Arunachal Pradesh. Under Indian control, Arunachal Pradesh would be removed as a natural barrier to India's Brahmaputra plains. Of more immediate import are the internal reasons for New Delhi wishing to retain Arunachal Pradesh. It constitutes one of the seven northeast Indian states which are physically linked to the Indian heartland by a 32-kilometre-wide corridor. This area, apart from the comparatively peaceable Arunachal Pradesh, is the home of tribal insurgents. By comparison, the security benefits of Arunachal Pradesh for China are negligible.

The seemingly simple solution, of both nations accepting each other's control over their preferred sectors, had been proposed by Beijing but rejected by New Delhi. By 1987, China changed its mind on the deal by denying that it had ever been offered. China's ambassador to India, Tu Guowei, told the Indian press that there was no official record of such a proposal by either Zhou Enlai in the early 1960s or Deng Xiaoping in 1980. Not only did the proposal for mutual concession fail, but its withdrawal was an added setback at a time of revived tension. From 1986 the border issue had deteriorated with fresh mutual recriminations and military provocations. In July of that year, India accused China of building a helicopter pad in western Arunachal's Sumdorong Chu valley (see Figure 4.4). To the Chinese, who regard the valley as their own territory, 'it is but natural that we will be there'. This episode resulted in troop reinforcements by both sides. Although reported skirmishing had not been confirmed - evidently, both Beijing and New Delhi wished to downplay the incident - China possesses a military advantage in the area. Troop movement and supply are facilitated by a better road system and an
earlier thaw of snowbound terrain on the Chinese side of the disputed border. With the streamlining of PLA Military Regions completed in 1985, redeployment of troops to the Indian frontier has been considerably facilitated. The reported reintroduction of the 62nd Field Army in Tibet, giving China a strength of about thirty divisions compared to the seven deployed by India, had led one Western source to observe that: 'even if the Chinese could not support all their troops in combat, the troop movements in Tibet have made Indian military planners nervous.'129

In December 1986 Arunachal Pradesh, which had been federally administered, was declared a State of the Indian Union. China condemned India for attempting to 'legalise its occupation of Chinese territory through domestic legislation'.130 However, New Delhi's attempt to consolidate its ownership claim to the Eastern Sector was not unduly provocative. It may be understood as an expression of the practice if not the negotiated agreement of mutual concession. Despite Chinese protests over India's conferral of full statehood to Arunachal Pradesh, China has not attempted to reclaim the Eastern Sector through large-scale military action. By the same token, China does exercise effective control of the Western Sector, and with the passing of time it has become too entrenched in this zone for India to seriously expect a Chinese withdrawal. In effect, each side's vital strategic zone of the common frontier has not been seriously contested. Because the present arrangement is, for the most part, strategically satisfying, and there are no economic reasons to fuel competition - the disputed highlands are neither fertile nor endowed with any known mineral wealth - any future conflict over the border issue is likely to remain restrained.

If another war in this area were to eventuate, its containment would be well within China's conventional military capability given the divisional strength which the PLA could bring to bear. Even though there are more soldiers in an Indian division (about 16 000 compared to the PLA's 13 000), China still retains an almost 4:1 superiority in that area. Only in regional air power do the Indian forces hold clear numerical superiority. Ultimately, however, terrain and climate would dictate the extent and duration of hostilities. As regards the latter, operations would have to be confined to the summer months. So limitation must continue to characterise armed hostility on the common frontier. On its own, India could not afford to escalate operations beyond the border passes for fear of serious conflict with a now nuclear-armed China. An Indian offensive into China under the pretext of, say, liberating Tibet, would be construed by Beijing as an invasion rather than a mere border clash. Significantly, India did not politically exploit, or interfere in, the October 1987 or March 1988 Tibetan rebellions against Chinese authority. Rather, it co-operated with the Chinese government by sealing off the border with Tibet to prevent an exodus of refugees. In view of these recent examples of restraint, Indian support of Tibet's 'liberation' appears unlikely in the near term.

