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Modern Chinese Defence Strategy: Present Developments, Future Directions

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If China remains an enigma to many, then Chinese defence policy is the best hidden of its secrets. This book is an investigation of Chinese defence policy and the contemporary importance of the 'people's war' strategy, exemplified from the revolution of 1949 to Vietnam. Contrary to the widely held view that defence modernisation must spell an end to 'people's war', this study argues that the strategy will continue, finding new effectiveness through a combination of middle-range technology and unconventional warfare, including new uses for nuclear weapons: 'guerrilla nuclear warfare'. China is not grooming its military force as a poor replica of a Western or Soviet military force. The changing face of Chinese defence is only cosmetically Western; its strategic features remain distinctly Chinese.

For a note on the author, please see the back flap.

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The jacket-design incorporates a photograph by Zhou Bin of the Chinese air force on the Salvation exercise in the desert (courtesy of Zhou Bin/New China Pictures Company).
Modern Chinese Defence Strategy

Present Developments, Future Directions

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List of Abbreviations

4M Four Modernisations
AAM Air-to-Air Missile
ABM Anti-Ballistic Missile
ADASS Australian Defence and Strategic Studies
AFV Armoured Fighting Vehicle
ANU The Australian National University
APSA Australasian Political Studies Association
ASAT Anti-Satellite
ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASW Anti-Submarine Warfare
ATBM Anti-Tactical Ballistic Missile
BAM Baikal-Amur Mainline
BBC British Broadcasting Corporation
BMD Ballistic Missile Defence
C3I Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence
CEP Circular Error Probable
CIA Central Intelligence Agency (US)
CMC Central Military Commission
CPC Communist Party of China
CPSU Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSA Chinese Surface-to-Air
CSS Chinese Surface-to-Surface
DIA Defense Intelligence Agency (US)
DPRK Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EDI European Defence Initiative
EEZ Exclusive Economic Zone
FBIS Foreign Broadcast Information Service
GDP Gross Domestic Product
GMD Guomindang
GNP Gross National Product
GW Guided Weapon
ICBM Intercontinental-Range Ballistic Missile
IISS International Institute for Strategic Studies
INF Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces
IRBM Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile
JPRS Joint Publications Research Service
LPAR Large Phased-Array Radar
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the School of Social Sciences, Deakin University, Australia, for the unstinting support I received throughout my research; and to Dr Magnus Clarke in particular for his supervision of the PhD thesis on which this book is based. I am also grateful to the many people who have helped in many ways. Finally, I wish to thank my parents for more than can be expressed in words.

ROSITA DELLIOS
A Note on Transliteration

Chinese names and terminology are rendered in China’s official pinyin transliteration system. The exceptions are:

(i) source citations where names appear in the older Wade-Giles or other systems;
(ii) the names of familiar regions or rivers, such as Tibet, Inner Mongolia, the Yellow River; and
(iii) the names of historical persons, such as Sun Tzu and Sun Yat-sen.

According to the new spelling rules provided by China’s State Council, certain historically familiar names need not be changed, but ‘Mao Tse-tung’ and ‘Chou En-lai’ should. In pinyin these are rendered as ‘Mao Zedong’ and ‘Zhou Enlai’. Similarly ‘Teng Hsiaoping’ becomes ‘Deng Xiaoping’. For convenience of recognition, both the pinyin and Wade-Giles versions are given at the first appearance of familiar names, for example, Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung).

Introduction

There he is, with the powers of the dragon, and yet lying hid.

I Ching

A new era in Chinese defence policy followed the ascent in 1977 of China’s most powerful political and military leader since Mao. After being disgraced in 1966 and again in 1976, Deng Xiaoping (Teng Hsiao-ping) returned to the ruling ranks for the third time in July 1977. A decade of quiet self-strengthening and reform would result. The objective of that decade’s endeavours: that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) should stand strong and able in the twenty-first century. In accordance with this mission, defence development in the period since 1977 has been guided by the strategic doctrine of people’s war under modern conditions. This book is an analysis of the significance of this simple slogan to China’s emerging defence posture.

Of specific interest is the balance and competition between the traditional concept for China’s defence, massive manpower, and the lure of the ‘technological imperative’ – that is, the reorganisation of military forces along contemporary lines, employing contemporary weaponry. A related consideration concerns the issue of credibility: how ‘impressive’ the Chinese believe the deterrent force must be in view of the power available to potential antagonists, and in this respect, the type of nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities required to achieve credibility. The pattern of the post-Mao years suggests that China sees itself continuing to be independent of the Soviet and Western military alliances in the future. However, the question then arises as to whether such a stance affects the PRC’s ability to maintain or to create a viable deterrent force. If this policy is an element of weakness then China must compensate: alternative means to the end of deterrence become especially relevant to the status of a strategically independent China. Whilst it is true that in recent years people’s war under modern conditions has not been emphasised as much as it had in the early 1980s, the direction of military reforms indicates that the strategy is taken seriously. Contemporary Chinese policy suggests that the tradition of people’s war is being and can be further developed to provide a cheap yet wholly credible deterrent through its extension into a strategy of guerilla nuclear warfare.
Introduction

Technologies in the service of non-nuclear guerilla operations conducted by regular forces. Nevertheless, the role of nuclear weapons in China's security is by far the most intriguing, and deserves comment from the outset.

At approximately three-million-strong, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) combines all services: Army, Air Force and Navy; conventional and nuclear. Because any significant and visible modernisation in conventional defence capability would be an enormous and excessively costly task, this would suggest that high priority is being given, and must continue to be given, to the development of nuclear weapons as a vital aspect of deterrence. However, while the development of Chinese nuclear weapons and their delivery capabilities has been persistent since 1964, the programme has also remained comparatively modest in view of the power available to China's nuclear-armed enemies of the past, the United States of America (USA), and in more recent times, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Attempts to understand why this is so must take into account the usual resource-related considerations, but must ultimately probe beyond them.

Material restraints on nuclear force development may be attributed to influences such as the state of technology and industry during and since the disruptions of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–76), and higher resource allocation priority to the civilian economy under the four modernisations programme. Not only is China still relatively backward economically, but a decade's hiatus during the Cultural Revolution left it in an even more disadvantaged position with regard to national development. More specifically, technical problems in solid fuelling and guidance systems contributed to the delayed development of intercontinental-range ballistic missile (ICBM) and submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) capabilities. As one analyst has indicated, Chinese willingness to persevere over a long period of time with these difficulties, rather than to mobilise research resources at a more urgent pace, may well have had a retarding effect on the nuclear weapons programme as whole. The Chinese, it would appear, are not driven by a sense of urgency.

However, this may be explained, in part, by reference to the broader issue of time as a variable in Chinese thought. The philosophies of present-day Chinese society are an amalgam of the old and the new. Traditional philosophy, or what anthropologists refer to as 'non-modern ideology', needs to be understood in China's case as the product of many schools of which the Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist are the most enduring examples. The 'new' thought system comprises Communist ideology and its Maoist variant. 'Non-modern ideology' is characteristic not only of pre-industrial societies generally, but is reinforced by a Chinese awareness of a continuum between an ancestral past and the natural progression of lineage into the future. Because such an awareness controlled attitudes and behaviour within the context of daily life, such as filial piety, it became more a practical experience than a notional one.

This cultural predisposition helps explain why the Chinese view of time is 'expansive'. The People's Republic is culturally endowed with an abundance of time and for doctrinal rather than cultural reasons, Communist ideology, too, is concerned with a long-range perspective. It envisages the 'laws' of society unfolding toward the ideal of the 'new man' and translated to military terms, it is the underlying nature of the war that matters – characterised as the inevitable clash with 'imperialist hegemonists' – rather than the situational idiosyncrasies of a particular conflict. Taken together, traditional Chinese thought may be identified as a primary ideology through which the political ideology of Communism has been filtered. Maoism is a product of that filter to the extent that Communist ideology has been adapted to Chinese conditions, including the subjective condition of traditional Chinese thought. Under Mao's direction, time became an operational necessity, and thus a practical application: people's war had to be protracted if it was to succeed in exhausting the enemy in order to reverse the balance of strength. Time, therefore, is a variable that may also contribute to decisions affecting nuclear force development.

This issue of time, and the sheer logistics of military modernisation, are developed further in the first two chapters, while the nuclear strategy they logically suggest is elaborated in the third. Chapter 1 examines the theory of people's war and proposes a model relevant to China's future defence needs. On this basis, it is possible in the next chapter to formulate China's defence modernisation requirements. The overriding conclusion of Chapter 2 is the need for 'mid-tech' modernisation rather than blind pursuit of technological equivalence with the world's more advanced military establishments. Military reforms within the PRC during the Deng decade support this more realistic definition of Chinese defence modernisation.

China's strategic environment acts to establish the purposes and
goals of modernisation. For this reason the view from the 'Middle Kingdom', an historical term for China which retains geostrategic validity in the late twentieth century, is introduced in Chapter 2 and developed more fully in Chapter 4. By reflecting on the nature of the PRC's strategic environment – not as a Western military strategist would, but as a modern people's war strategist might – it will be possible to gain a better understanding of China's ability to meet any future conflicts that may require an armed response. Because Chinese conceptions of defence are far from 'passive' in practice, despite the 'retreat and absorb' concept advertised by people's war, they must also entail offensive military action in pursuit of objectives deemed defensive. Essentially, if the defence of China is at stake, one needs to establish within the limits of informed speculation how it will defend itself, against whom, and under what circumstances. Chapter 4 will form the analytical background to these considerations but it will also highlight the perception-cum-diplomatic management process which has long been a distinctive feature of Chinese security policies. For more than 2000 years the Chinese have known that 'to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill' and that 'a victorious army wins its victories before seeking battle'. Within the fullest sense of people's war under modern conditions this represents strategy of the highest order.

This book argues that people's war under modern conditions is no mere 'human wave' response to armed aggression, but rather the strategy for psychological pre-emption of such aggression. However, if the opponent cannot be forced to 'resign' on the cerebral battlefield then its will to fight must be undermined on the physical one. With GNW as the culmination of people's war under modern conditions, China can not only defend itself successfully against a better equipped aggressor, but may also reverse the adversarial relationship so that it becomes the more powerful party. China can circumvent even the most sophisticated of nuclear strategies devised to date – that of space-based ballistic missile defence – by simply refusing to base its own nuclear deterrence on strategic systems. By doing so it recognises that offensive long-range forces may well become strategically obsolete. GNW, not expensive ballistic missile defences, is the Chinese option for deterrence in the twenty-first century. The enemy will know that even if China cannot stop a nuclear strike it can prevent conquest. In practical terms, by ceding as little as possible over a protracted period, GNW renders the enemy's initial act of nuclear aggression too costly.

In metaphorical terms, China is the dragon lying hid in the deep. As this image from the ancient Chinese oracle I Ching, or Book of Changes, suggests, the nation is not without potential. Indeed, in the absolute terms of human and natural resources, China is extremely powerful. The potential for superior adaptation in the new century's military environment is being matched by deliberation – in other words, by policy and planning. 'There he is, with the powers of the dragon, and yet lying hid' is explained by 'It is not the time for active doing.' The dragon hides in its technological weakness in order to emerge with a force of strategy far superior to its foes. The time for 'active doing' must come only when China has brought to fruition the promise of people's war under modern conditions. Armed with such a strategy, the Chinese dragon cannot be slain. On the contrary, should its potential aggressors fail to show proper regard for this reality, it is they who will be bled of purpose.
Part I
1 People’s War: A Conceptual Odyssey

One of the great characteristics of Mao’s military thought is its flexibility. Many elements can be changed while arguing that nothing has changed.

Gerald Segal, 1982

The Chinese slogan for defence development in since 1977 has been *people’s war under modern conditions*. To understand the implications of this statement in present and future defence planning, it is necessary to examine first the original concept of ‘people’s war’, prior to any analysis of the meaning of ‘modern conditions’, and then to examine the phrase as a whole.

PEOPLE’S WAR

Although the expression ‘people’s war’ may be traced to the advent of the mass armies of the Napoleonic era, it was brought to prominence by the revolution of mid-twentieth-century China. Generically, people’s war must be viewed not as a type of war, in the sense of total, general, limited or revolutionary wars, but rather as a strategy of warfare typically applied to revolutionary wars, including those denoted as wars of national liberation and resistance. Guerilla, insurgency, insurrectionary and other identifiable modes of irregular warfare are terms which are sometimes used interchangeably, and sometimes descriptively – in part or in whole – with broad reference to people’s war. Beyond such confusions and employed within the Chinese revolutionary model, by which people’s war is distinguished in modern times, the term may be defined simply as ‘the traditional Chinese military doctrine designed to deter or repel invasion with massive insurgent forces’.

While there are definitions specific to China, people’s war – in concept – is not uniquely Chinese. It no more belongs to the Chinese than it does to the Spanish whose campaigns against Napoleon inspired the term *guerilla* or ‘little war’. The people’s war concept issues from the interdependence of War and Politics and represents a
distinctive combat genre that has found application throughout recorded military history. This is true not only of ancient China where guerilla operations may be traced back to as early as 360 BC, but also to other parts of the ancient world. Alexander the Great, for instance, responded in kind to guerilla resistance during his central Asian campaign. Across centuries, continents and cultures, the reality of people’s war – whatever its precise designation – can be clearly identified.

For the Arabs led by T.E. Lawrence against the Turks in 1916–18, people’s war represented the normal combat mode for tribes or clans to whom the bearing of arms was a commonplace, whilst in other locations evolved or discovered tactics equally represented people’s war. To cite but a few, there was the Apache guerilla-style resistance during the American colonisation, American use of such methods against the British in the southern theatre of the War of Independence, and Second World War European partisan activities. However, the lessons of one episode, and indeed its attendant theories (if any), cannot be indiscriminately applied to another. The context within which people’s war is applied is crucial to an understanding of any particular people’s war theory. Nevertheless, there remains an identifiable common ground of the people’s war experience. This can be simply illustrated by comparing such disparate sources as the descriptions of a classical nineteenth-century European strategist, Henri Jomini, in reference to Spanish popular resistance against Napoleon, with the US Defense Intelligence Agency’s synoptic view of the twentieth-century Chinese version of people’s war.

Jomini:

The invader has an army: his adversaries have an army, and a people wholly or almost wholly in arms, and making means of resistance out of every thing, each individual of whom conspires against the common enemy; even the non-combatants have an interest in his ruin and accelerate it by every means in their power.

... he finds no signs of the enemy but his campfires; so that while, like Don Quixote, he is attacking windmills, his adversary is on his line of communications, destroys the detachments left to guard it, surprises his convoys, his depots, and carries on a war so disastrous for the invader that he must inevitably yield after a time.3

US Defense Intelligence Agency:

In People’s War, the army and the paramilitary forces, supported by the populace, would conduct a protracted war against an invader. Initially the Chinese main forces, using conventional tactics, would carry out a strategic withdrawal supported by guerilla-type operations until the invading forces were overextended and dispersed. When this occurred, overwhelming Chinese forces would be concentrated to annihilate the enemy forces in detail.4

Both passages refer specifically to: first, the involvement of the entire populations, not just the professional military forces; second, an accompanying use of irregular rather than codified combat methods (that is, the accepted laws and customs of war, today embodied in international law); and third, to territorial wars, fought through land operations for political control of a given territory. This is true not only of the above examples, but also of all the historical examples mentioned earlier, and of twentieth-century revolutionary wars generally.

A conservative definition of people’s war may offer amorphous military forces fighting by unorthodox means within a territory that is to be defended against conquest, or reclaimed in the event that the invader has established control. A radical definition would include this, essentially military, aspect of people’s war, but would continue in the identification of a significant political component prevalent in modern revolutionary warfare.

In Marxist literature, people’s war is the means to political ends. Just as the influential nineteenth-century military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz regarded war as an instrument of policy, Lenin adapted war as the tool of communist party power. Territory is not only defended or reclaimed, it is ‘liberated’ from the incumbent authorities. The radical definition of people’s war is, in this spirit, addressing anti-colonial (‘national liberation’) wars or, for example, the Palestinian style of warfare: one waged by sporadic operations – such as bombings and hijackings – outside the disputed territory, while at the same time maintaining ‘little wars’ within that territory. In this definition, terrorism may be included in people’s war where terrorism itself may be defined as the use of violent, politically motivated acts against civilians. Here, too, the formal conventions of warfare are ignored.

Whether people’s war is conservatively or radically defined it may be said to display one key characteristic, that of the planned achievement of psychological ascendancy which denies the opponent the
choice of concepts of how a war is to be waged. The effect is intended to be disorienting, demoralising and therefore debilitating. Theoretically this amounts to a powerful psycho-military determinant of war outcome. In practice this may not be so, usually for reasons other than any inherent flaw in the people’s war logic. To use the examples already cited: in Spain the war against Napoleon’s forces was finally won through Wellington’s decisive intervention; and in T.E. Lawrence’s Arabian campaign by Allenby’s major offensive against the Turks. To use China’s own experience, the defeat of Japanese forces in 1945 was ultimately secured through American use of atomic weapons. People’s war, in these notable instances, had not been able to demonstrate the efficacy of its psychologically-based methods in the ultimate test of strategy – the claim to victory.

Despite this evidence, as well as that of the civil war which resumed after the fighting with Japan had ended, the credibility of the people’s war concept in present Chinese doctrine does rest on its ability to convince a potential enemy that the costs of aggression outweigh the expected benefits. This is people’s war in its preferred deterrent aspect. In short, the same objective applies to people’s war as it does to nuclear weapons: to deter. In both, the threat must be credible and to be credible it must be perceived as capable of actually inflicting the unacceptable losses that are threatened.

PEOPLE’S WAR IN CHINESE THEORY AND PRACTICE

The original theory of people’s war (renmin zhanzheng) in relation to China was expounded by Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) in a series of lectures between 1936 and 1938. Mao’s military formulations may be traced to centuries of Chinese experience in peasant uprisings (and therefore the notion of peasant armies), to the insights of classical Chinese military philosophy, and to Mao’s immediate preoccupation with fighting Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist forces. In essence, as first expressed by Mao, people’s war is a doctrine of victory denial by means of ‘protracted war’ (chijiuzhan). Its aim is to erode the adversary’s strength by military and psychological attack on weak points (attrition warfare), and to secure opponent defeat in a final phase which is marked by decisive battle.

Specifically, the protracted war begins with a strategic retreat or ‘luring the enemy in deep’. This is the first of three stages in the progression of people’s war. In Mao’s words, it is ‘the period of the enemy’s strategic offensive and our strategic defensive’, for ‘a weak army fighting a strong army’ must preserve itself in order to prepare for a decisive counter-attack.5

During this early phase, swiftly executed surprise attacks alternate with elusive battle-avoidance behaviour, in line with Mao’s oft-cited dictum: ‘The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue.’ Such guerilla tactics naturally favour fluid rather than fixed battle lines. The purpose is to avoid engaging the enemy force on its own self-serving terms6 – an example of the wider principle of denying the adversary its concepts of warfare. The terms by which battle must be fought to maximise the advantage of a ‘weak army’ capitalise on an abundance of numbers, space and time: attack the enemy forces piecemeal through a concentration of one’s own numerically superior forces; attack under conditions of mobile rather than positional warfare; protract the war by keeping the enemy ‘engaged in extensive theatres of war’.7 Further, Mao clearly understood that the advantageous use of space, and the freedom of movement it affords, is dependent on the co-operation of local rural populations in providing bases, fighters, food, and military intelligence.

‘The second stage,’ said Mao, ‘will be the period of the enemy’s strategic consolidation and our preparation for the strategic offensive.’8 At this level, essentially one of stalemate, the disparity in the balance of forces is minimised. The ‘weak army’ has armed itself with an arsenal captured from the ‘strong’, ruptured adversary morale, and mobilised the masses against the enemy. Finally, as ‘guerilla units waging guerilla warfare’ are transformed into ‘regular forces waging mobile warfare’, the balance turns in favour of the people’s forces who initiate the concluding ‘period of our strategic counter-offensive and the enemy’s strategic retreat’.9

However, if a common view is to regard the PLA (and, by extension, its supporting doctrine) as purely defensive in capability and intent, then this is misleading. The Chinese are cognisant of the principle that military victory cannot be assured by defence alone. After all, Mao’s classical reference, The Art of War, a Chinese text ascribed to Sun Tzu and dated at circa 350 BC, categorically states: ‘Invincibility lies in defence; the possibility of victory in the attack.’10 Apart from making obvious military sense, it fits the logic of deterrence: Mao’s concept of people’s war represents a two-tiered deterrent of (a) threat of protracted resistance; followed by (b) threat of
opponent annihilation through counter-attack. This means that even if undeterred by the prospect of a lengthy engagement against defensive forces, the enemy must still take into account the eventual offensive intent of that protraction. It is therefore important to recognise that people’s war, as set forth by Mao, is not wholly a defensive mode of guerilla harassment in support of mobile main force units, nor are the Chinese content to resist by swamping the invader with human wave tactics – though this is expected to constitute a considerable threat in itself. The whole point of the protraction exercise is to prepare for victory through attack. As Mao stated: ‘the only real defence is active defence, defence for the purpose of counter-attacking and taking the offensive’. Indeed, the final credibility of people’s war as a deterrent depends not on the defence but on the offence:

It should be pointed out that destruction of the enemy is the primary object of war and self-preservation the secondary, because only by destroying the enemy in large numbers can one effectively preserve oneself. Therefore attack, the chief means of destroying the enemy, is primary, while defence, a supplementary means of destroying the enemy and a means of self-preservation, is secondary. In actual warfare the chief role is played by defence much of the time and by attack for the rest of the time, but if war is to be taken as a whole, attack remains primary.

Nevertheless, existing practical demonstrations in support of this proposition are inadequate. People’s war was not demonstrated in its entirety against the Japanese invasion. Mao called for total commitment – ‘everything for the front, everything for the defeat of the Japanese aggressors and for the liberation of the Chinese people’. Indeed, people’s war at this time may be judged to have been more propaganda than reality. Mao expended less effort on the Japanese than on his own party and its primary enemy, the Guomindang (Kuomintang) or Nationalist Party government of Chiang Kai-shek. The war of resistance against the Japanese was useful for advancing the national appeal of the Communist Party of China (CPC). ‘Such is a real people’s war,’ said Mao of the Communist resistance. ‘Only by waging such a people’s war can we defeat the national enemy. The Kuomintang has failed precisely because of its desperate opposition to people’s war.’ In terms of the realities of that time, Walter Laqueur has written:

In the search for historical truth, one has to proceed beyond mythology and political polemics: despite all the tenacity and courage displayed by the Chinese Communists, they were on more than one occasion exceedingly lucky. They operated in near ideal conditions: there was no strong central authority in China even before the Japanese invasion. Once the war had started in 1937 the Communists enjoyed virtual immunity in their bases in northern China. For the Japanese, the Communist guerrillas were not a serious danger, and this [was] despite [the fact] that the Japanese occupation army was small by any standards. Indeed, the Chinese Communists did little fighting against the Japanese after 1940, though Chiang Kai-chek’s troops did even less. Mao’s policy was to devote seventy percent of the Communists’ effort to expansion, twenty percent to coping with the Kuomintang government and ten per cent to fighting the Japanese.

Even in the civil war between the Communists and the Guomindang (GMD), it would be misleading to attribute Mao’s CPC victory in 1949 to the strength of the people’s war concept. The GMD’s ineptitude – of which the Communist forces naturally took advantage – made a contribution at least as great. Chiang’s government presided over a disintegrating economy, alienated the populace and some of the powerful Triad (secret society) leaders who were used in the GMD intelligence service. It failed to carry out the very socio-economic reforms which sparked revolt against the old imperial order of the Manchus, and generally promoted self-defeat through internal quarrels, corruption and, in the words of Chiang’s American adviser, Major General David Barr, ‘by a politically influenced and military inept high command’. Given the natural advantages gained from these internal problems of the GMD, the Communists’ performance was still far from Mao’s ideal – largely because of the CPC’s own internal dispute on strategy in the early 1930s. Chiang Kai-shek’s Fifth Campaign in 1933 highlighted the inadequacy of Communist forces fighting pitched battles. This, according to people’s war doctrine, they were not supposed to do. Mao criticised the tactical blunder of attempting to ‘engage the enemy outside the base area’, and worse still – of attacking ‘enemy strongpoint’ locations. Chiang, in a manoeuvre which befits the people’s war principle of inducing the enemy to fight on one’s own terms, caused the Communists to engage prematurely in regular warfare. He did this by changing his methods to ‘blockhouse war-
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The enceinte', whereby the encircling force 'advanced gradually and entrenched itself at every step', at the same time isolating the Communist forces from supplies and intelligence. 'Then in seeking battle,' Mao complained, 'we milled around between the enemy's main forces and his blockhouses and were reduced to complete passivity ... we showed not the slightest initiative or drive.' In one analysis, Mao focused blame on faulty assessment of enemy strength: 'The military adventurism of attacking the key cities in 1932 was the root cause of the line of passive defence subsequently adopted in coping with the enemy's fifth "encirclement and suppression" campaign.' In another, he deplored the lack of strategic foresight. For Mao, people's war must not only plan for change, but accommodate change within that plan:

Even though future changes are difficult to foresee ... a general calculation is possible and an appraisal of distant prospects is necessary. In war as well as in politics, planning only one step at a time as one goes along is a harmful way of directing matters. After each step, it is necessary to examine the ensuing concrete changes and to modify or develop one's strategic and operational plans accordingly, or otherwise one is liable to make the mistake of rushing straight ahead regardless of danger.