India could not credibly threaten the PRC with nuclear retaliation to any similar such threat of invasion by China. For although India tested a nuclear device in 1974, a decade after the first Chinese test, it has yet to embark on a nuclear weapons programme of comparable scope. China possesses a nuclear triad of air, land and sea based weapons with ranges extending from tactical to intercontinental. By comparison, when the Indian navy acquired its first nuclear-powered submarine in 1988, the country's undeclared nuclear arsenal was alleged to amount to less than 20 air-deliverable low-yield atomic bombs, with the projected addition of another 80 by 1990.131 A number of short-range (300 kilometres) land-based missiles are also believed to be nuclear capable.132 These American estimates came at a time when Rajiv Gandhi's government acknowledged an increase in public pressure towards 'the nuclear option' and are not dissimilar to the sort of force advocated in the ensuing debate. K. Subraheemanayam, a past director of the government-funded Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, suggested that a tactical nuclear deterrent, comprised of low-yield airburst devices, was both credible and cheap: 'As long as China and Pakistan believe in [nuclear] deterrence, you have to use it to influence their thinking ... A bomb is much cheaper than a Mirage-2000 plane. For the cost of one Mirage, you can build many bombs. A bomb is the cost of only two or three tanks.'133 The Institute's director, Jasjit Singh, while no advocate of a nuclear India, agreed in 1988 that 'the most cost effective solution is to go nuclear'.134 Officially the Indian government has kept its nuclear option open, the final decision depending on whether Pakistan went nuclear. If it did, 'India would not hesitate to build an atomic bomb'.135 Whether or not India decides to declare itself a nuclear-armed power, any present or future deployments would necessarily represent a force so embryonic as to be rendered vulnerable to pre-emption by China. The prospect of a nuclear-armed Pakistan poses a further complicating factor to the survivability of an Indian nuclear arsenal, even without China assuming the role of India's primary nuclear threat in the event of serious conflict. In this respect, China's friendship with Pakistan and India's friendly relations with
the Soviet Union had reinforced the need for military caution to be exercised between Beijing and New Delhi. The more recent improvement in Sino-Soviet relations would act as a further cautionary consideration on India's part. Economically, both India and China are among the world's poorest states. Yet since the late 1970s, they have embarked on their own versions of a modified free economy. War would represent too expensive a diversion of precious development resources. Thus deterioration in bilateral relations is in neither party's interests; co-operation is.

The only plausible circumstance for Indian aggression against China would be an opportunistic one. Just as a Soviet or Soviet-supported invasion of China holds implications for Taiwan, so too with India. Taking advantage of PLA diversions to other theatres of combat, India might attempt to forcibly settle the border issue, an operation which could involve seizure of China's strategic road linking Tibet and Xinjiang, and the capture of Lhasa. The ultimate objective here would be to restore Tibetan 'independence' and thus create a buffer state against China. Under circumstances of the PLA fighting both Soviet and Vietnamese forces, India would risk not a Chinese punitive nuclear strike against one of its own cities (for any such action by Beijing must take into account the possibility of provoking a Soviet counter-threat on behalf of India, or direct Indian retaliation), but the more probable prospect of a protracted people's war employing guerilla tactics and subversion. The threat of subversion is a particularly powerful one for it holds the potential of destabilising the Indian administration and thus undermining its ability to pursue a war beyond its borders. The benefits of participation in a Soviet-Vietnamese war against China must be weighed against the threat of domestic upheaval.

In this respect it is pertinent to note that India is a poor, politically troubled nation, which spends a fifth of its total budget on defence. China, with a GDP about three times larger than India's and twice its growth rate, spends only half as much on defence as a proportion of GDP. India's defence spending increased by about 150 per cent in the five-year period to 1987, but its force profile is better suited to conventional warfare than countering professional guerilla operations in mountainous terrain. At sea the Indians would perform better. Their navy is approaching 'blue water' capability and has incorporated rapid deployment capability, as demonstrated in November 1988 when Indian commandos helped crush an attempted coup in the Maldives. Whilst Indian naval power poses a potential threat to China if employed in Soviet naval operations on China's southern littoral, it is of no use against a modern people's war operation on the inland border. A Chinese counter-offensive into Arunachal Pradesh, for example, could involve professional mountain warfare units, equipped with tactical nuclear and chemical arsenals, in conjunction with a campaign to destabilise India's north-east tribal states by providing independence movements with material support. The costs of an armed incursion into Chinese borderlands, even when Chinese forces are diverted to other theatres of war, would be too high for the objective of conclusively demonstrating India's sovereignty over the disputed frontiers.

NORTHEAST ASIA: KOREA AND JAPAN

In the preceding evaluations of threats to the People's Republic from the Soviet Union, Vietnam, Taiwan and India, it was argued that China's security is not endangered by any one these powers acting unilaterally against the PRC but would be endangered in the event of collusion. It was also argued that under a modern people's war strategy, Beijing cannot afford to pursue a reactive policy toward its strategic environment, when the preferred strategy should be one of holding the psychological initiative by dissuading enemy forces from embarking on hostile action. This objective of active deterrence must also extend to Korea and Japan. As the ensuing discussion will indicate, it is here that interdiction of Soviet-Vietnamese lines of communication becomes most crucial, and where strategic and economic threats to China's security are particularly worrisome given that the superpowers, China, Japan and the two Koreas render East Asia the world's second most heavily armed region after Central Europe. The Korean peninsula, adjoining the Chinese mainland, is the most intensely confrontational zone within this region. It holds immense strategic importance to China. The task of modern people's war strategy is to ensure Korea acts as a protective shield against foreign invasion, rather than as the traditional 'dagger' poised to strike at its industrial eastern flank; and that it serves to stretch enemy logistics instead of tightening the maritime noose around China's seaboard. The Chinese do not need to be reminded by the North Koreans that 'only when Korea is at peace can China expect to be at peace'. The warning, as suggested below, could even be heeded at Pyongyang's cost.
Korea

Historically, Korea has been the object of regional power rivalry, as exemplified in the thirteenth century when Kublai Khan used Korea as his base for an attempted invasion of Japan, and in the sixteenth century when Japan's Shogun Hideyoshi did likewise in the hope of invading China. By the seventeenth century Korea came under Manchu domination and served as a Chinese vassal state for 250 years. The return of Japanese rule early in the twentieth century permitted the peninsula to be exploited for Japanese war aims: first the capture of Manchuria in 1931, then the invasion of China in 1937, and finally the onset of the Pacific War in 1941. Soviet occupation of the peninsula's North in the last month of The Second World War, and American control of the South, led to the division of Korea at the 38th parallel of latitude, ushering yet another phase of great power competition on the peninsula. The 1950-53 Korean War, which began when North Korean forces attempted to forcibly reunify the country, escalated into a superpower war by proxy: the Soviet-supplied, Communist regime of the North fought the American-led UN defence of the South, but when the UN Command under General Douglas MacArthur crossed the 38th parallel and advanced as far as the Chinese border marked by the Yalu River, China's own security was directly threatened. Indeed PLA participation in the Korean War in support of the North and China's cultivation of friendly relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), clearly demonstrate the peninsula's continued relevance to Chinese security. As Ian Wilson has noted:

Large numbers of Chinese troops were dispatched to protect the DPRK in late 1950 because Korea was seen as a knife pointing at the key industrial centres of the Northeast and, once the war aims of MacArthur's UN forces had changed from the simple status quo ante bellum, it was unacceptable that hostile troops should drive up to the Yalu River or that a hostile regime should be installed on China's border. A main thrust of Chinese policy in the region from that time on has been to maintain good relations with Pyongyang and, as far as possible, to deny the territory to others, even the Soviet Union.137

That the DPRK is the only state with which the PRC has a mutual defence agreement is indicative of China's desire for close relations with North Korea, but this treaty does not deny the territory to Soviet influence. Pyongyang signed an essentially similar security treaty with the Soviet Union in the same year, 1961. Admittedly, the DPRK has demonstrated an ability to maintain overall balanced relations with these two strategic adversaries, avoiding actions which would be inimical to either, and gaining military and economic aid from both. For example, China supplied North Korea with about 50 improved MiG-21 aircraft (the A-5 or export version of the O-5) in 1983-4; and the Soviet Union provided an equal number of MiG-23s. However, since the mid-1980s when the Soviets obtained overflight and port visiting rights in the DPRK, the strategic outlook in North Korea has favoured the USSR. In return for military aid in the form of some 40 MiG-23s in 1985, the Soviets were allowed use of North Korean military airfields, the port of Nampo opposite China, and overflight rights which would be of obvious application to reconnaissance of eastern China. Soviet strategist Michael Sadykiewicz admitted the airfields would allow Soviet aircraft shorter strike ranges against Beijing and Manchuria (in comparison to deployments from Mongolia), and bring the 'key strategic territory of West Central China' within tactical bomber range; while Korean ports would 'provide an intermediate link between ports in the Soviet Union and ports in Vietnam'.138 Soviet military supplies to Vietnam and Cambodia already passed through the railhead at North Korea's Najin port, a Soviet port of call like Wonsan and Nampo. Thus Soviet use of Korean facilities in their prosecution of a war against China cannot be ignored. To prevent such a development, China's options are essentially twofold: indirect support of the South in a bid to remove Moscow's influence in the North; and naval co-operation with Japan to frustrate Soviet access to the Yellow Sea and South China Sea.

Chinese Support of South Korea in Time of War

In the event of war breaking out again in Korea, analysts have identified Beijing's dilemma as essentially one of either supporting the North and alienating Washington and Tokyo; or refraining from involvement and thereby forcing the North into greater Soviet dependence.139 Whether China supported the North and thereby opposed US forces in the South, or remained non-committal, it would still find itself inadvertently aiding Soviet influence on the peninsula. Beijing is, of course, committed by treaty to defend North Korea if it were attacked. Rhetorically, too, it has affirmed this position. In 1984, for example, the Chinese officially stated that 'if the South expands its
army and invades the North, it would be impossible for China to remain a spectator with its arms folded.\textsuperscript{140} However, strategic logic would suggest that this is precisely what China should do. A Westernised, united Korea cannot be regarded as an immediate or direct threat to China. Although Beijing does not recognise Seoul diplomatically, it has formed stronger economic ties with the South than with its ally in the North. The flourishing if unofficial relationship includes joint venture initiatives and indirect trade in excess of US$2 billion a year (compared with a mere US$19 million in 1979). By 1988, trade with the Korean capitalists was about three times greater than with the Communist North. Rather than being a cause for concern, a non-Communist Korea would not only contribute to China's modernisation—the chosen path to national power—but would detract from Moscow's own strategic standing in the region. It would do this specifically by depriving the Soviets of access to Korean facilities; and generally by providing a counterbalance to Soviet power in Northeast Asia to PRC advantage. In modern people's warfare, China's strategy in Korea may be referred to as the 'Seoul strategy'. It mirrors that employed in Southeast Asia where Beijing sought the diminution of Vietnamese-Soviet influence in Indochina. In this light, and to return to the earlier pseudo-dilemma of which side of the Korean divide Beijing's interests lie, opposition to a North Korean offensive against the South makes more than moral sense: 'if the DPRK strikes the first blow and starts a war, China would be in no position to support her.'\textsuperscript{141}