In Chiang's Fifth Campaign, the danger towards which the Communists 'rushed', and then 'passively' remained, was such that they were left with no alternative but to flee. The subsequent Long March, 12,000 kilometres northwest from the southern province of Jiangxi to Shannxi near Mongolia, was therefore a symptom of defeat. As Laqueur again astutely observed: 'The Long March was not a major victory but a great retreat. But the Communists turned military defeat into a propagandistic victory, for Chiang had failed to destroy them; their forces seemed invincible.'

If victory came eventually and for reasons beyond the correct application of people's war theory, then the whole issue of whether Mao's theories actually had practical results must be considered. Was the relationship between people's war and the 1949 Communist victory one of cause and effect or was it that the Guomindang lost the capacity to fight for other reasons? Whichever, it is at least true that the ideas of how a people's war ought to be fought were evident on the field in many instances, and not just on the part of the Communists. Chiang demonstrated the importance of seizing the initiative and of reducing the enemy into a state of passive defence during the

Fifth Campaign, as did the Communists during the decisive battle of Huai-Hai by which the PLA encircled, isolated and destroyed the Nationalist government forces piecemeal.

Mao's propaganda war capitalised on the failures to implement people's war at a strategic level. This involved not only the Long March which ironically enshrined the mystique of people's war in the popular imagination, but its use against the Japanese. By fighting a war of resistance against the Japanese invaders, the CPC acquired the appearance of being involved not only in a class war but a broad national struggle, hence tapping the potent force of national appeal - a force which was turned against the CPC's primary enemy, the Guomindang.

From the above, one may conclude that Mao's people's war succeeded in demonstrating its possibilities in revolutionary China, rather than offering a complete and satisfying demonstration of success in war wholly attributable to this strategy. By contrast, General Vo Nguyen Giap did prove people's war in Vietnam. During the First Indochina War of 1948-54, his Vietminh (Vietnamese Independence League) army successfully employed Mao's three-phased strategy of protracted people's war against the French colonial forces. The Vietminh numbered 300,000, with a roughly equal ratio of guerillas and regular forces, against an enemy strength of 415,000. Only when Giap was confident that his forces were sufficiently superior in men and matériel, did he launch the final and decisive offensive against the French at Dien Bien Phu.

The North Vietnamese Army's performance against technologically superior American forces in subsequent years also provides valuable lessons to the aspirant of modern people's war. These are detailed in the next chapter, but for the purposes of the present discussion, it is important to note that in the pre-1949 laboratory of its formulation, the Chinese model sought to create military insights appropriate to observable conditions. Mao understood the constants, especially China's magnitude, and their value; he studied change, including tactical defeat, and how to use it. That the PLA was, as Harlan Jencks put it, 'outgunned and outnumbered until 1949' shows that Mao's theory - if it is to be meaningful - must be read as a strategy based only on the pragmatic (and as a result, primarily psychological) exploitation of immediate conditions to attain the objective. The important proviso is that contemporary circumstances cannot be assumed to be as accommodating as they have been in the past. Hence the need to prepare for the more complex strategic
environment in which China now finds itself. China’s chief perceived adversary is no longer an internal rival but a global superpower. Apart from the possibility of direct confrontation with technologically superior Soviet forces, the broader strategic circumstances of Soviet-American rivalry may be as much a cause of any Chinese participation in future conflict.

TOWARD A GENERAL CONCEPT:

(a) CONTRIBUTIONS FROM MILITARY PHILOSOPHY

Having examined the theory and practice of people’s war in recent Chinese history, it is possible to arrive at a general concept which can be applied to understanding its role in modern or even post-nuclear battlefield conditions in China, if they too may be deemed ‘modern’. To do this one must connect – or perhaps in some instances re-connect – Mao’s thought to the wider field of military philosophy, and establish the set of conditions distinct to the Chinese situation and under which the concept must operate.

Mao’s concept of people’s war is regarded in the PRC as part of a ‘unified system of knowledge’ known as ‘military science’ (junshi xueshu). The Chinese have defined this term as: ‘The study of war and of the laws for directing wars, with the theory of war and strategy being the basic framework. Military science comes from military practice and in turn plays a major, directing role in military practice.’24 Mao’s call for flexibility and a responsiveness to change allude to his ‘military art’ (junshi xueshu), which is considered in China to be an important branch of military science. With the stress on people’s war under modern conditions, this facet appears to have been further emphasised by the Chinese, as in the 1978 observation of CPC Vice Chairman Ye Jianying (Yeh Chienying), namely: ‘We must not stick to the beaten track. We must accept new things and study new problems.’25 Similarly A.T. Mahan stated that ‘principles and rules in the art of war are guides which warn when it is going to go wrong’.26 Within the broader circumstances of changing times, and therefore conditions, Mao agreed with the traditional, Clausewitz, and the revolutionary, Lenin in support of the argument that these differences affecting form must be taken into account – a significant observation in view of Beijing’s preoccupation in the post-Mao era with people’s war under modern conditions.30

When applied to Mao’s indirect strategy of undermining the material and moral foundations of enemy strength, before attempting to achieve victory through direct assault, irregular warfare may be interpreted as a predilection of form. Mao judged the irregular guerilla component as suitable to the conditions of time and place then characterising China. However, because it is a question of form, which may change as conditions change, guerilla warfare (fought by non-regular forces) is an option, not an essential, in an enduring general concept of people’s war. To return to the example of Vietnam, one may distinguish the professional military usage of guerilla warfare. Referring to the Second Indochina War of 1965–75, Paddy Griffith explains:

For the village fighter there was essentially no alternative to fighting as a guerilla. It was inherent in his relationship with his village and his local political cell. For the mainforce fighter, by contrast, ... it was a military stratagem adopted by choice, which could be abandoned, if circumstances were appropriate, in favour of more overt or close-order fighting.31

Considered from a classical Chinese and European military perspective: irregular warfare is not crucial, or even relevant, to the application of an indirect strategy. What counts is the ability to demoralise the enemy. In other words, one cannot expect to succeed with such a strategy against an enemy who has not lost the will to fight. ‘What-
ever the form,' wrote B.H. Liddell Hart, 'the effect to be sought is the dislocation of the opponent's mind and dispositions - such an effect is the true gauge of an indirect approach' (emphasis in the original). However, both Liddell Hart and Jomini - who advocated concentration upon enemy weak points - were concerned with professional armies rather than armed citizens.

Similarly, in The Art of War Sun Tzu discussed the subject in relation to the operations of conventional armies and not in the context of a protracted people's war. To Sun Tzu, deception and surprise were the key factors in formulating a strategy of indirect approach. Described by him as an 'offensive strategy', it is nevertheless similar to Mao's concept of active defence: both propose that the psychological initiative must be held. Thus, withdrawal of forces in the face of enemy strength,33 is as much a deliberate exercise of initiative as offensive action when circumstances are considered appropriate. The underlying logic of strategic initiative corresponds to the requirements of manipulating the adversary's responses to the ideal point of rendering them ineffectual. 'Therefore against those skilled in attack, an enemy does not know where to defend; against the experts in defence, the enemy does not know where to attack.'34 Sun Tzu's injunctions establish the salient features of indirect strategy as we have come to know it in the more recent European and Maoist formulations. They include:

(i) mobility: 'Appear in places to which [the enemy] must hasten; move swiftly where he does not expect you';
(ii) effecting adversary dispersion: 'If I am able to determine the enemy's dispositions while at the same time conceal my own then I can concentrate and he must divide';
(iii) confounding the opponent with unexpected theatres of battle: 'The enemy must not know where I intend to give battle . . . And when he prepares in a great many places, those I have to fight in any one place will be few'.35

A strategy based on deception may be of more general use than reliance on mass mobilisation: unless, of course, the enemy is deceived (such as through official articulations on the theme of 'everyone a soldier', and the maintenance of an extensive militia) into believing that the masses will be mobilised in a lengthy war of resistance. To openly prepare for one strategy, but to surprise the enemy with another, is totally in accord with psychological warfare. This is more so the case where mass mobilisation does remain a genuine option, if conditions are indeed genuinely conducive to its employment. By creating uncertainty in the adversary's mind, the threat of war by the Chinese masses (even if it is not intended) still serves a useful psychological - and thus deterrent - function. Therefore, an indirect strategy based on psychological warfare is also relevant to a general concept. Because all deterrence is psychological, such a people's war concept is far from a strategic anachronism. Rather, it offers an application of modern deterrence theory.

At this stage, the objection may be raised that a concept of people's war which does not incorporate mobilisation of the masses is no longer representative of a true people's war - in effect, a people's war without 'the people'. In the first instance, there has been no demonstration of a 'true' people's war in China. The second and related point concerns the understanding of people's war as a theory of deterrence and which, with nuclear weapons, is China's deterrence strategy. The reality of people's war would signify a failed deterrent. However, as considered earlier, for a deterrent to be credible, it must be capable of being used successfully. A third consideration is that if the deterrent which is people's war does fail, its war-fighting role through mass resistance can be used only if mass loyalty is assured, and the political values associated with people's war in the pre-1949 era were not assured in the China of Deng Xiaoping. The contemporary social fabric is qualitatively different from that of the revolutionary era. China's people are learning to be consumers in an economically driven environment. As will be shown in the context of China's modernisation efforts (Chapter 2), the qualities of national survival - those that are encouraged and rewarded - call for a professional, 'efficiency-first' ethic, rather than the former ideological fervour. Moreover, ideological fervour may not only be irrelevant in the post-Mao political climate, but potentially dangerous, especially when armed. (That China's ordinary militia are generally unarmed makes eminent sense on that basis alone.)

When Clausewitz and Jomini expressed esteem for irregular warfare,36 they did so in reference to detached, regular, units. They were well aware of the political objection to irregular troops: trained in arms they may be a threat to social order. After all, Clausewitz had fought against the French revolutionary armies whose doctrine was, the people in arms. When Clausewitz proposed his concept of war as a trinity (comprising the people, the army and the government), the people en masse, in this revolutionary sense, were not Clausewitz's intention. Rather, he meant people loyal to the king. Similarly, the
ruling elites of the PRC must be assured of their citizens’ loyalty. The havoc caused by militant citizens during the Cultural Revolution has not been forgotten, nor have the more recent expressions of citizen dissent—the ‘pro-democracy movement’ of June 1989—been tolerated.

In summary, the general (contemporary) concept of people’s war entails a deterrent doctrine of victory denial whose credibility derives from a combination of classical Chinese and Western formulae:

(i) intent – the communication of a national will to first resist and second, to destroy an aggressor;
(ii) capability – sufficient flexibility at an operational level to address the demands of contemporary warfare;
(iii) deception – use of an indirect strategy of psychological warfare premised on deception, ambiguity and, generally, the manipulation of adversary perceptions.

The last of the above elements furthers the accepted understanding of the manipulative role of deterrence, to encompass the core psychological characteristic of people’s war, as stated at the outset of this chapter. Thus, in the case of the militarily inferior, it is not enough that ‘Threat Perception = Estimated Capability x Estimated Intent’, to borrow the brevity of J. David Singer’s quasi-mathematical formulation.37 The opponent, his gameplan frustrated, must be forced to resign—preferably before the physical game begins and the game of deterrence has ended. ‘To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.’38 If, in the language of deterrence, we substitute ‘persuade’ for ‘subdue’ in Sun Tzu’s statement, we arrive at the desired state of deterrent play.

However, the above list is incomplete without that distinctive fourth feature which adds to the perceived credibility of people’s war: China’s unique set of conditions.

TOWARD A GENERAL CONCEPT:
(b) PEOPLE’S WAR UNDER CHINESE CONDITIONS

That the tradition and practice of people’s war should be adapted to Chinese conditions (one of which was—and still is—a condition of relative weakness) is unremarkable. Any strategy of warfare must address indigenous conditions if it is to accord with the military logic of obtaining the maximum objective with the means available. That which is especially pertinent to China’s adoption of people’s war is the nature of the combination or coincidence of those conditions that are peculiarly Chinese. These may be summarised as vast land mass and population, a largely agrarian and therefore decentralised economy, and cultural and historical predispositions, including the historically significant influence of one man. Mao Zedong himself constitutes a ‘Chinese condition’ beyond a mere catalytic synthesis of the other components, inasmuch as his ideas, politics, personality, and influence stimulated the moral (or spiritual) dimension of people’s war with its paramount concern for the value of human resources. Manpower is regarded, qualitatively and quantitatively, to be a more decisive factor than weapons superiority. The man-over-weapons concept, popularised as the ‘paper tiger’ thesis, does not tactically underestimate the power that the enemy (then the United States) and its weapons (atomic bombs) can bring to bear: the ‘tiger’ in that sense is real enough. But such power is morally questioned, and hence strategically despised, on the basis that it is ‘divorced from the people’.39 The tiger is seen for what it is, a paper tiger, a ghost, for it is without substance in the face of the people. This view is plausible when one considers that, in the final analysis, victory can only be achieved by occupation and that would be impossible in the case of China, given its people’s continued loyalty to Beijing.

Within the overall philosophical orientation represented by the paper tiger thesis, there are psychological means for dealing with the tactical reality of weapons-based strength. Some of these are well illustrated by the paper tiger’s lesser known alias, the ‘ghosts’ analogy, developed in Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts, first published in 1961. China’s decision to develop nuclear weapons, for example, may be likened to the method of paying ghosts back ‘in their own coin’.40 Impression management is another recommended method of dealing with one’s tactical superior. In the tale of ‘Sung Ting'po Catches a Ghost’, the ghost is deceived when the hero also plays the role of a ghost. ‘Mentally he completely held the initiative,’ note the editors. ‘Besides, he was clever at doing what was appropriate to a specific situation so as to keep the ghost under his control from start to finish.’41 Deng’s ‘capitalist reader’ image must be seen in this light. (During the Cultural Revolution, he and Head of State Liu Shaoqi were called ‘capitalist readers’ because they appeared to represent right-wing values within the CPC.) China might appear to have drawn closer to the West—and indeed the West is useful to China as a source of technology—but ultimately the Chinese have relied on the ‘American ghost’ to complicate any Soviet designs on
war with China. Of interest here, however, is the deliberate cultivation of an attitudinal condition which states: 'Nothing in the world should be feared, but there are men who scare themselves.' In the psychology of people's war, it is an attitude that can be used to bolster domestic morale and foster uncertainty in foreign perceptions. Certainly, the importance attached by Maoist doctrine to the 'human element' can refer to other nations too. But it is particularly pertinent in China's case: the mobilisation of one billion ('hearts and minds' is as awesome a prospect as the literal mobilisation of their numbers. No adversary can afford to ignore this potential for 'national will'.

The military asset of a large population, replete with the will to fight, is further enhanced by its predominantly rural character and the vast Chinese land mass. These mutually reinforcing characteristics strengthen the credibility of a people's war under 'Chinese conditions'. A peasant population is ideally placed to provide: (a) support for a protracted war in the country's interior; and (b) a rural and agricultural economic base which is less easily paralysed, whether by conventional or nuclear military action, than an urban-based industrial economy. An effective example may be drawn from Ralph Clough's comparison of Japanese and Chinese nuclear vulnerabilities. Japan is vulnerable to a small number of nuclear missiles because 32 per cent of its population and a large proportion of its industry are within a radius of 50 kilometres from Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka. By contrast, China's cities, Clough points out, contain only 11 per cent of the population. Even with the more recent figure of 14.6 per cent obtained from the 1982 census, the proportion of urban dwellers in China's population is still relatively low. The urban figure is even smaller - 11.4 per cent - when one takes into account only the largest cities (totalling 324) with a minimum of 50,000 people. Clearly, China is not a good nuclear target. Nor is it likely to be in the near future, given official controls of urban migration from the countryside. The requirement for a residence permit which specifies each citizen's residential location means that China can indeed adhere to its urban development policy slogan: 'Keep the Cities Small'. Rural migration will be absorbed by the construction of 280 smaller cities - a policy of urban dispersal rather than concentration - allowing the Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction to project that China's urban population will not exceed 175 million by the year 2000.

The nature of China's military-industrial targets also poses difficulties for a potential aggressor. Since 1978 defence factories have been undergoing conversion toward dual military-civilian production, and by 1986 civilian goods accounted for 40 per cent of total defence plant output. First, it should be pointed out that the blurring of distinctions between civilian and military industry in the Deng era is in keeping with the people's war concept which incorporates the role of whole populations in a war effort, not just its professional military forces. Second, by creating an industrial capacity to cater for both civilian and military production, China may be in a constant state of war readiness, while maintaining the non-belligerent impression that it has converted its 'swords' into 'ploughshares'. This is not identified by the Chinese as an aspect of defence policy, but rather as a means of promoting economic development. However, the joint civilian-military production scheme does resemble the Soviet method of allowing rapid expansion of military production in the event of war.

There are also benefits to be gained in complicating enemy targeting plans, especially if military factories are no longer discernible from traditionally civilian ones - a situation which would require the reciprocal conversion of civilian plants into military manufacturing capability if needed. When every motorcycle or refrigerator factory is also capable of producing weapons and munitions, for example, does the opponent then target every such factory? Apart from the considerable practical problem involved, there is also a moral one. How does one justify to international opinion, strikes against targets that are also civilian? With Ministry of Ordnance plants gearing up to the estimated two-thirds production output for civilian goods in 1990, even those factories once thought to be military can no longer be readily distinguished. As one anecdotal account puts it, 'The change-over sometimes produces weird results. An American delegation was recently escorted through the Shenyang Aircraft Factory, home of the Chinese F-8 jet fighter project. It was bemused to see assembly lines producing rowing machines and rubbish compactors.'

Predispositional factors contribute to the complex of conditions deemed indigenously Chinese. Historically, as Gerald Segal points out, China's military culture has tended toward 'classical realist calculations' and the preferred application of 'psychological warfare'. Although it is not possible to ascertain the precise extent to which modern China has been influenced by its historical military culture, Mao is known to have familiarised himself thoroughly with classical literature such as The Romance of the Three Kingdoms and
Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*. Certainly, Sun Tzu is still studied in Chinese military academies and included in the 1985 *Handbook of Military Knowledge for Commanders*. Societal predispositions may also be viewed as conducive to people’s war operations, particularly in the systemic context of conditions favourable to the organisation of base areas in the countryside. Hence it is of congruent interest that Eric Wolf notes, with reference to China and Vietnam, the politico-military utility of traditional village associations:

Under Communist control these came to serve as a template for welding army and peasantry into a common body. This common organisational grid – connecting the centralized army mainly recruited from the peasantry, the part-time guerrilla forces stationed in the villages, and the village population – both obviated the development of unco-ordinated peasant revolts and the autonomous entrenchment of the peasantry which had occurred in Russia.48

Rural China as a system of ‘associations’ has continued under CPC rule in the form of collective communes and, since 1979, within its more liberal development – the ‘responsibility system’. In this system farming is conducted by individual families which must meet the state quota, but can keep for profit any excess production. Collective production teams, however, still retain organisational responsibility. They are responsible for disposing of set production quotas to the state purchasing authorities, and allocating tracts of land to family units. So whatever the transformations, there is still a useful ‘grid’.

In view of the foregoing discussion, one may posit that China is in a strong position to invest people’s war with deterrence credibility. Because China’s distinctive set of conditions leads to the assessment that it is neither easily targetable by nuclear weapons nor readily occupied by invasion forces, people’s war viewed in the context of modern conditions needs to be understood as a general theory distinct from the model derived from China’s revolutionary past. The use of civilians (for moral and physical support), of sabotage and of methods of attrition, rather than main force engagements in the face of enemy superiority, are in accord with the underlying people’s war principles of fighting from a position of material weakness. *They are not the ends but the means of an indirect strategy*. Methods of deception incorporating the use of regular troops are also applicable. These underlying principles and their associated means were articulated by theoreticians, one of whom was Mao Zedong. Having enunciated a people’s war doctrine, Mao nevertheless did stress its flexibility in terms of applications suitable to local conditions of time and place. Classical European strategists also spoke of war strategy in these terms. So, in this investigation, they too have been found relevant to a general concept which transcends the limits of a revolutionary model. Such a model is not only historically restricted to early twentieth-century China, but it is also undemonstrative of theory.

That Mao’s theory was simply that – a theory unrelated to what actually happened in China – does not detract from its usefulness as a deterrent or its relevance to what might happen in China in the event of war. We have observed that the genre to which people’s war belongs is independent of the need for large professional armies. *This characteristic may not be useful to the defence requirements of a modern nation state, but it may prove to be a vital survival quality if the specialised military functions of a victim society are effectively destroyed. In the hypothetical post-nuclear battlefield of the future, so long as there are surviving populations amenable to organised resistance, people’s war might prove an ideal, or perhaps the only possible strategy against an occupation force*. Ironically, the grooming of people’s war for ‘modern conditions’ could entail recourse to its guerrilla mode for a ‘primitive’ future battlefield.

Understandably, the prime concern of critics is the performance of the concept within the more immediate military phenomenon of the electronic battlefield. This is a real concern, and the issue will later be examined in greater detail. But rather than seriously exploring the modern possibilities of people’s war, the writings of a number of external analysts tend to be dismissive of the whole concept. It is not seen as a deliberate strategic plan which finds validation in its intrinsic value as a military doctrine, but as a mere circumstantial response which makes the best of a recognised inadequacy. June Dreyer, for example, states that ‘for the foreseeable future, China will remain militarily inferior [to the Soviet Union], and public espousal of the doctrine of people’s war, despite its deficiencies, can be construed as making a virtue of necessity’.49 Thomas Robinson’s reference to people’s war as ‘that overworked and by now sterile term’50 is indicative of the whole tendency of the dismissive school: it is prone to regarding people’s war as the antithesis to modernisation, as if this would explain the deeper dilemma of the Chinese in coming to terms with modernisation – a matter dealt with in the Chinese attitude to time (Introduction and Chapter 2). William Heaton, for example, selectively draws on the literature – including the modern-
isation debate within China — to support what is virtually a people’s war-versus-modernisation argument, conveying the impression that the two are intrinsically incompatible.51 Obviously, to the Chinese who speak of people’s war under modern conditions, they are not. That this view is accepted as official policy is, after all, significant.

Besides yielding to a Eurocentric attitude which assumes the ultimate aim of developing military establishments is to ‘keep up with the electronic Jones’s’ in doctrine and structure (perhaps it is, but it cannot be assumed),52 critics fail to reckon with the possibility that people’s war might actually be more than a matter of convenience: that the Chinese are talking seriously about the modern expression of this doctrine rather than a makeshift model grafted from the 1930s.53

The doctrine does address the facts of China’s current condition of relative backwardness; it does attempt to exploit effectively its manpower, geography and other characteristics. To ‘make a virtue of necessity’ is — as noted earlier — unremarkable: the maximum objective must be obtained with the means available and indeed with the minimum means necessary. Otherwise overall modernisation will be curtailed. Furthermore, the judicious exploitation of available resources must be viewed as a determinant of the strategy of the weaker adversary whose means are materially limited — not a statement of that strategy. People’s war can be ‘played’ at a higher ‘game’ level. This has been suggested through the psychological orientation of the general concept.

A switch from the early revolutionary to the modern professional paradigm entails experimentation with people’s war as a ‘fertile and underworked’ strategy, particularly in the cerebral climate of deterrence. As with all experiments there are no guaranteed outcomes. The Chinese have nevertheless embarked on a practical exercise in finding the optimum combination of material and methods in which they may prevail. Contemporary Chinese strategists are treating people’s war in precisely this manner when they refer to its relevance under ‘modern conditions’. The term includes the deterrent value of nuclear weapons, the modern military methods of combined arms operations, defence of industrial centres, and the need for a stronger technological-industrial infrastructure — in addition to the usual understanding of people’s war methods involving mass mobilisation and harassment tactics.

PEOPLE’S WAR UNDER MODERN CONDITIONS

The precise form of people’s war under modern conditions must remain a matter of speculation for the Chinese as well as for external analysts. However, in general terms, the needs of modern warfare are addressed in a number of Chinese publications, two of which are: National Defense Modernization, a ‘textbook’ jointly edited and published by the CPLA Fighters Publishing House and the Science Popularisation Publishing House in 1983, with an accompanying introductory version;54 and Handbook of Military Knowledge for Commanders, written and approved by the Beijing Military Region in 1985. While both convey similar ideas, the first is a document for more general consumption, the second for practitioners. The former will be quoted here more frequently as its less specialised language is better suited for the purposes of this overview.

Among its recommendations for ‘Chinese-style’ national defence modernisation are the constant improvement of weapons and equipment, with a view to ensuring that the ‘army’s principal weapons . . . meet the needs of electronic warfare, guided missile warfare and nuclear warfare’, and an accompanying improvement in the quality of soldiers so that ‘weapons and equipment are closely integrated with men . . . [for the purpose of] real combat effectiveness’.55 This involves technical competence in the use of modern weapons and training in the method of combined arms operations. The Handbook of Military Knowledge for Commanders provides more detailed information on combined operations, such as methods of employment. Chapter 6, entitled ‘Coordinated Movements’, defines the method thus: ‘movements in coordination together by all service arms, special arms, and special units (fendui) to perform a common operational mission in accordance with the combat objective, time, and place’.56

The call for organisational reform toward a regularised, combined services system — a system long ago adopted by the world’s modern armed forces — represents a major departure from the PLA’s traditionally infantry-dependent force:

For a fairly long historical period, our army depended on a single service arm to fight a war, mainly the infantry. After the founding of the PRC, we took a second step and independently developed various technical service arms, organizing and setting up the Air Force, Navy, artillery, armored corps, engineering corps, as well as
strategic rocket force, but in systems and organization, training, and management we have not yet organically integrated them. With this situation it is very hard to meet the demands of modern warfare. Now we should take a third step, namely, to better enhance the combined arms nature of all branches and arms of the service.57

To this end, the Joint Tactical Training Centre had been established by Nanjing Military Region in east China. On its inauguration in April 1986, the Chinese news agency Xinhua described it as ‘the largest comprehensive training base with the most advanced equipment currently in our country’.58

Whilst efficiency-driven reform now dominates and has resulted in manpower cuts within the PLA (a reduction of one million personnel since 1985), human wave tactics have not been removed altogether from the modern scheme of Chinese warfare. ‘We must also put into practice ... a system that combines the field army, local armed forces, and militia, and perfect the reserve system and mobilization system, so that once an enemy encroaches he will be engulfed in the boundless ocean of people’s war.’59 Thus China’s vast reserves of manpower are still deemed to be an important adjunct to the above, regularised, three-dimensional force concept. (Given the importance of social protection, Chinese civil defence will be discussed shortly.)