Beijing's current policy of discouraging the North from embarking on a military solution to the reunification of Korea holds direct relevance to Chinese defence: a second Korean war, whatever China's responses, is best avoided for it would constitute a theatre in close proximity to China's industrial northeast (Manchuria) and its accelerating coastal economy in the east. This area accounts for about 70 per cent of China's total industrial production. On the other hand, the economic importance of Manchuria and China's coastal belt is such that its fate cannot hinge on the hope that war will not again erupt in Korea or that the Soviets will not use a North Korean attack as 'a prelude to Soviet military action in the Pacific'.\textsuperscript{142} Otherwise Beijing is pursuing a reactive policy which only views Korea as a strategic dagger pointed at China. If the dagger is to be converted into a defensive shield, then China must protect its interests in accordance with a modern people's war strategy in which knowledge of the enemy, stratagem and deception play a more crucial role than a direct application of armed force. Accordingly, the nature of a second Korean war must be anticipated.

Popular projections of a second Korean war, marked by great power involvement, may be overstated. North Korea, if it were contemplating an invasion of the US-backed South, could not be certain of Soviet or Chinese support. Without such assistance, the chances of DPRK victory through conventional warfare methods would be extremely slim. The North Korean forces are thought to be capable of sustaining a conventional war for no more than three months without allied assistance. Knowing that allied support might not be forthcoming, and given that the DPRK has adopted a Maoist strategy of people's war, it is probable that a modern-day offensive by North Korean forces would be far from 'conventional'. Rather, the operation would be one of pre-emptive surprise attack or blitzkrieg. This strategy is suggested by the elements of surprise and deception necessary in the execution of a modern people's war offensive; the DPRK's published emphasis on special warfare operations, 'which hit and destroy the enemy by employing concentration, dispersion, and swift mobility';\textsuperscript{143} and its established numerical superiority over the South in both special and regular forces. A commando component of some 100 000 personnel has been described by the Commander of the US forces in South Korea as 'the world's biggest special attack forces capable of infiltrating into South Korea from the front and rear' and that these forces are assisted by '250 AN2 light transports capable of airlifting and dropping 2500-3000 paratroopers simultaneously'.\textsuperscript{144} North Korea's conventional forces hold numerical superiority over the South in every category, including a 3:1 superiority in tanks and missile-armed fast attack craft, and a 2:1 superiority in combat aircraft. The North's equipment is not as advanced as that of the South, but as with the PLA numerical advantages against technologically superior foes, swarm tactics could be applied. In this respect, it helps that Seoul is just a short distance from the demilitarised zone. There is, of course, the risk of American use of tactical nuclear weapons. South Korean government analyst, Young Choi, has suggested that this would be offset by North Korean forces taking South Korean civilians hostage, 'making it impossible for US forces to use their sophisticated weaponry . . . and thus facilitating a political settlement'.\textsuperscript{145} However, this raises the whole issue of great power involvement which the North Koreans must avoid if a quick-decision war is to succeed. Rather than relying on the uncertain threat of using hostages, Pyongyang could deter American ground force involve-
ment by threatening to call upon Chinese allied assistance in the form of tactical nuclear guerilla units – the distinctive threat of Chinese military forces in the 1990s and beyond – in contrast to PLA assistance in the form of ‘human wave’ tactics four decades earlier.

Beijing could promise tactical nuclear assistance for its own strategic reasons. Viewed from this vantage point of self-interest, the similarity between North Korean and Chinese forces raises a relevant consideration for Chinese defence, one which tends to be overlooked on the East Asian gameboard. Would the DPRK assist China if the latter were invaded? After all, the two armies would be inter-operable in equipment (both of Soviet design) and operational doctrine within a theatre of close proximity to their domestic war supply sources. Article Two of their mutual security pact states:

The two Contracting Parties shall collectively take all necessary measures to prevent either Contracting Party from being attacked by any other country. If either of the Contracting Parties should suffer armed attack by any country or coalition of countries and thus find itself in a state of war, the other Contracting Party shall immediately extend military and other assistance with all necessary means at its disposal.

However, if the DPRK were to render assistance to the Chinese forces it would lose Soviet support, much of which has enabled the growth of the North Korean military establishment. Pyongyang would also weaken itself against the South if it diverted military resources across the Chinese border. It is probable that North Korea would assist China not with men or matériel in Manchuria but by denying the Soviets naval and air bases. Beijing could obtain this assurance from Pyongyang in exchange for the promise of tactical nuclear support if the South Koreans were similarly supported by US forces. In the event that war did break out, China would benefit not by deploying its forces in support of the North Koreans but by a declaration that the North Korean action threatened to escalate into a major war involving the superpowers, and therefore it would (a) refrain from all action in support of the North or (b) restore the peace by occupying Pyongyang until the arrival of international peacekeeping forces. The second option would be facilitated by the PLA’s allied presence on North Korean territory, under the terms of its commitment to provide the North with tactical nuclear deterrent forces. That a tactical nuclear commitment by Beijing might actually promote North Korean confidence to launch an invasion of the South would work to China’s benefit by creating the very situation it sought: North Korea’s military downfall. By breaking its promise and withholding all military aid from the North, Beijing would be instrumental in achieving a South Korean victory.