While the authors of both National Defense Modernization and the Commanders’ Handbook clearly advance the need to develop strategic ideas and operational principles relevant to modern warfare, Mao Zedong’s military thought is affirmed, as is its stress on adjusting to ‘changes in historical conditions’ and, particularly, ‘changes in weapons and equipment’. This requires that ‘we absolutely must not copy indiscriminately the strategic ideas and operational principles of the past’.60

In adapting to current changes in the combat environment, it is proposed that ‘prelaid battlefields’ need to be built for ‘long-term hold-fast defense and independent operations’.61 Under this system, the PLA will be theoretically capable of holding positions – especially ‘strategic points, key cities, and fortress zones’ – rather than yielding them. Within these theatres of battle, ‘the capability for defending against atomic, chemical, and biological weapons will be improved in order to adapt operations to conditions of nuclear attack’.62 One may discern here a modification of Mao’s territory-yielding model in accordance with the changed circumstances of the PLA’s projected preparedness, and the increased importance of industrial and strategic areas.63 A strategy of ‘luring the enemy in deep’ is retained, but modern developments modify the way in which it is implemented. The point is well illustrated by a comparable source:

In coping with invaders, we must strike at the enemy after letting him in, and strategically we strike only after the enemy has struck. By luring the enemy in deep we do not mean letting enemy troops go wherever they like but we will force them to move as we want them to; at key places we will put up a strong defence, prevent them from penetrating inland unchecked and systematically lead them to battlefields of our own choice so as to wipe them out piecemeal.64

Because the ‘uninterrupted trial of strength between firepower’65 is observed to be a prominent characteristic of modern warfare, the authors of National Defense Modernization point out that weapons research capabilities and supply of material and ammunition must be assured at levels responsive to such warfare needs. Besides the firepower requirements of soldiers on the field, they also recognise the need for a ‘comprehensive and integrated system of command and control, communication and liaison, intelligence and reconnaissance’66 to improve command efficiency in high-technology battlefield conditions. In this respect it is worth noting that China’s growing aerospace industry, which is best known for its commercial satellite launch services, has obvious applications for improved PLA command, control, communications and intelligence (C3I). A 1988 Beijing Review article also spoke of the military applications of China’s expanding electronics industry. Among them was the electronic ground command system which has been used in ‘large-scale military exercises, to improve the co-ordination and responsiveness of army groups’.67

Finally, the maintenance of a strong civil defence system is recommended. Mao had long ago urged the Chinese to ‘dig tunnels deep’. Modern conditions reinforce this view. ‘For us, a future war will mainly be one in which we resist the enemy’s aggression on our own land, so, in order to fully display the power of people’s war, we should even more set up a strong civil defense system’.68 This statement, like others made by Chinese leaders and strategists over the decade since 1978, reveals the type of major war in which the Chinese expect to be involved. For instance, Ye Jianying’s 1978 civil defence speech at the Third National People’s Air Defence Conference was
based on the stated belief that the Soviet Union planned to subjugate China. An analysis along similar lines of Soviet military strategy, by Cheng Minqun and Yao Wenbin of the Institute of International Strategic Studies in Beijing, was reproduced in English under the title 'Soviet Military Strategy for World Domination' in *Beijing Review* (28 January 1980). General Wang Zhenxi, Deputy Director of Foreign Army Studies of Beijing's Chinese Military Science Academy affirmed this view in 1988 when he said: 'so far we've seen nothing to demonstrate that the Soviet Union has abandoned its strategic goal of hegemony'.69 His statement suggests that although by the late 1980s there was no expectation of near-term threat from the Soviets, the Chinese remain cautious about the Soviet Union's long-term intentions. Not surprisingly, the *Handbook of Military Knowledge for Commanders* devotes considerable attention to the Soviet armed forces and to protection from nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) weapons. The expectation of invasion, probably preceded by NBC attack, still forms an important basis of Chinese strategy.

It should be stressed once again that this view does not find favour with external analysts who dismiss people's war as an obsolete concept, one they believe the Chinese themselves have virtually abandoned. In his book *The Chinese Army After Mao*, published in 1987, Ellis Joffe argues that China appears to have shifted from a strategy of victory denial to one of nuclear retaliation because it now has a credible second-strike capability. This, in turn, is taken to imply a downgrading of civil defence: '[C]ivic defence measures, which had figured prominently in China's preparations for war a decade earlier, have hardly received any attention in recent years.'70

What does this mean? The short answer is that China does not expect a mass attack scenario under the current conditions of improved superpower relations and improving Sino-Soviet relations. On this point there is no disagreement with Joffe and fellow analysts. Differences in interpretation set in when one considers that China is still in a position of relative weakness, it still needs a strategy to address that weakness and that this is precisely what the model of contemporary people's war advanced in this chapter does. First, it is worth repeating that a modern people's war strategy, unlike the traditional one, is not 'human wave' defence against armed aggression *per se*, but rather the strategy for psychological pre-emption of such aggression. From the first flows the second point: deterrence is psychological and denial is a question of choice combined with circumstance. Third, modern Chinese strategy is not so clearly defined, or narrowly based, as to negate the traditional importance of civil defence and the victory denial posture from which it derives. Fourth, if the ultimate coup of a modern people's war strategy is to defuse Soviet enmity as the less costly and most effective means to assuring China's security - in line with the very essence of Sun Tzu's teachings - then of course there is no need to give the impression that the Chinese nation lives under the constant threat of war. Joffe rightly argues that China's improved military capability bears relation to its 'more relaxed stance towards the Soviet Union'.71 In other words, it is always easier to 'reason' with one's enemies from a position of strength. The confidence gained from possession of an invulnerable second strike, however, does not go far enough. Deterrence implies a working relationship between enemies. It is still a negative condition premised on fear. Diplomacy, at its best, aspires to remove that fear by converting the enemy into a friend, and if that is too much to expect, at least neutralising the basis of enmity by appealing to a higher interest (such as economic prosperity through co-operation). Unless the Chinese have already succeeded in neutralising the Soviet threat through diplomacy, which they have not, giving up the capacity to survive war is an act of premature and unprecedented optimism for a nation whose very history is a lesson in survival.

A modern people's war strategy simply suggests that should prevention of war fail, then protection is the next best policy. If the Chinese are neglecting this policy, then they are behaving in an uncharacteristically Western fashion. They would be playing the superpower game of retaliatory revenge as if this would be enough in itself to assure one's protection. Who would dare strike first? China is not strong in superpower terms, and both superpowers are capable of striking in a 'small' way, with sub-strategic weapons. The strikes might even be chemical to reduce environmental damage and/or the degree of international censure that would be expected from nuclear usage. A 'small' demonstrative strike in China's northeast, or a chemical attack, translates to a potential casualty figure of 90 million people. For this reason if no other, civil defence must continue to underpin Chinese military philosophy: if it was vital to the North Vietnamese against an adversary that refrained from employing weapons of mass destruction, how much more so for the Chinese under NBC conditions? So long as the threat of this type of warfare prevails, the whole issue of civil protection deserves closer inspection.
The magnitude of China's civil defence effort is apparent in its handbook, *Basic Military Knowledge*, which the authors describe as one of ‘a set of books for young people to study’. Preparation for survival against NBC weapons is detailed, with practical advice on protective measures. The American translators remark, for example, that the manual ‘gives more advice on practical means to assure adequate supplies of safe drinking water after an all-out attack than we have noted in any other civil defence handbook’. On the more well-known city system of underground shelters, they observe: ‘“a system of networks” would also serve to greatly reduce the effectiveness of tanks and other expensive machines of a mechanized invading army – as first proved by the Warsaw defenders’ use of the sewers to attack Nazi tanks at close range and destroy them with cheap Molotov cocktails’. Although this manual was published in 1975, ten years later the Commanders’ *Handbook* also speaks of ‘wartime mass defence organizations’ with regard to NBC defences, and continues to recommend use of shelters and tunnel networks.

The seriousness and scale with which China, like the USSR, has pursued civil defence planning accords with its traditional victory denial posture. Such a posture is premised on the belief that the chances of Chinese society surviving a nuclear war, in order to defend against occupation forces, would be enhanced by careful preparation. The concept of damage limitation does fulfil a deterrent function by signalling Beijing’s victory denial resolve. But because of its clear operational relevance, damage limitation is not a deterrence-dependent concept whose value is lost if war has not been deterred. Although it is obvious that operational survival must be a fundamental requirement for the ability to conduct a protracted war of resistance under the primitive conditions that can be expected in a post-nuclear environment, it is not always obvious that damage limitation plans explicitly serve this proposed function. Indeed, civil defence in Western literature continues to be subsumed under the category of passive defence. However, if considered from the perspective of ‘guerilla nuclear warfare’, elaborated in Chapter 3, civil defence is both passive in its provision of shelter from nuclear attack, and active in supplying the protected base area infrastructure, which is necessary for the post-nuclear phase of guerilla harassment. Command links, technical expertise, and the production and supply of nuclear artillery would mark the type of functions fulfilled by the nuclear guerilla base.

Alastair Johnston rightly draws attention to questions about the quality of Chinese shelters in withstanding nuclear attack, or whether they can be quickly converted to wartime needs given their present use as hospitals, storage depots and other day-to-day civilian enterprises. On the question of quality, it is worth remembering that the shelters are virtually underground cities, covering millions of square metres. Like other aspects of Chinese defence, casualties might be heavy but the scale of the operation means that survival rates are likely to be far from negligible. Indeed, descriptions of the types of uses to which Chinese ‘shelters’ are put, are indicative of such scale. The Chinese press has reported that these shelters accommodate a total of 1700 hotels, 1100 shops, 1800 recreation centres and 140 hospitals. That the shelters are being used for these purposes may not be such a disadvantage to wartime needs. Johnston’s concern ‘whether in time of crisis these shelters could be emptied quickly or converted to wartime use’ may be unwarranted. Of what would they need to be emptied? Shoppers, cinema audiences, hospital patients? It would be far more desirable to have crowds of people in shelters at the time of attack, than above ground. The willingness to conduct normal urban life underground is, in fact, an invaluable aid to war preparedness. As for conversion, there is no reason to believe that China’s dual-purpose (civilian–military) attitude to its technological and production resources does not extend to activities in the shelter cities. ‘Apart from being able to serve society and contribute to the four modernizations’ (their annual turnover was later reported to be about US$426 million), a Chinese radio broadcast commented in 1982, ‘the people’s air defence projects can also be properly maintained and managed by being used in peacetime, thus creating conditions for their use in wartime’. Urban defence warfare, according to the Commander’s *Handbook*, requires the co-operation of the civilian population in such tasks as movement of ammunition to the soldiers, evacuation of the wounded, fire protection and, generally, the maintenance of social order. One would expect that wartime conversion would be a relatively simple task, especially for facilities which already cater to human requirements, such as food, sanitation, and medical supplies. Under proper planning, even storage depots would be limited to only foodstuffs, strategic materials and other items relevant to survival under wartime conditions.

Having examined the problems and possibilities of the shelter system, one is left with the objection that shelters are ultimately pointless in view of the superior protection afforded by China's
demographic characteristics. As Segal asserts: 'No amount of shelters could equal the demographic reality of a vast rural population engaged in agriculture or dispersed light industry'. This is true, but Segal fails to consider the effects of residual radiation or 'fallout'. One ground-burst nuclear weapon can lethally contaminate thousands of square kilometres. Such shelters protect against that effect. Moreover, Segal's statement overlooks the strategy of 'active defence' which the Chinese take to include the defence of cities (savers and the city inhabitants will be needed in this task), as well as post-nuclear people's war which will require shelters as organised base areas.

CONCLUSION

That China's survival should be assured even under the most adverse conditions of future warfare is a clear indication that the nation's military requirements have grown considerably since the civil war years. Indeed the quest for change in response to global advances in military technology became apparent when the slogan people's war under modern conditions was first introduced during the Korean War. After Chinese participation in that war, Defence Minister Peng Dehuai insisted on the need to be assured of one's weapons supplies, standardised ordnance and adequate logistical support. Above all, he could not comprehend how China's military forces could operate without rank and regularisation, without a professional ethic, with which to conduct themselves effectively and coherently on the modern battlefield. That Soviet weapons supplies, along with subsequent assistance on the development of an indigenous weapons industry, should have been accepted, along with the Soviet military model, does not fault Peng's judgement. One way or another, China's defence establishment had to modernise if it was not to perish. But Soviet assistance did reveal the Chinese inability, and ultimately - in view of the Sino-Soviet split - unwillingness, to accept the implications of foreign dependence to meet domestic needs.

For people's war, premised as it was on the goal of 'national liberation', the most important of modern conditions was the change in China's political authority: the Communist victory in 1949 meant that Mao's revolutionary forces became the defence establishment of the new nation. From challenging the prevailing authorities or competitors for authority, they became the defenders of the new incum-
the warrior ethos, as Western societies have also found to their cost. This would indicate less immediate willingness to engage in human wave sacrifices within the format of a prolonged people's war, and that human power rather than firepower cannot remain the cornerstone of defence. (One must appreciate, however, that 'war orientation' is a fluid situation. The orientation of populations changes over a period of time. Thus the longer the war, the greater the willingness to engage in human wave tactics.) To preserve massive mobilisation as a credible deterrent, China must be able to convince the adversary of its 'will' to conduct a 'total war' campaign of victory denial. To achieve such credibility it is first necessary to convince one's own soldiers and ordinary citizens - as well as to be seen to do so. The confidence inspired by the possession of formidable weapons cannot be overestimated as a morale-boosting factor. China's military parade of 1984, the first to be held in 25 years, may well have served such a domestic purpose. In an interview with People's Daily (3 October 1984), Defence Minister Zhang Aiping said: 'The people of the whole country and all the men and officers of the Army saw with their own eyes that the troops were much better equipped.' Adversary propaganda designed to fuel resentment in the poorly equipped infantry soldier is also an admission that the possession or non-possession of protective weapons does affect morale.85 This is especially so in the case of cross-border incursions - such as during the Sino-Vietnamese clash of 1979 - which no longer resemble revolutionary defensive wars fought within China's territory, but need to be understood by PLA fighters in the modern and somewhat less immediate terms of national foreign policy. Ideological fervour, though useful in mobilising national support, cannot be the appropriate nor the desirable long-term mechanism for motivating a state's military force. It is not appropriate in the context of a limited war which needs to be executed in accordance with time and damage restraint, and it is not desirable as a political force to be unleashed in anything but a national emergency - lest it question (once again) the ideological credentials of the prevailing leadership. The Chinese leadership, one may conclude, has a new appreciation of the value of civil-military separation.

In summary, people's war under modern conditions is a more deliberately psychological strategy than it was under revolutionary political conditions. 'Political power', which originally signified the power of the CPC, must now be viewed as the power of the CPC-led state, and can no longer be regarded as simplistically as that which 'grows out of the barrel of a gun', but rather from the calculations of deterrence. This raises the problem that even nuclear weapons and massive manpower under 'primitive' Chinese conditions may not be convincing as a deterrent. The weapons are known to be in many instances obsolete, and the people may fail to prove effective in defence if they are still capable of being roused on an 'everyone a soldier' basis. The military worth of the people's militia has been questioned in the past and it is still subject to continuing review, evidenced in manpower reductions announced in 1986 (80 per cent in the People's Militia and 88 per cent in militia trainees as a result of the militia being combined with the reserves). Nevertheless, sufficient uncertainty about its prowess remains, for adversaries to wish to avoid its test - especially in the absence of serious provocation. Under such circumstances it may be argued that it is not necessary for China to equip itself with significant numbers of expensive modern battlefield weapons. These could be updated slowly - at China's own industrial modernisation pace - so long as its willingness to fight a people's and a nuclear self-defensive war continues to be communicated. Both nuclear weapons and massive human mobilisations serve as useful symbols of power. They provide a deterrent which cannot be easily ignored; but a deterrent which is being constantly reassessed, nonetheless, in the light of changing standards in military technology.

In the long run, the PRC needs more than a convincing exhibition of will: it also needs the industrial-technological base to empower that will, for in the context of superpower relations, technical capability is increasingly the measure of military capability - be that wrong or right. As the next chapter will show, the PLA's modernisation does call for technological improvements in weapons systems, but this is done out of tactical rather than strategic respect for the power of technology. It is the type of technical capability, not its degree of sophistication, that will matter most in China's military preparedness. If the criteria for such capability are met - that is, if capability is sufficient for the purposes of modern people's war - then all the indications are that, strategically, China may be especially qualified to prevail in the psychological and military climate of twenty-first-century warfare.
2 Defence Development: The Mid-Tech Path to Modernisation

Growth is not modernization: technology acquisition is not technology assimilation.

Jeffrey Schultz, 1980

Framing military requirements for weapons systems that make the maximum contribution to defence policy aims within limited resources is not easily achieved... It is important not to lose sight of the needs of those who will operate the new systems and to ensure that performance is not obtained at the expense of reliability and maintainability.

Donald Hall, 1987

If people's war is to be fought under 'modern conditions', the PRC must decide on whose terms the conditions of modernity are to be defined. Does China seek technological equality with the industrially developed world, and therefore military forces to match that level of development? Or will it seek to modernise along comparatively modest lines, in accordance with its own capabilities and strategic culture? In the previous chapter it was observed that a prime characteristic of people's war is refusal to fight on the enemy's terms: the planned achievement of psychological ascendancy which denies the opponent the choice of concepts of how a war is to be waged. This requirement would suggest that practitioners of a modern people's war should become cognisant with advanced military technology and methods of warfare - in order to 'know the enemy' and even to 'capture', on a selective basis, some of its ideas and technologies. But ultimately they should aim for a form of military modernisation which follows the direction of China's strengths (a large territorial, human and weapons base) rather than aping its opponents, a policy which would draw attention to its weaknesses (economic underdevelopment and paucity of technical expertise). A modified people's war strategy is unlikely to make excessive demands on China's level of technical proficiency. As demonstrated in Chapter I, the logic of Chinese strategy argues against dependence on high technology if it is to optimise its chances of survival in the primitive post-nuclear battlefield. At the same time, improvement in medium technology ('mid-tech') weapons when combined with the advantages of plentiful manpower and matériel, may be all that is required for China's essential defence needs. Therefore, a central argument advanced here is that Chinese defence modernisation must be defined as pertaining to the application of middle-range technology to unconventional warfare methods.

This chapter will begin with an examination of the PRC's policy of national modernisation, showing that the nation's post-1978 development policies are intimately linked to its security concerns. Treatment of the economic underpinnings of China's modernisation programme necessarily encounters the uncertainties which afflict all discussions of Chinese economic statistics. As Harry Gelber pointed out: 'They stem from a variety of causes, including the importance of the "unofficial" economy, the imperfect information in Peking [Beijing] about even official activities around the country and especially the simple fact that in a system of prices set by regulation no-one can know the real cost of anything, and therefore almost all models of the economy are unreliable.' This cautionary note applies to all economic analyses pertaining to China and the material here is no exception. Besides identifying the internal factors shaping military modernisation, this chapter will provide a brief overview of China's strategic environment in order to establish the purposes and goals of defence modernisation. It will then examine the implications of changes in China's armed forces in the 1980s, and suggest their future direction with the objective of determining the realities of people's war under modern conditions, in a situation where these are not yet clear from available theory. In the final analysis, it is within the context of these realities that Chinese defence modernisation needs to be understood.

THE FOUR MODERNISATIONS

The credibility of people's war under modern conditions is ultimately linked to the government's adoption in 1978 of the 'four modernisations' (4M) programme. These are the modernisations of agriculture, industry, science and technology (as one), and national defence
which, as a package, are designed to bring China into the twenty-first century as a comparatively modern nation. With the new century increasingly imminent, it is important to recognise how far China has developed in order to appreciate the scale of modernisation envisaged. The 4M goal is to be achieved in a country whose per capita Gross National Product (GNP) – the measure of output per person – is classified among the poorest strata of nations: those below US$400. By Western methods of calculation, per capita income rose tenfold (from US$20 to US$200) in the three decades between the founding of the PRC and the introduction of the four modernisations. After this point it rose to US$300 in 1983 and US$350 in 1986. Yet in the late 1980s an estimated 100 million Chinese, or a tenth of the population, earned less than the official poverty line of US$65 a year. The government’s goal for per capita income in the year 2000 is US$800. To achieve this target, World Bank estimates indicate that China would need to maintain per capita growth rates of 5.5 to 6.5 per cent a year. Figures to 1988 indicate that this is possible. The World Bank found that China’s per capita GNP rose by an average of 4.5 per cent in the period 1965–84, rendering it the world’s twelfth highest rise in those years. In 1987 China’s GNP rose by 9 per cent and in June 1988 it was up 11 per cent, but inflation had also grown – as much as 20 per cent by Western measures. The government aims to reduce growth to a steady 7 or 8 per cent. Understandably, the projected fourfold increase in Chinese earnings between 1978 and 2000 is consuming the greater part of resources allocated for modernisation: improvements in the material standard of living must come before the pursuit of military sophistication – particularly under circumstances in which Chinese military philosophy continues to hold a higher regard for human rather than technological performance.

Although defence is a low priority in the 4M programme, this must be weighed against the high value of deterrence implied throughout the history of Chinese modernisation efforts. Such a perspective is necessary if one is to understand the spirit in which the four modernisations were conceived, and in so doing, to gain a more intimate understanding of the 4M relationship to Chinese deterrent thinking. In 1963, Mao warned:

If in the decades to come we don’t completely change the situation in which our economy and technology lag far behind those of the imperialist countries, it will be impossible for us to avoid being pushed around again...
preoccupation with the international environment as the measure of modernisation – achieving ‘front rank’ economic status became a typical expression of comparison – indicates that ‘open door’ policy advocates fully appreciate that economic strength is a primary source of national strength in the contemporary world order. In this respect, Thomas Fingar noted the dominant role of economic security in guiding policy decisions in the 1970s, a role grounded in the argument that ‘if a nation is not strong and sovereign in the economic sphere, it cannot possibly retain its political independence or cultural integrity, nor can it obtain or sustain military security’.10

In a 1984 review of the Chinese press, China News Analysis identified the recurrent theme of the ‘motherland’. This it described as being ‘more a pragmatic notion than a historic one’, and as serving to mobilise the population toward building a ‘free and responsible nation’.11 Like the Soviets with their 20 million war dead, the Chinese have never lost sight of the humiliations suffered in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when internal weakness permitted ‘transgressions’ by technologically superior foreign powers. This is an historical and rhetorically reiterated lesson that must have had more than a transient influence on Chinese perceptions. Therefore the survival to the present era of the early message to modernise – with its pointed stress on the national security motive – suggests that it is more than a product of its particular time in the 1960s, when the threat from both the superpowers was accorded a considerably higher profile than it is today, and when the USSR’s withdrawal of aid had been accompanied by Chinese determination to succeed in independent development. Rather, it has become a fixed element in Chinese threat perceptions, in which the experiences of the early 1960s only confirmed the need for national self-reliance.

To this end, Mao’s 1963 call to modernise was made visible at an operational level in the creation of a Chinese nuclear capability. The PRC’s detonation of its first atomic device in October 1964 represented the initial practical step on the path towards an independent nuclear deterrent, an objective to which China has remained irreversibly committed. In this respect, it is interesting to note that Benjamin Schwartz’s analysis of that time remains valid today. ‘The apparent priority granted to nuclear development in China through all the recent shifts in economic strategy,’ he concluded, ‘is related fundamentally to its nationalistic goals rather than to any obvious imperative of the modernisation process.’12

Compared to the nuclear weapons programme (a primary policy objective since its inception), the four modernisations – like the earlier modernisation efforts to which Schwartz referred – have suffered from a delayed and difficult birth. During the disruptions of the Cultural Revolution in the decade from 1966, the nuclear programme had the notable distinction of being relatively sheltered, as evidenced in 1967 when China exploded its first hydrogen bomb. While acknowledging that the nuclear weapons programme has been subsumed under the 4M umbrella, within the fourth and least urgent modernisation category of national defence, in the 1980s it remained central to China’s long-held objective to deal with the international environment from a position of self-reliant strength. The nuclear deterrent would therefore stand to benefit, not diminish, from the 4M plan to powerful nationhood. Even if that particular plan of modernisation is abandoned or again modified,13 it is highly improbable that China’s nuclear muscle – whatever its chosen mode of development – will be permitted to atrophy.

This conclusion is reinforced by the shift in implementation doctrine which dates from the end of 1978. The third plenum of the 11th party Central Committee had, in effect, endorsed the concept of efficiency and pragmatism, and thus the infusion of Western technology, to boost development efforts (self-reliance through selective borrowing). In doing so, it sought to rectify systemic sources of economic retardation, placing ‘economics’ rather than ‘politics’ in command. The notion of ‘class struggle as the key link’, embedded in the radical egalitarian philosophies of the past, was supplanted by the injunction to ‘seek truth from the facts’ – that is, the prescription that practice is the sole criterion of truth. Accordingly ‘the reforms’, as the four modernisations increasingly came to be known after this turning point, were systematically comprehensive in scope: they embraced legal, educational and administrative reform/modernisation. Correspondingly, their implementation – to use Deng Xiaoping’s own choice of metaphor – favoured not the colour of the cat, but the ability of the cat to catch the mouse. By this he meant that in modernising China, the expert prevails over the ideologue, though the latter is not bereft of influence, as evidenced by the conservatively inspired movements between the third plenums of 1978 and 1988. Most notably, these were the campaigns against ‘spiritual pollution’ (1983–4), ‘bourgeois liberalism’ (1987) and, most significantly, the Politburo’s decision in 1988 to modify the pace and methods of economic reform. The more cautious approach of central planners was adopted at a time when an overheated economy had to
be cooled and inflation curbed. Dengist reform had not been abandoned, but nor had socialism. As the Chinese saw it: 'Capitalism doesn't have a patent right over the market economy. We're trying to establish a modality whereby the state regulates the market, and the market guides the enterprises.'

A pragmatist implementation doctrine – should it survive in recognisable form – is of obvious importance to advancing China's defence capability, depending as it does on the viability of its economic support base. It has also meant that PLA recruitment procedures had become more professionally oriented. For example, the family background of a recruit was no longer subject to ideological screening.

Thus despite lower priority resource investment in defence modernisation, it is important to note that China's modernisation was justified in terms of its deterrent value against future aggressors. 'Economic strength is the foundation of military strength,' the PLA Chief of Staff, Yang Dezhi, affirmed in 1985. 'Army building must rely on the country's economic development and be commensurate with economic construction.' Earlier, in 1978, Defence Minister Xu Xianguan, encapsulated the relevance of an economically empowered military establishment to the implementation of a modern people's war strategy: 'Our aim in speeding up the development of the national defence science and technology and national defence industries and improving the arms and equipment of our army is to build up the material basis for increasing the might of people's war under modern conditions.' Given the importance accorded to national development in ensuring China's security, the pertinent questions which arise concern the way in which national defence modernisation is likely to be shaped by allocation of time and money. In other words, when and on what terms will the PLA modernise?

MODERNISATION: (a) THE TIME VARIABLE

With civil sector demands remaining uppermost in China's development priorities, the strength which the military hopes to derive from a sound industrial base will require time. This variable is significant not only in the obvious terms of stability or deterioration of conditions (internal politics and relations with external adversaries) affecting development over an extended time period. It is also significant in terms of the conceptual frame of reference governing the very pace of modernisation, and upon which military improvements are ultimately dependent.

Some valuable insights on the latter may be found in psychological and anthropological sources of development theory literature. These propose models of 'action' versus 'receptive' modes, and 'modern' versus 'non-modern' ideologies, respectively. Briefly expressed, the action mode is concerned with manipulation of the present environment for a future benefit. The act of striving toward that which is planned assumes greater value than the quality of present existence, or the value of past activities which have formed a culture's traditions. The receptive mode, by comparison, is a state which does not challenge the environment but achieves fulfilment through it. As a result, 'the sense of time can change to what might be called timelessness' and 'the urgency to accomplish things is undermined by this timeless orientation'. The receptive mode is compatible with 'non-modern' ideology, whereby 'ideas are in conformity with the nature and order of the world' – a holistic view, as distinct from the separation of the parts from the whole, characteristic of the individualistic nature of 'modern' ideology. So while one ideology conceives of time as a unifying experience (indeed the Chinese traditionally describe time as cyclical), the other measures it in the linear terms of progress towards the future. Modern ideology tends to emphasise the action mode in modern industrial societies, while the non-modern variant characteristically lends itself to the receptive mode in industrially underdeveloped societies. China, in seeking to re-establish its identity through modernisation, appears to be caught in a precarious conceptual balance between the two time-scales associated with these orientations.

The military dilemma is a graphic example. For Mao, time was an ally: he sought to win a war by protracting it. On the other hand, the Chinese are adamant about the need to modernise the PLA, to prepare for a people's war under modern conditions. But does this concept help the Chinese or increase their dilemma? Events to date show that it has been difficult for the PLA to accept a modern military system. Two decades had passed before it decided to re-establish the rank system in 1984 and, because of rivalry and dispute over the upper rungs, another four years elapsed before they were actually assigned. Equipping itself with modern weapons is another extended activity for the PLA. Weapons purchasing delegations have been prominent in terms of publicity, but not especially productive in their ostensible purpose. For example, Chinese teams interested in advanced jet fighters travelled to Europe in the early 1960s but no purchases were made. Similar expeditions in the late 1970s also proved disappointing to Western arms manufacturers. 'Reverse-
engineering' — whereby an imported foreign weapons system is copied and used as the prototype for Chinese production — had been favoured in the past, but has proven time-consuming. This was illustrated by the delayed development of the Q-5 attack aircraft which incorporates features of the Soviet MiG-23. Post-Mao China is interested in co-production agreements with foreign armaments companies (for example, agreements have been concluded with American, British and French companies), as a step toward a more modern indigenous military industry. Even the introduction of computer war games has not budged the military from its traditional notion of man's superiority to weapons. The Chinese predetermine the outcomes of such simulations (to their own advantage) so that the worth of the exercise is ultimately lost. One US defence analyst explained the problem thus: 'To be effective, war games cannot be predetermined, their outcomes must be unknown at the outset, and this is likely to be a big problem with the Chinese because of the still strong ideological nature of their military thinking.'

This is a minor example compared to the above, but it is illustrative.

That it has taken the Chinese 20 years to realise the necessity of a well-defined hierarchical command structure, that it has occupied itself with time-consuming and qualitatively unpromising reverse-engineering methods of weapons design, that it has engaged in extensive overseas weapons inspection exercises, while at the same time exhibiting a determination to establish a self-reliant weapons industry, indicate that China has not been doing a great deal to modernise its military forces. By modern military standards, it is proceeding slowly. Why do the Chinese feel they have so much time? Such an expansive attitude to time has a greater affinity to the people's war philosophy of Mao Zedong and the cultural bias affecting national modernisation generally. The military dilemma is, in fact, compounded by the latter, whose uncertain time-scale may have a further effect of retardation.

This is borne out in the deliberate vagueness surrounding the goal of modernisation. Notwithstanding a specified aim to quadruple the value of agricultural and industrial output between 1980 and 2000, modernisation has not been systematically defined. Instead, any such definition appears to be reliant on the outcome of shorter-term sub-plans which are themselves subject to revision. China's projected stature as a developed nation is more usefully interpreted as an indicator of the scale of change envisaged, than understood in the sense of a goal with a terminal target date. This is a view which finds support in the altered treatment of the modernisation theme over the first decade of Dengist reforms. For instance, the PRC's once oft quoted aim to become 'a powerful, modern socialist country by the end of the century' was modified by an extension of some 50 years and a tone of caution, characterised by such qualifying expressions as 'perhaps' (in 50 years), 'approaching' and 'close to or on a par with' (developed countries).

By 1987, in the context of Chinese socialism, Deng spoke of 'production forces' becoming 'sufficiently developed by the middle of the next century'. The end-of-century deadline is also missing from the 1982 Constitution which replaced that of 1978. In the following passage, economists Ren Tao and Wang Shunsheng reflect this restrained approach and best express the current meaning of Chinese modernisation:

Modernization is a process of development from a lower to a higher level. In a big country such as ours it will take a very long time. Our goal at the end of this century is a comparatively well-off society, and from then on to achieve a higher level of modernisation. Therefore, it is too early to work out a comprehensive summary of its characteristics, since many concepts and courses of action need to be tested and evaluated in practice.

To some Western analysts this method is simply one of trial-and-error. Yet its resemblance to Mao's military advice on the necessity for a guiding plan which incorporates change, would caution against such an interpretation.

In defence modernisation, the underlying receptive mode logic of flexible planning is especially troublesome in its incompatibility to the action mode or what Francis Romance termed the 'exigencies of modern military realities'. Without recourse to a more specific modernisation schedule, PLA leadership estimates have been at variance with one another as well as with Deng's measured approach. In an interview with the English-language China Daily on 20 April 1984, Defence Minister Zhang Aiping enthusiastically projected that China would reach advanced world standards in conventional defence by 1990; whereas in July of the previous year, Politburo member and Director of the PLA's General Political Department, Yu Qiuli, indicated that even 20 years would not be sufficient for preparing against a 'better equipped aggressor'. Whatever the motives of these statements — if underlying motives may be presumed — it is nonetheless hardly suprising that nothing of substance has been published on the relationship between defence and civil
sector modernisations. We are told that civil sector development must have priority and that its development will help defence, but we are not told how. At face value it looks as if defence industry is already sacrificing a great deal to the commercial sector by having many of its factories produce civilian goods. Upon more careful consideration, this circuitous, receptive mode, route to defence modernisation does proffer strategic advantages within the modern people's war concept. As noted in Chapter 1, military-cum-civilian factories provide a more discreet path to war preparedness. They also complicate enemy targeting plans. But in the context of the present discussion it is probably accurate to say that, security reasons aside, an absence of published policy confirms that Chinese defence planning is an evolutionary matter (the guiding plan which incorporates change) and that policymakers are genuinely uncertain as to how defence modernisation is expected to relate to the rest of the 4M programme. If the Chinese leadership equates 'modernisation' with 'technological equality', as their statements which compare China's intended modernisation to that of the world's industrialised nations would suggest, then Beijing's confusion is understandable. The fundamental problem posed by economic logistics - the length of the development leap in relation to available time and resources - argues against Western-style modernisation. Not only is 'high-tech' modernisation unaffordable but, more importantly, it is not necessarily cost-effective or even relevant to Chinese military strategy. This issue of resource availability requires further discussion before Chinese-style modernisation is formulated in greater detail.

MODERNISATION: (b) FUNDING ALLOCATIONS

Since 1979, when China began liberalising its hitherto centrally controlled economy, the nation has been experiencing sustained growth rates in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Real increases in GDP during the Sixth Five Year Plan of 1981-5 averaged an annual 10 per cent. In 1988 it was 9.3 per cent. This is large in absolute terms when one considers that by the second half of the 1980s China's GDP was almost three times India's and more than five times South Korea's. Despite these increases, the defence budget has been maintained at fairly constant levels, thereby accounting for a reduced percentage of the national budget - from 17.5 per cent in 1979 to 8.5 per cent in 1988. The defence budget for 1988 represented a rise of only 2.6 per cent over the previous year.

In terms of GNP, estimates of China's defence spending in 1987 have hovered in the 6-8 per cent range. But according to figures released by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in May 1988, China's real defence spending may account for only 4 per cent of GNP. This compares poorly with its principal adversary, the Soviet Union, which spends an estimated 17 per cent. The United States, by way of further illustration, spends 6 per cent of GNP on defence (or 27 per cent of its budget compared to China's 8.5 per cent).

With the military's share of the state budget reduced and its modernisation linked to slow progress within higher priority sectors (CPC General Secretary Zhou Ziyang complained at the party's 13th Congress held in October 1987 that the nation was experiencing lagging productivity, inefficiency and zero growth in farm income), it would be reasonable to assume that the pace of defence development will be gradual. In the absence of policy changes affecting modernisation priorities and/or a sharp deterioration in relations with either or both the Soviet Union and Vietnam, it would appear that defence will have to defer to the more urgent tasks in the civilian sector. For China, the security of food supply is the most pressing concern. With an official estimate of population growth at less than 1 per cent, agricultural output must sustain a nation of at least 1.2 billion people by the year 2000. The impetus for improved production techniques, together with an industrially derived higher material base, are recognised as outcomes of the scientific dimension of modernisation. Similarly, the modernisation of science and technology is a part of the modernisation of defence. Here it can be seen that while defence remains a lower priority than the other three modernisations it benefits simultaneously from their advances. The problem which arises is, again, one of time and money. How long can defence - the least important modernisation - wait to share the benefits of a more advanced industrial and technological base, produced by the higher priority modernisations? Air Marshal Donald Hall, former British Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Systems), expressed this problem well when he observed:

There is a point, of course, when resources are spread so thinly that the capability provided lacks credibility. If resource constraint is maintained beyond this point then political leaders must face the prospect that it may no longer be possible to implement defence policy. The alternatives are threefold: ignore the problem; increase defence resources; change the policy. (emphasis added)

With regard to the first course, ignoring the problem, officially
China perceives no problem until the turn of the century. Thus London’s International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) observed in 1987 that: ‘given Deng Xiaoping’s assessment that no world war is likely for twelve years or so, political support for defence spending is unlikely to be strong’.32 Elsewhere, it has been argued that Beijing’s lowered threat assessment in the early 1980s was more a response to the need to justify resource re-allocation for pressing non-military purposes, than any significant change in the threat assessed environment.33 Even though Sino–Soviet relations in the period to 1988 held the promise of diplomatic progress, the military realities remained much the same. Soviet force levels on the northern border had not declined significantly – one division was removed in 1987 but 56 remained. Nor had China’s hostile relationship with the Soviet client-state, Vietnam, shown any marked improvement. Lowered threat assessment has had a practical application. It may be argued that China stresses the need for global peace generally, and its own peaceful intention in particular, in order that its modernisation proceed unhindered. If China wishes to be militarily competitive at some future date, when it can afford to do so, then the ‘problem’ is indeed being ‘ignored’, for the enemy may choose not to be accommodating of PRC development schedules. On the contrary, military unpreparedness could invite pre-emptive attack. Indications that Chinese defence leaders and their sympathisers were disturbed by this prospect emerged in the military press during the second half of 1987, a period marked by the 50th anniversary of Japan’s invasion of China (July), the PLA’s 60th anniversary (August), and the CPC’s 13th Congress (October) when PLA representation in the Politburo was significantly reduced. An anti-pacifist campaign was waged by both leftist and moderate (or reformist) military leaders. General Li Desheng, a known leftist, spoke out against ‘the numbing thoughts of pacifism’, as did Defence Minister Zhang Aiping, a reformist, who lamented the ‘tide of pacifist thought which not only fails to fit actual circumstances but is detrimental to national and army construction’.

This was a response to criticism by ‘some people’ (meaning the ‘pacifists’) that defence spending was straining the Chinese economy. He dismissed these charges as ‘utterly false’ and said that the accusation was based on the argument that because China was experiencing relative peace, it was time ‘to put the weapons back in the arsenal and graze the warhorses on the hillside’.35 Attacking the view that economic progress will necessarily lead to military strength, he argued that: ‘Wealth of the people and nation does not translate into – and cannot be a substitute for – national strength. Some countries in the world are relatively well-off. But this does not mean they are strong countries.’36 This was a pointed reminder to the party leadership that the whole rationale of national modernisation, as argued in the opening section of this chapter, was to so strengthen China that it could never again fear for its security. Drawing on Chinese history to make this point, Politburo theorist Hu Qiaomu used the occasion of the anniversary of Japan’s invasion to condemn the Qing Dynasty’s ‘pacifism’ and the Guomindang’s ‘non-resistance’ to imperialist Western and Japanese threats, respectively.37 The campaign’s message was summed up by one press commentary which cautioned: ‘Without a strong defence, economic construction will lose a reliable buffer and guarantee.’38 Even if there was no discernible ‘problem’, Zhang Aiping and his supporters maintained that peacetime provides the opportunity for military modernisation, not an excuse for spending less on defence. In other words, if you want peace, prepare for war.

This leads to consideration of the second option, increased resources for defence. Quite apart from the need to attend to more pressing problems such as assuring China’s food security and economic viability, one difficulty with this second option is that increased investment in military preparedness would heighten adversary suspicion. Such suspicion may be used to justify Soviet border troop reinforcements and elicit accusations of militaristic ambitions on China’s part, thereby arousing fears in a region of valuable trade potential to 4M requirements. Another difficulty is scale of cost. By how much would resources for defence need to be increased if the PLA is to be truly modernised – that is, if it is to achieve a standard comparable to the armed forces of advanced nations?

Because of the army’s sheer size, and its reliance on weaponry based on obsolete 1950s and 1960s Soviet technology, the introduction of modern military equipment would account for the most expensive aspect of defence modernisation. CIA costing estimates of the PRC’s past defence outlays show that weapons procurement accounted for the largest single category of defence expenditure (40 per cent) in the period 1965–79.39 A decade later, this share of the defence budget would be insufficient for the procurement of modern weapons – more so in view the CIA’s later findings that spending on weapons had decreased in the decade 1978–88.40 The official 1988 defence budget figure of 21.5 billion yuan converts to about US$5.8 billion. It is generally assumed that the budgets of other ministries cover the costs of a number of defence sector expenditures. (Neither
the CIA nor London's IISS, for instance, regard the official figure as representative of total defence expenditure.) Thus, in the absence of detailed statistics, a more realistic estimate may be obtained by doubling the official figures. By this system, which is employed by the CIA, the 1988 figure would convert to US$11.6 billion. Even if the weapons component cost had remained at 40 per cent, this upper ceiling would still mean a mere US$4.64 billion allocation. This is still grossly inadequate for meeting the cost of weapons systems and equipment required for converting the PLA into a comparatively modern military force. According to the US Defense Marketing Service, China would have to spend about sixteen times the above-mentioned amount in military equipment — an estimated US$65 billion — if it wished to reach comparable American and Soviet standards.41 Understandably, the optimism of 1978, which envisaged China under the 4M programme ‘catching up with and surpassing advanced world levels in scientific and armament production’,42 has been tempered by a realisation of the inherent difficulties involved. On this point, Yu Qiuli’s remarks five years later are worth recalling: ‘The PLA would not be able to match a better equipped aggressor even if it modernised its weaponry over the next ten to twenty years.’43

It could, however, match a better equipped aggressor if it adopted the third option, a change of policy. Rather than seeking to ‘catch up’ technologically, the PLA should strive to incorporate only as much technology as it requires for improving its combat effectiveness. Considering that the vital components of ‘combat effectiveness’ — leadership, morale and the will to fight, mission, manpower, training, C3I, and weapons — are predominantly associated with human performance, or man-the-weapon, this should not prove difficult to implement. ‘Change of policy’ is perhaps too strong a term to describe the still uncertain direction of China’s defence modernisation. The PRC has not changed its essential defence strategy of people’s war, and it has yet to show that the modern conditions under which people’s war must be fought necessarily entail a high-tech people’s war. Modern conditions simply refer to the late-twentieth-century battlefield on which the armed forces of advanced nations are capable of employing state-of-the-art technology within the combined arms concept. The PLA could still be effective against a technologically superior adversary by creating its own battlefield on which enemy strength is circumvented and thereby rendered irrelevant. This can be done by employing robust, mid-tech weapons, in large numbers, and in combinations which are effective for small unit guerilla attacks as well as larger unit concentrations at critical times and places during the war. Accordingly, China’s solution to defence force credibility is better expressed as ‘change of aspiration’ rather than ‘change of policy’. China must aspire to its own — not foreign — definitions of modernity.

By defining its modernisation as pertaining to mid-tech systems, the People’s Republic could also reduce the monetary cost of modernisation. As Donald Hall has stated, the ultimate criterion of a military requirement is certainly not cost but rather cost effectiveness and that ‘the real measure of effectiveness is the influence of the weapon systems on the outcome of the battle’.44 Besides drawing on budgetary sources, mid-tech modernisation could be paid for by the money saved from recent PLA manpower reductions (a quarter of the force), contract work done by military factories for civilian industry (the earnings of which are estimated to pay for half the PLA’s research and development costs), and the foreign exchange earned from arms sales. The PRC has always provided military aid, accounting for an estimated 8 per cent of Chinese military production. It was not until the 1980s that arms, ranging from automatic rifles to tanks and aircraft, were exported on a commercial basis. Chinese weapons manufacturing industry, the precise capacity of which has not been revealed publicly, comes under the auspices of four out of China’s eight Machine Building ministries. In 1984, North China Industries Corp. (Norinco) emerged as China’s arms export organisation, and subsequent advertising has been aimed at the Third World market. This market is attracted by the easy maintenance and lower cost of Chinese weapons. Chinese AK-47 rifles were used by the Afghan guerillas, missile-armed MiG-19 aircraft were purchased by Pakistan, T-69 tanks by Thailand, and both sides of the recent Gulf war employed Chinese weapons — the most notable being Iran’s employment of the Chinese Silkworm anti-ship missile. Such sales provided the opportunity for China to have its weapons battle-tested. Their popularity swiftly elevated China to the position of fifth largest weapons exporter worldwide, earning almost US$2 billion a year (7 per cent of total exports). Significantly, the PLA was permitted to keep most of these earnings. Arms sales not only financed the purchase of avionics, radar guidance and computers from the West — technology acquired on a selective basis for upgrading PLA equipment — but will be especially beneficial to Chinese domestic procurement, as arms exports reduce development costs. This, of course, is
dependent on China maintaining its high level of exports or at least remaining competitive in the Third World arms market. With the ending of the Iran–Iraq war, which accounted for 70 per cent of Chinese arms sales, Beijing turned its attention to markets in South America.46

All of the above considerations strongly suggest that the Chinese solution to defence modernisation lies in forgoing advanced technology aspirations and concentrating on the consolidation of middle-range technologies. Indeed, China's long-term view of modernisation and its essentially self-reliant procurement policy ('the PLA will depend mainly on itself to modernise its equipment')47 indicate that defence policy has evolved in this direction. The employment of robust weapons systems, in large numbers, as well as the introduction of cheap defensive weapons represent a more realistic defence modernisation goal than that of technological equality with developed nations. This is particularly so in view of China's strategic environment. Numerically superior forces employing mid-tech conventional and tactical nuclear weapons are deemed sufficient to counter any hostile incursion into Chinese territory.

MODERNISATION OBJECTIVES IN RELATION TO CHINA'S STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Certainly, a fundamental premise in the defence policy of any nation is the maintenance of its territorial integrity. For the Chinese government this entails the defence of a comparatively large area. At over nine million square kilometres, the PRC represents one-fifteenth of the world's land mass, rendering it the third largest country after the USSR and Canada. A 20 000-kilometre land boundary is shared by a dozen other countries, two of which – the Soviet Union to the north and Vietnam to the southwest – are China's major adversaries. With these nations, China fought border wars in 1969 and 1979, respectively. Earlier, in 1962, 150 000 PLA troops clashed with Indian forces on the PRC's western periphery. The Korean peninsula to the east, where China committed 300 000 troops in 1950, remains politically divided and heavily armed. Indeed, as Chapter 4 will elaborate, Soviet and American competition in this region brings superpower rivalry in close proximity to China's industrial centres. (For comparative PRC-superpower strength levels, refer to Tables 2.1 and 2.3.)

Although traditionally viewed as a continental military power, China's maritime defence needs are by no means negligible: the mainland coast sweeps 18 000 kilometres in a south-westerly arc commencing at the mouth of the Yalu river on the Korean border and terminating at the Sino–Vietnamese boundary. Armed disputes along China's littoral waters have included the Taiwan Strait crises of 1954–5 and 1958, and the PLA naval seizure of the Paracel Islands in 1974. Relations in the decade 1978–88 were characterised by Beijing's perception of the Soviet Union as its principal strategic adversary, whose close relations with Vietnam and India compound the threat posed by Vietnam as the immediate regional irritant and India as a border disputant. Nationalist-held Taiwan, which refuses to recognise Beijing's political authority, represents a source of unresolved dispute. Irredentist claims over the Dachen Islands held by Japan remain benign in view of current Sino–Japanese cooperation, but those in the South China Sea may aggravate future conflict with Vietnam. Sino–Vietnamese naval skirmishes over the Spratly Islands in 1988 could be a portent for worse to come.

The intentions and capabilities of hostile or potentially hostile powers surrounding China will be examined in more detail in Part II. For present purposes, a quantitative comparison of forces is necessary for the basis upon which a key argument in this book may be advanced: that China must exploit its overall numerical superiority in men and matériel. It is true that the quality of weapons is improving but not at a level which can carry the burden of China's defence. Numbers still matter most.

Beginning with absolute strength levels, the PLA's regular armed forces of about 3.2 million (see Appendix 1) outnumber Soviet deployment strength in the Far Eastern Strategic Theatre by a ratio of 6:1 (even on the more limited basis of Chinese border region deployment the ratio is 3:1). The advantage held in absolute terms over the armed forces manpower of its regional rivals India and Vietnam, is about 2.5:1 for each, and roughly 8:1 for Taiwan (see Table 2.2). Excluding northern deployments, China would still have sufficient available manpower to outnumber these smaller forces, except in the improbable event of a multi-front war involving all four adversaries.

China's numerical advantage also extends to its weapons inventory (as indicated in Tables 2.1 to 2.3). With some 6000 combat aircraft, the Air Force of the PLA is almost six times the size of the Soviet Far East Air Force (possessing 1100 combat aircraft), and many times
Table 2.1 Force comparisons, 1988: PRC and the superpowers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PRC</th>
<th>USSR</th>
<th>USA (in Philippines, Japan, Korea only)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total personnel</td>
<td>3,200,000</td>
<td>5,096,000</td>
<td>121,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>2,300,000</td>
<td>1,900,000</td>
<td>31,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>458,000</td>
<td>14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force</td>
<td>470,000</td>
<td>444,000</td>
<td>36,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat aircraft</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>4,400</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submarines (including SSNs)</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>(7th Fleet) 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal surface combatants</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2.2 Force comparisons, 1988: PRC and the region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PRC</th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
<th>Taiwan</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total personnel</td>
<td>3,200,000</td>
<td>1,252,000</td>
<td>405,000</td>
<td>1,362,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>2,300,000</td>
<td>1,100,000</td>
<td>270,000</td>
<td>1,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>33,000</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>52,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force</td>
<td>470,000</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>115,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat aircraft</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval units</td>
<td>1,326</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

developing technological base, while selectively upgrading some weapons systems and production facilities through imported technology. However, improvements will have to be accompanied by larger-scale production – particularly in the J-8 and its variants – to replace the J-6 fighters that are being retired. The J-8 is relatively new to the PLA Air Force. It was revealed in 1984 as China’s first indigenously designed fighter, but retains some MiG-21 and MiG-22 characteristics. (As will be noted in a later context, it is to China’s advantage to continue copying Soviet designs. Captured enemy aircraft would be readily assimilated in the PLA Air Force.) It is unlikely that the Chinese Air Force will reach advanced Western standards in the next decade or so. But if numbers can compensate for sophistication then the sacrifice of expending precious resources need not be made. The current inventory improvements will at least ensure that the Air Force’s technological lag does not worsen in relation to advances within rival air forces.