Japan

Because the purpose of promoting a united Western-oriented Korea is to create a buffer against Soviet aggression, Japan too is potentially valuable in this objective. Tokyo’s official defence policy in the 1980s, contained in the annual Japan Defence Agency white papers, names the Soviet Union as the nation’s primary potential threat. This adversarial relationship is the outcome of Japan’s defence treaty with the US, thereby rendering it part of the anti-Soviet Western alliance, and is accentuated by regional factors which place the Soviet Union in close proximity to Japanese territory – and indeed, from the Japanese point of view, within Japanese territory itself. Tokyo claims sovereignty over the four islands of Shikotan, Habomai, Etorofu and Kunashiri, which the Soviets have occupied since the end of the Second World War. Their location off Hokkaido in the southern Kurile chain place Soviet forces (at the southernmost island of Kunashiri) only 1.8 kilometres from Japanese soil. These islands, referred to by Japan as the ‘Northern Territories’, are colonised by 40 000 Soviet civilians, permanently patrolled by Soviet naval vessels, accommodate supply bases and are garrisoned by a division of troops.146 The islands are strategically important to the Soviets because they guard the opening to the Sea of Okhotsk and provide access to the Western Pacific. They could also function as a forward base for a pre-emptive Soviet attack to free Japanese-held choke-points in the Sea of Japan (see below). Possession of these islands, however, cannot compensate for the Soviets’ geostategic disadvantages within the Far Eastern maritime region. As Figure 4.5 illustrates, the Soviet Pacific Fleet headquarters in Vladivostok is on the Sea of Japan. This sea represents the quickest naval route to the East China Sea and the South China Sea. The Soviet Navy must pass through the Korean and Tsushima straits. If these were blocked, the only other exits are through the Soya and Tsugaru straits (the Soya Strait also links the Sea of Japan to the four Soviet-occupied islands). Both straits are under Japanese control, and thus serve as potential choke-points for Soviet ships seeking alternative outlets from the Sea of Japan. Even if the Soviets attempted a pre-emptive attack to free
these choke-points, they would have to contend with the US presence in Japan which, in 1988–9, accounted for 64,700 military personnel,147 two US Navy bases and a Marines base in southern Japan, as well as an Air Force base at Misawa adjacent the Tsugaru Strait. Although, as the Americans admit, the Soviets hold an approximately 4:1 numerical superiority over US naval vessels and have one-and-a-half times as many aircraft within this maritime theatre, strategic geography erodes Soviet numerical strength.148

The Chinese, who are well-versed in the benefits derived from exploiting geographical impediments to the enemy, could attempt to further restrict the Soviet Union’s access to China’s contiguous southern and eastern waters – a situation permitted by Moscow’s influence in Hanoi and Pyongyang, respectively. China could do this though an agreement with Japan to pool their naval capacities: such an arrangement would impose a stronger counterweight to the Soviet naval presence in the Sea of Japan. For example, a Sino–Japanese agreement could result in a line of sonar detectors between Shanghai and Kagoshima (possibly even paid for by the United States, provided it had access to the resultant data) to track Soviet naval movements, especially ballistic-missile nuclear submarines (SSBNs). Such a venture would be congruent not only with the people’s war strategy of exploiting geography and maintaining the strategic initiative, but also with developments in the US–Japanese security alliance whereby Tokyo has been encouraged to assume a greater responsibility for the defence of its sea-lanes, and with Japan’s military build-up which began in 1977. The decision to strengthen defence was based on the recommendations of the Japanese government’s October 1976 National Defence Program Outline. The ‘Outline’ stipulated that Japan should develop the capability to ‘repel limited, small-scale invasion in principle without external assistance’. Such a capability was defined as: (a) ground – 12 divisions, including one armoured division; (b) sea – 60 anti-submarine ships and 16 submarines; and (c) air – 10 interceptor squadrons (250 aircraft), 3 ground support fighter squadrons, 1 early warning squadron, and 6 groups (19 squadrons) of SAMs.149