The Navy of the PLA is roughly thirteen times larger than that of India, eight times the size of the Nationalist navy and seventeen times the Vietnamese navy. Equipped with over 1000 combat vessels, the Chinese Navy is still about twice the size of the better equipped Soviet Pacific Fleet. Whilst retaining strength in numbers, the Navy has undergone significant changes during the Deng decade. Foremost among these is the nuclear capability attained in the early 1980s (see Appendix 2). Apart from qualitative changes in armament, the Navy also grew quantitatively in the decade to 1988. This is evident, for example, in the commissioning of a guided weapon (GW) frigate force, and an approximate doubling in the number of submarines and GW destroyers. This growth period corresponds to the strengthening of the Soviet Pacific Fleet in the 1970s, including its strategic acquisition of Vietnamese port facilities in Cam Ranh Bay. The political motivation for an improved Chinese naval capability may be traced, then, to the perceived dangers of Soviet–Vietnamese sea-based strength. This threat perception relates to the security of China’s southern periphery but also impinges on the related issues of Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea, and the security of current and projected exploitation of its seabed resources. Viewed from a wider strategic perspective, China’s northern border vigilance must now be supplemented with an enhanced southern naval capacity.

Only in armour is the PLA outnumbered by the Soviet Army. Whilst Soviet armoured superiority in both numerical strength and technology identifies a serious vulnerability in Chinese ground force capability within the same category, similar comparisons with China’s three lesser adversaries must be approached with caution. The strengths and weaknesses of their respective armed forces are less relevant to combat performance than is the case with naval or air force comparisons. The reasons lie in geography and the limited nature of past operations. Apart from narrow corridors, such as those through which the PLA launched its 1979 offensive against Vietnam, the mountainous terrain on China’s Vietnamese and Indian borders is unsuitable for tank warfare. The 1979 operation was largely infantry and artillery based, with tanks serving only as assault support vehicles. Unless China used the strategic passes on its rugged frontiers to enter the plains of enemy territory, or its adversaries are to similarly enter China, the armoured element in border wars with Vietnam or India must be seen serving only a supplementary role. Similarly, and obviously, tanks would not predominate in a military operation against Taiwan. Such an operation would be primarily naval. Furthermore, the extreme numerical discrepancy between Chinese and Taiwanese tank forces precludes any serious comparison between the two. Because armoured warfare holds little relevance to a Sino–Indian war in the border highlands or a naval operation against Taiwan, Chinese tank capabilities are most realistically compared to those of Vietnam – particularly in view of the 1979 action. The advantage of superiority in armour contributed to the PLA’s victory in the decisive battle of Lang Son. The obvious lesson here is that numerical superiority means the PLA can afford to lose tanks and still prevail. Despite this, the need to minimise losses has been recognised and improvements introduced in the 1980s have attempted to overcome the problems of poor fire-power and lack of versatility.

For all its numerical strength, the Chinese armed forces are still perceived to be vulnerable to a technologically superior adversary. Such criticism may not be altogether relevant in view of the fresh strategic possibilities inherent in modern people’s war. Anti-blitzkrieg operations under modern conditions provide a ready example of how strategy may be used to subvert technology and why the Chinese emphasis on mobile warfare does not discredit positional warfare. Contrary to the ‘prevailing’ opinion in the Western strategic community, mobile or active defence significantly enhances it. Positional, layered defence, within the context of Chinese material inferiority, would serve not to challenge superior Soviet firepower but to disrupt the blitz operation’s high tempo of advance,
the idea being to 'bog down' the Soviet forces into a protracted war. This would force the enemy to respond to Chinese terms of attrition warfare, and to depart from the distinguishing characteristic of blitzkrieg attack, which is battle avoidance, in favour of 'by-passing' defensive positions. Even if 'prelaid' defensive positions have been identified and successfully avoided, the Chinese could still concentrate their more agile forces - employing guerrilla tactics - at selected points of engagement against enemy flanks. Once enemy forces are engaged in a war of attrition (entailing delay and the need to deviate if vulnerable points are to be protected), their reliance on a campaign of speed and surprise has been undermined. The invaders' dilemma is that they cannot refuse to give battle, nor can they respond to PLA harassment but still expect to attain their military objective within the shortest possible time.

CHINESE DEFENCE PLANNING TO THE YEAR 2000

Because China's strategic environment favours attrition, degree of sophistication will not be emphasised in defence modernisation - at least not until the middle of the twenty-first century when China hopes to narrow its technological gap with the developed nations. Selective modernisation in the shorter term - to the year 2000 - will entail a mid-low technology nexus within the PLA, or what a parallel situation in more advanced countries is referred to as the 'hi-lo mix'. It is difficult to be convinced otherwise. After all, how much better are improved Chinese weapons systems when one considers Soviet technological superiority in every weapons category, and envisages the typical air-land battle scenario of massive Soviet tank assaults under heavy air cover? By this measure of Soviet superiority, the best that China has produced in weaponry can only be regarded as medium-range technology. The rest remain low-tech. A pragmatic mix of available and improved equipment is well suited to a modern people's war strategy. How is this pragmatism likely to manifest in the remaining decade of this century?

Given the established emphasis on the mechanised environment, Chinese anti-tank capabilities remain a major weakness which the military leadership is seeking to overcome. Present shortages of anti-tank missiles mean a continued reliance on towed artillery, some of which are equipped with anti-tank rounds. Even when increased production of missiles in the 1980s is fully absorbed, towed guns are unlikely to be discarded. These low-tech systems will probably retain their importance in the composition of Chinese artillery because of their attritional value and their suitability to the rugged, often jungle covered, terrain of southern China. With the shift to tank/anti-tank warfare as part of the more profound reform toward combined arms operations, the PLA may logically call upon the assistance of tactical air power. Rotary-wing forces used for overhead tank attack, for example, could compensate for weaknesses in the anti-tank role of Chinese armour. Indeed the helicopter in its various roles is especially pertinent to the development of light mobile forces using more advanced but essentially moderate technology in the service of people's war strategy.

As for countering the enemy's own helicopter gunships, the Army's surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) are manportable, shoulder-firing missiles which are eminently suitable for guerilla warfare. The effectiveness of such defensive systems was demonstrated in Afghanistan in late 1986 and 1987 when the Mujahideen successfully employed anti-aircraft missiles including the US Stinger. In keeping with the mid-low technology mix, the more common attritional method of anti-aircraft operations is already well catered for in China's 16 000 air defence guns. The effectiveness of guns used in this role has been repeatedly demonstrated in a variety of wars, including those in Vietnam and the Middle East. This is also true of their role in air combat. The Vietnam air war showed that American missile-armed F-4s were disadvantaged against more primitive gun-armed MiG-21s. Overall, close air combat still favours the gun rather than the missile, but the introduction of missile capabilities to older aircraft is a sensible option for long-range combat situations. It seems probable that China will continue to make optimum use of its present inventory, which largely comprises copies or adaptations of elderly Soviet aircraft. Although the J-6 (MiG-19) fighter is the most numerous of these dated aircraft, those sold to Pakistan are fitted with air-to-air missiles (AAM) and are supposed competent. A redesigned attack version of the J-6 which entered service in 1975 also incorporates the 'mid-low tech' armament approach. The Qiangjiji-5 or Q-5 is internally armed with two 23mm cannons, one in each wing root, and can be externally armed with AAM. Further indication of the search for new applications for China's aging inventory may be found in the H-6 (Tu-16 derived) bomber force, best known for its strategic nuclear role. Although of 1950s design, these aircraft are being developed for a diversity of roles pertinent to contemporary Air
Force needs. One variant is armed with C-601 air-launched missiles for an anti-shipping role, while another could emerge as an air refueller for the Q-5.

The C-601 is a derivative of the basic surface-to-surface missile (SSM) in China's armoury: the Haiying (Sea Eagle) or HY-2 Styx-type missile. This 'mid-tech' missile, which represents 1960s to 1970s generation technology, also arms a sizable section of the PLA Navy, rendering it far more potent as a coastal defence force than fleet characteristics would otherwise permit. Recent Iranian deployments of these missiles showed that they continued to be effective in an anti-shipping role.

While defensive missiles will improve PLA capabilities they may not be enough. The introduction of 'reactive' (outwardly exploding) armour to Soviet tanks will eventually reduce the effectiveness of conventional anti-tank systems. According to US Defense Science Board information in 1988, "thousands of Soviet T-64, T-72 and T-80 tanks were being fitted with "reactive" armour on their exterior shells of ceramic and steel composite laminated plating which explodes outwards when hit by a shell or missle." Tactical nuclear weapons might become, by necessity, the PLA's only plausible counter to these tanks.

The deterrent would apply not only to a conventional tank-led assault but also to the use of nuclear weapons on the battlefield. If the Soviets knew that China would be prepared to employ such weapons to defend itself, then this preparedness could act as a credible deterrent. Strategic nuclear weapons are neither appropriate nor credible for tactical deterrence. They would surely constitute an overreaction and would invite unacceptable levels of retaliation. It is understandable, then, that China has recognised the need to plug a serious gap in its nuclear force profile – that of battlefield systems. Therefore, Chinese defence modernisation along mid-tech lines will almost certainly entail a strengthening of tactical nuclear capabilities. It might also extend to chemical warfare (CW), and not just because of the threat posed by chemically equipped Soviet forces. Less advanced armies are both willing and capable of employing this form of warfare, as illustrated in 1988 by Iraq's chemical attacks against its Kurdish minority. Chemical weapons, which have been shown to be the choice of poorer countries, could even become a genuine substitute for nuclear capability in future war scenarios. Though horrific in human terms, their use is not as environmentally damaging or as psychologically unacceptable as would be the case with nuclear detonations. So the empirical realities of so-called 'modern' warfare cannot escape the attentions of Chinese defence planners.

**TACTICAL NUCLEAR AND CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

The decision to develop a tactical nuclear capability has been evident from the very onset of the Deng era. At least two scientific articles noting Chinese research on enhanced radiation weapons, and one Army journal article advocating PLA use of battlefield nuclear weapons, were published in the late 1970s. It should be noted that this was the time (1978) when China appears to have begun deployment of its estimated 100 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs). Furthermore, a Chinese report in 1979 mentioned mastery of solid fuel technology for 'tactical rockets'. (It is notable that 1979 was the year in which China set up its Eighth Ministry of Machine Industry for tactical missiles, SAMS and ship-to-ship missiles.) A report on the defence industry's achievements of 1981 included mention of tactical missiles as part of the 'constant advances' made in China's nuclear weapons programme. The Soviets appear well aware of these advances. For example, Major G. Mos'ko, citing open source material, wrote in early 1982 that the programme was in 'full swing', and that China was 'concentrating mainly on creating strategic and operational-tactical nuclear munitions'. If further confirmation was needed, then the Chinese appeared more than willing to oblige: in June 1982 the PLA *practised* tactical nuclear warfare.

The publicised exercise, in Ningxia Autonomous Region, represented a theatre depth of 700 kilometres from the Mongolian border, possibly more if operations are to reach across the border into enemy territory. Interestingly, the 700-kilometre theatre depth and the distance of the closest border approach to Beijing (about 400 kilometres) are well suited to the range versatility of the new mobile SRBM, first promoted in 1986 by China Precision Machinery Import/Export Corporation. These single-stage 'Model M' SRBMs are like the Martin Marietta Pershing-2 in appearance and are capable of ranges between 200 and 600 kilometres, depending on choice of solid-propellant rocket motors. The 600 kilometre version, which is expected to enter service by 1990, is carried on a vehicle similar to the Soviet SCUD-B launcher. Mass production of this short-range missile will be possible if China succeeds in exporting it despite US disapproval. (In 1988 countries interested in purchasing the M9 version were said to include Libya, Syria, Iran and Pakistan.)
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If the M9, because of its export potential, captured media attention in 1988, the creation of a Ministry for Aerospace Industry was no less significant an event in furthering the cause of China’s tactical intentions. The new department was formed out of the old ministries of Aeronautics and Astronautics Industry with the objective of developing more advanced aircraft and rockets. Of more specific interest is its plan to develop ‘a new generation’ of tactical missiles.57

Finally, in November 1988, China was reported to have tested its first neutron device. This development is of particular relevance to the problem of overcoming Soviet armoured superiority. By targeting the crew (through prompt or immediate radiation) rather than the tanks themselves (thereby limiting collateral damage), enemy troop morale may be expected to suffer more from the knowledge that this type of tactical nuclear weapon – as distinct from the standard fission variety – could be employed. Hence possession of the ‘neutron bomb’ contributes to the PRC’s deterrent aims. Certainly in the task of war-fighting this type of weapon would offer considerable advantages to an otherwise disadvantaged PLA position vis-à-vis Soviet armoured superiority. The enhanced radiation device, as Chant and Hogg have pointed out, is ‘the only weapon guaranteed to kill and disable the crews of armoured vehicles in a given area, no matter how many of them there may be’.58 They have also stressed that such a weapon is of relevance only to a defending army because an attacking force would lack protection against exposure to radiation. At the same time it should be noted that if radiation produced can penetrate tank armour it can also penetrate all but deep earth shelters. Moreover, when exploded at ground level, radioactive contamination from enhanced radiation weapons is lengthy. The PLA must therefore (a) ensure ‘prelaid battlefields’ incorporate deep earth shelters, and (b) employ small kiloton air bursts which, unlike ground level bursts, do not dig craters from which debris is carried downwind in the form of radioactive fallout.

Turning to the simpler technology of the tactical force mix, the PLA’s artillery systems are potentially well suited for the requirements of battlefield nuclear warfare. Artillery launched nuclear munitions were one of the earliest US solutions to this form of warfare. China possesses ample quantities of suitable guns, that is, those over 152mm which have a maximum range of 40 kilometres. Therefore, it would not need to invest heavily in expensive battlefield nuclear development projects. Moreover, in this respect the US, whose tactical nuclear shells are designed to be fired from 155mm guns, has supplied the expertise to China for the construction of a 155mm artillery shell manufacturing plant.59 Potential conversion of China’s artillery systems to nuclear capability applies also to chemical warfare.

Although the Chinese have practised chemical defence and have openly admitted to the existence of chemical warfare units within the PLA,60 their possession of chemical weapons has not been confirmed. The PLA allegedly used toxic gas against the Vietnamese during the February 1979 border war; while the Vietnamese also reportedly resorted to chemical warfare against the Chinese. Certainly the Chinese have developed their own protective garments to be worn by soldiers on the chemical battlefield;61 garments which would also protect against nuclear radiation. It is most unlikely, however, that China could afford to equip a significant proportion of its forces with expensive chemical protection suits. Furthermore, because such garments are cumbersome, they impair a soldier’s combat effectiveness. This, of course, may not be the case in the longer term. The Soviets already supply their reconnaissance units with lightweight suits, and the NBC battle suit is projected to become an indispensable item in twenty-first-century warfare. The Chinese, no doubt, will do their best to incorporate selectively future developments in this area.

Despite the presence of chemical warfare units in the PLA and the development of protective combat garments, one could reasonably conclude that the PLA would not have a great resistance to CW or, for that matter, nuclear contamination. Harlan Jencks proposed that Chinese ‘vulnerability to chemical weapons, which the Soviets are sure to use in a major war, is perhaps the single greatest threat to PLA ground forces’ (emphasis added).62 Writing in 1982, Lee Ngok was similarly pessimistic, not only with regard to CW but the other means of mass destruction: ‘it is difficult to conceive that China will be able to successfully wage a large-scale guerrilla war in the open terrain of the Manchurian plains under NBC (nuclear, biological, and chemical) conditions’.63 These conclusions on PLA combat capabilities under NBC conditions require one important proviso: whilst there may be operational difficulties, Chinese society is drilled in protection measures, thereby enhancing China’s chances of surviving attack and protracting their resistance to enemy occupation. The subject of civil defence was examined in greater detail in the previous chapter but within the present context Samuel Griffith’s mid-1960s account of Chinese preparedness against chemical and nuclear attack is of interest, as it refers to training in that early period:
During [the early 1960s], the authorities in the People’s Republic have obviously attached a considerable importance to training the PLA and the People’s Militia in ‘anti-chemical warfare’ measures... Apparently (although this is never expressly stated) the emphasis is on decontaminating critical installations which may survive the heat and blast effects of atomic-nuclear explosions; rendering first aid to human beings who are not within the killing radius, and constructing fallout shelters.

Although the latest available MND [Ministry of National Defence] chart [1966] does not show an ‘anti-chemical warfare’ command, one certainly exists. Obviously, there is some central authority responsible for formulating doctrine and providing standard equipment. In this context, the militia’s training in fire fighting is relevant.

If the Chinese possess chemical weapons, these might not have advanced greatly from the type provided by the USSR in the 1950s. It is possible, of course, that the Chinese will not seek to modernise any chemical arsenals that they might have but approach the problem from a different angle. For instance, they may choose to employ psychological incapacitants intended to confuse rather than severely injure or kill their victims. This is an innovative notion prompted by a report that British police investigations conducted in 1977 revealed ‘a British company had sold 400 million doses of LSD to the People’s Republic of China, possibly for use in chemical warfare’. Rather than attempting to gain technological proficiency in yet another variant of the means of mass destruction, the People’s Republic might consider psychological incapacitants to be preferable in war conducted on its own territory. They can be used to tactical effect without inadvertently contaminating the local environment or friendly forces.

China’s adversaries, of course, cannot be expected to exercise as much environmental concern in their selection of chemical arsenals. Only fear of retaliation in kind might act to deter such usage. If China intends to possess the means of retaliation, then the likely direction of its CW research needs to be considered. The latest generation of CW systems – the ‘binary’ weapon which the US has deemed most suitable for the modernisation of its own chemical weapons stockpiles, seems an obvious solution for the Chinese too. Unlike ‘unitary’ munitions, the binary weapon is composed of chemicals which, in themselves, are far less toxic than the poison gas they produce when fired. The component chemicals of the binary weapon are stored in capsules within a warhead, and only when the warhead is fired do the capsule walls break, allowing the chemicals to react as the nerve agent GB (Sarin).

The binary weapon possesses five distinctive features which are compatible to a people’s war under modern conditions. First, it is relatively safe because its chemical components remain separate – and therefore non-lethal – when manufactured, stored or transported, thereby allowing for safe distribution to small guerilla units or individual soldiers. This feature leads to the second advantage of the binary weapon: deliverable by manportable missile or grenade, it can become a personal armament for elite troops engaged in nuclear and chemical guerilla warfare. Third, that binary chemical shells can be fired from guns of the same size as those suitable for tactical nuclear delivery means that the Army has sufficient delivery capabilities for chemical weapons too. Fourth, the binary weapon has an extended ‘shelf-life’, unlike many of the older unitary weapons which cannot be stored for prolonged periods. Thus binary munitions produced and stockpiled by the Chinese in, say, 1989, could be employed in a protracted war ten or twenty years later. US tests conducted in the early 1980s on binary munitions indicate ‘no agent deterioration’, prompting one analyst to suggest ‘the munitions may well last out the century’. Finally, being a nerve agent with odourless, colourless properties, the binary weapon is well suited to the people’s war requirements of surprise and deception. Under protracted war conditions characterised by guerilla methods, enemy soldiers cannot be certain when and under what circumstances the PLA will choose to employ this weapon, nor can they smell or see evidence of its use. Mechanical aids, such as the Soviet poison gas detector kits and gas alarms, are cumbersome and of questionable utility under conditions of protracted war involving guerilla raids.

If the binary weapons come to represent the PLA’s modernised chemical force, the ‘low-tech’ component of the force – suitable for use against regional adversaries without sophisticated chemical warfare defences – would be simple unitary weapons like the blister agent, mustard gas. This can be disseminated by means of artillery shells, aircraft spray, land mines, bombs and missiles, with which the PLA is amply equipped. With reference to the Iran–Iraq war – itself a war fought with low- and mid-tech weapons, including those sold to both sides by the Chinese – Bryan Boswell observed that:
Mustard gas can be spread by munitions delivered from virtually any type of weapon, including the mortars, artillery and aircraft that Iraqi forces are reported to have used. Indeed, one of the most effective means of distribution – produced by the British between 1939 and 1945, but not used – is simply to fill a 22 litre oil drum with mustard oil and fit it with a simple burster charge.67

Blisters agents can persist for hours or days, as do nerve agents (depending on type, some persist for days while others for only a few hours). Air-deliverable persistent agents would be suitable for retaliatory raids on vulnerable enemy positions, including those within the sparsely populated Chinese borderlands, protection of flanks and for slowing an enemy breakthrough. Non-persistent GB, on the other hand, would be useful for battlefield situations in which the PLA troops must advance to occupy ground after firing their chemical shells. Use of non-persistent agents means that friendly forces would be unhampered by the need to wear full protective clothing.68

The issue of tactical nuclear and chemical capabilities is a difficult one for China. A strong advocate of nuclear disarmament and of the total prohibition and destruction of chemical weapons, it cannot ignore its vulnerabilities in these areas – vulnerabilities which will become more pronounced if East–West progress in strategic arms reductions is not accompanied by a lowering of states’ threat perceptions. Under such circumstances, a compensatory interest in battlefield ‘weapons of terror’ is probable. That China has tested a ‘neutron bomb’ and is preparing its soldiers for chemical defence shows that it has given this matter serious thought.

STRUCTURAL REFORMS AND THEIR STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

Since the early 1980s, and particularly since 1984, Beijing has introduced reforms aimed at increasing the efficiency and combat effectiveness of the armed forces. These reforms have involved (a) changes in force structure generally and, (b) related policies such the passing of the new military service law in May 1984, reduction in troop strength, a clearer division between party and army functions within the high command, streamlining of regional commands, and other measures such as higher education requirements of military personnel and the retirement of elderly officers.
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[The 'storm trooper'] was to be a foot soldier of the new type, adapted to the conditions of the modern battlefield and employing a range of new weapons to the full. He would be given more flexibility and independence than ever, and would fight in particularly small groups. In the attack he would skirmish forward cautiously to infiltrate through an enemy position, rather than tackle it head-on. In defence he would act as an immediate counter-attack element in support of a dispersed 'web' of small strongpoints. The enemy would be enmeshed in the web and then struck with violent blows at the moment when he was least prepared to receive them.  

To return to late twentieth-century China, the PLA's Handbook of Military Knowledge for Commanders shows a particular appreciation of this type of warfare. For instance, in discussing ambush warfare, the Handbook advises: 'Coordination between crack teams and militia may be organized in accordance with circumstances or instructions from higher headquarters to use various tactics to confuse the enemy, make the enemy misconstrue the situation and lure the enemy into the ambush area in order to wipe him out.'  

The creation of elite Chinese assault units may be viewed as a further (albeit smaller and more specialised) development from the traditional differentiation of PLA army corps into three types ranging from relatively well equipped to light infantry. Thus elite units would be better armed than the rest of the army (China could not afford to arm everyone in this way), but still operate within the main force 'web' as illustrated by the NVA operations. The following excerpts from Paddy Griffith are selected to show combat techniques related to mobility, preparation and attack.

(a) Mobility/Casualty Rates

The key [to NVA combat technique] seems to have been constant movement and a willingness to accept high casualties when taking the initiative, combined with the use of terrain, camouflage, dispersion and entrenchment to minimise casualties at other times ... [These last four factors are also covered in the PLA Commanders' Handbook.]

(b) Preparation

When an NVA regiment passed into South Vietnam from its sanctuaries in Laos or Cambodia [for the Chinese, enemy occupied territory in Manchuria, for example, would be supported from sanctuaries to the centre, south and southeast of China], it would typically move in small groups to a large pre-prepared and fortified base area situated in difficult terrain. [Chinese Commanders are similarly advised that: 'Deployment for combat should be done in accordance with the principle of small groups scattered at many points.']. In this base area it could re-group, study local conditions and conduct rehearsals for forthcoming operations. While it was in its base area, furthermore, it was well poised to accept battle on favourable terms with American units as might stray in. In the event of a co-ordinated large-scale sweep it could refuse action and retire in small groups ...

(c) Attack

A central operational principle for the NVA was known as 'one slow, four quick'. This meant that their attacks or major ambushes would be meticulously planned and prepared well in advance ... First there would be a rapid movement, still in dispersed groups, to the battle area. Then a sudden concentration on the field itself would deliver a violent and unexpected blow at the decisive point, covered by ambush parties on the flanks to confuse and delay enemy relief attempts. The third phase was a quick but thorough policing of the battlefield to collect weapons and casualties. Finally there would be equally rapid withdrawal to a known rendezvous.

It may be observed at this point that the capture of enemy equipment, a practice which was obviously acceptable to the Chinese in Korea and the NVA in modern times, need not be discouraged as obsolete in that it was appropriate only to China's militarily primitive revolutionary era. Indeed, modern-day PLA commanders are instructed that after an engagement 'a small number of troops should be sent out to police the battlefield, to collect materials and equipment and to destroy enemy equipment and vehicles that cannot be carried away'. If the Chinese, who have based most of their weaponry on Soviet models, were to capture enemy Soviet equipment in the event of war with the Soviet Union and/or Vietnam, the PLA could hope to supplement its own arsenals with upgraded but essentially familiar weapons models at the very low cost of only those weapon systems used up in their capture. This provides a plausible argument for China to continue basing its weapons on Soviet designs and represents a most economical, if somewhat opportunistic, procurement policy.
A strategy of professional guerilla warfare accords with the central war-fighting premise of people's war – that is, that the capability and resolve to engage in war invests Chinese deterrence with its essential credibility. China has shown interest in modern defensive technologies well suited to a future guerilla strategy, but has not achieved any significant large-scale advances in the improvement of mass force offensive weaponry. This would indicate that the mid-tech component of people's war will be in the defensive, relatively cheaper, technologies of precision-guided missiles (PGMs). In addition to missile warfare capabilities, China has shown interest in related electronically based capabilities such as computer data processing and C3I. Among known Chinese research developments in the technology of modern warfare are remotely piloted vehicles (RPVs) and microlight aircraft for reconnaissance, while the PLA Commanders' Handbook includes chapters on night vision equipment, lasers and their application, and electronic countermeasures. By contrast, large weapon systems – like tanks, aircraft and ships – are likely to remain less technologically advanced because they are too numerous, and hence too expensive, to replace or upgrade.

That mid-tech weapon systems represent current PLA policy is incontrovertible. Compared with the USA, anything the Chinese could produce would scarcely be true high-tech. New arms of moderate-range technology represent a more realistic level of attainment in weapons improvement. As suggested above not all sections of the PLA need these types of weapons, only the chief combat troops: the special elite which can be used as a counter-attack or invasion force, followed by forces equipped with simpler arms. Therefore, while acquisition of new defensive technologies will equip special units, the heavy mass forces will continue to be better utilised in a 'swarm' role – such as resisting an invasion by sea or offensive missions involving Chinese occupation of disputed territory, including Taiwan. In the foregoing investigation it was also suggested that like the North Vietnamese main force troops who were regulars employing guerilla methods, and the First World War 'storm troopers' who were foot soldiers armed with advanced weapons, the Chinese 'regular guerilla' may likewise adopt these approaches but will extend them to the modern convention of combined arms. The combined arms method has been adopted by the present generation of Chinese defence policy-makers, and the creation of an army aviation corps, a new marine corps, and a nuclear submarine force are outcomes of this policy with regard to elite forces. This means not only the inclusion of the elite foot soldier carrying manportable missiles, but also air and seaborne commando guerillas. In sum, the modern guerilla war must be three-dimensional, and it must also address both pre- and post-nuclear environments (on which PLA commanders are given clear instruction) if it is to prepare for those wars of the future which China may expect to experience.

(b) Other Reforms

The Draft Law on Military Services, also known as the Military Conscription Law (replacing that passed in 1955), defined China's military service system and re-introduced military ranks. The law combines reserves and militia to improve the effectiveness of China's wartime (mass mobilisation) forces. The onus is on better training and the provision of a wider pool of skilled personnel. Eighty per cent of the estimated 12 million People's Militia has been formally retired to civilian organisation duties, such as construction and education projects. In announcing the cutback, Xinhua said militia work had been 'readjusted and reformed in the interests of economic construction'. While there has been an increased effort toward harnessing military production facilities and expertise toward development of the civilian sector, the militia was already largely engaged in production activities. From the practical administrative point of view, formal recognition of this may simply serve to decongest the military system, in line with overall cutbacks in the regular forces.

As noted in Chapter 1, the military value of the militia had long been questioned in the PRC. As early as the 1950s, the Defence Minister of the time, Peng Dehuai, decided that the system of citizen-soldiers was an anachronism, claiming that the militia had, after all, 'accomplished its historical role' (which was the success of the Chinese Communist revolution). Preferring to replace the militia with an army reserve, Peng and other professional elements in the PLA regarded militia work as time-consuming, burdensome and a distraction from more serious defence modernisation tasks. June Dreyer makes the pertinent observation that the role of the militia essentially challenged the role of a professional army: 'The greater the defense role given to an armed citizenry, the less the prestige of the regular army.' It is notable that during China's highly politicised period of the Cultural Revolution which began in the mid-1960s, the armed forces were stripped of the rank system – an attack on the perceived bourgeois trappings of professionalism – and the power of
the militia as a security force was elevated. A return to professional military values is evident in the 1984 decision to restore ranks along with the diminution of the militia in favour of a reserve force.

It could be argued that far from demilitarising Chinese society the conscription law is making the PRC more militaristic. This, however, does not appear to be the motive behind conscription in China. Rather, by introducing compulsory military service in 1955, China hoped to gain a better selection of 'quality' soldiers than it did under the previous voluntary system. Its annual personnel requirements, after all, are only an estimated 700,000 to 800,000. China can afford to be selective. It is this opportunity for selection, not the 'compulsory' availability of manpower, that seems to have inspired the conscription law. Selectivity can be expected to be even more pronounced with the overall reductions in PLA strength since 1985. David Bonavia made the point when he explained that 'every citizen has the duty to perform military service, but the reduced size of the armed forces means that progressively fewer will be required to do so.' One may reasonably conclude that China could well achieve a standard of very high quality personnel depending, of course, on the basic standards of the education process.

The second notable achievement of the military service law, the restoration of ranks, was aimed at furthering the cause of PLA modernisation. (Ranks were first introduced in 1955 but abolished ten years later because, as noted above, Mao regarded the system to be bourgeois.) In announcing the re-introduction of rank insignias in 1984, the Beijing Review linked it closely to such professional concerns as army regularisation and clarification of a soldier's responsibilities:

The military ranking system will help co-ordinate the various service branches. It will also help raise soldiers' sense of responsibility, so that they can exert initiative in battle and work. It will strengthen the army's sense of organization and discipline, push forward its regularization and increase its combat effectiveness.

The system will also smooth international exchanges. Although progressive in outlook, it will be recalled that there have been delays in rank implementation. First, it took the PLA two decades to realise their necessity and then another four years after their revival to have them enforced. These delays are indicative of the difficulties involved in transforming any large organisation with historically imbedded traditions. Indeed, the PLA has often been described as 'a state within a state', but this had not daunted the Administration's zeal in pursuit of military reforms. Manpower reductions, which began in 1982 with the demobilisation of 500,000 soldiers, had continued on a larger scale after 1985 with a further reduction of one million personnel. These cutbacks affected both administrative and operational sectors. According to an official statement in 1987, personnel in the three General Departments of Staff, Political, and Logistics had been reduced by nearly 50 per cent and the Air Force, the Navy and the Second Artillery Corps [strategic rocket forces] have also made considerable reductions. The Army, numerically the largest of the services, lost some 25 per cent of its manpower. For the second largest of the services, the PLA Air Force, the policy of reduction-in-strength led to hopes for greater reliance on weapons than on manpower. This was revealed in the following statement in 1985, by a 'new generation' leader, Air Force Commander Wang Hai: 'The number of Air Force servicemen will be drastically cut and a large number of units above the regimental level disbanded or merged.' The aim, according to the Beijing Review article in which he was quoted, was 'to make the Air Force a more compact and efficient military division and to promote young and competent people to command posts.' The following year, Xinhua reported military exercises which involved 'advanced supersonic fighters, bombers, transports, helicopters, tanks, airborne troops and surface-to-air missiles' - a description indicative of China's interest in mastering modern air-land warfare.

Changes in the size and quality of PLA manpower have been accompanied by attempts to improve command structure. At the administrative level, the Central Military Commission (CMC) was established in 1982 as a state equivalent to the party Military Affairs Commission. That the state body was expected to become fully responsible for professional military affairs by 1987, is a recognition of the need to separate army and party functions in the country's highest command levels. But that 'the party and state military commissions are the same organ with two names,' as bluntly observed by one Western critic, shows yet again the PLA's dilemma in coming to terms with a modern military structure.

At the regional level command changes have been effected through the merging of the following Military Regions (MRs), as shown in Figure A.1, Appendix 1: Lanzhou (west) and Urumqi (northwest); Chengdu (south) and Kunming (southwest); Wuhan and Jinan (centre); and Nanjing and Fuzhou (east). A progress report to the CMC forum...
in October 1985 announced the completion of the above mergings, as well as substantial progress made in the rejuvenation programme: '[The CMC forum] followed the completion of the major reshuffle of PLA general headquarters and regional commands which involved the retirement of many senior officers and the promotion of younger ones.' The policy of rotating MR commanders is significant in terms of diffusing the entrenched regionalism that has characterised the PLA in the past. As this writer has observed elsewhere, Deng 'has reshuffled [the PLA’s] command levels to reflect support for his own leadership direction, and to break up centres of loyalty to individual commanders rather than the central authorities'. Apart from the political advantages accruing from this rotation of commanders and the savings in military expenditure through regional command rationalisation, there are sound military reasons for fewer but larger MRs. One such reason is the need to reduce the vulnerability of isolated MRs to enemy surgical strikes. But the primary implication of enlarged MRs, with their more unified command and control, lies in their easier conversion to the command and operational needs of larger-scale wartime ‘fronts’. During the Sino-Vietnamese border war of 1979, for example, the MRs of Guangzhou and Kunming (now part of Guangzhou and Chengdu MRs, respectively) were organised as the southern front for the Vietnam operation, while a separate northern front comprising the MRs of Xinjiang and Lanzhou (which are now merged), as well as Beijing and Shenyang, was set up lest the Soviet Union retaliate on behalf of its ally. The Chinese, it appears, have acknowledged the modern requirements for a unitary command system, as distinct from the pluralistic command structure of the past. Under nuclear-augmented warfare conditions, unitary command is advantageous in ensuring proper co-ordination of Chinese tactical nuclear responses over a wide theatre of operations. But there is a significant disadvantage. Larger units need bigger command centres, and bigger command centres make better targets. This observation relates to the whole question of fighting a people’s war under modern conditions. The logic behind unitary command is essentially Western: besides the administrative encumbrance of pluralistic regional commands, regional command competitiveness (an historical echo of the old warlord defence system) could conceivably result in command and control blockages at a time when speedy and precise response to enemy action is vital. The idea of a tactical-nuclear armed PLA, employing guerilla nuclear warfare (Chapter 3), however, is to avoid swift responsive action. Uncertainty as to where and when the nuclear guerilla will attack is to be prized more highly than predictability. An effective compromise between conflicting views on command might be found in matching command to mission. The tactical nuclear mission has different command requirements to, say, the invasion of Taiwan or a punitive action on the Sino-Vietnamese border. In general, executive control is perhaps best served by covert, constantly shifting, command cells within a loose structure of front operations, rather than retention of the institutionally inclined MR commands. Reforms in regional command could foreshadow developments of this nature (a tactical nuclear offensive that is opportunistic cannot be commanded from the ‘rear’), and they in turn are responsive to the strong emphasis on ‘active defence’ (jiji fangyu) in the modern concept of people’s war.

Active defence, also sometimes referred to as ‘resolute defence’ and ‘positive defence’, is an offensively oriented method of defence. Its renewed importance is evident in a 1983 injunction by Yu Qiuli, Director of the PLA’s General Political Department: ‘The army must adopt a strategy of positive defence’, which includes the capability of attack, to be ready to fight against a stronger opponent. This is not a new concept but one clearly advanced by Mao in his theory of people’s war. A statement in 1965 by Luo Ruiqing, a former defence minister and advocate of military modernisation, serves as a reminder that strategic retreat is only one side of Chinese defence doctrine. By active defence, Luo meant strategic pursuit. Its purpose was to destroy the enemy ‘at his nest’. In terms of missions for China’s nuclear force, one may logically conclude that active defence calls for the offensive capability to strike military supply targets in Soviet territory. China’s theatre nuclear forces are capable of threatening Soviet Far Eastern targets (see A.3 in Appendix 2). Employed in a war-fighting role, they could disrupt vital supply and command links used by the invading forces, while on the short-range battlefield tactical nuclear weapons would play a supplementary role in retarding the enemy’s advance into China. Seen in this light, active defence holds important implications for the deterrent credibility of the PLA.

The most obvious implication concerns the traditional image of the PLA as an essentially defensive force, capable of resisting rather than inflicting punishment. Such an image, which serves a useful function in communicating a non-threatening posture to neighbouring governments, derives from two types of evidence: that the PLA is intended to fight on Chinese territory in defence of the homeland; and that it is not capable of projecting a significant or sustained presence beyond
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its borders. The first relates to evidence of doctrine or what Georges Tan appropriately terms the 'defensive essence' of people's war. Its essence is drawn from Marxist-Leninist theory which predicts that war would be the outcome of imperialist/hegemonist aggression.91 Thus, in keeping with the Communist doctrinal interpretation of the nature of war, China must prepare to resist aggression, not initiate it. By comparison, the second type of evidence rests on the more empirically based observation that Chinese forces are not offensively configured, nor are they capable of being so.

Whatever the relative merits of doctrinal and capability-based explanations of China's defensive posture, both Maoist teaching and Chinese military behaviour exhibit an unabashed regard for the offensive use of force in operational and strategic terms. This does not necessarily contradict an overall defensive posture if such a posture is understood to belong to the more philosophical domain of 'grand strategy'. In practice, if the 'defence of the homeland' requires demonstrative deterrent or compellent action, then China appears willing to engage in such action, as indicated by its offensive operations in Korea in the early 1950s, India in 1962, and Vietnam in 1979.92 China's defensive 'image' has always coexisted with offensive practice and, in any case, the age-old axiom that attack is the best form of defence has never been supplanted.

If one is left with the conviction that any interpretation of the deterrent role of the PLA must include offensive capabilities as well as the usual defensive ones - and this is particularly so under the modern conditions of people's war, fought with modern weapons of multimission characteristics - one must also question the extent to which deterrence credibly serves defence, before it is perceived as a compelling offensive posture. Nevertheless, offensive weapons can be argued to be defensive, and an offensive operation can be conducted for defensive purposes. The Soviet Union is a prime example of a nation which maintains that its forces and its actions are of a defensive intent.

If China wishes to minimise cause for enemy pre-emptive action, a careful balance will have to be established between the build-up of offensive deterrent forces on the one hand, and their clearly communicated defensive intent on the other. This is an implication of active defence that must be borne in mind throughout the military's transitional period in the remaining years of this century. Continued adherence to the defence-in-depth strategy represents the most effective precaution against misperception of Chinese intent. It also offers a powerful reason why active defence cannot divorce itself from its counterpart, strategic retreat, or become the new defence doctrine to supersede people's war.

What it will do is reinterpret people's war in accordance with the policy of preparedness to fight a people's war under the modern combat conditions of intense firepower and mobility at the 'initial stage of war'. The Chinese believe that within modern warfare this stage can be expected to be of shorter duration than that of past wars, fought on a larger scale, and likely to erupt suddenly in accordance with the military benefits of surprise. This stage of the war is thereby characterised to be 'a fierce, cruel, and destructive one'.93 It is also deemed to be of greater importance to determining the outcome of the whole war: 'All these three new characteristics indicate that in modern warfare, the battles in the initial stage will play a more important role than before in winning the initiative of the war and in its later development.94 If the initial stage is so crucial then people's war must adjust to this modern condition. Writing on the application of people's war under modern conditions, Lee Ngok stresses that 'Chinese war plans have the well-defined objectives of stopping Soviet advances in order to win time for strategic cover (zhanlu yanhu), or else the entire process of defeating a superior force with an inferior force for the entire country will be delayed.'95 Certainly China's determination to prevent strategic breakthrough is reflected in its reforms since 1984. These include the modernisation of reserve forces, the introduction of combined arms Group Armies and the adoption of joint services operations. In a modern people's war strategy, mobile and positional defence will remain interactive to sustain defence-in-depth. In this way Chinese defence planners hope to influence the strategic outcome of the whole war (previously reserved for the final phase of conventionally applied active defence).

Chinese defence need not aspire to a NATO-like forward confronational posture because the PLA can, in extremis, employ a defence depth of as much as 1000 kilometres to impede an invader's strategic breakthrough. Such a depth could be harnessed to stretch enemy logistics, weaken key force concentrations and slacken their tempo of movement. Any resistance offered by conventional fighting in prelaid defensive positions must fulfil the role of interrupting the momentum so crucial to the success of Soviet-style blitzkrieg operations. Topographical and climatic hardships must also place considerable stress on an invasion force that seeks to pierce a defence of this depth. In this respect, it is pertinent to note that two-thirds of China comprises
inhospitable terrain (such as mountains and deserts), which may be expected to degrade mobility. By contrast, an invasion force could overwhelm its opponent more readily in a limited theatre of operations, for the defending forces would be without sufficient depths of retreat or supply. One of the reasons for American military failure in Vietnam, for example, was enemy use of sanctuaries and bases in Cambodia.

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

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

Xu Xiangjian, 1978

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

M. Phillip Powell, 1987

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

The conjectural model which is proposed here does not presume to indentify China's future defence policy, for which adequate evidence is lacking, but on which it is nevertheless possible to speculate. It is a model drawn from the analyses in the foregoing chapters which, in turn, are a reflection of this writer's understanding of nuclear and conventional deterrence theories, people's war theory including its modification under modern conditions, and probable developments in future warfare generally. The model's key proposition is the continued use of guerilla warfare by the professional military forces armed with light modern weaponry (essentially in the 'mid' range of technology), especially of the anti-tank and anti-air variety, and borne by infantry on versatile weapons platforms such as helicopters, fast attack craft and submarines. PLA use of battlefield nuclear weapons as part of protracted guerilla warfare represents the nuclear phase of this strategy. The non-professional elements of people's war would be responsible for maintaining a network of civil defence activities and fulfilling the support requirements of guerilla base areas. Executive control will be exercised through fluid, mobile and disguised command cells.
A modern people's war strategy needs to be understood as integrating both nuclear and non-nuclear military elements. It will not depend on the occurrence of strategic nuclear exchange for its initiation, but will be employed at any stage — and without warning — against a technologically superior aggressor. If this is the reality of people's war under modern conditions, then the foundations of this reality have been laid already — regardless of what the West chooses to see. In effect, military reform during the Deng decade may well bring about the PLA's virtual metamorphosis. But the changing face of Chinese defence is only cosmetically Western. Its strategic features remain Chinese. As the term 'nuclear guerilla' suggests, the metamorphosis is more likely to be one from revolutionary fighter to nuclear saboteur, than from Eastern army to Western clone.

As indicated in the Introduction and Chapter 2, China in the late 1980s lacked the skills, economic base, and possibly the inclination to become a major nuclear power. The PRC does not have a personal alliance system to protect, nor need nuclear parity be relevant against those that do: as this chapter will argue, a formidable nuclear force need not become a prerequisite for the defence of the homeland, when employment of battlefield nuclear weapons in a guerilla mode offers the cheapest and most viable evolutionary direction in Chinese nuclear policy to the goal of general and effective deterrence. To understand why this is proposed, it is necessary to begin with an examination of the Chinese nuclear arsenal and doctrine for employment in the late 1980s. As will be shown, China's nuclear forces cannot compete with the superpowers in either numerical or technological terms, but must rely on raising the costs to a nuclear aggressor with the promise of a retaliatory strike. This traditionally accepted function of a nuclear force (second-strike capability is the mainstay of both Soviet and American deterrence policies), has served the PRC well in the late twentieth century. It offers protection without being unduly provocative, for Chinese nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles are too few to be construed as a pre-emptive strike force. At the time of writing, China's stockpile of fission and fusion warheads was thought to number 1245, or approximately 3 per cent of the world's total.³ Warhead delivery systems (missiles and aircraft) number about 700.⁴

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

in the face of a large scale nuclear attack, less than 10% of the coastal launching silos will survive, whereas submarines armed with ballistic missiles can use the surface of the sea to protect and cover themselves, preserve the nuclear offensive force, and play a deterrent and containment role.⁵

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

NUCLEAR STRATEGY

Beijing has never elaborated on what might be considered its own concept of nuclear strategy, if indeed it has one. Besides the threat of punitive retaliation (deterrence by threat of punishment), Beijing must continue to pursue deterrence by denial if its commitment to survive and fight a full-scale war is to retain credibility. The available evidence would suggest that the Chinese do believe nuclear weapons to be an aspect of the people's war deterrent, not a separate deterrent to be placed under the conceptual microscope.⁶ People's war under modern conditions presupposes the nuclear condition. In the absence of more specific formulations, one may extrapolate a Chinese nuclear strategy within the ambit of modern people's war.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY:
(b) GUERRILLA NUCLEAR WARFARE

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

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

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

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

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

Uranium deposits are found in various locations, including Xinjiang in the northwest and Inner Mongolia. The major processing facilities, like the uranium deposits themselves, are in northern China. Two warhead production centres have been identified in Qinghai Province in the southern part of northwest China, and one near the city of Harbin in the northeast. With the development of solid fuel for its missiles in the early 1980s, China is known to have opened a production facility for this form of propellant in the Inner Mongolian city of Huhehaote, about 400 kilometres northwest of Beijing.13

Because most nuclear powers would accept that the arsenal their opponents have at the start of the war is the one with which they will fight the whole war, all nuclear weapon production centres are very high priority (and easy) targets. As can be seen from the above, China’s known facilities for the processing and manufacture of nuclear weapon materials are located in northern China, with concentrations, as the Soviets have pointed out, ‘in the northwest of the country, in the triangle formed by the cities of Baotou, Yumen, and Lanzhou’14. The area’s proximity to the Soviet Union can be viewed as a drawback because it falls within Soviet theatre-range targeting, but then so does practically the whole of China if a nuclear attack is launched from the Soviet Far East or from bomber bases in Vietnam (see Figure A.3, Appendix 2). However there is another perspective to be taken into account. That China’s nuclear weapon production facilities do not appear to be dispersed over the whole of China simply renders their neutralisation marginally less complicated – not the entire range of other military, political and economic targets, which the Soviets must also take into account if they wish to disable a Chinese military response, and – at the very least – attack on these remote northern facilities would leave large expanses of China undamaged.

Survival of the Chinese resistance below, say, the Yellow River, raises interesting suggestions as to the deployment and employment of tactical nuclear weapons. Harry Gelber’s prediction of 1973 – that China’s developing nuclear force profile ‘might even suggest the creation of some unorthodox and non-immediate means of retaliation’15 – becomes plausible when viewed from the perspective of a protracted, guerilla-style, nuclear war. Retaliation, in the context described here, would be at the theatre rather than the strategic level, with the survival of the weapon systems enabled by dispersal methods which employ, to use Horner’s expression, ‘exotic system(s)’, such as ‘mobile-based missiles on barges, railroad flatcars ... and deployment of missiles in a large number of small units’.16
However, under GNW, with its requirement for no announced doctrine of use, retaliation, in the commonly understood sense of a second-strike capability, will be abandoned. One important reason for this is that a retaliatory strike may not even be possible for the Chinese if space-based strategic defence systems – whereby strategic defence is deemed to refer to counter-measures to nuclear weapon delivery vehicles – are successfully developed and deployed by the superpowers.

GNW VERSUS STRATEGIC DEFENCE

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

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

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

This is a truism with which the Chinese can readily identify. Well aware of priority research into ATBM technology, they will not rest in the hope that space shields are too fanciful to be true or that in the post-INF era the superpowers will curb their competitive appetite. By mid-1988 China was officially expressing its concern to the Soviets over the ‘expansion of the arms race through high technology and its extension into outer space’,20 while academics like Zhuang Qubing, of the China Institute of International Studies, warned that ‘the arms race has not and will not stop, although its nature may alter from a
stress on quantity to quality, and from nuclear weapons to space weapons. It is not necessary to ‘believe’ in space wars to understand China’s concern. In the absence of hard evidence as distinct from speculation, uncertainty remains as to whether full-scale BMD schemes will eventuate, but given superpower R&D investment in the area, lower level deployments are almost certain. Since even such ‘lower-level’ deployments could frustrate a Chinese nuclear deterrent based on classical concepts, as it would remain numerically limited, then guerilla nuclear warfare provides a safeguard. The Chinese would be able to circumvent the Soviet ‘Red Shield’ by not challenging it. Nuclear strategy within a modern people’s war would therefore call for the abandonment of long-range ballistic missiles and the adoption of GNW using tactical nuclear weapons. This leads to the conclusion that if GNW does not exist now, it soon will because it is the Chinese option.

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

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

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

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

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

If, however, the future battlefield is a primitive one in the wake of nuclear war, GNW may still offer a viable method of combat. This is because it is not technologically dependent, but can exploit the latest
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Technology systems within the PLA. Certainly GNW may readily embrace both. One is also reminded that it is not the weapons (for example, nuclear artillery shells). Again, this brings to mind the complementary relationship between relatively modern and older technologically ‘weaker’ contestant. Employed by the nuclear guerilla, simpler weapons – be they nuclear artillery systems or even downgraded ATBMs – could come to represent the ‘stronger’ technology, thus achieving the reversal of strength sought in people’s war strategy.

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

Guerilla nuclear warfare as the culmination of people’s war under modern conditions, represents China’s mastery of strategic-military survival in the twenty-first century. When a potential aggressor is deterred from provoking GNW it can be truly said that ‘a victorious army wins its victories before seeking battle’, but should GNW as a deterrent strategy fail, then it will prevail as an effective defence. An invader that ‘fights in the hope of winning’, under these terms of protracted warfare, is ‘an army destined to defeat’.26
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'. 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, Transbaikal, 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 air 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.

Chinese consternation over the 56 divisions of Soviet border forces needs to be viewed against the background of territorial disputes dating from the previous century. Even though Beijing has regarded these two issues as separate items for negotiation, border disputation instigated serious clashes when Sino-Soviet relations were at their worst. Recognition of the importance of the border issue for future Sino-Soviet relations was evident in Gorbachev's historic Vladivostok speech of 1986 and the subsequent negotiations which began in February 1987. They included an offer to settle in China's favour the disputed Ussuri and Amur river borders in the East Asian sector, where the severest clashes occurred in 1969. The Soviets then claimed that the border ran along the Chinese bank, while for the Chinese it was marked by the river's main channel. A main channel boundary would be expected to result in Chinese control of the strategically significant Chimnaya Islands opposite Khabarovsk. However, by 1989, the Chimnayas were still under Soviet control and little of real import emerged from the boundary negotiations. Sino-Soviet border dispute over the Pamir region in the west also remained unresolved.