By 1987, both the army (Ground Self-Defence Force) and air force (Air Self-Defence Force) had achieved the above goals for their respective divisional and squadron strengths. In terms of equipment, qualitative standards are impressive. Older generation Type 61 tanks and F-4 Phantom fighter interceptors are being replaced with the more advanced Type 74s and Japan-built F-15 Eagles, respectively. The 38-ton Mitsubishi Type 74 MBT, with amphibious capabilities, already constitutes more than half of Japan’s 1170 tanks; while 120 F-15s made up about a third of combat aircraft in 1988–9. In 1990 the number of F-15s is expected to reach 200 and more than 100 Japanese-
modified F-16 Falcons would have been added to the nation's air power. As for the F-4s, these have undergone refurbishing for ground attack missions. The navy (Maritime Self-Defence Force) operates 14 submarines (the 1976 goal was for 16) but its anticipated anti-submarine strength of 60 vessels (destroyers and frigates) was achieved in 1988. Even though the defence capabilities sought in 1976 against a limited attack are largely met, they are clearly inadequate against enemy strength more than a decade later. The Soviet Union's eastern theatre of wartime operations (spanning the Transbaykal and Far Eastern MDs) deploys four tanks divisions, representing a 4:1 superiority over Japan. Furthermore, only about half of Japan's tanks are based in the country's northernmost reaches of Hokkaido which mark the closest landing point for a Soviet invasion. Japanese air defence capabilities are relevant for the four home islands, but they do not adequately cover the approach route from the southwest - that is, Soviet bombers flying over North Korea and the East China Sea. In 1989, Japan's navy had neither the reach to defend a 1000-nautical-mile radius of sea-lanes, as formally proposed by Washington in 1982, nor the capability to close the straits leading out of the Sea of Japan. In this respect, co-operation with Chinese air and naval forces would advance Japan's security interests in relation to threats greater than the 'limited, small-scale invasion' addressed by the 1976 'Outline', and would free US forces for more flexible deployment (such as in the Indian Ocean). Tokyo's commitment to an enhanced 'self-defence' role could well benefit from a complementary relationship with China, whereby Japan's technological sophistication is supplemented by Chinese air and naval numerical might.

Indeed, speculation over such a relationship was voiced by Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, at a conference of regional powers in November 1987. Arguing on the basis that the US had lost its economic supremacy, Lee questioned whether the Japanese would decide that their 'economic-security relationship with the US was no longer valid and that they must build up their own defence'. He speculated on the possibility of 'a fundamental shift in the belief of the Japanese that the world they have known since 1945 is at an end and that they have to either grow themselves or align themselves... or come to some understanding with China, the Soviet Union, or both'. Beijing, naturally, would wish to promote an 'understanding' with Tokyo to the exclusion of the Soviet Union, otherwise military co-operation with Japan would lose its rationale. However, a re-armed Japan of uncertain loyalties does pose a distant threat to China.

This is particularly so in view of the two nations' history of animosity. Chinese national memory of the Japanese invasion in the 1930s, not to mention the Second World War, manifested in the 1980s over a number of issues which led to Chinese warnings of revived Japanese militarism. These included Japan's 1982 attempt to revise school textbooks so as to de-emphasise its wartime excesses; Japanese prime-ministerial homage to the nation's war dead at Tokyo's Yasukuni shrine (1985); and the Japanese Cabinet's resolution in 1987 to increase defence expenditure beyond the 1 per cent GNP ceiling. More fundamentally, the historical root of Sino-Japanese hostility has found contemporary expression in economic relations. Anti-Japanese sentiment was exemplified by the 1985 student demonstrations in Beijing and Xian. Students protested over Japan's 'second invasion' of China, this time an economic invasion perceived to be exploitative. This attitude was reflected at the official level by Beijing's displeasure over bilateral trade relations. Admittedly Japan has become the PRC's major foreign partner in the four-modernisations programme, but complaints have centred on inadequate efforts by the Japanese to transfer high technology desired by China. (This is another facet of China's high-tech phase which accompanied the 4M programme, elaborated in Chapter 2.) Japan, for its part, met with disappointments in its economic relations with China from as early as February 1979, when Beijing suspended 23 major contracts with Japanese firms. Clearly the long-term threat to China from Japan is an economic one: a Japanese economy which is domestically overgrown and can only maintain itself by 'spilling over'. As with the East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere of the 1930s, Japan could seek military expansion - which would be technically feasible in that Japanese shipyards and armament factories have a huge idle capacity - in order to advance into neighbouring territories to secure markets. China represents the largest and the closest market to the Japanese home islands. (By the mid-1980s the PRC had become Japan's principal export market in Asia.) For this reason, China's people's war strategists would need to persuade Tokyo that a defence arrangement with Beijing would be in Japan's interests. Re-armament for economic reasons would be unnecessary if Japan continues to provide China with capital and appropriate technology in exchange for access to its markets and energy resources. China's coal mining industry provides a graphic example of the two nations' practical arrangements in this regard: Japan buys back the coal produced by mining equipment provided to China, and the Chinese are able to pay for this capital equipment with their subsequent coal sales.
Modern Chinese Defence Strategy

complementary nature of the two economies is the most compelling argument for China assuming a significant role in Japanese investment priorities. A practical indication of this came in 1988 when the Japanese premier’s visit to China was accompanied by a low-interest loan package worth US$6 billion over the period 1990-95. In exchange, Beijing offered better terms for Japanese companies and Deng’s blessings for a ‘new kind of relationship’. Enemies in the past, China and Japan were now prepared to become ‘Brothers in Fortune’, to borrow the fitting description of an Asiaweek editorial: one would receive a boost in its four-modernisations goal, the other stood to realise its ‘pre-war dream of China as the economic promised land’.