China had begun questioning the legitimacy of the Sino-Soviet border in the early 1960s, pointing out that it was the product of 'unequal treaties' exacted by Tsarist Russia. Territorial claims - including those east of Baikal as well as Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, and Kamchatka - amounted to about half a million square kilometres. The Chinese did not request the return of these areas but rather an acknowledgement from Moscow that the treaties were unequal (and therefore illegal), as the basis for negotiating a new treaty. According to Roy Medvedev, who cites an interview with Mao published in the Japanese press in 1964, the total area in dispute had reached 1.5 million square kilometres by that year. 'Mao Zedong openly accused the Soviet Union of practising an annexationist policy,' records Medvedev, '... [Mao] declared that Khabarovsk and Vladivostok were on territory that belonged to China a hundred years before, as had Mongolia.' Thus the border issue became yet another item in the agenda of Sino-Soviet disputes by the end of Khrushchev's era in 1964. This was also the year that China demonstrated its nuclear capability. Not surprisingly the military buildup on their mutual border began in the mid-1960s. Prior to that, the Sino-Soviet dispute had remained largely political. In 1966, Soviet Far Eastern forces were reinforced with additional divisions, the stationing of Soviet troops in Mongolia, and the first deployment of nuclear missiles. The ballistic missiles were of two types: the SS-4
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,\(^7\) 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.’\(^8\) 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 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.’\(^9\) 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.\(^10\)

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-
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The problem with this outcome is that a Soviet nuclear reply might be proportionately large-scale commando operations to cut the Trans-Siberian Railway, assassinate Soviet personages, terrorize the population, and demoralize Soviet troops. Soviet Army and KGB forces could deal with this, but would have difficulty keeping the railway line open.15

Although a second rail link between the Urals and the Pacific, the Baikal–Amur Mainline (BAM) railway, has since been completed, there is no reason why it should remain more secure than the first. Nor is there any reason why commando raids should not be the preferred option to a conventional PLA counter-attack into Soviet territory – even if Chinese conventional forces could escape heavy losses. The central objective of a Chinese military response, however, should be the annexation of Mongolia – as a ‘buffer zone’ against further Soviet aggressions. If Mongolia were left under Soviet patronage, Chinese commitment of a sizeable attack force beyond its borders would bring with it unnecessary logistic problems, including enemy disruption of re-supply lines, and would draw attention to opportunities for other neighbouring rivals. Above all, China must maintain its main force armies at strategic depths within its borders. Otherwise the PLA could find itself fighting on two fronts: one in Soviet Asia and the other within China against a second Soviet attack. Finding a massive PLA pursuit across its borders, the Soviet military leadership could turn events to its advantage by launching a swift and deep manoeuvre campaign – that is, a ‘blitzkrieg’ or lightning war – to detach buffer provinces within China, such as the nation’s industrial lifeline of Manchuria. The entry point for such an invasion could well be Mongolia, which is why the Chinese would have occupied it.

Hence it is entirely feasible that Soviet strategy would take advantage of enemy response to its first attack as a diversion to launch Soviet nuclear attack. However, Jencks has offered a possible Chinese response that is particularly suited to the professional guerilla mode advocated in Chapter 3. The relevant passage is therefore worth quoting:

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, Uli 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 northwest, 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’. 24 It is true that although more than half of the Chinese armed forces are deployed in the north, and are supportable from Jinan MR, 25 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). 26

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. 27

Donald Mercer, drawing upon a selection of Soviet open source documents, has argued convincingly that the nuclear option is indeed the preferred Soviet strategy. 28 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 7000 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”’. 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.

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.

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
Teams (LPZUs), 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 northeast 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 accorded 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 – Da’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 guerilla 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 guerilla nuclear mode, as well as a continuation of conventional guerilla 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 guerrilla 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 military support could be involved in active civil defence operations. Their activities would include not only armaments production but maintenance of underground power stations, hospitals, and supervision of food distribution. Under GNW, the pattern of active civil defence in the cities must be understood to extend to the countryside allowing the PLA to operate within ‘webbed areas’ of small bases. Their larger weapons systems, particularly aircraft, would be serviced in camouflaged cave sites, thereby frustrating Soviet reconnaissance and bombing missions into these rural areas. Even if suspected or known military/industrial targets were bombed, they would be too numerous and dispersed to warrant repeated sorties: the Chinese would not suffer from the loss of a few targets (for example a civilian workshop suspected of being converted into a munitions factory), but the Soviets would be subjected to a high rate of aircraft attrition. Such losses would be sustained not only from anti-aircraft attrition, but from PLA ground-to-air missile strikes.

Guerrilla 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 guerrillas 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.

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 endangering
their position by radio communications to command headquarters,
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
would remain central to the military task of occupying and holding ground
for political objectives. If soldiers believe they are being unnec¬
essarily 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.
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).46

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.47 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 1980.48 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’.49 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.

Compared to, 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 would require heavy investment. 'In the next 15 years we will invest in the region's economy an amount equal to the previous half century.'

Clearly, to be assured of its future economic viability, the USSR must invest east of the Urals and it must tap into the prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region. In this sense, Gorbachev's Vladivostok and Krasnoyarsk speeches were less of an initiative than a response to economic realities. If the Soviets are going to 'relocate' east, Gorbachev's desire to neutralise China's enmity through diplomatic means makes eminent sense. Therefore, besides production facilities falling 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...
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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', and 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. 'Grain 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.)64 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 castigating 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 technologies’, 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 Kazaks’ 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.
VIETNAM

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

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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 unpunished 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 affairs of the rest of Indochina. The possibility that this also could mean a de facto acceptance of the Soviet Union’s position in Indochina would not be particularly consoling for Beijing. The seriousness with which Beijing viewed Vietnamese–Soviet ‘collusion’ in the 1980s was evident in Deng’s response to Gorbachev’s 1986 Vladivostok Initiative aimed at improving relations: ‘Among the three major obstacles, the main one is the Vietnamese aggression against Cambodia, for China and the Soviet Union are actually in a state of confrontation . . . which takes the form of pitting Vietnamese armed forces against China.’

Two years after Gorbachev’s speech, and despite partial troop withdrawals in 1988, there were no grounds for improved relations over Vietnam’s behaviour in Indochina. On the contrary, shortly after the Vladivostok Initiative Vietnam received an increase in Soviet aid – the equivalent of US$11–13 billion in the years 1986–90. In effect, Soviet aid was doubled from its prior level of an estimated US$1.1 billion a year. This rendered Vietnam the largest Third World Soviet aid recipient after Cuba, which received an annual US$3 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 Septem-

ber, 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 guerilla 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–Vietnam 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 Xiyang 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 politico-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.
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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 seelines 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 seelines of communi-
cations. US airlifts of military aid would have to contend with Soviet efforts 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. 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 disputatation in these 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'. 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. A military build-up on the Island would be expected to heighten Vietnamese suspicions, thereby 'creating a new focus for Sino-Vietnamese tension'. The next Sino-Vietnamese war, should it eventuate, might even pre-empt a Spratly 'tutorial'.

Chinese Campaigns of Attrition, 1979-88, and TheirProjected 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. 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'.

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 bombard-
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 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 American missing-in-action (MIA) remains to a US mission. It was, in all, an exceptional month of interaction between the regional rivals and their superpower sympathisers. For although the Soviets had participated in joint anti-submarine exercises in the past, the April amphibious landing of 500 Soviet marines clearly communicated the threat of Soviet ground force participation in the event of a future war between China and Vietnam. To quote Anthony Paul, the exercise marked 'the first foreign soldiers in Vietnam since the Americans left in 1975'.83 In effect, Moscow had signalled to Beijing 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
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Pacific, and China's Xisha [Paracel] and Nansha islands'. 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. 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. At the same time, China announced it was establishing postal and telecommunications links with the Spratlys. 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 Laoshan 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. (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. 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'. This was not necessarily a disadvantage given the guerrilla 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,\textsuperscript{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'.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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 \textit{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 Taiphe 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 Taiphe 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, Taiphe 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 Taiphe'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...\(^{100}\) The following year Taiphe explained its yet higher budget allocation for defence as a response to the PRC's improved amphibious capability.\(^{100}\) 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.\(^{101}\) 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.\(^{102}\) 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

Figure 4.3 The PRC and Taiwan
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 Taipeh 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 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.

Taipeh, 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-1880s, 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 Taipeh 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'.

Nothwithstanding Teipeh'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', 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 Teipeh'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
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.'110 Early in 1982, shortly before Beijing suggested it would recall its US Ambassador, Deng Xiaoping indicated 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.'111 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.112

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',113 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'114 - 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 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',115 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 Taipei, 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 from Taipei. 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 Taipei 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-
of their allegations.

Taiwan. In the near future, the Kuomintang [Guomindang] will be
clandestine weapons dealings with the Israelis.)

sales would be counter-productive. (Like Beijing, Teipeh has had
the Arab bloc by becoming more openly reliant on Israeli weapons
reliant on the import of raw materials. It would not wish to under-
drawings account for 53 per cent of its GNP, and it is industrially
is diplomatically isolated, it is not so commercially. The Island's
similar nuclear - claimed in 1983 that Taiwan had already embarked
radio) - transmitted in Mandarin from the Soviet Union but purpor-
it is interesting to note that the clandestine Ba Yi (First August
itis diplomatically isolated, it is not so commercially. The Island's
undeclared nuclear powers may be a lesson not lost on the National-
be held in abeyance as a contingency in extremis. In this respect
interest to note that the clandestine Ba Yi (First August
was once manager, has gone so far as to build a nuclear project in
Taiwan. In the near future, the Kuomintang [Guomindang] will be
be able to produce guided missiles and nuclear warheads.'121 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.122 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. 123 Although the Island has an energy-
oriented nuclear programme, with three such power plants in opera-
tion, any secret hoarding or processing of plutonium would raise
suspicion: plutonium, which is obtained from uranium by bombard-
ing it with neutrons, 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.124 China's ability to interdict 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.'

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, 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. 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 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.'

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'. 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. A number of short-range (300 kilometres) land-based missiles are also believed to be nuclear capable. These American estimates came at a time when Rajiv Ghandhi's government acknowledged an increase in public pressure toward 'the nuclear option' and are not dissimilar to the sort of force advocated in the ensuing debate. K. Subrahmanyan, 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.' 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'. 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'. 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 guerrilla 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 guerrilla 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 northeast 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. 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 war parlance 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.

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’. 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’; 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’. 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’. 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 guerrilla 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. 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' geostrategic 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
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.
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 Wolczek:

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 exchange intelligence on their common enemy, the USSR. Their 1978 Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty includes an ‘anti-hegemony’ clause directed against the Soviet Union. Co-operation in defence of their regional sea-lanes and airspace would constitute 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 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-maneuver 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 Shogun Hideyoshi. 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 cooperation 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.
Conclusion

There he is, with the dragon's powers, and occupying exactly the central place.

I Ching

This study recognises that since 1977 the Chinese military leadership has been deliberating on the best methods for implementing—not simply advocating—a doctrine of people's war under modern conditions. Herein lies a conscious effort, a situation representing directed strategic attention. As far as this indicates control rather than confusion, such an exploratory condition may be surmised to be a positive one. But a potentially negative outcome from such 'controlled' exploration could be one of delay linked to the dilemma of choice: a choice the Chinese believe they may not have to make if Maoism is successfully wedded to modernity; people's war to professionalism. In this respect it can be observed that modern warfare has become a combined arms and a combined services phenomena; it is a systemic approach to armed combat. The term People's Liberation Army, it has been noted, refers to the Chinese armed forces in their entirety: Army, Air Force and Navy; the conventional as well as the nuclear components. These are the Chinese forces of defence and deterrence, and the PLA is the deterrent force as a totality. For just as the US Administration recognises that 'neither nuclear forces nor the cleverest theory for their employment can eliminate the need...to provide a capable conventional deterrent', the Chinese understand that their massive conventional forces may well represent their final deterrent against invasion and one for which nuclear weapons can never wholly substitute.

This tendency to combine rather than distinguish is both a characteristic of the PLA's heritage and a characteristic of contemporary warfare, as in the Soviet system where all arms are integrated to the goal of security. Furthermore, the human and psychological factors that are so important to a revolutionary army are also a vital element of warfare in any age. The will to fight, and to continue fighting even if the war is a protracted one, cannot be regarded as a matter of mere military fashion: morale has ever been universally recognised as a central element in capability.

Other traditional strengths in Chinese defence will remain relevant for the future. In respect of matériel, Chinese traditions of the 1950s and 1960s have not been abandoned: equipment continues to be based on and inter-operable with Soviet designs; a system which holds advantage in the capture and use of Soviet equipment in possible wars with China's major adversaries, the USSR and its ally Vietnam. Further, by combining attrition warfare through the 'swarm effect' of plentiful manpower and older technology weapons, with the 'sting effect' of mobile moderate-technology guerrilla warfare, the PLA will not only enhance the strengths of its defence but may well emerge as the prototype of a futurist Third World army. This, latter, observation is justified first by the conditions of modern warfare. These are not peculiar to China but of universal application. Second, it may be proposed, that just as the Chinese 'revolutionary paradigm' spread to other Third World regions earlier this century, so too may the technological refinement of its armed forces offer a military model for the twenty-first century. In this, the guerrilla method is likely to remain the poorer nation's alternative to the prohibitively expensive arms race, but armed with light anti-armour and anti-air weapons, for example, well-organised guerrilla units can expect to find success when opposing conventional armies if these can be forced to engage in protracted war. In turn, conventional armies may themselves adjust to the strategy of guerrilla warfare—as did the British in Malaya during the 1950s—resulting in a far more widespread change in the structure of armed forces as we know them. Moreover, the mutation of professional armed forces from the conventional to the guerrilla mode, can be proposed as the obvious and universal adaptation to the post-nuclear battlefield. Armed forces which are already structured in this mode will enjoy an obvious advantage in such circumstances.

Nevertheless, the concept of guerrilla nuclear warfare is particularly applicable to conditions which are peculiarly Chinese and must be viewed as deterrent in intent. Like other strategies for use of nuclear weapons—launch on warning, pre-emption, retaliation—GNW is meant to deter an aggressor from provoking its enactment. GNW is credible in that it is practical for the Chinese and appears to hold a significant probability of actual military success, a situation which offers marked contrast to the (widely argued) 'incredible' nuclear strategies of NATO, the USA and the USSR. Moreover, for the Chinese the escalatory transition of guerrilla warfare to a tactical nuclear level offers a credible strategy in that the cost and technology are entirely within China's capabilities. This mode of guerrilla warfare
must be seen as a logical development of China's traditional victory denial strategy, and a key element in the philosophical 'flanks and rear' of a modern people's war theory.

However, Chinese defence policy is unique and defies exact classification. Behind the weapons improvement and organisational restructuring of the PLA is the assumption, underlying comparative strength analysis, that it wishes to be more competitive with - and therefore similar to - modern military forces. At the same time, it is recognised that such improvements still fall far short of any meaningful parity - let alone marked improvement in the face of continued Soviet improvements. Obviously, if the Chinese have no real chance of 'catching up', then the attempt to be similar would be futile. The maintenance of people's war in modified form as the governing doctrine of modern Chinese warfare, coupled with the types of weapons selected for improvement and the organisational changes that are being implemented, suggest the PLA is not being recreated as a poor replica of a Western or Soviet military force, and that people's war under modern conditions is more than a temporary expedient or a substitute for the unattainable goal of high-tech Western style forces. Mao's original solution to the problem of a weak army pitted against a strong one centred not on adversarial strength (a description of the strategic problem), but on those adversarial weaknesses which were open to exploitation (an attempt to produce a favourable outcome, that is, the implementation of a problem-solving strategy). The Vietnamese demonstrated such a proposition to be valid when, despite the obvious disparity in the 'balance of forces', they successfully waged a war of resistance against the French colonial authorities.

This exploitation of enemy weaknesses remains highly pertinent to threat assessments of China's security in the 1990s and early twenty-first century. The most serious threats for China must be those which are both more probable than others and potentially more devastating to national survival. Although in absolute terms no threat in the current era is so serious that it would lead to a major war involving China - all the potential conflicts examined in this book are well below an even chance of occurring - the threat from the USSR and Vietnam is firmly established. And that threat is always one which involves dealing with a technologically superior foe, directly or indirectly (as in the case of Soviet intervention in a Sino-Vietnamese war).

Whilst regional threats to China are within the defence capabilities of a modern people's war doctrine, the People's Republic can be expected to suffer tremendous losses in the event of nuclear attack on China as a consequence of US-USSR strategic war. Nuclear attack on China would be a matter of either contender wanting to neutralise a third party in the war. Within the strategic climate following the Washington summit of December 1987, such a war may be designated a low probability of occurrence but its importance to China's survival is extremely high. Because such an event would be the outcome of conflict between the two superpowers, China could not ensure against this threat. Only continued strategic deterrence is workable as a solution.

A full-scale Soviet attack on China, employing weapons of mass destruction with long-lasting environmental effects, might carry a higher probability of eventuating and also a higher risk to China's survival, because in this attack China is not a third party to be neutralised as in the above case. It is the prime and sole focus of Soviet hostility. Such a scenario must be accorded the highest priority factor in Chinese defence policy. True, it has been argued that a mass attack would be counter-productive for the Soviets and, therefore, would constitute an irrational act if it were enacted. But even supposing the Soviet leadership did behave irrationally, it would be extremely difficult to achieve the long-term irradiation of all China's cultivable land. If a viable socio-cultural-political entity survived in China, then even this most threatening of conflicts could not destroy the nation. Indeed, China's ability to survive in a post-nuclear environment must be judged to be a powerful deterrent.

Whereas in the past PRC deterrence policy has relied on the combined threats of strategic nuclear weapons and the enormous manpower available for conventional resistance, in the 1990s and beyond the deterrent strength of the PLA (nuclear and conventional) would have to be such as to perform convincingly within battle. In other words, if war has not been deterred, then China must be able to both defend itself and dissuade the enemy from continued and/or escalatory aggression. To do so, the nuclear basis of a future defence policy would need to shift emphasis away from reliance on strategic systems, and concentrate on tactical weapons for use in unconventional warfare. China's resolve to resist nuclear aggression, at both pre- and post-nuclear levels, is unequivocal.

If Chinese defence policy is to insure against the most serious threats by means additional to continued strategic deterrence, then a multi-layered deterrent offers a workable solution. In the event that
the PRC's territorial integrity is violated through failure of the first layer, the overall Chinese deterrent, GNW would provide an effective instrument of retaliation. It is an indirect strategy of tactical nuclear use which seeks to undermine the enemy's confidence of tenure in China by rendering the cost of final 'victory' excessive. Operations would be conducted against the invaders' physical and psychological resources (from security of supply to the morale of troops), at a level low enough to render useless their strategic superiority in nuclear and conventional weapons.

While appreciating the possibilities open to a nation which must operate from a position of military weakness, one cannot ignore the prevailing strategic ethos in international affairs. This holds that the capability of one's own forces must be maintained at a sufficiently convincing level to deter attack. The most common argument legitimising the military establishments of modern nations is that: 'In peacetime the purpose of military forces is to reduce to a minimum the enemy leadership's incentive to seek military solutions to political problems.' What this book has sought to convey is that capability can be convincing even in the absence of stronger or equal level of military force or technological ingenuity than that of one's adversary, provided that the potential costs of attack can still be made to exceed potential gains. GNW, again, is a hedge against the possible erosion of Chinese nuclear strategic retaliation capabilities in the last years of this century as a consequence of Soviet deployment of BMD systems. To paraphrase Mao, in the 1960s and 1970s, a few ICBMs might have been enough, but in the first decades of the twenty-first century, even the 'many' ICBMs will probably not suffice. In this respect the nuclear-armed guerilla - with the possible assistance of ATBMs - will be of more relevance to the PLA than strategic ballistic missiles which are likely to become redundant if the superpowers do deploy BMD systems.

For the Chinese neither qualitative nor quantitative parity in weapons are goals. One of the more enduring conclusions that may be drawn from this study is that while the current modernisation of the PLA seeks to enhance its deterrent credibility, it will not seek to do so by employing established methods. For the Chinese there is little point in acquiring retaliatory parity, then BMD counters, even if such achievements were possible, when GNW offers an obvious and cheap alternative. The same end will be reached by different means - means which are different to those of the superpowers because change in defence is based on the concept that whatever the modernisation it must be compatible with China's resources and military experience. Almost by chance, such means are also compatible with the demands of future warfare: that is, speedy social recovery after nuclear attack and a credible post-nuclear strategy, rather than further technological contest which would, in the circumstances, be impossible. Supposing resilience (social and economic as well as military) to be the key to twenty-first-century warfare, powers of survival and denial may well hold value over the power of punishment, especially in foreseeable circumstances where maintaining the power of punishment against BMD may demand ever-larger allocations of GNP and offer bankruptcy rather than security. If China's position in the late twentieth century was that of hidden power - the dragon lying deep - then in the first half of the twenty-first century the dragon will emerge to assume a central place in the global order. The dragon will be the more important because its billion claws will be sharper whilst its scaly armour will be no less penetrable.
Appendix 1
The Chinese Armed Forces:
Strength Levels and Organisation in 1988

At a strength of 2,300,000 personnel, PL A ground forces form the largest of
the service arms. Implementation of the combined arms concept has resulted
in the reorganisation of the 36 Maoist field armies into 22 integrated ‘Group
Armies’. These are mobile forces, commanding up to four divisions, and
represent the Western equivalent of ‘corps’. Although reorganisation is
complete in administrative terms, only three group armies were reported to
be fully equipped in 1988. Eighty infantry divisions, ten armoured divisions,
as well as five or six field and anti-aircraft artillery divisions make up the 22
group armies. These are deployed in seven Military Regions (MRs), each of
which is comprised of a number of a Military Districts (MDs) that reflect the
boundaries of provinces. Figure A.1 and Table A.2 show deployment organ¬
isation.

Second largest service is the PLA Air Force. It has a total strength of
470,000 personnel, 220,000 of whom are assigned to air defence, and deploys
some 6000 combat aircraft in seven Military Air Regions. Combat organis¬
ation is conventional: three squadrons of 12 to 15 aircraft each make up a
regiment or ‘wing’, and three wings constitute the largest operational unit,
the division. The Air Force’s ground forces consist of four airborne divisions
(one in Beijing MR, and three in the central MR of Jinan) as well as sixteen
anti-aircraft artillery divisions.

With 300,000 personnel and about 1830 vessels – 53 large surface ships
(destROYers and frigates), 115 submarines (three nuclear-powered and the
rest mainly modified R- and W-class diesel submarines), and hundreds of
minor ships – the PLA Navy is the smallest of China’s armed services, but
numerically the third largest in the world and the largest among its neigh¬
bours in the Asia-Pacific region. Naval deployments span the entire coast
from the north, along the eastern coastline and south to the Vietnamese
frontier, with base headquarters in Qingdao, Shanghai and Zhanjiang,
respectively. The North Sea Fleet, with about 500 vessels (including one
submarine flotilla and two squadrons), is deployed from the Yalu River to
the south of Lianyungang. From this point to Dongshan, Chinese waters are
patrolled by the 750-vessel-strong East Sea Fleet. The East Sea Fleet is
equipped with air, air defence and coastal missile units. The South Sea Fleet
is responsible for the southern region with its proximity to Vietnam and
disputed territories. This fleet comprises about 600 vessels, including two
submarine flotillas (25 submarines).

Table A.2 PLA deployments, 1988

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<td>Infantry</td>
<td>16*</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9*</td>
<td>10*</td>
<td>10*</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airborne</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*There are 2–3 divisions worth of border troops in these MRs.
Appendix 2
Chinese Nuclear Forces, 1988

Chinese nuclear forces are small in number but versatile in both reach and basing mode. Offensive nuclear systems, meaning those missiles and aircraft designed to carry nuclear weapons to enemy territory, are the established deterrent. Because China is also developing tactical systems which can be used within the immediate confines of the battlefield, these too are included to provide a more realistic picture of China's current inventory.

Beginning with its strategic systems, China has developed three ranges of ICBM: full, extended and limited. The full-range ICBM is the Dong Feng (East Wind) -5 or DF-5, designated by the US as CSS-4 (CSS = Chinese Surface-to-Surface). It is thought to be capable of delivering a five-megaton payload - presumed to comprise 10 MIRVed warheads - to a distance of 12,900 kilometres. Believed to be in the same class as the US Titan II (first deployed in 1963) and the obsolete Soviet SS-9 Scarp, the two-stage DF-5 was successfully tested in 1980. Those now deployed (in hardened silos located in central China) are thought to be powered by solid propellants which, unlike liquid fuel, would permit them to be fired at short notice.

A single DF-5 was used in 1981 to launch, as one payload, three space research satellites, and in 1985 its testing with a multiple warhead nosecone was reported. This MIRV capability, whereby the nosecone can release a number of warheads to separate targets, has resulted in the modified DF-5, the newly deployed three-stage CSS-5 or DF-6. Given Soviet and American design comparisons, the number of MIRVed warheads it can carry (over a 15,000-kilometre distance) has been estimated at 10 to 12. In practical terms, this MIRV capability means, as one commentator expressed it, that China could 'launch nuclear strikes on at least 12 major Soviet cities, including Moscow'. Certainly European USSR and continental USA are within range of these missiles, each with three warheads, are reported to be deployed. This MIRV capability, whereby the nosecone can release a number of warheads to separate targets, has resulted in the modified DF-5, the newly deployed three-stage CSS-5 or DF-6. Given Soviet and American design comparisons, the number of MIRVed warheads it can carry (over a 15,000-kilometre distance) has been estimated at 10 to 12. In practical terms, this MIRV capability means, as one commentator expressed it, that China could 'launch nuclear strikes on at least 12 major Soviet cities, including Moscow'. Certainly European USSR and continental USA are within range of these missiles, each with three warheads, are reported to be deployed.

Turning to sea-based systems, China successfully test-fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) in October 1982 and a cruise missile three years later. The Chinese SLBM, the Julang (Giant Wave) -1 or JL-1 (CSS-NX-4), is a variant of the DF-3. The two-stage, solid-fuelled missile is thought to be capable of delivering a three-warhead MIRV, of 1 to 2 megaton yield, to a maximum range of 3000 kilometres. Broadly in the category of early model Polaris missiles, the JL-1 was publicly displayed by the Chinese at the 1984
National Day military parade. Comparatively, the Chinese SLBM is more compact than the Polaris A1, and of similar size to the Pershing. Twelve of these missiles are carried on one operational Xia-class ballistic-missile nuclear submarine (SSBN). Three more are under construction. Slow progress in the SSBN building programme has led to suggestions that China could be experiencing technical difficulties in this area.

As regards aircraft deliverable weapons, some 120 H-6 medium strategic bombers and 250 Q-5 attack aircraft are nuclear capable. The H-6 could deliver free-fall (gravity) bombs up to a 3000-kilometre combat radius if modern air defences could be penetrated, and the Q-5 could carry a nuclear bomb of 5 to 20 kilotons to about 600 kilometres. The 250 to 300 H-5 twin-jet light bombers could also carry nuclear weapons, but at a far more limited radius of action. Although some of the 500 to 600 Q-5s in service perform an air defence role within the Navy, most are thought to be deployed along the northern borders. The H-6 bomber is also deployed in this area in an attack role. Hence range capabilities are maximised, as is their deterrent value, by deployment close to Soviet territory. Nuclear-capable aircraft and MRBMs could supplement short-range missiles and munitions in a defensive war within Chinese territory rather than beyond it.

In terms of the offensive and defensive characteristics of China's nuclear force posture, the Strategic Rocket Units are offensive forces intended to threaten enemy targets. Chinese missile capabilities, as indicated above, range from intercontinental to theatre levels (Figure A.3). Submarine-based missiles, because of their mobile platform, are theoretically capable of threatening targets at either level. Active defence measures against hostile aircraft and missiles are also employed. For its air defence, China relies on an Over-the-Horizon Backscatter (OTH-B) radar system, with a range of 700 to 3500 kilometres and a 60 degree arc of cover; more than 4000 PLA Navy and Air Force fighters; about 100 Hongqi (Red Flag) -2JC or HQ-2JC (SA-2 type) SAMs; and over 16 000 anti-aircraft guns. Early warning against ballistic missiles is the function of a phased-array radar complex; while central Asia and the northern border are covered by tracking stations in Xinjiang and Shanxi, respectively. China also has a limited ship-borne anti-ship capability. As a so-called 'passive defence' measure, China seeks protection through a civil defence programme incorporating shelter, evacuation, and local defence systems in Beijing and all key cities. In sum, China's nuclear posture comprises the three tiers of strategic retaliatory capability, air defence and civil defence.
Notes and References

Introduction

2. For 3000 years China regarded itself as the 'Middle Kingdom', surrounded by less civilised peoples (or 'barbarians'). China's 'sudden catastrophic demotion', to use Toynbee's expression, is dated from the Anglo-Chinese War of 1838–42. (Arnold Toynbee, 'Introduction', in Arnold Toynbee (ed.), Half the World: The History and Culture of China and Japan, Thames & Hudson, London, 1973, p. 10.)

1 People's War: A Conceptual Odyssey

6. ‘You fight in your way and we fight in ours; we fight when we can win and move away when we can’t.' – Lin Piao [Biao], 'Long Live the Victory of People's War', Peking Review, 3 September 1965, p. 19.
7. Selected Military Writings, p. 234.
8. Ibid., pp. 210–11.
9. Ibid., pp. 181, 211.
12. Ibid., p. 230.
13. Ibid., p. 304.
14. Ibid.
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44. 'Keeping the City Gates Shut – Tight', * Asiaweek*, 15 February 1987, p. 64.
46. 'China Invents the Entrepreneurial Army', *The Economist*, 14 May 1988, p. 79.
52. Similarly, Jonathan D. Pollack, 'Rebuilding China's Great Wall: Chinese Security in the 1980s', in Godwin, loc. cit., has advised that we should 'resist the temptation to impose an “externally approved” model of a force structure and doctrine upon the PRC' (p. 13); Segal, loc. cit., speaks of ‘artificial and western-centred’ suggestions (p. 29), along with an ‘arrangement of weapon categories and capabilities’ (p. 22), and Lee Ngok, in a review article, states that ‘one should bear in mind the fact that the Chinese do not necessarily operate on the basis of Western models and concepts’ ('Dimensions of China's Defence Policy for the 1980s and Beyond', *Asian Studies Association of Australia*, November 1985, p. 135).
53. For example, the PLA newspaper has stated that 'people's war under sustained modern conditions is the fundamental strategic doctrine for crushing a superior enemy'. (Li Lianyu, ‘Assessment of Balance of Strength and Available Forces onto Battlefields of Our Own Choice’, * FBIS*, Daily Report: People's Republic of China, 8 August 1985, p. K1-7.)
55. *Introduction to National Defense Modernization*, loc. cit., p. 16.
60. Ibid. In the case of the *Handbook*, Mao's military thought is emphasised as the opening chapter of the 'Section on Military Thinking and Strategic Policies of China's Armed Forces'.
61. *Introduction to National Defense Modernization*, loc. cit., p. 18. This view was also expressed to a French military delegation in China: ‘We have chosen to defend a certain number of key points along the border and inside the country. We would use mobile warfare to draw enemy forces onto battlefields of our own choice.’ (Agence France-Presse, 3 May 1979, in FBIS, *Daily Report: People's Republic of China*, 4 May 1979, p. 1.)
62. *Introduction to National Defense Modernization* loc. cit., p. 18. This is also discussed in the Commanders' *Handbook* loc. cit., especially p. 79.
64. See, for example, *The China Quarterly*, September 1982, that 'there is no indication that the Party sees People's War as only a transient phase before China becomes an equal in the strategic and tactical weaponry of the Superpowers' (p. 134). He also states in 'Chinese Strategic Thinking', seminar paper, ANU, Canberra, 2 September 1982, that 'there is no indication that the Party sees People's War as only a transient phase before China becomes an equal in the strategic and tactical weaponry of the Superpowers.'
of China, 9 August 1978, p. E7.) In another speech, delivered to the City Defence Symposium held in 1980 and reported by Jilin Ribao in March of that year, the First Secretary of the Jilin provincial party committee, Wang Enmao, said: 'We should consider city defence construction as a strategic issue and never underestimate its importance.' (Cited by Lee Ngok, 'Chinese Strategic Thinking', op. cit., p. 17.) Finally, the Commanders' Handbook, loc. cit., devotes attention to this within its section, 'Defensive Warfare'.

64. Hsu Hsiang-chien, 'Heighten Our Vigilance . . . ', loc. cit., p. 10.


66. Ibid., p. 19.


68. Introduction to National Defense Modernization, loc. cit.


71. Ibid., p. 182.


73. Ibid., p. xii.

74. Ibid.


76. Passive defences are defined as 'non-weapons measures – such as civil defence and hardening – which protect important assets against attack', as distinct from active defences which 'utilize weapon systems to protect national territory, military forces, or key assets'. (‘Soviet Strategic Defence Programs’, a joint US Department of Defense and Department of State Report, Backgrounder, United States Information Service, 10 October 1985, p. 4.)


82. Segal, Defending China, op. cit., p. 21.

83. This is distinct from the appropriation of ideology for internal power struggles, as revealed by events in June 1989.

84. Ching and Bloodworth, op. cit.


2 Defence Development: The Mid-Tech Path to Modernisation


3. Prof. H. Gelber, University of Tasmania, personal communication, October 1988.

4. The four modernisations were re-introduced by the late premier Zhou En-lai (Chou En-lai) in 1975 after more than a decade’s delay associated with the Cultural Revolution. They were accepted in revised form in 1978 and then again, after further revision, in July 1979. It is worth noting that in the 1975 listings defence came third (before science and technology) rather than fourth as it did later. Zhou had signalled changes in investment priorities as early as 1959-60.


6. Ibid., p. 17.


8. Ibid.


13. An outstanding example of such modifications is the 1976–85 '10-year plan' for development of the national economy, belatedly announced in February 1978. An admission that it had been overtargeted came as early as 1979 when a ‘three-year plan’ of economic readjustment and consolidation was launched. The CPC Central Committee decided on the revision barely 10 months after the original plan’s announcement. The 1985 constrictions marked a further decision to decelerate the pace of modernisation, as did the 1988 decision to slow down because of an ‘overheated’ economy.

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20. This is strongly associated with the rate of social change. As Alvin Toffler postulates: ‘in a changing society and culture . . . the past becomes a less sure guide to present decisions and future possibilities. In this circumstance, thinking clearly about future possibilities and creating new ideas to cope with them becomes essential to survival. The time-bias of the culture must shift toward increased future-consciousness.’ (Alvin Toffler, Previews and Premises, Pan Books, London, 1984, p. 181.) Chinese interest in futurist thinking is evident in their translation and publication of The Third Wave, an earlier work by Toffler; Sleepers, Wake, by Australia’s Minister of Science, Barry Jones, in 1986; as well as the incorporation of Edward De Bono’s ideas on education through the use of ‘lateral thinking’, and – as Toffler states (loc. cit., p. 179) – the establishment of ‘think-tank’ style futurist studies. For background on the latter, see ‘Decision-Making: Rise of the Think-Tanks’, Asiaweek, 5 October 1986, pp. 75, 77.


28. One may offer the tentative speculation that the former case served as communication of a deterrent signal to the Soviet Union less than a week prior to US President Reagan’s visit to China. Zhou may have been playing his ‘Western card’ at a time when it could draw maximum effect. Yu Quil’s statement, however, would appear to be targeted at the United States. By drawing attention to the PLA’s inadequacies, he may have been appealing for favourable treatment in weapons sales and technology transfers.


37. Ibid.

38. Outlook Weekly quoted in ibid.


41. The Economist, 16 May 1986, p. 32.


44. Hall, loc. cit., p. 134.


47. Yang Dezhi, Chief of PLA Staff, quoted in China Daily, 2 June 1984.


52. Bradley Hahn, ‘Quick Nuclear Lead Paves to Credible Nuclear Deterrent,’ Pacific Defence Reporter, May 1987, p. 29. According to information provided by Jencks, these SRBMs are based on the Soviet FROG and SCUD-A. The former is unguided, solid-fuelled, has a launch weight
of 3000 kg and a range of 25-65 km; the latter is guided by radio command, relies on liquid fuel, has a launch weight of 4500 kg and a range of over 100 km. (Harlan W. Jencks, From Muskets to Missiles: Politics and Professionalism in the Chinese Army, 1945-1981, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1982, p. 295.)


56. International Defense Review, December 1986, p. 1737; and Flight International, 7 February 1987, p. 35. In 1986 there were also reports that simpler, shorter-range, unguided rockets were being developed - a version of the Soviet FROG-7 SSM, which is understandable in view of the reported 215 FROG launchers deployed by the Soviets along their common border with China. (Reports cited by The Military Balance 1986-1987, op. cit., p. 141. FROG SSM force numbers: US DoD, Soviet Military Power 1987, op. cit., p. 97.)

57. Announced by the Minister of Aerospace Industry, Lin Zongtang ('China Refines Aerospace Bureaucracy', The Australian, 13 July 1988, p. 25.)

58. Christopher Chant and Ian Hogg, The Nuclear War File, Ebury Press, London, 1983, p. 76. The differences between a neutron and standard fission warhead are such that the latter would have to be 10 times more powerful than the former to produce the same effects.


the 1970s, Praeger, New York, 1972, p. 341; and in Johnston, op. cit., p. 26, note 21. In people's war to 'destroy the enemy' means 'to disarm him or 'deprive him of the power to resist'". (Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1966, p. 230.)


92. As Samuel Griffith states: 'Peking [Beijing] demonstrated during the border fighting with India that she could very effectively deploy and support limited but still significant conventional land power beyond her borders under particular conditions. This she had previously demonstrated, on a much larger scale, in Korea.' (Samuel B. Griffith, 'The Military Potential of China', in Alastair Buchan (ed.), China and the Peace of Asia, Chatto & Windus for the Institute of Strategic Studies, London, 1965, p. 67.) In his analysis of Chinese risk taking, Whiting also notes that 'the PLA has repeatedly projected its power across China's borders' and that it has adopted 'a belligerent forward posture as opposed to a passive role remaining behind the PRC border or withdrawing from positions of potential conflict' (Allen S. Whiting, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence, The University of Michigan, USA, 1975, p. 236.)


94. Ibid.

95. Lee Ngok, loc. cit., p. 5. Professor Lee has been particularly helpful (via personal correspondence, 1988) in stimulating thought on the initial stage of war in relation to the concerns of this study.

3 The Nuclear Guerilla

1. Speaking in his capacity as Defence Minister at the 51st anniversary of the PLA. (Quoted in Banning N. Garrett and Bonnie S. Glaser, War and Peace: The Views from Moscow and Beijing, Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1984, p. 128.)


6. Of interest is Wong-Fraser's comment on the meaning of the word 'deterrence' in Chinese:

While frequently rejecting Western ideas and theories about deterrence, the Chinese concept of deterrence, which is translated as hezu liliang (literally: the power to force inaction by frightening), can be simply embodied within pre-existing notions of war and politics: to win victory without fighting a war is the best strategy (bu jan er churen zhibing).

(Agatha S.Y. Wong-Fraser, 'China's Nuclear Deterrent', Current History, September 1981, p. 245.)

This observation is congruent with Sun Tzu's teachings and the psychological focus of people's war discussed in Chapter 1.

7. Magnus Clarke, 'Nuclear Explosives and Nuclear Deterrence', Book D, Australian Defence and Strategic Studies (ADASS), Deakin University, Victoria, 1985, p. 17. To illustrate the destructive potential of relatively few warheads, he adds that 'the destruction of only the 50 largest cities [of the Soviet Union] would mean 20 per cent of its population as casualties and the destruction of 38 per cent of its industries'.


9. The possibility that the Chinese would use nuclear weapons on their own territory has been raised by a number of authors, including Jonathan Pollack.


17. Tim Colebatch, 'We Have Star Wars: Soviets', The Age, 2 December 1987, p. 6.

18. Dr Magnus Clarke, personal communication, Deakin University, January 1988.


22. Clarke, loc. cit.

23. This is evident in Xing Hua's comments of August 1985:
Strong in maintaining the independence and self-reliance of Western Europe, France is worried that the US plan would cripple nuclear deterrence and render its independent arsenal powerless, so French leaders are suspicious of the US plan. The United States, they contend, will not truly treat the West European nations as partners. Therefore, France put forward its Eureka proposal, which calls for a joint West European research effort in six new-born technologies.

(Xing Hua, ‘SDI: Western Europe Faces Challenge’, *Beijing Review*, 5 August 1985, p. 24.)

For Western commentary, see Peter J. Opitz, ‘China’s Policy Towards Western Europe’, *Aussen Politik*, vol. 36, no. 3, 1986, pp. 259–60.


26. Ibid.

4 The Kingdom in the Middle: Threats to China


7. Ibid. *The Military Balance* does not include artillery divisions in its totals as they are not manoeuvre formations.

8. As Yaacov Y.I. Vertzberger has observed:

>Because China is unable to deploy and project power far beyond its borders, and has little political influence in the Middle East, it cannot deal with the Soviet presence and contain it farther away from its borders in the Middle East and the Gulf regions. Hence the importance of the land ‘stitch’ between the Middle East and South Asia, that is, Pakistan and Afghanistan. At the same time Soviet naval dominance in the Indian Ocean, particularly in the western part, could play an important supportive role in an attempt to dominate South Asia. Thus the most important elements in China’s counter-encirclement strategy are: Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Indian Ocean, in this order.

*(China’s Southwestern Strategy: Encirclement and Counterencirclement*, Praeger, New York, 1985, p. 6.)


10. This is well illustrated by an item in *World Affairs Report*, California Institute of International Studies, California, No. 102790: the Soviet press in 1981 spoke of ‘Great Khan expansionism’ and quoted ‘a number of writers, going back to Kan Yu Wei, the nineteenth-century political leader who foresaw the day when the yellow dragon flag (the flag of the revolutionaries) would fly over all countries’.


13. Thai Ming Cheung, *Computer War Games Catching Up*, *Pacific Defence Reporter*, September 1988, p. 23. The outcome which was predetermined (a matter raised earlier in Chapter 2), and with which foreign assessors disagreed, was a PLA victory. Despite Soviet technological superiority, the Chinese won because of such factors as ‘tactics’ and ‘bravery of soldiers’.


15. Ibid., p. 308.


24. Hunt, loc. cit., p. 112.

25. Nelson notes that the Wuhan MR (now absorbed into the Jinan MR) serves as the strategic reserve area for the others . . . presumably because of its central location, large industrial base, and good rail communications with the others’.

(Harvey W. Nelson, *The Chinese Military System: An Organizational Study of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army*, 2nd edn, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1981, p. 123.) During the Sino–Vietnamese border war of 1979, for example, main force units had been drawn from Wuhan, as well as Chengdu in
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30. Ibid.


32. Lee, ibid., p. 4.


35. Ibid., p. 175.

36. Green and Yost, op. cit., p. 141.

37. Ibid., p. 142. The authors have quoted from Vigor Louis, *The Coming Decline of the Chinese Empire*, Times Books, New York, 1979, p. 147.

38. Vigor, loc. cit.


40. Sun Tzu, op. cit., p. 92.

41. In support of the proposition that the US would avoid direct military involvement, Thomas Pepper and London’s IISS information officer, Maj. S.R. Elliot, are worth citing. The former described a US nuclear response to an Asian nuclear war as ‘unlikely’; and the latter has stated: ‘If there is any conflict in the Asiatic theatre, I suspect it will be limited and there will be a strong lobby to keep other states out of the conflict by taking strategic precautions.’ (*Asiaweek*, 27 May 1983, p. 40.)

42. A term used by Gerald Segal, *China’s Security Debate*, *Survival*, March–April, 1982, p. 74.


46. Ibid., p. 11.


52. Frisch, op. cit., p. 51.


54. During the period 1965–84, the area under irrigation increased from 33 to 45 million hectares, and chemical fertiliser usage increased from 2 to 18 million tons. (State Statistical Bureau, *Chinese Government*, cited in *New Internationalist*, April 1987, p. 17.)

55. Ibid., pp. 16–17.


60. Quoted in Robert Delfs, ‘Chen Yun: A Chilling Speech’, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 10 October 1985, p. 40. Indeed, the importance of grain production was stressed again, by CPC General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, at the 13th Party Congress in October 1987 and at the meeting of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee soon after.


63. Ibid.

64. During the Second Indochina War, Hanoi had planned a combined Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian military command. This was formalised in 1970, but the concept had not been implemented until after the establishment of the SRV.

Sino-Vietnamese relations have traditionally been expressed in terms of vassalage. Only in recent years have the Chinese and Vietnamese begun to speak of their relationship in terms of theoretical equality. Making this new relationship effective will require a large adjustment in the view each nation has historically had of the other. Chinese pressure of any kind is instinctively felt by the Vietnamese as a threat to their national survival. On the other hand, the assertion by Vietnam of its national interests other than in deference to Chinese policies is instinctively felt by the Chinese as impertinence bordering on insubordination. Perhaps an inevitable result of the difference in size between the two countries, these feelings lie at the root of Sino-Vietnamese relations today as they did two thousand years ago. (p. 297)

72. Quoted in 'Another Spratlys Spat', Asiaweek, 20 May 1988, p. 27.
74. 'The Trouble with Roubles, Asiaweek, 19 October 1986, p. 10; and 'Sweeping Change at the Top', Asiaweek, 4 January 1987, p. 12, respectively.
75. At the time of writing, it is too early to tell the impact of Western trade sanctions against China in response to the Chinese Government's violent suppression of the 'pro-democracy movement' in June 1989. Even if Western trading partners to not soften on the issue of sanctions, China has already explored alternative arrangements for the continuance of its economic progress: plans to expand considerably its economic relations with the USSR are underway. See Seth Faison, 'China Wards off Western Chill with Soviet Trade', The Australian, 18 July 1989, p. 12.
102. Snyder, ibid., p. 4.
103. Dr Chang King-yuh, Director-General of Taiwan's Government Information Office and the Government's chief official spokesman, quoted in 'Makers of a Miracle', Asiaweek, 28 June 1985, p. 41.
104. Ibid.
105. An interesting comparison may be found in the Falklands War of 1982. Argentina's action to reclaim the Malvinas (Falklands) coincided with the approach of the 150th anniversary of Argentina's claim, which was backed by strongly nationalist sentiment, to the British-held Islands. (The British had reasserted colonial control over the Falklands in 1833.)
106. The expression gained currency during the Sino-British negotiations over Hong Kong, when the Chinese referred to the colony's status as a 'question left over from history'. The Chinese have used the expression in other contexts, for example: 'Border issues were left to us by history.' (Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian speaking of the Sino-Indian border dispute, quoted in David Bonavia, 'Troubled Frontiers', Far Eastern Economic Review, 4 September 1986, p. 15.)
111. 'The Sino-American Chill', Newsweek, 8 March 1982, p. 6.
114. Ibid.
121. First August Radio, 'USA Deceiving China over Taiwan', in SWB, 8 February 1983.
123. Cited in 'The Case of the Missing Scientist', loc. cit.
124. Snyder, op. cit., p. 5.
128. Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian said that 'reports from foreign agencies have exaggerated the event along the Sino-Indian border. ('Peaceful Border Solution Sought', South China Morning Post, 22 May 1987, p. 7.)
129. 'What McMahon Wrought', The Economist, 23 May 1987, p. 32.
130. Quoted in 'A Fresh Chill at the Border', Asiaweek, 4 January 1987, p. 15-17.
131. India's undeclared nuclear arsenal in 1988 is based on CIA estimates; the projection for 1990 comes from a report by the Carnegie Endowment Task Force on Non-Proliferation, released in 1988.
139. This dilemma was expressed, for instance, by John Hackett, The Third World War: The Untold Story, Macmillan, New York, 1982, p. 296; and 'A Walk on the Wild Side', Asiaweek, 23 March 1984, p. 5.
141. Quoted in Pollack, loc. cit.
142. The uncertainty of whether a North Korean attack would be 'a unilateral act or a prelude to Soviet military action in the Pacific' is noted in Larry A. Niksch (specialist in Asian affairs for the US Congressional Research Service), 'Korea - Democracy and Security: Can the Two Co-exist?', Pacific Defence Reporter, November 1987, p. 29.
145. Ibid., p. 355.
   The Soviet Union has brought into these islands not only tanks, APCS, an assortment of artillery pieces, antiaircraft missiles and Mi-24 Hind attack helicopters, but also 130 mm cannons which were usually not found in the equipment of an ordinary Soviet division. The troops deployed in the Northern Territories have been actively engaged in various types of training.
   The number of MiG-23, Flogger fighters deployed . . . on Etorofu Island has been increased. About 40 such aircraft are currently deployed.
147. By service, the figure comprises 2400 army, 16 200 air force, 8100 navy, 38 000 marines. (The Military Balance 1988-1989, op.cit., p. 28.)
148. Adm. Ronald J. Hays, US Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, in an inter-
view with Denis Warner, 'View from the Top', Pacific Defence Reporter, August 1987, p. 11.
149. Ibid., p. 11.
151. Ibid.
152. South China Morning Post, 8 October 1985, p. 6.
156. See The Japan Economic Journal, 18 October 1986, p. 6. Other defence dealings include unofficial Japanese arms exports to China. These include Oki Electric's sale of radars for the PLA Navy, according to the separate investigations of Reinhard Drifte and Kazuo Tomiyama, and there is speculation among defence analysts that some components for China's own export weapons may have come from Japan. (Reported in 'Meet the New Arms Exporters', The Economist, 6 August 1988, p. 61.)
158. The warning is attributed to the Korean king who had been defeated by Hideyoshi. It came as a response to the shogun ruler's expressed intention of conquering China as well. Derived from his statement: 'All warfare is based on deception'. (Sun Tzu, op. cit., p. 66.)

Conclusion

4. Mao Zedong reportedly said in 1965: 'All I want are six atom bombs, with these bombs I know that neither side will attack me'.

Appendix 1 The Chinese Armed Forces

Appendix 2 Chinese Nuclear Forces

1. This writer agrees with Hahn that China's newly acquired MIRV capability (1985) may be presumed to have extended to existing launch systems. (Bradley Hahn, 'Beijing's Growing Global Missile Reach', Pacific Defence Reporter, February 1987, p. 13.)


12. Ibid.


17. Ibid., p. 146.
Appendix 2 Chinese Nuclear Forces

1. This writer agrees with Hahn that China's newly acquired MIRV capability (1985) may be presumed to have extended to existing launch systems. (Bradley Hahn, 'Beijing's Growing Global Missile Reach', Pacific Defence Reporter, February 1987, p. 13.)
12. Ibid.
13. Hahn, 'Quick Nuclear Leap... ', loc. cit.
17. Ibid., p. 146.

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