By comparison, the Soviet Union represents a less accessible market geographically and a less desirable one politically. The former entails long trade routes to reach a largely European-based population. China’s energy resources, such as those in Manchuria and the offshore petroleum facilities in the Yellow Sea, are geographically more accessible than those in ice-bound Siberia. Notwithstanding the newly acquired finesse of Soviet foreign policy, the latter (political) considerations must also weigh heavily in favour of China. Japanese pursuit of the Soviet market must face the prospect of political exploitation from Moscow, for the USSR is neither an equal nor an ally, but a military superpower at odds with Western security interests. Moreover, as long as Japan is aligned with Western interests, American apprehension over Soviet access to Japanese technology will remain a constraining influence. Nor are Chinese sensitivities to be overlooked, though they became less pronounced at the end of the decade. Japan’s past involvement in Siberian resource development was condemned by Beijing as a direct threat to Chinese security and ultimately disadvantageous to that of Japan’s. By 1987 Japanese interest in such ventures was flagging. It might yet revive in the wake of the Sino-Soviet summit. Normalised relations between Beijing and Moscow, in addition to the new Soviet-American detente, would cause Japan less anxiety about investing in Siberia. But even without worrying about offending Beijing, Japanese investment priorities may still gravitate toward China for another reason: the offer of greatly improved access to raw materials and labour. This was part of the 1988 deal in exchange for the US$6 billion loan. Therefore, there were not just strategic reasons for Japan’s loyalties but more favourable economic incentives as well, thereby strengthening China’s geographic advantage over the Soviet Union. (This provides a further example of how a people’s war strategist exploits an otherwise strong enemy’s weaknesses by concentrating on the non-military ‘flanks and rear’.)

Another consideration which must weigh in favour of closer ties with a China willing to accommodate Japan, is that Tokyo has fewer economic options than Beijing. To quote Miguel Wionczek:

Searching for capital goods and technology for its long-term development China has many options. It can get capital goods in practically every Western industrial country and technology in the United States, Japan or Western Europe. Japan’s future expansion of external markets will be seriously circumscribed, however, by economic stagnation in the industrialized North Atlantic area [plus the greater insularity of a unified European market after 1992]. And the Chinese are sending a stream of signals to Japan that economics, and trade in particular, cannot be divorced from political and military issues.

Japanese militarism, born of externally imposed economic constraint, cannot be regarded as Tokyo’s preferred option for survival. The risks of such a venture could prove suicidal. Massive re-armament would be both visible and subject to pre-emptive surgical strikes – perhaps from Chinese SLBMs – on Japan’s war industry. At that stage of overt Japanese re-armament, China would still hold overwhelming numerical superiority in every category of major weapon except large surface ships, but Japan’s concentration of industry and population within a small geographic radius would permit its destruction with only a few low-yield nuclear weapons. (The American bombing of Hiroshima in 1945 was achieved with only 20 kilotons.) Just as the Japanese would prefer to avoid the risks associated with a militaristic path to economic survival, so too the Chinese would wish to avoid destruction of an otherwise useful techno-economic partner and front-line state to Soviet expansion. It is true that Beijing could refrain from a direct attack on Japanese industry, but still demonstrate its military resolve to Tokyo by seizing the Japanese-occupied, Chinese-claimed Diaoyu Dao or Dachen Islands (shown on Figure 4.3). For this reason, and despite the reported existence of oil deposits around the islands, the territorial dispute is best left unresolved until such a time as Beijing requires an excuse for a punitive operation to remind Tokyo of its military vulnerability to Chinese action. That armed and electronically equipped Chinese fishing vessels circled the Dachens in 1978 hints at Beijing’s preparedness to use the
islands issue as a medium for military action against the Japanese.

In view of the benefits which both nations would derive from military and economic co-operation, pragmatism should triumph over historical animosity. Both have shown themselves to be pragmatically motivated. For Japan this pragmatism has encompassed a cost-effective military alliance with its wartime enemy, the United States, while a special feature of Chinese military tradition - relevant to a modern people's war philosophy - is that a secondary adversary should be befriended in order to counter the primary adversary. Thus China improved its relations with its former enemy, the United States, in balancing its latest strategic opponent, the Soviet Union. Similarly, Japan - and, more recently, Korea's capitalist south - are historical foes who would advance China's future security calculations if they were converted to friends. Already China and Japan have shown themselves to be pragmatically motivated. For Japan this pragmatism has encompassed a rational development of this fledgling security relationship. It would be one which Washington would welcome in view of the possibility of diminishing US defence commitments to an economically strong Northeast Asia. The alternative, that Beijing and Tokyo should become competitors for power in the region, would disadvantage both insofar as a divided Northeast Asia can only represent a strategic gain to their common adversary.

To conclude, Japan, as the region's dominant economic power, may threaten the People's Republic either directly with an economic imperialism reminiscent of the 1930s, or indirectly through an 'economic-security relationship' with its strategic adversary, the Soviet Union. These threats can be circumvented by appeal to Japan's economic interests (an incentive) while China is still the military giant of the region (a disincentive for Japanese re-armament). The task of modern people's war strategy is psychological pre-emption of a future Japanese threat by assuring Tokyo of its future energy and market needs, while at the same time using Japanese capital and technical expertise to develop China's resource base (and therefore its military power). This policy would not only empower China in relation to the Soviet Union, but would, in effect, deny Moscow influence over Tokyo's loyalties. To sustain the complementary Sino-Japanese economies, military co-operation between the two countries must be viewed as a plausible consequence. A people's war strategy of closer military and economic co-operation between the two countries must be viewed as a plausible consequence. A people's war strategy of closer

alignment with Japan would therefore contribute to countering China's primary strategic opponent. It would also significantly reduce any Japanese incentive to violate Chinese security.

Conclusion

Whilst contemporary people's war strategy seeks to out-manoeuvre real or potential adversaries by psychological means, China's physical deterrent against armed aggression from any of its neighbouring powers must be attritionally based. This premise of traditional people's war must continue to underpin the PRC's security as the 'Middle Kingdom' of the twenty-first century - that is, at a time when China has regained its former stature as a power centre but remains surrounded by potential foes. The geography of attrition renders any serious incursion into Chinese territory unprofitable. The problem of defending such an extensive land mass can be offset by its potential utilisation in absorbing and dispersing the enemy. By optimising the advantages offered by a vast interior, the PRC leadership believes it can attend to the security of its borders, for it has indicated that only 'a certain number of key points along the border' have been selected for defence. 'We would use mobile warfare to draw enemy forces onto battlefields of our own choice.' The proclaimed use of mobile warfare does not suggest that positional warfare has been abandoned as an effective means to sustain defence-in-depth. Rather, it has been almost synonymous with the Chinese understanding of active defence which definitely underpins the importance of positional warfare.

In the final analysis China's security is assured by the futility of any invasion scenario. Indeed, there is a certain eloquent relevance in the fifteenth-century warning to Japan's Hideyoshi: Trying to conquer China was like trying to pierce the shell of a tortoise with a feather. Even in the age of long-range missiles, an aggressor must still seize and hold ground or gains will prove transitory and wholly illusory. However, assuming a continued Chinese will to resist, any attempt to do so is likely to prove just as frustrating as it did for the Japanese. Therefore whilst the Chinese 'walls' and positional warfare are still relevant, especially at the initial stage of war, China will not be conquered at its gates. To paraphrase the ancient advice quoted at the opening of this chapter, the Chinese do not rely on 'walls' alone; they trust in the 'virtue' of a people's war strategy played across a vast chessboard that is not only geographic - but also cerebral. Or, as Sun Tzu might have put it, 'Trust in deception, not...
walls.'" For the Middle Kingdom of the late twentieth century 'perception' would be the inclusive word. Its proper exploitation refers to both deterrence and diplomacy. Their convergence carries China's security into the new century and forms the concluding observations of this chapter.

The basics of China's options and likely choices rest with a preparedness to deal with war should it arise - hence the deterrent need for GNW - but in the day-to-day environment of economic self-strengthening a co-operative approach will most likely prevail. China will reach the height of its diplomatic acumen by appealing to a pan-Asian identity, fostering a trend in which Asia will seek greater responsibility for its strategic, political and economic destiny. It would be against Asian interests for the Asia-Pacific region to again become a theatre of war, particularly as future war could involve nuclear weapons usage. It is also within Asian interests to encourage the continued economic development of the region, but on terms more decidedly beneficial to its member nations. The Soviet Union, under the Gorbachev leadership and a Siberian-led perestroika, would become a legitimate member. Both the Chinese and Soviet leaders are agreed on the primacy of economic co-operation over military competition in the region. The ultimate coup in Chinese strategy will be to help Gorbachev succeed in his vision. If the 'new political thinking' is consolidated in the Kremlin, China would be less troubled by the possibility that its growing power in the coming century might be construed as a growing threat. China and the Soviet Union have much in common - an eastern autocratic tradition and a communist party government. They understand each other more than the West is prepared to concede. They are also the co-creators of a modern vision of socialism. It is a hybrid of capitalist and communist ideas, but nonetheless a socialism they insist will remain viable, just as China believes that Maoist strategic concepts can be merged with modernisation. Vietnam, too, is adopting the modern mode of socialism. It must if it is to be assured of its economic recovery and its political integrity.

A likely consequence of the increased prosperity projected for the region in the next century is China's and Japan's elevation in world power. The 'Eastasia power centre' could represent a more independent, self-reliant Asia by transcending communist–capitalist, East–West rivalries. The superpowers would be treated more like everyone else - as business associates in the global market place - rather than the old world puppeteers behind the scenes of an Asian shadow play.

In the new world of a growing pan-Asian identity, the primary goal of enhanced self-reliant security would be to protect the region's trade and economic viability, and to promote co-operative economic practices which would reduce cause for intra-regional rivalries or external exploitation. This study has drawn attention to the potential for Sino–Japanese co-operation. The military expression of such co-operation might be the development of naval capabilities for a policing role (as originally suggested by the US with regard to Japan defending 1000 nautical miles of sea lanes). India's not inconsiderable contribution would extend this Asian security perimeter. Such a 'policing' role could encompass preventive action which guards against an overspill of superpower conflict in the region. It may then be said that China's strategy of people's war under modern conditions will go beyond deterring attack on the homeland. Its future role as a regional giant necessitates an active contribution to preserving the strategic peace, just as it had in the days of the Celestial Empire. In contemporary language this amounts to nothing less than a Pacific defence initiative.